University of
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(Un)doing Old Boy:
Performativity at the Intersection of Elitism, Masculinity, and Privilege

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Elite boys' schools in Australia have been increasingly scrutinised for the elitism, hyper-masculinity, and privilege inherent within these institutions. This has occurred at a time of cultural and social change, during which elites and elitism have been investigated and interrogated more broadly. Given that the men who emerge from elite boys' schools will likely be placed in positions of power and influence, it is necessary to understand their perspectives on elitism, masculinity, and privilege. Drawing on three case studies that investigated the discursive mediation of masculine subjectivity at the intersection of elitism and privilege, as well as additional material produced from in-depth interviews, this thesis examines how a group of elite boys' school alumni have reconciled schooling experiences that endorsed attitudes, behaviours, and values which are out-of-step with modern society. It explores the meanings of elite boys' schooling experiences and their application as discursive resources in the process of reflecting on, and re-evaluating, what to keep and what to reject in contemporary formations of selfhood. Further, this thesis considers how these peculiar schooling experiences are reconfigured to align with the contemporary values of gender equality, social inclusion, and workplace diversity. The research addresses how the positionality of these men is the product of a complex rendering that combines parental aspirations and wishes, which are realised through elite school choice, conformity with elite school practices and images of well-rounded studenthood, and the role of elite schools in the making of 'men'. The research indicates that disavowal is used as a technique to demonstrate individual capacity and capability, while obscuring the advantages and opportunities acquired from a schooling experience that was economically privileged. Through creating and maintaining the appearance of being morally good, honestly sincere, and well-rounded, disavowal is a performative act that cultivates an appearance that positions the research participants as having emerged from an elite and privileged environment, while not being personally elitist nor entitled. This thesis encourages a more complex understanding of elite masculinities, including the multitude of possibilities surrounding the ways in which men make sense of, and respond to, various forms of privilege. In accounting for disavowal as a technique for asserting virtue and well-roundedness, this research also supports an understanding of how the discursive mediation of self is performed.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I Cameron A. M. Meiklejohn declare that the PhD Thesis entitled *(Un)doing Old Boy: Performativity at the intersection of elitism, masculinity, and privilege* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signed: Date:

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Associate Professor Stewart Riddle

Principal Supervisor

Professor Andrew Hickey

Associate Supervisor

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

> Whoever writes about his childhood must beware of exaggeration and self-pity (Orwell, 2014b, p. 432).

I spent most of my childhood attending an elite boys' school, benefiting from its teachers, indulging in its facilities, and participating in a broad array of extra-curricular activities, including cadets, debating, musical ensembles, rowing, and singing hymns in chapel. I was confirmed in that chapel. I had a student leadership position in my senior year. I was even voted by the school newspaper as the person most likely to become a priest. I wanted to be a 'good' boy and do my part for school spirit. And yet the essence of elite boys' schooling has remained, in many ways, impenetrable to me. A baffling and cunning mystery, my schooling experience has been difficult to understand, and hard for me to explain to others. My memories are replete with contradictions and mixed emotions.

For me, elite schooling is about more than educational inequality and unearned advantages. It is also about feelings. I feel unsettled about my school days, even though they ended more than two decades ago. However, the sense of discomfort and unease I feel is largely absent in the research literature. Most stories about elite schools are told by children who are yet to graduate and move beyond the bubble. These narratives reveal certainty and confidence. They are portraits of young, socially aware, cultural omnivores, who are eager to offer an anecdote, opinion or thought on any subject, in any context. Driven by what they perceive to be their natural ability, intelligence, and talent, they are unaware of their vast, unearned privilege, viewing themselves as the leaders of tomorrow, destined for a life of deserved opportunities and material success.

That was certainly my feeling when I graduated from school. However, that is not how I feel now. I posture and profess that I am happy and satisfied with life. But beneath the veneer I am ashamed, embarrassed, and indignant at the lack of prestige and wealth I have accumulated. The advantages I had expected to flow effortlessly from my schooling have failed to materialise. I have observed myself being awkward and clumsy with anyone who does not look and talk like me – able-

bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, male, middle class, and White – an ineptitude that I partially credit to my schooling and its lack of diversity.

I failed to launch into adulthood. Unable to stick at anything, I bounced between university degrees, jobs, and relationships. I was incapable of following through on anything, loathe to take part in the long banal trudge that is growing up. It is possible this was another outcome of my insulated schooling, where there was little need to labour, or to want for anything.

My twenties were defined by drinking, partying, studying, and international travel. I was decadently rudderless. By my thirties I was persevering at the one thing I had been good at, being a high-functioning alcoholic, indulging in a lifestyle that masked my anxiety, paranoia, and shame. I contemplated, on a couple of occasions, whether I should hurl myself into an oncoming train. As I commence my second act, I am loved, medicated, and sober, but remain anxious and frightened in other ways. I am cloaked by the feeling of being ill-equipped and unprepared to cope with the emotional sensitivities, nuanced language, and social issues that define our cultural moment. A silent discomfort is how I can best describe it. It is flamed by feelings of loss and regret, but also the discomfort of knowing that I have taken too long to rethink my assumptions and understanding about choice, consent, masculinity, opportunity, privilege, and success.

Despite the substantial outlay of my parents, I also feel short-changed on the product of good character, strong intellect, and generous spirit peddled by my school. As much as I want it to be, it is not possible to make my experience fit the idyllic vision of a well-rounded education that transforms young boys into useful men. My schooling experience involved a relentless competitiveness that was both exhilarating and fatiguing, but ultimately stifled my attempts to collaborate, share ideas, seek support, and form genuine and healthy friendships with my classmates. The absence of females. The superiority of sport. The hyper-ambition to become Masters of the Universe. The line of luxury cars at school pick-up. The overprotective teachers who cultivated feelings of specialness and a preoccupation with my own self-importance. Under these conditions an alertness is developed, as well as a suspicion of any known and potential rivals. The penchant to display superiority over others is another outcome. The loathing of weakness. The abhorrence of losers. For me, these feelings would manifest in a need to gain approval from people who were 'deserving' of my

admiration. I was obedient to those with power, expectant that in doing so, I might gain their favour. With this outlook, I panned constantly for people of value who could accelerate my journey. I became quite good at that. But it is underpinned by fear. Fear of failure, of not being good enough, of not measuring up to your potential. On the way through to my current location, I have been worn away by this hyper-masculinity. Criticising myself, and analysing personal weaknesses, has become an obsession. But this self-absorption makes others invisible.

During my twenties I worked as a management consultant before entering the legal industry, two employment destinations that were entirely predictable. The narrow conceptualisation of success promoted by my school had set out this aspiration. The identities that can be constructed within these environments are limited, such that one lacks the resources to productively work on different formations of selfhood. After years of constant pressure to view myself as exceptional, I had fully accepted the expectation placed on me: return the investment made in my education; be successful; stay close to the community; and should I be so fortunate, send my sons to the school. This only added to the casual remarks from home. Become a CEO, or a Company Director. Escape the financial worries of my parents. You see, I was born into a deep pool of aspiration and hope. My personal expectation was to avoid the financial struggles of mum and dad. However, as I would come to understand in later life, expectations are almost always planned resentments. My scope for an acceptable and appropriate trajectory in life was restricted and would feed anxiety and shame in adulthood as I struggled to find purpose in work, respect in friendships, and trust in relationships. Or maybe it was just resentment. A combination of anger, disappointment, disgust, and fear that things had not worked out exactly as I had been told they would.

Over time, I became both sceptical of, and uncomfortable with, my schooling and its peculiar cultural practices and traditions. Seeing former classmates at bars, nightclubs, sporting events, and eventually across boardroom tables, ceased to be thrilling. It was more like running into an ex-girlfriend. I had a history. I had shared good times. But the love was gone, and it was awkward and tense. For me and for her.

While many of the things I learned at school have been forgotten, there are a few experiences that stick with me. The snobbishness of these institutions runs deep.

They pass down an overbearing pride to children. These things, in particular, lurk within me. It is not about being wealthier than most, it is about feeling righteous in judging the lives, manners, and utterances of others. In an environment that assumes natural talent, and meritocratic success, there is an incredible penchant for pointing out the failings of 'lesser' people and how their shit jobs, and shit existence, are their own fault.

My school experience was brutal, confusing, and contradictory. It left me harbouring insecurities about myself and generated unconscious biases towards others. In time, these would become obsessive thoughts about the things I had done and who I was.

I have spent more than two decades working towards a more complete acknowledgement and understanding of the pain and disruption my submission to certain attitudes, behaviours, and values have caused to myself and others. Now in middle-age, I have overhauled many aspects of myself, having dedicated earlier parts of my life to pursuing ends that seemed acceptable, appropriate, and natural. In many ways, I bought into some of the worst aspects of schoolboy culture. I am sorry for those moments where my actions created, or added to, the problems of others. I recognise how I have gained advantages that were unearned or unfair, benefiting from cultural and social arrangements that privilege men like me. Revealing my faults, approaching those aspects of self to which I have an aversion, and going towards places that scare me, has become an important and necessary practice.

Correcting, rectifying, or taking retribution on my past has not been helpful. But neither has excusing nor justifying previous behaviours. Instead, I have attempted to understand the constraints and limitations that I have submitted to so that I can properly name them. To name, after all, is to master. But mastery does not grant absolution. As a start, I name some of my transgressions in the vignettes that precede the chapters of this thesis. I share these without any purpose of evasion, so that I might make firm amendments, and in time, live with my conscience.

But what of all those other men who absorbed a culture that legitimised offensive and outdated behaviours? I still have empathy for them. As a child, I did not consciously determine to take on these traditions and values, but inside the school gate I soaked up the jokes, stereotypes, songs, stories, and war cries that

conditioned me to despise difference and fear outsiders. Of course, attending an elite boys' school does not mean that one will implicitly believe in the entitlement, homophobia, misogyny, and racism inherent in these practices, but it is an immersive experience. After being steeped in it for years, it is difficult to recognise just how deep it has gone. I may never know if I have weeded it all out.

Like my peers, I did not create this culture, but it was something I imbibed wilfully, condoned, and even defended for a time. It anticipated the ways in which I would achieve purpose in life, shaped my ethics, and perhaps most importantly, focused my thinking on what my life trajectory could, and should, look like. Aligning this type of education with being an enlightened member of society, someone who is comfortable in the presence of strangers, is complicated. As Orwell (2001) noted:

> However much you like them, however interesting you find their conversation, there is always the accursed itch of … difference, like the pea under the princess's mattress. It is not a question of dislike or distaste, only of *difference*, but it is enough to make real intimacy impossible (p. 145, emphasis in original).

I first read Orwell while I was a schoolboy, and vividly remember the feelings produced by *The Road to Wigan Pier* (2001). I identified with the feeling of having prestige with no money, something which meant that 'you knew how to wear your clothes and how to order a dinner, although in practice you could never afford to go to a decent tailor or a decent restaurant' (Orwell, 2001, p. 115). Overtime, I became more invested in Orwell and his struggle to admire those who were different, as it reflected my own discomfort in attempting to identify and understand the *other*. Fortunately, Orwell does suggest that it is possible to overcome your dislike and disdain for people who are different. In many ways, he can be considered a pioneer of cultural studies, and an advocate for its utility. For this reason, Orwell is present in my thesis, as there is no other standard of comparison.

In overcoming my dislike and disdain, I still have much work to undertake. I have failed colleagues, friends, and former partners, holding their *difference* against them. I have been unpleasant and uncivilised. In undertaking this thesis, I recognise how I have not looked at my circumstances from the perspective of others and failed

to acknowledge the advantages and benefits my schooling has provided me. I embarked on this project so that I could come to terms with my own relationship to privilege and its continued presence in my life.

It was my first day at an elite boys' school. Mr Paugh[1] was my Year 5 teacher. He introduced himself to the class and shared some of his sporting interests, passion for exotic cars, and enjoyment of James Bond films. He was different to the teachers at my previous school. He had a beard. He was smart. He was a man. I looked around the room and my classmates were different too. Stern. Serious. Focused. It was a relief to be spared the gossip and nonsense talk of girls.

At lunch time, boys played cricket on the oval. Some played force em' back[2]. Others played tiggy[3] on the quadrangle, although it was more like a skirmish, with occasional outbreaks of violence. It was perfect.

When my mother collected me in the afternoon, I piled into the back-seat of her car, convinced I had found Shangri-la.

'Never send me to a school with girls again,' I said.

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[1] Mr. Paugh is not his real name. Names and other identifying details of research participants have been changed.

[2] Force 'em back is a game played by students, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, at lunch or recess. It is played by kicking a football back-and-forth between two teams.

[3] Tiggy is a chasing game where one child is 'in' or 'it' or 'up' and has to catch another child and tag them.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My journey towards enrolling in a doctoral, higher degree research program, and researching elite boys' schools in Australia, began in the wake of #MeToo. Media reports about the workplace conduct of powerful men coincided with my rising interest in articles about elite boys' schools. While some journalists reported on high tuition fees (Bita, 2019), exceptional academic results (O'Flaherty & Egan, 2020), and pipelines of professional athletes (Gleeson & Ryan, 2019), others focused on more scandalous and salacious material. As I tracked the more abhorrent and vicious behaviours that would periodically bubble to the surface, I became increasingly concerned about the underlying cultural practices and traditions of these institutions. There was also a curiosity with the way school leaders and administrators responded to incidents that were labelled as irresponsible and unacceptable. In most instances, aberrant student behaviour was framed by school leadership as isolated events, involving a small number of students. These boys, we were told by stern and serious headmasters, did not represent the explicit teachings, traditions, and values of the school. However, the frequency and persistence of such scandals suggested to me that these problems ran much deeper than just involving a small number of boys (e.g., Baker, 2022; Bennett, 2021a; Carson & Lang, 2020; Chrysanthos, 2021; Ferguson, 2020; Hunter, 2020a; Karp, 2019; O'Brien, 2022; Pearson & Foster, 2020; Squires, 2020; Sturrock, 2020; Tuohy, 2021; Urban, 2021).

1.1. The Past in the Present

There is something about elite boys' schools in Australian society that remains anchored in its colonial past (Crotty, 2001). This fixed point of Australian manliness remains, in many ways, the standard against which each new cohort of boys comes to understand and judge their abilities and achievements (Crotty, 2020). The absence of women and abhorrence of weakness. The over-investment in sport and obsession with winning. The centrality of military cadets and its valorisation of courage and toughness. The relentless celebration of institutional history and tradition. The expectation of academic excellence. These conditions inform the actions, behaviours, language, and memories of the men who emerge from these schools. It can be difficult to interact with people who have not had this experience, often requiring

many to be kept at a distance. It can be difficult to grasp the daily realities of people who occupy and traverse a pathway so different from their own. As Kenway (2016) noted, drawing on the work of Bauman (2000), elite schools are a '*purified* space ... tamed, sanitized, guaranteed to come free of dangerous ingredients' (pp. 99, emphasis in original). In the case of elite boys' schools, the dangerous ingredients include ethnic diversity, homosexuals, powerful women, and uncouth *others* ('the poor' especially). This contrast invokes a temporal dimension that establishes idyllic narratives of a safe environment where boys can become men; something that would otherwise be denuded by the encroachment of these dangerous ingredients. Of course, this absence means that those educated in elite boys' schools know relatively little about marginalised social groups, and consequently, have little affinity, nor familiarity, with difference.

I find myself increasingly confused by elite boys' schools. As someone who benefited from an elite education, provisioned with opulent facilities, and over-indulgent opportunity, awareness of my background comes with a heavy responsibility. It necessitates an acknowledgement that the relative comfort and security I enjoy in adulthood is more of a gift than an achievement. To ignore how my education has provided advantages and opportunities that are inaccessible to most would be regressive. While I have become more responsive to the feelings and perspectives of others since graduating more than 20 years ago, a retrograde step is still easy enough for me to make. Stumbling into deeply entrenched bias and prejudice remains a common occurrence. My past intrudes on my present, colouring my understanding of the social world. It affects my self-awareness and understanding of what is fair, just, and right.

1.2. Why Now?

Surely this is nothing new. Elite boys' schools in Australia have always privileged a hyper-masculine culture that breeds entitlement, values toughness, and loathes effeminacy (Crotty, 2001). They have always produced 'real' men with the characteristics needed to command and lead, providing a space where posh boys are free to openly rehearse bigotry and snobbery without consequence. We know this already.

Compared to when I was a student in the 1990s, elite boys' schools in Australia have changed. A higher proportion of teachers are now female, while the student population has become more ethnically diverse. There is also a greater appreciation for achievement and success occurring beyond the sports field. Of course, this modernisation was necessary and occurred alongside other significant changes in Australian society, such as a rise in working mothers, more progressive views on marriage and parenting, as well as a decline in religious affiliation (Wilkins et al., 2021). However, the shifts that have occurred within elite boys' schools have been slow and uneven, with recent scandals reinvigorating public scrutiny of the elitism, entitlement, hyper-masculinity, and privilege that is inherent within these institutions.

Since I began this thesis in 2019, scandals surrounding the behaviour of students at elite boys' schools in Australia have surfaced with predictable consistency. Sexist public chants on a Melbourne tram (Henriques-Gomes, 2019), a 'muck-up day'[4] list that included a challenge to spit on a homeless person (Hunter, 2020b), a Snapchat post re-enacting the murder of American man George Floyd (Pearson & Foster, 2020), the consumption of pornography and online gambling in class (Baker, 2022), and rating the sexual attractiveness of female teachers (O'Brien, 2022), have formed the basis of media attempts to capture the culture of these institutions. Despite increased awareness and progress towards the recognition of difference and diverse positionality in many areas of Australian society, elite boys' schools remain in many ways anachronistic as a 'club' that asserts significant hostility towards people on the 'outside' (Crotty, 2020).

Elite boys' schools have always propelled alumni into prestigious universities and the most esteemed employment destinations. It occurs that alumnus take their entitlement and hostility with them (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005). What is different today is that the cultural practices and traditions learned and mastered within elite boys' schools are more noticeable for being retrograde. The elitism, entitlement, hyper-masculinity, and privilege that has previously ensured unchallenged access to respect, status, and wealth, is under scrutiny.

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[4] In Australia, muck-up day is a form of organised practical joke or prank that is conducted by members of the graduating Year 12 class with the intention of creating confusion or disorder across their school. The jokes and pranks typically occur at the conclusion of the school year.

1.3. Research Topic and Aims

The research reported in this thesis focused on a group of elite boys' school alumni. Specifically, this project considered how elite boys' school alumni have reconciled a schooling experience that endorsed attitudes, behaviours, and values, which run counter to a contemporary society pursuing gender equality, social inclusion, and workplace diversity.

This research examined discourses that are implicated in the process of subjectivation at elite boys' schools in Australia. Specifically, it aimed to understand how the research participants make sense of the elitism, masculinities, and privilege they encountered while attending school, how it was perceived, and whether it has produced contradictory and incompatible subjectivities in adulthood. It also considered the strategies adopted to reconcile gender and class dilemmas produced by public tales of elite boys' school scandals, toxic masculinity, heteronormativity, and White privilege. The central aim of this research was to understand how the navigation of the elite school experience preceded how some men have attempted to renegotiate its rules and regulatory constraints into adulthood.

1.3.1. Research Objectives

The objectives identified for this research project included:

- to document the gendered discourses contained within elite boys' schools in Australia;
- to document the stories of old boys[5];
- to evaluate how old boys feel about, make sense of, and (re)negotiate the masculinities encountered while attending school; and
- to explore the strategies adopted by old boys to make sense of gender and social class dilemmas confronted in adulthood.

As this suggests, my research project was concerned with how men talk about what they witnessed and participated in at school, and how they feel and think about this as adults. I wanted to talk to these men about what happened later in life. What was

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[5] The term 'old boy' emerged during the 1860s to identify graduates from a small set of schools in England that were widely considered to be the 'chief nurseries' of the British elite, which prepared their male-only alumni, hence the term 'old boy', to take up positions of power across business, culture, law, military, and politics (Reeves et al., 2017). The term has now become widely used, especially in countries that are former colonies of the British Empire.

it like to attend an elite boys' school in Australia? How has it shaped their lives? How do they feel about it now?

I set out to produce new evidence of the ways in which this sense-making occurs, and how their educational experience has shaped and continues to shape their identities. How does the schooling experience continue to inscribe itself on the feelings, thoughts, and performances of these men? How does it influence how they see, interpret, and talk about the world?

Pursuing this research agenda is necessary as men who emerge from elite boys' schools will likely be placed in positions of power and influence. Understanding their perspectives on elitism, masculinity, and privilege is important in developing an awareness of those patterns across culture and society that condition the experiences of old boys and inform their daily interactions. At present, this is a phenomenon that is poorly understood and a gap in our understanding of elite education and its implications beyond the school gate.

1.3.2. Analysis

In undertaking this research project, I used case studies of old boys to explore how one group of men have rationalised their experiences of elite boys' schooling in adulthood. The analysis, contained in Chapters 5 to 7, and theorised further in Chapters 8 to 10, problematised debates and popular discussions about elitism, masculinity, and privilege within elite boys' schools, as well as the type of men these institutions produce. Through the stories provided by the participants, an account of how privilege is experienced and reproduced is presented, detailing a nuanced understanding of elite masculinities. The analysis explores how the participants came to be regulated by, but also renegotiated, the various discourses of masculinity that emerged from their experiences of elite boys' schooling.

Performing Privilege

Inspired by the ideas of Judith Butler (2006c) on subject constitution and the problem of gender formation in the context of school, I analysed how elite boys' schooling might generate a sense-making framework that remains necessarily incomplete for understanding elite subjectivities. The binary of winners/losers that is implicit within these institutions permits only two options for responding to the elite masculinities they privilege: submission or rejection. However, throughout this

research I observed possibilities that existed somewhere in between; an interstitial formation of gender that is far less certain and far less confident. Through the interviews, it became apparent that there were spaces where men expressed confusing and contradictory accounts of their schooling and lived experience. Ultimately, I became interested in the challenges and difficulties these men had in absorbing the rules and regulatory constraints of elite masculinities, and how this 'allows for an exposure of their [gender norms] porousness and malleability, their incompleteness and their transformability' (Butler, 2006c, p. 533). Like Renold and Ringrose (2008), I extended this conceptualisation in my analysis to consider how 'ruptures and cracks and movement within this porous and malleable matrix [are] already happening all around us' (p. 318). In this way, it was possible to illustrate the meaning of uncertainty in gender, and its presence in the minutiae of everyday talk and activity of my participants. However, I also recognised the enduring stability of these performances, and in particular, the stalling effect of class position and material conditions.

Through the adoption of a Butlerian analysis, my research project has offered a divergence from some of the established approaches to elite school research that have utilised the cultural reproduction framework developed by Bourdieu (1984). In particular, the approach I have pursued permits a more complex rendering of cultural reproduction theories, to reveal that privilege, and its ability to flow with cultural and social change, is a highly elusive phenomenon. It is unpredictable, but more importantly, is difficult to separate from personal histories, often leaving subjects with perplexed and confused experiences of selfhood. As my thesis took shape, it became helpful to understand my research subjects as being in an ongoing process of reflecting and re-evaluating, which at times produced contradictory choices about what to keep and what to reject from their elite schooling experience and social background.

Class Disavowal and Performative Acts

Elites and elitism have attracted an increasing level of scrutiny as displays of class superiority and snobbery have become widely unacceptable in society (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017). As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) argued, this has required elite schools, and their clients, to at least adopt the appearance of 'liberal, progressive, multi-cultural, anti-elitist social sentiments' (p. 265). In doing so, they engage in a

discourse of 'disavowal' that is more than simple deception and deceit, but rather a distortion of the economic power and privilege that they enjoy (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017). By downplaying the role of social class and its influential networks, discourses of disavowal are designed to soften the negative implications of having accessed and benefited from advantages and opportunities that were unearned and unfair. Specifically, it requires the outward appearance of being egalitarian. As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) indicated, this requires claiming to uphold the values of being caring and honourable, diligent and fair, and tolerant and hospitable.

This research extends the analysis of disavowal commenced by Kenway and Lazarus (2017). Specifically, I suggest that disavowal provides a useful conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) for understanding the performative acts at work in elite schools, and in particular the interpersonal repertoires drawn upon to conduct the practice of framing enactments of self-representation. From this perspective, disavowal is deployed as a discursive platform for the performance of prescriptive accounts of self. It is from this perspective that the experience of elite boys' schooling will be analysed.

As Butler (1993) indicated, 'performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power' (p. 225). The 'binding power' of these utterances also involves the 'regulation of identificatory practices' (Butler, 1993, p. 3). This is highlighted in the study by Kenway and Lazarus (2017), where students indicate that despite attending an elite school, they are not personally elitist, as they belong to humble and virtuous households that are only 'moderately well off' (p. 273). In this way, elite schooling is legitimated by students, with the institution absorbing all responsibility for class superiority, elitism, and the imposition of undesirable practices on otherwise good and moral students.

Disavowal is applied in my research to illustrate a particular way of demonstrating individual capacity and capability as an old boy; a strategy that emphasises 'well-roundedness' and functions as an important marker of self-identification, while also indicating aspirations towards liberal, progressive, inclusive, and anti-elitist formations of selfhood. In this regard, creating and maintaining the appearance of being well-rounded, moral, and virtuous is the purpose of disavowal. The analysis applied in this thesis examines the performative

(Butler, 2006b) uses of disavowal among my research participants. Through the interview process, it was apparent that the old boys wanted to cultivate an appearance that positioned them as having emerged from an elite and privileged environment, while not being personally elitist nor entitled. Unlike the typical, self-serving old boy, they were civic-minded, egalitarian, and virtuous. In accounting for disavowal as a technique for asserting well-roundedness and virtue I illustrate how the discursive mediation of self is performed.

1.4. Elite School Scholarship

Scholarly interest in elite schools is well established with research activity surging in recent years, both internationally (e.g., Fahey et al., 2015; Kenway et al., 2017; Khan, 2013; Madrid, 2013; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016a) and within Australia (e.g., Drew et al., 2016; O'Brien, 2019; Saltmarsh, 2016; Variyan, 2018; Yeo, 2011). Emergent themes from the Australian literature have included shifting distinctions in how elite schools are recognised and understood, as well as the contribution they make to discursive constructions of childhood happiness and idealised studenthood. International texts have more recently emphasised how elite schools have mobilised their traditions and values to align with shifting cultural tastes and social conditions in order to better serve an emergent global elite (Kenway et al., 2017; Kenway & McCarthy, 2016).

1.4.1. Globalisation, Colonialism, and Elite Schools

Contemporary elites are produced by a multitude of forces that are made coherent through globalisation and its impact on education and social stratification (McCarthy & Kenway, 2016). As Kenway and Fahey (2014) noted, drawing on the work of Burawoy (2000), three global factors are relevant in understanding globalisation, namely: imaginations, connections, and forces. In establishing theoretical foundations for a global ethnography, global forces were identified as "global" culture, economy, and politics, which are experienced locally through capitalism, colonial history, and imperial interests (Burawoy, 2000). In particular, colonialism has been observed as being a form of expansionism that preceded globalisation, with various European nations – Britain, France, Holland, Portugal, and Spain – imposing authority and command over distant, sovereign lands for the purpose of driving industrial growth and global influence (Hobsbawm, 2000). As Kenway and Fahey

(2014) argued, the colonial period was about more than competition between European nations, and produced the necessary conditions for global capitalism to emerge. Globalisation, both its reach and influence, has been recognised for asserting 'intense pressure on places, institutions, situations and people' (Kenway & Fahey, 2014, p. 179). For elite boys' schools in Australia, the legacy of colonialism remains a powerful and significant force and is relevant to an understanding of the circumstances that make certain discourses possible within the context of these institutions and society more broadly.

An Elite School Network Takes Shape

In Australia, the elite school network was taking shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period that coincided with the peak, and decline, of the British Empire. During this time, there was an explicit aim to translate the traditions of the English Public Schools to the education of ruling-class men in the colonies. This educational model had 'class-based orientations to knowledge' while also having peculiar cultural practices, traditions, and 'modes of organisation' (Kenway & Fahey, 2014, p. 179). This schooling was intended to develop useful men with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for empire building (Gronn, 1992; McCalman, 1993; Sherington et al., 1987). However, they were also about the expression of Christian duty, with religion often being a useful channel for conveying the purpose and righteousness of colonisation. As Epstein et al. (2013) noted, having privilege and wealth carried a moral responsibility, which was embedded in the Christian teachings and charitable practices promoted by the English Public Schools. Within the context of colonial projects, 'this took the form of saving the souls of the colonised poor and of course this had strong racial overtones' (Epstein et al., 2013, p. 477).

Developed for the purposes of educating the children of local elites, these schools also benefited from the movement of headmasters and teachers from England to the colonial frontier (Kenway & Fahey, 2014). The expectation of leadership and devotion to Britain were embedded in school curricula through the transportation of teachers who were trained in the English Public Schools tradition (McCalman, 1993; Sherington et al., 1987). Through this transportation, the elite school network in Australia inherited the English Public School 'practices of classed, gendered and racialised privileged benefaction' (Epstein et al., 2013, p. 477). Of

course, this does not mean that elite schools in Australia are comparable or equivalent to the English Public Schools, or that local adaptations to their ideals and practices have not occurred. However, the ethos and traditions of this system did descend to the elite school network in Australia and remains an historical legacy into the present. In this way, the class-based educational model, as well as teachers trained in the English Public Schools tradition, can be understood as 'colonial carriers of certain forms of eliteness' (Kenway & Fahey, 2014, p. 180).

The English Public Schools were also influential in circulating ideas about 'manliness', which referred to the appropriate behaviour and character expected of young men. This included the attributes of courage, deference, directness, energy, hardiness, independence, stoicism, and will (Mangan & Walvin, 1987). As Rothery and French (2012) highlighted, elite masculinities were not delivered by birth nor inheritance of wealth, but were acquired through a system of norms and values shaped by schooling. Importantly, those boys who were successful at cultivating the characteristics of elite masculinities would be able to compete effectively and become useful men (Tosh, 1999). As Crotty (2001) noted, in a period that was defined by mounting moral and political concerns about a decline of the British Empire, as well as the effeminising effects of urban life, the English Public Schools had the explicit task of producing men who would be *useful*; in the clergy, in industry, in the military, *and* in the colonies.

Old Schools in Modern Times

Within Australia, scholars have placed a microscope on what constitutes elite education and how contemporary circumstances have repositioned some schools in the government, independent, and Catholic sectors as 'elite' (Saltmarsh, 2016). As Rizvi (2016) argued, schools modelled on the English Public Schools, which were founded in the late nineteenth century, 'now face intense competition from newly established elite schools' (p. 126). Some of these 'old schools' have addressed this contemporary challenge through the development of new identity narratives, which are based on a distinct understanding of their history, past achievements, and adaptability to global circumstances (Rizvi, 2016). In Australia, the risk of these schools appearing old fashioned in a modernising, globally connected world has necessitated a reinterpretation of their cultural practices and traditions. In some instances, this has involved a 'careful and strategic project of modernisation which

[is] grounded in a strong sense of stability and tradition and underpinned by a strong and specific moral code' (Proctor, 2011, p. 853).

While this highlights some contemporary research themes, elite school scholarship has historically pursued the broader issue of how these institutions are implicated in educational inequality and the cultural reproduction of power and privilege (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Connell, 1977; Mills, 1956; Roper, 1971; Sherington et al., 1987; Wakeford, 1969; Weinberg, 1967).

Elite Schools and Education Inequality

Educational inequality is strongly associated with the attainment of qualifications and social position, reflecting the inequalities that exist in society more broadly (Breen & Jonsson, 2005). The concept can be categorised in two ways, namely: inequality of outcomes, which is variability in test scores; and inequality of opportunity, which is the proportion of variation that can be explained by characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, geographic location, and social class (Ferreira & Gignoux, 2013; Portes, 2005). While all students should receive access to equal educational opportunities, factors such as parental income, place of residence, and school attended, continue to shape the ability, potential, and employment destinations of individuals. Sociological theories and research have consistently indicated the persistent function of economic, social, and cultural capital in transmitting advantages between generations (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Lareau, 2011). Despite more than half a century of study and research, there remains a need to investigate elite schools and the social groups that benefit from the production of educational inequality.

1.4.2. Why We Study Elite Schools

Much educational research is concerned with the poor and disadvantaged, but some scholars have highlighted a need to also 'study up' (Connell et al., 1982; Donaldson, 2003; Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2010; Nader, 1974). As the conditions and experiences of social elites are rarely investigated, understanding their advantages and how they are implicated in the circumstances of others, remains underdeveloped. As Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard (2010) argued, 'lack of attention to privileged groups is not simply a gap in existing research but a conceptual link missing in our understanding of inequality' (p. 1). Instead of turning the research

gaze 'down' to view the educational predicament of the poor and marginalised, elite school scholars look 'up' to consider how elitism, privilege, and educational advantage are entangled in the perpetuation of inequality (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2010).

Within the context of elite schools, studying up has established that these institutions 'serve dominant social groupings within the nation state' and 'provide an avenue of social mobility for 'deserving' members of subaltern populations' (Kenway & Fahey, 2014, p. 177). As Kenway (2013) indicated, these institutions have always been, and continue to be, implicated in the perpetuation of 'haves' and 'have-nots' in society. Therefore, the key question in elite school research has not been 'if' these institutions contribute to inequality, but rather 'how' they contribute (Cookson & Persell, 1985). More recently, Weis and Fine (2012) emphasised the importance of studying up as it enables scholars to 'trace *how* circuits of dispossession and privilege travel across zip codes and institutions, rerouting resources, opportunities, and human rights upwards as if deserved and depositing despair in low-income communities' (p. 174, emphasis in the original).

1.4.3. Pathways of Privilege

Elite schools are one stepping-stone in a pathway of privilege and have a well-established reputation for channelling alumni into positions of leadership and material success. As Hutchings (2021) argued, people with the necessary means – cultural, economic, and social – can propel their children along a pathway that traverses the 'best' schools, where they can experience success and access enrichment activities, before arriving at the 'best' universities, and eventually, the 'best' jobs. In this case, the 'best' jobs are financially rewarding, prestigious, and secure. Within Australia, this pathway is highlighted by the number of employees in the upper ranks of large companies and the professions who attended non-government schools (Mather, 2014). At the very least, this reveals a correlation between non-government education, the channelling of alumni into esteemed employment destinations, and the maintenance of economic and social advantage. Globally, studies have indicated the persistence of non-government school alumni in positions of power and influence, despite widespread efforts to improve workplace diversity (e.g., Ashley et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2013; Green & Kynaston, 2019; Reeves et al., 2017; Rivera, 2012, 2015; Verkaik, 2018; Watters, 2016).

The current position of elite schools in pathways of privilege, and their role in maintaining power for the social groups they service has been considered by several scholars in recent years, especially in the United Kingdom (e.g., Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Reeves et al., 2017; Verkaik, 2018; Watters, 2016). These studies have revealed how the practices and structures of these institutions cultivate entitlement and privilege, and an ease with hierarchies of authority and power that result in elite school students envisioning a deserved and earned future at prestigious universities and in high-status jobs (e.g., Forbes & Lingard, 2015; Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Khan, 2013; Power et al., 2006; Reeves et al., 2017; Samuelsson, 2021). However, pathways of privilege enable more than structural access to status and its economic and social advantages. Inherent in these pathways is the mobility of privilege and the robustness of dominant discourses surrounding achievement, diligence, fairness, honour, leadership, merit, success, and tolerance, which express the external character of elite schools. For elite boys' schools, these discourses are also gendered, and are reflective of the men they claim to produce. Through this process of transportation, elite boys' schooling is marked as the best possible training ground for boys who are destined for national leadership and corporate management (Proctor, 2011).

1.4.4. Bourdieu and Cultural Reproduction

Elite education research has drawn on the culture of dominant social groups, and the ability of parents to deploy cultural resources, as factors that ensure children are in harmony with schooling and institutional expectations of scholastic excellence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Central to this work are the concepts developed by Bourdieu (1984) and his theoretical framework of cultural reproduction. This approach has been applied in several studies to explain and interpret how elite schools are implicated in shaping the identities, tastes and dispositions of students, and reproducing privilege (e.g., Baker, 2013; Featch, 2020; Forbes & Lingard, 2015; Jack, 2016; Khan, 2013; Light, 1999; Loh, 2016; Proctor & Aitchison, 2015; Sparks, 2018a; van Zanten, 2015b; Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012; Zimdars et al., 2009). However, scholars have expressed concerns about the use of Bourdieu's concepts in educational research, arguing that its application has become 'habitual' and 'superficial' in some instances (Atkinson, 2011; James, 2015; Reay, 2004). Within the field of cultural sociology there has been a significant shift away from the

concepts of Bourdieu (1984) and the notion of class reproduction, to an awareness that elites are no longer 'snobs' who use distinctions of taste to establish class, but are instead 'cultural omnivores' who consume artefacts across the cultural spectrum (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Opportunities to move beyond cultural reproductionist perspectives have been presented in an edited collection (Fahey et al., 2015) that considered the sensory dimensions of elite school privilege, while a special edition of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (see Howard & Kenway, 2015) offered fresh theoretical approaches and new methodological directions in elite school research.

One perspective that has not been investigated or studied extensively within elite school research is how alumni make sense of their schooling and the attitudes and behaviours encountered within these learning environments. In short, what does it *feel* like to have attended an elite boys' school? This research project took this focus and engaged with a group of old boys to understand their experiences of elitism, masculinity, and privilege.

1.5. Literature Evaluation and Gap

The current literature on elite schools, and its particular interest in cultural reproduction, suggests that the experiences and outcomes arising from these privileged spaces are fixed and uniform. However, there is a danger that this places an almost unitary blanket over the experiences of men who attended elite boys' schools. As Poynting and Donaldson (2005) concluded, the 'masculinity of success' that is present in elite boys' schools, university colleges, and boardrooms, is emotionless and rational, producing clear boundaries between the group and loners, bullies and victims, hard men and soft boys, and winners and losers. The defining dichotomies on which this understanding of elite masculinity is based obscures many contradictions, inconsistencies, and variations that likely occur between extremes.

Existing studies of elite boys' schools likely provide incomplete explanations of how current and former students experience, and feel about, their schooling. In particular, the alternatives they offer, between winners and losers, are neither exclusive, exhaustive, nor appropriate categories, while also being unable to accommodate instances of contradiction, malleability, and incompleteness. This study presented a new opportunity for observing how elitism, masculinity, and

privilege take hold in elite boys' schools, and how they function in identity work and positionality. Further, the approach taken in this inquiry also permits an investigation into strategies of renegotiation, which draws into consideration the entangled influence of school and personal histories, on actions, feelings, and thoughts. While this suggests affective structures and practices (Wetherell, 2013), and how they shape the communication and interpretation of emotions (Clegg, 2013), this will not be a particular emphasis or focus for this thesis.

1.5.1. Importance and Contribution

Within the literature on elite boys' schooling in Australia, there is a need to provide an account of men who question and critique the dominant masculine discourses of these institutions, how and why they reflect on their experiences, and its implications for identity work. While there are glimpses of students who were bullied, marginalised, and ostracised within these privileged spaces, they are predominantly used to reference, and reproduce, the key markers of elite masculinity (Donaldson & Poynting, 2007; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005). This ignores, and leaves undeveloped, accounts of students who were unwilling, or unable, to adopt the dominant cultural practices and traditions of elite boys' schools. This study examined why old boys might confront the privilege of their schooling, navigate cracks in elite masculinities, and attempt to recoup certain advantages, opportunities, and privileges, while rejecting others. At present, it is unclear how these men make sense of the masculinities they encountered at school, and the discourses they create to reconcile contradictory and inconsistent subjectivities. This represents a gap in existing accounts of elite schooling and provides an opportunity to move the discussion beyond questions of cultural reproduction, of bullies, of hard men, and of winners. Such positioning enabled the consideration of a multitude of possibilities surrounding the way in which men make sense of, and respond to, the complexity of privilege and its role in modern life.

1.6. Research Questions

The aims, objectives, and analytical approach of this research project orientated my thinking towards the central research question, as follows: ***How do old boys feel about their schooling and talk about privilege in adulthood?*** In addressing this central question, I wanted to consider the masculine characters who were

encountered within elite boys' schools. I wanted to know what it feels like inside the school gate. I wanted to understand whether these men were able to resist, reject, or take principled action against the normative values they confronted, and the expectations placed on them by these institutions. Further, I wanted to consider whether they had experienced any gender and social class dilemmas as they probed and navigated cracks in elite masculine norms. In adulthood, I wanted to know whether they believed their schooling and status as an old boy continued to have any meaningful impact on their life trajectory and formation of selfhood. The supporting questions for my research project were as follows:

- ***How do men make sense of the dominant discourses and practices of elite boys' schooling in Australia?***
- ***Were they able to negotiate, resist, speak back to, or inhabit these dominant discourses and practices to change or mobilise them differently? If so, how?***
- ***Have they needed to confront and reconcile any gender or social class dilemmas in adulthood?***
- ***What strategies do they engage to address cracks and dilemmas? Do these strategies rupture or recuperate their privilege?***

These supporting questions emphasise a particular interest in the lived experiences of men who attended elite boys' schools and how they are the product of discursive practices. In addressing these questions, the thesis seeks to further develop an understanding of elites and privilege by acknowledging the potential richness and complexity in the lived experiences of old boys. Further, it seeks to explore the possibility for tension in the spaces where old boys seek to reflect on, re-evaluate, and reconfigure their identities.

1.7. Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 has outlined the thesis, providing an introduction to elite school scholarship, while also providing context for the aims and objectives of this research project. I discussed the importance and contribution of the thesis within the literature and addressed my core arguments and analytical approach to an investigation of old boys and the experience of elite boys' schooling in Australia.

Chapter 2 explores in detail the elite school literature, tracing the various lines of inquiry that have emerged from this field. I consider the scholarly work that has investigated the conceptualisation of elite schooling, and how this informed my thinking about what constitutes an elite school in the Australian context. I develop my own markers of elite status for the research project before reviewing critical studies of elite schools in Australia. In addition to this, I provide a review of literature on elite schooling with an emphasis on elite school choice, elite schools and identity formation, and elite schools and masculinities.

Chapter 3 outlines theoretical developments in the study of gender and education, highlighting the contested nature of gender identity formation in schools. I consider poststructural approaches to the investigation of gender in schools and how this has informed my theoretical framework. Further, I present the analytical lens that emerged from this framework and how it will be used to understand the old boys and their stories of elitism, masculinity, and privilege.

Chapter 4 establishes the methodological approach and method utilised throughout my field work and data analysis. I highlight the linkages between narrative analysis and poststructuralism, while also discussing its appropriateness for an investigation of talk and identity work. The project design is set out, including the guidelines for participant interviews and ethical considerations required for this research project.

Chapters 5 to 7 contain three case studies that examine the discursive mediation of masculine subjectivity at the intersection of elitism and privilege. They are rich and descriptive accounts provided by three participants who are examples of the old boys who contributed to my research project.

Chapters 8 to 10 provide a discussion of the thematic elements that emerged from an analysis of my field work data. Chapter 8 establishes the image of a model elite boys' school student who is cultivated through the practice of gendered class performances. In particular, it reveals how these practices are used as a discursive resource in adulthood to simultaneously compliment and critique the idealised, well-rounded studenthood of an elite boys' school. Chapter 9 examines the fragmenting of elite identities and the performance of disavowal. Specifically, it identifies this practice as a strategy to renegotiate the rules of elite masculinity and reinterpret the

experience of having attended an elite boys' school. Chapter 10 examines the process of recuperation and considers how old boys reconcile identities that are contradictory and incompatible. Specifically, it considers how acts of self-reidentification fracture, fragment, but ultimately repair, notions of gender, class, and social justice, necessitating a reconciliation with past behaviours and former selves.

Chapter 11 provides a conclusion and final reflection on the performances that occur at the intersection of elitism, masculinity, and privilege. The main emphasis is on disavowal as a technique to demonstrate individual capacity and capability, while obscuring the advantages and opportunities acquired from elite boys' schooling.

At eight o'clock on Monday morning I walked through the school gate. Mr Garner, the Primary School Headmaster was waiting for me. He grabbed me by the shoulder and dragged me into his office.

I was frightened.

'What's this,' he said, 'you know that haircut is not allowed. You're in a lot of trouble'.

School rules only permitted short back and sides. Long enough on top to comb into a side part, but short enough on the back and sides so it would not touch your collar or cover your ears.

'I'm sorry Sir. I didn't know?'

'Didn't know?' he said. He was outraged that I had not committed the rules to memory.

Tears welled in my eyes. I had never been one to go against the rules and I had never been in trouble until now. 'I'm calling your mother. This will get fixed today,' he barked.

The tears began to flow. I was ashamed that I had done something wrong. I was fearful of the punishment to come.

Later that morning, Mr. Garner recounted my story to the entire primary school at assembly. My failure at not knowing the rules. My tears and wimpy behaviour while being 'corrected'. It was presented as a cautionary tale for the benefit of the majority, but it had the feeling of targeted humiliation.

The boys laughed. I cried.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I provide a review of literature on elite schooling with an emphasis on the topics as follows: *Who is Elite* (Section 2.1) considers what constitutes elite school status and who can claim this title; *Elite Markings* (Section 2.2) identifies the dimensions of an elite school, with specific consideration of wealth, tradition, and Whiteness; *Elite School Scholarship in Australia* (Section 2.3) highlights recent critical studies of elite boys' schools; *Elite School Choice* (Section 2.4) explores parental motivations for enrolling children in elite schools, what students learn in these institutions, and processes of selection and exclusion; *Elite Adolescent Identities* (Section 2.5) considers how students come to identify themselves as elite, justify unearned advantages and opportunities, and embody elite talk; and *Elite Schools and Masculinities* (Section 2.6) reveals how these privileged spaces construct and regulate a normative elite masculinity.

2.1. Who is Elite?

Within the scholarship on elite education, there is little consensus surrounding what constitutes an elite school (Courtois, 2020; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b; Saltmarsh, 2016). I commence this section with a discussion of how the term *elite* has been defined, and how it was deployed to identify the schools examined here.

Khan (2012) defined elites as 'those who have vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource ... [that has] transferrable value' (p. 362). This emphasis on power and privilege has also been applied to the field of education by van Zanten (2015a), who defined elites as those who are in 'possession of resources allowing for the hoarding and monopolization of desired positions, opportunities and honours' (p. 4). Drawing on this conceptualisation, elite schools can be viewed as 'engines of privilege' (Green & Kynaston, 2019) in that they are able to convert their resources into motion along highly desirable life trajectories for the social group they service. By 'hoarding' resources that advantage them, elite schools provide students with benefits and opportunities that are inaccessible to most. However, the resources that confer advantage are not fixed, and are instead specific to time and place (Kenway & Koh, 2015). In short, the cultural, economic and social factors of a given time period,

as well as geographic location, will necessarily inform the intention and objective of an elite education and what constitutes elite status (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016b).

2.1.1. Elite Australian Schools

In Australia, it has been argued that elite status varies within and between educational sectors, across time, and geographically (Saltmarsh, 2016). As Saltmarsh (2016) highlighted, there is a need to problematise the notion that elite schools in Australia are to be found exclusively within the non-government sector, arguing that 'there are forms of elite schooling in the public, Catholic and independent sectors' (p. 43).

The presence of academically selective government schools in the Australian market reveals how the presumed 'public/private binary' of quality and excellence can be problematised (Angus, 2015, p. 403). This notion was extended by Saltmarsh (2016), who demonstrated that:

> These high-achieving schools [academically selective government schools] maintain exclusivity through rigorous admissions processes, with entry gained on the basis of test scores, or in the case of selective performing arts high schools, through a highly competitive audition process. (p. 43)

Recent reporting has highlighted that students attending select-entry government high schools are just as academically advantaged as those attending high-fee non-government schools (Heffernan, 2021). Numerous scholars have identified that selective government schooling options provide access to academic and extra-curricular excellence, which produces opportunities and outcomes that are inaccessible to most students in the government sector (Angus, 2015; Campbell et al., 2009; Windle, 2009). It follows that these selective government schools can, and should, be conceptualised as elite.

The presumed 'public/private binary' also conceals the commercialisation and stratification that has occurred within the government system (Lingard et al., 2017; Rowe, 2016). As Thompson et al. (2019) argued, 'the idealised public school – comprehensive, state-funded and open to all within a community – is but one of the forms of provision within Australia's public school systems' (p. 894). As Rowe

(2016) noted, desirable government schools can attract a student cohort that is more advantaged, particularly in economic terms, enabling the acquisition of additional funding through the contributions of parents and other donors. Further, some government schools transfer schooling costs to parents in order to subsidise commercial services, as well as learning and extra-curricular activities (Lingard et al., 2017). As this suggests, the expectation of parental contributions within the government system challenges the assumption that all government schools are the same, and that the sector is equitable (Thompson et al., 2019).

Conversely, non-government education in Australia is marked by considerable variability and includes a broad range of schools that cater for a variety of cultural, ethnic, and religious affiliations. As a result, many non-government providers 'serve clientele that are not particularly affluent or influential,' and as a result, being non-government 'is by no means a guarantee of elite status' (Saltmarsh, 2016, p. 45).

Although it should be acknowledged that a variety of Australian schools can make a legitimate claim to being elite, the elite schools of interest in this research project are elite in the sense that they can restrict attendance on economic and social grounds. This indicates the capacity for *exclusivity* as well as *selectivity*.

2.2. Elite Markings

The markers of elite school status include longevity, academic success, propulsion of alumni into prestigious universities and esteemed employment destinations, membership within broader networks of influence, high public esteem, and material wealth (Kenway et al., 2013). Similarly, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009b) has argued that elite school status is achieved through a combination of five dimensions that signal these institutions as being demographically, geographically, historically, scholastically, and typologically elite. Through these markers, schools express their character and become recognisable as elite to prospective clients and elite school scholars (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b). These markers have been used by numerous studies in the past decade to identify elite schools in various geographical locations, including Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States (e.g., Courtois, 2015; Drew, 2013; Drew et al., 2016; Featch, 2020; Forbes & Weiner, 2014; Hermann, 2015; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013a; Scheepstra,

2018; Sparks, 2018a). For the purposes of this research, the markers of wealth, academic success, and longevity require further unpacking. An additional dimension of Whiteness will also be considered to address issues linked to Australian society, its colonial past, and the implications of the elite school network taking form across the peak and decline of the British Empire.

2.2.1. Wealth

Material wealth has been acknowledged as being particularly important in establishing what constitutes an elite school, especially when stratifying non-government schools. Specifically, elite schools are distinguished by: expensive tuition fees; extensive land holdings; well-maintained buildings and facilities; and large endowment funds and donation programs (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b; Kenway et al., 2013). It is not uncommon for the tuition at an elite boys' school in Australia to cost in excess of A$30,000 per year, with this outlay purportedly providing children access to a 'quality' education, but also opulent facilities (it is not unusual for schools of this type to include orchestra pits, observatories, yoga rooms, and on-campus baristas) (Lyons, 2019; O'Flaherty, 2019; Ting et al., 2019). It is estimated that the accumulated wealth of the most prestigious schools in Australia is approximately A$8.5 billion (Schneiders & Millar, 2021). Further, when compared to the median personal income in Australia, which is approximately A$51,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), the financial outlay required to access these spaces is significant. However, this does not necessarily designate all parents who can enrol their children in these schools as members of the Australian elite. For example, discounts are offered to the children of teachers, while financial concessions are provided through academic, cultural, or sporting scholarships, as well as means-tested bursaries (Henseke et al., 2021). Regardless, as an educational choice that is typically funded entirely by parental contributions, the high tuition fees commanded by these institutions would suggest that most students come from households that are financially above most. As a result, many others are excluded from these schools on the basis that their parents are unable to afford the expense.

2.2.2. Tradition, Honour, Discipline, Excellence

Claims to the quality and superiority of learning and teaching accessible within a school is also central to the identification of elite status (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b; Kenway et al., 2013; van Zanten, 2016). Elite boys' schools in Australia are

concerned with the 'making' of men, who reflect their ethos and traditions. This invariably includes capacities and characteristics that coincide with 'strength' and 'prowess' (especially in terms of sporting ability and intellectual superiority).

The assertion of a masculinist character has descended from the English Public School system;[6] a relatively small group of institutions that have historically educated the boys of the upper classes in England. The curriculum of these schools originally emphasised the study of Greek and Roman classics, and while the classics continue to be taught, a more athletic, duty-bound, heroic, and imperial model for educating boys emerged in the late nineteenth century (Tosh, 2005).

Useful Men

In nineteenth-century England, a public school education aimed to prepare boys for life beyond the family home by minimising the potentially emasculating influence of their mother and offering an 'indispensable introduction to the company of males' (Tosh, 1999, p. 105). As Tosh (1999) argued in his study of masculinity and class in nineteenth-century England, the central purpose of the English Public School system was to enable a young boy to 'rub shoulders with his peers [and] experience competition' (p. 105). Distinct spheres of social interaction for both men and women were viewed as appropriate and necessary, with this being promoted and reinforced through these schools. Specifically, the purpose of the all-male environment was to 'toughen and develop character in preparation for the rigours and responsibilities of adult life' (Rothery & French, 2012, p. 37). The continued gender segregation promoted by elite boys' schools in Australia is a legacy of this system and the belief of maintaining separate spheres for men and women.

The adulation of all-male spaces and the promotion of manly attributes ensured that the English Public Schools produced young men who would dutifully serve the British Empire. As Caine and Sluga (2000) have argued, the English Public Schools 'advocated the values of Empire and the bonds of fraternity' (p. 106). Through the character and traditions instilled in them at school, alumni would carry forward the qualities needed to administer the British Empire and maintain its global hegemony. The expectation of leadership and devotion to Britain were similarly

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[6] The best-known English Public Schools were founded in the late Medieval and Renaissance periods and include: Charterhouse School; Eton College; Harrow School; Merchant Taylors' School; Rugby School; Shrewsbury School; St. Paul's School; Westminster School; and Winchester College.

embedded in the curriculum of elite boys' schools in Australia, which was often delivered by teachers trained in the English Public Schools tradition (McCalman, 1993; Sherington et al., 1987).

The ideals and practices of an English Public School education travelled to Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, following the recruitment of teachers from England (Crotty, 2001). Through this transportation, the elite school network in Australia inherited the English Public School 'practices of classed, gendered and racialised privileged benefaction' (Epstein et al., 2013, p. 477). As Proctor (2011) indicated, these practices were embedded in the tradition, discipline, honour, and excellence of the English Public Schools that 'included an intense focus on competitive team sports, the self-conscious promotion of school heritage traditions, and the enlistment of older students in the discipline and pastoral care of younger students' (p. 844). Of course, this does not mean that elite schools in Australia are *exactly* comparable or equivalent to the English Public Schools, or that local adaptations to their ideals and practices have not occurred. However, the ethos and traditions of this system did descend to the elite school network in Australia and remains an historical legacy into the present. As Saltmarsh (2016) argued:

> Australian private schools that tacitly reproduce English heritage in the form of boarding, prefectures, 'house' systems and disciplinary regimes are able to trade on these as signifiers of superior status and worth. This, together with high fees that maintain and protect the exclusivity of such schools, caters to idealized notions about their perceived quality. (p. 46)

2.2.3. Whiteness and Christianity

Symbolic and material Whiteness has also been identified as being significant to elite status, especially for schools that were established in former colonies of the British Empire (Angod, 2015; Bolt, 2021; Crotty, 2001; Epstein et al., 2013; Saltmarsh, 2016). As Epstein et al. (2013) argued, the moral responsibility of those living in privilege was embedded in the Christian teachings and charitable practices promoted by the English Public Schools. It is well established that elite schools in Australia have been historically interested in teaching skills and attitudes that would form Christian gentlemen (Sherington et al., 1987). This sentiment was captured by Canon

Morris, founder and first headmaster of the Church of England Grammar School (Churchie), a member of the elite boys' school network in Australia. He stated that:

> The main thing is to remember that our first object is to turn out
> Christians – men of character, Christian gentlemen of the 'type' and
> 'character' familiar in the Church of England. This will mean the
> development of certain qualities. I have mentioned one quality,
> gentleness: this includes courtesy and chivalry. It includes of course,
> other gentlemanly qualities, courage, honour, a sense of duty, mercy
> and patience. (Morris, 1955, p. 45)

As Christians, the men produced by elite boys' schools were expected to make a useful contribution to helping the poor by espousing the quality of 'mercy,' while also embodying other classed behaviours befitting a gentleman. Schoolboys, sitting fastidiously in chapel pews, would be told that, 'unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more' (Luke 12:48, *King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Old boys would be held accountable for their qualities, skills, and wealth, and were expected to use the influence of their esteemed employment destinations to benefit the less fortunate.

For schools in the colonies, such as Australia, 'this took the form of saving the souls of the colonised poor and of course this had strong racial overtones' (Epstein et al., 2013, p. 477). Obviously, there is an inherent difficulty with this expectation, which illustrates the bewilderment and confusion that old boys have historically confronted. As Orwell (2014b) noted of his time during the early twentieth century at St. Cyprian's School in England, 'Broadly you were bidden to be at once a Christian and a social success, which is impossible' (p. 440). The incompatibility of mercy and ruthlessness, of spiritual awareness and corporate management, are some of the many impossibilities that old boys must reconcile from their schooling. Regardless, within the Australian context Whiteness, Christianity, and Englishness underpins much of what it means to be elite (Saltmarsh, 2007). As a result, Whiteness and Christianity is embedded in the cultural practices and traditions of elite boys' schools and is likely evident in the beliefs and values of the men they produce.

Marketing Whiteness, Selling Diversity

The marketing materials of elite schools continue to foreground Whiteness, with the presence of ethnic diversity often used to emphasise the White, wealthy subjects who constitute the majority of the student body (Gottschall et al., 2010; McCandless, 2017). Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) referred to this process as the 'curriculum of diversity', a phenomenon where minority and historically marginalised groups are included in elite school communities for the purpose of enriching the curriculum of a majority White student population. In this way, the *other* becomes an object for White students to 'learn' from, accumulating a valuable resource that can be transported into university, employment, and their future role as global citizens. As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) indicated, diversity and multi-culturalism are both celebrated and welcomed across the admissions policies, curriculum, and co-curricular activities of elite schools. However, the practical adoption of these values can be unsophisticated and ignorant, often being tokenistic in the celebration and inclusion of difference (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017).

Significantly, much of the literature on elite schools and social justice initiatives has indicated that diversity and inclusion measures only serve to reproduce privilege (Howard, 2013; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010). This suggests that the presence of diversity and inclusion in the marketing priorities and policies of elite schools further perpetuates an exclusivity that has historically been used to service the interests of a predominantly White and wealthy client base (French, 2017; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). As a result, the diversity initiatives of these schools have been viewed by students as pandering to the needs of minority social groups. In turn, this has been observed to produce feelings of apathy rather than developing a genuine awareness of social justice and opportunities for young, upper-class White students to challenge their economic, political, and social privilege (Howard, 2013; Keddie et al., 2020).

2.2.4. Elite Boys' Schools in Australia

For the purposes of my research project, elite boys' schools have been defined as an exclusive educational choice that is: funded by parental contributions; delivered by a non-government institution; capable of delivering cultural, economic, political, and social resources of transferrable value; and recognised for delivering alumni into esteemed employment destinations and material wealth. White, wealthy, and steeped

in history, these schools are selective environments that create and restrict access to desirable outcomes.

Extending the typology developed by Gaztambide-Fernández (2009b), I note that elite boys' schools in Australia are also defined by exclusivity. This is particularly relevant to the considerations of *restricted* access that these schools mediate. As Drew (2013) indicated, the 'elite ideological narratives' utilised by these schools reveal the economic, social, and cultural capital required of students, their families, and those associated with the wider school community. As a result, the elite ideological narratives deployed by these schools establish criteria for entry by suggesting that 'the elite school [is] more exclusive and discerning than non-elite public schools' (Drew, 2013, p. 182). Accordingly, this thesis applies a conceptualisation of elite boys' schools as sites that are:

- selective and offer 'exclusive' educational choices;
- reliant on the demonstration of narrowly defined prescriptions of economic, social, and cultural capital of students and their families;
- non-government and utilise 'elite ideological narratives' to emphasise exclusivity; and
- geared exclusively towards the education of boys under defined narratives of masculinity that are positioned as indivisible with the approaches to teaching advocated within these schools.

2.3. Elite Schools Scholarship in Australia

Despite many elite schools in Australia enjoying an external reputation for delivering quality education (Kenway, 2013; Saltmarsh, 2007, 2016), their internal cultural practices and traditions are largely invisible to the public. However, some scholarly work has emerged in the past two decades that has complicated and problematised the status and prestige enjoyed by elite boys' schools in Australia.

2.3.1. Critical Studies of Elite Boys' Schools in Australia

While the investigation of elite boys' schools in Australia has been infrequent, this is not to say that it has been absent from the literature. There has been a range of extensive studies that have positioned these institutions differently, as well as adopting a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. Some extensive studies that have been produced in the past two decades include the following:

- Crotty (1999), who explored the reworking of manliness ideals in elite boys' schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- Light (1999), who used a cultural reproduction framework to compare the role of rugby union in the construction of masculinity at an elite high school in Japan and an elite boys' school in Australia.
- Saltmarsh (2004), who integrated sociological and poststructuralist theories to study incidents of sexual violence that occurred between students at an elite boys' school.
- Yeo (2011), who used ethnographic methods to examine the lives and experience of Southeast Asian boarding students and the construction of a group identity at an elite boys' school.
- Variyan (2018), who utilised poststructuralist theories to study teacher agency in three elite boys' schools.
- O'Brien (2019), who used ethnographic methods to explore the numerous practices and processes that constructed masculinities within an elite boys' school.

In addition to these in-depth works, numerous other studies have investigated the marketing and impression management strategies of elite schools in Australia (e.g. Drew, 2013; Drew et al., 2016; Gottschall et al., 2010; McCandless, 2015; McDonald et al., 2012; Mills, 2004). These studies have revealed that the impression management texts produced by these institutions, such as school prospectuses and websites, construct a range of elite ideological discourses that position these institutions as desirable for prospective clients (Drew, 2013). As Connell (2013) argued, the advertising and brochures of these institutions:

> create an image of an orderly, disciplined, clean and uniformed little world, which the parents are invited to contrast with the undisciplined, dirty and dangerous world outside – 'outside' being understood to include the public schools. (p. 105)

This is evident in popular accounts that reveal parental anxieties about children being negatively 'influenced by bad kids with too many piercings' at government schools (Bachelard, 2011), and popular mythology surrounding the innate capacities for hardworking and scholarship by non-government school students (Fowler & Carey,

2019). Therefore, it is unsurprising that elite schools have become inextricably linked with idealised notions of childhood and student life (Drew et al., 2016). In the case of elite boys' schools, they occupy a place in public imagination as the best possible training ground for boys to become men (Gottschall et al., 2010).

During the same time period, extensive studies of elite schools have also emerged from Canada (Angod, 2015; Baker; 2013; Scheepstra, 2018), New Zealand (Sparks, 2018a), the United Kingdom (Green & Kynaston, 2019; Verkaik, 2018) and the United States (Bolt, 2021; Chase, 2008; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Hermann, 2015; Howard, 2008; Khan, 2013; Scarbrough, 2012), while numerous edited collections have also been produced (e.g., Fahey et al., 2015; Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010; Kenway & McCarthy, 2016; Koh & Kenway, 2016; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013b, 2016a). This recent scholarly work has provided important insight into how elite schools are implicated in the circulation and reproduction of privilege, class-centric notions of gender and race, globalisation, and the preservation of economic, political, and social advantage.

Combined, domestic and international studies have emphasised how elite schools: perpetuate educational inequality; respond to shifting cultural and social expectations; reproduce and amplify economic, political, and social advantage; manage their public image and reputation; and conceal practices that might threaten their reputation and financial viability. However, these studies fail to consider, or adequately represent, the experiences of students who were unable, or unwilling, to be compliant with the cultural practices and traditions of their schooling environment, or who may not have become complicit and regulated alumni. It is with this lacuna that the research informing the thesis was conducted. Articulations of the experiences of men who confront and unpack the attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics instilled in them at school represent an unexplored insight into elite boys' schools in Australia.

2.4. Elite School Choice

2.4.1. Scholastic Achievement

Research surrounding elite school choice has highlighted the role that parental strategies play in increasing and maintaining economic and social advantage for their children (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Cookson, 1994; Cookson & Persell, 1985).

The literature identifies that elite schools have been historically selected by parents based on a perception that these institutions produce high levels of scholastic achievement, while also instilling a distinct character through discipline (e.g., Ball, 2003; Caro & Bonnor, 2007; Donaldson & Poynting, 2007; Fox, 1985; Nelson, 2010; Walford, 1986). This association between parental perceptions of scholastic achievement and school choice is well established and highlights the premium that parents place on academic reputation, teacher quality, teaching style and exam results (e.g., Bosetti, 2004; Jackson & Bisset, 2005; Robinson & Smithers, 1999; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). From this perspective, parents presume that a quality education, which foregrounds the importance of academic endeavour, is essential to gaining entrance into prestigious universities, and ultimately, esteemed employment destinations (Power et al., 2003; Reay et al., 2011; Weis et al., 2014). These studies represent a rational approach to school choice, where selection is made based on perceptions of academic outcomes and educational opportunities. This approach is particularly relevant for middle-class parents who present themselves as being 'successful strategists' and 'skilled choosers who are able to operate in the market place to advantage their children' (Power, 2001, p. 202). However, parents do not always act as rational agents.

Ball and Gewirtz (1997) suggested that parents often choose a school for their child through 'a combination of personal prejudices derived from their own school experiences, vague and uncertain grasp of received wisdom, and reputational gossip acquired through local social networks and media hype' (p. 219). From this perspective, some scholars have suggested that the act of school choice is a means to enact and express parental identity (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014). This is supported by more recent investigations into the predictors of non-government school participation, which have revealed that parents who adhere to traditional values[7] are more likely to enrol their children in non-government schools (Anders et al., 2020). Anders et al. (2020) suggested that an interpretation of this finding could be that 'traditional values is capturing a proxy for parents' political views and attitudes towards equality' (p. 987). This can be contrasted with Reay (2013), who revealed how liberal ideals and political commitments can result in some parents pursuing

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[7] In this study, traditional values referred to, for example, being concerned about the impact of mothers working on children and family life.

'against the grain' school choices, such as ethnically diverse government schools. This reveals the ambivalences of privilege and the seemingly contradictory ideas that some parents may have about where to enrol their child for school.

Although concerns for the future life opportunities of children clearly underpins the choices parents make around schooling, for many this is clearly 'realised through a 'fuzzy' and sometimes misguided logic' (Ball & Gewirtz, 1997, p. 219). It is possible that parents who select elite schools for their children hold more conservative political views and attitudes towards diversity, equality, and inclusion, which forms part of this logic. While scholastic achievement might be foregrounded in justifying non-government schooling, it is unlikely to be the sole determinant of quality for parents. This is particularly relevant when considering the lack of meaningful evidence to connect non-government schooling with a higher standard of learning and scholastic achievement (Gillespie, 2014).

While important, these big-picture studies fail to account for deeper complexities and nuances in the process of school selection (Bosetti, 2004; Campbell et al., 2009; Cookson, 1994).

Exclusivity and Selectivity

Elite schools have access to, and control of, resources that deliver opportunities and advantages inaccessible to most people, while access is further restricted by the exclusivity of these institutions, achieved through their high tuition fees. Through these mechanisms, other sectors of the educational market are required to 'absorb the challenge of more diverse and disadvantaged populations on behalf of the larger system' (Doherty & Pozzi, 2017, p. 4). For elite schools, the admissions process has an implicit intent to exclude those students who are unlikely to apply themselves to the endeavour of scholastic excellence, and thereby maintain the reputation for learning and teaching superiority crafted by the school. As Gaztambide-Fernández (2009b) highlighted, elite schools can:

> exclude some students, [ensuring] each class is composed of a
> carefully selected group of students whom, to some extent, have
> agreed a priori to participate in such endeavours. As such, teachers
> can make assumptions about the particular qualities, attitudes, and
> skills of the students who enter their classrooms and expect that the

students enter with some degree of willingness and even eagerness to participate. (p. 1103)

From this perspective, it is the ability of these institutions to be selective at the point of enrolment, and exclude students who are unlikely to succeed academically, which is critical in producing their exceptional exam results. Of course, these are the results that so many parents defer to as being the key factor in school selection. Therefore, it is likely that the outstanding performance of these institutions in league tables (O'Flaherty, 2020; O'Flaherty & Egan, 2020) is about the process of social exclusion and academic selectivity, rather than the instrumental education that might be taking place in the classroom. Further, as Doherty and Pozzi (2017) highlighted, for non-government schools, selectivity at enrolment is further bolstered by the capacity to exclude students who underperform at some future point, by encouraging them to transfer to a less demanding learning environment, if not removing them directly through expulsion.

The ability to determine who gets in, combined with wealth, influence, and the economic resources to invest in sophisticated image management strategies ensures that elite schools can make plausible gestures towards the superiority of their teaching and learning (Drew, 2013; Drew et al., 2016; Gottschall et al., 2010; Wardman et al., 2010). Further, this position enables these institutions to exercise significant control and influence over public perception of what constitutes the gold-standard for schooling in Australia and the education agenda more broadly (Crotty, 1999; Sherington et al., 1987). However, the transportation of students into higher education, where scholastic achievement can be more directly compared with individuals educated in different sectors of the market, permits a more critical understanding of the learning and teaching available within elite schools.

While elite schools excel at channelling students into university, research suggests that non-government schooling does not translate into superior scholastic achievement in higher education (Birch & Miller, 2007; Dobson & Skuja, 2005). Although limited, the available evidence would suggest that university students who attended government schools in Australia are more likely to achieve higher scores at university, relative to non-government school students, after controlling for other factors (Li & Dockery, 2015; Shulruf et al., 2008). The is supported by the most

recent results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which revealed that distinctions in test scores, between government and non-government schools, disappear after accounting for the socioeconomic background of both the student and school (Chrysanthos, 2019). Students educated in elite boys' schools also present other difficulties when transitioning into higher education. As Robinson and Smithers (1999) concluded, students from single-sex schools experience anxiety about their ability to adjust to a co-educational learning environment. This issue is contextualised by an old boy in Australia who indicated that single-sex education had not prepared him for interacting with women. He stated that:

> I think that the main thing for me about going to a single-sex boys' school is that once I got out, I was not prepared for there to be a completely different gender. You know, talking to women, and just dealing with women as though they were people, did take me a while. (Seccombe, 2021, p. 2)

As this suggests, elite schools may not deliver a superior standard of teaching and learning, or graduates who are prepared for diverse environments, but they do produce a disproportionate number of national leaders and corporate managers.

2.4.2. Relational Achievement

Several studies have highlighted the importance of tradition and values in parental school choice, especially where this relates to extra-curricular opportunities (Chase, 2008; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Howard, 2008; Khan, 2013; McCalman, 1993). Critical studies of elite school marketing materials and impression management strategies have revealed how these institutions emphasise their unique position to develop the all-round abilities of children, nurture their 'innate' talents, and prepare them for success (e.g., Drew, 2013; Drew et al., 2016; Gottschall et al., 2010; McCandless, 2015, 2017; Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004).

The Hidden Curriculum

One component of this development is achieved through the 'hidden curriculum' – the implicit values that students learn at school, but are not part of the official curriculum or included in the explicit aims or goals of teachers (Jackson, 1968). Derived from the concept of 'manifest' and 'latent' functions (Merton, 1968), the

hidden curriculum is a latent function of education that, while not articulated or self-evident, is critical to the continuation and preservation of specific ideologies and the buttressing of group identity. As Apple (2004) indicated, certain meanings and practices are emphasised in school through the knowledge that is selected for teaching. Of course, this implies that other knowledge will be neglected, excluded, diluted, or reinterpreted because of these selection processes. While these covert and subtle lessons are not explicitly stated or recognised by the institution, they are essential to producing group identity. Within the context of elite schools this often includes providing students with a vision of their future as leaders and cultivating an assuredness about their abilities and talents. Through the hidden curriculum, elite school students develop the assertiveness and confidence needed to promote themselves, justify their privilege, and defend their suitability as leaders (Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Khan, 2013; Rivera, 2015).

In emerging from these privileged spaces, elite boys' school students have 'an unquestioned belief in a *right* to a successful future' (Sparks, 2018b, pp. 18, emphasis added). Given that academic differences between government and non-government schooling outcomes largely disappear when students transition into higher education, this 'right' to a successful future is unlikely to be based on any objective claims to academic and intellectual superiority. Of course, elite membership has never been 'dependent on knowledge, or ability, or democratic approval, but was buttressed and kept in place by a restrictive educational system' that was a 'device to regulate and limit entry into a governing elite' (Shrosbree, 1988, p. 59). However, as Khan (2013) noted, an implication of this is that elite school students 'consistently overestimate' their own abilities, and the talents of their classmates, falsely determining that if they, or a classmate, are the best at academic, athletic, or cultural endeavours, they must be remarkable individuals who are destined for greatness. In short, elite boys' schools excel at encouraging students to view themselves as exceptional. Of course, there is the potential that this celebration of exceptionalism, and expectation of success, may produce some debilitating effects beyond the confines of school.

Failing Against the Odds

Elite education places an overwhelming emphasis on the role of cultural reproduction in the maintenance of privilege. However, this does not mean that reproduction is

guaranteed, with pathways also having detours, deviations, and dead ends. In gaining access to what is presumed to be the best possible learning environment, it has been revealed that some students from grammar and non-government schools in the United Kingdom reach adulthood with the belief that they have 'failed against the odds' (Power et al., 2003, p. 103). For individuals, perceptions of failure are often relative to the aspirations and expectations set by their family, peers, and school. In particular, perceptions of failure, for those who were academically able, privileged, and surrounded by high expectations from an early age, can produce 'long-lasting legacies of low self-esteem and guilt' (Power et al., 2003, p. 113). As Power et al. (2003) indicated, 'for the children of those parents who made heavy financial sacrifices to purchase a private education, failure can be particularly guilt laden' (p. 113). The expectation that is placed on elite school alumni, to pursue pathways into higher education and high-status employment, means that arriving in stable, secure, but otherwise unremarkable destinations, can be associated with feelings of disappointment, regret, and shame. For this cohort, embracing a life that they never planned on can result in concern, nervousness, and unease, because it fails to align with the imagined future they were encouraged to embrace while students. As Power et al. (2003) concluded, although most middle-class students from grammar and non-government schools 'manage to sustain their socio-economic status, those with troubled and damaged educational identities can have difficulties in taking up the social positions that their cultural inheritance, educational pathway and academic ability seemed to promise' (p. 115). The perception of being surrounded by exceptional talent, when combined with institutional pressure to pursue high-status pathways, must place unbelievable strain on those men who believe that they have 'failed' to measure up and realise their potential. For these men, the ladders they were expected to climb might ultimately mean they have further to fall.

Climbing Ladders

Within the Australian context, Sherington et al. (1987) observed that the hidden curriculum of elite schools is embedded in, and deployed through, a set of key mechanisms. These mechanisms are based on the English Public Schools system and include the following components:

- a prefect system, to maintain discipline;
- a house system, to organise intra-school sport;

- a diverse sport and physical exercise program;
- a strong school identity, achieved through a cadet corps and sporting success; and
- cultural enrichment, especially debating and social service.

These components are markers of class distinction that buttress dominant discourses surrounding scholastic achievement, learning quality, and prestige (see Saltmarsh, 2016). It is through these mechanisms that a particular worldview is taught and legitimated, and students learn how to find their place within the institution and its network of influence. Specifically, this is achieved by learning how to be both subject to, and progress upwards through, hierarchies of authority and power (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005). As Khan (2013) argued, the persistence of hierarchical arrangements within and surrounding elite schools, such as prefectures and house systems, provide students with:

> Relentless practice, in engaging the ladder, learning its rules, figuring out when to climb and when to stay put, [which can] eventually make hierarchies not limit but enable their advancement – provided they learn the right way to climb. (p. 91)

It is this aspect of the hidden curriculum, and the emphasis it places on the ability to cultivate a sense of self that is at ease with authority, which enables alumni to effortlessly develop and leverage relationships with power and navigate hierarchies. Evidence suggests that these relational skills are well developed by the time alumni reach higher education. In particular, Jack (2016) highlighted how non-government school alumni at an elite university in the United States were 'at ease in interacting with authority figures' relative to lower-income undergraduates who were 'more resistant to engaging authority figures in college and tend to withdraw from them' (p. 1). The formality and hierarchy demanded by elite institutions can also surprise and shock outsiders, making it difficult, if not impossible, to belong authentically without extensive experience on the inside, practicing and mastering the peculiar rules and regulations (Epstein et al., 2013). Of course, this has significant implications for the opportunities and outcomes accessible to those beyond the elite school network.

Relational achievement is the salient component of an elite education. For this thesis it refers to the knowledge that is imparted and practiced about how to

negotiate relationships, acknowledge and benefit from distinctions in power, and feel at ease with authority figures. Through the relentless practice of these skills at school, hierarchy 'flattens' and students learn to approach relationships with authority figures without 'fear or trepidation' (Taylor, 2021). As a result, the 'ease' of privilege and success in adulthood has the appearance of being deserved and earned, as opposed to being the product of social class, networks, and wealth. This resonates with the work of Butler (2006a), and an understanding of a 'stylized repetition of acts' that gives the 'illusion of an abiding … self' (p. 191). From this perspective, success becomes a 'mode of belief' for old boys. In their minds, their success is not tied to the school environment, or any privilege and advantage that is a product of social position. Rather, individual success is evidence of hard work, innate talent, and skill. This belief, enacted repeatedly, results in further assuredness about their right to a successful future, which will be earned through those qualities and traits that have taken on the appearance of being natural.

The importance of relational achievement highlights that school choice is about much more than parental perceptions of learning quality and scholastic achievement. While parents may foreground rational choice and conceptions of the presumed higher academic standards of elite schools, choice is far more complex and nuanced than any rational model permits. When parents talk of a quality education, it is therefore not just about scholastic achievement (Jackson & Bisset, 2005), but rather a commitment to being present in, and surrounded by, particular networks of influence that are a feature of elite schools (Ashley et al., 2015; Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Howard, 2008; Howard et al., 2014; Khan, 2013; Rivera, 2012, 2015). With an embodied sense of exceptionalism, and a hierarchical understanding of power and influence, students and schools develop an obsession with how they are viewed and regarded by others.

2.4.3. Communities, Networks and Relationships

The close association between elite boys' schools and the social groups they service is a well-established aspect of this educational segment (Campbell et al., 2009; Connell et al., 1982; McCalman, 1993; McLeod & Yates, 2006). As Proctor (2011) argued, there are 'strong connections between the community-making and the identity-making practices of elite schools' (p. 853). This is most evident in the networks and relationships that surround these institutions, such as the Old Boys'

Association[8] (Kenway, 1984; Watters, 2016). As this suggests, the making of class and gender at an elite boys' school in Australia is 'not only about the making of individual men but about the making of networks within and around social class and masculinity' (Proctor, 2011, p. 853). The skills needed to negotiate these networks and relationships are embedded in the curriculum and practices of elite schools, conferring an advantage on alumni that propels them along pathways towards esteemed employment destinations (Ashley et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2013; Rivera, 2012, 2015), and the highest incomes (Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Power et al., 2006; Reeves et al., 2017). Significantly, identification with the elite school system, and initiation into its social networks, begins from enrolment and is intended to last for life.

2.4.4. Selection and Exclusion

Given the advantages and opportunities available to old boys, it is perhaps unsurprising that many parents are eager for their sons to acquire an education at one of these institutions. However, many students are excluded from entering these privileged spaces, or even beginning the enrolment process. For example, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) quipped about elite boarding schools in the United States that 'no one arrives … by accident' (p. 43). At the core of this is the high financial cost of attending these institutions, which works to reinscribe their exclusiveness and prestige (Saltmarsh, 2016). The power to determine who is selected and excluded from attendance explains how these schools have been able to maintain their high public esteem and 'position as elite and superior within broader education and social communities' (Keddie et al., 2020, p. 3), which is relevant to crafting an image of teaching and learning superiority and academic excellence.

The tuition fees for an elite boys' school in Australia are expensive, and as such, attendance is beyond the means of most families. However, the ability to afford tuition is just the first of many pre-requisites for admission. Demand for enrolment often outstrips the number of positions available at these schools, with preferential access being extended to prospective students who already have a brother enrolled, are the son of an old boy, or come from those families with some other connection to the school, such as maintaining a religious affiliation (Lang, 2021). As this suggests,

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[8] An Old Boys' Association is a network for all past students from a boys' school, which has the objective of maintaining school fellowship among alumni and supporting the school and its mission.

attachment and loyalty to a specific school can be deeply embedded in family values, histories, and identities, with attendance across multiple generations implying a further mark of distinction for boys to *authentically* belong.

The perceptions of prestige and excellence that surround these spaces, and the high fees that exclude many from enrolling, also make them socially homogenous (Courtois, 2013). This homogeneity is further reinforced by familial relations to the school, conservative parental values, and multiple family ties that often exist between students and old boys. As a result, on arriving at an elite boys' school, most students already share many dispositions, mannerisms, tastes, and traits, if not direct family relations, with their classmates and the school community more broadly. This distinct lack of diversity, combined with the structural exclusion of others, is crucial to beginning the process of becoming elite and is an important factor in community building, strengthening networks, and identity making (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Proctor, 2011).

2.5. Elite Adolescent Identities

In the past decade, a multitude of studies have considered the production of identities within elite schools (e.g., Allan, 2010; Chase, 2008; Forbes & Lingard, 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Howard, 2008; Howard et al., 2014; Khan, 2013; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010, 2014). However, these studies have primarily focused on identity formation within co-educational settings and elite girls' schools.

2.5.1. Elite Girls' Schools

For the middle and upper classes, sex-segregation in education has always been designed to deliver high-status knowledge differently to boys and girls (Kenway & Fahey, 2014). As a result, understanding some of the contemporary and historical differences in the educational experiences of elite boys' and girls' schools is a relevant inclusion to this review.

Findings have suggested that for young women attending elite girls' schools, identities of entitlement and privilege are reproduced in a multitude of ways through: a careful balancing of success and heteronormative femininities of beauty, passivity and subservience (Allan, 2010; Wardman et al., 2010); the appropriation and maintenance of social class markers (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010); and aspirational discourses (Forbes & Lingard, 2013, 2015). Collectively, these studies have also

revealed how these institutions have responded to cultural shifts and social change, while also considering the extent to which gender segregated and socially homogenous sites can promote progressive change. More recent studies have considered how Black girls are racialised at mostly White, elite girls' schools, and how this process is experienced individually and collectively (Smith Jean-Denis, 2021).

Some studies of elite girls' schools have approached these spaces as potential sites of progressive feminism and empowerment, given the instrumental role they have performed in preparing girls for higher education and careers in business and the professions (Kenway et al., 2015). However, as Kenway et al. (2015) argued, the expectations of leadership and success embedded in the curriculum of these institutions fail to account for the inequalities and asymmetries that persist in the labour market for women. For students that attend elite girls' schools, it was concluded that the 'smooth sailing they are taught to expect in their lustrous post-school lives leaves them unprepared for the male resistance they are likely to encounter in the corporate workplaces they will enter' (Kenway et al., 2015, p. 158). Similarly, a study of an elite girls' school by Forbes and Lingard (2015) revealed processes of 'intense cultivation' that aimed to produce 'girls who aspire to high-status universities as a segue to professional careers' (p. 116). In particular, the study highlighted how the school was implicated in shaping the identities and dispositions of girls so that they were 'well aligned to possible global futures as professional leaders' (Forbes & Lingard, 2015, p. 118). While the assured optimism instilled in these girls was evident, it was concluded that the 'exigencies of the ever-changing gender order and the impact of child-bearing and child-rearing on women' would mean that in some instances these imagined futures would remain unrealised (Forbes & Lingard, 2015, p. 121). These studies have revealed that the curriculum of elite girls' schools, and expectations of global careers in business and the professions, are incompatible with the heteronormative femininities that are also cultivated within these learning environments. As a result, some alumni might develop identities of disillusionment and disappointment in their life beyond the school gate (Kenway et al., 2015).

While these recent studies of gender, class, and elite girl subjectivities are informative, there is significantly less understanding of making identities at elite

boys' schools. Historically, the elite school network was required to prepare men for public positions of power, and women for the private maintenance of social and kinship networks (Davidoff & Hall, 1992). However, from the 1970s elite girls' schools in Australia were increasingly 'obliged to accommodate a new generation of parents demanding prestigious careers for their daughters' (Theobald, 1996, p. 94). Given both the historical purpose of elite girls' schools, and how they have been reformed to accommodate contemporary shifts in the lives of girls and women, it is possible these institutions are less averse to external scrutiny by researchers. Conversely, the persistence of elite boys' schools as the incubators of national leaders and corporate managers, and their stubborn adherence to heritage and tradition, could result in these institutions being more protective of a carefully curated public image. This could explain some of the challenges experienced by those seeking to 'study up' and interrogate elite schooling practices (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012). Regardless, within the context of a contemporary society pursuing gender equality, social inclusion, and workplace diversity, there is a paucity of evidence surrounding how the men emerging from elite boys' schools feel about, and make sense of, their privilege. Investigating and understanding old boys is important, given the reality that these men will likely be placed in those positions of power and influence necessary to create a more equitable society (Howard & Maxwell, 2018).

2.5.2. Ambivalence and Privilege

Elite school research from the United States highlights an ambivalence among students about their privilege, and how internal contradictions and inconsistencies can become manifest in feelings of discomfort surrounding achievements and success (French, 2017; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). For White students in particular, becoming aware of their privilege can generate feelings of guilt and shame about race (Case & Rios, 2017; Wise & Case, 2013), leading many to avoid discussions on privilege, racial justice, and class inequality (French, 2017). As Case and Rios (2017) argued, feelings of guilt and shame associated with White privilege may lead students in elite settings to 'shut down, feel targeted, get defensive, and exhibit greater resistance to learning' (p. 140). Similarly, some students may actively resist diversity initiatives and social inclusion policies in the hope that their school will maintain its historical homogeneity (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2013). For

Keddie et al. (2020), internal feelings of conflict and contradiction, and associated strategies of avoidance and resistance, reflected the anxiety of students at elite schools and the difficulties they had confronting and justifying privilege.

2.5.3. Justifying Privilege

The extensive ethnographic study by Khan (2013), which investigated an elite boarding school in the United States, revealed how students strategically deployed notions of meritocracy, commitment to hard work, and individual talent, to justify their achievements and success, while simultaneously downplaying the influence of economic, political and social advantage. By adopting merit as the lens to justify achievement, Khan (2013) revealed how the 'new elite' unburdened themselves from 'the old baggage of social ties and status and replaced it with personal attributes – hard work, discipline, native intelligence and other forms of human capital' (p. 9). However, the movement of these elite school alumni into the labour market, and the transportation of their discourses of hard work, talent, and meritocracy, has permitted a questioning of employment policies that account for factors other than performance, justifies higher wages for the already powerful and wealthy, and obscures '*how* outcomes are not simply a product of individual traits' (Khan, 2013, p. 9, emphasis added). More recently, Friedman et al. (2021) observed how people from privileged backgrounds construct identities that deflect the advantages of their childhood by amplifying humble, working-class family histories and stories of multi-generational social mobility. It has been argued that these stories are used to strategically position the narrator as having achieved professional and social success, often under challenging circumstances, framing their trajectory as being 'unusually meritocratically legitimate while erasing the structural privileges that have shaped key moments in their trajectories' (Friedman et al., 2021, p. 1). As this suggests, the discourses that move through elite schools, which are transported along pathways of privilege, might encourage some alumni to distort and obscure the conditions of their own lives. In a mist of meritocracy, and cultural practices that reinforce belief in their exceptional, individual talent, it is likely that old boys overestimate their own ability, constructing an assured belief that anything they have achieved in adulthood is detached from their educational background, and has been earned, and deserved, by their efforts alone.

2.5.4. Elite Schools and Class Disavowal

While the certainty of meritocratic success is important for understanding the logic that underpins elite identities, additional components are needed to successfully justify and sustain privilege. In a cultural moment that has witnessed an increased scrutiny of elites and elitism, there is a need for those who have benefited from economic and social advantage to adopt the appearance of being liberal, progressive, multicultural, and anti-elitist (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017). As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) indicated, an awareness of shifting attitudes and values has required elite schools, and the clients they service, to downplay their distinction and prestige, while simultaneously adopting an appearance of virtue that obfuscates the economic, political, and social advantages they enjoy. This requires strategies of disavowal.

Kenway and Lazarus (2017) identified three strategies of disavowal that were common among elite schools and their students. First, students remarked that despite being immersed in the elite materials of excellent resources, they were not personally elitist. Instead, these students presented themselves as being caring and honourable, destined for professional roles that would enable them to make decisions that could benefit the lives of those beyond their immediate social network. For these students, work that was honourable and meaningful was not self-serving, but rather civic-minded, suggesting that 'distinction comes not from your wealth but from what you contribute to your country' (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017, p. 270). As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) concluded, students from elite school considered themselves to have high moral standards, relative to others.

Second, the celebration of meritocracy, and the association of success with individual effort, intellect, and talent allows the further distortion of how the educational and financial resources of elite schools contribute to academic excellence. For elite school students, life advantages and opportunities are based on merit, not inheritance. This is similar to the observations made by Khan (2013) about the replacement of social ties and status with the personal attributes of hard work, discipline, and native intelligence.

Third, the championing of diversity and inclusivity is another disavowal strategy that is intended to amplify the virtues of tolerance and hospitality in a cultural moment that necessitates a change in values. As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) argued, this strategy enables the introduction of culturally diverse locals, as well as

international students, who assist the traditional majority to 'become "global citizens"' who are 'open to, comfortable with, and respectful of "difference"' (p. 273). Like the 'curriculum of diversity' that was suggested by Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a), tolerance and hospitality in elite school communities are primarily for enriching the curriculum of a majority student population that is White and wealthy. However, unlike Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a), Kenway and Lazarus indicated that diversity is not merely about displays of cultural and ethnic inclusivity, but is also about economic inclusivity.

Claims that only a small proportion of students are from affluent families, was revealed as a common disavowal strategy within elite schools. As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) argued, this strategy draws 'attention away from the vast majority who are indeed economically powerful and privileged' (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017, p. 273). Specifically, scholarships that assist socially disadvantaged students were cited as examples of the diverse economic backgrounds that are present within elite schools. However, in referring to these scholarships as markers of economic diversity, the requirement to complete an entrance examination or means test is often downplayed or obscured. As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) indicated:

> There is little, if any, prospect of these schools non-selectively
> admitting students from economically poor families. Scholarships are
> about cherry picking talent from other education systems. In turn this
> is about the educational and social recruitment of students who will
> "add value" to the school's all-important reputation. (p. 273)

Like other performative acts at elite schools, disavowal involves downplaying the significance of economic, political, and social advantage, by cultivating the appearance of individual intelligence, talent, and skill, but also moral and virtuous qualities such as care, honour, hospitality, and tolerance. For old boys, who are the likely future leaders of business, politics, and the professions, it is necessary to consider how disavowal might be expressed in adulthood. As Howard (2013) argued, in adopting a commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion, elites must be open to challenging their own economic, political, or social privilege. This commitment presents a gap that can be difficult to bridge, especially for those who have developed a language that gives an appearance of moral goodness, while also being

undergirded by a belief that individual opportunities and advantages have been earned and are therefore deserved.

Extending the disavowal strategies developed by Kenway and Lazarus (2017) I note that the class disavowal of old boys is also gendered. This is particularly relevant to considerations of an increasing disapproval of toxic masculinity, which includes characteristics such as aggression, physical toughness, heteronormativity, self-sufficiency, and emotional insensitivity. As a result, disavowal strategies deployed by old boys establish an additional channel to suggest an appearance of having a masculinity that is more moral and virtuous, especially surrounding commitments to gender equality.

2.6. Elite Boys' Schools and Masculinities

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the elite school network was taking shape in Australia, there was an explicit aim to translate the traditions of the English Public Schools to the education of ruling-class men in this country. As Crotty (2001) indicated, these traditions included: an intense focus on competitive team sports, often making participation mandatory; a self-conscious promotion of school heritage; the enlistment of older students in the discipline and pastoral care of younger students; and the valorising of toughness within the student population. Further, fostering military cadets, martial virtue, and a sense of duty to the nation, as well as an emphasis on chapel and Christian duty, were also aspects of the English Public Schools that have been observed as being important in the Australian context (Crotty, 2001; Sherington et al., 1987). This has highlighted that elite boys' schools in Australia have always had a broader agenda than simply providing instrumental education and scholastic endeavour (Proctor, 2011). The founding headmasters of these institutions had a clear mission to develop useful men with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that would be needed to lead the nation and administer an Empire (Gronn, 1992; McCalman, 1993; Sherington et al., 1987). As Canon Morris, the founding headmaster of Churchie, indicated, the confident, compassionate and educated young men produced by his school would be 'the most efficient men in the country, so that they will be our chosen leaders later on' (Cole, 1986, p. 74). This attitude persists at elite boys' schools as an historical legacy, with many of these institutions maintaining some variation of the mission to produce young men who will be a 'gift' to Australia and its future.

Class and gender have always been a feature of elite boys' schools, especially given the hyper-masculinity they foster and encourage (Crotty, 1999; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005; Saltmarsh, 2004). Despite responding to contemporary educational needs and social expectations, including recent examples of supporting transgender students (Boisvert, 2022; Heaney, 2022; O'Brien, 2022), modernisation in elite boys' schools remains slow and uneven (O'Brien, 2019). These schools retain many of the historical legacies imported from the English Public Schools, including gender segregation, hyper-competitiveness, and most significantly, an over-investment in sport (Crotty, 2020; Donaldson & Poynting, 2007, 2013; O'Brien, 2019; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005).

2.6.1. Sport and Elite Masculinity

At the beginning of the twentieth century, sport was a key component in measuring the performance of an elite boys' school in Australia. Physical activity and sport were inseparable from notions of a 'quality' education, as they were essential to the cultivation of manly attributes such as bravery, courage, physical strength, teamwork, and devotion to a cause (Crotty, 1999). As Canon Morris (1955) stated, a 'school without plenty of manly exercise and open-air life is no school for British (or Australian) boys … the training of the playing fields is at least as important as the training of the classrooms' (p. 26). Like the United Kingdom and United States at this time, masculinity in Australia was firmly 'anchored in the games field' (Mangan & Walvin, 1987, p. 4).

Throughout the century, sport continued to have a central role in making elite boys' schools masculinising institutions of the ruling-class (Connell et al., 1982), endorsing male superiority over women (Connell, 2005; Donaldson & Poynting, 2007), but also superiority of higher status men over weaker men (Bowley, 2013; Burgess et al., 2003; Light & Kirk, 2000; Messner, 1990). This was especially the case for 'soft' boys who lacked athletic ability and skill, as well as boys who were overly effeminate. As Skelton (2000) argued, sport is not 'just a game' for boys, but is instead inscribed with broader structural components that make it 'central to the gender regime of the school, particularly in relation to the construction of a dominant mode of masculinity' (p. 5).

Rugby Union and Elite Boys' Schools

Sport participation at elite boys' schools in Australia is not just about creating distinction on the grounds of gender, it is also critical in the construction of class distinctions that further differentiate elite schools from the government system (Kirk & Twigg, 1995; Sherington, 1983). Rugby union, especially in Queensland and New South Wales, is one such marker of distinction that is important for instilling elite masculinities (Light, 1999, 2007; Light & Kirk, 2000). In these geographic locations, rugby has been important in connecting contemporary sporting practices with the manly attributes that were espoused at their foundation (Mangan, 1982). Further, it has also been used as an instrument to distinguish elite schools, and the young men they educate, from schools and other males who are presumed to be socially inferior (Light & Kirk, 2001).

It is well documented that the sport of rugby union was codified on the playing fields of English Public Schools (Chandler, 1996), while also being enthusiastically adopted by elite boys' schools in Australia (Crotty, 1999; Light & Kirk, 2000; Sherington, 1983; Sherington et al., 1987). As Canon Morris (1955) noted of Churchie, rugby had the ability to cultivate and indulge the most important masculine qualities, suggesting that:

> It is the best game for schoolboys; for besides providing easily for the greatest numbers, it gives them fighting, with only minor casualties, and victory ... Boys need it! It is meat and drink to them! And Queensland boys, because they are so tough and manly, simply revel in it. (p. 83)

A victory in rugby has historically been regarded as the high point of sporting triumph and an important marker of school performance and success (Light, 1999). While a rugby premiership could distinguish the superiority of one elite school over another, stratifying the local elite school market, the sport itself has also been used to establish other important markers of dominance and distinction.

While rugby union has become a class signifier for boys in Queensland and New South Wales, it is also important to note that racial distinctions exist within, and between, sports at these schools. Within rugby union, research from Australia has indicated how the sport effectively subjectifies Pacific Islander students as the *other*

to reproduce ideas about race and the dominant White culture (McDonald, 2016). Similarly, post-war European immigration has been explored as creating a racial distinction between the sports of rugby union and football (soccer), and its effect of marking soccer players as effeminate and socially inferior (Tsolidis & Pollard, 2009). This distinction between sports resonates with Bowley (2013), who concluded in a study of masculinities at an elite boys' school in South Africa that, 'playing sport does not mean boys are automatically accepted into the dominant or hegemonic group. They need to choose the right sport at their school in order to be fully accepted as a dominant heterosexual male' (p. 92). Like elite boys' schools in Queensland and New South Wales, the 'right' sport in South Africa is rugby union, with its status over other sports being connected to the perception that it is the sport for 'real' men (Bowley, 2013). As Orwell (2014b) commented about sport, during his time as a schoolboy, 'I was a fairly good swimmer and not altogether contemptible at cricket, but these had no prestige value, because boys only attach importance to a game if it requires strength and courage' (p. 443). As this suggests, rugby union at elite boys' schools in Australia can be understood as a set of practices that construct a particular masculine ideal of being heterosexual, upper class and White, while also building a certain brand of male solidarity through notions of heroism, teamwork, and self-sacrifice (Proctor, 2011).

Sport and Male Solidarity

The group cohesion and male solidarity enabled through team sports at elite boys' schools is particularly important in understanding the contempt, and on occasion outright hostility, students from these institutions have for outsiders. As Crotty (2020) indicated, this hostility can be directed at rival schools, but more often it is intended for those outside the elite school network entirely. This contempt and hostility for outsiders becomes overt on occasion, as is evident in the misogynistic and sexist chants made in public by students from St. Kevin's College in Melbourne, which occurred while travelling to an inter-school athletics carnival (Henriques-Gomes, 2019). As Courtois (2013) explained, it is the bonding rituals permitted by elite schoolboy sport that deliver a certain legitimacy to hyper-masculine behaviour that are abhorrent and vicious, while also reinforcing a belief that the participants belong to a superior and special community, which is above reproach.

2.6.2. Performing Elite Masculinities

Elite masculinities are more than shared experiences and include the social meanings that are communicated through the dispositions, mannerisms, and utterances of old boys. Something is communicated through old boys about the dominant discourses of elite boys' schooling, which becomes manifest in how they stand, walk, and talk. Further, these performances evoke certain feelings and ways of thinking, which mark the bearer as an old boy. Popular accounts have revealed that 'you can pick' an old boy 'when you meet one ... just by the way they behave' (Macaronas, 2019).

Assertiveness, confidence, and self-assuredness are marks of distinction that are repeatedly enacted in the classroom, playground, and sporting field, which become less artificial across schooling, taking on the appearance of being who old boys are naturally. For elite boys' schools in Australia, the practice of rugby union is 'surrounded by a discourse of domination, aggression, ruthless competitiveness, and giving all for the school' (Light & Kirk, 2000, p. 167). The embodiment of these discourses will appear most 'naturally' in the older, athletic students (Light, 1999; Light & Kirk, 2000), who successfully communicate the 'right' stance, walk, and talk, which is to be adopted as part of the required survival strategy for all students (Stoudt, 2006, 2012).

In seeking to belong authentically, group attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics become manifest in the talk and posturing that communicates disdain for outsiders, such as government school students, but also for those within the institution who are presumed to be 'poorer specimens', such as young female teachers (Variyan, 2018). However, this is unsurprising as research has revealed that most students seek to be outwardly recognised by both their peers and teachers as accomplishing the 'right' identity at school (Davies et al., 2001). This is primarily achieved through repeated acts that either confer or deny recognition on an individual (Butler, 2006a).

You're Only as Good as Your Last Game of Rugby

As Proctor (2011) revealed, within elite boys' schools in Queensland and New South Wales the correct identity is communicated through rugby union, with the top athletes being 'treated as heroes to the exclusion of other kinds of people and other kinds of achievement' (p. 848). A similar finding was made by Edley and Wetherell

(1997), who indicated in their study of a non-government boys' school in the United Kingdom that the cultural practices and traditions of the school:

> privilege and, to a certain extent, produce a particular version of masculinity. The hard lads or sporty boys are its main representatives (both symbolically and literally). As a consequence, school life for them is relatively straight-forward. For the remainder, however, life is much more difficult. They are the ones who are most alienated by the dominant cultural order. (p. 17)

The centralising of sport within the dominant masculinity of schools has been revealed to have implications for the classroom management strategies of male teachers, while also defining relationships between students (Skelton, 2000). In short, the premier athletes receive a classroom and schoolyard dividend, not unlike the patriarchal dividend identified by Connell (2005). It is acquired by performing the normative behaviours that signify them as heterosexual, upper class, White males, and in so doing, provides them with honour, prestige, and a right to rule the school. This resonates with Butler (2006c), who argued that students achieve, through the mastering of skills, the 'mundane practical appropriation of norms and rules' that culminates in a public recognition of success (p. 532). This was further explained as follows:

> The acts of skill acquisition are thus modes of subject formation, and this formation takes place within a set of norms that confer or withdraw recognition. Put more precisely, these norms operate through a demoralization of experience: the subject is constituted through the anticipation or fear of having recognition conferred or denied. The conferral of recognition, however, does not just happen once, if it happens at all, so a certain anxiety is built into the norm, since the student must repeat the good grade [or rugby performance], and that repetition is not assured in advance. The norm is applied, but the norm is always about to happen again. (Butler, 2006c, p. 532)

Within the context of elite boys' schools, the norms that confer recognition of having accomplished the correct identity include, among others, aggression, competition, domination, and intimidation. However, that conferred status can be easily revoked,

and as such, subject formation is a perilous, anxiety inducing process that is always happening. It demands that the right characteristics for belonging authentically to the group are always on display and available for public scrutiny and inspection. Students at elite boys' schools are figuratively and literally only as good as their last game of rugby. Of course, for those who are not rugby players, but instead participate in 'lesser' sports, or who do not play sport at all, the likelihood of them ever being recognised as having the 'right' identity is unlikely. However, for those who correctly appropriate the norms and rules, a submission of self occurs (Butler, 1995; Davies, 2006). At elite boys' schools, this can be seen through the practice of school spirit, which is the expectation of self-sacrificing loyalty and 'abnegation of self for the good of the school' (Cole, 1986, p. 74). Through this submission, young men at elite boys' schools are constrained in their ability to both understand and perform their identities.

It is a Saturday night, and I am attending my first school dance. It is a Year 8 social, hosted by St. Mary's, an all-girls' school. Young boys prowl the hall, circling clutches of girls who are dancing to 'The Sign' by Ace of Base. I recognise Wilson, a boy from school. Like a lion stalking a gazelle, he lurks near a group of girls before swiftly pouncing, tapping one on the shoulder.

'Do you want to dance?' I am unable to hear him over the music but can read his lips. She turns around and he grabs her by the waist. No conversation. Nothing. Did she say yes? I am unsure. An inconsequential matter I assume.

His hands slide from her waist to backside. Knuckles tightening as he squeezes her. He notices my act of juvenile voyeurism, but does not appear offended that I am taking it all in. He smirks, tilts his head, and starts making out – tongue and everything!

Later in the evening I see him outside and ask, 'How did you do that?' He chuckles, proud that his accomplishment had an audience. After all, what is the point of doing anything if there is no approval or recognition? He is unable to conceal the deep pleasure of being asked, and raises his hand, placing it firmly on my shoulder. He leans in to quietly dispense his advice.

'Just grab them by the ass,' he says. 'They love it'.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter begins with an overview of theoretical developments in the study of gender and education (Section 3.1), tracking the movement of theories from socialisation patterns to the contested nature of gender identities in school. Poststructural approaches to the investigation of gender in schools is provided (Section 3.2), including an introduction to the theoretical approach developed by Judith Butler (2006a). Specifically, I identify the central concepts of *performativity*, *intelligibility*, and the *heterosexual matrix*, and how these have been applied to an analysis of identity work in elite schools. My analytical lens is presented (Section 3.4), including how the identified theories and concepts have shaped my research, my understanding of elite boys' schooling, and my analysis of how old boys talk about privilege and do identity work. The chapter concludes with a consideration of my position as an insider-researcher (Section 3.5), giving particular attention to the ethical implications of my knowledge and experiences of being an old boy.

3.1. Gender Theory and Education Research

Theoretical developments in the study of gender and education have produced both changes and continuities that require contextualisation before presenting the framework that I have pursued for this project. Specifically, I track the movement of theories from socialisation patterns to the contested nature of gender identities in school.

Gender emerged as a topic of investigation and analysis for Australian education research during the 1970s (McLeod, 2001). Initially, sex-role theory and gender socialisation emerged as an attractive conceptual approach for explaining the position of women in society and their lack of power (Delamont, 2012; Sharpe, 1976; Spender, 1982; Stanworth, 1983). It was argued that the assumed inferiority of girls, and the covert teaching of sex roles in school, was the reason why female students failed in educational settings. However, several criticisms emerged that argued against the simplistic and dualistic politics of this approach. As Davies (1989) argued, sex-role theory is a 'common sense but inaccurate' understanding of gender identity formation because it has a 'profound confusion about what a person really is' (p. 5).

In the 1980s, gender research in education moved towards a focus on essential gender differences and the implications of these differences for teaching practices in schools (Dillabough, 2006). This approach established that the gender, behaviour, and social experiences of students were innate, with 'authentic' identities and their cultural and social descriptors being causally linked to biology and the inherent natural differences present in the male-female binary. However, criticism of essentialist approaches highlighted the difficulties that emerge from connecting identity with a belief that people are locked into behaviours and performances based on their location within a matrix of biology, culture, and society (Fuss, 1989; Grossberg, 1992). Further, the notion of an irreducible and unchanging gender identity, which is determined by culture, sex, and social position, was critiqued for its tendency towards reductionism and character typology.

The arrival of poststructural feminism in the 1990s moved thinking beyond essentialist positions and reductive understandings of gender towards an awareness of gender as an increasingly fluid, and inherently unstable, construction (McLeod, 2001). The constructivist approach acknowledges the significance of culture, while also understanding identity as a process of articulation, as opposed to something that is authentic, natural, or real. Therefore, within poststructuralism, identity is recognised as a discursive resource that is curated through a process of interaction (Davies & Harré, 1990; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). As Hall (1996) argued, it is through language that individuals convey and construct meaning, make life meaningful, communicate that meaning to others, and bring their identity into being. This approach is of particular benefit to my research and the aim of understanding how discourse positions subjects as coherent selves (Francis, 2002).

Through the application of a poststructural framework it will be possible to illustrate how meaning is constructed through language, while also maintaining an appropriate scrutiny of underlying motives and dispositions that are presented as being authentic, innate, or natural. In this way, the theoretical framework will make it possible to address my research objectives by explaining why old boys might:

- discursively distance themselves from the elitism, masculinity, and privilege of their schooling;
- frame themselves as politically and socially progressive; and

- obscure (to themselves, and others) how they remain implicated in economic, political, and social inequality.

3.2. Gender, Poststructuralism, and Education

The work of Judith Butler has provided important insights for scholars working within the field of gender and sexuality in educational research (Ringrose, 2013; Youdell, 2019a). A poststructuralist and feminist philosopher, her theoretical works have been broadly applied within education research, producing numerous studies (e.g., Atkinson & DePalma, 2009; Davies, 2006; Kitching, 2011; Matus & Infante, 2011; Nayak & Kehily, 2006; Rasmussen, 2009; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Zembylas, 2003), edited collections (Youdell, 2019b), and a special edition of the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (see David et al., 2006).

Butler (2006a) has argued for a conceptualisation of gender as a performative practice that operates within a heterosexual matrix of norms. At the heart of this theoretical framework is an understanding that this matrix constrains the ability of individuals to both understand and perform their gender identities. In particular, the term *heterosexual matrix* is used to:

> designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies,
> genders, and desires are naturalized … to characterize a hegemonic
> discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that
> for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex
> expressed through a stable gender. (Butler, 2006a, p. 208)

For education scholars, the heterosexual matrix enables an exploration of intelligible genders, and how the grid they exist within governs the construction, performance, and lived experience of students at school. Butler (2006c) has discussed how this has enabled 'important developments in the theory of subject constitution, focusing on the problem of gender as it is formed and re-formed in the spatial and temporal context of school' (p. 529).

For education researchers, Youdell (2006) has highlighted the potential of this theoretical approach for understanding how gender takes hold in schools, and the importance of intelligibility and performativity for investigating how subjects are constituted and regulated in these spaces.

3.2.1. Butler and Performativity

The concept of *performativity* developed by Butler (2006a) revealed the ability of discourse to not only govern how individuals think and talk, but also how they act. Performativity is particularly useful in that it explains how, through a repeated engagement with gender discourses, individuals internalise various ways of thinking and talking about subjects. More specifically, it is through this ongoing and repeated engagement that the active accomplishment of gender is obscured, with individuals unlikely to recognise that certain thoughts and actions are socially generated and externally imposed (Butler, 2006a).

Performativity views those aspects of identity, which individuals accept as being essential or natural, such as their actions, desires, and thinking, as being the effect of repeated processes and utterances. Throughout my field work, performativity became helpful in understanding the old boys as having a set of appearances, mannerisms, and utterances that coalesce into a seemingly essential and stable gender position. However, this position is contradictory and inconsistent, while also being constrained by the space in which the performance occurs.

As Butler (2006a) indicated, it is by internalising discourse that individuals adopt social scripts, engage in performance, and become intelligible to others. In the case of this thesis, the adoption of scripts and performances make certain men 'intelligible' as old boys. However, these performances are not fixed and individuals can develop alternative, counter, and subversive scripts, which can break the preceding performance. In this way, the concept of performativity is useful, and enabled me to recognise old boys as being agentic, classed, and gendered subjects, who are also capable of challenging, or at least renegotiating, the regulatory constraints of the elite masculinities they confronted and navigated as students.

3.2.2. Butler and Intelligibility

Intelligibility refers to the ongoing process of being seen, heard, and interpreted as a viable and legitimate social subject (Butler, 2005). As Butler (2004b) argued, being valid is 'produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms' (p. 3). These norms govern the social intelligibility of action allowing for:

> certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such,
> imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters

of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social ... the
norm renders the social field intelligible and normalizes that field for
us (Butler, 2004b, p. 42).

Therefore, intelligibility is the extent to which an individual is inclined to perform
the appearances, mannerisms, and utterances that are culturally acceptable and
socially expected. To become intelligible, old boys are supposed to be hard,
emotionless, bullies (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005). However, recent cultural shifts
present a narrative outlet for men wanting to discursively distance themselves from
toxic aspects of elite boys' schooling while remaining individually intelligible as an
exceptional, morally good, honestly sincere, social subject.

The concept of intelligibility is applicable to the analysis outlined in the
following chapters as it recognises that men must *become* intelligible to be
recognised as old boys. In order to share and explain their feelings and thoughts
about elitism, masculinity, and privilege, it is necessary to talk themselves into
existence as privileged gendered beings (Davies, 2000). However, as Butler (2004b)
indicated, it is through this process of becoming known that the subject is also
capable of offering a 'critical perspective on the norms that confer intelligibility
itself' (p. 73). The phenomenon of 'toxic masculinity' and its associated narratives
provides an example; old boys may well become intelligible as old boys, but in doing
so are able to deconstruct the prescriptions of intelligibility that are abject to (in turn)
manipulate the process of subjectification. This is to say that intelligibility remains
fluid and responsive to cultural shifts.

3.2.3. Butler and Elite School Identities

While not used extensively, the work of Butler (2006a) is not absent from the elite
school literature. Specifically, it has been applied to highlight how the interactions
and relations of students in elite schools are not learned, but are best understood as a
performance (Chase, 2008; Khan, 2013). Unlike essentialist approaches, which view
gender as a set of rules imposed on individuals, these studies conceptualise students
as individual actors who produce relations across various contexts. Rather than
revealing an essential self, these performances work to create the perception of an
inner character (Butler, 2006b). In short, through constant performance an illusion is
created, which suggests the presence of durable social categories, and their

associated dispositions, mannerisms, tastes, and traits, as innate and natural. As Butler (2006a) asserted:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced though the way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 191)

This conceptualisation was extended by Butler (2006a):

> If gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment, which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief (pp. 191-192).

This understanding of identity construction as a 'performance' was used by Chase (2008) to reveal how students at an elite boarding school in the United States internalised their gendered. The study argued that the internalisation of gender norms and the 'relative value society places on them play out in the students' self-concept, self-identity, and self-esteem' (Chase, 2008, p. 7). In another study of an elite boarding school in the United States, Khan (2013) drew on Butler to analyse how students embodied and naturalised their privilege. The study revealed how privilege becomes obscured in elite schools so that advantage and opportunities have the appearance of being meritorious and the result of hard work, innate talent, and skill (Khan, 2013). In discussing what this means for understanding elite school students, Khan (2013) argued that:

> Being an elite is not a mere possession or something "within" an actor (skills, talents, and human capital); it is an embodied performative act enabled by both possessions and the inscriptions that accompany *experiences* within elite institutions (schools, clubs, families, networks, etc.). Our bodily tastes … are things that are produced through our *experiences* in the world. Not only do they occur in our

minds, but they are things we enact repeatedly so that soon these
performances look less and less like an artificial role we're playing –
a role that might advantage us – and instead look more like just who
we naturally are (p. 136, emphasis added).

Intrigued by this conclusion, I considered how students at elite boys' schools are
unlikely to internalise the norms of elite masculinity in isolation. In developing an
understanding of gender identity as something enacted repeatedly and in context, I
recognised that these performative acts are internalised by experience, and that this
experience validates and justifies feelings of earned and deserved success. Hearing
and understanding what the experience of elite boys' schooling *feels* like, and how
these feelings become embodied, emerged as a critical element of this research.
Specifically, I considered how performativity could create emotional and social
anxieties for those who claimed to have 'failed' to realise the expectations of elite
boys' schooling, as well as those who 'succeeded' (Rich & Evans, 2009). This
theoretical approach was applied to analyse how performative acts might explain
what occurs at the intersection of elitism, masculinity, and privilege. Specifically, I
wanted to analyse how the cultural practices and traditions of elite boys' schooling
became 'imprinted' on students, making them intelligible as 'exceptional men' to
themselves and others, while also generating nervousness and unease surrounding
perceptions of success or failure in adulthood.

3.3. A Poststructural-Feminist Lens

This research project utilised poststructuralist-feminist approaches as a theoretical
lens to access and understand how educational settings are implicated in the making
of gender and social class. In this way, I utilised poststructuralism to mobilise
consideration around the 'limits of knowledge', as well as the key concepts of
'intelligibility' and 'performativity' (Dillabough, 2006; McLeod, 2001; Scott, 1988;
St. Pierre, 2000; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Williams, 2005).

The adoption of poststructuralist theory for research in education is well
established and is particularly appealing as a framework for 'troubl[ing] foundational
ontologies, methodologies, and epistemologies, in general, and education in
particular' (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 2). Further, scholars have also identified the
potential of poststructuralist theory to make visible new practices, and new forms of

agency, for individual subjects (Davies, 2004). As indicated by St. Pierre and Pillow (2000), citing the work of Butler:

> The subject of poststructuralism is generally described as one constituted, not in advance of, but within discourse and cultural practice. Some critics believe that such a subject is also determined, but Butler (1992) explains that the agency of this subject lies precisely in its ongoing constitution – the 'subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process' (p. 13). (pp. 6-7)

However, because this process of resignification is both complex and elusive, it presents opportunities for unanticipated and unimagined change (Davies, 2004). Like others, I argue that by recognising the discursive constitution of self, there is agency to change, resist and subvert the discourses through which an individual has been constituted (Davies, 2000). It is this understanding of agency that further highlights the relevance of the poststructuralist approach to this research project as it:

> comes from the freedom to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity. Agency is never autonomy in the sense of being an individual standing outside social structure and process. Autonomy becomes instead the recognition that power and force presume counter-power and counter-force, which in turn create new life-forms, life-forms capable of disrupting hegemonic forms, even potentially overwriting or eclipsing them. (Davies, 2004, p. 4)

This is a particular benefit of poststructuralism, which is its ability to problematise knowledge and destabilise sense-making that has been taken for granted. By adopting this theoretical approach to guide this analysis, it will be possible to understand old boys as autonomous subjects. As a result, these men can recognise how they came to be constituted by the cultural practices and traditions within their learning environment. However, this does not emancipate the old boys from their past, nor does it provide them with total control over the formation of new identities in the present. There is no final destination where the cultural practices and lessons from their educational background will be overwritten and left behind. Instead, the

disciplinary discourses of elite boys' schooling remain stable, as they are embedded within a larger system of social discourses (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) identified, the stories shared by individuals remain entangled with broader social discourses that shape people and their experiences. The old boys may recognise the influence of their educational background, but will never fully escape its influence or disciplinary impact.

The theoretical framework adopted for this research project also permits an analysis of how individuals reconstruct the meaning and significance of experiences, and how cultural narratives are used to manage the intricacies and dilemmas of self-interpretation (Freeman, 1993). In many ways, this highlights an interest in how individuals are socially produced as subjects through the ongoing effects of language and talk (St. Pierre, 2000). Specifically, I utilised a poststructural lens to focus on the ways men construct multiple accounts of elite boys' schooling, and the multiple possibilities this presents for how they view society and understand themselves.

3.3.1. Getting at Elite Masculinities

My poststructural lens provided access to the compulsion for old boys to perform elite masculinities, predominantly through an expression of their exceptionalism, as well as their innate qualities as morally good and honestly sincere men. From this perspective, it was possible to understand the research participants as both an outcome of elite boys' schooling, as well as an expression of the cultural practices and traditions of these institutions. However, as agentic subjects, it also facilitated an analysis of how these expressions have been impinged on, and imprinted by, shifting cultural and social values, as well as the external desires of others who have been encountered beyond the elite school network.

In articulating the meaning of elite boys' schooling, it was possible to recognise how the construct of a model schoolboy was an unattainable ideal for many of the participants, with its normative standards of academic excellence, athleticism, and leadership. However, despite this impossible standard, this image persisted as a desirable subject position to inhabit, albeit with strategic reinterpretations of certain rules and regulatory constraints. I also recognised how the 'normative phantasm' (Butler, 1994, p. 19) of the model schoolboy excluded certain standards from being included in performances, which created class and gender distinctions through the constitution of binary differences, namely:

diligence/carelessness; fairness/discrimination; honour/disobedience; leadership/subordination; success/failure; and tolerance/prejudice. Further, in acknowledging that subjectivities are stylised through agentic practices, as the research unfolded it became apparent that the participants were active in the process of including and excluding what were desirable distinctions. As Nayak and Kehily (2007) indicated, the choices of what to include and exclude from identity is a 'powerful act of *disidentification* in which the sign is dependent on this absence – its Other – in order to 'be' (p. 171, emphasis in original).

Throughout the research process the old boys were performing their masculinities through an active identification and disidentification, or avowal and disavowal (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017), with elite boys' schooling identities. The analysis, contained in Chapters 5 to 7, and theorised further in Chapters 8 to 10, revealed how practices of disavowal were discursively performed when it became necessary to distance themselves from the elitism, hyper-masculinity, and privilege of elite boys' schooling. However, the persistent regulatory effect of elite masculinity on the research participants was also apparent, specifically in the identity work that distorted the benefits of an economically privileged education, while simultaneously accruing its advantages through professional and social success in adulthood. To borrow from Gaztambide-Fernández (2011) in their compulsion to perform elite masculinities the old boys were required to 'appear at ease, but not so at ease that it might give the impression that they have not earned the right to the privileges of elite schooling' (p. 583). This balancing act became important in conceptualising elite masculinities as an interstitial formation of gender that is far less certain and far less confident than the 'masculinity of success' (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005) projects and postures.

3.4. Inside and Outside

I am an old boy, which positions me as an insider-researcher (Merton, 1972). An insider-researcher usually shares an identity, language, or some other experiential base with the participants being investigated (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), and is therefore able to draw on insights and understandings of research subjects that emerge from their own lived experience (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). However, within much social research it has been traditionally accepted that the researcher should maintain distance and perspective from study participants. The reasoning for

this approach, especially within qualitative research, has been an acceptance that ethnographic research is best undertaken by a complete outsider who learns how to become like the community they are investigating (Hockey, 1993). However, this is not to say that the benefits of insider-research have not been championed within qualitative research.

Scholars have highlighted several advantages are gained from being an insider-researcher, including a more rapid and complete acceptance by study participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Further, as Hockey (1993) argues, the insider viewpoint allows for a:

> relative lack of culture shock or disorientation, the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication, the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses, and the likelihood that respondents will reveal more intimate details of their lives to someone considered empathetic. (p. 199)

An intimate knowledge of an institution or community can enable the researcher to achieve a deep understanding of, and sensitivity towards, research subjects, whereas an outsider may be overly abstract and emotionally distant in their understandings (Kanuha, 2000). However, the insider-researcher has been referred to as 'double-edged sword' (Mercer, 2007), as prior awareness of, and exposure to, a research field means that they will necessarily bring a personal disposition to the study that shapes several aspects: their interactions with participants; the language they use; the knowledge they obtain; and the interpretation and reporting of their findings (Jankie, 2004).

3.4.1. Insider-Positionality

Researcher positionality refers to the world view of the researcher, as well as the position they adopt within a given research study (Holmes, 2020). Positionality is therefore viewed as a classic dilemma in qualitative research, and something that is particularly important for the insider-researcher (McRae, 2007; Mercer, 2007). For the insider-researcher, positionality generates legitimate concerns about their knowledge and status relative to the research subjects, and how this can impact the substantive and practical aspects of a research project. Carling et al. (2014) highlighted that the relative closeness or distance of a researcher to the community

being investigated can significantly impact the 'nature of questions that are asked, through data collection, to analysis and writing, and to how findings are received' (p. 37). This issue is extended by Foote and Gau Bartell (2011), who indicated that the:

> positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes. (p. 46)

As this suggests, there are significant challenges for researchers investigating places and people that are entangled with, and implicated in, their own narrative, stories, and identity work.

3.4.2. Insider-Status

Silverman (2004) argued that insider-status requires the researcher to engage in an ongoing scrutiny of their positionality and how this might inform the attitudes, beliefs, and characteristics they bring to a research project. While this level of reflection is a helpful exercise for all researchers, it is particularly relevant for the insider-researcher as their over-familiarity with the research field may result in a weak inquiry of their interactions with research subjects, as well as an unconscious rejection of otherwise meaningful and pertinent information (Kanuha, 2000). Further, there is also a risk that the insider-researcher can be viewed by research subjects as being duplicitous, raising suspicions about their loyalties, or about the real intentions of the research project. This is something that was addressed directly by Humphrey (2007), who indicated that the hyphen in insider-researcher reveals the tightrope that must be successfully negotiated by those adopting this positionality. The insider-researcher must be alert and watchful to avoid being torn between the views and values of the academic community on one side, and the research subjects who they closely identify with on the other.

As someone who spent much of their schooling in an elite boys' school, I bring to this research project an intimate knowledge of these institutions and direct experience of having participated in their cultural practices and traditions. Further, I have undergraduate qualifications from a prestigious Australian university, as well as an employment history in management consulting and the legal profession. As a result, my status as an old boy, combined with experiences across tertiary education

and the labour market, might orientate my thinking in a predetermined way when engaging with various topics of discussion. However, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argued, 'membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference' (p. 60). This is helpful in establishing my insider-status for this research project. Although I share little sameness with old boys in some areas, I do recognise common ground and interest in others, as well as an overwhelming empathy surrounding a similar educational experience. I am neither completely in, nor completely out, in terms of my positionality. It is for this reason that some scholars have argued for insider- and outsider-status being understood as a continuum with multiple dimensions, as opposed to a dichotomy of extremes (Hellawell, 2006; Mercer, 2007). As Mercer (2007) indicated, all researchers 'constantly move back and forth along a number of axes, depending upon time, location, participants and topic' (p. 1). Rather than being concerned with whether status as an insider-researcher diminishes the reliability of social research, it has been suggested that the emphasis should be on the ability of scholars, regardless of positionality and status, to be 'open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

3.4.3. My Positionality

As someone interested in elite boys' schools, my positionality does not align neatly with most scholars in this field who are predominantly outsiders with a strong interest in dismantling these institutions by highlighting the educational inequalities and injustice they produce. Indeed, my insider status as an old boy is a particularly novel element of this study, and offers an insight not previously expressed in the literature.

In approaching this research project, it is necessary to confront my own motivations for undertaking this work, and some of the mixed feelings and contradictory ideas I have about elite boys' schooling. This ambivalence, and cracks in my own identity, continues to create complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies in my ethical values and sense-making. I am regularly confronted with opportunities to either rupture or recuperate the opportunities and advantages that are available to me. While this is not the case for many elite school researchers,

it is undeniable that an aspect of this research project, as determined by my positionality, will be to confront how the advantages and opportunities provided by my education have kept me bound to elitism and privilege, as well as a particular masculine performance. Like Variyan (2018), who pursued an extensive study of teachers in elite boys' schools in Australia, and in turn considered his own experiences of being a teacher within these spaces, my research project will be an 'exploration of others as much it is an exploration of self in-retrospect' (p. 62). I seek to comprehend my schooling experience, recognise how I have been complicit in reproducing inequality, and ultimately hope to achieve some reconciliation with my past, make firm amendments, and live with my conscience.

I hear an agitated voice coming from the bedroom. It bounces along the polished floorboards. They do not notice my presence at the doorway. It is 10am on Saturday morning and he is still in bed. Face pressed into the pillow. If he ignores her for long enough, perhaps she will leave him alone.

A toxic cloud shrouded him and touched all of us. The inability of a man to stand before his family as a breadwinner spreads a pall over a household. 'Paul, you have to get up and look for work in the paper,' my mother pleaded. No response. 'Paul, please!' His head shot up from the pillow.

'Get off my back!' he barked. He glared at her. But he was not angry. It was the look of a wounded animal that wanted to be left alone to die. I felt something in my chest. Shock. Parents can only conceal so much from children. 'You don't know what it's like. To apply and hear nothing. To be passed over for someone half your age'.

'But you have to do to something,' she said.

But all he could do was press his face back into the pillow and cry. It was not a whimper. Or a whine. Or a sob. It was a bawl. I was no longer shocked. I was scared. For some reason, I needed to run. I ran out the front door and down the stairs. Then I ran out the front gate and up the street. I had to run away. I'm still running. Running from the embarrassment, the indignity, the shame of failing to become a 'real' man.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

This chapter begins with an overview of narrative analysis (Section 4.1), highlighting its linkages to the theoretical framework and investigations of identity work. Barriers and difficulties surrounding the researching of old boys are provided (Section 4.2), including a consideration of gaining access to this social group. The project design is set out (Section 4.3), with a focus on schools and participants. My approach to the staging of interviews is presented (Section 4.4), including the guidelines that were used to elicit stories about elitism, masculinity, and privilege. The chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis techniques (Section 4.5) and a summary of the ethical considerations required for my research project (Section 4.6).

4.1. Narrative Analysis and Social Research

Examining how men talk about the experience of elite boys' schooling requires a methodology that accounts for an understanding of how personal histories are recounted and presented by individuals, but also how they are read and interpreted by the researcher. Narrative analysis was identified as having the necessary versatility for a study of elitism, masculinity, and privilege.

Narrative analysis is concerned with the examination of stories, and how stories are used by individuals to impose order, make sense of their lives (Riessman, 1993), and interpret things (Bruner, 1990). Further, it also allows for the observation and analysis of the cultural and linguistic resources used by the narrator to persuade the listener of their story and its authenticity. This often involves the referencing of ideas, images, associates, and plots, which are interlaced with literary symbolism from everyday life (Murray, 1999). As Taylor (2006) indicated, these meanings, which are ascendant in the wider cultural, political, and social context, are the discursive resources that speakers use to tell their stories, understand the world, and make sense of their position and positionality. As this suggests, identity work occurs at multiple levels, which requires an analysis of talk, but also the public tales that are expressed through films, magazines, newspapers, and television, which feedback into personal discourses (Plummer, 1995). As Murray (1999) argued, individuals define themselves with reference to these public tales and their 'narratives move from the

level of the personal to that of the public and political, and back to that of the personal' (p. 49).

4.1.1. Narrative, Story, and Discourse

Before providing a more complete overview of the linkages between narrative analysis and the theoretical framework, it is necessary to define the notions of narrative, story, and discourse. These concepts are heavily contested and require further unpacking to understand how they have been applied in this thesis.

Narrative

Narrative is the cohesive amalgam of stories that is applied to make sense of, and give meaning to, one's life. As Dean (1998) indicated, narrative refers to the 'threading together of a set of events or experiences in a temporal sequence in order to make sense of them' (p. 24). Specifically, this can involve constructing a story, the cognitive structure of a story, or the personal history or tale that the process of constructing a story generates (Polkinghorne, 1988). It can also refer to the process of data collection, and asking people to 'tell stories', or alternatively, 'making stories' from the accounts that people provide the researcher (McAdams, 1996). However, for the purpose of this thesis, a narrative is defined as a mode of thinking or a way of making sense of experience (Bruner, 1990).

Stories

Stories are discrete retellings of events and instances, which on collation, form the material of the narrative. As MacIntyre (2006) suggested, in discussing heroic stories from antiquity:

> Human life has a determinate form, the form of a certain kind of story.
> It is not just that poems and sagas narrate what happens to men and
> women, but that in their narrative form poems and sagas capture a
> form that was already present in the lives which they relate. (p. 124)

As this suggests, human life pre-exists the stories people tell, but it only becomes comprehensible in narrative form. In developing the plot lines of a story, the obscure and vague understanding of daily life is made intelligible through the literary structure of a story. As MacIntyre (2006) argued, stories are the occurrence where meaning is created. However, this does not mean that stories represent a

straightforward account of experience and personal history. Instead, experience and meaning are shaped, and structured, in the process of telling a story (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Discourse

Discourse refers to a way of speaking that is deliberately framed by coded language acts. As this suggests, far from being a passive reflection of some pre-existing social reality, language actively constructs reality through the attachment of meaning to ideas, images, people, and plot lines, but also the broad cultural, political, and social context (Christie, 2002). As Fairclough et al. (2011) indicated, discourse is a 'social practice' that implies a story is shaped by:

> situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned; it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. (pp. 357-358)

In the challenging and deconstruction of discourse, it is possible to bring about cultural, political, and social change. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) argued, '*changes* in discourse are a means by which the social world is changed. Struggles at the discursive level take part in changing, as well as in reproducing, the social reality' (p. 9, emphasis in original). This is evident in the shifting discourses surrounding sexual assault and sexual harassment, which have been prompted by the emergence of online social movements, and in which elite boys' schools have been implicated (Bennett, 2021b; Chrysanthos, 2021; Leser & Chrysanthos, 2021; O'Brien, 2022).

4.1.2. Social Movements, Public Tales, and Experience

The ability to observe how personal, political, and public resources in the present impinge on past experiences is a particularly useful aspect of narrative analysis. For the purposes of this research project, social movements such as #MeToo, and media reports of abhorrent behaviour by elite boys' school students, have generated public debates that provide both a language and forum to talk about elitism, masculinity,

and privilege. This includes a wider interrogation of masculinity and how it is directly implicated in the perpetration of sexual assault and sexual harassment, as well as the complicity and inaction of men in response to the violent acts of men against women (Flood, 2019). As Flood argued (2019), the #MeToo movement 'prompted valuable public scrutiny of the narrow and dangerous ideals of masculinity which inform men's violence toward women' (p. 285). In particular, #MeToo has asked men to listen to women and recognise that the violence men perpetrate against women is common, serious, and wrong. Further, it has asked men to reflect on, and change, how they behave and engage with women and other men in the course of everyday interactions (Flood, 2019). However, discourses within #MeToo, especially those that label perpetrators of male violence against women as 'monsters', distort and obscure the linkages that exist between different forms of male violence while allowing 'normal' male behaviour to pass as unremarkable. By containing the worst behaviours and characteristics within an increasingly small number of men, the structures that maintain male privilege more broadly are kept beyond question (Boyle, 2019). Similarly, I argue that the abhorrent and vicious behaviours of elite boys' school students have necessitated an acknowledgement that elitist, homophobic, misogynistic, and racist attitudes are common in these institutions.

The public scrutiny attracted by elite boys' schools has required administrators, students, and old boys to reflect on, and change their behaviour. However, the strategy of labelling these behaviours as aberrant, irresponsible, and unacceptable, enables a line to be drawn between 'good' and 'bad' boys, not unlike the distinction that can be made between 'monstrous' sexual predators and 'normal' men. As a result, the cultural practices of elite boys' schools, which enable these abhorrent and vicious behaviours to be rehearsed and to flourish, remain largely untroubled by media reports and the response of school administrations. Regardless, the cultural moment has enabled elite boys' schooling to become increasingly questionable, fracturing public tales of an educational gold-standard and idyllic surround for boys to become men. Narrative analysis can bring into view this process of moving from the personal experience of elite boys' schooling, the influence of emergent public tales, and the sharing of personal experience. In this way, narrative

analysis is concerned with how and why individuals construct and recount their experiences in certain ways, and is underpinned by the argument, as follows:

> How individuals recount their histories – what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience – all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned. (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1)

4.1.3. Poststructural Experiences

The poststructural turn has required a shift in how experiences are understood by social science researchers. Specifically, the truth that was previously believed to be uncoverable within narrative accounts has been problematised. In approaching my field work, I adopted a poststructural approach to narrative analysis, the telling of experience, and the interpretation of personal accounts about elite boys' schooling. Rather than understanding stories as transparent accounts of events and instances, the experiences recorded in the interview data were understood as being complicated and tangled. In generating accounts of schooling experience, I was concerned with how my research participants formulated themselves as subjects, as well as their identities.

As Davies and Davies (2007) indicated, citing the work of Scott (1992), since the poststructuralist turn:

> Accounts of "experience" can no longer be read … as straightforward descriptions of "an individual's being or consciousness." Nor can readings of accounts of experience produce any final analysis of the meaning of the "real person" who made the account or of "real worlds" that might be acted on as a result of that meaning making. (p. 1139)

This similar to the observation made by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), who noted that for the poststructuralist:

knowledge has an entirely discursive provenance. Signs can only rely on other signs for their meaning, and thus inquiry does not deal with lived experience itself. Such experience may exist. But as soon as we speak or write about it, we have moved into the process of representation (p. 49).

For researchers, listening to personal accounts of experience requires an awareness that what is 'hearable shifts with the interactional space the researcher inhabits, with the time and the purpose in telling, and with the discursive possibilities available (or brought to conscious awareness) at the time of each telling' (Davies, 2003, p. 144). Davies and Davies (2007) extended this by arguing that there are 'multiple possible trajectories in the tales that we, and our research participants, tell in the process of "generating data"' (p. 1140). As this suggests, the reading of interview transcripts is always undertaken from a particular vantage point, making the researcher an active participant in the generation of data, but also in the meanings that flow from that data. However, in the process of telling, the experience also shifts for the participant, as they 'look back' on past events.

In contemplating the experience of childhood, Butler (2004a) indicated that our past experiences are not fully banished in the present, but they are also no longer fully our own. Instead, these experiences are impinged on by others, while also being imprinted with desires that are external to the individual. Therefore, the past can never be fully captured, primarily because life continues to unfold as we generate accounts about the events we have experienced. In this way, a past experience becomes a new experience as an accounting is made of the past experience. Rather than accepting the accounts of research participants as being 'true', the accounts of experience become fiction as a result of the poststructural turn to discourse (Davies & Davies, 2007).

For the purpose of this thesis, personal experiences are not taken on face-value as having some straightforward authenticity. Instead, the narratives of research participants will be understood as being always partially formed, in a process of becoming and changing, while the act of narrating itself will be conceived as a performative expression of subjectivity.

4.1.4.Narrative Identities

A narrative is talk that is organised around sequential and consequential events (Riessman, 1993; Taylor, 2006). Through the telling of these events, individuals create plots that enable them to make coherent sense of their lives (Murray, 1999), while also constructing a preferred self-image (Wagner & Wodak, 2006). The importance of narratives in the construction of identity has been highlighted by Davies and Harré (1990), who argued that identity is:

> always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives. Stories are located within a number of different discourses, and thus vary dramatically in terms of the language used, the concepts, issues and moral judgements made relevant, and the subject positions made available within them. In this way poststructuralism shades into narratology. (p. 47)

Stories are not an expression of an authentic or real self, but are instead the site where identity is constructed, contested, and negotiated by active speakers (Taylor, 2006). As Davies and Davies (2007) noted, experience is neither straightforward, nor something that can be accounted for in a transparent manner. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, identity is best understood as an 'artifact of communal exchange' (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). As Bell (1999) argued, stories are a process through which individuals actively construct and revise their identities, and try out alternative configurations. For this reason, I adopt the term *narrative identity* to foreground the importance of talk in identity work, while also illuminating how stories emphasise the 'constant need for negotiations and renegotiations' (Andersson, 2008, p. 144).

4.1.5.Troubled Identities

The communal exchange and discursive resources that determine talk also reveal the constraints and limitations of identity work. While active speakers have agency in what resources they utilise, their positionality remains constituted through the larger discourses of society (Davies & Harré, 1990). As a result, it is necessary for speakers to conform with the plots that are embedded in their personal histories. In this way,

identity work is restricted and limited by the discursive resources available to speakers within the autobiographical fragments they have selected to include in their stories. Through narrative analysis these restrictions and limitations of identity work can become visible as 'trouble' (Taylor, 2005; Wetherell, 1998).

Taylor (2005) defined a troubled identity as 'one which is potentially 'hearable' and challengeable by others as implausible or inconsistent with other identities that are claimed' (p. 254). Where trouble occurs from a potential misreading of talk, the speaker must undertake 'repair' work (Wetherell, 1998). In some instances, inconsistencies might result in the speaker being unable to repair the trouble created. Trouble becomes apparent in the form of inconsistent, or poorly articulated discourses, which draw attention to questionable accounts of experience. For old boys, larger social discourses of anti-elitism, toxic masculinity, and White privilege, combined with the discursive constraints of elite boys' schooling, could become visible as 'trouble' in their identity work. For men who want to position themselves as being caring, honourable, hospitable, and tolerant, it is plausible that they will be positioned by others as being disingenuous given their economically and socially privileged background. The repeated experience of this trouble, and an associated need for regular repair, could become visible in talk through a 'rehearsed account of trouble as part of the ongoing project of … identity work' (Taylor, 2006, p. 100). Disavowal is one discursive structure that could mediate these deliberate narratives about self.

4.1.6. Disavowed Identities

Disavowal is a concept with significant utility for the analysis of elite identities. As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) indicated, class disavowal can be conceptualised as a set of social practices that draws on the appearance of virtue to simultaneously assert status and deflect criticism about eliteness. Central among these practices is the representation of a desired self-image that is attuned with the increasing disapproval of elites, elitism, and snobbery. This is similar to the notion of a discursive strategy developed by Wodak (2003) who argued that a positive self-presentation is constructed through talk as part of an 'intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic aim' (p. 139). For this reason, it is important for the researcher to be alert and considered when listening to stories surrounding experience. As Atkinson

and Delamont (2008) argued, narratives are not privileged accounts that provide access to some private site of personal experience, stating that, 'we should not simply collect them as if they were untrammelled, unmediated representations of social realities … narratives should be analyzed as a social phenomenon, not as the vehicle for personal or private experience' (p. 316). In analysing the narrative identities of old boys, disavowal is a strategy that emphasises the phenomenon of *exceptionality*, functions as an important marker of self-identification, and indicates aspirations towards acceptable formations of selfhood (Drew, 2013). As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) argued, while moral and virtuous claims towards allyship, equality, and inclusivity, might be sincerely believed by elite schools, their clients, and in the case of this study, old boys, these claims may still be designed to lessen any negative associations with unfair access to power, privilege, and status. As a result, any appearance of moral goodness and honest sincerity must be appropriately critiqued and scrutinised. Understanding disavowal as a performative act represents one approach to undertake this critique.

4.1.7. Disavowal as Performative Narrative Act

Narrative identity is also a performative act (Butler, 2006b) and in this way the methodological approach relates directly to my theoretical framework. As Riessman (2003) indicated, narratives link our past, present, and imagined futures, but they are also something that is 'accomplished performatively' (p. 7). Therefore, identity is always accomplished with the audience in mind, which means that 'one can't be a "self" by oneself, identities must be accomplished in "shows" that persuade' (Riessman, 2003, p. 7). This notion is extended by Peterson and Langellier (2006) who argued that the 'narrative is not merely the performance of an underlying communication competence; rather, narrative is performative in that it produces that to which it refers' (p. 174). This approach challenges the realist understanding that the 'observable aspects of a person, including talk, are the expression or manifestation of some interior entity' (Taylor, 2006, p. 96). This understanding aligns with the conceptualisation of gender as performance promoted by Butler (2006a), in which 'identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (p. 34). Therefore, through narrative performance the individual 'reproduces, recaptures, and re-inscribes power relations' (Peterson & Langellier, 2006, p. 178). From this perspective, *talking* about elite boys' schooling

experiences would *perform* elite boys' schooling through the reproduction and re-inscription of power relations as participants tell *stories* of personal experience. As this suggests, the methodological approach of my thesis is not concerned with how stories are a medium for communicating details about events and instances about elite boys' schooling. Instead, I am concerned with what is happening now in the lives of these men, and how the act and practice of talking in a social context, reveals how memories of their schooling experience have been impinged on by cultural, political, and social factors, while also being imprinted by the external desires and values of others. In this way, the analytical approach is useful for exploring, and responding to, the central research question. Specifically, it enables a consideration of how old boys feel about their schooling, and talk about privilege, in adulthood. In narrating their past, it will be possible to glimpse at how their schooling experience is not fully banished by the present, but is also no longer fully their own. It recognises that these remembrances of past experiences, presented as claims towards historical truth, have been imprinted by the desires of others, and shifting social values, influencing accounts of their experiences.

4.1.8. Masculine Identities

Narrative analysis has been used extensively within the field of men and masculinities studies. Specifically, it has been used to explore the experiences of men across a diverse range of research fields, including: care work (Gilbert et al., 2014; Jordal & Heggen, 2015); education (Edley & Wetherell, 1999); disability (Scott, 2014); domestic labour (Aarseth, 2009); incarceration (Evans & Wallace, 2008); mental health (Caddick et al., 2015; Valkonen & Hanninen, 2012); physical illness (Gray et al., 2005; Oliffe, 2005; Riessman, 2003); sexual pursuit (Grazian, 2007); teaching (Davis, 2015; Davis & Brömdal, 2020; Davis & Johnson, 2016); and violence (Andersson, 2008). However, it has not been used to explore the experiences of old boys or social elites.

4.2. Encountering Old Boys

Conducting this research project presented some challenges and difficulties, especially in relation to participant recruitment. However, previous studies of elite schools have revealed that the social network and personal positionality of the researcher can be significant in gaining access to participants (Gaztambide-

Fernández & Howard, 2012). In particular, my status as an old boy presented me with an existing social network of men who could assist in establishing a list of initial research contacts.

4.2.1. Gaining Accessing

Gaining access to subjects and institutions has been identified as the key issue for those interested in researching elite schools (Kenway & Howard, 2013). While this research project is not concerned with the direct study of elite schooling practices, the issue of accessing research subjects was still a critical aspect. Regardless of the institutional setting, 'gaining access to elite subjects is often the issue on which the fate of the entire project hinges' (Winkler, 1987, p. 133). As a result, much social research into elites has been achieved from what Gilding (2010) referred to as 'remote observation points' (p. 756). Most studies that have explored elite boys' schools have predominantly utilised personal biographies and other primary resources that are on the public record (e.g., Crotty, 2001; Morrell, 2001; Murray, 2007; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005). While these studies have been insightful, especially in illustrating the connections between education and pathways of privilege, they tend to understand this social group as an uncomplicated, uniform cohort.

Studies that consider elite schools and their alumni have highlighted that participant recruitment requires a combination of strategies including the leveraging of pre-existing relationships (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a), the insider-status of the researcher (Khan, 2013), and snowball techniques to connect one contact with another (Madrid, 2013). I considered a combination of these recruitment methods in developing the project design for my thesis.

4.2.2. Positionality and Interviewing

Throughout the research project I was required to consider my positionality as an old boy, but also as a researcher who identifies as being able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, male, middle class, and White. The implications of positionality for research, especially qualitative research, has been addressed by feminist scholars who have revealed that the personal is an in extricable part of the research process (Denzin, 1994; Harding, 1991). From a feminist perspective, positionality draws attention to the subjective experience of the researcher, relative to the research

participant, while also acknowledging the two-way nature of research and the limits of objectivity. Given my own affective experiences of attending an elite boys' school, it was necessary for me to consider the role I was performing in the research process, as well as in my direct interactions with the research participants. It was necessary to acknowledge my own positionality and how it influenced my research activities and the relationships I formed with the old boys. Through an ongoing process of reflexivity, it was possible to highlight the multitude of positions I occupied as a researcher, relative to the research participants (Wolf, 1996). Further, it also revealed the multitude of sites that shape my own identity, and how these notions of self 'influenced my choices, access, and procedures in research and also permeate the representation of research subjects in my writing' (Lal, 1996, p. 190).

4.3. Project Design

4.3.1. Participant Framework

In all instances, the participants had attended schools that can claim membership of the Great Public Schools (GPS) Association[9] in their respective state or territory. As Sherington (1983) noted, the GPS Associations have historically been the mechanism through which member schools have asserted their status, social prestige, and class specific values within the context of Australian education. With few exceptions, these schools are in the capital cities of Australia, often in wealthy, inner-city suburbs.

From these elite boys' schools, I focused on the most recent generation of old boys (age 25–44). This decision enabled me to restrict the research project to men who had entered school at the onset of the 'boys' crisis,[10] a period that utilised a number of arguments to advocate for the rights of male students. Significantly, this socio-historical moment reinforced beliefs among some parents about the benefits and virtues of a single-sex education for boys. Further, this particular cohort is

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[9] The Great Public Schools Associations were established to provide students from member schools with opportunities to participate in a range of inter-school cultural and sporting activities. Members of these associations are predominantly elite boys' schools. Australian Associations include, but are not limited to, the Great Public Schools Association of Queensland, Athletic Association of the Great Public Schools of New South Wales, and Associated Public Schools of Victoria.

[10] The boys' crisis cited the deterioration in boys' examination results relative to girls, the poor emotional and social skills of boys, shifting attitudes about bullying and school violence, and suspicion about the influence of feminism on classroom knowledge as justification for teaching practices that explicitly addressed the needs of boys.

recognised as having more egalitarian attitudes, especially in relation to gender, relative to men who are 45 years and older (Chesters et al., 2009; van Egmond et al., 2010). Research has also indicated that young people aged between 18 and 24 do not consider themselves to be adults (Arnett, 2000), with individuals who are 25 years and over being more likely to have a self-perception of having achieved adulthood (Eliason et al., 2015). Indeed, studies have highlighted that people with the markers of marriage or cohabitation, parenthood, completion of full-time education, and establishment within full-time work, are more likely to report having 'achieved' adulthood (e.g., Benson & Furstenberg, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007). Based on these conditions, men aged between 25 and 44 were eligible to participate in the study.

4.3.2. Participant Recruitment

The development of my participant framework provided the necessary parameters for recruitment and revealed how I would leverage my pre-existing relationships and insider-status as an old boy. My positionality was ultimately critical for gaining access, with participant recruitment only becoming successful when I determined to disclose my schooling history to potential interviewees. Prior to this strategic shift, research targets would not respond to requests to participate, and in some instances, displayed hostility towards the project and my motives as a researcher. Encountering this challenge required significant reflection on how the project design could be modified to address the hesitance and hostility that had been experienced in the initial stages of field work. While I had initially committed to a position of neutrality, returning to the literature on gaining access to elite research participants encouraged me to embrace the advantages of my pre-existing relationships (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) and insider-status (Khan, 2013). I adjusted my recruitment strategy to utilise my network for generating research participant leads, while also disclosing my status as an old boy to establish a shared point of reference when contacting potential research participants. The benefit of this approach is confirmed by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), who indicated that disclosure of insider-status can generate a more rapid and complete acceptance by study participants. Following this change in strategy, positive responses from potential interviewees was achieved, and recruitment proceeded across three stages:

- Stage One: I approached old boys from my personal network to ask if they could make introductions with colleagues or friends who would be

appropriate candidates for my research project. I also utilised internet searches, and social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to identify men who publicly promoted their status as old boys.

- Stage Two: Potential research participants were contacted through email to advise them of my research project, including a detailed description of what would be required from them as participants, the expected benefits and risks, and the guarantee of privacy and confidentiality should they consent to participate.
- Stage Three: After the interview was completed, I asked the participant to connect me with former classmates and work colleagues who might be interested in contributing to my research project.

4.3.3. The Participants

The field work phase of my research project produced 17 interviews with 12 men aged between 25 and 44 years of age. Collectively, they had attended nine all-boys' schools in Australia. However, my final data set is based on semi-structured interviews from nine participants who attended six elite boys' schools in Australia. While the three excluded participants had attended all-boys' schools, screening questions revealed that the institutions they had attended did not have the necessary characteristics to mark them as an *elite* all-boys' school. Of the nine participants, three were identified as the focus for case studies to be included within the analysis, while the remaining six were utilised as supporting data sources. Additional details on the nine participants are contained within *Appendix A: Research Participants*.

The case studies were identified following an initial analysis of the in-depth interview data, which established the broad characteristics and life trajectories of the participants. In this way, the case studies were determined to be exemplars of the nine participants included in the study. In addition to providing rich and descriptive accounts of elite boys' schooling, the case studies also served an important purpose in the development of findings and process of theorisation. Specifically, writing the case studies was an essential component of my enquiry process, and provided me with an opportunity to analyse, contemplate, and discover the issues and themes emerging from my field work and the in-depth interview data more broadly. Further, it enabled the analysis of macrosocial discursive formations, as well as an awareness of how subject positions were being used as a resource in constructing personal

narratives of identity. In this way, the case studies became essential in accounting for subject positions, and the further theorising of how the discursive mediation of self is performed.

The nine participants were somewhat diverse in terms of their social background, pathways into an elite boys' school, and life trajectories. Some belong to wealthy and established families and have access to significant reserves of economic, political, and social capital. Typically, these participants had a legacy at their school as either the son of an old boy, or through some other family connection such as a brother, uncle, or grandfather. Other participants emerged from aspirational family groups who had pursued elite boys' schooling as a pathway towards upward social mobility. In these instances, the participants were the first-in-family to attend an elite school, and in some instances, this was achieved through the financial assistance of an academic scholarship.

Most participants identify as able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, male, middle class, and White. However, one participant identifies as gay, while another is queer. Two have southern Mediterranean heritage, while another has south-east Asian heritage. All participants attended Christian schools, where religious education and chapel were compulsory aspects of the curriculum until at least Grade Ten. One school was Catholic, while the others were affiliated with various Protestant denominations. Nearly all the men have largely rejected religious belief in adulthood, and claimed to be agnostic, if not atheist, although one is an ordained minister in the Anglican Church.

With the exception of one participant, all the men are university educated. Some have post-graduate qualifications, mostly from elite Australian universities, but others have credentials from prestigious institutions in the United Kingdom. They were mostly raised in affluent suburbs across the capital cities of Australia. By the standards of most people, they have achieved financially comfortable and successful lives in adulthood.

Where these men appear to diverge from the 'typical' old boy is in their career trajectories and occupations. Unlike the notable alumni who are celebrated by these institutions for their contributions to the fields of finance, law, and politics, the research participants are employed within creative industries, education, and social

policy. One is a full-time father, and another is a priest. The absence of old boys who have arrived at prestigious employment destinations, such as senior executives at financial institutions, partners of law firms, or elected members of parliament, suggests that the most influential and powerful men who emerge from elite boys' schools were not present within the final data set.

4.4. Conducting the Interviews

As Bryman (2016) indicated, the interview is among the most commonly used methods in qualitative research, with the efficiency and flexibility of this approach making it particularly attractive to social researchers. The value of in-depth interviews is particularly evident in its ability to reveal the intentions and reasoning of research subjects (Gerring, 2007). This is something that was considered by Chong (1993), who indicated that:

> One of the advantages of the in-depth interview … is that it records more fully how subjects arrive at their opinions. While we cannot actually observe the underlying mental process that gives rise to their responses, we can witness many of its outward manifestations. The way subjects ramble, hesitate, stumble, and meander as they formulate their answers tips us off to how they are thinking and reasoning. (p. 868)

Being able to produce a deep understanding of the process that underpins how men think and talk about the experience of elite boys' schooling is of central importance to my research project. However, getting at these processes requires the interviewer to gain the trust of participants, something that is accumulated with time and by building a rapport (Harvey, 2011). This was particularly relevant for my interviews, with data often being collected across two sessions. Further, conversations were rarely linear, and were often punctuated, if not completely derailed, by shared understanding of sporting triumphs, academic achievements, and experiences of employment, relationships, and parenting.

4.4.1. Interview Guidelines

The interviews conducted for this research project were concerned with the experience of elite boys' schooling in Australia and identity work in adulthood. I

conducted semi-structured interviews, which encouraged the participants to share personal stories about their schooling and life trajectories (Bruner, 1990; Riessman, 1993). The narrative prompts were organised thematically, with an emphasis on key life stages, but with a deliberate focus on schooling. These thematic prompts included:

- School: Experiences and impressions of elite boys' schooling.
- Graduation: Imagined post-school trajectories (e.g., higher education and/or employment).
- Adulthood: Study, work, and relationships; personal lifestyle and interests.
- Contemporary Society: Thoughts and observations on gender equality, social inclusion, and workplace diversity.

Each topic of discussion had an initial question to enable the participant to examine each theme or life stage, while additional narrative prompts were provided in order to encourage direct consideration of particular issues of interest. Additional details on the interview guidelines, key questions and narrative prompts are contained within *Appendix B: Interview Protocol.*

The semi-structured interviews also provided flexibility to permit the exploration of themes and topics that occurred within the flow of participants sharing their stories. This was relevant as the main objective of the interview was to elicit how the subject imposed order and made sense of the experiences they had, rather than producing a descriptive understanding of the events and instances that made up their personal history.

4.5. Data Analysis

My thesis draws primarily on the analysis of three case studies that examine the construction and performance of masculine subjectivity at the intersection of elitism and privilege. The case studies drew on the experiences of three participants, with further supporting material drawn from additional in-depth interviews. The case studies presented rich and descriptive accounts that enabled the comparison of social constructs (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From this perspective, the case studies were representative of what Bromley (1986) referred to as 'an exemplar of, perhaps even a prototype for, a category of individuals' (p. 295).

There is a precedent for the use of case studies to investigate privilege and identity in elite educational contexts (Howard et al., 2014). Howard et al. (2014) utilised eight case studies that revealed the common qualities shared by a small group of affluent adolescents from elite schools in the United States, as well as their inner lives and understandings of privilege.

4.5.1. Case Studies

The case studies for this thesis draw on the experiences of three participants, with the interview data transcribed and checked for accuracy against the audio recording. Analysing the transcripts revealed that the participants had exercised control in their interviews by dominating talk time and directing discussion, often highlighting issues and topics they believed would be important for my research. This process was critical in developing an awareness of how privilege was integrated into the lives of my research participants, and how various socio-cultural factors were implicated in the interview process. It was this representation of self that formed the basis of my case studies (Riessman, 1990).

As Riessman (2003) has noted, within the social sciences a case study is a story that involves the actions of a subject and the actions of an investigator, who transforms the subject into a case. This requires the investigator to 'recreate the presentational features of the encounter in a way that replicates the experience of the investigation' (Radley & Chamberlain, 2001, p. 328). For this reason, all data was analysed, before being transformed into a case study that reconstructed the interview experience and the main points of each story as shared by the participant.

Case studies have been particularly informative for the study of health and illness, where they have highlighted how stories placed in a broader socio-historical context can reveal social structures, while also revealing how meaning is co-constructed in a relational context (Gray et al., 2005; Murray, 1999; Seymour-Smith & Wetherell, 2006). As Radley and Chamberlain (2001) noted, 'a case study elaborates upon pattern and meaning within the particular … [and] it is the configurations within each case that provide the basis for comparisons with other cases, and out of which generalisations about actions and structures are made' (p. 324). Therefore, my analysis was concerned with how the case study data integrated with theory and how it was 'generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes' (Yin, 2014, p. 21). In this way, the analysis of my case

studies was concerned with expanding and generalising theory, rather than extrapolating probabilities to the experiences of all old boys in Australia.

My writing of the case studies commenced with a close reading of the interview transcripts in order to identify the elements that formed the 'point of the story' (Mishler, 1991, p. 83). Drawing on the work of Riessman (2002), I examined how elitism, masculinity, and privilege were narratively constructed and performed in the three case studies, giving particular attention to the discursive resources and strategies that were selected and used within these performances. In doing this analysis, I engaged in a process of ongoing questioning in an attempt to understand the experience of elite boys' schooling and its ongoing presence in the lives of adult men.

4.5.2. Identifying Themes

The themes that emerged from this project were identified through the process of writing. Specifically, they became apparent by adopting a process that Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) referred to as 'writing as a method of inquiry' (p. 960). In writing the three case studies I engaged with a creative analytical practice, which enabled the development of stories to produce qualitative writing that generated valid, but also engaging, representations of the social world. Further, it also displayed how the writing process and the writing product – in this instance the case studies – are both intertwined and privileged (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962). Through this practice it was possible for me to make inquiries of the old boys and reveal the deeper issues that had been raised by their stories of elite boys' schooling and life trajectories. Like Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), a 'great part of that inquiry is accomplished in the writing because…writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery' (p. 967).

4.6. The Vignettes

Erickson (1986) defined narrative vignettes as a 'vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life' (p. 149). This notion was extended my Miles and Huberman (1994) to suggest that they are also intended to elevate ethnographic research by providing further 'contextual richness' (p. 83). From this perspective, the narrative vignettes that precede the chapters of this thesis are provided as a window into some of the discomfort, humiliation, pleasure, pride, and vulgarity that I associate with my

experience of attending an elite boys' school. In this way, it is my intention to provide the reader with a taste of my educational background, but more specifically, an insight into how it has shaped my interactions with, and understanding of, the social world.

By including myself as an actor alongside the other old boys, I also intended to address what I believe are necessary insights of a phenomenon that is not well understood, primarily because there is an absence of candid writing on the topic. Through the narrative vignettes I begin to address this omission by using episodes from my own life to express how I am implicated in the absorption and performance of schoolboy masculinities. As Ellis and Bochner (2000) argued, narratives of this type reveal how autoethnographic accounts can 'illuminate the culture under study' (p. 740).

The vignettes that are included throughout the thesis were trigged by discussions with the research participants, listening to audio recordings of interviews, reading transcripts, and writing case studies. In hearing, reading, or writing about the experiences of old boys, episodes from my own time at an elite boys' school emerged from my memory. Vivid and visceral, I noted my reactions and how they evoked feelings of both empathy and difference with the participants.

As I further developed an awareness of positionality, and its influence on my research activities and interactions with the research participants, I recognised the value of further developing these field notes into narrative vignettes as a necessary component of reflexivity. In writing the vignettes it was possible to further clarify to myself, and potential readers, of the multitude of positions I occupied as a student, and as an adult, and how this has shaped my own identity.

4.7. Ethics and Limitations

4.7.1. Institutional Ethics

The interviews for this research project were conducted with the approval of the USQ Human Research Ethics Committee — Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H19REA287 (see *Appendix C: Ethics Approval*). All research subjects were informed about the research project through a participant information sheet (see *Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet*), which provided an overview of the interview process, the expected benefits and risks to participants, as well as privacy

and confidentiality obligations. Research subjects were required to read and understand the participant information sheet, before completing a statement of consent (see *Appendix E: Consent Form*). The identifying features of specific schools and individuals have been removed from this research project. To maintain the anonymity of research subjects, pseudonyms were applied to the names of individuals, schools, universities, and workplaces, while generic professional titles or roles were used when discussing employment.

4.7.2. Personal Ethics

Research that involves people, especially in the exploration of personal experiences and expressions of self, can present a multitude of ethical concerns. As Vaughan (2004) noted, drawing on the work of Pillow (1997), such research can produce a 'space' in which participants can express their grievances and become emancipated through 'victory narratives' (p. 352). In listening to the old boys, and their feelings about the elitism, homophobia, misogyny, and racism they witnessed and navigated as students, it was necessary for me to contemplate how the interview provided a context to express their opposition to cultural practices they acknowledge as being abhorrent. Further, I was left wondering about the appropriateness of listening to, and documenting, their stories and claims about the rejection of elitism and privilege, without providing them with some validation or vindication in return.

This dilemma was ultimately addressed by adopting an approach that acknowledges narratives and stories as being a 'regulating fiction' that produces textual identities and truth regimes, as opposed to some accurate portrayal of an experience (Britzman, 1995). This is further buttressed by the poststructuralist view that there is no single Truth or reality that is waiting to be revealed through the sharing of experience. Instead, there are truths that are present within discourses, including the discourses of elite boys' schools, and the education of children more broadly. In adopting this perspective, it was not possible to fixate on the rejection of cultural practices and values experienced and navigated as schoolboys. As Britzman (1995) indicated, the theoretical and methodological approach adopted for this study was limited to exploring 'how categories of blame and resistance become discursively produced and lived' (p. 233)

In adopting this perspective, the stories that are present throughout this study, and the claims of becoming morally good and honestly sincere men, is not the focus

of my research. Rather, the study was concerned with the discourses that make it possible to simultaneously claim that elite boys' schools are elitist, homophobic, misogynistic, and racist institutions, but individual students are not personally entangled with these values. It reveals how these claims generate competing truth regimes that need to be navigated and reconciled. Further it enables a consideration of how the presenting of oneself as morally good, honestly sincere, and well-rounded is a necessary invention of current discourses that surround elitism, toxic masculinity, and male privilege.

The need to engage in acts of disavowal is therefore not a critique of the research participants, but rather an explanation of the necessity to generate discursive distance from the cultural practices of elite boys' schooling that are increasingly, and appropriately, excluded from what is socially acceptable conduct. From this perspective, disavowal is not a rejection of some true notion or ideal about the best form of education for boys but is rather an artefact of the cultural and social shifts occurring in society. These discourses construct elite boys' schools as a source of shame and embarrassment to be rejected by some old boys seeking to avoid judgement as bad men.

My status as an old boy produced additional ethical considerations, which I was required to address. In undertaking a research project that investigated the experience of elite boys' schooling, and the subsequent trajectory of old boys through university and employment, I had, in my own way, been collecting data about the research participants for most my life. As a result, when I interviewed the old boys, I brought certain expectations of what they would be like, what they had experienced at school, how they had behaved as students, and what life had been like since moving beyond the school gate. In some ways, their stories were consistent with my expectations, such as their description of the model schoolboy, the expectation of academic excellence, and the over-investment in sport. However, other experiences seemed distant to my own, especially surrounding the lack of awkward, embarrassing, and unpleasant experiences with the *other*, especially girls and women. My own experiences within an elite boys' school, and attempts to reconcile past attitudes and values, impacted by interactions with the participants. As this suggests, there is a risk that the personal, lived experience of the researcher can become a benchmark to determine the accuracy and validity of stories. As McWillian

et al. (1997) argued, the affective experiences of the researcher can produce a 'vanity ethnography' (p. 24). This notion was extended by Vaughan (2004), who suggested that the likely outcome of a methodological approach that lacks reflexivity could be a 'confessional tale' (p. 398). As noted previously (see. Section 4.2.2), this necessitated an acknowledgement of my own positionality and how it influenced my research activities. Through an ongoing process of reflexivity, it was possible to highlight the multitude of positions I occupied as a researcher, and how this influenced my research choices and representation of research participants.

Everyone was screeching 'Sage' in a high-pitched voice. It was the whole Year 10 chemistry class. The substitute teacher was doing her best to get them under control, but was struggling. Maybe it was because she was a substitute, or a woman, or both. Regardless, she had no authority to control a group of 15-year-old posh boys. If only she could. You see, the mockery was targeted at me.

Sage was a nickname enforced on me after my Year 8 English teacher shared a story with the class about an odd, peculiar, and pathetic 'poof' he had known at university. His name was Tim, but he had wanted to be called Sage. I was odd, peculiar, pathetic, and also suspected of being a 'poof'. So, the moniker was applied to me, much to the satisfaction of my classmates and teacher.

Brrring. Back in Year 10 chemistry the bell rang to signal the end of class. Boys filed out of the room, and I was the last one to collect my belongings. The substitute approached me and asked, 'Why do they call you Sage? Do they think you are wise?'

'No,' I said, 'They think I'm a fag'.

CHAPTER 5: NEIL: 'THESE KIDS AREN'T LIKE ME'

Neil is 25. He is comfortable and relaxed sitting in a home studio used for recording music, making podcasts, and pursuing a wide variety of digital and creative projects. As we commence our Zoom session, I thank him for participating in my research project, and he reassures me he has the time. 'I'm just sitting around watching online lectures at the moment,' he explained, before volunteering that he is currently undertaking a master's degree in educational leadership. The 'ultimate goal' he tells me, is to get involved in education reform, and start a business that leverages digital media to shift how learning occurs in Australia. I register that this goal is ambitious, but I am still thinking about his home studio and redirect the conversation. We briefly talk about our shared interest in music and discuss some of our favourite bands. Neil has a musical background, and casually shares that he released an EP of original music after completing high school. 'I just did like a year of working as a barista and doing music,' he explained. It was just something to do while figuring out what path to take in life. He went on to explain that he still gigs with his band, before moving our conversation to a company he has recently launched. The business is an online service providing local musicians with digital marketing solutions and public relations advice. While writing and performing music was great, his real passion was starting projects and building companies. 'I always kind of wanted to create something, or come up with something,' he said. There are just these 'entrepreneurial tendencies within me,' he explained. He currently works as an advocate and educator, a dual role that enables him to teach, while also supporting pre-service and beginning teachers as they enter the profession. As I listened to his interests and passions, I was feeling comfortable with his confidence, list of achievements, and life goals. He was at ease talking about himself and I was excited to start the interview.

5.1. School Days

5.1.1.   Very Conservative, Christian, White, Upper-middle-class

Neil grew up in a regional Australian city and attended a non-government primary school where his father was a teacher. He shared how his education had been largely dependent on where his father worked, and that he 'kind of just followed dad around' for school. When his father had the opportunity to transfer to *Rivercity Grammar*

School, he explained that 'it made sense for me to go' to the same school where he would be teaching. Unlike most students who attend an elite boys' school, Neil arrived through the discounted tuition fees offered to teachers. Already marking him as an outsider of sorts, he mentioned that his father commenced work at the beginning of Term Two, presenting additional challenges for him as a new student. He explained that this 'made it harder, because I was the only new kid in the whole school. There were no other kind of new kids with me. That made it a little bit awkward.' I considered how arriving at a new school, in a new city, in the middle of the academic year would be difficult regardless of context. I wondered whether there was anything distinctive about Rivercity that made his transition awkward and difficult. As our conversation progressed, Neil indicated that his memory of arriving at the school was clear, 'I could just see that there weren't [pauses] my initial thought was that there weren't kids like me'. After allowing this statement to settle, he elaborated on the school community as follows:

> There is like an Old Boys' Association group in there, where all the
> parents know each other, and they send them [their sons] to the school
> because of the sports, or the academics, and for the type of people
> they will get to meet. So they can network in the future. So that is the
> type of culture. It's [pauses] very conservative, Christian, White,
> upper-middle-class kids.

Atheist, sensitive and with socialist beliefs, Neil explained that his upbringing in regional Australia had been community focused, leaving him unprepared for the exclusivity of Rivercity. In particular, he was surprised by what he saw as the cruel intentions that underpinned many of his interactions with other students. Rivercity boys thrived on schadenfreude. His encounters led Neil to the assessment that the school prospered on a vindictiveness that was unlike his previous school. 'I felt the kids at Rivercity had this incredible arrogance, and they felt holier than thou. They felt that they were better than you. You know, mummy and daddy are rich,' he shared.

As we discussed this further, he provided stories of over-indulged boys who lacked any perspective on the value of money or the opportunities and possessions it could access. However, Neil also acknowledged that he had never reflected on

money matters either, at least not while he was a student. It was only as an adult that he had been able to fully articulate his relationship with money, privilege, and the advantages it had provided him. He explained that 'I never really thought that I was better than anyone else. I can understand it now, but back then [pauses] I never really thought about that'. After discussing his recollections further, an explicit memory emerged as follows:

> When I used to play basketball, all the boys used to critique everyone's basketball shoes. We used to get the magazines with all the NBA players and all their shoes, and some of these shoes were $400 each. I just rocked up in my runners. I felt like an idiot. Everyone is like, I got the new Kobe's, or the new LeBron's, and that kind of pressured me to go and ask mum and dad to go get some basketball shoes too. There was a negative perspective on you if you didn't have the right shoes.

The homogeneity of an elite boys' school, and the relative ease with which high-status items can be acquired, insulates students from the economic realities of most families. Families who can afford the tuition fees of an elite boys' school are wealthy relative to the median personal income of most Australians, which is approximately A$51,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). As a result, the displays of affluence that occur inside the school gate have the potential to become banal and pedestrian. Being different is arriving at basketball training with the *wrong* shoes. However, this performance was informative of the cultural practices expected at an elite boys' school. For Neil, the experience of feeling like an idiot, of not knowing or understanding the cultural etiquette, was an important lesson. It was about more than having the right shoes. It was about signifying who could belong authentically, and who fit the mould.

5.1.2. A Weird Bubble

As our discussion progressed, Neil expanded on his personal sketch and explained that Rivercity had been a 'weird' place. He added that 'it's like a real bubble'. This insularity is further reinforced by the communities and networks that surround elite schools, such as the Old Boys' Association. This is what Neil was reflecting on when he began explaining to me that Rivercity had not provided him with opportunities to

interact with a diverse group of people. He shared that after leaving school, he met people with cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds unlike anything he had encountered at Rivercity. He reflected on how this initial exposure to diversity was confronting. We discussed some of these experiences and I asked him about what this had been like for him. He recalled that, 'It made me feel pretty stupid at times I suppose. Like, when I heard, what I saw from them. Like [pauses] it made me feel a bit guilty'. The feeling of guilt was something I asked him to think about further.

Neil shared a story about a friendship that developed with a young woman soon after leaving Rivercity. She lived with her mother in a simple house on the outskirts of the city. While it was never made clear to Neil, he assumed that her mother was unemployed. As he recounted this memory, he thought about the experience of arriving at her home for the first time. 'There was shit everywhere,' he exclaimed, before continuing, 'Like her mum was a bit of a hoarder almost and there were like dirty dishes from ages ago'. As we further discussed his feelings, he concluded that, 'I just felt so out of place'. He explained that:

> It kind of made me feel bad. It made me feel, I suppose guilty that, you know, mum and dad used to put $50 on my go card[11] a week so I could get my own way to school. I had my own room. I had a two-storey house, and stuff like that. It was a pretty stark difference between her upbringing and mine.

I wondered whether this personal experience of confronting disadvantage, its challenges and difficulties, had enabled Neil to locate his own privilege. I asked him whether his transition from the 'weird bubble' of Rivercity had galvanised the 'socialist' beliefs and values he claimed to have developed while at school. He responded quickly, sharing how he had been a member of the Greens[12] and a volunteer with a progressive political activist group. However, as we further discussed his political views, and feelings about social progress, he explained that:

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[11] A go card is an electronic ticket used on all bus, train, ferry and tram services in South-East Queensland.

[12] The Greens party has its origins in the Australian environmental movement and has four core values, namely: ecological sustainability; social justice; grassroots democracy; and peace and non-violence.

Now, I don't align myself with any [political] party. Like, you can just see how corrupt the politicians are if you look at the news headlines now. I just think they're all out for themselves. I don't really see any politician that I believe in strongly. As I get older I just kind of, I feel like life is unfair and you have got to just work with the hand you're dealt, and some people are dealt a worse hand. You can try your hardest to help them out as you progress, but I feel that there's no real [political] party that looks out for my interests. Or any politician that I would support. I'm very anti-politics now.

This scepticism of politicians, and abandoning hope in political activism, surprised me. I wondered about this movement from activism to apathy and his concern that no one was looking out for him. I asked about his 'interests' and why he believed no political party represented him or his worldview. In responding to my question, he reiterated his feelings about the corrupt, personal interests of the political class. 'The general need to support people and support people trying to get ahead is just not looked at,' he said. He concluded that, 'I just feel you have to look after yourself and try and make the best with the hand you've been dealt. Because no one is going to help you.' This detachment from generosity, and an indifference to the plight of people who had been 'dealt a worse hand' than him, was confusing. Before concluding this topic of conversation, he returned to the theme of individualism and self-reliance saying that 'you have to look out for yourself'. I recognised that the ability to step away from activism and political engagement was a privilege to those with a secure childhood, good education, and a strong attachment to the labour market. He had exercised choice by rejecting the possibility of social change being achieved through conventional political processes, returning to a more coherently intelligible position that was self-assured and confident in his ability to succeed in a meritocracy, where he would be rewarded for his innate talent and personal effort.

An encounter with the messy and unkept home environment of a classed and gendered *other* demonstrates the social position Neil inhabited and had accepted as being normative. However, in confronting the *other* head-on it was necessary to recognise and reconcile the circumstances of someone who had experienced a childhood that was different to his own – a childhood that continued to place her in a predicament that was uncomfortable to witness. While the requirement to address the

realities of social disadvantage can be perpetually deferred by those with access to privilege and material wealth, conditions that shelter them from dangerous ingredients, an encounter with the *other* illuminates how they are implicated in inequality. For Neil, being implicated is reconciled with the messaging of our post-neoliberal times, imagining himself and others as entrepreneurs in a market, where opportunities and rewards are determined by the application of effort and talent. For people who are 'dealt a worse hand' they must take responsibility for their own future and work harder in the market.

I returned the conversation back to his experiences surrounding social inequality and the feelings this generated for him. In doing so, our conversation was directed towards his thoughts on the baggage and embarrassment of having previously been a Rivercity student.

5.1.3. Bad Reputations

Neil indicated that when he revealed himself as a Rivercity old boy to people outside the elite school network, they would profile him as 'the kid that had gone to private school'. He further explained that 'You know, like, I was the really smart kid'. I assumed that this was about the pride or respect that came with revealing his status and the superiority of teaching and learning he had enjoyed at school. However, the association between his status as a Rivercity student and being smart was something that troubled Neil. It made him feel uncomfortable. In describing the assumptions others had of him, he explained that it 'pissed me off because I am thinking, no, I don't want to be that'. In revealing himself as an old boy, Neil sensed that others were labelling him as naïve and socially awkward. I asked him how he wanted to be viewed, to which he replied, alternative and cool. He wanted to distinguish himself as being different to what might be expected of a 'lame' private school student. 'I was [pauses] kind of [pauses] almost like, embarrassed about where I had come from,' he explained. As he thought about this further, he concluded that, 'I wasn't proud that I was from Rivercity'. His strategy to manage these feelings of embarrassment and shame was to conceal and suppress his background as a Rivercity student. 'I never let it be known, I'm from private school. I never really flaunted it,' he said.

I returned the conversation back to his initial arrival at Rivercity and the boys who would become his classmates. He reiterated that if these were the people he

would be going to school with, there was no sense that he was one of them. In those early days, Neil explained that he made the decision to 'sit in the back' and not draw any attention to himself.

5.1.4. Making Friends

Despite some initial challenges, Neil eventually found the rhythm of school life and developed a friendship circle. However, in discussing the boys he would 'hang-out' with at school, he stated that the 'kind of normal kid I would get along with, was like an outcast'. The feeling of not belonging and making friends was something I asked him to think about further, as I probed deeper into his reflections of schoolyard dynamics and practices. 'I had a real empathy for new kids,' he said, reflecting on his own experiences of awkwardness and isolation when he first arrived at Rivercity. He went on to say that:

> Whenever there was a new kid that came in, I always used to like
> invite them over to come sit with us … I always used to look after the
> newer kids or try and like get kids that were a bit isolated like me to
> come and like sit with us.

As our conversation progressed, I encouraged him to think more about these friendships and the feelings he associated with his classmates. He paused for a moment, before telling me about some personal difficulties he had during Grade Ten. He shared that, 'my friendship group … it was never a real, true, friendship I suppose. I guess it is more like strength in numbers, because the kids that chose not to really fit in with anybody, usually were so isolated.' He continued to reflect on the lack of support his friends had provided him during this personally challenging period at school, and mentioned that 'they never rang me once, or texted me once, or checked-in to see how I was going once'. There was a genuine disappointment behind his words, which hinted at feelings of abandonment. Ultimately, Neil and his parents decided to withdraw him from Rivercity, allowing him to complete his final two years of secondary education at a different school. However, the lack of emotional support he received from his friends at Rivercity continues to linger and he stated that:

> These friends I had, allegedly friends that I had, since like Grade Five,
> Six, they never said anything to me, ever. They never checked-in to

see how I was going. Then when I left, they never reached out, and

they still haven't, to this day. I haven't heard from any of them.

There was a sensitivity behind this story, suggesting a desire for connection and support that appeared contradictory to the individualism, self-reliance, and stoicism that had punctuated our discussion. I contemplated how Neil had invested time and conviction in becoming a 'protector', by inviting new students into his group. In many ways he was an outsider at school but was still intelligible as a leader through his role as defender of the isolated and vulnerable. While I considered how this hierarchical positioning in a small and unstable group would make it difficult for expressions of sensitivity to move upwards, I was beginning to sense a small irritation building within myself. I began to wonder as to whether he had not received the acknowledgement and recognition that he wanted and expected.

5.1.5.   Rules, Rules, Rules

The enforcement of formal school rules was something that emerged on a few occasions throughout our discussion. They were 'just stupid rules they put in for control,' he explained. I asked him to discuss this further, suggesting that it would assist me if he provided some examples and how he thought they were controlling. He easily dispensed with a long list before mentioning that these rules were representative of a deeper school culture, and a set of 'old fashioned' values that Rivercity had inherited from schools in England. As we discussed this further, he revealed how all these rules and regulations made him feel, and the challenges and difficulties they presented. He paused briefly before sharing that, 'eventually, you learn [the rules] where you just do them as second nature'. These comments enabled me to consider how cultural practices and traditions move from being abstract, to something tangible and visible, at an elite boys' schools. I was able to conceptualise how this was evidence of Neil submitting himself to the school hierarchy and its expectations of him in terms of deportment and presentation. This was a phenomenon that was occurring at once in his mind, but it was also something he was enacting repeatedly, until he had mastered the performance, and it was 'second nature'. Although they were 'stupid rules' there was also an acceptance of their authority, and no suggestion that he had exercised any radical opposition. In asking whether he had ever attempted to be playful with his uniform, or intentionally bend

the rules, Neil responded, 'I wasn't that extreme'. He despised these stupid rules, but there was a resignation that he must go along with what was expected of him and conform. I considered how the repeated submission to, and mastery of, these rules was an important modality of subjectification that conferred intelligibility as an elite boys' school student. After pondering what had been discussed, Neil concluded that:

> I didn't feel comfortable walking around with my shirt out, or my top
> button undone. I knew that there would be a teacher around the corner
> that was going to pull me up and I would get in trouble. I suppose that
> has indirectly affected the clothes that I wear now, and how I behave.
> There might be some ingrained stuff there.

This comment was curious and asked him to further explain how the experience of submitting to these rules, and the fear of punishment, continued to inform his behaviour and clothing choices as an adult. He explained that he enjoyed wearing nice clothes and aimed to include a 'bit of luxury' in his style. Like his shifting political views, this comment was confusing and was illustrative of inconsistencies in the formations of selfhood being claimed. It seemed at odds with his stated individualism and rejection of elitism and privilege, so I asked for some clarification. He acknowledged there was some hypocrisy in his statement, before quickly moving to a discussion of 'Melbourne Cup'[13] people. 'Those are maybe my least favourite type of people in the world,' he explained. I was unsure of this social group, so I asked for an explanation. He defined them as 'people that dress up in a cheap suit and act like a dickhead and get all drunk and are just generally arrogant, ignorant people'. If there was any doubt surrounding the point he was making, he concluded that these people were 'private school kind of people'. I recognised this as a moment where his noble beliefs were called into question, as he attempted to justify his desire for nice clothes and luxury. It was a moment of trouble that required fixing. There was an immediate attempt to renegotiate the normative rules of elite masculinity. This was achieved by positioning his own tastes as refined and sophisticated, compared to the cheap, drunk and ignorant revellers who were typical examples of old boys. Neil wanted to assure me that he was tasteful: a dignified, class act. The

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[13] The Melbourne Cup is a famous annual Thoroughbred horse race in Australia. Colloquially it is referred to as the 'race that stops the nation' given its cultural significance to the country. Cup culture is entwined with alcohol consumption and high fashion.

'ingrained stuff' of gentleness, politeness and refined presentation, was being deployed simultaneously as an act of resistance and submission. There was a clear rupture that was created by the tension between who he claims to be and what he actually does.

The style that Neil had adopted for himself was deployed as a form of resistance that challenged his personal conception of old boys as being 'cheap', 'ignorant', and unrepresentative of acceptable behaviour and conduct. Neil had constructed a personal style that required the wearing of nice clothes, punctuated by displays of 'luxury', performances that emphasise the socioeconomic and class-based context of his schooling and family background. While the theme that underpins his story is the rejection of elitism, and the entitlement of old boys to 'act like a dickhead and get all drunk', there are many similarities between Neil and the class sensibilities that are acquired through elite boys' schooling. Specifically, the 'ingrained stuff' of gentleness, politeness and refined presentation. As an adult, there was nothing radical or subversive in his presentation that had the potential to produce anxiety or fear among dominant social groups, and his gendered class positionality remained intelligible through his sensibilities.

5.2. Becoming an Old Boy

As our conversation progressed, it was evident that it had been difficult for Neil to belong authentically at Rivercity. I asked whether he had ever had the feeling of being valued by his classmates or school. 'Initially I did ... for the first three or four years, I probably bought into it,' he said. I asked him to elaborate on this point and provide me with some further context. He explained to me as follows:

> Just the whole culture around it. Like, I would do all the sport, and be the sporting captain, and things like that. I was basketball captain, and I was some other things as well, and I probably got into war cries at sport. Wearing the school colours with pride. Trying to do as much for the school as I could.

However, as he progressed through the year groups, he indicated that he was increasingly reluctant to conform to the school and its expectations of him. Specifically, he was disenchanted with the career trajectories expected of Rivercity students.

5.2.1. Expected Pathways

Neil found it difficult to adopt and pursue some of the explicit expectations the school had for its students. In particular, he mentioned how the parameters of success and future work were restrictive and he could, 'see the detrimental effects that it would have on certain kids, and on me'. He continued to explain that:

> It's all about conforming. Even the professions that a lot of the kids go into are pre-formed professions that already exist. You join someone else's law firm, or you go do this for somebody, or you go do mining, or something for another company. Or you're a doctor, or a surgeon, and you just work in a hospital. I think that eventually just pushed me down inside a box.

In sharing this thought Neil provided some insight into his own feelings and the difficulty he had locating any self-identification within the career expectations of Rivercity old boys. For many of his classmates, he assumed that their life trajectory had been 'mapped out for them since the day they were born'. I asked him to explore this further and he reiterated how most of his classmates had imagined future careers in engineering, law, and medicine. This recognition made him feel different from his peers, primarily because his pathway into adulthood had seemed less obvious as a schoolboy. However, as we discussed this it was clear that he was unwilling to sit with the feeling of uncertainty, and the discomfort it created within him. Instead, Neil ridiculed the uncritical acceptance of his peers and their pursuit of a particular pathway because, 'it's just what daddy has told you to do'. This comment about life trajectories, and the mindless pursuit of traditional careers, led our discussion to a more direct consideration of becoming an old boy.

5.2.2. The Model Rivercity Schoolboy

Initially, I was interested in the process of leaving school, entering a world beyond the school gate, and his thoughts about being an old boy. Neil answered by revisiting the Rivercity culture. He reflected on the language used by the school and students and how it framed Rivercity as a group of 'brothers' who should be forever looking out for each other. As we talked further, he explained how various components of the school, such as 'the uniform, and the war cries, and the culture' enforced a tribalism that encouraged students to view life as a zero-sum game of winners and losers. I

was intrigued by this observation and asked him what Rivercity promoted as winning-at-life. He had a clear understanding that this necessitated being a married, Church-going father with a university education. Further, it required being employed in a traditional profession, such as engineering, law, or medicine. It also meant being tall and attractive with a passion for cricket and rugby. I immediately thought about the unblushing American male[14] described by Erving Goffman, which I had studied as an undergraduate. Later, I contemplated how this 'unblushing' old boy had no need to experience doubt, feel embarrassment, or question their pathway. In contrast, those who deviated from the pathway were required to defend their departure. The greater the departure, the greater the justification required. I recognised how failing to realise this expectation could be anxiety inducing.

As Neil pondered this checklist for success, he concluded that 'it's the same path that's expected for everybody'. I wondered why this expectation had been difficult for him to accept. He paused briefly before stating, 'I could have easily been that if I wanted to'. I was again left feeling confused as this statement seemed to deviate from much of our preceding discussion about restrictive expectations and some certainty in an authentic self who naturally opposed these aspirations. However, he immediately clarified his position by stating that the expected pathways 'just didn't appeal to my interests'. Throughout our conversation, Neil had been establishing himself as critical, entrepreneurial, and individualistic. He was a creative and imaginative thinker who would write his own story. The pathway of privilege did not align with his own sense of selfhood.

5.2.3. Becoming my Own Man

As we discussed his adult life further, Neil provided further context for the difference between himself and other Rivercity students. He began by explaining that the boys who do well at Rivercity are:

> people who really like being told what to do, and when. People who
> really like having an identity thrust upon them almost. Like, you are a

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[14] Goffman (1976) described the unblushing American male as 'a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height and a recent record in sports' (p. 152).

Rivercity old boy and that's basically all they are. I think people who like being in the bubble.

He continued to say that there were many old boys with fond memories of Rivercity who still have the same friendship group from school. Neil explained how he would receive friend requests through Facebook from former classmates. 'I look at their friends list and it's literally just all the boys that were in my class. Like, some boys have just stuck in that bubble, even after they've left school,' he said. According to Neil, these were model Rivercity schoolboys. They were members of the 'Association' and had remained close to the school community. These men had become 'perpetual sons of the school' who were working on strengthening Rivercity and its mission. For Neil, this was deeply problematic as there was no room within this identity to 'be your own man'. This thought was extended when I asked him what self-reliance means for him and his own pathway. He restated how he was an individual, and a risk-taker, qualities that he suggested could be problematic within large institutions and organisations. The 'big feeling' of these environments was no different to Rivercity. He expressed the personal satisfaction he had experienced as an entrepreneur and the feeling of 'having influence on something real and seeing it grow'. He continued to explain that in large organisations:

> You don't have any influence over anything. I don't like feeling like I could drop off the face of the earth and no one would bat an eye. I don't like feeling like I don't have any influence over a place that I spend every day at. I don't like that feeling.

For much of our conversation, Neil had been looking for ways to present himself in opposition to what occurs at the intersection of elitism, masculinity, and privilege. Association with the more toxic aspects of this intersection did not sit comfortably with his formation of selfhood. He engaged with a discursive strategy to distance himself from the elite masculinity of Rivercity. He had rejected the lack of diversity, the absence of closeness and sensitivity, the rules and regulations, and the expectations of acceptable life trajectories. In sharing his views, he was positioning himself as someone who was making independent, thoughtful, and socially responsible choices in life. His stories ensured the presentation of a desired self-image. However, in sharing these stories, there was a failure to acknowledge how

self-reliance and staunch individualism are inherently masculine characteristics. In rejecting normative discourses about elite schools, there was always an immediate attempt to renegotiate the rules that had been rejected. In doing so there was a recuperation of the behaviours and conduct he claimed to oppose. The desire for acknowledgement and recognition, and a need to exercise influence over the place where he works, reaffirmed qualities of elite masculinity, while also revealing how entitlement and privilege were still entangled in his identity.

'Have you listened to that mix tape I made yet?'

'Yeah. There was some good stuff on there,' I respond to Roger, who is perched on an amplifier across from me.

'I'm putting another one together for you ... unless of course you want to keep listening to the Spice Girls and Hanson,' he giggles. He likes to needle me by suggesting that posh schoolboys have no right playing punk rock.

'Nah,' he continues, 'I'll get it to you at work this Thursday'.

I wash dishes at Sizzler. Roger works there as well. Without this job, I would have no reason to cross paths with someone like him. It sets me apart from all my classmates. Not that I know someone from a government school, although that is strange enough, but that I work. I had been working since I was 13. It was the only way I could get the things my parents were unable to afford.

My mind floats to the boys at school and how they are lavished with everything they could possibly want or need. I become self-conscious of the cheap guitar in my hands. I bought it with my own money, but there is no pride in that fact right now, or the life lesson of knowing the value of work. Just resentment for the meagre resources of my parents.

CHAPTER 6: CHRIS: KIDS WITH FABER-CASTELL PENS

I am sitting in a virtual meeting room waiting for *Chris* to arrive for our Zoom interview. He arrives punctually, coming online while walking down the hallway of his apartment. He is 31. As our meeting is taking place on a Monday morning, I begin by asking him about the past weekend. He explains that he has been interstate on a business trip and has only returned home this morning. Chris wears many hats, and is recognised nationally as an educator, speaker, and writer. As we discuss his employment, he shared how his normal flow of work had been significantly disrupted by COVID-19 travel restrictions. Fortunately, there is some promise that the coming year will see a return to normal movement around the country and pre-pandemic levels of work. He sits down and makes himself comfortable on the floor of his lounge room, leaning against a couch. There is an immediate sense of comfort as we exchange a few more pleasantries, with Chris appearing assured and relaxed in his role as interviewee. I begin by asking him about his first memories of attending an elite boys' school.

6.1. School Days

6.1.1. Being the Best

Chris attended the prestigious *Albion House* from Grade One. As we begin our conversation, he shares that his parents, the children of immigrants, both attended dilapidated government schools. Despite becoming small business owners and achieving upward social mobility, Chris discussed how his parents had always wanted something better for their children. In particular, he reflected on their belief that this could only be achieved through non-government education. As he worked through this initial personal sketch, we discussed how his parents had 'bought the line' that the only way to 'get ahead' in life was to enrol their children in a school like Albion. He shared his thoughts on how elite schools benefit from this parental anxiety and stoke fears that children will be left behind academically if they attend 'lesser' schools. I wondered what parental anxiety he was referring to and asked him to unpack this for me. Rather than referencing his own memories, he provided some more immediate conversations that he had shared with friends. He mentioned the difficult choices parents are required to make between available schooling options,

and how elite schools benefit from this doubt and uncertainty. He described the public messaging of elite boys' schools as follows:

> You have to go to a certain school to have certain doors opened for you. To be a certain type of person. That's the advertising. If you don't come here [pauses] it is that sort of excellence in education, to create fine young men.

As we discussed this further, he thought about how elite boys' schools 'push' the image of being a machine that is capable of turning boys into 'young men' who achieve 'ideal best lives' in adulthood.

Chris expanded on his views by sharing some personal feelings about his time at Albion, and the belief that he, and his classmates, were being 'bred for a certain purpose'. I gave him the space to explore this feeling, which enabled him to consider how Albion boys were encouraged to view themselves as being 'better than others'. We discussed this further, and I asked him how these feelings of superiority were cultivated by the school. He considered my question for a moment before saying that there is, 'this huge divide between the haves and the have-nots' and 'that's something that, you know, you learn that from the school'. He reflected on how Albion was situated on expansive, well-maintained grounds, with numerous sporting fields and ovals. This was something he pondered for a moment, before considering the importance of physical spaces in fostering feelings of superiority. Of the sporting fields and playgrounds, he said that:

> They were not in use 90 per cent of the time, because kids were in class. Why weren't the three or four high schools around our school that were just concrete playgrounds, why weren't they allowed to use our ovals? The school didn't share.

I considered how the hoarding of resources, and control of space, could inform ideas of elitism and entitlement and it was unsurprising when Chris concluded that, 'We weren't taught to be strong members of the community. We were taught to be the best and taught to think that we were the best'.

Opulent facilities and expansive grounds comprise the complex aesthetic of an elite boys' school and reveals the coalescence of privilege with the sensitivity of

selfhood. Interaction with the environment of Albion House signified the privilege that surrounded Chris, as well as its role in formulating a self-concept that he was among the best. However, as our conversation progressed, it became clear that being the best was not achieved easily. It required discipline, and at Albion, discipline was delivered with distinct overtones of shame.

6.1.2. Rigid Expectations

The expectations of Albion were rigid and uncompromising, and Chris reflected on the school uniform to highlight this lack of flexibility. He explained that 'you wear the suit and tie at all times, no matter your body type or the weather'. The importance of the uniform was something that I asked him to think about further, so I could develop an understanding of self-presentation, and its importance to the cultural practices of elite boys' schooling. He went on to say that:

> Whenever we travelled around [the city], heading to the school and back, it was always reiterated that we were billboards for the school. There was a certain behaviour that we always had to live up to, and it wasn't even anything that was remotely realistic.

I asked Chris what type of behaviour he was referring to, and why he viewed these expectations as being unrealistic. 'I remember constantly being berated about eating [in public] in our uniform,' he said. He continued, 'like, even the fact that kids could be eating something, could be deemed as not well representing the school'. I considered how public image and reputation was critical to elite schools and was something they fiercely protected. I contemplated how discipline, and the fear of punishment, was an example of Albion controlling and regulating individual student behaviour and deportment while in uniform. He explained to me that students were scolded and criticised for not adhering to behavioural expectations and the uniform policies of the school. As we discussed this more deeply, he shared stories of students being disciplined about inappropriate behaviour while wearing the school uniform in public. He stated that:

> Every lecture on behaviour is, we are disappointed in you, because we expect you to be fine young men. You know? Not, hey, you made a mistake, let's learn and grown from this. It's always about protecting the reputation of the school, not about actually becoming good people.

And it was the harshest punishments that were always reserved for those who had brought the school into disrepute.

However, there was no suggestion that Chris had been personally targeted for discipline and punishment. Indeed, he later revealed that, 'you couldn't probably find a more strait-laced student than me'. But he did share stories about a friend who was a 'free thinker' and wanted to break free from the rigid expectations and rules of Albion. In sharing these stories, he considered how the school, and its expectations and rules, were uncompromising. In turn, the rigidity surrounding culture and traditions denied students the opportunity to express their differences, diversity, and individuality. While Chris suggested that Albion could have supported his friend, all it accomplished was to 'force him into a box'.

The making of men at Albion House included a belief in an educational model that was rooted in discipline, a fundamental characteristic in traditional representations of moral and effective leadership. The heritage and traditions contained within the school uniform offered stability, something that was underpinned by a clear moral code. Further, the correct wearing of the uniform promoted a sense of community, and shared destiny, which could be challenged and scrutinised by 'free thinkers' who wanted certain dress standards to become flexible or negotiable. As Chris indicated, the messaging about behaviour and deportment was delivered strongly at Albion, highlighting that self-presentation and self-respect were values that should guide personal behaviour and conduct. The severity of response, especially for those who had 'brought the school into disrepute', suggests that these values were essential, and therefore not open for discussion or change. While Chris viewed the enforcement of uniform policies as repressive, he did not oppose them, which suggests that he was not confused about the traditions of Albion House, nor its aims, culture, and values.

The conversation again returned to the hopes of his parents, and their belief in the attitudes, demeanour, and manner Albion claimed to instil in boys. In reflecting on this point, Chris exclaimed, 'Forget that you know? They're not adequately preparing people for the world'. It was at this point that he brought together his thoughts about elitism and superiority, rigid rules and expectations, and his own narrative. He spoke about the financial position of his parents, their separation when

he was still in primary school, and the strain this placed on his mother. 'I remember money playing [pauses] like I remember being self-conscious about, sort of, what I had,' he said. He paused for a moment before coming to rest on his parents and their separation. It was a story he needed to share if I was to fully understand his feelings about Albion and elite boys' schooling.

6.1.3. 'I'm Going to Be Dumb'

Despite commencing at Albion in Grade One, Chris briefly attended a local Catholic school in Grade Four, following the separation of his parents. While it was a condition of separation that his father would continue to pay the tuition fees at Albion, Chris and his brothers were advised at the conclusion of Term One that this had not occurred. They were told not to return after the mid-semester break. Being removed from Albion was something I asked him to think about further. I wanted to probe deeper into his reflections of this moment. He explained that:

> I had it in my head [pauses] I had already bought the propaganda,
> where it was, oh, I'm not there anymore. I'm going to be dumb. I'm
> going to fall behind. I'm not going to be, sort of, I'm not going to be
> the [person] that I want to be.

I asked Chris if there was an instant that justified this feeling. He thought for a moment before considering how the teachers at his new school had tried to support his development and extend him academically. However, after being presented with an English extension opportunity, he remembered becoming tearful in front of the class. He explained that the teacher had asked him to attempt a writing task, which he had already completed, and excelled at, a year earlier at Albion. 'So, in my head,' he explained, 'that just confirmed all the biases. I am just going to fall behind all the kids who were at Albion'.

For Chris, his time at the local Catholic primary school was short-lived. His mum advocated for him to be reinstated at Albion, by requesting a meeting with the headmaster. He explained that his mum had the tenacity to negotiate for him, vowing to stay in the headmaster's office until a suitable outcome had been reached. Confrontation with the Catholic school system, and its perceived deficiencies, activated his mother, propelling her to become an agent who was capable of influencing the Albion administration. The conversion of cultural capital, to gain an

intervention with the headmaster, who 'sat at a very commanding desk', reveals much about parental aspirations surrounding the education of children. Albion represented an environment where experiences, relationships, and skills would combine to produce advantages for Chris in adulthood. This highlights the effort that parents, especially those who belong to social groups that can access the promise of elite schools, invest in education on behalf of their children. Through this story it was apparent that life outcomes were not something that should be left to chance, effort, or individual merit in the Catholic system. It reveals a lack of trust in this segment of the market, and an acknowledgement that ability, effort, and talent are insufficient ingredients for success. Facilitating attendance at the best schools, and best universities, and the opportunities this presents for developing the skills to interact with desirable social networks, reveals the importance of positionality in the attainment of certain educational opportunities. As this story suggests, how parents operate in relation to the schooling of their children reveals peculiar social practices, which are fundamental in the formation of position, positionality, and representations of self.

Ultimately, Chris received a full academic scholarship, but returning to Albion under revised conditions presented new and unexpected challenges. As Chris explained, 'I was just constantly aware that I was there because I was on scholarship'. Unlike many students at elite boys' schools, Chris was now attending by virtue of financial support, altering his relationship with classmates and the institution.

6.1.4. Not Quite Fitting In

Chris discussed the feeling a being aware of, and sensitive to, the material wealth of students and their families throughout his time at Albion. While he never wanted for anything, he distinctly remembered not being able to afford the possessions of 'fancy kids'. His reflections on wealth enabled him to share stories about his childhood home, which had been left partially renovated at the time his parents had separated. The exposed wires, removed floorboards, and kitchen sink propped up by a plank of wood, meant that 'kids were never allowed over to my house'. However, in sharing this story, Chris highlighted that the implications of the home environment were less visible to him in childhood, and any feelings of shame were more profound for his mother than him. As we continued to discuss his thoughts on wealth, Chris

considered how extra-curricular activities were fundamental to the Albion experience. 'It's not about just the study, it's about the holistic education,' he said. He acknowledged that these extra-curricular activities had a financial cost attached to them, and as a result, were opportunities he had been unable to experience. On the rare occasion when an extra-curricular activity was free, it would often be held on a weekend, clashing with his casual work at a fast-food restaurant. He concluded that:

> Either there was the extra-curricular you missed out on, because they cost too much, like trips, or whatever, or the opportunities within the school that you just couldn't engage with because they assumed your free time was your free time.

I thought about the concentration of material wealth within elite boys' schools, and how this informed an assumption that students, and their families, had ready access to a variety of resources, especially money and time. Resources that could access the activities needed to produce 'fine young men'. I recognised how this could be a demoralising experience for students who came from households with fewer resources than their classmates. Chris reiterated how this concentration of wealth had made him feel self-conscious about his own possessions. I asked him how this awareness developed for him as a student, and when he realised his circumstances were different to others at his school. He thought about my question, before offering the story as follows:

> You know, like the kids with the really great Faber-Castell Connector Pens, and I had two pencils and maybe three or four pens from Target. I remember feeling really self-conscious when the kid who sat next to me [pauses] like, our birthdays were close. I think we were all assigned birthday seats. So, the kid who sat next to me, it was his birthday a couple of days before mine. I didn't get him anything, because, like, why would I? Then, he bought me Connector Pens, and I thought, oh my god, we're friends. Then I realised, no wait, it's because he was tired of me using his.

I contemplated the feeling of not having Faber-Castell Connector Pens, missing out on extra-curricular activities, and the realisation that classmates were not necessarily friends who wanted to share. I asked Chris if these feelings affected him in the

present. He reflected on his work ethic, which he attributed to the self-discipline that was needed to balance the competing demands of a casual job and schoolwork. Through hard work, he had been able to enjoy 'a pretty comfortable standard of living' as an adult. However, as we discussed this further, he acknowledged that the pandemic had released some dormant feelings. At the height of COVID-19, he had been relying on JobKeeper[15] payments, and explained that:

> This is something I haven't felt since I was a kid. I hadn't realised that, you know, my mum's tight budgeting was something I felt. It wasn't until I was doing that sort of really tight budgeting [during COVID-19] that I thought, oh, like, this is something I have felt before. So, it is obviously something I still carry with me.

As we discussed this further, there was an indication that the tight budgeting he had been exposed to in childhood could be associated with a sense of guilt when buying 'fancy' things as an adult. Chris explained that during the pandemic there had been a:

> persistent weight on my chest. There was guilt if I went and had Thai instead of cooking my tuna and rice at home for lunch. So, it was little things like that, where I was, oh, okay, this is reminding me of, you know, how we used to just sort of get by.

I continued to think about the story of Faber-Castell Connector Pens and the feelings of guilt Chris had attached to small indulgences during the pandemic. How might the peculiarities of an elite boys' school be implicated in these feelings? In bringing our conversation back to the pens, I asked Chris to think about how his financial position had been different to his classmates. I probed deeper, wanting to understand if this resonated with him as an adult. 'I think it has reminded me I don't need half the shit they have,' he said. As we concluded this portion of our conversation, he said, 'I could get by then, I'll get by now'.

In discussing the concentration of wealth at Albion, Chris had reflected on other aspects of his experience where he could rightfully claim adherence to the cultural practices and traditions of his school. He had excelled academically,

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[15] The JobKeeper payment was a Commonwealth Government initiative designed to help businesses affected by COVID-19 to cover the costs of employee wages, so that employees were able retain their job and continue to earn an income during the pandemic.

'topping' his classes, which permitted him to feel like 'I do fit in here'. Scholastic attainment demonstrated an important area where he could make a rightful claim to being a model schoolboy. He was capable of becoming a useful man who could make a purposeful contribution to public life, as is the tradition an expectation of elite boys' schools. However, there was a tension that impacted Chris and his schooling experience. He reflected on how his formation of selfhood was stretched and complicated by other aspects of school culture. While one aspect of this had been financial, there was also a perception that he was not as masculine as his classmates. He preferred books, while they preferred sport.

6.1.5. Celebrating Sportsmen

Chris thrived within the academic programs at Albion where he was able to pursue his passion for writing, but these endeavours were not prized by the school. We returned to our earlier discussion about the type of man Albion produced, and the centrality of academic excellence within this particular discourse. While this was part of the Albion brand, Chris suggested that this had not been his experience as a student and was 'not really what they [Albion House] were aiming for'. I asked him to describe what Albion expected of its students, and he quickly replied, 'first and foremost they wanted sportsmen. That's what the school sort of privileged'. He continued to develop his thoughts on the importance of sport, its privileged position within the school, and the hero worship of senior athletes. In particular, Chris reflected on how this was implicated in producing the student hierarchy:

> The rugby players, they were sort of, what the school celebrated. Like we had, you know, sports assemblies, and you know, it was essential that, you know, everyone in the school goes to the Head of the River[16], and cheers on our rowing team. You know? All that sort of stuff.

Chris expanded on this story by explaining that, 'If you look at [rugby], it's about one school versus another, and so it is the sort of, dick swinging contest between all the GPS schools'. I considered how sporting triumphs were an important marker of school performance and that sporting success could determine the superiority of one

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[16] The Head of the River is a name given to high school rowing regattas conducted by the Great Public Schools Associations, or equivalent, in Australia.

elite school, and its boys, over another. Returning to his thoughts on academic excellence, and its importance relative to sport, Chris concluded that:

> The teachers were very focused on, what can we do to lift your grades, like, all that sort of stuff, but it felt like there were all these traditions in the school that [pauses] you know ... that yearly rugby match with Bridge Academy, that is, that is vitally important to who we are.

As a student who was dedicated to academic pursuits, it is understandable that Chris would be irritated by the privileging of sportsmen and the lack of recognition for his own achievements. To emphasise this, he shared a story about winning a prestigious writing award in Grade Eleven. He was presented to the school at assembly in recognition of his achievement after various sporting accomplishments had been acknowledged. The headmaster introduced Chris, prefacing his award by stating that, 'it's not for sport, but it's still important'. Enraged and hurt, Chris discussed how this incident had hardened his belief that as an institution, Albion did not value him. His existence at Albion did not align with the dominant discourses of the school. However, although Chris existed outside the dominant school culture, he recognised that 'there were always those teachers who were outside the culture as well'. These teachers had been inspirational in the development of his intellectual curiosity and creativity.

6.2. Becoming an Old Boy

As our conversation shifted towards life after school, Chris reflected on how he had pursued a career that was unlike many of his classmates. As a result, he had never benefited professionally from the elite school network. He mentioned that he does not include Albion on his CV and does not 'see that door opening for me day-to-day'. However, his work does require him, on occasion, to connect with the elite schools, and he acknowledged that, 'it puts some teachers and some people in that machine, a little bit [pauses] it puts them at ease ... knowing that I have been trained in a certain way'. I wondered why this status put elite school teachers at ease. He considered my question for a moment before indicating that while he had been able to connect with, and secure work from, government schools, relatively early in his

career as an educator and speaker, the elite school network had been difficult to penetrate. He explained that:

> So, I was good enough for public schools, but I couldn't get into the GPS schools, until it was like, oh, Chris is an Albion old boy. Then suddenly, all of those doors opened, almost immediately, and it wasn't because I understood those schools better, it was because suddenly it was like, oh, no, Chris is a *proper* person.

While this feeling waned, as his reputation and standing within the elite school sector increased, Chris admitted that he had been 'looked at differently' by the elite schools because he was an old boy.

6.2.1. The Old Boys' Association

As our conversation progressed, Chris raised the importance of the Old Boys' Association to Albion. He talked about the emails he received from the Association and highlighted that most of the events were not relevant to his life or would not be things he would enjoy. He provided me with a list of typical events that included: networking breakfasts; golf days; rugby matches; or drinking sessions at a pub. In considering the meaning of these events for him personally, Chris explained that 'it's just this very narrow idea of what it means to be a man'. As his thoughts developed, he concluded that:

> The actual big reason for those old boys' things is so that, we are paying to go to events, we feel a connection to the school, and we send our kids there, and that cycle continues. I think it's just another way to sort of keep us in that bubble.

In reflecting on the significance of maintaining these networks Chris considered his own pathway and why he had moved away from the Albion bubble in adulthood, explaining that, 'I think how I've developed, and how I've grown, it hasn't been from staying in that network. It's from actually branching out and engaging with the wider community. That's what has made me a better member of society'. I sensed that Chris had undertaken a personal journey of discovery after school, detaching himself from the feelings of rejection he had experienced as a student. He began to discuss his sexuality and how this had informed his experiences as a student:

> So much of that sort of outsider status [at school] is, you know, without sort of realising it, or at least realising it and not speaking it, comes with sort of being gay at an all-boy's school, when we weren't really, sort of talking about it, like we are now.

In sharing this story, I recognised his need to escape the bubble and acquire the means to understand the difference between himself and other Albion students. He shared how the typical student was, 'just reflective of that person that they [Albion House] wanted us to be. Then it is everyone into adulthood pretending to have become that person when they haven't.' As Chris suggested, it is possible that many of his former classmates were projecting a desired self-image that was lacking substance. In many ways they were phoney and inauthentic. After leaving school, and progressing through university, Chris explained that he had acquired a 'new language' to describe his experiences and relationship with Albion.

While the themes of self-realisation and self-actualisation are apparent in many of the stories shared by Chris, it reaches a denouement as he addresses the need to understand the fundamental departure points between himself and his former classmates. Despite indicating that his association with an elite boys' school did not result in doors opening for him on a daily basis, it has nonetheless produced specific employment opportunities in adulthood. As this suggests, how the conceptualisation of privilege is both mediated and understood in the ordinary or routine events of life, is significant. Understanding what counts as opportunity and privilege becomes a key question in the investigation of old boys, but also in their own reflective practice. Revealing his status as an Albion old boy, to generate professional engagements within GPS schools, could be interpreted as 'seeing the door open' and benefiting from the elite school network. However, Chris does not view it in these terms, indicating that the opportunities were still earned on merit.

6.2.2. The Bubble Bursts

Entering university and confronting students who were educated in the government system was a pivotal moment in the evolution of how Chris viewed himself and his identity. He explained that:

> There was a huge bubble burst moment, like, where it all sort of made sense to me. Where the girl whose notes I would copy at uni, who was

the brightest girl in the entire cohort, went to the local public school.

It was like, all that stuff we were taught was bullshit.

Throughout his time at Albion, Chris had been encouraged to feel 'better than others,' but this interaction demanded that he critically reflect on the feelings of superiority that had been cultivated at school. In sharing stories about university, he considered how important it is for elite school students to be 'exposed to people who aren't from a certain school'. Indeed, the 'bubble bursting moment' that Chris had at university, being exposed to an exceptional student with an educational background and gender that had been assumed to be inferior, was significant for him. In further discussing this point, he reiterated how elite boys' schools build silos, 'like the old boys' bubble that you stay in', which has the effect of 'closing everyone off from the world'. He suggested there was an inherent danger that these silos would freeze boys in time, stalling any development or growth in how they view the world, and experience their place in it.

While universities have historically been elite and exclusive institutions, indeed many remain so, market forces have required most to expand places and enrol students who would not have previously considered the pursuit of tertiary study, or been afforded the opportunity of an extended education. For old boys, the result of this shift has been that university requires a direct confrontation with the dangerous ingredients they had been able to avoid at school – ethnic diversity, homosexuals, powerful women, and uncouth others. These encounters can be unsettling, especially when it becomes apparent that the *other* is just as capable and talented, if not more so, than oneself. The difficulty and trouble experienced by Chris is perhaps an indication that the network of privilege is less apparent than in previous generations; at least at university.

6.2.3. Owning it

As our discussion concluded, I was interested to know whether Chris believed there was a stigma attached to being an old boy. I wondered whether the experience of financial challenges, or the belittling of his creative achievements, had made a lasting impression. He thought for a moment, before sharing that his feelings towards his former school were complicated because he was, in many ways, an Albion success story. Chris began developing his thoughts before stating that, 'It's a part of me, and

look, credit where credit is due, there are teachers at Albion, and there are people at Albion, and there are things that I learned at Albion, that did shape me'. In considering this statement, he reflected on a tendency for some people, who have enjoyed privileged childhoods, to 'obscure certain parts of themselves to appear like they had humbler beginnings than they did'. Chris wanted to assure me that this was something he avoided. He did not want to 'play act at [being a] certain thing' and shared that:

> I don't want to pretend like I had a different, sort of, upbringing, because it informs my perspective. I think my perspective on that [elite boys' schooling] allows me to speak to those issues a little bit more. I don't want to take up the space of somebody who did go to the local public school, and who did go without, and whose suffering is so much bigger than anything I could have imagined.

In concluding our interview, Chris shared how he had been impacted by financial challenges while at school but acknowledged that 'it was largely self-inflicted. Like, we didn't have to go to that school. We didn't have to suffer.'

Being enrolled at Albion House had been a choice, and a choice that continued after the separation of his parents and its ensuing financial challenges. The belief in an elite boys' school as the best possible environment for Chris to transition into manhood had been a powerful presence in the minds of his parents and his own. However, it became increasingly entangled with, and complicated by, affluence, wealth, and cultural practices and traditions that privileged athleticism, sporting prowess, and expensive personal possessions. Grateful for the teachers he had been able to access at school, and their role in guiding him towards his creative dreams, a residual tension remains. The pathway of privilege, which channelled Chris into university and an adult life where he has achieved national acclaim, is not without burden. To identify as an Albion success story, to recognise its role in the achievements and opportunities of adulthood, illustrates a fracturing of the ease with which privilege is achieved and the complicated place it can have in the identities of men.

Prefects were combing the schoolyard searching for Year 11 students. They were rounding up the boys who had been elected student leaders for next year. Price and Wilson turned the corner with purpose. They each held a bright, white piece of paper in their hand. Radiant sunshine illuminated the page and its crisp list of names. Price looked down at the list of anointed boys, then towards me. My breathing accelerated. 'It's me! I'm going to be a prefect'. I had indulged this thought. I had memorised the prefect oath – approach your duties as prefect without 'fear, nor favour, nor selfishness, nor sloth'. Wilson brushed past me, stealing my dream as he went. I leaned on the railing in front of me. It was brown, but the paint had started to chip, revealing the cold, blue steel beneath. Whitney was staring at me. 'You didn't think **you** *were going to be a prefect?' he asked.*

'Of course not,' I replied. I never told him the truth. I never told anyone.

CHAPTER 7: JOHN: 'IT WAS A REALLY GOOD PASSAGE FOR ME'

An email notification appears on my smartphone while I am waiting for a Zoom meeting to commence. I quickly check my inbox. It is a message from *John*, my research participant, asking if we can delay the interview start time by 15 minutes. He is preparing dinner for his family and needs some extra time to get the meal in the oven. In coordinating an appropriate day and time for our meeting, John had shared that he had been a full-time dad for the past 12 months. This responsibility provided him with immense joy, but he later joked that an unexpected consequence had been the self-imposed pressure to produce restaurant quality food. Hence the need for a few extra moments.

John is 39. He was comfortable and relaxed as we commenced the interview. Self-deprecating, and with a dry wit, I sensed an affable and warm personality throughout our early exchanges. There was also an openness that I hoped would be conducive to an honest and sincere discussion about his schooling. Currently living overseas, he later shared that he had left Australia to accept a business development role with a global corporation. He began the interview by apologising for scheduling our session on Good Friday. 'There's no holiday here,' he explained.

'Not a problem,' I reassured him. I was happy to accommodate his family responsibilities. We talked briefly about his move overseas, and I encouraged him to expand on some of his experiences. He offered up some wonderful insights about the differences he had noticed with Australia. 'It's interesting when you move here. You see proper rich people,' he explained. While there was an observable class disparity in Australia, John reflected on the pronounced gap between rich and poor he had experienced since moving abroad. He also shared how most of the people he had met while overseas considered work to be dull and boring. The point was emphasised when he considered how menial labour might explain the wistful affection so many of his colleagues had for the time they spent at university. He wryly commented that university is 'probably the last time they had any bloody fun'. I sensed that having fun was rarely far from the surface with John and that it would punctuate our interview.

7.1. School Days

7.1.1. Getting In

John attended the prestigious *Bridge Academy* from Grade Seven. An academic scholarship recipient, he had no prior association with the school, and acknowledged that before sitting the entrance examination, he was unaware that Bridge Academy existed. He explained that the examination had been intended as a practice for the government selective high school examination, which would be taking place later in the year. His mum had wanted him to experience a high-pressure test, in a hall with other students, before attempting the 'real' examination. However, after walking through the Bridge Academy grounds, John remembered thinking, 'this is a pretty good set-up. I wouldn't mind going here'.

In sharing his story about gaining an academic scholarship at Bridge Academy, John discussed the letter of offer sent by the school. 'There was a sentence in there that I've never forgotten,' he said. He continued to say that the letter stated, 'We believe that John is someone who has much to give and much to gain from the Bridge Academy experience'. As we worked through his personal history, he shared some thoughts about being given a place at the school. 'I was right into it,' he said, before sharing that:

> I remember my parents bought me a book about the history of the
> school. It's one of those schools that likes its own history. I remember
> reading that cover-to-cover, and I remember proudly putting on my
> uniform when we bought it.

Standing in front of the mirror in full school uniform, on the verge of starting at Bridge Academy, John shared a memory of looking at himself and thinking, 'Wow! This is pretty cool'. I contemplated the feeling of trying on a blazer for the first time, and the feeling of authority and importance this might produce in a boy.

As he thought further about beginning at his new school, John returned to his earlier comment that Bridge Academy had not been his intended destination. Despite performing well enough on the examination to access a scholarship, he reflected on this moment with some implied wrongdoing. 'I feel quite guilty that I kind of lucked into the experience of going there,' he said. After all, some of his classmates had

been on a waitlist since birth. Regardless, I wondered how he could conflate high performance on an examination, and an earned place at the school, with luck or good fortune. Why did this manifest in feelings of guilt?

I considered how this might be a function of downplaying the advantages he would eventually access, or possibly not making the most of those advantages in adulthood. He appreciated that I had provided him with an opportunity to clarify his thoughts before saying that 'I don't think I felt any guilt about going to the school'. As his response unfolded, John mentioned that as a scholarship recipient, he had fulfilled his obligations to Bridge Academy, stating that, 'I was a high academic performer. I was invested in the life of the school. Joined the prefect team. So, I always felt comfortable that I offered the school something and that I belonged there.' He had been an asset to Bridge Academy, providing them with exceptional academic results, validating its external image as a place of excellence and superiority. He later indicated that:

> At Bridge Academy I felt confident that they wanted me there. That I had earned my place there, because I felt like a kid with ability when I got there, and that was pretty quickly confirmed because I was in the top classes. I felt capable, especially academically against other guys in my year.

If there had been any sense of guilt, John suggested that it was 'towards my 18-year-old self'. He recalled the sensation of extraordinary possibility and potential he had after graduating, sharing that 'you walk out of Bridge Academy feeling very capable, and you've been a big fish in a small pond'. There was a sense he had not fully realised the potential that was made possible by his schooling. Regardless, John concluded his opening sketch with an expression of profound gratitude for his time at Bridge Academy. 'I had a great experience,' he said, 'but I think that is because I was a natural fit for the school'.

7.1.2.   A Natural Fit

On numerous occasions, John reflected on how he had been a natural fit at Bridge Academy and that he had enjoyed a relatively smooth transition into school life. I asked him to further explain being a natural fit, and why he believed the Bridge

Academy environment was particularly conducive to him and his personal style. He responded quickly with the reflection as follows:

> A lot of it had to do with the fact that I was either a natural fit, or being sort of, somewhat compliant by nature. I could make myself fit the mould of what was ideal at the school. To that extent, I had a really frictionless school experience.

He further explained that as an 'academic kid who liked cricket and rugby' he was able to access and experience the best of Bridge Academy. 'If I had gone to the local government school,' he added, 'I reckon I would have struggled'. I considered this insight for a moment and asked him why an elite boys' school had been so easy. Again, he responded quickly, '[Bridge Academy] likes the concept of … they call it a well-rounded boy'. I asked him to think about this concept further, as I probed deeper into his sense of alignment to being well-rounded. He explained:

> That was me. I think because I was academically inclined. But then, I also enjoyed sport, and I was relatively extroverted, and generally able to fit with people's expectations of what they would like me to be. It was a really good passage for me.

As we further discussed well-roundedness, John reiterated that the school 'wanted students to be committed academically, to participate in games and sport, and to serve the community'. In reflecting on this particular segment of our interview, he engaged with a discourse of appreciation, before highlighting his gratitude for Bridge Academy. 'I look back and think, with a sense of gratitude, and sense of good fortune, that it kind of worked out perfectly for me,' he said. I asked whether he would have different feelings if he had not been a natural fit. In responding to my question, John shared a recent conversation with a former classmate who had asked him, 'how I would reflect on Bridge Academy if I didn't get my end game, which was to be a prefect and be recognised as a leader … maybe I *would* reflect differently if that wasn't the case'.

7.1.3.   An Unnatural Fit

While the environment of Bridge Academy was a perfect fit for John, I was intrigued as to whether he had any thoughts on the type of boy who would have been

challenged by the experience. As he began sharing his observations, John reiterated how much he had enjoyed school and that his experience had been resoundingly positive. However, he did realise that 'there were some things I might have excused during my time there'. I wondered what behaviour he had excused as a student and asked him to expand on the cultural practices and traditions of his school. In responding to my question, he returned to our previous discussion about the model Bridge Academy schoolboy and the importance of academic performance, sport, and service. 'If you fell outside those, you would get bullied,' he explained. To illustrate the point, he shared a story about sport:

> In Year Seven we had to pick our winter sport, and there were guys running around checking if anyone had picked wog[17] ball. You know, soccer ... *They* would get a hard time. I guess I tacitly excused that by not saying, 'who cares what sport you play?'

We continued to discuss examples of schoolyard bullying before John revealed a story where he had been a target of coercion and intimidation.

In Grade Nine, students had the opportunity to enlist in either the Bridge Academy Army or Air Force Cadet Units. 'I was dreaming of being a pilot in Year 9,' he explained, 'so I joined the air cadets thinking it would be relevant'. John explained how a teacher, who was involved in the Army Cadet Unit, intimidated him as a result of this decision. He shared how this teacher told him he was being 'soft,' and was 'not going to amount to anything.' I encouraged John to think about this reprimand and how it made him feel. 'Strangely enough,' he said, 'that motivated me.' This was a curious response and I wanted to understand why this had been motivational. He shared how this interaction had encouraged him to transfer into to the Army Cadets, where he ascended quickly through the ranks to become a Cadet Under Officer.[18] As he continued to talk about this experience, John reiterated how the teacher had been motivational. For him, there was no association between the actions of his teacher and bullying. I used this as an opportunity to further explore his understanding of bullying:

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[17] A pejorative term for a foreigner or immigrant, especially one from southern Europe.
[18] Cadet Under Officer is the highest rank attainable in the Australian Army Cadets.

> I didn't necessarily see bullying as something that trod me down. I
> just saw it as, okay, I guess I now know what's expected, and I'll go
> do that…If I got a hard time, it would be because I had stepped
> outside the mould.

The solution, he explained, was to 'just jump back in the mould.' John had exercised personal choice by realigning himself with the dominate school culture, which made him intelligible as a successful, well-rounded Bridge Academy boy.

7.1.4. Over-resourced and Underprepared

The opulent facilities at Bridge Academy, such as the library and sporting ovals, emerged as another feature of our interview. 'I was at a school with limitless resources,' he said. This was an acute memory, and he emphasised this point again saying that 'I've never been as well-resourced for the rest of my life as I was for the 6 years I had at school.' As he shared additional stories, John reflected on his transition to university and remembered thinking, 'Wow! My school is better resourced than my university.' I recognised how the resources available at an elite boys' school can insulate students from the realities of most learning and work environments. By the standards of most Australian schools and workplaces, the facilities and grounds at Bridge Academy were exceptional, but to the students, their daily interactions with this infrastructure meant that they were commonplace and unremarkable. I contemplated whether the limitless resources of Bridge Academy had any lasting impact on John. He paused for a moment, before sharing that, 'I feel I was less self-sufficient than the students I met through the course of university. Then, in the workplace, probably less self-sufficient than a lot of people.' He continued to discuss this feeling and reflected on how the facilities, grounds, and resources at Bridge Academy had impacted his attitudes and behaviours at work. Within his stories there was a sense that without a well-resourced environment it had been difficult for John to undertake the ordinary and routine aspects of work. 'Like, I had less hustle than people', before adding that, 'I've never been good at the hard yards.' He elaborated further stating that:

> When you go into the corporate workforce, the guys who end up
> getting promoted are the guys who prove themselves by doing what,

you know, coming out of my exceptional background at Bridge Academy, I would look at as a menial task.

He reinforced the point by sharing a story about his Grade Eleven report card that said, 'John is brilliant at the things in which he finds interest.' I found this section of our conversation to be particularly insightful. It was a moment of genuine introspection where he questioned how his school continued to impact him in adulthood. However, he suggested that this was not the result of anything intrinsic to Bridge Academy but was instead associated with a national curriculum that was 'less relevant to the real world, or to the workplace, than it needed to be.' Again, John returned to expressions of gratitude for his schooling experience, before he stated that:

> I don't think I reflect and say Bridge Academy had me unprepared for the real world. I think, like I said, I think Bridge Academy resourced me in a way that I was never going to be resourced again. So, there is a hangover from that.

As John reflected on the well-resourced environment of Bridge Academy, I thought about what an elite education means after graduation. Does a failure to remain in the upper echelons of society and work mean that the colours and sounds of life become dull and muted?

In rejecting the notion that Bridge Academy had left him unprepared for the real world, John had at least acknowledged that a feeling from his past survived into the present. Many things appeared second-rate and it had impacted his self-sufficiency. I considered the discourse of being appreciative, fortunate, and grateful, while also being well suited to the cultural practices and traditions of the school. I was also intrigued by the emerging revelation that Bridge Academy had possibly influenced his professional development and career opportunities and I inquired more directly about his experience of life after school.

7.2.   Becoming an Old Boy

As our conversation about school progressed, it was obvious that Bridge Academy had been enjoyable for John. By the time he had reached Grade Twelve, he was a

prefect, Cadet Under Officer, and a member of the 1st XI[19] cricket team. He was a leader within Bridge Academy. We discussed his memories of these final school days, which were again punctuated by feelings of gratitude. However, I wondered whether these feelings had informed his time after graduation. As he considered my question, he reflected on his frictionless experience at school, stating that:

> I was the model Bridge Academy boy. I was a prefect. I was held up as a leader within the school. I did for the school what the school wanted me to do. I got the marks I needed to get.

As an exemplar, John revealed that this also came with a 'sense of custodianship'. Having a responsibility to protect the school was curious and I asked him to further explore this feeling. He paused for a moment before referring to scandals involving Bridge Academy students, which had been reported in the media since he graduated. Reading about these incidents had left him 'angered' and 'disappointed' that these behaviours would be present at *his* school. In discussing these feelings, he shared stories from his final school days and explained that 'I remember finishing Year Twelve, looking at the kids coming into Year Seven and going, these kids are absolute entitled little shits. I remember even back then worrying about it.' Unlike the incoming generation of Bridge Academy boys, who were entitled, John and his cohort had been different. He wanted to assure me that he had been appreciative, deferential, and respectful, while also being grateful for the advantages and opportunities made available to him. Comparatively, the next generation lacked gratitude, and were inconsiderate about how their behaviours might reflect poorly on the school, its heritage and traditions, and the men who preceded them.

7.2.1. Imagined Futures

As we further discussed his feelings about finishing school, I was interested in understanding the future John had imagined for himself. 'I don't think I had a very good forward-looking plan for what I wanted to do outside of school,' he explained. Without a clear pathway, he enrolled in an Arts/law degree at university, expecting to make up his mind about career options at some later point. In sharing this story, John reiterated his lack of enthusiasm for menial tasks, like researching career pathways

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[19] The 1st XI is the premier cricket team in a school.

and university courses, and acknowledged that he was 'fortunate that it's all kind of worked out, without a plan'. However, as our conversation progressed, he became increasingly aware about aspects of his time at school that had channelled him into a particular direction. He revealed that his career trajectory was not what he had imagined as a student explaining that 'I think the exposure to the parents of boys, and things, is that you see very quickly [pauses] there are certain highly regarded career types'. In further discussing the influence of Bridge Academy on his decision-making he added that:

> I think there would have been influence that I was trying to look towards a very [pauses] that idea of the prestigious degree or prestigious career. It came to me without much more of a further plan. So, I think maybe that was one part where the school influenced my planning a little bit.

John shared that the decision to enrol in an Arts/law degree was informed by a belief that had been cultivated by Bridge Academy and its broader network. He explained that 'the idea of being a lawyer is prestigious,' before adding that 'I felt it incumbent on me to take something that had a degree of prestige to it'. However, in sharing these thoughts, John also commented that his employment had lacked prestige. At one stage there had been a desire to pursue something in corporate finance, as it was an industry where he could have more directly benefited from the elite school network. 'The old school tie probably means a lot more there than it does anywhere else,' he explained. There were also memories of a possible career in advertising, but as he shared 'that's a Bachelor of Commerce, and Commerce isn't as good as law'. In sharing these stories, John returned to his trajectory and the choices he had made while at university. He concluded, 'it never occurred to me to do Commerce/Arts, which is, now I look back, is entirely what I should have done,' before reiterating 'I really never had a plan'.

7.2.2. Jarring Experiences

The lack of purpose or direction following graduation provided John with an opportunity to further consider how Bridge Academy was implicated in experiences after graduation. I asked him to consider how it had informed his feelings about transitioning to university. He considered my question for a moment before sharing,

'one thing the school does create, and I think that all those schools create, is a very rarefied environment where they're very good at making that small world your entire world'. I was intrigued by this awareness of an educational environment that was distant from the lives of most young people. John indicated how being a leader within the school had provided him with a sense of importance. However, the comfort, ease, and privileges of the position he inhabited at school had an unexpected impact beyond the school gate. 'I remember the very jarring experience of going to university … I wasn't important anymore. But in the Bridge Academy environment, I was *very* important,' he explained. I wondered whether John believed he had peaked in high school. Had adulthood been something of a letdown relative to his importance at school?

After graduating, John remembered having an expectation that he would be accomplished and successful. As a member of the Bridge Academy 1st XI, he used cricket as a metaphor to explain the feeling of exceptionalism that is cultivated at an elite boys' school:

> Cricket is a microcosm. It's exactly what I went through just with private school as a broader thing, which is kids that come through private school cricket and play in their 1st XI have got the great resources. Gilded the whole way through. White gloved. Then they come out into the real world and they just, none of them get into even, sort of, mid-tier grades of grade cricket.

I asked him to further explore this feeling of being in the mid-tier of life. Had it been an expectation that his importance would continue beyond the school gate? He thought about my question for a moment before sharing the following:

> Those schools are very good when you're within the walls of the environment. You're just told the whole time, you're in a position of privilege … I think the messaging, the consequence of the messaging is, you receive that you're special, you've been part of a very special environment. There's an old boy network that means that will continue to mean something. As you leave the school gates you think you are going to do really, really, well. Maybe that was it? I walked

out of the school gates with no plan for what I was going to be doing,
but just the expectation it was going to be great.

I considered his earlier comments about succeeding without a plan. Having discussed his experience of adulthood in more detail, I wondered whether his thoughts had changed from this initial position. He paused briefly before reflecting on some of the circumstances surrounding his employment. John explained that some recent aspirations for career advancement 'didn't turn out the way I wanted to'. In considering these recent setbacks, he shared with me that there had been quiet, pensive moments, where he had 'imagined my 18-year-old self, looking at my 39-year-old self and going: What the fuck happened?' He had alluded to this earlier in our conversation, and I allowed him to sit with this for a moment. While I sensed feelings of unfulfilled potential and discomfort, John suggested that his 18-year-old self was misguided and naïve. While this young man may have been naïve, the expectations of greatness and a successful life were still present within him, and all grown-up, he conceded that it was, 'probably a consequence of being in that [Bridge Academy] environment'.

7.2.3. Realised Destinations

As we discussed his adult life further, John provided additional context for the difference between his imagined future and his realised destination. He reiterated the enjoyment he received from being a full-time dad, while adding that there was no pressure to justify why he was not employed. 'Like, it would have never of bothered me, which one of us [John or his wife] earned more or, whatever else,' he said. However, he continued to share that:

I would have liked, if I was way more successful with my career, to provide a great station of life to my wife and kid [pauses] I think she would love to have time away with family. So, I feel the pressure to give her that time.

I was intrigued by this attempt to immediately reclaim a more traditional conceptualisation of fatherhood and I considered how breadwinning has been

historically bound to cultural ideals of being a good husband.[20] As John pondered what it would be like to offer his wife time away with family, he somewhat wryly commented that 'it would be great to be one of those guys who went through the school and then got a good job at dad's bank and has always been rich'.

7.2.4. 'What's Happened, Has Happened'

As our interview concluded I asked John if there was anything about his experience that he would like to discuss further. He thought about this for moment, before considering some of the broad themes we had explored. In reflecting on his statements, he moved to a more neutral position for his final remarks. Despite suggesting there had been an expectation to pursue a prestigious degree and esteemed profession, he concluded that this had not been made explicit by the school. 'The only person who would have expected me to do really, really well coming out of the school was myself,' he explained. However, he conceded that being given access to advantages, opportunities, and limitless resources could pressure individuals into thinking they should maintain a certain trajectory. 'I had a great time, and made the most of my time there, and the rest, is life,' he exclaimed.

Grateful and fortunate for the opportunity to attend Bridge Academy, recognising that the experience was smooth, effortless, and without difficulty, may inform a belief that life will continue without impediment. However, to belong authentically at an elite boys' school is to recognise that the importance and status enjoyed within its walls may have been the peak of personal influence. From this rarefied position, there is no need to plan for a life beyond the school gate, as there is an expectation a frictionless experience will continue. To identify as the model Bridge Academy schoolboy, to retain custodianship over its heritage and traditions into adulthood, highlights the simultaneous mastery of, and submission to, elite masculinity. For many old boys like John, who emerged into a world pursuing gender equality, social inclusion, and workplace diversity, time spent inside the school gate might just be 'the last time they had any bloody fun'.

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[20] See, for example: Coltrane, S. (1996). *Family Man: Fatherhood, Housework and Gender Equity*. Oxford University Press; Townsend, N. (2002). *The Package Deal: Marriage, Work, and Fatherhood in Men's Lives*. Temple University.

It was my final week of high school. A week that would include numerous ceremonies and rituals. A passing-out parade[21] for senior cadets. A valedictory dinner to recognise the achievements of our classmates and the support of our parents. A speech night to honour our best and brightest. And of course, a final chapel service where would be formally dismissed for the last time.

As the week began, the graduating class gathered in the mezzanine of the school hall. We were to receive some parting wisdom from the Deputy Headmaster. He regaled us with colourful accounts of the escapades of our classmates. These tales were legendary among students, but we believed they had been concealed from the school hierarchy. However, at this late hour, any knowledge of secret locations for smoking cigarettes, or any other malfeasance, was inconsequential. As the stories subsided, things took a more serious turn.

'You are now on the precipice of becoming men, and a great responsibility lies ahead,' we were told. 'You can start by repaying your parents for the investment they have made in your education. Become doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Make them proud. Reach out to those boys who were your adversaries on the rugby field. They are no longer your enemies. They are your future business partners and colleagues. So much can be left un-said in your dealings with them because of this shared experience of having attended a boys' school. Do this so one day you may send your own sons here'.

I fully expected to do all of these things.

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[21] A passing-out parade is a ceremonial parade for cadets on completion of Year 12. The term, which is also applied to parades that mark the completion of a course by military or other service personnel, or the graduation from a military college, is in common use throughout Commonwealth nations.

CHAPTER 8: CONFORMITY: WELL-ROUNDED SCHOOLBOYS

In the narratives provided by the research participants, a central theme emerged about their understanding of elite boys' schooling and its alignment with public tales of academic excellence. In considering this discourse, the old boys shared personal stories about the cultural practices and traditions of their school, providing an understanding and awareness of how these institutions cultivate *model* schoolboys. Specifically, they explained how the model schoolboy becomes intelligible through the development of well-roundedness.

In this chapter, I examine how concepts of *compliance*, *discipline*, and *well-roundedness* were inferred in the narratives provided by the participants, while also being characteristic of the performance that is practiced within elite boys' schools. The participants relayed how practices associated with these concepts worked in adulthood to provide a resource that is used to simultaneously compliment and critique the elitism, masculinity, and privilege that was confronted and navigated as students. The focus taken in these accounts is on the normative behaviours that were witnessed and practiced within elite boys' schools and how this informs a present-day understanding of the model schoolboy.

8.1. School Characteristics

8.1.1. Getting In

The participants within this study arrived at their respective schools through a variety of pathways. Neil was the son of teacher, while Chris and John had received academic scholarships. Some claimed a multi-generational connection with their school, while others were the first-in-family to access an elite education. Regardless of how they arrived at an elite boys' school, most participants provided a consistent narrative surrounding the importance of academic excellence in the enrolment process. As Chris indicated, attending an elite boys' school was necessary for him to 'get ahead' in life and avoid the academic disadvantages of 'lesser' government or Catholic schools. *Steven* explained that his parents believed an elite boys' school education was 'better than whatever a public school could offer' in terms of teacher quality and learning outcomes. Similarly, *Joe* discussed that an elite boys' school

would offer him protection from the 'really frightening public school system'. Participant stories also revealed how these ideas of academic excellence and superiority were overtly reinforced at school. Chris shared how students at Albion House had been:

> encouraged to view ourselves as being better than others. You would be reminded that you are at one of the best schools in the country. You are the best and the brightest. You are a cut above everyone else, purely because you're here.

Through these stories, the participants were engaging with larger social discourses about the perceived superiority and quality of elite schools, which is contrasted with tales about the hazards and risks of the government system. However, the old boys personalised these discourses to emphasise the aspirations and moral commitment of their parents, who were not presented as elitists, but rather hardworking people who only desired the best opportunity for their child.

While academic excellence was cited in the arrival stories of most participants, others reflected on characteristics that extended beyond scholastic attainment. John shared the experience of walking through the grounds of Bridge Academy and being impressed by its buildings and facilities. Similarly, he discussed 'proudly putting on my uniform' for the first time and feeling the sensation of being 'pretty cool' in his formal attire. This example highlights the importance of spatial and tactile dimensions to the elite boys' school experience, such as the sandstone buildings and manicured lawns, but also the performative dimension that is achieved through the wearing of a uniform. For John, this was clearly influential to his early identity work, and internalising the heritage and traditions of his school.

The exclusivity of elite boys' schools, and the high tuition fees, was another characteristic that was commonly discussed by the participants when sharing their arrival stories. For the majority of participants, attending an elite boys' school was often framed as being a financial sacrifice for their parents. This discursive resource emphasised that they had not emerged from a wealthy household and could not be associated with the typical elite boys' school student. *David* described that his family was not affluent, before sharing the difficulties his parents experienced paying the tuition fees at his school. *Charlie* reflected extensively on the 'sacrifice' that had

been made by his parents to cover the fees of an elite boys' school. Similarly, Joe shared that it had taken the combined contributions of nine people, who were collectively 'scrimping and saving and putting money away,' to pay for his education. Other stories focused more on the material conditions of childhood homes.

Chris explained how his childhood had been defined by a 'bad financial situation'. Specifically, his home had never been 'presentable' for visitors, while 'kids were never allowed over'. However, he conceded that it was located on a 'fancy street', in an affluent suburb. Within the context of his story, this was justified by suggesting that the desirable residential address was not the result of family wealth, but rather his parents having 'lucked out with the property market'. John also talked about his childhood home as being humble relative to other students at Bridge Academy, who lived in 'beautiful neighbourhoods, and incredible houses'. Unlike these boys, John lived in a less desirable suburb, in 'your standard four- or five-bedroom house'. That most private dwellings in Australia have three, or fewer, bedrooms (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), would suggest that his home was more than standard. Similarly, Charlie referred to how his family home was in a lower socio-economic neighbourhood. Unlike his classmates, who had emerged from 'multi-generational monied families,' his background had been defined by a lower level of wealth. As Charlie indicated, 'compared to other boys in my year … there weren't many other [students] from where I came from'.

These stories were important to the identity work of the participants, as it enabled a position of having come from humble economic beginnings, marking them as different to the typical elite boys' school student who was upper class and rich. However, the high tuition fees commanded by their schools would suggest that the old boys were from households that were more affluent than most, an observation that was absent from their reflections. This insight is similar to a study by Kenway and Lazarus (2017) who indicated how elite schools commonly claim that while a small number of students come from 'very rich' families, there is a 'middling majority who are not rich or upper class just moderately well off' (p. 273). Through a focus on the extreme wealth that was perceived as being typical of most students, the participants were able to diminish and distort the economic power and privilege of their childhood households and the exclusive education it could access. Further, their

claims to having humble social origins suggested an awareness of the rising disapproval of elites, elitism, and snobbery, and a need to discursively distance themselves from these elements.

The characteristics of academic excellence, opulent facilities, and social exclusivity formed the core narrative of why the participants were enrolled in an elite boys' school. These schools were framed as being idyllic, well-appointed learning environments, where they would be able to excel academically. Although the cost had been presented as a financial stretch, this had been necessary if they were to avoid the perceived inferior educational standards of government schools. [22] While present in the stories of all participants, these features were amplified by those old boys who made particularly overt claims to a humble social background. These men accentuated how they had been raised in dual income households, or by single parents, where there had been an expectation for them to achieve upward social mobility. For these men, their stories contained moments of anxiety as they reflected on parental expectations and the meaning of an elite education within their childhood home. As *Todd* explained, there was pressure for him to attend a prestigious university and have a successful career, as these outcomes would 'make the financial sacrifice worth it'. Similarly, Joe described that the 'hopes and dreams' of his family had been literally invested in his education, which necessitated him doing 'something of value' in adulthood. This is similar to an observation made by Power et al. (1999) about grammar and non-government school students in the United Kingdom who 'had been keenly aware of the sacrifices made by their not always affluent parents, and had felt some guilt if the highest parental expectations had not been met' (p. 331).

8.1.2.   Belonging Authentically

The idea of belonging *authentically* was explicit in stories of arriving at an elite boys' school. While some participants, like John, shared fond memories of being a 'natural fit,' most reflected at length about the difficulties they had experienced belonging authentically as students. In the narratives provided by Neil and Chris, there were explicit examples of the barriers and challenges to fitting in. Chris shared

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[22] As noted earlier, recent results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) have revealed that distinctions in test scores, between government and non-government schools, disappear after accounting for the socio-economic background of both the student and school (Chrysanthos, 2019).

that he had initially struggled to make friends at Albion House, and that he had been 'self-conscious' about the relative lack of family wealth and the meagreness of his personal possessions. Neil explained the feeling of being unlike most boys at Rivercity Grammar School, while also indicating that he had never experienced 'real' or 'true' friendships while a student. Similarly, David explained that the connections he had made at *St Mark's Boys' School* had been 'superficial' and lacked the closeness that defined his friendships in adulthood.

Other participants reflected on a hyper-masculine culture to describe how they had been unable to belong authentically at an elite boys' school. This was particularly evident in the account provided by Steven, who explained that:

> It was a very traditional, boys will be boys, rough and tumble culture. If you were shy, or quiet, or sensitive, it wasn't the kind of a place that made you feel welcome. That doesn't mean you were always bullied or vilified, but it didn't feel like a place for you. It didn't welcome all different ranges of boys. It was trying to turn you into a real man.

In this narrative, Steven described his school as having cultural practices and traditions that were intended to produce 'real' men. The notion of 'real' men is framed here as an intolerance of sensitivity and weakness, but most all, difference. He further explained that as someone who had been willing to display his emotions, his arrival at *Bridge Academy* had left him feeling 'unsure' within himself. Similarly, David explained how he had lacked confidence as a student, and had been unlike the extroverted, outspoken, and self-assured boys his school appeared to privilege.

These stories further contextualise the experience of students who lack the discursive resources to integrate with the practices of an elite boys' school, while also highlighting that those boys who are quiet and sensitive are unable to belong authentically within these spaces. The experiences shared by these men highlight how they were formed by, and came to understand themselves through, the circumstances of their education. Specifically, the structure of an elite boys' school exerts an enculturating effect on students. The dissemination of school culture and traditions demands an assimilation of the practices and values expected by the institution, whereby students come to fully understand the meaning of elite boys'

schooling. Of course, the ideal of being able to authentically perform these values requires a capacity to deploy a discursive repertoire that allows one to 'fit'. The narrative provided by Steven was typical of the elite masculinity that the research participants suggested was prevalent within these institutions: aggressive, emotionless, hard, and hostile towards difference (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005).

8.2. School Practices

The distinctions made by the participants, through their stories of arrival, are more than descriptive accounts of these institutions and the process of integration. They are also evidence of a set of practices that construct a peculiar masculine ideal of belonging authentically in an all-male environment. While most participants indicated they had experienced difficulty arriving at their respective schools, they eventually became comfortable within these spaces. As Steven indicated, it just 'took me a while to really acclimatise'. After becoming accustomed to their new conditions, the old boys revealed the importance of excellence and exceptionality to their schooling experience.

A prominent theme that emerged from the stories shared by participants was the ways in which giving an appearance of exceptionality had been central to their schooling experience. Central to their conduct was being good and moral, honest and sincere, but also well-rounded. These were crucial attributes of their time at an elite boys' school. The participants each provided accounts of how these markers of identity were conceptualised and deployed to demonstrate exceptionality.

8.2.1. Good and Moral

Several participants communicated how they had performed in accordance with their beliefs, feelings, and thoughts while students. In many ways, their behaviour was in harmony with their school and the expectation they would develop into men of good character, strong intellect, and generous spirit. Steven noted that despite being challenged by many cultural practices and traditions at his school, he was 'academically inclined, studious, hardworking' but had always remained 'softer and nicer as far as human beings go'. Despite acknowledging that they had been surrounded by attitudes, behaviours, and values that were unfamiliar, if not being unacceptable to them personally, the participants claimed that being inherently good and moral had enabled them to avoid the worst aspects of schoolboy culture. As Neil

indicated, he 'could have easily been that' – arrogant, entitled, privileged – but the expectation that he would conform to the group 'just didn't appeal to my interests'. *Gerry* extended how being good and moral ensured that he would avoid the indulgences and pitfalls of privilege:

> There was exposure to drugs, and this and that, but … if you had the right values … [you would] make the right decision not to get involved in that shit. Not to get involved with drugs. To be responsible with alcohol. To treat women with respect.

As was observed by Kenway and Lazarus (2017), the moral rhetoric contained within these statements may have been sincerely believed by the research participants, but it also softens any negative associations with being an old boy. In talking about their experiences of elite boys' schooling there was an awareness of the increasing disapproval of these institutions and the cultural practices that occur within them. Their personal accounts were being impinged on, and imprinted by, shifting values that suggested their past might not be fully captured in their stories of having always been good and moral. Instead, renegotiation was occurring as they recounted a past experience (Davies & Davies, 2007). Rather than interpret these stories as a straightforward account of navigating elitism, masculinity, and privilege while students, the experience of elite boys' schooling, and its meaning, was being reshaped, and restructured, in the process of telling a story (Polkinghorne, 1988). From this perspective, the participants shared stories of being 'good' boys without pretence. In claiming that they had been able to 'stay true to oneself' in an otherwise toxic environment, they were able to present themselves as having emerged from an elite environment, without being personally elitist nor entitled. They had been morally good relative to the typical elite boys' school student.

8.2.2. Honest and Sincere

In providing their memories and reflections of elite boys' schooling, the participants presented these institutions as cultural monoliths that are indivisible from the men they produce. Many participants described their school as a 'machine' that was involved in the relentless production of athletic, capable, and scholarly young men. Despite these schools making claims to turn soft boys into useful men, Chris shared that 'they're not adequately preparing people for the world'. An awareness of public

tales about homophobic, racist, and sexist boys (Crotty, 2020; Henriques-Gomes, 2019; Hunter, 2020b; O'Brien, 2002; Pearson & Foster, 2020), who were ill-prepared for a modern society pursuing gender equality, social inclusion, and workplace diversity, were present across the stories of most participants. Todd had been quiet and shy as a student and indicated that he had been intimidated by the aggressive and competitive behaviours of his classmates. However, secure in his understanding of an abiding self, he indicated that 'I don't think there was ever a point where I thought that it was better to just succumb to it and become really masculine and to do all those things'. Neil explained that most of the boys at his school were content to have an 'identity thrust upon them'. Charlie considered how his commitment to an honest and sincere 'self-identity' that incorporated a working-class ethic, set him apart from his classmates. similarly, Steven noted that as a student the beliefs and values promoted by his school, especially elitism and exclusivity, were not 'part of my identity' before adding that his 'character, traits, and values' had never been 'grounded' in elite principles.

This belief in an honest and sincere character, which had always differentiated them from the model schoolboy, was similar to being good and moral. While the participants were genuine in their accounts of being honest and sincere schoolboys, their claims also work to further lessen any negative associations with having attended an elite boys' school (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017). In many ways, this is not dissimilar to the act of deflection observed in people from privileged class backgrounds who misidentify their origins as working class to cast their narrative as being 'meritocratically legitimate while erasing the structural privileges that have shaped key moments in their trajectory' (Friedman et al., 2021, p. 1). For these men, it was convenient to have the large, impersonal structure of their former school as a point of reference against which they could contrast their own claims of being honest, sincere, and virtuous.

8.2.3. Well-rounded

Most participants had immersed themselves in expansive extra-curricular programs while they were students at an elite boys' school. John invoked the gendered concept of a 'well-rounded boy' to describe his schooling, and exclaimed:

> That was me. I think because I was academically inclined. But then, I
> also enjoyed sport, and I was relatively extroverted, and generally

able to fit with people's expectations of what they would like me to be. Bridge Academy wanted students to be committed academically, to participate in games and sport, and to serve the community.

Steven explained how he had an 'all-round' experience at school, which provided academic, athletic, and community service opportunities. Similarly, Chris highlighted that the elite boys' school experience is 'not about just the study, it's about the holistic education'. As this suggests, the practices of elite boys' schooling are about becoming, and being, well-rounded. This is consistent with critical studies of elite school marketing materials that emphasise the position of these institutions to develop the all-round abilities of children, nurture their 'innate' talents, and prepare them for success (Drew, 2013; Drew et al., 2016; Gottschall et al., 2010). However, as Khan (2013) noted, the belief that a student has exceptional, 'innate' talents can result in an indifference to the facilities and resources of an elite school and the extraordinary opportunities these institutions provide. The claims being made about well-roundedness are only possible because of the wide range of activities, and well-appointed facilities, which are central to the elite boys' school experience: the essential elements necessary for the cultivation of 'interesting characters' (Khan, 2013, p. 177).

Neil explained that it was 'normal to do a whole bunch of stuff' at Rivercity, without considering the economic, cultural, and social advantages that ensured these opportunities were readily accessible. Similarly, John suggested that he had enjoyed a 'gilded' experience at school with access to opulent academic and sporting facilities. He reflected that 'I've never been as well-resourced … than I was for the 6 years I had at school'. However, he also contemplated how his place at Bridge Academy had been deserved. Talking about his time as a student, John explained that:

I lived up to my side of that deal. I was a high academic performer. I was invested in the life of the school. I joined the prefect team … I always felt comfortable that I offered the school something and that I belonged there.

Distancing himself from any notion of entitlement or privilege, John suggested that he had never taken these opportunities for granted, noting that his access to these

resources had been earned through individual effort and dedication to the school. It was through this effort and dedication he was able to belong authentically. As students, the participants had committed themselves to academic excellence, athletic accomplishments, and cultural enrichment. In their own way, they had attempted to adopt, and master, the cultural practices and traditions that were most valued by their institutions.

Academic Excellence

As most participants had emphasised the importance of academic quality in parental decision-making to enrol them at an elite boys' school, it is unsurprising that a devotion to study and academic success was prevalent in their reflections. Chris shared that he had excelled at academic subjects and was often the most outstanding student in his class. In particular, he indicated that being an exceptional student had been critical in developing a sense of belonging to the Albion House community. John explained that he had entered the elite boys' school environment feeling self-assured about his intellectual abilities relative to other students, something that he acknowledged was 'pretty quickly confirmed because I was in the top classes'. Similarly, Steven described how he had been a good student who excelled academically. He added that his classroom achievements had been validated by positive reinforcement from teachers, which made him feel good about himself and his intellectual abilities. However, not all participants claimed to be high academic achievers. Gerry explained that he was not 'intellectual' but had instead benefited from the learning and teaching culture of his school. Specifically, he shared that within an elite boys' school, teachers encouraged the students 'to be intellectually curious, to be opinionated, and to share your thoughts'. Further, he also indicated that the exceptional talents of his classmates meant that he had benefited from an environment where he was surrounded by the 'smartest' and 'most creative' boys.

Within these stories is a belief in innate intellectual abilities, but also an indifference to the facilities and resources that might have facilitated academic success. In particular, there was no recognition about the absence of challenging, diverse, and disadvantaged students, who had been excluded through admission processes and high tuition fees. Any awareness that they had benefited from a tame, safe, and sanitised learning environment, which was well suited to scholastic excellence, was absent from their stories. Indeed, an awareness in childhood that elite

boys' schools are sites of superior learning and teaching, combined with the cultural resources of their parents, would suggest that these men were largely in harmony with their schools and the expectation of scholastic excellence. However, this is in contrast with the majority of participants who claimed an outsider status and an inability to belong authentically. Further, it also suggests that through their stories they were overestimating their own academic abilities, and the academic abilities of their classmates. In this instance, the reflections by Gerry are indicative. Although he expressed humility in evaluating his own capabilities as a student, he had found it reassuring to be surrounded by young men who were exceptional and high performing. Of course, this becomes internalised, before being transported into university, workplaces, relationships, and families, providing a confidence that he had been exposed to, and surrounded by, the best of the best from a young age.

Athletic Prowess

While elite boys' schools claim to produce scholars, and position academic excellence as being their primary focus, several participants indicated that scholastic attainment was often secondary to sporting achievements. Chris indicated that despite his school claiming to prioritise the cultivation of academically minded boys, this was 'not really what they were aiming for'. Instead, he explained that 'first and foremost they wanted sportsmen. That's what the school sort of privileged'. Joe suggested that at *Foveaux Grammar School*, the element of school life that was most 'valued and promoted was sports'. Similarly, Steven highlighted that 'the leaders of the school, like the young male leaders, were the sports stars'. This is consistent with observations made by Proctor (2011) who noted that the top rugby players at an elite boys' school in Australia were 'treated as heroes to the exclusion of other kinds of people and other kinds of achievement' (p. 848).

Athletic prowess and sport were evident throughout participant stories, suggesting its significance in achieving harmony with the expectation of becoming well-rounded. Neil discussed at length his enjoyment of sport, and how he had indulged in a wide variety of athletic opportunities while at Rivercity Grammar School. In discussing his memories of school sport, he explained that:

> What I did appreciate at Rivercity was that there were a lot of things
> you could do. I did basketball. I did a whole bunch of stuff. It was

normal to do a whole bunch of stuff. Like if you didn't, it was a really
weird thing.

As Joe indicated, the over-investment in sport by elite boys' schools means that boys were not simply 'expected to do sports' by classmates and teachers, but rather it was 'assumed' they would be preoccupied with thoughts of athletic development and sporting prowess. Being interested in sport was understood as being the normative condition for elite boy's school students, which contained the assumption that physical activity and competition was both fitting and appropriate for young men.

Within the elite school network, sport has always been inseparable from notions of a 'quality' education, and has been viewed as a necessary component in the cultivation of manly attributes such as bravery, courage, physical strength, teamwork, and devotion to a cause (Crotty, 1999). However, participation in sport at elite boys' schools is also about class distinctions. This was evident in the centrality of rugby union to the sporting stories that were provided by most participants. Chris shared that the rugby players were 'what the school celebrated'. Similarly, John discussed that the popular boys 'played rugby'. Like academic excellence, rugby union can be understood as a set of practices that constructs a particular masculine ideal within elite boys' schools. Specifically, rugby union represents a particular version of masculinity that is privileged by these institutions. For those students who play rugby, and especially for those who become successful proponents, their time at school is easy and straightforward. This was addressed by David who indicated that:

> I think if you fit into the mould that the school wanted, it could be
> fantastic for you. I still kind of think that now. Like, if you are a
> person who would do well under those conditions, then I think the
> school is great. Like, if you are good on the [rugby] team, and you
> want to actively pursue that. I don't know, I just think it fits some
> people, and I think it really leaves some behind.

As this suggests, for those who are able to achieve harmony with their school and its expectations, the experience will be something that is easy, uncomplicated, and enjoyable. However, for those who are unable, or unwilling, to participate in rugby, the elite boys' school experience can be alienating and difficult. Charlie shared his passion for rugby league, and its distinct set of working-class practices,

acknowledging how this was 'unusual because *Paterson College* is, a big rugby union kind of environment. It sounds weird to say this, but I think in terms of my self-identity, I kind of thought that set me apart, or something'. John indicated how younger students who played soccer, would be 'reminded they were soft because they weren't going to play a tackle sport'. In this instance, John is indicating that to be in harmony with the privileged masculinity at an elite boys' school, students must select the right sport. As Proctor (2011) argued, within elite boys' schools in Australia, 'rugby prowess could function as a masculinity test both at the individual and collective level' (p. 848). However, playing the right sport was identified as being insufficient to belong authentically. Todd highlighted that:

> I actually quite enjoyed sport, and I quite enjoyed all the different things that sport offered. I liked the actual playing of the games and everything. But the part that I didn't like is how we got to a certain age and sport became so competitive.

Of course, competitiveness and winning are essential to the elite boys' school experience, and conditioning students for the aggression and discipline needed to achieve this end, is most visible through the practice of sport. That it is assumed all boys will participate in, enjoy, and be skilful at, aggressive and competitive team sports, is indicative of the masculinity privileged by these institutions.

Cultural Enrichment and Christian Values

The importance of cultural enrichment and Christian values were also a common reflection in the stories provided by participants. Specifically, conversations about weekly chapel services, or participating in Christian Studies classes, provided an opportunity to discuss privilege and the importance of moral responsibility. Steven indicated that 'being Christian' was a significant memory from his schooling experience. Charlie noted that Paterson College 'worked very hard to help us to see that we were privileged, and that with that, came responsibility'. Similarly, John shared that a central mission of his school was to 'steward boys in the Christian tradition' and produce men who would embrace the values of compassion and forgiveness. He explained that:

> You're just told the whole time that you're in a position of privilege, and in part that's because of the school's Christian ethos, because

they're trying to remind you that to whom a lot is given, a lot is
expected, and all that.

This sentiment, draws directly on Luke 12:48 (*King James Bible*, 2017), which reads that 'unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more'. This gospel passage was quoted by several participants, particularly if they had been educated at a school in the Anglican tradition. In reflecting on this passage, and his relationship with Christianity while a student, John suggested that:

The consequence of the messaging is, you receive that you're special.
You've been part of a very special environment. There's an old boy
network, which means that you will continue to be special. As you
leave the school gates you think you are going to do really, really,
well.

The use, and misuse, of Christian values, and associated teachings of moral responsibility, is something that was also considered by Charlie. As a student who confidently embraced a Christian identity, he expressed that this had been difficult within the context of Paterson College, indicating that, 'despite its quite strong Christian ethos, and the excellent, you know, chaplaincy team and all that kind of stuff, to be a Christian was actually quite a difficult thing. It was seen, I think, as wimpy'. Although identifying as a Christian in this environment had been difficult, Charlie still believed that 'it is a positive thing to have schools that are attempting to challenge people from elite, privileged backgrounds, to use that for good'. However, as indicated in the narrative provided by John, rather than cultivating a commitment to moral duty and charitable practices, becoming well-rounded produces feelings of specialness and an expectation of material success. In such an environment, where academic excellence is expected, and aggressive competitiveness is assumed, it is unsurprising that the qualities of charity and mercy, which underpin most Christian philosophy, were viewed as being weak. Despite strong preaching in chapel, which was reinforced in Christian Studies, many participants conceded that the importance of these messages and values were lost in the larger discourses of elite boys' schooling. As Chris concluded, 'We weren't taught to be strong members of the community. We were taught to be the best and taught to think that we were the best'.

8.3. The Model Schoolboy

Through the sharing of stories about their elite boys' schooling experience, the participants sketched an image of the model student. Through these rich and descriptive accounts, it was possible to identify and compare the social construction of well-rounded schoolboys and how this was implicated in the identity and sense-making of the research participants. In discussing their understanding of the model student, most participants shared similar views about the exemplar character. There was a common understanding that the model student was self-assured and certain about his abilities and talents. David discussed the importance of confidence, while also reflecting on the significance of being extroverted and outspoken. John shared that the model schoolboy was 'confident … and probably more compliant'. Similarly, Steven suggested that the prototype character of an elite boys' school student was someone who was confident and could take charge, while also being compliant. In particular, he indicated that the model schoolboy:

> Responds to discipline, does what the teachers asks them to do … and is invested in the school as an institution. Like, they love the school and want to be a good ambassador for the school. That classic thing of wearing the uniform with pride and being an ambassador in the community.

The idea of compliance was also discussed by Joe who suggested that the 'perfect' schoolboy was a 'sports person who takes on leadership roles but does not lead. Like does not change things'. Specifically, it was someone who would adopt, maintain, and defend the cultural practices and traditions of the school. This was confirmed by Neil who indicated that the purpose of student leaders at Rivercity was to have a 'role model for the other students.' He added that student leaders were required to maintain the rules, as 'that's going to help keep order so the other kids, kind of, fall into line as well.'

8.3.1. Compliance, Conformity, and Discipline

Being compliant, and the importance of disciplining oneself to the expectations of well-roundedness, was consistent across the stories shared by the research participants. Neil indicated that the cultural practices of Rivercity Grammar School were 'all about conforming'. Similarly, Steven indicated that his school was 'never

really, you know, trying to accommodate the individual. You were just trying to, you had to conform, you know, that was a big part of it'. The experience of confronting and navigating the normative values and expectations of an elite boys' school was summarised by David who suggested that as a student he had enjoyed the process of conforming and attempting to belong authentically. However, in adulthood he indicated that:

> Now I look back on it like, I didn't really enjoy it at all. But at the
> time I told myself I did because I was, you know, I felt like that's
> what I needed to do. That's what I needed to fall into.

Central to the process of becoming compliant schoolboys was the application of disappointment, fear, and shame. Chris shared stories about school assemblies and serious reprimands from the headmaster surrounding unacceptable conduct and deportment. He described that 'every lecture on behaviour was, we are disappointed in you, because we expect you to be fine young men'. Similarly, Steven recalled students being warned by the headmaster that:

> If you've got any complaints or gripes against the school, there's a
> waitlist a mile long of boys and families that would kill to be in this
> school, and are desperate to get in. So, if you don't like it, go
> somewhere else, because we've got no problem filling your spot.

As this suggests, students who failed to become compliant, well-rounded boys who willingly embraced the cultural practices and traditions of the school, were ungrateful disappointments who would be best suited to a less exacting schooling environment.

While most participants acknowledged that they had been reluctant to accept the circumstances of their schooling environment and had concealed or suppressed authentic aspects of their identities, most either adopted, or were complicit through their silence, about the cultural practices and traditions of their institution. Despite making claims to being culturally and socially divergent from most students at Rivercity Grammar School, Neil indicated that he was never extreme or rebellious. In discussing his feelings about wearing the school uniform he shared that, 'I didn't feel comfortable walking around with my shirt out, or my top button undone. I knew

that there would be a teacher around the corner that was going to pull me up and I would get in trouble'. Similarly, Chris indicated that 'you couldn't probably find a more strait-laced student than me'. In discussing his experience at the *Cathedral School*, Gerry shared that if students were not prepared to wear the uniform correctly, they should 'get out of the uniform'. Specifically, students should 'wear it properly, with pride,' before adding that, 'where a lot of that pride comes from is the school. The school spent a lot of time focusing on its history, and the history of the Cathedral School man'.

While most participants reflected on aspects of their schooling environment that had denied them the opportunity to express their authentic self, or had made them anxious or uncomfortable, they were all compliant and well-behaved boys. Chris indicated that had he been less compliant, 'school would have been far more awkward'. This feeling was further developed by Todd who shared the barriers that prevented him from 'speaking out' about the sexual harassment of female teachers that he witnessed while a student. He highlighted that, 'obviously, because you've got all this culture around you that if I speak out, I have an entire school of boys who are going to accuse me, you know, of being a snitch or breaking the bro code'.[23] However, not all participants claimed to have experienced difficulty being compliant and well-behaved students. Charlie shared that it had always been in his 'nature' to 'respect authority'. Similarly, John explained that he had been a 'natural fit' within an elite boys' school. Like Charlie, he had been 'compliant by nature' and could 'fit the mould of what was ideal at the school'. As a result, John had never viewed the admonishments and reprimands of teachers and headmasters as something that was constraining or restrictive. Compliance and discipline were not something that:

> trod me down. I just saw it as, okay, I guess I now know what's expected of me, and I'll go do that. If I got a hard time, it would be because I stepped outside the mould. So, I would just jump back in the mould.

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[23] The bro code is the notion of an unwritten set of rules that govern the relationship between male friends. In this instance, an unwritten rule is not to 'speak out' about witnessing instances of sexual harassment.

8.4. Reflections

Elite boys' schools are presented as having the necessary conditions to cultivate scholarly commitment and academic excellence among the student population. This positioning, relative to the perceived inferior educational standards of government and Catholic schools, is revealed as being critical in the decision-making of parents to pursue these institutions to educate their sons. The cultural, economic, and social capital of parents mean that boys are largely in harmony with institutional expectations on arrival, despite their claims to the contrary. Through various practices, spearheaded by notions of academic superiority, elite boys' schools construct a particular masculine ideal that becomes intelligible through well-roundedness. Through this process, students at elite boys' schools are presented as having exceptional and interesting characters that distinguishes them from young people who are educated in other market segments.

Exceptionalism is one outcome of well-roundedness that enables the development of an authentic and natural self, which is carried beyond the school gate. However, the compliance and discipline required to achieve well-roundedness prevents authentic expressions of individuality, which are repressed by a culture that privileges conformity and loyalty to the group. In this environment, the model schoolboy is presented as being assertive, confident, and self-assured about his abilities and talents. He belongs authentically in an all-male environment, which values him for adopting, maintaining, and defending the cultural practices and traditions that mark the school as being elite.

It is 2006, and at 24 I am already the Marketing Manager of a law firm. In my mind, it is completely deserved and reveals my innate brilliance compared to the older and more experienced candidates who had been passed over for the role. On reflection, I was nowhere near ready for the responsibility of running a marketing department. I was barely capable of running a bath. I had managed to bullshit my way in the door, aggrandising my capabilities and experience. That is not to say I told bald-faced lies, but I understood the game. I knew the language of elite, corporate types, and how to present myself as being exceptionally capable. The vision I presented was light on detail but sounded impressive enough. As I was later told by a member of the selection panel, 'You interview well'.

CHAPTER 9: DISAVOWAL: SCEPTICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

This chapter examines the fragmenting that occurred in participant stories as they progressed beyond the school gate. In particular, I consider how the participants describe their experience of elite boys' schooling in adulthood through the practice of *disavowal* (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017). While attendance at an elite boys' school has been associated with effortless and guaranteed pathways through prestigious universities and into esteemed employment destinations, cultural shifts have increasingly framed old boys as having accessed unearned opportunities, which is compounded by problematic and toxic masculinities. Various discursive resources are analysed in order to understand the process and purpose of disavowal. The focus is on the experience of transitioning from an elite boys' school into university and the re-evaluation of school and normative behaviours that had been confronted and navigated as students.

9.1. Post-School Characteristics

9.1.1. Getting Out

The participants in this study shared similar trajectories immediately following their education at an elite boys' school. All but one research participant attended university, with the majority gaining entry to prestigious institutions across Australia. Several old boys were accepted into dual arts/law programs, while others pursued qualifications in communications, economics, and journalism. Regardless of the pathway they traversed through tertiary education, the participants shared a consistent narrative that revealed undertaking further study at a prestigious university had been expected, if not assumed, by their school. In reflecting on his pathway beyond the school gate, Todd shared that:

> The trajectory that I imagined for myself was that I was going to be quite successful, and I was going to, you know, go to the best schools, and get the best education ... I think that was the idea. That I was just going to go to a great school, and everything was going to be really easy for me. And once I get into the great school, the great university, like everything was going to be fine.

This reflection aligns with research that has suggested people from higher social classes expect to propel children along a pathway that traverses the 'best' school, where they will experience success and access cultural enrichment activities, before they arrive at the 'best' university, and eventually, the 'best' jobs (Hutchings, 2021). However, although Todd had expected that this transition would be easy, his experience, and that of other participants, would suggest that entrance into prestigious universities and esteemed employment destinations was not always straightforward.

Neil revealed feeling that his pathway beyond the school gate had been ambiguous and ill-defined while a schoolboy. Unlike his classmates, who he presumed would acquire qualifications in engineering, law, and medicine, his post-school trajectory was less certain. Steven shared that he had shown little interest in researching his university options while a student and had failed to consider what pathway he would like to pursue in adulthood. Despite enrolling in arts/law at a highly prestigious university he indicated that:

> I didn't really even do a good job of looking at different universities
> or different courses. I definitely wasn't one of those kids who came
> out with a clear plan of, I'm going to do this degree, then this career.

Similarly, John discussed how his transition had not been planned, but was driven by vague expectations of acquiring social status and prestige in adulthood. Like Steven, John enrolled in arts/law, but on reflection acknowledged that, 'I don't think I had a very good forward-looking plan for what I wanted to do outside of school. The idea of the prestigious degree or prestigious career, it came to me without much more of a further plan.' After further reflection, John conceded that, 'I walked out of the school gates with no plan for what I was going to be doing, but just the expectation it was going to be great'. This is similar to the narrative shared by Todd, and indicates that on leaving an elite boys' school, young men have acquired an assuredness and confidence in their abilities and talents, which translates to an expectation that life will be 'easy' and 'great'. A related observation was made by Orwell (2001) who indicated that, 'a person of bourgeois origin goes through life with some expectation of getting what he wants, within reasonable limits' (p. 44).

While other participants were more certain about career pathways beyond the school gate, this did not necessarily mean their transition into tertiary education was uncomplicated. Unlike most students at *Bourke College*, Todd had been creative and imaginative, aspiring to become an artist. Although he knew the tertiary course that would best prepare him for his dream career, the university that housed this program lacked the prestige and quality expected by his school. He shared feeling extreme 'pressure' to enrol at *Bowen University* just because it was recognised as the better university to go to, and the other schools, were kind of, I guess, embarrassing to get into'. Although he was accepted at the *Talbot Institute of Technology* on a full academic scholarship, Todd explained that he remained sceptical of the institution, initially doubting his decision to enrol. He shared a story about his first semester of tertiary study and explained that:

> I was a little bit ashamed about [going to Talbot] because I had such a
> high ATAR[24]. Even when I started, I remember looking around at all
> the students and thinking like, which of these kids went to private
> school? Like, which of these kids are the good students? Because in
> my head, I was like, public school kids like, they're not going to be
> able to study as well as me. I need to seek out those people and
> become friends with them because they will help me get good grades
> here.

As this suggests, an over-estimation of their own academic abilities and the teaching and learning quality of their school, was internalised and transported into university. However, embarrassment and shame are also presented as being a key factor in transitioning to higher education. Specifically, the expectation to attend the 'best' university constrains decision-making and limits the range of pathways and performances available to old boys beyond the school gate. Further, it also impinges on the possible identities, and associated abilities, of people beyond the elite school network who they meet and interact with in adulthood. Confident that they had been exposed to, and surrounded by, the best of the best, the participants commenced

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[24] The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 that indicates a student's position relative to all the students in their age group. Universities use the ATAR to help them select students for their courses and admission to most tertiary courses.

tertiary education with a sense of superiority and a need to remain surrounded by the brightest and most capable.

9.1.2. Bursting Bubbles

The idea of a bubble bursting moment was common in the stories participants shared about arriving at university. While some participants, like John, indicated that this was associated with a loss of importance, most reflected at length about the difficulties they experienced interacting with people who were not from the elite school network. By internalising elite boys' school discourses and adopting the social scripts of being compliant, well-rounded boys, the participants had engaged in a performance that made them intelligible as old boys, informing their perceptions of, and interactions with, other students. However, these performances were not fixed, and university presented an opportunity to break from these preceding performances and re-evaluate their experience of elite boys' schooling. As Charlie indicated, most of his classmates at Paterson College did not have 'much time outside the kind of … elite bubble' while students. However, for some the pathway into a prestigious university was a continuation of the elite school bubble. As Steven indicated, 'it was still a homogenous group, you know, it was basically a bunch of White kids from private schools … But it felt like diversity at that point in life'. Regardless, at some point in their university career, leaving the bubble of an elite boys' school resulted in the meanings and associations, which had been embodied as students, becoming fractured and fragmented.

In the narrative provided by Neil, there were explicit examples about intelligibility and position as an old boy, and opportunities for these scripts and performances to be challenged. As revealed in his case study, the challenging of his perceptions and understanding of economic and social disadvantage by a female friend were significant. As Neil indicated, Rivercity had been 'weird' and a 'real bubble' of 'very conservative, Christian, White, upper-middle-class kids'. The environment of an elite boys' school had not provided him with opportunities to interact with a diverse group of people. In moving beyond the school gate, he lacked the discursive resources to appropriately understand, and interact with, someone from a different social position. This was articulated by Joe who shared that as a student at Foveaux Grammar School he, 'didn't see what was happening to people who were worse off than me, because I wasn't experiencing it directly'.

Chris shared how university had challenged his perceptions of academic excellence and intelligence, which he had embodied during his time at Albion House. Similarly, Todd described that:

> Making friends with people at university who went to [government] schools made me realise that they were switched on in a way that I didn't think I was … That's when I started to realise that I've been in a very sheltered bubble for a long time.

Other participants reflected on the feeling of importance and specialness that had been cultivated by their schools, and the implications of this when arriving in a new learning environment. This was particularly evident in the account provided by John, who explained that:

> One thing [Bridge Academy] does create, and I think that all those schools create, is a very rarefied environment where they're very good at making that small world your entire world … I remember the very jarring experience of going to university … I wasn't important anymore.

In this narrative, John described his school as being distant from the lives and concerns of most people, where his experience had been intimate, tame, and sanitised. An athlete, leader, and scholar, he had been an important and influential person within this exclusive, safe, and selective environment. From his perspective, this was an identity that had failed to travel with him into university. However, this had not been the experience of all participants. For some, their experiences at an elite boys' school had offered excellent preparation for an uncomplicated transition into university. As Gerry indicated:

> In terms of that preparedness for uni, to me it was sweet. I had been treated autonomously [at school]. I had been regimented at the Cathedral School to … study independently and be left to my own devices. I knew how to meet deadlines. I knew how to converse with lecturers and tutors at uni … I had no hesitation to go up to [lecturers]. I had no hesitation to challenge tutors.

For Gerry, his relational skills were well developed by the time he arrived at university. His comment is consistent with the study by Jack (2016), which highlighted that non-government school alumni at an elite university in the United States were 'at ease in interacting with authority figures' relative to lower-income undergraduates who were 'more resistant to engaging authority figures in college and tend to withdraw from them' (p. 1).

While most participants had been challenged by their transition into university, there was no indication that they had been unable to advocate for their own education, nor maintain an identity as capable and high-performing students.

9.2. Practices of Disavowal

The stories that were being shared by the participants about moving beyond the school gate and arriving at university required a re-evaluation of the cultural practices and traditions they had experienced and navigated while students. The challenging and jarring experiences of moving beyond the exclusive, safe, and selective environment of an elite boys' school, where they had been important, special, and assured of their exceptional abilities and talents, necessitated a process of self-reidentification. As Steven indicated, 'I feel like it started really at university. Talking about identity and becoming who I kind of have become today. It really, for me, starts at university'. As this suggests, university becomes a discursive resource to highlight an initial step towards renegotiating the rules of elite masculinity, reinterpreting their experience as students, and adopting practices of disavowal.

9.2.1. Square Pegs, Round Holes

While most participants had highlighted their reluctance, if not eagerness, to be compliant, well-rounded schoolboys, their stories became increasingly conflicting as they progressed along their life trajectories. Neil indicated that conformity had been the primary element of his experience at Rivercity Grammar School, which was evident in his compliance with its rules. However, through deeper reflection on his experience he shared that his adherence and commitment to the beliefs and values of Rivercity 'eventually just pushed me down inside a box'. Steven explained that his school had a structure, system, and culture that all students were required to adopt and maintain. Despite being a celebrated athlete, and class valedictorian, he explained that the constraints of his school environment had required him to suppress

his authentic nature of being compassionate and sensitive. He shared that, 'I just remember the sheer relief of finishing there [Bridge Academy] and not having to have anything to do with the school again … the school's values and the culture, it didn't really speak to me anymore'. Despite highlighting the assertiveness, confidence, and expectations for success that had been cultivated while students at an elite boys' school, many participants gave attention to internal contradictions and inconsistencies that necessitated careful navigation, revealing a process of self-reidentification.

The research participants highlighted that 'disavowal' provided the means for rationalising the more toxic aspects of elite boys' schooling. Specifically, most of the participants discussed how they worked to (re)frame prior experiences in deliberate ways to (re)assert the legitimacy of their senses of self. Notably, this process of addressing discomfort (Keddie, 2021; Keddie et al., 2020) necessitated a further re-evaluation of past experience and identity work to mitigate the personal culpability that encompassed attendance at an elite boys' school.

9.2.2. Rejecting Elite Boys' Schooling

Reports about anti-social male behaviour (Gilmore, 2017; Milligan et al., 2020) and investigations into elite boys' school culture (Baker, 2022; Henriques-Gomes, 2019; O'Brien, 2022; Pearson & Foster, 2020) have come to represent (and be associated with) the phenomenon of 'toxic masculinity'. Scrutiny of 'toxic masculinity' and incidents that make it visible to the public, has resulted in greater awareness of the cultural practices and traditions of elite boys' schooling, which amplify behaviours that do not bear wider scrutiny (Carey, 2021; Crotty, 2020). In discussing their attendance at an elite boys' school, research participants were aware of, and directly engaged with, these public tales and larger social discourses. Further, the participants also displayed an awareness of the material advantage that accrued from attendance at these schools, which informed a significant aspect of their ongoing understandings of self. Notably this awareness of the advantages provided by elite schooling subsequently provoked participants to question the life opportunities they had received. It was during these recounts that a process of rationalising and re-evaluating descriptions of the former self occurred. Specifically, the participants deployed techniques of downplaying their personal culpability within the situations recounted, with several old boys actively disavowing the performativities of the

former self. These practices of disavowal align with Kenway and Lazarus (2017), who indicated an apparent design within disavowal that is intending to 'lessen any negative associations with … unfair power, status and privilege' (p. 268).

While reflecting on their experiences as students, most participants engaged in a strategy of disavowal, denial, and rejection of having attended an elite boys' school. They shared an awareness of how the cultural practices and traditions of these schools are abhorrent, shocking, and unacceptable to many people, which represented a significant fracturing in how they reflected on their schooling and identification as old boys. Despite having shared stories about being socially and culturally engaged as students, including numerous examples of participating in extra-curricular activities, and excelling academically, it became evident that any affinity towards their school community had faded in adulthood. Steven expressed his feelings as follows:

> I'm not one of those former students that prides myself on being an
> old boy … It's not the sort of thing that I would offer up in
> conversation about myself. Normally, I'm very reluctant to name the
> school I went to, mostly because I feel it comes with more baggage
> than prestige.

In adulthood, Todd shared that his belief in the quality and excellence of an elite education had been productively challenged by time and experience. He explained that there was no pride associated with being an old boy, and only attached the feeling of shame to his educational background. Similarly, Neil indicated that he was 'embarrassed' about his education and was not 'proud' to be an old boy.

For many participants, there was a negative association with the school they attended, while they also expressed concern that an unconsidered revealing of this knowledge could disqualify them from being socially accepted by others. There was an absence of the allure that has been witnessed in other social groups who have managed concerns about how they are viewed by 'not only accepting a "spoiled" identity … but by embracing stigma in forms of dishonor, pathology, and dysfunction as markings of moral commitment and political authenticity' (Hughey, 2012, p. 220). Instead, the old boys were uncomfortable in revealing the privilege of their background to those beyond the elite school network. Steven further explained

that this was predicated on a need to distance himself from the 'bad' men who had attended his school:

> You can be seen as very entitled. A wanker.[25] You know, you can be seen as arrogant. You come from a very rich, privileged background. I don't feel that it tends to be seen warmly that you're an old boy … It cues eye rolls and people forming assumptions about you based on that.

This sentiment was shared by most participants who expressed that their association with an elite boys' school was something they had largely distorted or obscured in adulthood. Like Steven, Joe highlighted some of the possible implications of revealing where he had attended school and indicated that:

> I don't want to be seen as some, you know, a bratty rich kid from the rich school. The rich, racist school. I think that [Foveaux Grammar School] makes my reputation worse, because it associates me with an economically exclusive, and exclusive as in it excludes, organisation that has some real problems with racism and has some real problems with homophobia.

As Chase (2008) indicated, the value that society places on gender norms is evident in the 'self-concept, self-identity, and self-esteem' of students (p. 7). However, the norms that are linked with elite boys' schools, such as homophobia, misogyny, and racism, have been increasingly challenged and repudiated, necessitating a process of self-reidentification for some men who attended these schools.

Old boys have historically used their education and social background to maintain and expand an unquestioned access to esteemed employment destinations and material wealth. However, the research participants revealed an awareness that there has been a shift in public sentiment surrounding these institutions and the men they produce. In considering their stories, declarations about elite boys' schools being homophobic and racist institutions, which educate rich wankers, is reductive and anathema to critical thinking. Further, the distorting and obscuring of their educational background is an attempt to transform their past, make it disappear, or

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[25] A pejorative term for someone is perceived as being a contemptible person.

forget it ever happened. Drawing on the work of Kenway and Lazarus (2017), these men may have attended elite schools, but they are compelled to highlight that they are not personally elitist nor entitled. Being an old boy comes with baggage, and negative associations with elites, elitism, and snobbery. As Kenway and Lazarus (Kenway & Lazarus) observed, this requires accommodating 'moral codes of liberal, progressive, multi-cultural and anti-elitist social sentiments' (p. 265). However, this exercise in disavowal does relatively little to advance an understanding of how educational and social background has shaped, and continues to inform, their identity work, professional opportunities, and life trajectory.

While it is not possible to fully banish their educational background in the present, the feelings of embarrassment and shame highlight that the experience of having attended an elite boys' school is no longer fully their own. The experience is impinged on by others who might view them as entitled wankers, or rich bratty kids. As a result, the past experience of these men is not being fully captured, primarily because their life has continued to unfold beyond the school gate, where it has been productively challenged, initially by a more diverse student population at university. Their past experience has been imprinted by an increased disapproval of elites, elitism, and snobbery, as well as a rising commitment towards gender equality, social inclusion, and workplace diversity. This awareness has necessitated past experiences to become new by pressing it through a filter of moral rhetoric and rejection. However, it was unclear how close they had come, as university students or at other stages of life, with the people with whom they wish to ally. As Orwell (2001) noted, 'it is only when you meet someone of a different culture from yourself that you begin to realise what your own beliefs really are' (p. 153). Despite the claims of disavowal and rejection, it is unclear how far the old boys have travelled from the economically, politically, and socially privileged background of their childhood. In discussing their experiences, they are somewhat uncertain as to where their beliefs emerge from and how this is informed by experience. As this suggests, the notion that a belief is clear and innate is not the case, and as a result, most people are somewhat confused as to what they actually believe. In addressing this tension, the old boys defer culpability, distorting and obscuring their past as part of the process of self-reidentification.

9.2.3. Deferring Culpability

Through the deployment of a morally good and honestly sincere identity, the participants positioned themselves as being aware of an increased public focus on heteronormativity, toxic masculinity, and White privilege. However, they needed to navigate the inbuilt tension of continuing to benefit from economic, political, and social advantage, while making claims of wanting to dismantle institutional examples of privilege and material wealth. While the identities presented by these men suggested that they had not adhered to the worst aspects of schoolboy culture, through their commitment to well-roundedness they were still constrained by many normative practices that construct and regulate elite masculinities. Indeed, many of the portraits provided by the participants – as being academic, athletic, culturally aware, and leaders – revealed how they continue to talk themselves into existence as privileged gendered beings (Davies, 2000). In talking about their experiences at school, the old boys became willing participants in reproducing, recapturing, and re-inscribing power relations (Peterson & Langellier, 2006). They were simultaneously deferring culpability and reproducing privilege. While the action and practice of talking about their educational background made them intelligible as old boys, as celebrated sportsmen, high academic achievers, and school leaders, the lack of unease about being implicated in larger social discourses of entitlement and privilege was curious. As Keddie (2021) indicated, discomfort should be embedded in conversations about male power and privilege. However, there was no sense of any embarrassing or regrettable moments, nor the discomfort of having undertaken transformative work. Instead, the participants reflected on how they had always been good, moral, honest, and sincere, at least relative to the model schoolboy they interacted with as students. They had emerged from a schooling experience that endorsed attitudes, behaviours, and values out-of-step with modern society, but they had not personally indulged in these practices.

John had consistently stated how he had enjoyed a frictionless experience at school, sharing that:

> I was the model Bridge Academy boy. I was a prefect. I was held up
> as a leader within the school. I did for the school what the school
> wanted me to do. I got the marks I needed to get.

As an exemplar, John revealed that this also came with a 'sense of custodianship'. This became apparent when he discussed media reports about incidents involving boys from his school, which had left him 'angered' and 'disappointed'. In discussing these feelings, he shared stories from his final school days and explained that, 'I remember finishing Year Twelve, looking at the kids coming into Year Seven and going, these kids are absolute entitled little shits. I remember even back then worrying about it'. In this instance, the cultural practices and traditions of the school were not framed as being problematic, but rather it was a younger generation of boys who had displaced what had been good and wholesome about Bridge Academy. There was no need for John to engage with practices of disavowal, as the elitism and entitlement was framed as a recent phenomenon, something that had occurred after he had completed schooling.

By interpreting these stores as practices of disavowal, what is obscured by these individual men is how they have emerged from an environment that is economically, politically, and socially powerful and privileged. While their stories are presented as being genuine and sincere, they are also designed to distance themselves from negative associations with their educational and social backgrounds.

Todd noted that the concealment of his educational background was needed if he was to avoid others forming opinions about him. To further downplay the influence of economic, political, and social advantage, he justified this strategy by stating that:

> Bourke College hasn't really contributed to my life in any formal way … Because none of my success can be attributed to Bourke College. Like, it was all just attributed to my life outside of school. And in fact, I wonder in what ways [Bourke College] has actually inhibited me.

Specifically, Todd reflected on the lack of an extensive creative and performing arts program at his school, suggesting that he could have enjoyed even earlier success in his career had he 'gone to a different school'. The claim that attending an elite boys' school had been a barrier or hindrance to accessing opportunities beyond the school gate is provocative. This is particularly relevant for Todd, who received a full academic scholarship to the Talbot Institute of Technology, something that must

have been attributable to his attendance, and academic performance, at Bourke College.

Any questioning that associated career trajectories and personal success with educational and social background was invariably channelled, by Todd and other participants, towards comments and statements about individual effort and talent. In doing so, the participants detached their individual achievements from elite boys' schooling and old boy networks. Like Todd, Chris shared how he had concealed his status as an Albion House old boy. He indicated that he has never benefited professionally from the elite school network, nor has he procured employment by virtue of his education. As Khan (2013) noted, by adopting merit as the lens to justify achievement, elite school alumni have unburdened themselves from 'the old baggage of social ties and status and replaced it with personal attributes – hard work, discipline, native intelligence and other forms of human capital' (p. 9). Like Todd, most of the participants shared how beyond the school gate they had been:

> forging my own path in a way that I don't think school has in any way
> contributed to … I don't think school actually helped in any way.
> Like, I didn't use a single contact from my school days. No one from
> my school had anything to do with it, and none of my schooling itself
> had anything to do with how I would end up turning out.

Understanding the benefits of elite boys' schooling as something that is confined to the acquisition of business partners, employment opportunities, and professional referrals, or functional skills and tasks that are taught in a classroom, is reductive and obscures the sophisticated and substantial benefits that are gained from an educational experience that is economically and socially privileged. As Khan (2013) argued, the acts that become embodied at elite schools are performances that 'look less and less like an artificial role we're playing – a role that might advantage us – and instead look more like just who we naturally are' (p. 136). By engaging with identity work that creates stories about deserved, earned, and fair success, which is detached from any association with elitism, hyper-masculinity, and privilege, the old boys distort and obscure to others, and themselves, those qualities of assertiveness, confidence, and self-assuredness that were practiced, and mastered, at school.

9.3. Troubled Identities

The stories shared by the research participants revealed how the discursive resource of elite boys' schooling determines the plot lines they are capable of following, while also placing constraints and limitations on their identity work. While they have exercised agency, curating specific stories about their experiences for a desired and expected effect, their positionality remains constituted through larger social discourses (Davies & Harré, 1990). In the case of this thesis, the identity work of participants is embedded within the personal histories they have shared throughout a research interview. As a result, the practices of disavowal must conform with the plots established within these histories. However, in considering these instances of disavowal, and its strategic value to identity work, the participants were restricted by the autobiographical fragments they had selected surrounding being morally good, honestly sincere, and well-rounded, and how these were necessary for curating the desired self-image of having exceptional talent and earned success. The analysis of their stories, and instances where they were rationalising the more toxic aspects of prior experiences, highlighted the restrictions and limitations of their identity work.

The participants revealed that their identity is troubled, primarily because the stories they shared about themselves are challengeable. Specifically, their professional and social success in adulthood is inconsistent with other identities that are being claimed in earlier stories (Taylor, 2005). As Wetherell (1998) indicated, in these instances there is a need for the speaker to undertake 'repair' work to realign their stories with the plot lines of their life history. In sharing their stories of disavowal, the participants became confused by the contradictory and inconsistent positions that arose from their accounts. Through an engagement with larger social discourses, such as toxic masculinity, and the curated autobiographical fragments of being morally good, honestly sincere, and well-rounded, their identities became somewhat implausible. However, this is unsurprising as individuals travel deep into their own paradigm, and the patterns that form their life, so much so that it can be difficult to see how elements of their own narrative fail to stack up. Part of this is associated with the lack of continuity and experience they have had beyond elite and privileged environments. As Steven indicated, university was 'still a homogenous group … of White kids from private schools'. Similarly, Joe indicated that as an elite boys' school student they were protected from directly experiencing and witnessing

the *other*. The presence of diversity in their university stories, specifically the presence of government school students, becomes a further resource to 'produce' themselves as being exceptional men, who continue to associate with the best and brightest. Further, their engagement with these students becomes a resource for personal enrichment and an object who they can learn from and accumulate a language that can advance their own engagement with social issues. Rather than being examples of a re-evaluation of past social scripts, these objects are subsumed into the stories provided by the old boys as being an important example of their hospitality and tolerance (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017).

The social homogeneity of the schools attended by the research participants means that they lacked the discursive resources to appropriately grasp and inhabit the daily realities of people who have occupied and traversed a pathway that is different to their own. Further, by concealing their educational background and downplaying its influence on their career trajectory and success, their position begins to fragment. Through expressions of humility, in which they gestured towards having a modest view of their own importance and influence, troubled identities and inconsistency break through. In the stories provided by Todd, who claimed that elite boys' schooling made no formal contribution to his life or professional success, he later suggested that:

> I had a good foundation at school. I was given the language. I could write an essay and it could be recognised academically. People who uphold a particular kind of academic hierarchy would be able to understand my voice because of the way that I was expressing it. I'm not sure other schools, and friends who went to other schools, necessarily feel like this is something they developed.

Despite concealing his educational background, Chris had indicated a willingness to disclose his status as an old boy when he had experienced difficulties acquiring work from the elite school network. This requirement to simultaneously obscure, and benefit from, an elite boys' school education highlights the potential for repeated experiences of identity trouble and the necessity for regular repair work. Comments about avoiding eye rolls, potential damage to reputation, and concerns about the opinions of others, would suggest that the participants have talked about their

schooling background and experiences on numerous occasions. In turn, the negative responses have imprinted on these experiences, necessitating the development of new accounts. This becomes evident in their 'rehearsed account of trouble as part of the ongoing project of … identity work' (Taylor, 2006, p. 100). By concealing their status as old boys, they avoid trouble. They not only soften negative associations; they avoid them entirely.

The trouble that is inherent in the stories shared by the old boys provides some insight into the experience of pursuing incompatible positions and the bewilderment and confusion this produces. In analysing the practices of disavowal that have been adopted by most of the participants, the observation made by Orwell (2001) about shabby genteel families seems appropriate:

> In such circumstances you have to cling to your gentility because it is the only thing you have; and meanwhile you are hated for your stuck-up-ness and for the accent and manners which stamp you as one of the boss class'. (pp. 116-117)

Unable or unwilling to seek the full acceptance of those above, they are despised by those below. This is the anxious and uncertain ground that these old boys appear to navigate as they seek to claim an identity and allyship with those who are marginalised and oppressed, while simultaneously seeking to retain the comparative decency and gentility of their lives that is made possible by the marginalisation and oppression they oppose. Unlikely to ever weed out all that they acquired from elite boys' schooling, they must at least 'appear to accommodate the moral codes of liberal, progressive, multi-cultural and anti-elitist social sentiments' (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017, p. 265). Their position as 'good' men, in comparison to typical old boys, must be constantly available for public scrutiny and inspection. However, a retrograde step can easily reveal entitlement, privilege, and unearned or unfair opportunities, which could expose them as inauthentic, risking deportation back to the land they want to escape – an association with elites, elitism, and snobbery. Further, being too successful in their allyship risks losing the support of those who have been critical in affirming their desired identities as morally good and honestly sincere men.

While disavowal and the deferment of culpability appeared in the stories of most participants, others reflected on the importance of 'owning' their background and association with an elite boys' school. Despite his hostility towards Albion House, Chris shared that his particular educational experience is 'part of me' and 'did shape me'. Indeed, despite his criticism of his school, and elite education more broadly, he could not deny his status as an Albion House success story. As a result, he criticised those men who enjoyed privileged childhoods but 'obscure certain parts of themselves to appear like they had humbler beginnings than they did'. Although Chris pursued a variation in his practice of disavowal, he shared that he was unwilling to 'play act' and needed to be honest and sincere. He explained that:

> I don't want to pretend like I had a different, sort of, upbringing, because it [elite boys' schooling] informs my perspective. I think my perspective on that allows me to speak to those issues a little bit more. I don't want to take up the space of somebody who did go to the local public school, and who did go without, and whose suffering is so much bigger than anything I could have imagined.

9.4. Reflections

The analysis provided in this chapter has revealed how the participants engaged in numerous strategies to position themselves in opposition to aspects of elite boys' schooling that they believed disqualified them from full participation in a social life. There was an ongoing effort to distance themselves from the dominant discourses that surround these institutions and the men they produce. They claimed to reject the lack of diversity, the absence of closeness and sensitivity, the rules and regulations, and expectations of successful life trajectories cultivated by these institutions. In sharing their experiences and reflections, they positioned themselves as being morally good, honestly sincere, and ell-rounded men who were respectful, thoughtful, and socially responsible.

However, in negotiating these identities, there was a clear awareness of how to play the game of influence through a particular form of impression management, which they activated through the distortion and obscuring of economic, political, and social privilege. They sought to impress and persuade the listener by relating and making connections, as well as seeking praise and approval, rather than developing a

deep awareness and understanding of a common reality. Instead, they downplayed the economic, political, and social advantages from which they have benefited, while constructing identities that further distanced themselves from elite boys' schooling.

There are limitations to this identity work. The misrepresentation of self, and an indifference to how things are beyond their social position, revealed a deep-rooted feeling that personal success should be an enduring element of their identities. Despite extensive effort to frame themselves as being different to other men who share their educational and social background, fundamental desires and self-interest persist, exposing their maintained position within the structure of society. When the facts about their schooling experiences and life trajectories are given critical attention, their positionality became tenuous, susceptible to fractures and ruptures. The identities presented by these men were elusive and fragile. The interstitial formation of these subjectivities was far less certain and far less confident than the 'masculinity of success' (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005) would posture and profess.

It is a Tuesday evening, and I am at a networking event for young professionals. Wait staff, wearing black-tie, circulate the room, ghosting between aspiring lawyers and a butler's pantry where they remain out of sight, and out of mind. Like a Jay Gatsby party, the invisible 'help' obscures how your gentility is ultimately provided by poor people with shit jobs.

A woman in her late-20s walks across the room and notices I am looking at her. She pivots towards me. Short, bone-straight, black hair. Effortless and understated make-up. She is wearing a Ralph Lauren business shirt with a baby blue pin stripe. Pearl earrings and matching necklace complete the ensemble. She attended private school I tell myself as the clack of her patent black stilettos become audible over the background chatter. Who is she?

'Hi Cam,' she says with a confidence and familiarity that can only come from having met me somewhere before. But where? I take on a quizzical expression, my eyes darting around the room for someone more important to save me from what will quickly become an awkward situation. I see Carrington, a friend from school. We have a psychic conversation that can only be had between old boys, or couples following years of marriage. He swiftly crosses the room, interjecting himself with ease and style, before quickly moving to some salty notes about an 'accommodating' secretary at staff drinks last Friday. The presence of a female does not seem to perturb him. If anything, it just adds to the fun.

It is so satisfying, being offensive like this with a friend.

CHAPTER 10: RECUPERATION: MODERN MEN

This chapter examines the process of recuperation that occurred in the stories provided by the research participants. In particular, it considers how they describe their experiences in adulthood, with a particular emphasis on employment, relationships, and parenting. While most participants have engaged in practices of disavowal surrounding elite boys' schooling, they also recuperated and reconciled aspects of elitism and privilege. Various discursive resources are analysed to understand the process of recuperation and reconciliation. The focus is on self-reidentification and how a fracturing of gender, class, and notions of social justice require a reckoning and reconciliation with past experiences.

10.1. Adulthood Characteristics

10.1.1. Getting On

After completing undergraduate qualifications at university, some participants pursued post-graduate studies at prestigious schools in Australia and the United Kingdom. Most have experienced international travel, while others have lived and worked abroad. Many are married with young families and are presently contemplating the educational pathways for their own children. Raised in affluent suburbs across the capital cities of Australia, most are well advanced in reproducing the economic, cultural, and social capital from which they have emerged. By the standards of most people, they have achieved financially comfortable and successful lives in adulthood. However, most participants highlighted how their employment and domestic arrangements have diverged from the typical trajectories expected of an old boy. These stories were used to further mitigate the personal culpability encompassed by earlier performances at elite boys' schools, while recuperating aspects of their identity.

After completing a dual degree in arts/law, Stephen worked for a global management consultancy before completing graduate rotations at a multinational law firm. He shared how these had been uncomfortable work environments that reminded him of Bridge Academy. After a period working at an executive level within the Australian Public Service, he transitioned into employment that combines elements

of community service, advocacy, and policy. In discussing his current role, he shared that:

> I've kind of eschewed the corporate, like career path. I felt there was
> that same sort of, sense of self-prestige and exclusivity, that I saw at
> Bridge Academy. So, I didn't like those sorts of workplaces. In a
> sense because they kind of reminded me of Bridge Academy … in a
> negative way. It reminds of the school, and I don't want to have a part
> of that.

Despite attending prestigious universities, and harbouring vague aspirations of esteemed employment destinations, many participants shared how they had revised their career expectations in adulthood. Navigating and justifying this shift in focus was revealed as an important function in the recuperation of their masculine identity and positionality.

10.1.2. Self-Importance and Self-Sufficiency

Difficult labour market transitions, and unexpected detours in career trajectories, were common in the stories old boys shared about work. Some participants, like Gerry, indicated that he had enjoyed a linear trajectory through corporate finance, before accepting an executive role within his family business. However, most old boys reflected at length about the challenges and demands they had experienced in the labour market. By internalising discourses of deserved and earned futures in high-status jobs, the participants had engaged in performative acts that made them intelligible as old boys. Significantly, the adoption of these scripts and performances were transferred into employment and informed their perceptions and interactions with colleagues and office environments. The analysis of these stories was particularly informative of how certain behaviours and values remain deeply embedded in their identities.

Like Steven, most research participants discussed how their employment had been significantly different to the pathways they had imagined for themselves while at school. John explained that school had informed his thinking and expectations of a future career, indicating that 'I was trying to look towards a very [pauses] that idea of the prestigious degree or prestigious career'. Specifically, he had enrolled in an arts/law degree because 'the idea of being a lawyer is prestigious' and 'I felt it

incumbent on me to take something that had a degree of prestige'. Despite this imagined future, John emerged from university in an analyst role, before pursuing various corporate positions in business development. Reflecting on his time as a law student, and the early part of his career, he shared the feeling of being, 'less self-sufficient than the students I met through the course of university. Then, in the workplace, probably less self-sufficient than a lot of people'. He continued to discuss this feeling and reflected on how the facilities, grounds, and resources at Bridge Academy had impacted his attitudes and behaviours towards employment. Within his stories there was a sense that without a well-resourced environment it had been difficult to undertake the ordinary and routine aspects of work. He explained that 'I had less hustle than people', before adding, 'I've never been good at the hard yards'. He elaborated further stating that:

> When you go into the corporate workforce, the guys who end up
> getting promoted are the guys who prove themselves by doing what,
> you know, coming out of my exceptional background at Bridge
> Academy, I would look at as a menial task.

This story reveals a further element of elite boys' schooling, which had been difficult to disentangle in adulthood. While he rejected that his education had left him unprepared for the labour market, there is an acknowledgement in this story that John had viewed meaningful and useful work as being important, prestigious, skilful, and useful. However, there is also a humility in this talk that needs to be read with some caution. Despite claiming to be less sufficient, having less hustle, and being less willing to undertake menial tasks, this self-deprecation obscures the relative professional and social success that John has enjoyed. While he did not pursue a career in the legal profession, by his own acknowledgement, everything has 'kind of worked out'. Indeed, he has held senior management positions with premium corporations across the aviation, broadcasting, and technology industries, both in Australia and overseas. All this despite his lack of self-sufficiency, hustle, and willingness to undertake menial tasks.

Other participants reflected on always aspiring to pathways that diverged from those encouraged by their schools. Neil shared that as a student it was unclear what employment he would pursue in adulthood. However, he knew he was not

interested in the expected professions of engineering, law, and medicine. Indeed, Neil ridiculed these careers as being forced on uncritical and unthinking boys by overbearing fathers. Unlike his classmates, he initially pursued an interest in journalism, before settling on a career in education. Pursuing employment that amplified his commitment to 'make an impact' was further evidence that Neil was independent and capable of following his own path. This is similar to the observation made by Kenway and Lazarus (2017), which highlighted how students from elite schools expected to 'take up posts where their decisions would significantly affect people outside of their social circle' (p. 269). Such moral rhetoric was intended to give the appearance of being caring and honourable, while also downplaying the benefits of elite schooling. However, for Neil, his practices of disavowal were also gendered. He was an individual, a risk-taker, and unlike the typical old boy, capable of being his own man. Like Steven, he had experienced large, impersonal organisations beyond the school gate, and shared how these environments reminded him of Rivercity Grammar School. He explained his antagonism towards these environments:

> You don't have any influence over anything. I don't like feeling like I could drop off the face of the earth and no one would bat an eye. I don't like feeling like I don't have any influence over a place that I spend every day at. I don't like that feeling.

Throughout his stories, Neil had presented himself in opposition to what occurs at the intersection of elitism, masculinity, and privilege, engaging in a discursive strategy to distance himself from his experiences at Rivercity. However, like John there were elements of his education that remained entangled with his identity work. While he had rejected traditional pathways into prestigious professions, he retained aspects of exceptionalism and self-importance. He had enjoyed sharing stories about colleagues who referred to him as 'Superman' and 'Mr. Fix It' and how they would often defer to him for advice and guidance, despite his relative youth and lack of experience as a teacher. Through an understanding of the cultural practices and traditions of elite boys' schooling, it was apparent that Neil had been pushed and pulled in his understanding and representation of self. In particular, his case study revealed a disruption to the expected linear pathway. However, the contradictions and inconsistencies that are presented by his non-linear trajectory produce a troubled

identity that must be reconciled. While his exploration of teaching, as an alternative to the expected pathways of engineering, law, and medicine, highlights a multiplicity of destinations, his desire for control and influence over his workplace reveals the stabilising effect of his gendered class position. Like most of the participants, Neil avoids any consideration of his fixed class position and the desire to achieve continuity in the comfort and security that was experienced during his childhood. However, this limits the potential for meaningful reconciliation with the past as it largely disengages identity work from the definite articles of lived experience. While they appear eager to engage in re-evaluating their gender, and how toxic masculinity is implicated in the marginalisation and oppression of others, they are less willing to discuss how this can co-exist with the material conditions they continue to enjoy and pursue. In emphasising the fluid and multiple understanding they have for gender and sexuality, there is a failure to 'consider how they actually co-exist … with grinding stability and exploitative continuity' (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 19). Present in the stories shared by the research participants are the conditions where social progress becomes stuck. They continue to pursue professional and social success, benefiting from the advantages and opportunities provided for by an economically privileged education that ensures a 'monopolization of desired positions, opportunities and honours' (van Zanten, 2015a, p. 4). As Blackman et al. (2008) argued, it is in the dispositions, mannerisms, tastes, and traits of these men 'where process becomes a standing wave, its activities trained and regimented in ways that do much to facilitate the reproduction of (for example) class and gender inequality' (p. 19). In the case of Neil, his work in education, and future ambitions to establish an independent school of his own, highlight a virtuous and altruistic commitment to positively influence the lives of young people. However, the 'grinding stability' of his gendered class position suggests a lack of interest in seeking to redress power relations, or the material advantages that he currently enjoys. The expectation he will be *important*, *influential*, and *special*, is explicit in his talk. The desire for acknowledgement and recognition, and a need to exercise control and influence over the place where he works, reaffirmed qualities of elite masculinity, while also revealing how entitlement and privilege remained entangled in his identity work.

10.2. Recuperative Practices

The stories that were being shared by the participants, about the experience of moving beyond the school gate, arriving at university, and entering adulthood required a re-evaluation of the cultural practices and traditions they had engaged with while students. The challenging and jarring experiences of moving beyond the exclusive, safe, and selective environments, where they had been important, special, and assured of their exceptional abilities and talents, required a variety of recuperative practices. These stories are evidence of further steps towards renegotiating the rules of elite masculinity, reinterpreting their experience as students, and the process of self-reidentification.

10.2.1. Recuperating Masculinity

By engaging in narratives that amplified claims of being morally good and honestly sincere, the participants positioned themselves as being 'more moral and desirable than the masculinities of other sorts of men' (Wilkins, 2009, p. 360). The qualities of competitiveness, confidence, and physical toughness that typify elite masculinity, were associated with other, lesser men. Like Steven, the participants recognised that:

> Empathy, sensitivity, being caring, being nurturing, having emotional intelligence, is all part of being a man, and it's part of the healthy side of masculinity … For me, it's really that it's okay for boys and men to have vulnerabilities and problems, as we all do, but to talk about them openly. To seek help. That's healthy, and it's actually the strong thing to do.

Becoming a father was identified as a pivotal moment in self-reidentification. As Steven indicated, parenthood had been a moment that demanded 'deeper thinking' on the issues of gender, opportunity, and male allyship. Specifically, having a daughter was the catalyst for an internal cultural shift. As a father, he became dedicated to ensuring that his daughter would experience the 'same sense of equality and ambition, I suppose, in her life, that a boy would'. While becoming a father activated him politically, it also required a re-evaluation of what constitutes masculinity. In becoming a father, he realised that:

One of the most masculine things you can do, is actually to care for your new baby child. Give them things that they need. That is a masculine thing to do. To try to take this idea of being weak or a sissy, sort of, out of the equation. Those are some of the things to me that, sort of, are the deeper aspects of being a man.

This language highlights the good men approach, which is male positive and avoids the affective intensities of confronting the realities of having been implicated in the perpetuation of heteronormativity, misogyny, and patriarchy. In mobilising the qualities of care, empathy, and sensitivity as being central to his healthy and strong understanding of masculinity, Steven implied that the masculinities privileged by elite boys' schools are toxic and weak. This strategy is consistent with other studies that have revealed how discursive distance can 'simultaneously reaffirm many qualities that typify hegemonic masculine forms and dominance' (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 251). Like Neil, Stephen is pushed and pulled in his understanding and representation of self. Rather than pursuing more experimental performances, the participants are constrained in their ability to perform and understand their gender differently (Butler, 2006a).

John had shared that he was a full-time father. Although he enjoyed this role, and the ability to support his wife to maintain her own career ambitions, he shared that:

I would have liked, if I was way more successful with my career, to provide a great station of life to my wife and kid [pauses] I think she would love to have time away with family. So, I feel the pressure to give her that time.

While he feels no pressure to justify why he is not employed, there is a sense that he still feels an expectation to provide for his family and inhabit the traditional role of family man and breadwinner. Being a full-time parent is not a desired shift in performance, but rather a matter of circumstance, enabled by the reality that his wife, a corporate lawyer at a Fortune 500[26] company, can ensure the financial security of

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[26] The Fortune 500 is an annual list compiled and published by Fortune magazine that ranks the 500 largest United States corporations by total revenue.

the household. Similarly, Neil has pursued entrepreneurial and creative opportunities, starting new businesses, creating podcasts, and gigging and recording as a musician. He moves freely within the labour market, shifting between teaching jobs at the earliest sign of workplace discomfort or irritation. Much like John, there was a sense that Neil had been unwilling to do the 'hard yards' and 'menial tasks' required by the labour market. This was evident in the stories about his most recent job role. He shared that on arriving at his new school, he had been assigned the 'lowest [performing] classes,' producing a feeling of outrage. The allocation of low-quality classes was humiliating, given his exceptional talent and skills as a teacher. He explained that:

> There wasn't much professional respect given to me. There was no like, "Oh Neil, you're young. You did all this stuff at your last school. You've got your Masters." … They just gave me a whole bunch of shit [students] and said, "Off you go".

He emphasised his contempt for school administration, as well as disappointment that the students were 'completely disengaged' from learning. Before the conclusion of Term One, Neil had quit, something that was justified because, 'no one gave a shit about me'. While this further suggests an expectation of being viewed as important and special, the stabilising effect of a gendered class position is further obscured. Specifically, Neil lives with his parents, where he is able to operate unfettered by the economic and social realities of independent living. Although they talk extensively about their fluid and multiple understandings of gender, allyship with the marginalised and oppressed, and sensitivity towards the disadvantaged, the presence of class, which is largely silent in their stories, ensures that the potency of these claims loses momentum, if not becoming stuck all together.

Rather than engage in the transformative work necessary to experience a genuine break in performance, the old boys highlight practices of disavowal that enable them to downplay their persistent socioeconomic privilege, while maintaining claims of exceptionalism that are rooted in self-concepts of being hardworking and talented. However, in doing so, they mitigate any personal culpability of having attended an elite boys' school and the advantages of having emerged from safe and secure environments. In many ways, the participants are largely ignorant about how

privilege works. While they claimed to recognise the privilege of being male, there was no radicalism in how they performed or understood their identities at the intersection of elitism, masculinity, and privilege. Despite emphatic declarations to the contrary, their identity work suggested a difference of degree, not kind.

10.2.2. Recuperating Class

The research participants had expressed the difficulty of identifying as old boys. As former students at elite boys' schools, institutions that were established on ideas of exclusivity and selectivity, they can articulate how they have been marked by their passage through this peculiar learning environment. Some acknowledged that this aspect of their past comes with a degree of responsibility. Todd shared that:

> I feel a sense of responsibility, because I have graduated, and I have developed this language to go back to the school because so many people haven't developed the language and they haven't seen how school has, you know, affected them long term.

In this narrative, Todd highlighted that to resist talking about the toxic elements of his experience would be unethical. However, for most of the research participants, the experiences of elite boys' school are not fully banished in their present-day identity work. The old boys who have emerged from a background of socioeconomic privilege are acutely aware of these autobiographical fragments and how they can be viewed alongside media reports of abhorrent behaviours occurring within elite boys' schools. For these men, full social acceptance is perceived as being conditional on them publicly rationalising and re-evaluating certain negative associations. In considering schooling pathways for his son, Gerry shared his belief that:

> Elite private boys' schools give you the opportunity to do what you want. They're enablers … A big thing that influences me and what school I want my son to go to is the networks the school can enable later in his career.

For the majority of participants, these comments would appear retrograde and something that is indicative of the old baggage they are seeking to avoid through their own practices of disavowal. It is notable that Gerry often provided against-the-grain responses, relative to the other participants, something that could partly be

explained by his more traditional adherence to the social characteristics and life trajectories that are expected of old boys. Unlike those participants who were compelled to justify their educational background, the relatively linear progression through university, corporate finance, and a senior executive role with a prestigious family business, could mean that Gerry had relatively little exposure or experience outside the elite school bubble. In turn, this may result in less social pressure to disavow the unearned advantages and opportunities of an economically privileged education and social position.

Unlike Gerry, most participants seek to benefit from a modern society that has given new importance to individuals and individuality (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). As Rustin (2008) argued, unlike earlier societies that 'provided social scripts, which most individuals were expected to follow, contemporary societies throw more responsibility on to individuals to choose their own identities' (p. 153). From this perspective, the reflexive project of the self is greater than in any other socio-historic situation (Giddens, 1991). As a result, it is the responsibility of each individual to make their 'life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization' (Rose, 1999, p. x).

While elite boys' schools have always produced alumni who do not conform to expected life trajectories, the contemporary circumstances of social change, globalisation, and neoliberalism, have both challenged and eroded normative plot lines, especially surrounding class. Traditions are disrupted by shifting cultural standards, globalisation unsettles the White and Christian client base, and prestigious university degrees are being displaced by technology, artificial intelligence, and more holistic measures of talent and skill. These changes weaken the importance of elite school networks and communities of old boys. As the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality becomes increasingly destabilised, being an able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class, White, male is losing its historical power and influence. As result, the link between school and identity can be broken, so that education is no longer relevant to deliberate enactments of self-representation. To borrow from Taylor (2005), while an elite boys' school education will not cease to be important, it possible that it will 'become significant in a different way, giving rise to new identities' (p. 251). In prioritising the importance of gender, race, and sexuality, old boys are able to diminish the advantages and opportunities provided by their

socioeconomic position in favour of those elements of identity that are attuned to contemporary egalitarian values.

10.2.3. Recuperating Social Justice

Participants shared narratives about their awareness and understanding of social justice and their commitment to ensuring equitable and fair outcomes across society. Within their stories were claims of activism, advocacy, and political engagement that became discursive resources to further curate an identity of being caring and honourable, but also hospitable and tolerant (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017). For example, Neil explained how the elitism, privilege, and wealth he had witnessed at Rivercity Grammar School had galvanised 'socialist' beliefs and values while a student. He also shared that in confronting economic and social disadvantage in early adulthood, the experience made him feel 'guilty' about the difference between his circumstances and those of other people. Steven discussed a dedication to gender equity, shared parenting, and dignity and equality for all. He explained how he had been fortunate to know 'bright young women' and how they had educated him about differences in the 'work setting and caring setting for women'. Through these experiences, he realised that 'there's this veneer of equality and a lot of men don't get past that thinking, and there's all these sorts of issues that sit beneath that, which men tend to turn a blind eye to every day'. Similarly, Todd had become political in adulthood and described how he had consciously surrounded himself with friends who were activists and intellectuals in the areas of class, race, and women's rights. Specifically, it had been through these associations that he acquired his own language to discuss his 'social conscience' and 'social issues'.

However, in the stories shared by the research participants, it was unclear how the acknowledgement and acceptance of social disadvantage and marginalisation translated into action and an acceptance of being implicated in the (re)production of inequality. In his narrative on political activism and engagement, Neil concluded that it is still incumbent on people to 'try and make the best with the hand [they have] been dealt'. Similarly, Steven discussed at length his personal ethic to eschew corporate work, as well as a commitment to being a male feminist. I had asked him to share some examples of how he had translated this into tangible outcomes for social progress through his employment. He responded, as follows:

Any examples? No. Look, I've tried to be working in a space that surrounds, sort of, public purpose and social justice, and working in the not-for-profit sector. So, I've certainly been drawn, I think it's, maybe, partly where my intellectual interests lie, and partly that's been reinforced by my experiences at school. I like these, sort of, careers or jobs where you, at least on paper, you're trying to give back to community, or make some positive community benefit, rather than something for yourself, or for a private entity. That's kind of been, sort of my, underlying career value set, I guess.

In this instance, having a 'career value set' appears to be sufficient evidence for the worthwhile contribution he is making to social progress and dismantling the privilege and social advantage he enjoys. The final statement of 'I guess' suggests that he is unconcerned with accessing a more certain knowledge about his contribution and positionality. As Messner et al. (2015) indicated, while this identity 'might carry some morally positive weight … it also necessarily includes some morally ambiguous baggage that raises critical questions and scrutiny concerning the depth of an ally's commitments to social change' (p. 137). Steven recognises the importance of gender equality, and talks about it with sophistication and purpose, but does not appear to have pursued ends that will directly impact the existing power relations from which he, and other men, benefit. Rather than explore more deeply the experiences they had, practices of disavowal enable an obscuring of the past.

When analysing these stories through the lens of disavowal it is important to acknowledge that the participants appear sincere in their moral rhetoric. However, as Kenway and Lazarus (2017) indicated, this does not discount that it is also designed to soften any negative association of having benefited from unearned and unfair advantages. There was no indication that Neil lied about his activism, or that Steven is not a male feminist, but there is an element of having adopted a virtuous appearance that is deeply aware of the broader socio-political context in which these attitudes and behaviours are valued (Kenway & Lazarus, 2017). In making these representations there is a disconnect from their own circumstances, and how they have been implicated in producing inequality within the networks and structures that have comprised their life histories. Further, in the case of Neil, there was no indication of any mental effort to empathise with, or understand, the *other*, and no

intention to engage with action that could make amends for his guilty feelings. In part, this is explained by Todd who indicated that:

> I don't come from a poor background. I come from a background where if I ever ran out of money, I could ask my dad to borrow some. And I think it took me a while to realise that other people, like, don't necessarily come from that background.

10.3.   Reckoning and Reconciling Experiences

The uncomplicated channelling of old boys into prestigious universities and esteemed employment destinations has been increasingly challenged and dismantled by generations of activists, intellectuals, journalists, and scholars. The prioritising of gender, race, and sexuality in contemporary identity politics, has exposed heteronormativity, toxic masculinity, and White privilege, stripping the pride and strength that was previously contained within the title of old boy. For most of the participants, the distinction and prestige of elite boys' schooling has been eroded and dissolved.

Rather than removing the regulations of elite boys' schooling, they have reinterpreted what it means to them as adults. These restrictions appear as fractures in their identity work. While they have distanced themselves from model schoolboys and typical old boys, they must still contend with the difficulties that arise from having benefited from an education that was economically privileged. As Steven indicated:

> I probably have found it hard to reconcile that [advantages and opportunities of elite boys' schooling]. Like, I try and appreciate the access I had to those things, but my first, yeah, emotional reaction when I think about the school, or talk about it are, yeah, quite negative.

Despite their practices of disavowal, attending an elite boys' school remains present in the identities curated by the participants. Their past is not fully banished in the present, but it is also no longer fully their own (Butler, 2004a). The discursive strategies they have engaged with create trouble, which is not present in the narratives of old boys who have experienced more linear trajectories and

uncomplicated pathways. Their stories of attending an elite boys' school are replete with meanings of being morally good and honestly sincere, while also being associated with well-roundedness and exceptionalism. Significantly, the participants characterised their experience, and positioned themselves relative to these meanings and associations, as discursive resources in their identity work. The position adopted by most participants, in relation to the elitism, masculinity, and privilege of elite boys' schooling, is consistent with an understanding of identity being the outcome of individual choices. These men are aware that their identities are not locked into behaviours and performances based on their location within a matrix of biology, culture, and society (Fuss, 1989; Grossberg, 1992). They are capable of pursuing agentic presentations that are not determined by culture, sex, and social position, or reductionist notions of what an old boy can or should be. However, the distortion and obscuring of a gendered class position also prevents any clear break in performance, as well as any capacity to more accurately grasp, account for, and reconcile, the discursive production of self.

The construction of elite boys' schools, as producing entitled, privileged, and socially inept young men, provides an alternative position for my research participants to reveal how they have been active in choosing their own identity. As Neil indicated, elite boys' schools are ideal for, 'people who really like being told what to do, and when. People who really like having an identity thrust upon them almost.' For Neil, this had been deeply problematic as there was no room in this identity to 'be your own man'. As a result, most of the participants claimed that being an old boy did not align with who they wanted to be. This suggests a more complex understanding of pathways that channel old boys into prestigious universities, and ultimately, esteemed employment destinations. By referencing their qualities of being morally good and honestly sincere, the participants provided stories that suggested their life trajectory had never been fixed or predetermined. The stories of identity developed gradually and were informed by personal choices that were detached from their educational background. In discursively distancing themselves from the toxic elements of elite boys' schooling, their disavowal of elites, elitism, and snobbery becomes central to their stories of being good men. This is the identity work of men in a cultural and social context that is hostile towards heteronormativity, toxic masculinity, and White privilege. These factors impinge on,

and inform, their past experiences, and how these experiences have been imprinted on by the shifting desires and values of society.

The claims being made by most of the old boys, surrounding their disavowal of elitism and privilege, is problematic. Although they display agency in what discursive resources they utilise, the old boys are still constrained by larger social discourses (Davies & Harré, 1990). This is evident in the example of Neil who positioned himself as being self-reliant and exceptional but was unable to reconcile this with how he had been positioned as unimportant at his new school. As Taylor (2005) argued, 'discursive work to construct and take up 'new' identities does not erase old meanings but must, inevitably, contend with them, particularly in the ways that speakers are positioned by others' (p. 263).

While the old boys can make themselves anew in adulthood, engaging in fluid and multiple presentations of self, this does not remove the past meanings they have encountered and navigated surrounding notions of masculinity, class, and social justice. Through a process of self-reidentification, the research participants are impinged on by those outside the elite school network who position old boys as being bratty, entitled, and rich *wankers*. In attempting to reconcile and recuperate incompatible subjectivities, the stories shared by the old boys become fractured and troubled. This occurs primarily through the 'visible facts' of their university degrees, secure employment, and comfortable domestic arrangements. As this suggests, past experiences are stabilised by their gendered class position, making it difficult to recount these experiences anew without an occasional retrograde step and associated repair work.

10.4.   Reflections

Through an emphasis on employment, relationships, and parenting, a process of recuperation occurs for old boys. Despite positioning themselves as pursuing ethical and socially responsible employment, being present and participatory fathers, and supporting partners to pursue career ambitions, there is a need to maintain exceptionality and self-importance. A set of recuperative practices are used that construct a new masculine ideal of being good men who are detached from their educational and social background, enabling them to make unambiguous and unproblematic contributions to social justice issues. However, the failure to

acknowledge the continuing influence of their experiences, which implicates them in particular performances of gender, class, and social justice, leaves an uncomfortable dissonance in their identity work.

In sharing how they have been active in self-reidentification, old boys present themselves as being morally good and honestly sincere men. Unlike the predetermined life trajectory of the model schoolboy, their lives have occurred gradually, with more challenges and complications, as a result of the independent and socially aware choices they have made. Acutely aware of the hostility surrounding heteronormativity, toxic masculinity, and White privilege, the practices of disavowal, and purposeful choices that are moral and just, is a problem. Rather than productively contributing to these larger discourses of society, they are instead impinged by many of these public tales. They reject the elitism and privilege they have emerged from, while simultaneously benefiting from economic, cultural, and social capital that ensures they maintain financially secure, and socially safe, lives. The mere act of disavowal, and claiming a new identity as a good man, does not banish the past. Indeed, concealing and obscuring their association with elite boys' schooling, to avoid undesirable positioning by others, highlights how much doubt, trouble, and uncertainty is present within these identities.

'They really need to be chemically castrated,' she said, reflecting on her tax bill. Her taxes were high because of bogans[27] who did drugs and fucked instead of working. 'If you can't get a job, you shouldn't be allowed to breed.'

'Hmmm ... yeah ... that's a bit much' I replied, grasping at how I should respond to such a blunt and insensitive instrument. 'Tell me, do you listen to much Wagner?' I asked, permitting myself a satisfying chuckle at having delivered such an astute zinger. But her puzzled expression suggested my parry had been wasted.

'Huh? What are you talking about?'

'Oh nothing. Never mind.' What had I expected? She was the product of what I mockingly referred to as a 'second-tier' school. Only those who are 'properly' educated can be a real snob.

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[27] A pejorative term for someone who is uncouth, unsophisticated, and of low social status.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

The aim of my thesis has been to consider the narrative subjectivities of men who attended elite boys' schools in Australia and how they feel about, make sense of, and (re)negotiate the masculinities they encountered as students. Through qualitative interviews with old boys, I interrogated the experience of elite boys' schooling and demonstrations of exceptionality to understand how discursive mediation of elite masculinities were performed. The stories and life trajectories of old boys have raised important questions about how elite boys' schooling is used as a discursive resource in adulthood to assert morally good and honestly sincere identities through practices of disavowal.

11.1.   Thesis Summary

In Chapter 2, I investigated how the term elite has been applied within the field of educational research. Based on an existing conceptualisation of elite school status, I argued that elite schools become identifiable through a combination of five dimensions that mark them as being demographically, geographically, historically, scholastically, and typologically elite (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b). I extended this typology to include the dimension of exclusivity to consider barriers of entry to elite schools. I discussed how the elite ideological narratives of these schools are used to indicate the economic, social, and cultural capital required of students, their families, and those associated with the wider school community. In this way, I argued how the dimensions of an elite school are not only markers that make them intelligible as such, but they also establish the criteria for entry by marking them as 'more exclusive and discerning than non-elite public schools' (Drew, 2013, p. 182).

In Chapter 3, I provided an outline of the theoretical framework that would be used to explore gender identities in schools. I considered poststructural approaches to the investigation of gender in schools and the analytical tools this offers for understanding the experience of elite boys' schooling and stories about elitism, masculinity, and privilege. This theoretical framework was put to work to understand how seemingly incompatible positions can come together in the performance of elite identities. Further, I considered how the construction of self is an ongoing process of reflecting and re-evaluating, which at times produces contradictory choices about

what to keep and what to reject from past experiences. Inspired by the ideas of Judith Butler (2006c) I also analysed how elite boys' schooling might generate a sense-making framework that is incomplete for understanding and interpreting elite subjectivities. This approach was used to consider how old boys presented inconsistent and implausible identities surrounding their schooling and lived experience of privilege. In Chapter 4 the theoretical framework was linked to the adopted methodological approach where I considered the complementary aspects of narrative analysis and poststructuralism.

Three case studies were then presented as examples of the old boys who contributed to my research project. Each case study was presented as a story, which recorded the actions of both the research participant and investigator. In this way, the case studies provided a rich and detailed expression of the interview experience, replicating the process of interviewing men about the experience of elite boys' schooling and its continuing presence in their life trajectories. The case studies highlight the cultural practices that construct and regulate masculinity at elite boys' schools and how the discursive mediation of self is performed through claims of individual choices in a self-reidentification project. In the case studies, the characteristics of being morally good, honestly sincere, and well-rounded were presented as important markers of elite boys' school identity and the demonstration of exceptionality as both students and men.

In Chapters 8 to 10, themes that emerged from the case studies, and other interview data, were analysed. Chapter 8 examined the image of a model schoolboy and how he is cultivated through a set of distinct cultural practices and traditions. It revealed how this image is used as a discursive resource in adulthood to simultaneously compliment and critique the idealised masculinities of an elite boys' school. Chapter 9 explored the fragmenting of elite identities and the practices of disavowal. Through this strategy, it was revealed how old boys renegotiate the rules of elite masculinity and reinterpret the experience of attending an elite boys' school in adulthood. Chapter 10 highlighted the process of recuperation and revealed how old boys reconcile identity positions that are contradictory, incompatible, and implausible. Recuperative practices were discussed in relation to the fracturing and fragmentation of gender, class, and social justice.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I provide some final reflections on the research project and the central themes that have emerged from my work. I focus on the practices of disavowal that permeate the narratives of elite boys' schooling and the identity work of research participants. The main emphasis is on how disavowal is used to simultaneously lessen negative association with elitism, toxic masculinity, and privilege, while buttressing claims of exceptionalism and individual talent. In doing so, I highlight how old boys obscure the advantages and opportunities acquired from an economically privileged education.

11.2. (Un)doing Old Boy

The findings of my thesis support the idea that students at elite boys' schools engage in a set of practices that confers recognition as being exceptional. The characteristic of exceptionality was a prominent theme in the case studies and other interview material for this project. Being morally good, honestly and sincere, and well-rounded emerged as important characteristics of how the old boys narrated their subjectivities in adulthood. These markers of identity were conceptualised and deployed in demonstrating exceptionality, while also being used within practices of disavowal and the deferring of culpability. This is significant as it reveals how the advantages of an elite education, and the benefaction of privilege, is renegotiated within the tangled influence of personal histories and shifting social values.

11.2.1. Morally Good

The old boys communicated how they had always performed in accordance with their beliefs, feelings, and thoughts while students. In many ways, their behaviour aligned with the external messaging of these schools as ideal environments for the development of good character, strong intellect, and generous spirit in boys. Reference to being 'good' boys who were morally sincere was evident in the case studies, as well as stories provided by other research participants. Some of the old boys shared stories about being surrounded by attitudes, behaviours, and values they recognised as being abhorrent and outdated. However, indulging in the worst aspects of schoolboy culture had been avoided by maintaining a personal commitment to being good and moral. In analysing these stories of confronting and navigating the idealised masculinities present within elite boys' schools, it was apparent that experiences were being impinged by shifts in cultural and social values, leaving an

imprint on how these experiences were recounted in the context of a research interview. Specifically, the old boys presented themselves as having always been compliant, disciplined, and well-behaved.

11.2.2. Honestly Sincere

Throughout the case studies, elite boys' schools were described as outdated cultural monoliths that produced assertive, confident, and self-assured men who were capable of belonging authentically in an all-male environment. Many participants considered how public tales, which emphasise how elite boys' schools are idyllic environments that turn boys into men, were inaccurate and concealed the indecent and unhealthy cultural practices of these institutions. The case studies highlighted a belief among some research participants that elite boys' schools produce synthetic and uncritical men who lack the capabilities and skills to successfully integrate with contemporary Australian society. This larger social discourse was used by the old boys to contrast their own honest and sincere characters. This belief in an authentic character, which differentiated them from the model schoolboy was similar to their claims of moral goodness. While the participants were not being deliberately misleading in these representations, there was a lack of concern about how they continued to be implicated in wider systems of power and privilege. Again, there was a sense that past experience was being impinged by shifting social values and a desire to maintain an appearance of being socially acceptable. As evidenced in the case studies, the old boys displayed an awareness of, and engaged with, public tales of elite boys' schools, toxic masculinity, and heteronormativity, to further distance themselves from their privileged origins, while continuing to assert an authentic and abiding self.

11.2.3. Well-Rounded

Becoming a capable, strong, and well-rounded boy was common in the case studies and is consistent with elite school marketing materials that emphasise the position of these institutions to develop the all-round abilities of children, nurture their 'innate' talents, and prepare them for success (Drew, 2013; Gottschall et al., 2010; McCandless, 2015). Of course, it is the accessibility and availability of expansive and well-resourced extra-curricular programs that ensure students at elite schools are capable of developing broad and interesting characters. The old boys revealed how they had participated in various opportunities including academic extension programs, cadets, sport, and cultural enrichment activities. However, as indicated by

Khan (2013) presence within a well-resourced environment produces an indifference towards the advantages and benefits that are relatively banal characteristics of the elite school experience. Throughout the case studies, and other interview data, the old boys revealed themselves as being dedicated to academic excellence, cultural achievements, and sporting accomplishments, if not all three. In this way, they all excelled at acquiring some, or all, of the skills most valued by their institutions, which confer the status of being a successful, compliant, well-rounded schoolboy. By enacting well-roundedness, and its associated norms of academic excellence, athleticism, cultural discernment, and popularity, the old boys became intelligible as having the 'correct' identity at school. This commitment to exceptionality is something that was carried beyond the school gate and into university, employment, and relationships.

11.2.4. Performative Breaks

This is not to suggest that transition into various stages of adulthood were smooth and uncomplicated processes. In sharing their experiences and stories the old boys revealed how the safe, sanitised, and sheltered experience of an elite boys' school had required a process of re-evaluation as they moved into university and employment. The case studies revealed that arrival at university had been a jarring experience. Specifically, exposure to social disadvantage, academic competition from unexpected sources, and a loss of importance, had required a process of self-reidentification. However, any recognition that these feelings of discomfort and unease required deeper reflection and engagement with the material advantages of their childhood, or their economically privileged education, were largely absent from these stories. Again, there is no sense that these men had knowingly engaged in deceit. The stories provided by the old boys did not suggest they were being dishonest about their experiences. However, what is evident in the autobiographical fragments that were presented to explain their life trajectory is how they are disconnected from their own circumstances and how they remain implicated in, and beneficiaries of, networks and structures that (re)produce inequality.

The old boys appear acutely aware that they have emerged from socioeconomic privilege, while also being highly sensitive about how this can be viewed alongside media reports of abhorrent behaviours occurring within elite boys' schools. Further, the increasing disapproval of elites, elitism, and snobbery requires

them to construct a clear distinction between having been educated at an elite boys' school, while not being personally elitist nor entitled. It is possible that these specific re-workings, within the narratives of elite boys' schooling, would be less necessary for those old boys who were more secure in their gender and social class privilege, and would therefore be less inclined to drawn on similar discursive constructions.

For these men, the realisation of full social acceptance is conditional on them publicly rationalising and re-evaluating certain negative associations about elite boys' schooling. Through a rejection of the economically privileged education from which they have benefited, and an amplification of meritocracy, commitment to hard work, and individual talent, they are able to justify the positionality they maintain. Further, they are able to achieve this without having to sacrifice material comfort and status, nor by making a direct contribution to the activism and advocacy needed to dismantle the power and privilege they claim to reject.

11.3. Practices of Disavowal

While reflecting on their experiences as students, the case studies of Neil and Chris revealed a strategy of disavowal, denial, and rejection of having attended an elite boys' school. Most participants shared an awareness of how the culture of these schools was abhorrent, shocking, and unacceptable to many people, which represented a significant fracturing in their experience of schooling and identification as (former) students at elite boys' schools.

Most of the interview materials included stories that were overwhelmingly negative, punctuated by a contempt for elitism, toxic masculinity, and privilege. Specifically, association with an elite boys' school produced feelings of embarrassment and shame, with many participants suggesting that there was a stigma attached to their schooling. Concerns about how they might be viewed by others, as a result of their association with an elite boys' school, necessitated techniques that permitted a simultaneous rejection and recuperation of elite masculinity.

11.3.1. Deferring Culpability

Through the deployment of moral goodness and honest sincerity, the old boys positioned themselves as being aware of the increased public focus on heteronormativity, toxic masculinity, and White privilege. However, they needed to navigate the inbuilt tension of having benefited from economic and social advantage,

while wanting to downplay the privilege and material wealth they had emerged from. As Kenway and Lazarus (2017) indicated, claims to being virtuous, while also maintaining class pre-eminence 'involves complex ideological manoeuvring' (p. 265). Although the identities presented by these men suggested that they had not adhered to the worst aspects of schoolboy culture, through their commitment to being compliant and well-rounded schoolboys they were still regulated by elite, masculine norms. The case studies revealed men who had been academic, athletic, and leaders, while schoolboys, if not all three, suggesting that they continue to talk themselves into existence as privileged gendered beings (Davies, 2000). As celebrated sportsmen, high academic achievers, and school leaders, the lack of unease about their complicity in perpetuating the attitudes and behaviours of elite boys' schooling through well-roundedness was curious. As Keddie (2021) indicated, discomfort should be embedded in conversations about male power and privilege. However, there was no sense of any embarrassing or regrettable moments, nor the affective intensities of having undertaken transformative work. Instead, the participants reflected on how they had always been morally good and honestly sincere, at least relative to the model schoolboy. It was this commitment to a representation of a desired self-image that also revealed the distortion and obscuring of how they continued to benefit from being economically, politically, and socially privileged. While they might sincerely believe the moral rhetoric contained within their narratives, it is also apparent these stories are designed to accentuate those aspects of self that suited their purpose in the context of a research interview.

The experience of discomfort, through the broaching of difficult and sensitive topics, such as elitism, homophobia, racism, and sexism, is necessary within educational settings and society more broadly. However, it is imperative that this occurs with an awareness of how the negotiation of the culpable self takes place. For men who attended elite boys' schools, the findings contained within this thesis provide some indication as to the practices and strategies used to maintain a sense of self-comfort. Through disavowal and deferral, it is possible to create distance between oneself and the typical old boy, whereby plausible distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' men can be made. However, in doing so the advantages and opportunities that have been gained from elite boys' schooling remain obscured, beyond question, and untroubled in the narrative identities of these men.

By engaging in narratives that amplified their moral goodness and honest sincerity, the old boys positioned themselves as being 'more moral and desirable than the masculinities of other sorts of men' (Wilkins, 2009, p. 360). The qualities of competitiveness, confidence, and physical toughness that typify elite masculinity, were associated with other, lesser men. The language and talk that was expressed by the old boys revealed the good men approach, which is male positive and avoids the discomfort of confronting the realities of having been complicit in the perpetuation of heteronormativity, misogyny, and patriarchy. The strategies that were adopted by most participants is consistent with other studies that have revealed how discursive distance can 'simultaneously reaffirm many qualities that typify hegemonic masculine forms and dominance' (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 251). Rather than pursuing more clean performative breaks, the old boys were constrained in their ability to perform and understand their gender identity differently (Butler, 2006a). Rather than engage in transformative work, they engaged in practices of disavowal to remain exceptional men, while mitigating any personal culpability encompassed with having attended an elite boys' school. In many ways, the participants remained largely ignorant about how privilege works. While they claimed to oppose entitlement, as well as unearned and unfair opportunities, there was no radicalism in how they performed or understood their identities at the intersection of elitism, masculinity, and privilege. Their subjective formation was a difference of degree, not kind. Despite stories of bursting bubbles and performative breaks at university, breaks that now inform accounts of experiences they had at elite boys' schools, the research participants continue to engage in discursive practices that make them intelligible as old boys. Specifically, they have an outward appearance that individual achievements and success have been deserved and earned, as opposed to being the product of social class and an economically privileged education. The 'stylized repetition of acts' that were practiced and embodied while students, has resulted in the 'illusion of an abiding … self' (Butler, 2006a, p. 191). In this way, they can make seemingly legitimate claims to having achieved success, which is detached from an economically privileged education, or any advantages and opportunities that are a product of positionality. Having pursued careers beyond the traditional scope of engineering, law, and medicine, they have not benefited directly from business deals, employment opportunities, and social connections derived from the elite school network. Instead, their success has been hard earned, through the application of

innate talent and skill, providing them with a comforting reassurance that they are indeed different to the typical old boy, who is self-serving and remains in the elite school bubble. By contrast, they have arrived at employment destinations where they can positively impact people who are disadvantaged, marginalised, and oppressed.

11.3.2. Limitations of Disavowal

The participants engaged in numerous strategies to position themselves in opposition to aspects of elite boys' schooling that they believed disqualified them from full participation in social life. There was an ongoing effort to distance themselves from the dominant discourses that surround these institutions and the men they produce. They claimed to reject the lack of diversity, the absence of closeness and sensitivity, the rules and regulations, and expectations of successful life trajectories cultivated by these institutions. In sharing their experiences and reflections, they positioned themselves as being good and moral men who were respectful, thoughtful, and socially responsible. However, in negotiating these identities there was a clear awareness of how to play the game of influence through a particular form of impression management, which they activated by obscuring privilege. They sought to impress and persuade the listener by relating and making connections, and seeking praise and approval, rather than developing a deep awareness and understanding of a common reality. They sought to downplay the economic, political, and social advantages from which they have benefited, while constructing distinctions that further distanced themselves from the typical schoolboy.

There are limitations to the practices of disavowal. The obscuring of privilege, and an indifference to how things are beyond one's social position, revealed a deep-rooted feeling that exceptionality should be an enduring element of their identities. It is possible that the concealing and obscuring of their association with an elite boys' school could result in affective intensities, and associated physical or internal consequences. Understanding the emotional and physical implications of this concealment represents an important issue that warrants further consideration.

Despite extensive effort to frame themselves as being different to other men who share their educational and social background, fundamental desires and self-interest persists, exposing their maintained position within the structure of society. When critical attention is given to the facts about their schooling experiences and life trajectories, their positionality became tenuous, susceptible to fractures and

fragmentation. The identities presented by these men were elusive and fragile, filled with doubt and uncertainty. This highlights the instability of identities and the difficulties in giving a full account of past experience. The moral goodness and honest sincerity of these men was misrepresented. Their feelings of comfort and ease were misplaced. Their stories disguised, even to themselves, the expectations and feelings that were formed at school. They remain compliant, well-behaved, and well-rounded schoolboys.

11.4. Contribution to Knowledge and Future Directions

Throughout the thesis it was acknowledged that there is a need to provide an account of men who question and critique the dominant masculine discourses of elite boys' schools, how and why they reflect on their experiences, and its implications for identity work. This study has attempted to begin the process of addressing this omission by further developing accounts of students who were unwilling, or unable, to adopt the dominant cultural practices and traditions of elite boys' schools. In pursuing this agenda, the study has revealed why old boys confront the privilege of their schooling, navigate cracks in elite masculinities, and attempt to recoup certain advantages, opportunities, and privileges, while rejecting others. Further, it has provided some sense of the masculinities encountered within these institutions, but more importantly, the discourses that are created to reconcile contradictory and inconsistent subjectivities. This has addressed an important gap in existing accounts of elite schooling and has provided an opportunity to move the discussion beyond questions of cultural reproduction, of bullies, of hard men, and of winners. Specifically, the study has revealed that in attempting to engage in matters of social justice and personal growth the mere act of disavowal, and claiming a new identity as a good man, does not banish the past. By concealing and obscuring an association with elite boys' schooling, to avoid undesirable positioning by others, it is evident how much doubt, trouble, and uncertainty is present within old boys.

11.5. Final Reflections

What does it mean for these men to disavow the elitism, masculinity, and privilege they confronted and navigated while students? Is their disavowal only possible because they are convinced that their educational background had no meaningful impact on their life trajectory and material success? Or was the interview a Potemkin

I,[28] an exercise in showmanship, persuasion, and impression management that distorted and obscured personal conditions?

For some of the old boys, developing a language surrounding elitism, gender, and privilege has enabled them to articulate their own experience of marginalisation and oppression while students. In turn, this has produced a sense of responsibility to speak about elite boys' schooling and the cultural practices and traditions it endorses, especially those surrounding homophobia, misogyny, and racism. To paraphrase Orwell (2001), to 'hate [elite boys' schooling], you have got to be part of it' (p. 134). The men who participated in this study attended elite boys' school for at least six years, and by the time they had graduated, most resented the experience.

From the outside, elite boys' schools have benefited from a public imagination that perceives them as being idyllic environments that prepare a special cohort of boys for positions of national leadership and corporate management. However, in hearing the stories of old boys it appears for some it is impossible to witness the cultural practices and traditions of these institutions without recognising how elite boys' schools are implicated in the (re)production of inequality.

This also requires some reflection on my own position within this study. Specifically, it necessitates a recognition that the questions I asked, and interpretations I made, were shaped by cultural and social factors, as well as personal beliefs and values. The interpretations that I made throughout my fieldwork were influenced by my own positionality and values, and I recognise how this could have obscured certain explanations and meanings provided by the old boys, especially when they contradicted, or failed to resonate with, my own beliefs and experiences surrounding elite boys' schooling. Specifically, the lack of discomfort and difficulty in experiencing and understanding the *other*, particularly women, failed to align with my own experiences of awkward, embarrassing, and uncomfortable interactions that continue to arouse feelings of discomfort and shame. As this suggests, my own experience of elite boys' schooling, and subsequent life trajectories, was shaping my analysis and interpretation of the old boys and their stories. However, through a process of reflexivity, I recognised that I was attempting to make the experiences of the old boys align with my own, minimising the ability to reveal a multitude of

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[28] In political discourse, the term Potemkin façade is used to describe something that is designed to hide an undesirable fact or condition.

complex and contradictory experiences that encompassed an array of social categories including ethnicity and sexuality.

Eager to remove the perceived stain of their origin, or at least provide some scuff marks to a polished social background, they seek to circumvent the discomfort that could facilitate a genuine reconciliation with, and understanding of, the continuing influence of an economically privileged education, and a secure social background, on their identities. Under these conditions, what does it mean to engage in practices of disavowal, rejecting entitlement, homophobia, misogyny, and racism, while continuing to benefit from the exceptionalism and well-roundedness produced by the same cultural practices and traditions? While the participants reject the toxic elements of heteronormativity, masculinity, and Whiteness, their identities are stabilised, and any opportunity for a genuine performative break remains stuck in place, by the continuity of a gendered class position. A position they appear unwilling to confront, address, and reconcile.

Neil is a socialist, and yet he likes luxury. Chris was not valued by his school, and yet is an elite school success story. John enjoys being a full-time parent, and yet there is a melancholia for unrealised potential. Steven despises elitism, and yet lives with his family in an affluent suburb. As their stories indicate, things do change. And yet–!

The men who contributed to this thesis continue to progress along pathways of privilege, but the problematic effects of their educational background have produced troubled identities with contradictions and inconsistencies that must be constantly justified and fixed. Like 'cafeteria Catholics'[29] they pick and choose the aspects of their social backgrounds that work to curate desirable self-images, while rejecting those that no longer serve them as modern men. I have done this myself, and recognise how contradictory and elusive this can make you on points of conviction and principle. Despite good intentions I am left with anachronisms and open wounds that will seemingly go on bleeding forever. While these contradictions and inconsistencies might make for interesting stories and characters, they are largely unhelpful when seeking a meaningful contribution to social change and progress.

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[29] Cafeteria Catholic is term that is applied to individuals who assert a Catholic faith, but dissent from one or more doctrinal or moral teachings of the Catholic church.

In reflecting on my doctoral work, I am doubtful as to whether old boys, and more than anything I speak here of myself, can be sincere in adjusting themselves to a new existence, unfettered from luxurious schooling and comfortable and secure social backgrounds. The comfort and ease to which we are accustomed, and seemingly want to maintain, means that we do not truly despair for the conditions of the present, and are therefore unwilling to sacrifice what we have, for a new identity, new life, and new social order. We want a revolution without having to *be* revolutionary. As a result, the identities that we curate and perform are more about 'styles of masculinity, rather than the institutional position of power that men still enjoy' (Messner, 1993, p. 732). Our sense of self is so opaque that behaviours and utterances that appear rational and sensible, when properly analysed, appear misguided, unreasonable, and in some instances, self-serving. Much like the thoughts of Orwell (2014a) on the writing of Charles Dickens, we are 'always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure' (p. 47). Although we may like the *other*, and find their conversation interesting, difference seems to always maintain some space between us. More than anything we appear intent on changing ourselves first, and society second, if we even intend on getting to the work of changing society at all. As a result, our performances are identified through degrees of difference, not kind. While our language and talk are different to that of previous generations, it is unclear how we are to dismantle, or even resist, the advantages and benefits of our positionality. We remain well-educated, well-credentialed men, who are professionally and socially successful. We have secure attachment to the labour market. We have comfortable domestic arrangements. We have the power and influence necessary to create a more equitable society. But all we seem to do is talk, primarily about our own socially informed achievements and status as morally good and honestly sincere men. Like Orwell (2001), I heard throughout my field work:

> bourgeois Socialists [make] tirades against their own class, and yet
> never, not even once, have I met one who had picked up proletarian
> table-manners. Yet, after all, why not? Why should a man who thinks
> all virtue resides in the proletariat still take such pains to drink his
> soup silently? It can only be because in his heart he feels that
> proletarian manners are disgusting. So you see he is still responding to

the training of his childhood, when he was taught to hate, fear, and despise the working class. (p. 127)

Like the 'bourgeois Socialists' discussed by Orwell, we seek to benefit from the virtue that resides under the protective umbrellas of allyship, hospitality, and tolerance, while changing little about ourselves, least of all our table manners. Measures of diversity, equality, and inclusion that we support only serve to reproduce privilege, not dismantle it. We seek to convince others that our success is not tied to an elite education, nor any cultural, economic or social capital that was given to us by birth.

The old baggage of social class, networks, and status have been replaced with the individualised attributes of hard work, discipline, and native intelligence (Khan, 2013). Unlike previous generations, elites are defined by their achievements, and what they have done. As a result, privilege is 'not something you are born with; it is something you learn to develop and cultivate' (Khan, 2013, p. 15). This is evident in the number of participants who suggested that they have received no benefit from elite boys' schooling, or membership within some broader elite school network. As Todd explained, 'I don't think school actually helped in any way. Like, I didn't use a single contact from school days. None of my schooling itself had anything to do with how I would end up turning out.' In making their achievements appear meritocratically legitimate they jettison those aspects of their past that are barriers to curating a desired self-image as modern men who are alert and sensitive to matters of social justice. However, in doing so they conceal how their gendered class position has been instrumental to key moments of their trajectory. Indeed, despite his earlier claims surrounding professional and social success, Todd conceded that 'Bourke College has, also kind of given me, the voice and the eloquent nature to be able to talk about things with a particular language'.

I am not opposed to people wanting to pursue a comfortable, safe, and secure lifestyle, and I credit each of the men who contributed to my research for their notable achievements at school and university, as well as in their careers and the domestic sphere. But they are somewhat confused about their actions being removed from the performances of those old boys who they disavow so vehemently. They claim to be concerned about 'having' a social conscience, and achieving social

justice, at least relative to previous generations of old boys, but there is little evidence they act like it. They use words like diversity, equality, and inclusion, highlight how they have acquired a new 'language' to describe and explain their experiences, and despise those men who are yet to achieve more enlightened understandings of culture and society. However, by the standards of most people, they have also achieved comfortable and successful lives. They remain on a pathway that is propelling them towards positions of authority and responsibility. They say that they want to be a positive force in achieving cultural and social change, while simultaneously sharing stories that revealed pathways not dissimilar to the typical old boy. Far from rejecting entitlement and success, these men are determined and destined to achieve high-status, if not highly remunerated, positions in their selected fields of work. They aim to deploy the relational skills acquired from their elite education, the 'eloquent nature to be able to talk about things with a particular language'. This is a fluent and persuasive language that enables them to engage with, and progress upwards through, hierarchies of authority without fear or trepidation. Hierarchies they will use for their own advantage.

It rings hollow when men who experienced elite boys' schooling express the need for more women, and more people from diverse backgrounds, to achieve leadership positions, access opportunities, and have platforms to share a personal truth, but then seek to claim those platforms, opportunities, and positions for themselves. Curiously, it would appear to be a reality that old boys will continue to be placed in positions of power and influence that can facilitate the creation of a more equitable society (Howard & Maxwell, 2018). However, it is necessary to recognise that meaningful social change and progress can only be achieved by fostering diverse, inclusive, and effective coalitions. Thinking reflexively and talking publicly about the experience of elite boys' schooling is a mere starting point for those men who want to generate the necessary conditions for respectful allyship and coalition. By becoming advocates and activists, and disseminating their lived experiences along their own pathways, they can begin to identify the contradictions, fractures, and inconsistencies that exist within themselves, but also others. But to do this requires genuine sacrifice. It necessitates deeds not words. This can be a scary proposition for those who fear the loss of their gentility, as well as the refinement and pre-eminence that has channelled them into prestigious universities, respectable

employment, and secure adult lives. What makes this all the more difficult is that these are characteristics that had been desired and longed-for by loving and well-meaning parents. These things can be difficult to let go. As Orwell (2001) recognised:

> To abolish … distinctions means abolishing a part of yourself. Here am I, a typical member of the middle class. It is easy for me to say that I want to get rid of … distinctions, but nearly everything I think and do is a result of … distinctions. All my notions – notions of good and evil, of pleasant and unpleasant, of funny and serious, of ugly and beautiful – are essentially middle-class notions; my taste in books and food and clothes, my sense of honour, my table manners, my turns of speech, my accent, even the characteristic movements of my body, are the products of a special kind of upbringing and a special niche about half-way up the social hierarchy. (p. 149)

To abolish these notions feels more like a withdrawal, and of course, something is always lost in a retreat. However, as Hill Collins (2000) indicated, this is to be expected as 'engaging in the type of coalition envisioned here requires that individuals become "traitors" to the privileges that their race, class, gender, sexuality, or citizenship status provide them' (p. 37). For old boys, there is a need to reconcile their positionality with a multitude of identities, most notably, class, gender, sexuality, and race, which have been filtered through the peculiar cultural practices and traditions of elite boys' schooling. There is a need to more completely understand the unearned and unfair benefaction of privilege that is bestowed by these institutions. There is a need to turn one's back on privilege, more completely break with embodied stylised acts, so that one can take up new traitorous performances. It is only in the complete loss of those benefits accrued from positions of privilege that the allyship and coalitions needed for social progress can be realised and flourish. However, the difficulty in arriving at this destination is revealed in the stories of my research participants, as well as my own meandering experience. It is clear that we must drop the markers of gendered class distinction, but it can be 'fatal to *pretend* to drop it before you are really ready to do so' (Orwell, 2001, p. 156, emphasis added). This thesis, my first treacherous artefact, is far from a confident step, and highlights that I am still unprepared to drop all the privileges that come with my position.

Recognising this has created a new source of discomfort and unease. As well as disappointment and shame. Perhaps this is because individual acceptance of complicity is one thing, but collective responsibility is needed for radical change. Without old boys sharing the difficult work of understanding structural inequality it is unlikely that it will ever be completely challenged and reformed.

Unable to deny the comfort and success they enjoy, the men who contributed to this thesis claim that unlike the self-interested lesser men who are typical old boys, they are using their advantages and opportunities to help those who are socially disadvantaged. Like Neil, they will 'make an impact' so that others might climb the ladder behind them. Their efforts will ensure a more just society in the future. Of course, this is what is claimed by each successive generation that has enjoyed institutional power and privilege – things will be different in the future, but right now, I'll get mine.

While it is desirable to have individual success and esteemed job roles, and greater workplace diversity and gender equality, it is not possible to have both. The reason that marginalised and oppressed groups are unable to have it all, is because those with privilege and power already do. Old boys need to ask themselves, do they want social progress, or do they want individual success, because these are mutually exclusive propositions. To claim that it is possible to have both is to believe in the illusion of trickle-down privilege.

Had the research participants talked about success as having less – influence, money, power, talk time – I would have been able to take their claims about being remarkably different from typical old boys more seriously. Instead, I can only conclude that they should express more caution in making statements about their evolved, progressive, and socially aware identities. And yet I am still empathetic towards, and understanding of, these men. I have been there. I am still there. I get it. Elite boys' schools have toxic cultures of competitiveness, elitism, racism, and sexism, as well as traditions that can be incredibly difficult to unlearn. But if you look deep in your heart, are you really that different with your university degrees, secure employment, home in an affluent suburb, and a little bit of luxury? I wish we were all better than the typical old boys, but the truth is we are more similar than we care to admit. We have the *appearance* of being changed men, but we cannot even change our table manners.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

APPENDIX C: ETHICS APPROVAL

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Case Studies Participants			

Name*	School*	Age at time of interview	Interview date
Chris	Albion House	31	01/03/2021 18/04/2021
John	Bridge Academy	39	02/04/2021 29/04/2021
Neil	Rivercity Grammar School	25	26/03/2020 26/03/2021 29/07/2021

Supporting Data Participants			

Name*	School*	Age at time of interview	Interview date
Charlie	Paterson College	37	13/05/2021
David	St. Mark's Boys' School	41	08/04/2020
Gerry	The Cathedral School	37	28/10/2021
Joe	Foveaux Grammar School	44	20/05/2021
Steven	Bridge Academy	39	11/04/2021 22/04/2021
Todd	Bourke College	26	25/11/2021

Participant names, and school names, are pseudonyms.

Project Details

Title of Project: **Narratives of leaving and moving on from elite schooling**

Human Research Ethics
Approval Number: H19REA287

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Mr Cameron Meiklejohn

Email:

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Supervisor Details

Assoc Prof Stewart Riddle

Email:

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Prof Andrew Hickey

Email:

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Introduction

At commencement of recording, state the following:

Principal Investigator: 1. Name; 2. Date and Time; 3. Location

Participant: 1. Name; Date and Time; 3. Location

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. I appreciate your time. The whole interview will take approximately sixty (60) minutes, which will be divided into four distinct parts, of approximately ten (10) minutes each.

Before we start, I want to confirm for the record that you have provided me with a signed consent form.

I would also like to confirm that you have agreed to have the interview recorded.

Recording the interview will enable me to return to our conversation later, and make sure that I capture your stories completely. It will also allow me to listen to you more closely during the interview.

I want to remind you that you can end the conversation at any point during the interview, or ask me to stop the recording.

Our conversation today is confidential, and if I quote you in my work, I will not use your name, or any details that may identify who you are.

Are you happy to start the interview?

Personal Sketch (10min)

As you are aware, the focus of this study is on the experiences of men who attended all-boys' private schools in Australia. In particular, the research will consider the culture of these

institutions, and how old boys think about their schooling and its impact on them in adulthood. Therefore, I would like to begin by asking:

What immediate memories surface when thinking about the school you attended? What does it mean to you to be an old boy?

As we talk, you might become aware of other memories about your schooling experience. If that happens, please feel free to come back to the response you have just provided, and expand or revise it as needed.

I'd now like you to think about yourself at the time you commenced at "_____". How would you describe yourself at that time?

Narrative Prompts

- When did you visit the school for the first time? What was your first impression?
- What did you like about the school?
- What did you not like about the school?
- What were your general feelings about the school?
- Why do you think you were enrolled at the school? Did your family have ties to the school (e.g. Father, Uncle, Brother, Cousins)?

***** Personal Sketch Ends Here *****

Part One: School Days (15min)

I'd now like you to think about the people you met during your time at "_____". How would you describe the typical student at this school?

Narrative Prompts

- What were considered to be the defining characteristics of a "_____" boy (e.g. academic, athletic, competitive, disciplined)?
- How did the school support, or encourage, these characteristics in its students? Do you recall an instance that would illustrate this for me?
- What do you think the school most wanted to instill in its students? What did the model student look like? Can you give me an example?
- Is there a word or a metaphor that describes what it meant to be a "_____" boy?
- What were some of the attitudes about women present in the school? How did boys talk about women with each other? What type of language was used when discussing other social groups (e.g. rival schools, public schools, different ethnic groups and nationalities)?
- Were there variations on the model student? What other types of students were there?
- Who were they, and how did they fit-in within the school?
- How did you make sense of these different types of students?
- *What was the dominant culture of the elite boys' school you attended?*

What was **your** experience like as a student at the school, and what was **your** impression of the typical student?

Narrative Prompts

- Was it easy for you to fit-in and make friends at the school? Did you feel accepted, included, or valued? Why, or why not?
- What was challenging for you as a student at the school? Can you give me an example?
- Would you say that the all-boys' private school you attended would be a good place for a family to send their son? Why, or why not?
- Who would make a good "_____" boy? Can you describe them for me? Could you have been that boy? Why, or why not?
- *Were you able to speak back to this culture? If so, how?*

***** Part One Ends Here *****

Part Two: Becoming an Old Boy (10min)

I'd now like you to think about the path you were planning on taking when you completed school. What was your imagined trajectory after school?

Narrative Prompts

- What were your future goals when you left "_____"?
- Did you plan on going to university? What did you want to study?
- What kind of job did you see yourself doing after school?
- How do you think "_____" prepared you for those goals?

***** Part Two Ends Here *****

Part Three: Status Update (10min)

I'd now like you to think about how you would you describe yourself today. What is the status update you would give at

an Old Boys' Reunion or to someone you haven't seen since leaving "_____"?

Narrative Prompts

- Have you completed any higher education? Are you working or studying? Are you in a relationship and/or have children?
- How do you think being a "_____" Old Boy has impacted your experiences of adulthood?
- Do you identify as an Old Boy? Why or why not? What does that term mean to you?
- *Have you needed to confront and reconcile any gender or social class dilemmas in adulthood?*

***** Part Three Ends Here *****

Part Four: Contemporary Society (10min)

I'd now like you to think about some of the issues of contemporary Australian society. What are your thoughts on workplace diversity, gender equality and social inclusion?

Narrative Prompts

- What are your thoughts on contemporary manhood and/or fatherhood? What are some of the demands and expectations on men in Australia?
- What has your reaction been to recent social movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter?
- Do you think your thoughts on contemporary society would be shared by the Old Boys from "_____"?
- How do you think being a "_____" Old Boy has impacted your thinking on these issues?

***** Part Four Ends Here *****

Conclusion (5min)

Before we complete the interview today, I would like to give you an opportunity to reflect on our conversation.

> What are your thoughts on all-boys' private schooling today?

> Is there anything else that you would like to share that might be important?

> Do you have any questions that you would like me to answer?

At the conclusion of the study, I will provide you with a summary report of the research findings. At this time, I will also let you know how you can access, and download, the submitted thesis.

I would also like to ask that if you know of anyone that has had an experience similar to you, could you please consider providing them with my contact details, or sharing with them a copy of the participant information sheet.

Thank you for spending time with me today and sharing your story. I am incredibly grateful for your participation.

> ***** Ends *****

APPENDIX C: ETHICS APPROVAL

[RIMS] USQ HRE - H19REA287 - Ethics Application Approval Notice (Expedited Review)

Dear Cameron

I am pleased to confirm your Human Research Ethics (HRE) application has now been reviewed by the University's Expedited Review process. As your research proposal has been deemed to meet the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), ethical approval is granted as follows.

Project Title: H19REA287 - Narratives of leaving and moving on from elite schooling: Identities, peer relations and future trajectories

Approval date: 12/12/2019

Expiry date: 12/12/2022

USQ HREC status: Approved with conditions

(a)   responsibly conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal;

(b)   advise the University (email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) immediately of any complaint pertaining to the conduct of the research or any other issues in relation to this project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of this project;

(c)   promptly report any adverse events or unexpected outcomes to the University (email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) and take prompt action to deal with any unexpected risks;

(d)   make submission for any amendments to the project and obtain approval prior to implementing such changes;

(e)   provide a progress 'milestone report' when requested and at least for every year of approval;

(f)   provide a final 'milestone report' when the project is complete.

(g)   promptly advise the University if the project has been discontinued, using a final 'milestone report'.

Additional conditionals of approval for this project are:

(a)   Nil.

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of this approval or requirements of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018, and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to make contact with an Ethics Officer.

Congratulations on your ethical approval! Wishing you all the best for success!

Kind regards,

Human Research Ethics

University of Southern Queensland

Toowoomba – Queensland – 4350 – Australia

Ph: 07 4687 5703 – Ph: 07 4631 2690 – Email: human.ethics@usq.edu.au

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Details

Title of Project: **Narratives of attending elite schooling**

Human Research
Ethics Approval   H19REA287
Number:

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Mr Cameron Meiklejohn

Email:

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Supervisor Details

Assoc Prof Stewart Riddle

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Prof Andrew Hickey

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Description

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Mr Cameron Meiklejohn, PhD Candidate, School of Education, University of Southern Queensland, under the Supervision of Associate Professor Stewart Riddle (University of Southern Queensland) and Professor Andrew Hickey (University of Southern Queensland). The research will document personal narratives about the experience of attending an elite boys' school in Australia and its impact on life trajectories.

Should you agree to participate in this research project, the Principal Investigator will ask you to sign a Participant Consent Form.

This information sheet is for you to keep, and the consent form will be retained by the Principal Investigator.

This study has been approved by the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee. The ethics reference number is H19REA287.

The focus of this study is on the experiences and perceptions of adult men who attended an elite boys' school in Australia. In particular, interviews will ask participants to reflect on their experience of attending one of these schools, becoming an old boy, and the impact of schooling on their life trajectory to date. The research will inform understandings of schooling practices within elite boys' schools, and how they are implicated in the formation of identity.

Participation

You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview with the Principal Investigator. Interview questions will ask participants about the following:

- their attendance at an elite boys' school;
- their future goals and plans after leaving school;
- their experiences of moving into higher education and/or work; and
- their life trajectories to date.

The interview will be conversational in style, and participants will be given opportunities to ask questions or to elaborate on their experiences as they see fit.

Interviews will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. They will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient to you. Locations may include a meeting space at USQ, a public space such as a meeting room in a public library, or another publicly available place agreed to by mutual arrangement. Interviews may also be conducted by telephone or online video communication (e.g. Zoom) according to participant preferences.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary, and there is no obligation for you to be involved. Should you decide to participate, you will be able to:

- withdraw at any time, without giving an explanation;
- request that any recording cease during the course of the interview;
- request that any unprocessed data be withdrawn from the study; and
- have any questions related to your participation in the research project answered at any time.

Expected Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this research. Indirect benefits of the research may include the publication of findings that will contribute to improved understandings of the experiences of old boys and the experience of attending an elite boys' school in Australia.

Risks

There are three main risks involved in participation in this study.

The first risk pertains to the amount of time it will take to participate in the interview. This risk will be addressed by ensuring that the interviews take place either by telephone, online or at a location that is convenient to participants, and ensuring that interviews take place within the allocated time.

The second risk pertains to participant confidentiality. This risk will be addressed by taking a number of steps to ensure that participants are not able to be identified in any publications arising from the study, and by ensuring that data are securely stored according to the policies and procedures of the University of Southern Queensland. Specifically, interviews will be audio recorded for the purposes of accuracy in transcription. Recorded interviews will be transcribed and anonymised, with pseudonyms used for the names of individuals, schools and cities/towns.

Only the research team will have access to the interview data from this study. The Principal Investigator will be responsible for the secure storage of audio-recordings and anonymised transcripts. Anonymised transcripts will also be available to Associate Professor Riddle and Professor Hickey in their roles as research supervisors. The information will be stored as electronic files on a secure, password protected computer, and any paper documents produced during the interview will be stored in a locked filing cabinet belonging to the Principal Investigator. Any information that you provide during the interview can only be disclosed by the research team under the following conditions:

- to protect you or others from harm;
- if it is specifically required or allowed by law; or
- if you provide the Principal Investigator with written permission.

The third risk pertains to the potential for some participants to find that discussing their experiences of schooling raises unpleasant or upsetting memories. This risk will be addressed by ensuring that participants are informed of the voluntary nature of the research, and that they are given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time.

Should you become distressed or upset as a result of your participation, you will be given the opportunity to 'pause' the interview, or if you would prefer, to conclude the interview and withdraw from the study, without having to provide an explanation. Further, you may also wish to access one of the following support services.

- Your GP
- A psychologist referred by your GP
- Lifeline (13 11 14)
- Beyond Blue (1300 22 46 36)
- MensLine Australia (1300 78 99 78)

You will be given the opportunity to reflect on your responses at the conclusion of the interview, provide any additional information not previously discussed, or request that the wording of particular responses be changed, or withdrawn from the record. Data will be anonymised with the use of pseudonyms, and neither participants, other individuals, or schools will be identified in any publications arising from this research project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

The results from this research project will be published in a doctoral thesis which will be stored in the USQ ePrints repository, a publicly accessible online library of research papers and theses. Findings may also be published in academic journals, book chapters and conference papers.

Participants will not be identified in any publications arising from the study.

The minimum retention period for data collection is fifteen (15) years from the date of the first publication. The recording and transcript of your interview will therefore be kept for a minimum of fifteen (15) years, before being securely disposed.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's <u>Research Data Management policy</u>.

Consent to Participate

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. Please return your signed consent form to the Principal Investigator prior to participating in your interview.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Team Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Please note that you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the contact details of the Principal Investigator, or sharing a copy of this

information with them. They can contact the Principal Investigator to discuss the research project or to request a copy of the Participant Information Sheet.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4631 1839 or email researchintegrity@usq.edu.au. The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Project Details

Title of Project: **Narratives of elite schooling**

Human Research Ethics
Approval Number: H19REA287

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Mr Cameron Meiklejohn

██████████████████

████████████

██████████

Supervisor Details

Assoc Prof Stewart Riddle

██████████████████

████████████

Prof Andrew Hickey

██████████████████

████████████

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Understand that the interview will be audio recorded. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Are over 18 years of age. ☐Yes / ☐No

- Understand that any data collected may be used in future research activities.

  ☐Yes / ☐No

- Agree to participate in the project.

  ☐Yes / ☐No

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Please return this sheet to a Research Team member prior to undertaking the interview.