

**RECONCEPTUALISING RESEARCH USING AN INSIDER ACTIVIST
APPROACH TO SEEK SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AROUND ISSUES OF
GENDER**

(University of Southern Queensland)

A Dissertation submitted by
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Doctor of Philosophy

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CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, analyses, and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisor/s Date

Signature of Supervisor/s Date

Author Note

As one of the intentions of this study has been to expose and challenge people's belief systems, values, and practices, much of the material collected and generated by the study is of a sensitive nature. In order to keep the location and community members' identities confidential, figures incorporating newspaper articles with photographs of community members have been removed from the chapters and included as an addendum – or blind chapter – at the end of the dissertation. (This does not apply to the examiners' copies of the dissertation.) The addendum can be made available upon request.

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Abstract

This study investigates what can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender in an isolated rural Australian community. The analytic component of the research couples an ongoing process of coming-to-know with a need to address a community issue. Thus, whilst initially inspired by the researcher's desire to understand and address boys' schooling underperformances, the study has evolved to become a multi-focused and multi-purposed research act. Specifically the study builds links between school-based performances and community constructions of gender; pursues a transformative agenda; and reconceptualises the boundaries of qualitative research and the role of the researcher.

Conceptualised as a study of human complexity, it makes use of bricolage to merge and extend feminist, poststructuralist, critical, and cultural understandings of hegemonic masculinity and research/er positionality. It deepens understandings of the multiple ways that individuals perform their gendered lives, publically critiques hegemonic masculinity, and documents and problematises the pitfalls and potential of insider activist work and its capacity for transcending power asymmetries.

The researcher draws on case study traditions (Merriam, 1998), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1995, 2003; Wodak, 2002a, 2002b), reflexive dyadic interviewing techniques (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), critical ethnography (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) and autoethnography to mine and analyse sources of evidence purposefully collected from the local newspaper, online forums, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, local school reports, and the lived experiences of community members past and present. The research is also informed by aspects of radical (Giroux, 2001, 2003) and public pedagogy (Ayers, 2010; Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). This lead the researcher to publish a letter in the local newspaper problematising, what she considers to be, a phallocentric discourse of white male entitlement being perpetuated by a revered local icon. The community dialogue triggered by her interventionist act is documented and analysed for its transformative potential.

The study exposes links between hegemonic masculinity and the subjugation of females, homophobia, femiphobia, poor schooling performances, anti-social practices, and high-risk behaviours. By developing a conceptual framework and a process for disclosing and dislocating ideological hegemony and its associated power imbalances, the research adds to knowledge in the fields of gender and education, social justice, and nascent activist pedagogies.

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Chapter 1

The Evolution of an Activist Study

An Introduction

This is a complex and dynamic study that makes a contribution to emerging research designs and nascent activist pedagogies by blurring and blending theories and practice in order to reconceptualise research. The study makes use of critical ethnography, radical pedagogy, social activism, public pedagogy, and critical reflection tools in order to disclose, disrupt, transform, and transcend asymmetries of power linked to patriarchal exclusions and discourses of white male entitlement. The research journey I chart takes place in a rural Australian community and is unpredictable, sometimes confronting, continuously evolving, and self-revelatory. I begin with the understanding that I am an educator and a researcher working from within my own community to transform thinking and action around issues of gender and student performance. I end my journey knowing that how I am positioned – and how I position others – are key to the enactment of any research seeking social transformations. The documenting and problematising of my journey of self-discovery enables me to reconceptualise research and my place within the world.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to introduce the researcher and the study's intentions, evolutions, and influences. In this chapter I establish who I am, the organic nature of the study, and what has inspired my research journey. I discuss how the study has evolved, the questions driving it, and its key conceptual informants. Also included are synopses of the chapters and a glossary of key terms.

My Study

My study was initially prompted by a desire to understand and address boys' schooling underperformances in a rural Australian community; however, as it has evolved, it has come to be as much about understanding myself, how I am being discursively positioned in this community, how I might be positioning others, and the capacity new and emerging research designs have for inspiring social change.

My research unashamedly places me at the centre of its design. I use a multitude of lenses and tools in my efforts to disclose, disrupt, and transform what I consider to be inequitable gender beliefs and practices being produced and reproduced within and across my community. The epistemological approach I am using means that I too need to make disclosures and have my beliefs and practices disrupted and transformed. A tool that I have found particularly useful for supporting my personal evolution and growth throughout the study has been autoethnography.

Autoethnography is a highly reflexive and introspective technique that gives insights into issues of human complexity. It exposes a vulnerable researcher setting out to openly document moments of personal discomfort, conflict, and self-revelation. Belonging in the fissure between science and art, it uses mostly a first person narrative format to re-tell private details of individuals' lives with a fourfold purpose: to evoke an emotional response from its readers; to give voice to those who would normally not be heard; to flirt with the literary or artistic; and to improve the lives of those whom it touches (Ellis, 2004).

Specifically, I combine forays into autoethnography with a case study approach, aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2002a, 2004), reflexive dyadic interviews (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), researcher observations, recollections, critical reflections, and interventionist strategies informed by the tenets of radical and public pedagogy (Ayers, 2010; Giroux, 2001, 2003; Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010) to interpret and re-interpret a way of life. Instances of storying and self-disclosure are threaded throughout the dissertation. They provide me with the necessary spaces for critically reflecting upon my life and my relationships with others, as well as giving insights into how power is being operationalised within and across a rural Australian community.

Who am I?

I am a white, middle-aged, middle class female who has feminist leanings and political intentions. I live on a grain and cattle property with my family fifteen

minutes from the rural Australian community of Wheatville¹. Two of my children are at boarding school in the state's capital city and my youngest is in her final year at the local state primary school. I met my future husband – a Wheatville farmer and landowner – in the Easter of my first year of teaching. We met at the local picnic races and married three years later. I have been living and working in Wheatville now for more than 25 years. Over this time I have become committed and attached to the community personally, professionally, and historically. I am convinced that, by marrying a member of a well-known local family, my acceptance and status within the community was both fast-tracked and bolstered.

In my early days in Wheatville I had much to learn about its customs and traditions. It took me quite a few years to understand the implications of being female and living in a traditional heteropatriarchal world. Throughout my own childhood, in a large regional inland city, my mother – a professional – had always afforded our family its financial stability and security. This arrangement enabled my father to pursue his multiple business interests with varying degrees of success. My family background meant that I considered it quite normal for a female to take primary financial responsibility for the family. I quickly learned that, in Wheatville, such a model for family life was considered unusual.

Wheatville is a community where most people know each other and one another's family histories. Lives are dependent on, and interconnected by, the seasons. The town and its surrounding shire operate according to a strict but unwritten code of cultural beliefs and practices. My more than quarter of a century's background in Wheatville means that I have gradually developed an insider's knowledge of what is and how things are meant to be. This includes the commonsense understandings that farming land is passed down from father to son; that men take chief responsibility for financial and civic duties; that women are the community's homemakers, nurturers, and cultural gatekeepers; and that girls outperform boys at school.

¹ Any research that exposes and/or questions community values, practices, and belief systems is, by nature, sensitive. Therefore, all places and sources of evidence have been pseudonymised.

I was posted to Wheatville State High School as an English teacher by the State Education Department in 1985. On arrival I shared a department house with three other young female teachers also new to town. It was my first teaching position. I was 21, excited, passionate, enthusiastic, and naive. I soon found that my expectations of what the teaching experience would be did not always correlate with my lived experiences. I learned quickly the difficulties in keeping many of the male students in my classrooms engaged and on task. This I found extremely stressful and can remember spending countless sleepless nights in my first couple of years of teaching reliving the day's events and wondering what I was doing wrong. Many of the boys were highly motivated outside of school by activities such as football, hunting, motocross, or underage drinking but they could not seem to muster the same enthusiasm for their studies. With experience I did get better at managing "the boys" but I knew I was *managing* them – not really teaching them or engaging them authentically in the learning process. This bothered me and I owned much of the blame for not being able to meet their needs. Then, about fifteen years ago, this thinking was interrupted during a conversation I had with a Year 10 boy.

At the time I was Head of the English Department. One of my responsibilities was to "chase up" students who had failed to submit their assessment pieces by the due date. I was admonishing a student for not making adequate use of his class time – something I found particularly frustrating as I knew the boy well enough to know that he was academically capable of better. From memory the conversation went something like this:

Me: *So Michael, if you don't complete this piece of assessment you won't pass English. If you don't pass English you can forget about any apprenticeships, a career in the defence force, or anything better than an unskilled labouring job. Is that really what you want? Is that really all you're capable of?*

Michael: *Miss, you don't know what you're talking about. I've already got three jobs lined up: I've got the option of a boiler making apprenticeship with my Uncle; I can go cotton contracting with Dad; or I've been offered a motor mechanic's apprenticeship at Robinson's. I don't need to pass English for any of them. I don't need to pass anything for any of them!*

His reply startled me. It was the first time I had ever considered that there might be a link between boys' schooling performances and the ideological messages they receive and transmit in their broader cultural contexts (McLaren, 2003b). It had taken me ten long years of teaching in this community to realise that something which I prized so highly – a formal education – was, apparently, of such little value to so many of the community's boys and their prospective employees. His blunt but honest response initiated in me the beginnings of a need to have a much deeper understanding of how gender beliefs and practices were impacting on students' and community members' lives. I wondered what the social impact might be on a community of so many of its boys devaluing schooling.

A gradual shift in thinking

Whilst I always believed that I could do better as a teacher, I began to consider that the issue of this community's disengaged boys was far more complex than just the quality of its teachers or schools. This was a whole of community issue deeply entwined within the "structuring principles and ideas that mediate between the dominant society and the everyday experiences of teachers and students" (Giroux, 2001, p. 161). Wheatville's boys did not value schooling because they believed they did not need it to be successful. Wheatville's boys did not value schooling because it would appear that Wheatville did not value schooling for its boys.

The possibility that males in Wheatville were significantly more likely than females to be guaranteed secure, well paid, local employment upon graduating from Year 12 – regardless of their schooling performances – forced me to rethink my teaching approach. This shift led to a journey of discovery that has been ongoing. What that Year 10 student so cogently articulated to me all those years ago has been reinforced many times over by data I began collecting from local schools. I have been tracking boys' and girls' schooling performances now for many years at the high school and the town's two primary schools. Resoundingly, girls as a cohort academically outperform boys. This performance divergence is first noticeable in Year 4. Generally male enrolments slightly outnumber female enrolments at the local high school; however, there has been a couple of years in

the last twenty when this has not been the case. My informal investigations indicate that such gender enrolment anomalies are natural and not linked to gender-biased parent decisions that favour sending boys or girls to boarding schools. Parents are generally non-gender selective about such decisions. A comparison of boys' and girls' participation rates in university entrance examinations at the local high school is represented in Figure 1.1. The data consistently demonstrate that girls are significantly more likely than boys to participate in these examinations thereby making themselves eligible for tertiary studies upon leaving school.

At various times over the past decade I have been employed to work with different schooling clusters in and around the community of Wheatville. An aspect of my job has involved securing and facilitating government funded projects targeting local boys' schooling underperformances. As part of a federally funded *Successforboys* initiative (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007), I facilitated the development of authentic task based learning as a way of increasing students' engagement levels, connections to the real world, and, ultimately, their academic outcomes. In my role as the project officer I worked across five small schools and the local high school. This initiative had beneficial social and academic outcomes for many students. Unfortunately when funding lapsed so did the program.

In another initiative at the local high school I co-facilitated the development of a program for underperforming and disengaged Year 9 boys. The concept behind this initiative was to connect students' learning across their subjects and also link it to the real world. As part of this project I invited special guests to the school to interact with the students and their parents. Guests included an ex-Australian football captain and a PhD student from Papua New Guinea. The football captain came to Wheatville to hear the boys give their English and Math oral presentations. The PhD student came to talk to the boys about her matriarchal culture and ask them to assist in fund raising for her village school on the island of Bougainville. Whilst most of the boys were very positive about their experiences in this class, and some parents spoke enthusiastically to me about the

changes they had noticed in their boys, the program was suddenly shelved when the school's Principal changed. The reason given at the time was that it "soaked up too many of the school's limited human resources."

In the course of facilitating such educational initiatives, I have noticed that gains made by students in one class or in one year do not necessarily transfer to the next class or the next year and, somewhat paradoxically for many of our male students, a poor performance at school does not translate to a shortage of job opportunities post-school. I have slowly come to understand that externally imposed school-based programs, that treat what the root cause is producing rather than address the root cause itself, are capable of offering only band-aid or cosmetic solutions (Argyris, 1990). The more experience I gain as an educator, the deeper is my realisation that the issue of Wheatville's disengaged male students cannot be addressed sufficiently through curriculum reform or teacher performance alone.

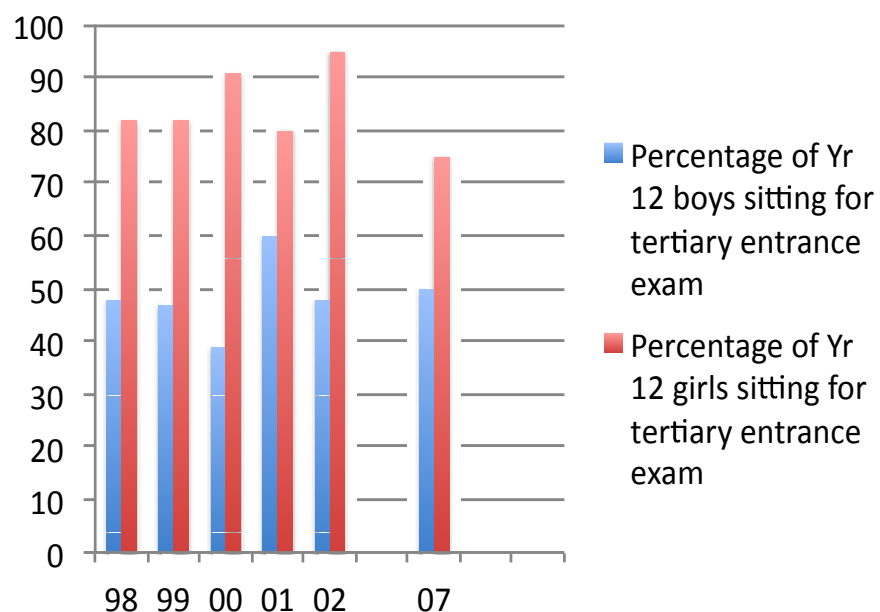


Figure 1.1. Percentages of male and female students sitting for tertiary entrance exams – Wheatville State High School, 1998-2002 and 2007

Local media interpretations of boys' and girls' schooling performances

I am not the only one to express concerns over local boys' schooling underperformances. Generally the Wheatville newspaper portrays the schools,

their stakeholders, and their performances favourably however, in 2006, a female journalist working for the newspaper published an article questioning local boys' schooling performances – “So Where Are the Boys” (Thistle, p. 15). This newspaper article, shown in Figure 1.2, contains a photograph of the top five academic students from the 2006 High School awards night. They are all female. The week before this article was published, the newspaper's editor lamented “at last week's Awards' night we couldn't help but notice the dearth of male students who walked on stage to accept a major academic award” (“Another thing” [editorial], 2006, p. 2). Come 2009, things had not changed with the same paper reporting all five of the awards night major academic prizes being won by girls (“Night of student excellence”, 2009, p. 20).

The journalist who wrote the 2006 article is an ex-teacher. To give her writing authority, she relied heavily on quotes from well-known Australian author, educator, and feminist, Dale Spender. Thistle's article appeared to have been written to challenge the public perception of a *crisis* occurring in boys' education. Whilst she used statistics to present her case for girls outperforming boys in the Australian schooling system, Thistle also argued that this dichotomy was reversed once students enter the workforce. She concluded her article with, “And always remember, the evidence shows success at school is quite different to success in the rest of a child's life” (p. 15).

The final line of Thistle's article resonates with my own experiences. Her observation that success at school does not necessarily equate to success after school – and the implied converse – is consistent with my own experiences. Whilst many Wheatville boys do not achieve to their full potential at school, this does not seem to hinder their employability or chances of financial success post-school. However, Thistle's article forced me to reflect further: How has this come to be? How is it being perpetuated? What might it mean for local boys' – and girls' – lives once they leave school? Is it, as Thistle suggests, nothing to worry about or could there be a danger in having a hidden curriculum² sanctioning boys' devaluing of

² Refer *Glossary of Key Terms* (pp. 20-23).

formalised learning? What else might such a curriculum be sanctioning? Are there gender inequities that need addressing in this community? How would I go about doing this? With questions like these racing through my mind I began to construct my research.

Research evolutions

Four years ago I commenced my doctoral studies by setting myself the goal of: *Inspiring transformative thinking around issues of gender and education within and across a rural Australian community*. I planned to make use of the knowledge I had accumulated from over 25 years of teaching in Wheatville. My intention was to identify gender issues associated with schooling performances and collaboratively critique these with teachers and community members. My thinking echoed Fairclough's (1995) claim that it is "from awareness and critique" that "possibilities of empowerment and change" (p. 83) arise. I wanted to conduct a deep and critical exploration of why boys were consistently underperforming at school and then problematise this with others in order to initiate a transformative agenda.

However, about two years into my study I realised that my perspective and primary goal had shifted. I was being influenced more and more by feminist thinking and increasingly harbouring liberatory intentions. Certain actions I had taken were extending the boundaries of the research beyond transformational thinking to that of transformational action. My research goal had evolved to become: *The inspiration of transformative thinking and action in a rural Australian Community through the public disclosing and disrupting of local gender ideologies, discourses, and practices*.

This new goal emphasised my increasingly emancipist intentions. By adopting it I was seeking to excavate, disclose, disrupt, and transform gender beliefs and practices that I believed were limiting lives. What I did not understand at the time was that, in setting out to disclose and disrupt the gender beliefs and practices of a community, I too would be significantly impacted upon. Throughout 2010 I gradually came to realise that capturing and problematising my emotional and experiential journey would be highly useful to others wanting to enact social

transformations from within their own communities. In seeking to understand and address the complex issue of boys' schooling underperformances, my study has evolved to become an activist study foregrounding self-discovery, social transformations, and the reconceptualising of research itself. Figure 1.3 charts this thinking trajectory.

This research places me at the centre of its design as it explores the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender within and across a rural Australian community. My research journey enables me to gain a much deeper understanding of who I am by problematising how I am being discursively positioned by others and how I position others. In the process of reconceptualising myself, I am able to reconceptualise research.

In presenting and problematising my experiences of positioning others and being positioned by others in a traditional patriarchal community I recognise that there are multiple groups and individuals within my community who are impacted upon daily by Wheatville's hegemonic structures and practices. The stories I present in this dissertation – including my own – are not intended to transcend race, class, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, religion, and/or nationality. In claiming that there is a hidden curriculum impacting on boys' schooling performances and subordinating and/or oppressing Wheatville's females, I also acknowledge that there are multiple forms of oppression operating within and across groups within this community. These coalesce to create multiple forms of injustice. Hill Collins (2000), writing about activist work from a black feminist perspective, claims that "intersecting oppressions" are arranged around "structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power" (p. 18). She labels these systematic forms of oppression a "matrix of domination" (p. 18). I recognise that I am positioned within this matrix as the voice of privileged white womanhood and, whilst I am committed to justice for all, I also acknowledge that the voices of some who are representative of the most oppressed from within my community are not presented in this dissertation.

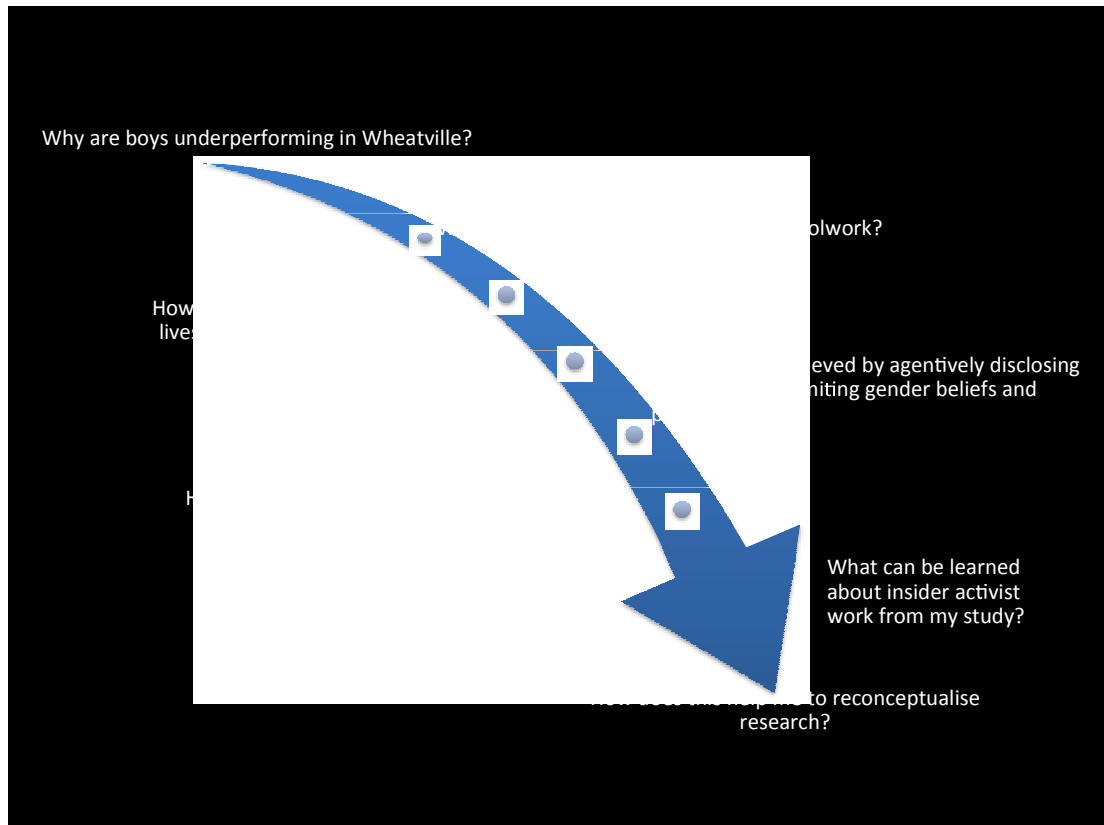


Figure 1.3. A diagram capturing the evolutionary trajectory of the study.

The Study's Question(s)

Specifically, this study answers the question:

What can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender?

In addressing this question I deepen understandings of the gender beliefs and practices operating within and across my community (*What is?*) before critiquing them (*What could or should be?*) and using this knowledge to make visible and unsettle asymmetries of power linked to hegemonic masculinity (*What can I do about it?*). I document and problematise my interventionist research journey in order to illuminate the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher (*How do I see others as a result of what I've done and how do they see me?*) and deepen understandings about myself (*Who am I?*). I recognise that my multi-focused approach is political, complex, risky, and possibly self-indulgent. However, I believe my research has value because of its capacity for reconfiguring personal histories and furthering knowledge about emerging research designs.

My overarching question is supported by a series of three overlapping and non-linear questions – each reinforced by an accompanying focus (see Chapter 4 for a more comprehensive discussion of the questions and foci). The supporting questions are as follows:

1. *How is gender being ideologically produced and reproduced through the texts, social structures, and cultural and discursive practices of a rural Australian community?*
2. *What transformative thinking or action is possible through a communal unsettling of phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement in this community?*
3. *How am I positioning, and being positioned by, others in my community as a consequence of my actions?*

In addressing the first of the supporting questions I deepen understandings of how gender roles and performances are being ideologically produced and reproduced in and across Wheatville. Through a process of exploring and critically analysing school and government reports, media texts, digital texts, and community stories, I illuminate and problematise the discursively and culturally constitutive nature of gender and its potential for narrowing and broadening our life options (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; Davies, 2005; Francis, 2006, 2008b, 2008c; Halberstam, 1998; Keddie, 2003). Ideologies embedded in the texts and stories of community members are excavated, made transparent and critiqued so that power asymmetries can be opened up for questioning. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) argue that “power works best when it is not recognised as power ... when everything seems normal and comfortable” (p. 7). My focus here is to excavate and make transparent “normal” and “comfortable” power relations whilst also providing alternatives that can challenge power bases and give glimpses of what could be. The constant digging made possible through the application of Kincheloe and Berry’s (2004) *butterfly effect* (see Chapter 5) helps to make visible and begin interrupting the power asymmetries being legitimised by the cultural beliefs and commonsense practices of Wheatville.

In addressing the second supporting question I operate as a social activist and transformative intellectual (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985) in my own community, publically and deliberately complicating the known (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). I work to unsettle limiting gender binaries so that a more equitable and socially just framework for thinking about and doing gender can emerge. My intention is to create the conditions necessary for transforming and transcending limiting gender binaries and their associated power hierarchies.

The third supporting question asks me to document and reflect critically on the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher. My approach is informed by Giroux (2001) who claims that:

If theory is to move beyond the positivist legacy of neutrality, it must develop the capacity of meta-theory. That is it must acknowledge the value-laden interests it represents and be able to reflect critically Thus, a notion of self-criticism is essential to a critical theory. (p. 17)

By capturing and then problematising my experiential and emotional activist journey I am able to contribute to new knowledge in four ways. Firstly, I increase understandings of how power asymmetries are being produced and reproduced within and across a rural Australian community; secondly I establish ways in which they can be interrupted and transformed (Giroux, 2001); thirdly, I increase my self-knowledge; and, finally, I am able to add to knowledge about emerging forms of critical theory and 'post' postmodern research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b).

It should by now be apparent that the study and I are complex, partial, and political. Initiated by an assumption that certain ideological beliefs and practices are working to limit students' performances and individuals' lives in and across a rural Australian community, my study has evolved to become a journey of self-discovery foregrounding the researcher and the research process itself.

Introducing the Study's Conceptual Underpinnings

By merging cultural and critical thinking I problematise the problematic and move beyond cultural understandings of the complexity that is the human condition to a point where I can begin effecting social change (Giroux, 2001, 2003). At the core of my approach is the conceptual understanding that the research act has the power to inform, disrupt, empower, and, ultimately, transform lives. My

approach is fluid, reflexive, and action-oriented. It rejects notions of objectivity, neutrality, and authority. Such notions are too often anchored in traditional, monological, “white male, class elitist, heterosexist, imperial, and colonial privilege” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306) and, as such, are undemocratic, falsely neutral, and themselves problematic. Instead, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) encourage critical researchers to think of themselves as bricoleurs who borrow from, blend, and blur a diversity of disciplinary influences in their quests for new knowledge.

Whilst my study has much in common with critical cultural work (Freire, 1971, 2000b; Giroux, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008; Steinberg, 2006) and critical pedagogy (McLaren, 2003b), it also reflects aspects of poststructuralist and feminist research (Butler, 2004; Francis & Skelton, 2008; Halberstam, 1998; Keddie & Mills, 2009; Lather, 1991, 1992), critical ethnography (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005; Richardson & Adams, 2005) and public pedagogy work (Ayers, 2010; Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). I use a combination of “knowing and showing” (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 767) and *disclosing and disrupting* to inspire a communal rethink capable of *transforming and transcending* previously unquestioned cultural norms. I then critically reflect on and problematise my insider activist journey to discover what can be learned from the research process itself. Whilst conceptually and methodologically messy, such a busy design is necessary for probing complex layers of meaning; creating conditions fertile enough to seed social transformations; critiquing the pitfalls and possibilities of being an insider activist researcher; and, ultimately, contributing to meta-theory (Giroux, 2001).

Effectively I merge and morph aspects of critical, cultural, poststructuralist, and feminist thinking and in doing so pay homage to the complexity that is the human condition. I am strongly influenced by Giroux (2001) who argues for the benefits of making “connections to those too often ignored institutional forms, social practices, and cultural spheres that powerfully influence young people outside of schools” (p. xxvii). I recognise that my whole-of-community activist approach – to what at first presented as boys’ devaluing their school-work – can

make my study appear unwieldy, complicated, and ambitious. It takes me out of the classroom and inserts me into the wider community as a transformative intellectual. However, I believe that my conceptually complex design has the capacity to ignite social and cultural transformations capable of transcending power asymmetries and improving lives.

Researcher perspectives

Some of the positions from which I set about interpreting, exploring, critiquing, unsettling, and transforming beliefs and practices in Wheatville include those of local land owner's wife; mother of three school-aged children (two boys and a girl); friend; part time Head of Department at the local high school; professional female; long term community member; *import*³; and, of course, doctoral student. My various perspectives combined with my collective personal experiences provide both a multi-perspective and emic account (Merriam, 1998) of what it means to *do* and *undo* gender (Butler, 1990, 2004) in this community. I understand that, whilst my observations, interpretations, actions, and analyses come from one – albeit multiply positioned – perspective, even this is not fixed if I embrace the poststructuralist notion of individuals as reflexive beings always in the process of being constituted and constituting others (Davies, 2005; Francis & Skelton, 2008).

Poststructuralist and feminist principles underpin much of what I say, do, and think. I recognise that my interpretations – and hence this study – are discursively constructed, partial, shifting, and incomplete. Another researcher could have accompanied me on my journey yet conceptualised the study vastly differently foregrounding different events, findings, and/or learnings. In acknowledging this, each chapter is deliberately constructed to incorporate the indefinite article in front of the words "Introduction" and "Conclusion" making them "An Introduction" and "A Conclusion". This reinforces the multiplicity of possibilities for constructing each section within the chapters – and, indeed, the chapters themselves. There are multiple discarded versions of introductions, conclusions, and even whole chapters sitting in a pile beside my bed. There are multiple sources of evidence that have

³ A local colloquialism for those not born in the district.

been collected and collated but not included; literature that has been read but not referenced; incidents that have been observed but not recorded. Whilst there are structural and conceptual threads connecting all the chapters, each has evolved to take on its own unique style and serve its own particular purpose. I have deliberately avoided uniformity and/or structural repetition.

Whilst my feminist leanings have influenced how I think and my femaleness assists me in knowing the world through others' eyes (hooks, 2000), it is still me who decides what voices, stories, and texts will appear alongside my own and, conversely, which ones will not, how I will position them and with what intent. My politically motivated decisions about what to include or exclude – and how to do it – are kept in check by a need to address the research question(s) with as much clarity, integrity, and rigour as I am able.

Figure 1.4 presents a wordle (Feinberg, 2011) that I have incorporated into the chapter in recognition of the study's creative and evolutionary spirit. Wordles offer a non-traditional medium for communicating information. Words are entered into a program and then randomly reconfigured and digitally displayed. The more a specific word or phrase is entered, the larger is its font size in the wordle. My wordle is used to illuminate the conceptual tenets and praxis underpinning my research design. It is heavily influenced by the principles of bricolage (Berry, 2006, Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, Steinberg, 2006, 2012).

Synopses of the Chapters

This section gives a brief outline of what is to be found in each of the study's chapters. It is followed by a glossary of key terms and the meanings I have adopted throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 1 is responsible for introducing the evolutionary and revolutionary nature of the research, its conceptual underpinnings, and myself as researcher. The rationale for the study is formulated by drawing on my personal observations and experiences and school data accumulated over many years of living and working as an educator in the rural Australian community of Wheatville. This chapter also introduces the research questions and foci and offers insights into the study's complexity.

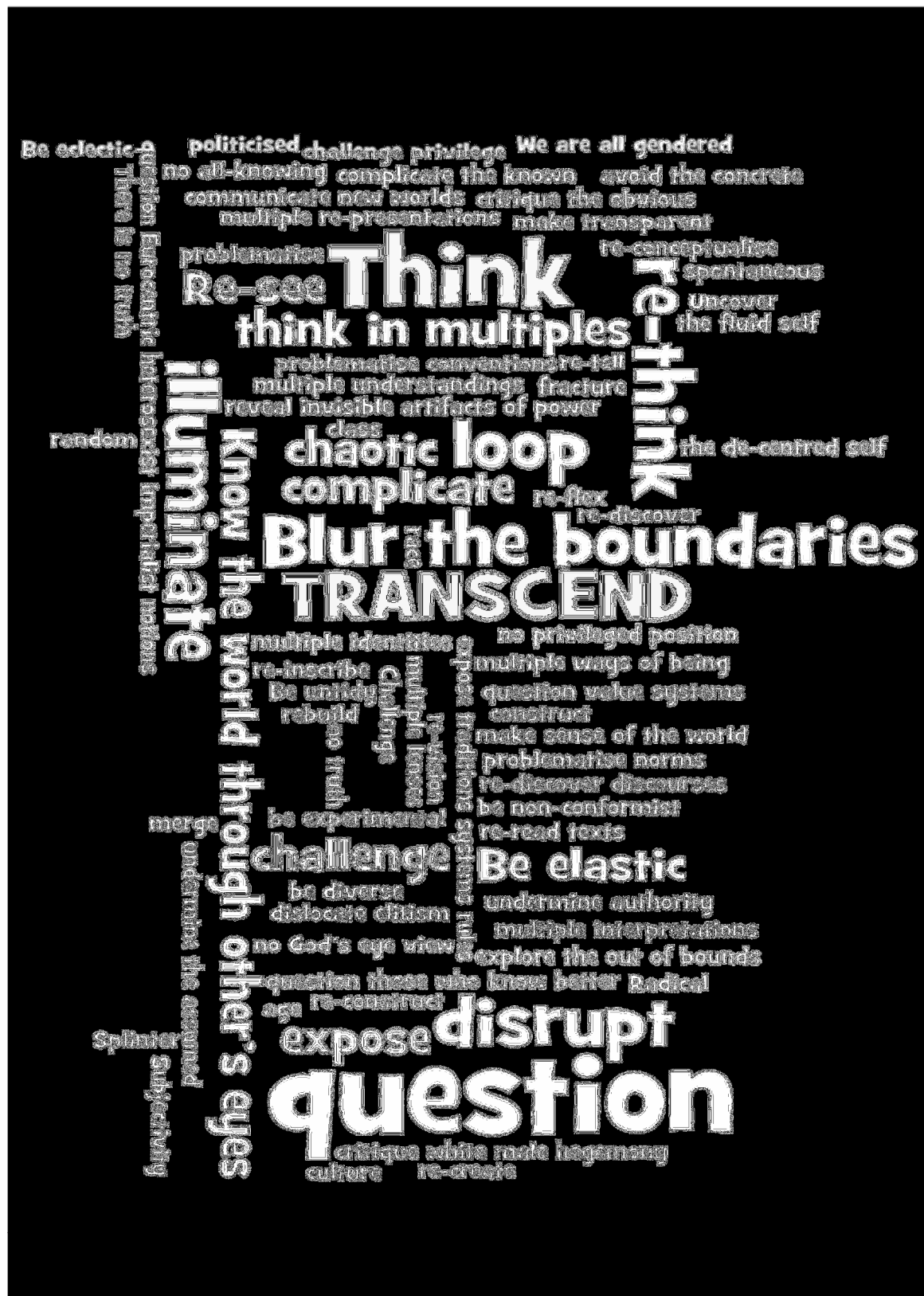


Figure 1.4. Bricolage Wordle (Feinberg, 2011)

Chapter 2 essentially functions as the literature review for this dissertation. It outlines the diversity of theoretical frames, discourses, and practices surrounding boys and their education. It examines past and present thinking and focuses on essentialist discourses which have been – and are being – used to explain and position the *crisis* (Gardiner, 2002) of boys' schooling underperformances. The chapter presents alternative ways of thinking about, and addressing, educational underperformance using a social justice lens and a transformative agenda. It introduces poststructuralist understandings of gender as socially constructed and performative. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of emerging research designs using radical theorising, activist pedagogies, and transformative agendas.

Whilst the purpose of Chapter 2 is to review what has been, and is being, done in the fields of gender and education, social justice, and 'post' postmodern theorising, the constantly evolving and interconnected nature of this study means that other sections of the dissertation will, at times, also review literature when it is relevant to the study and its findings. This blurring of the boundaries between the chapters' purposes and contents supports a cycle of continual learning. It is reflective of the bricolage design I am using and the study's complexity.

Chapter 3 outlines how I am adopting and adapting the tenets of feminist, poststructuralist, critical, and cultural theorising to conceptually support the study's complex and transformative agenda. It also introduces the study's reliance on bricolage as a framework for conceptualising and conducting the study.

Chapter 4 re-introduces the research questions and foci and diagrammatically supports the actioning of the study using two pictograms: one designed to show how the research foci align with the cycle of inquiry and self discovery introduced in Chapter 3 (see Figures 3.2 & 4.1); and the other to pictorially represent the study's process (see Figure 4.2). Chapter 4 also introduces the tools for collecting evidence and outlines how this evidence is to be selected, collected, generated, stored, analysed, and synthesised. The final section of this chapter discusses the study's ethical conduct.

Chapter 5 functions as the first of the three data chapters. It provides a broad but brief socio-diagnostic inventory of Wheatville as a means of contextualising the

research site and situating me within it. In this chapter I make use of demographic data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), newspaper texts, personal stories, and recollections. These multiple sources of evidence work to illuminate the dominant political, financial, educative, historical, cultural, and social practices and beliefs of the community.

Chapter 6 positions interview extracts beside and against electronic communications, school reports, local media texts, their analyses, and my own reflections, recollections, and observations in order to establish links between student performances and the community's ideological constructions of gender. The open-ended and conversational (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) tone evident in the extended interview extracts allows for an "evolving criticality" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 304) as research participants begin to re-see and rethink gender hegemonies. It is in providing a range and balance of my own and others' voices that a deep knowledge of the gender beliefs and practices of this community is realised.

A consequence of the extended interview extracts is that Chapter 6 has become necessarily lengthy. In consideration of this I have divided it into two broad but overlapping sections: one focussing on how gender is being constituted within schools; the other exploring how gender is being constituted across the wider community. I have labelled these sections Part A and Part B respectively. However, as with nearly everything about this research, it is impossible to keep the intentions of these sections from overlapping and there are moments when the contents of Parts A and B could justifiably be interchanged. My research journey continues to affirm for me that life and its complexities are not something to be easily compartmentalised.

The final pages of Chapter 6 are dedicated to exploring ways of being that operate as paradoxes or inconsistencies to the norm. Such contradictions and bifurcations⁴ are essential in helping to *delegitimise* patriarchy and the limiting gender binaries it supports.

⁴ Berry (2004) describes bifurcations as, "unexpected points at which the bricoleur favours one response or strand of knowledge over another" (p. 132).

Chapter 7 documents my activist journey as I set about inspiring transformative thinking and action around issues of gender from within my own community. Using a mostly diary entry format, this chapter provides a first hand account of an insider activist researcher struggling to make transparent, publically challenge, and unsettle phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement in a rural Australian community.

Chapter 8 provides a macro-analysis of the three data chapters. In so doing it explores whether the research has been successful in addressing the three supporting research questions. The chapter critically analyses how beliefs and practices steeped in masculine hegemony and phallogentrism are being produced and reproduced in Wheatville. It examines the cost to individuals of being constituted and policed by these limiting ideological constructs. It also explores how I have been positioned – and positioned others – as a consequence of my activist work.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, takes a holistic view of the research as it illuminates how the study has extended the boundaries of qualitative research. It addresses the overarching research question by establishing what has been learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender.

A Glossary

Commonsense: This is often given as the reason for why things are as they are. It refers to a “limited mode of self-consciousness, contradictory in nature and ill-equipped to grasp either the force behind it or its effects on the social reality” (Giroux, 2001, p. 152). Commonsense understandings need to be critically interrogated and demystified (Giroux, 2001).

Culture: A given society’s culture is discursively constituted by the ideological and political forces transmitted through the institutions, social practices, values, and lived experiences of its groups and social formations (Giroux, 2001). I interpret cultures to be fluid, thereby through political and cultural action capable of transformations. Giroux (2001) claims that:

In the most general sense, culture is defined as constituted by the relations between different classes and groups bounded by structural forces and material conditions and informed by a range of experiences mediated, in part, by the power exercised by a dominant society” (p. 163).

Discursive practices: McLaren (2003a) describes discursive practices as “the rules by which discourses are formed, rules that govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen” (p. 83).

Gender: In defining gender I look through poststructural feminist lenses to argue that our gendered identities are socially and discursively constructed – not biologically predetermined (Francis, 2006, 2008c). This interpretation avoids a conflation of sex and gender.

Gender binaries: Gender binaries is a term used to describe the naturalising of patriarchy into two opposing categories – male and female. Hill Collins (2001) argues that “[i]n binary thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled” (p. 70). Gender binaries work to oppress those who do not prescribe to hegemonic versions of masculinity: “The dual Others to normative heterosexual masculinities in schools are girls/women and non-macho boys/men” (Epstein, 2005, p. 263). Categorising gender using a dualistic notion fails to consider the constitutive nature of gender and the multiplicity of ways that individuals perform their gendered identities.

Hegemony: This term describes a system of social control by one group over others. Fairclough (1995) understands hegemony as “leadership as well as domination across the economic, political, cultural and ideological domains of a society” (p. 76).

Hegemonic masculinity: In accepting that there are multiple ways of performing masculinities, hegemonic masculinity refers to those forms of masculinity which give particular ways of performing it cultural superiority and authority over others (Connell, 1995).

Heteropatriarchal: This term, originally coined by Valentine (1993) is used to describe a process of socio-sexual power relations informed by a belief that the

singular purpose of sexuality is for reproduction. Heteropatriarchal communities are:

Organized around the construction of heterosexuality as the dominant and 'normal' form of sexual identity. This view of sexuality is directly dependent upon a binary system of masculine and feminine gender identities that are believed to coincide directly with male and female sexed bodies. (Myslik, 1996, p. 158)

Hypermasculine: Connell (1995) has coined this term to describe a limiting ideological framework that embraces power over others, a sense of white male entitlement, physical prowess and aggression, risk taking behaviour, and the objectification, denigration, and/or domination of females (Keddie, 2003, 2007; Martino, 1997).

Ideologies: These are the belief systems, often taken for granted, being produced and reproduced in daily life. Giroux (2001) argues that ideologies can be both conscious and subconscious. They provide the historically structured truth claims that govern individuals' and communities' actions, practices, and lives. Whilst ideologies are discursively mediated and perpetuated through media platforms, social groups, and institutions, Giroux's understanding of them is that they are produced and reproduced through human agency and, therefore, positioned within psychological and subjective referents.

Ideological hegemony: Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) define ideological hegemony as "the cultural forms, the meanings, the rituals, and the representations that produce consent to the status quo and individuals' particular places within it" (p. 422). It is the cultural format through which power is operationalised within and across communities.

Masculinities: This term was first used by Connell (1995) to acknowledge the multitudinous ways of performing masculinity. Halberstam (1998) has since argued the case for a version of female masculinity. Keddie (2001) claims that masculinity is "fluid and tenuous; culturally and historically located; continuously and actively constructed within social practice; contextual and multifaceted; layered and often contradictory; and dynamic and malleable to deconstruction"

(p. 73). She claims masculinities are hierarchically structured and “organised around class, race and sexualities” (p. 73). Some are dominant and others subordinate. They are policed by social and cultural understandings and practices. This term acknowledges the influence of poststructural feminist thinking and the discursive and cultural construction of gender performances.

Masculine hegemony: This refers to the authorising and legitimising of patriarchy. Masculine hegemony “guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

Phallocentric discourses of white male entitlement: This term refers to discursive constructions of masculinity that confirm dominance and power over others through the use of the symbol of the phallus or sexual superiority. Phallocentric discourses of white male entitlement privilege an elite all-male group whilst subordinating those who do not belong to the dominant social order.

Postmodern: Postmodern is interpreted as meaning the social transformation that has taken place in society since the end of the Cold War (1945-1991). This includes new forms of capitalism, new technologies, and interpretations in the social sciences (Malpas, 2001).

The hidden curriculum: McLaren (2003a) uses this term to refer to “the unintended outcomes of the schooling process” (p. 86). Giroux (2001) describes the hidden curriculum as the historical and sociological structures perpetuated daily through routines and practices which have become normalised and are working to maintain power inequities that privilege some whilst marginalising others. I am extending the use of the term beyond the school setting to encompass the ideologies, values, practices, expectations, political structures, and dominant discourses of communities and the capacity these influences have for shaping individuals’ performances and lives.

A Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research, the researcher, and my activist intentions. These intentions are unashamedly political and closely linked to the personal. Whilst the study originally set out to explore and interrupt discursive constructions of boys as failing students, it gradually evolved to become a study of self-discovery with the reconceptualising of research at its core. The study functions to extend 'post' postmodern research designs by blending and blurring paradigmatic boundaries and refusing to adopt a neutral stance. It is loaded research that actively seeks to interrupt commonsense gender beliefs and practices in one rural Australian community thereby creating the conditions for the emergence of positive, long term, social change. By documenting and problematising the emotional and experiential journey I undertake in the process of doing this, I am able to provide both a model for inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery and a process for action for others who wish to address power asymmetries and social inequities from inside their communities. In carrying out my research I learn as much about myself as I do about my community. I also gain valuable insights into the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher.

Figure 1.2. A newspaper article questioning the absence of boys at the local high school awards night (*The WheatvilleTimes*, 2006, p. 15).

Chapter 2

Blurring Boundaries and Converging Fields

An Introduction

Whilst issues of an educational nature were responsible for inspiring this research, the study has evolved to foreground the research process itself. Working from within my own community, I set about examining what can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender. Specifically I explore how gender is being constituted and policed in and across a rural Australian community, expose and irritate phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement, and critically reflect on how my interventionist approach has positioned me – and others – within my community. It is through problematising my insider activist journey that I am able to reconceptualise research and my place within the world.

Chapter 1 situated the research, introduced the research questions, and established the study's evolving nature. This chapter explores what is already known and builds links across gender and education, rurality, social justice, and emerging forms of 'post' postmodern research. Drawing from such a diversity of knowledge is in keeping with the complex and evolving nature of my study. Figure 2.1 diagrammatically represents three key fields of knowledge used to inform the study's epistemological and ontological direction. Whilst these fields are more than capable of standing alone – and some could be sub-divided yet further – they occupy zones of convergence and overlap. It is within these blurred boundaries and junctures that my insider activist study resides.

Gender, Education, and Rurality

Much of the literature in this chapter has as its focus what is, has been, or could be happening in schools. Repeatedly throughout the chapter, I build links between discursive constructions of gender in schools and discursive constructions of gender in the wider community. Understanding the importance of these links is fundamental to understanding why I have chosen to construct this research using a whole-of-community approach rather than a school-based one.

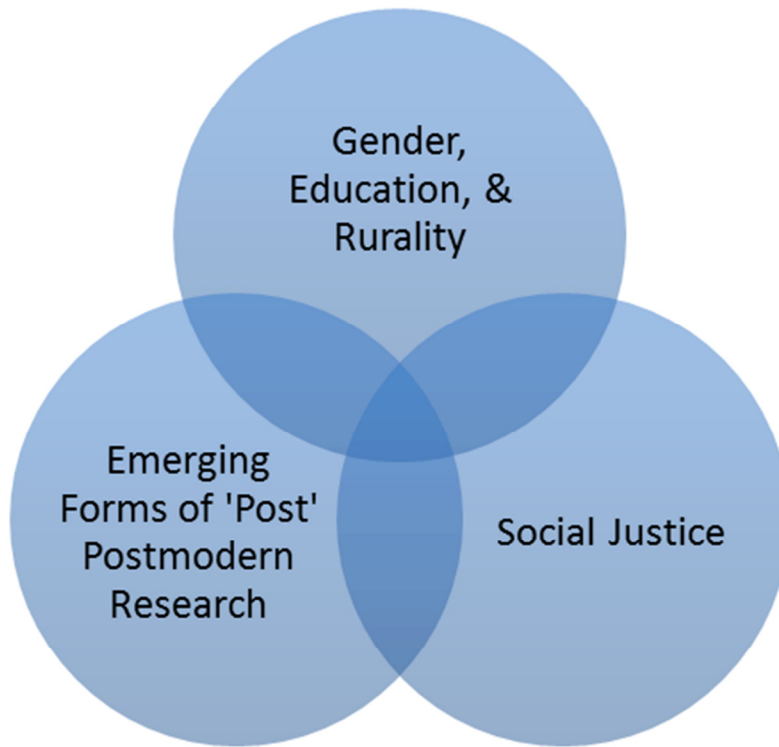


Figure 2.1. Three overlapping fields of knowledge that act as informants to this study

How gender is discursively constructed through the language choices made by teachers, publishers, journalists, political leaders, cultures, institutions, groups, and historical movements contributes to the ways in which individuals constitute and re-constitute their identities, relationships, and performances (Davies, 2005; A. Jones, 1997). In this section I explore historical constructions of gender before focussing on *poor boys*’, *failing boys*’, and *boys will be boys*’ discourses and building links between these, student performances, rurality, and under-researched approaches colonising teacher practices (Keddie & Mills, 2007).

Historical constructions of gender

The shifting nature of discourse is sometimes more evident when analysing texts from the past. Historical documents can be useful for making transparent how some gender beliefs and practices that once seemed normal and comfortable can, over time, appear inappropriate, inequitable, or even oppressive. A critical reading of mid 20th century texts using a 21st century feminist perspective is able to illuminate how power asymmetries founded in patriarchal discourses can be perpetuated within organisations and across communities. Critiquing these texts

is also useful for illuminating the fluidity of gender discourses and cultures over time.

The 19th and early 20th centuries saw the birth of the feminist movement across Western societies. A central plank of this movement was women's suffrage and making visible the invisible. The feminist movement challenged discursive constructions of gender perpetuating traditional patriarchal gender roles. It used discourses of resistance to question power inequities, class division, and capitalism (Giddens, 1984). Today the movement is known as first wave feminism. It has been followed by two further discursive and ideological shifts known, respectively, as second and third wave feminism (Francis, 2008b). First wave feminism questioned what was seen as the hidden curriculum preparing girls for future roles as obedient, subservient, service providers (Francis, 2008b). Its proponents argued that women were being raised to be second class citizens in a patriarchal world where they did not have the right to vote, paid work, or a university education.

Figure 2.2 presents an extract, supposedly taken from a mid 20th century school textbook, where gender is constructed using a discourse of white male entitlement. Originally emailed to me by a colleague, the authenticity of the text has proven difficult to ascertain. The extract gives advice to schoolgirls about how to sexually gratify and serve their future husbands. An internet blog site devoted to discussing the text's veracity initially triggers a discourse claiming that it is a mock-up – "The world it depicts probably never existed" ("Cautionary advice to young ladies - and internet users", 2010) – before bloggers change course to claim that it is most likely an authentic representation of gender beliefs and expectations from the 1950s and 1960s:

I cannot produce copies of the magazines or books that are discussed here. I can say that ... the attitudes and beliefs communicated by the articles and books described in this post existed, and were written about and advocated in popular literature of my grandparent's, parent's and my own 1940s & 1950s lives. (Jim, 2010)

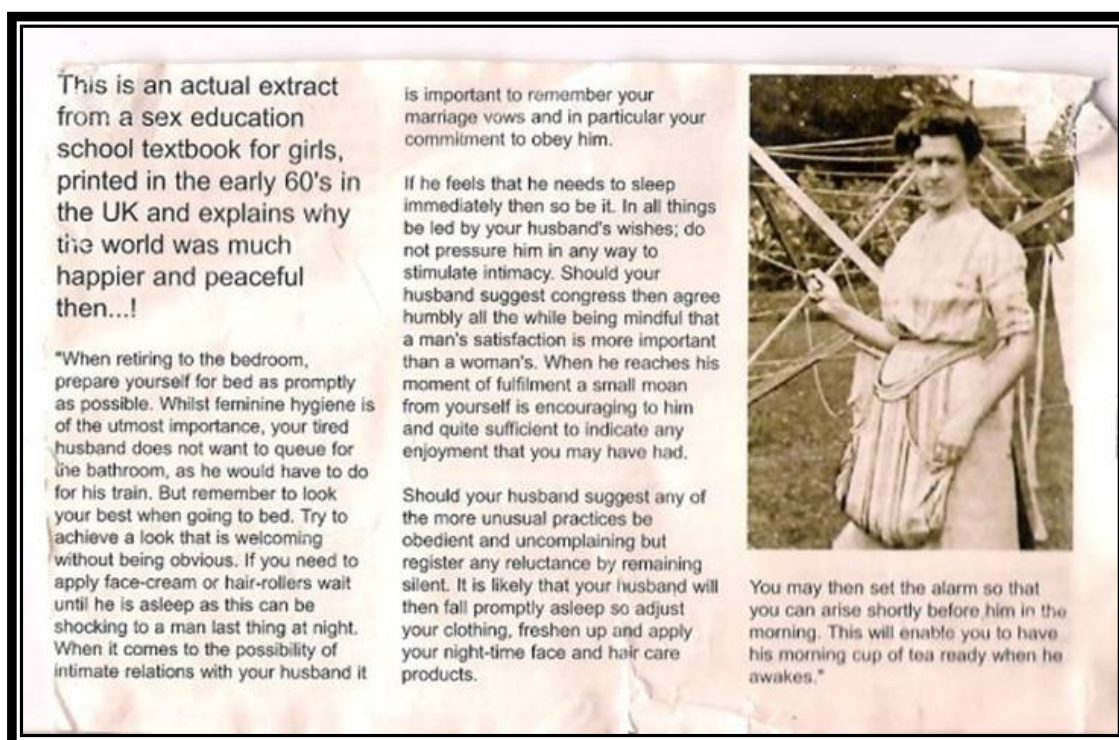


Figure 2.2. A purported extract from a mid 20th century school textbook

This blogger draws on personal experience to argue that the construction of gender roles represented in the text is culturally accurate. He is scathing in his criticism of others who dismiss the text as a hoax: "The greatest ignorance is the presumption that things have always been as they are today, and are likely to continue that way" (Jim, 2010). This claim acknowledges the fluidity of culture and gender roles.

A 1963 minute paper circulated internally by the Australian Department of Fair Trade would appear to provide further evidence for Jim's (2010) claims regarding mid 20th century gender attitudes and beliefs. The paper, represented in Figure 2.3, uses a discourse of discrimination against women to justify why females should be considered as unsuitable for positions as trade commissioners. In a speech delivered at a 2006 government function to mark the 40th anniversary of the end of the marriage bar – a law which made it compulsory for women to resign from their government positions upon marriage – a senior public servant official verified the authenticity of the minute paper (Briggs, 2006). The discourses

and practices it sanctions would now be in contravention of the Sex Discrimination Act (Australian Government, 1984).

These historical texts are representative of discursive constructions of gender that position females as second-class citizens in a two-tiered social hierarchy. The texts also elucidate how discourses and cultural practices – once considered normal and acceptable – can, over time, become ideologically and politically defunct. The fluidity of cultures, discourses, and ideologies is a poststructuralist concept that is central to this study.

First wave feminism culminated in the 1960s with equal pay, education, and work rights for women. However, whilst this original feminist movement freed women to participate in paid work, it did so with little or no renegotiation of their domestic duties. Second wave feminism, which flourished during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, sought equal employment opportunities and pay for women and emphasised the role of gender in the field of education. Supported in Australia by Greer (1971) and Spender (1989), one of its key concerns was that schools were places where boys were advantaged and girls were ignored: “Boys talk more, make more demands, question and challenge more ... girls ... are expected to be dependent and docile” (Spender, 1989, p. 59). Spender argued that boys received preferential treatment at school as was evidenced by their superior academic performances – particularly in the high status subject areas of Mathematics and Science. These achievements were presented as proof of a schooling system that was systematically disadvantaging girls.

In Australia, from the mid 1980s through the 1990s, political discourses and educational policies (Australian Government, 1987, 1993, 1996) used liberal feminist perspectives to widen options for girls so that they too would be able to thrive academically, socially, and post-school. Emphasis was placed on encouraging girls into the areas of Mathematics and Science – areas traditionally considered the domain of males. This explicit categorising of certain subjects as masculine (Mathematics, Science, Technical Studies) and others as feminine (English, Languages, Drama, Art), worked to reinforce gender binaries operating within schools (Francis, 2000). Boys’ subjects were associated with the more

highly prized virtues of rationality and reason whilst girls' subjects were considered to be those associated with emotion and subjectivity (2000).

Poor boys' and failing boys' discourses

It is ironic that, 20 years after gender equity policies were being designed to widen options for girls, statistics are now being used by media and political discourses to represent boys as failing at school – even in their areas of traditional strength. Poor boys' and failing boys' discourses construct boys as society's new disadvantaged (see Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2003; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007; Department of Education Science and Training, 2003-2005; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002) and have been used to portray males as needing to reclaim ground lost to women's rights movements and disproportionately high numbers of achieving female students (Charlton, Mills, Martino, & Beckett, 2005; Kenway, 1995, 1997; McLean, 1996, 1997; Mills, 2004; Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2007). Australian newspaper headlines such as "Girls pip boys in student scores" (Chilcott & Johnstone, 2009, p. 15), "Top marks go to the girls" (Livingstone, 2006, pp. 8-9), and "Women doing ok but men lagging behind" (Ross, 2011, p. 21) and British headlines such as "Girls surge ahead at GCSE to open up record gender gap at 16" (Shepherd, 2011) and "GCSE results: Boys slipping further behind girls despite exam changes" (Paton, 2011), are helping to contribute to a discursive construction of females as society's educational "winners" with males positioned as its "losers".

Whilst such discourses are littered with "evidence" that girls are outperforming boys at school and university – "Women enrolled at a consistently higher rate than men, passed at higher rates, dropped out less and were almost 50 per cent likelier to do some of their study overseas" (Ross, 2011, p. 21) – a major dilemma for girls seems to begin once they enter the world of work. In 2008 the average weekly income for females in the state was \$969.90. This compared to the male income of \$1124.40 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008a).

MINUTE PAPER

THE DIRECTOR:WOMEN TRADE COMMISSIONERS ?

Even after some deliberation, it is difficult to find reasons to support the appointment of women Trade Commissioners.

In countries where publicity media is well developed, such as North America and England and where there are no other major drawbacks, such as the Islamic attitude towards women, a relatively young attractive woman could operate with some effectiveness, in a subordinate capacity. As she would probably be the only woman Assistant Trade Commissioner in the whole area, as other countries employ women in this capacity hardly at all, she could attract a measure of interest and publicity.

If we had an important trade in women's clothing and accessories, a woman might promote this more effectively than a man.

Even conceding these points, such an appointee would not stay young and attractive for ever and later on could well become a problem.

It is much easier to find difficulties, some of which spring to mind are:-

- (i) Women are not employed, except to an extremely minor degree, as career Trade Commissioners in any known service;
- (ii) It is difficult to visualize them as Trade Commissioners, firstly because they could not mix nearly as freely with businessmen as men do. Most mens clubs, for instance, do not allow women members; *
- (iii) Relationships with businessmen would tend to be somewhat formal and guarded on both sides. This would make it more difficult for a woman to obtain information; *
- (iv) It is extremely doubtful if a woman could, year after year, under a variety of conditions, stand the fairly severe strains and stresses, mentally and physically, which are part of the life of a Trade Commissioner;
- (v) A man normally has his household run efficiently by his wife, who also looks after much of the entertaining. A woman Trade Commissioner would have all this on top of her normal work;
- (vi) If we engaged single graduates as trainees, most of them would probably marry within five years;
- (vii) If we recruited from the business world, we would have a much smaller field from which to recruit, as the number of women executives in business is quite small;
- (viii) A spinster lady can, and very often does, turn into something of a battleaxe with the passing years. A man usually mellows,

4

- (ix) A woman would take the place of a man and preclude us from giving practical experience to one male officer. She could marry at any time and be lost to us. She could not be regarded as a long term investment in the same sense as we regard a man.

CONCLUSION

It would seem that the noes have it.

ai
(A. R. Taysom)

13th March, 1963.

P.S.

I have since ascertained the following, which, it would seem, only serves to support the foregoing views -

Mr. H.W. Woodruff, U.K. Trade Commissioner:

They have a few women Trade Commissioners but only in capital city posts, for they have found that women cannot operate where contact with businessmen is necessary.

The women are fairly senior people from the U.K. Departments and presumably handle trade policy work only.

Mr. N. Parkinson, External Affairs:

Since their recruitments of trainees are made under the Public Service Act, there is no way of precluding women from applying and in fact, many more applications are received from women than from men. Some are chosen and all appointments are made on the basis of the quality of their educational achievements. About one woman is appointed to every twelve men. This year one out of sixteen, last year one out of twelve and the previous year, none.

They have to be trained for 18 months before going to their first post. The average marries within five years.

It is a very expensive process, but External Affairs lack courage to slam the door because of parliamentary opinion, pressure groups and so on.

ai
(A. R. Taysom)

Figure 2.3. An interdepartmental minute paper from the 1960s

Unfortunately, girls' inferior earning capacity post-school and/or university does not seem to be as politically or media marketable as discourses focussing on boys' poor schooling performances. Acknowledging and understanding such disparities is giving rise to a third or new wave of feminism. Francis (2008b), who works within the context of education and claims to be a member of this movement, describes third wave feminism as an approach which uses social learning and poststructuralist theorising to further understandings about boys' and girls' schooling and life performances.

Francis (2008b) argues that political and media pre-occupation with poor boys' and failing boys' discourses is the result of a world which has come to rely heavily on high levels of literacy and diverse forms of communication – areas traditionally considered the domain of girls – and less on manufacturing skills – an area considered the domain of boys. Hence, as jobs with higher literacy skills command higher wages, the “What about the boys?” discourse gathers momentum (2008b). Additionally, many boys are also needing to contend with discourses which work to constitute them in ways that encourage a level of contempt for literacy and humanities based subjects (Reay, 2005) – or even school itself.

Hegemonic masculinity

The Men's Rights Movement has been gathering momentum in Western cultures since the late 1970s (Bloodwood, 1997). This feminist backlash promotes a notion of men as having become overly feminised and, consequently, needing to win back lost ground. Qualities constituted as appropriately masculine by this movement include, “physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty, control, assertiveness, self-reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity and rationality” (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2005, pp. 41-42). Qualities considered unsuitable for men are often those associated with femininity. Discourses encouraging men to reclaim their lost masculinity have been broadcast by mainstream media outlets in Australia for many years. A 2003 headline on the front page of Australia's *Sun-Herald Magazine* (Hammerschmidt, 2003) taunts its

male readers with, “You’ve learnt to cook, clean and cry, but can you fix the car?” (p. 1) (see Figure 2.4) and promptly refers readers to an article extolling the benefits of returning to “The basics of being a bloke” (p. 10). A similar article in the same year in another popular Sydney newspaper demands that we “Bring back real men” (Casamento, 2003, p. 131) (see Figure 2.5).

Discourses using backlash politics seek, ideologically, to associate masculinities and being male with concepts of physical strength and practicality whilst relegating practices associated with nurturing, domesticity, or emotion to the feminine (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2005). Fitzclarence, Hickey, and Matthews (1997) claim that “the forces of hegemonic masculinity, reinforced via the media, provide young males with powerful messages” (p. 25). According to Gardiner (2002), these messages can manifest in ways that limit and constrict lives:

Hegemonic masculinity ... narrowed their options, forced them into confining roles, dampened their emotions, inhibited their relationships with other men, precluded intimacy with women and children, imposed sexual and gender conformity, distorted their self perceptions, limited their social consciousness, and doomed them to continual and humiliating fear of failure to live up to the masculinity mark. (pp. 5-6)

Kenway (1997) contests that the Men’s Rights Movement and the anti-feminist backlash which drives it are responsible for perpetuating discourses steeped in masculine hegemony. These discursive constructions tend to ignore “broad social structures and matters of power, social and cultural complexity and dynamics” (p. 4). Links have been established between masculine hegemony and some boys’ reluctance to participate in humanities and social science subjects and the gender gap in achievement (Foster, Kimmel, & Skelton, 2001; Keddle & Mills, 2007):

There is a great deal of evidence that boys’ curricular and life choices are severely circumscribed by dominant notions of masculinity, and the desire of many boys to eschew any association with the feminine or curriculum areas related to the private domestic sphere. (Foster et al., 2001, p. 11)

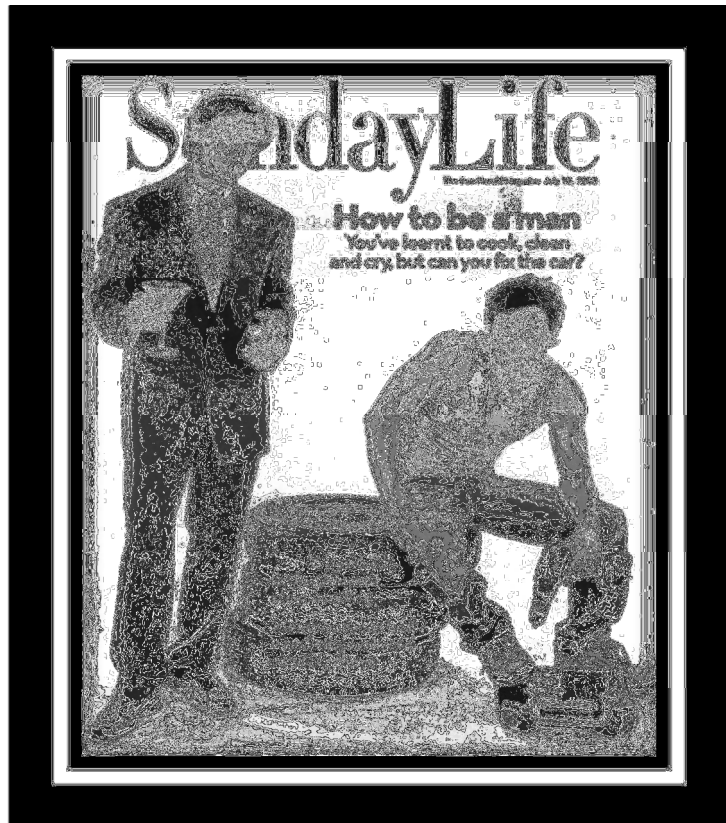


Figure 2.4. The front page of *The Sun-Herald Magazine* (July 13, 2003).



Figure 2.5. An article in *The Sunday Telegraph* (June 29, 2003).

Discourses perpetuating masculine hegemony are troubling because of their tendency to essentialise gender and construct masculinities in opposition to femininities. Discourses calling for a remasculinsation of males through an exhortation to return to more traditional ways of performing gender can be responsible for narrowing boys' schooling performances and life options (Keddie & Mills, 2007). Recognising these discourses, and understanding how they perpetuate ideologies that delimit lives, is a first step towards moving beyond them to a more socially just and equitable future.

Essentialist approaches to addressing boys' schooling underachievement

Discourses of remasculinisation have found a way into Australia's schooling systems and some of the "solutions" educators and politicians put forward for addressing boys' underachievements (Keddie & Mills, 2009). One frequently used argument constructs male students as needing male teachers. In the following extract from an Australian Broadcast Commission (ABC) radio interview with then Prime Minister, John Howard, "commonsense" is used to argue for more male teachers:

I mean there are 250 public or government schools in New South Wales, according to my advice, who have no male teachers. Now we're trying to do something about this. We're not trying to wind back the Sex Discrimination Act, nobody wants to wind it back. We're just asking that a little bit of commonsense be applied. (Howard, 2004)

Howard's words contribute to a discourse of remasculinisation that makes use of gender binaries to legitimise beliefs about male disadvantage. In this particular instance Howard implies that boys are somehow missing out educationally because of an absence of male teachers and an over feminisation of schools. In response to these essentialist discourses, Francis and Skelton (2008) claim that masculinised organisations form part of the dominant cultural code of Western society arguing that schools have hierarchical structures in which males are positioned at the top. Keddie and Mills (2007) contend that these structures work to "delegitimise" (p. 184) female teachers' authority. Howard's conservative government conveniently chose to overlook the power imbalances of many

Australian schools when designing policy responses to failing boys' and poor boys' discourses.

In 1998 the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training began an inquiry into boys' education (*Education of Boys, 1998-2001*), which resulted in the 2002 report: *Boys: Getting it right*. The following year *Educating boys* (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2003), a report exploring current trends in boys' education, was released. These reports rely heavily on quantitative data comparing boys' and girls' retention rates, literacy levels, academic achievements at school, and university entrance levels to help sell their case for boys as the new disadvantaged. The data are used as justification for directing policy and funding initiatives towards school programs designed to cater for boys.

Government action was influenced by input from then Western Australian principal, Ian Lillico, and psychologist and author, Steven Biddulph (1995, 1997). Both Lillico and Biddulph use biological determinism and brain based theory to construct their cases for boys being genetically different from girls and therefore having different pedagogical needs: needs which they claim are not being met by educational systems or practices. Lillico (2003) lists strategies such as physical changes to classroom seating, room colours, music, or lighting; increasing opportunities for boys to be more active; introducing rites of passage into manhood; and providing more male role models and teachers for boys, as ways of increasing boys' success rates at school.

Lillico and Biddulph belong to an ever-increasing cohort of 'experts' and authors using populist arguments for raising and educating boys (see also Gurian, 2002; Hawkes, 2001; Lashlie, 2007; Latta, 2009). Advice for mothers emanating from the pages of books published by these self-styled experts includes "Fart audibly from time to time It'll surprise the hell out of him and let him know that you are unpredictable and mysterious," and "Don't take any shit from him – that's not your job" (Latta, 2009, p. 35). Advice for males includes:

To learn to be the gender you are, you probably need thousands of hours of interaction with older, more – mentally – equipped members **of your own gender**. In our society, girls get this

contact from women on a day-to-day basis, but boys rarely get it from men. Women raise girls and boys – and most primary-school teachers are female. (Biddulph, 1995, p. 13)

These authors draw on essentialist discourses to provide “solutions” for dealing with underperforming boys although, occasionally, they do concede that, “it isn’t *all* boys who are in trouble, but *some* boys” (Latta, 2009, p. 102).

Whilst the Howard government’s reports (Commonwealth Government, 2002, 2003) clearly state that their aim is not to disadvantage girls, they recommend that future funding and policy setting be directed at improving learning conditions for boys. There is no mention made of a lack of correlation between girls’ and boys’ achievements at school and their respective financial or employment opportunities post-school (Foster et al., 2001). As a direct consequence of the two enquiries, significant sums of money have been consigned to improving educational outcomes for boys in schools. In 2007, the Federal Government set aside \$19.4 million for its *Successforboys* initiative, an Australia wide program directed at improving boys’ educational and social outcomes. Previously it had implemented the *Boys’ Education Lighthouse Schools* program (2003-2005), a similar initiative run across 550 schools at a cost of \$7.5 million. These programs were inherited and continued by the Labor government when it came to power in December 2007. The government rationalised the need for these programs by claiming that “boys are underperforming in literacy, are less engaged with school, and in some schools boys account for eight out of every ten suspensions and exclusions” (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007). Whilst not specifically naming girls as “the winners” in the schooling system, the poor boys’ discourse is nonetheless clear.

Critiquing essentialist discourses

The Australian Education Union released a scathing report (Davis, 2004) on the first stage of the *Boys’ Education Lighthouse* project (2003-2005). This report accused the Federal Government of practising backlash politics and being “alarmist,” “biased,” and “superficial” (pp. 9, 12, & 7) in the methods it was using to deal with an issue which “is complex and requires well informed responses, rather than the reactionary and largely anecdotal solutions the Government has

devised” (p. 2). The AEU argued that girls must not be disadvantaged by Government initiatives for boys and that any programs designed to address boys’ academic underachievements also need to address issues of gender construction, power dynamics, and social disadvantage.

Mills, Martino, and Lingard (2007) were also scathing in their review of these government reports and programs claiming the documents and programs used a neo-conservative boys’ education agenda to construct boys as victims of a schooling system which no longer caters for them. They argued that the government’s approach to handling some boys’ educational underachievements was grounded in patriarchal, biologically essentialist, and commonsense understandings deliberately constructed to fuel moral panic and outrage. Mills et al. cited the need for more in depth research that focuses on increasing our understandings of the complexities associated with gender performances, relations, influences, and identities.

Francis (2006, 2008a), Keddie (2003, 2004, 2006), Pallotta-Chiarolli (1997) and McLean (1996, 1997) also critique essentialist approaches that portray boys as an homogeneous group who are the victims of a schooling system which does not cater for their more boisterous hands-on learning style. They claim that these approaches confine masculinities, and being a boy, to a very narrow and fixed frame and fail to acknowledge the vast range of academic performances and masculinities operating within and across the boy continuum. Some boys may be underperforming but there are some who are not. A recent article in *The Australian* newspaper presents views that support the concept of performance diversity:

We need to ask: which boys? I suspect the data would show it is boys from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and regional areas who are lagging behind Some people might jump to the conclusion that we need gender-specific programs. But it’s better to engage at a community level rather than focus on particular groupings. (Gale in Ross, 2011, p. 21)

Francis (2006) identifies an emerging tendency for neo-liberal failing boys’ discourses in the United Kingdom to make distinctions within the failing boys’ cohort, reclassifying some boys as deserving whilst relegating others to the ranks

of the undeserving. In support of her argument she cites political and media discourses which attempt to position some working class boys and black ethnic minorities as almost beyond redemption and, therefore, as undeserving. The pathologising of these groups was at its most obvious during the 2011 London riots when headlines such as “British Youths are ‘The Most Unpleasant and Violent in the World’” (Moran & Hall, 2011) became commonplace. Essentialising certain minority groups as beyond salvation echoes elements of Australia’s own intervention policy. For example, the policy entitled *Closing the gap* (Australian Government, 2008) sets standardised targets for Indigenous students in literacy, numeracy, and retention well below those set for mainstream Australian students.

The rural context

In their 2004 study of students in regional Australia, Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, and Muspratt give a disturbing insight into ways of being a girl in some rural communities. Their study makes reference to domestic violence, negative labelling, and systematic subordination as ways in which females can be marginalised or oppressed in some isolated rural communities. In her study of Adam, a Year 6 boy living in rural Australia, Keddie (2007) makes mention of “the highly conventional gendered discourses that invariably characterise rural and working-class masculinities” (p. 189). These include traditional gender roles, high rates of male participation in combative sports, and the objectifying and intimidating of females.

Keddie (2007) argues that the highly structured, non-physical, conformist, and regulatory practices of schools can operate in opposition to the ways that some male students seek to perform their particular versions of rural masculinity. This sets up a conflict between these students and their often female teachers. These conflicts can present as disengagement from schooling, harassment of female students, teachers, or boys who do not conform to established gender norms, and academic underachievement. Such practices work to normalise limiting gender performances in communities. Being female becomes associated with “vulnerability, sexual objectification and passivity”; being male with “predatory behaviours, power over girls and women, and sexual desire” (Keddie &

Mills, 2007, p. 34). Homophobia, femiphobia, and misogyny are likely by-products of such worlds (2007).

In his study on masculinities in rural Australia, Johnson (2001) writes of communities in Western Australia where masculine hegemony has become institutionalised and “invisible in the cultural landscape” (p. 210). His study explores the lives of males and females working in an agricultural community in steady decline since the mid 1990s. Johnson reveals different life trajectories for boys and girls living on farms. Boys tend to go to boarding schools, and then return to live and work on their family farms. Their certainty of future employment and their farming destiny means they often have little or no interest in achieving academically whilst away at school. Johnson suggests that, far from broadening boys’ horizons and gender performance options, many of these boarding school experiences work to legitimise hegemonic masculinity and the restrictions it places on boys’ lives.

Conversely, his study found that girls were more likely to leave their communities after boarding school in order to take up tertiary studies and/or employment elsewhere. After some years of being independent from their families, young women return to their communities, marry into farming families and then, effectively, are relegated to having no financial control or power. Johnson found that the clearest segregation in gender work domains appeared between male farmers who had married female teachers. In his research he describes these men as overwhelmed, perhaps even emasculated, by their wives’ professional confidence and superior education. However, despite this, the women still “internalised, and colluded with, their subordination” (p. 205). The women’s collusion with limiting heteropatriarchal gender roles operates as a considerable barrier to more equitable alternatives.

Hypermasculine discourses

Hypermasculine discourses work to distort masculine hegemony and essentialise gender so that performing male is constructed as the binary opposite of performing female (Butler, 1990). Kenway and Fitzclarence (2005) issue a sobering warning to schools adopting and/or perpetuating hypermasculine

discourses. They claim that schools which “implicitly subscribe to and endorse hegemonic versions of masculinity, particularly in their more exaggerated forms ... are complicit in the production of violence” (p. 46).

There is mounting evidence to suggest that the males who subscribe to these limiting ideological frameworks are of the view that denigrating others, or using violence to resolve problems, is an acceptable way of performing masculinity (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2005). Hypermasculinity can lead to the sexual teasing and taunting of females or, at its worst, the sexual or physical assault of females and members of transgender and transsexual communities (2005).

In her confronting book, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege*, Reeves Sanday (1990) correlates the behaviour of some all-male American college fraternities to males from the Mundurucu forest tribe of tropical South America. She argues that both groups “engage in gang rape, using the penis as a weapon to dominate women” (p. 189). Her book details the manifestation into practice of phallocentrism. Reeves Sanday claims that, “Male disparagement of feminine qualities in themselves builds the phallocentric social order of the brotherhood” and posits that this version of “male dominance is based on the idea that men must separate from their mothers by turning women into objects that they control” (p. 190).

Phallocentrism embraces power over others, a sense of male sexual entitlement, physical prowess and aggression, risk taking behaviour, and the objectification, denigration, and/or domination of females. Research suggests that hypermasculine and phallocentric beliefs, discourses, and practices are also to be found in military institutions, all-male sporting codes, working class communities, and all boys’ schools (Keddie, 2003, 2007; Martino, 1997; McLean, 1996). Here, they not only function to limit schooling and life performances, but also to oppress females and those who do not conform to the narrow versions of masculinity being valorised.

Humour as a weapon for reinforcing hypermasculinity

Kehily and Nayak (1997) have documented cases where hypermasculinity and phallocentrism are being authorised, disguised as humour, in order to

consolidate a version of “hyper-heterosexuality” (p. 79). In these instances, humour is used as a way of mitigating limiting ideological constructs and normalising gender inequities. They report on a form of humour which “frequently blur(s) the boundaries between humour and harassment” (p. 81) of women and subordinate males. Their study, based in schools in the working class districts of the West Midlands in the United Kingdom, focused on the role of humour in constituting and consolidating masculine hierarchies and gender identities. What they found is that “sexist jokes, innuendoes and comments” (p. 73) are regularly used by male students to denigrate or upset female students and teachers and affirm male dominance. Much of the humour the researchers observed drew on hypermasculine and phallogentric ideological constructs:

Humorous interactions amongst young men were continually concerned with bodily practices: clay cocks, punch-’n’-run rituals, arthritic tongues, padlocked vaginas, sweaty armpits, antigay crucifixes. In these exchanges the disciplining process of heterosexuality occurs across the bodies of self and other. (Kehily & Nayak, 1997, p. 84)

Kehily and Nayak (1997) relate, and then analyse, an incident involving a boy named Paddy and his expulsion from school for “making a ‘cock outta clay’ and presenting it to a nun” (p. 78). They argue that the overtly phallic nature of the boys’ act was used as a means of shocking the nun and affirming masculine power over her. Kehily and Nayak posit that some boys use humour to perpetuate limiting gender discourses and promote “group solidarity and shared male identity through ‘othering’ teachers, girls, women, and those who fail to cultivate a hyper-masculinity” (p. 80). They contend that there is a need for further studies exploring the use of humour in normalising discourses of oppression.

In a separate study Keddie (2008) analyses the relationships between teachers and a Year 8 boy at a Tasmanian high school. Justin (the boy) claims to get on well with most of his male teachers but has problems with his female teachers – particularly his young female English teacher. His issues result from a perception that she cannot “control” him or “take a joke” (p. 350). Justin explains his poor relationships with female peers and teachers by dismissing females as “overly sensitive” (p. 350). Keddie (2008) argues that:

Despite decades of feminist reform in schools, a discourse of cultural entitlement prevails in terms of many boys' continued domination of classroom and playground space and resources, domination of teacher time and attention and perpetration of sexual, misogynistic and homophobic harassment. (p. 356)

A recent Finnish study (Huuki, Manninen, & Sunnari, 2010) exploring connections between humour, violence, status, and gender in the middle years of schooling argues that "violence masqueraded in humour may lead to serious consequences in the forms of, for example, depression, bullying, and even suicides or school shootings" (p.3). Kenway and Fitzclarence (2005) have explored links between "only joking motifs" (p. 44), the denigration of women, and violence against women. They suggest that discursive constructions of gender founded in traditional and patriarchal ideologies can lead to a belief that violence against women is an acceptable method of dealing with conflict. However, to date, limited research has been conducted exploring connections between hypermasculinity, humour, schooling underachievement, and the oppression of females.

The fluidity of gender discourses, ideologies, and culture gives reason for hope. In understanding that cultural and gender practices are temporal and shifting, researchers and educators are provided an opening for addressing limiting gender binaries and their various manifestations into practice. Exaggerated versions of masculinity valorising a resistance to schooling, hypermasculine discourses, hyper-heterosexual humour, and the marginalising and/or oppression of females need to be challenged and critiqued within and across schools and their wider communities. In embracing this thinking educators take on roles as critical pedagogues with transformative potential.

Using a Social Justice Lens to Address Gender Inequities

Whilst essentialist discourses have been used to promote, explain, and/or address boys' schooling underperformances, an alternative view involves linking gender performance to social, cultural, and discursive influences both within and outside schools. Keddie and Mills (2007) acknowledge that some boys are performing poorly at school, but in explaining why they claim that "gender regimes can work in oppressive ways to police and normalise particular behaviours

and constrain achievement” (p. 42). If cycles of female oppression, “disproportionate male power and privilege” (Johnson, 2001, p. 210), and boys’ resistance to schooling are to be interrupted, then making transparent and challenging exaggerated versions of hegemonic masculinity – and the gender inequities they support – are useful starting points.

McLean (1997) urges educators to capture, critique, and identify the cost to boys – as well as girls – of the discourses which inform “the masculine culture of hardness, competition, the obsession with strength and power, emotional distance, and boys’ determination at all costs not to be female” (p. 15). When left unchecked, these discourses – sometimes packaged as hyper-heterosexual humour – work to fuel ideologies that become unquestioned norms or “implicit assumptions” creating “‘reality’ as an effect” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 44). These norms and assumptions are then reproduced in communities’ texts, beliefs, social relations, institutions, material practices, and manifestations of power (Harvey, 1996). In *catching* texts in the act of constituting and perpetuating discourses fuelled by masculine hegemony (Davies, 2005) and its exaggerated self, hypermasculinity, the foundations are laid for interrupting and ultimately transcending them.

Cortis and Newmarch (2000) in their paper, *Boys in schools: What’s happening*, identify rurality and hegemonic masculinity as factors impacting on boys’ schooling performances. They also add language barriers, socio-economic status, and locality to these factors. Cortis and Newmarch posit that school leaders have a responsibility to research the social and cultural beliefs and practices of the communities in which their schools are situated so that gender performances – including student underachievement – can be problematised and addressed from an informed perspective. Using this approach takes the emphasis off a problem-solution binary and places it on problematising for social action (Berry, 2006). The complexity that is the human condition is foregrounded as the educator works co-operatively, critically, and agentially to understand, disclose, and disrupt long-entrenched gender beliefs and practices. Such an approach makes use of

poststructuralist thinking to capitalise on the notion of culture, gender, and identity as fluid.

Poststructuralist influences

Lather (1992), who describes herself as “a cheerleader for poststructuralism,” defines it as “the working out of academic theory within the culture of postmodernism”⁵ (p. 96). She posits that, “A growing concern of critical social science discourse is how to generate knowledge in ways that turn critical thought into emancipatory action” (1991, p. 12). A poststructuralist approach emphasises criticality for emancipatory action and social transformation (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008; Lather, 2006).

Central to poststructuralist thinking is the foregrounding of language – or discourse – as a means of giving subjects a sense of being *constituted*. This term captures how contexts – or more specifically, the discourses, belief systems, social relations, institutions, material practices, and manifestations of power operating within and across contexts (Harvey, 1996) – work to construct and reconstruct individuals’ identities (A. Jones, 1997). In using it to describe how our identities, beliefs, and practices are continuously being shaped by external forces, the existence of multitudinous discourses capable of influencing, enabling, and confining are likewise acknowledged. The term constituted also recognises the power individuals have to create new discursive spaces and practices. Poststructuralism encourages us to think of ourselves as constantly evolving works in progress, liberated to re-constitute ourselves over and over again (Davies, 2005). Connell (1995) relates this multiplicity of being to issues of masculinity by claiming that they do not exist prior to social engagement being “configurations of social practice” (p. 220).

Butler (1990) has made use of poststructuralist thinking to claim that not only our gender performances but also our sexed performances are entirely socially constructed. She argues that difference and multiplicity are what

⁵ Lather (1992) defines postmodern as, “the shift in material conditions of late 20th century monopoly capitalism brought on by the micro-electronic revolution in information technology, the fissures of a global, multinational hyper-capitalism, and the global uprising of the marginalised” (p. 90).

constitute gender performances – not some biologically predetermined and unavoidable condition (Butler, 1993). Butler frames our masculinity and femininity and our maleness and femaleness as subjectively conditioned. Halberstam (1998) has taken this theory and applied it in the field using a model which she calls perverse presentism to question and challenge what we think we already know. Using queer theory, radical feminism, and what she describes as female masculinity, her goal is to provocatively disrupt heteropatriarchal cultures and binary notions of gender by deliberately confusing and confronting others with her performances and representations.

However, Harvey (1996) issues a warning to researchers adopting theoretical frameworks that wholeheartedly embrace poststructuralist notions claiming that everything is permanently in a state of flux. He argues that such approaches ignore “permanences” (p. 7) which give our lives meaning. He defines permanences as the dominant social values to which most in a given community “willingly subscribe” (p. 11). Connell (2001) uses the term “fixing mechanisms” (p. 8) to describe such permanences as race, gender, and class. These can work to inhibit the fluidity of the co-created self. Keddie (2001) expounds on this concept by linking it to issues of gender and masculinity:

Despite the influence of poststructuralist theory in much of the more recent gender reform initiatives envisaged for schools, it is clear that the stability of masculinised structures remains largely undisturbed and the ways of being female, and in particular male have remained essentially uncontested and limited. It seems that the deeply ingrained and normalised nature of these intrinsically masculinised structures constitute extreme obstacles in the path of efforts which seek to contest and disrupt such structures in the pursuit of social justice. (p. 59)

The belief that the sexed body is a consciously constructed performance completely removed from biological influence is considered by some a form of poststructuralist extremism imbued with essentialist overtones (see Davies, 2005; Francis & Skelton, 2008). Nonetheless, Francis and Skelton (2008) argue that the test for feminists is:

To address the new discursive productions of subjecthood practiced within society and its institutions (such as education), and in particular to take forward analysis of masculinity and

femininity as not inevitably belonging to one “sex” or “the other” without losing sight of the feminist endeavour to identify – that we can work against – patterns of inequality. (pp. 316)

Davies (2005) relates this back to poststructuralism by arguing that:

The point of poststructuralism is not to destroy the humanist subject nor to create its binary other, the anti-humanist subject (whatever that might be), but to enable us to see the subject’s fictionality whilst recognising how powerful fictions are in constituting what we take to be real. (p. 96-97)

If I am to adopt poststructuralist theorising for this study – with a caveat that acknowledges the influence of socially constructed “fixing mechanisms” (Connell, 2001, p. 8) – then who we are and what we do becomes a subjective condition capable of constant evolution and change. Juelskjaer (2008) relates this back to the classroom by claiming that ““doing adequate boy”” and ““doing adequate pupil”” (p. 60) can sometimes conflict with one another. He posits that there is a need for studies that explore the “multiplicity, heterogeneity and fluidity in the subjectification processes” (p. 60) that lock some students into resisting schooling.

Juelskjaer (2008) is not alone. There is a growing field of research which puts forward a case for understanding and critiquing the complexities associated with the constitution and performance of gender using site specific studies (Davies, 2005; Dillabough, McLeod, & Mills, 2008; Francis & Skelton, 2008; Lather, 1988; Mills et al., 2007). Such approaches encourage researchers to explore, make visible, challenge, and provide alternatives to discursive constructions of gender that limit and confine individuals’ performances and ultimately their lives. This sort of research has the capacity to deepen understandings of the constitutive nature of gender, raise individuals’ consciousness, transform thinking and action, and transcend social injustices (A. Freire & Macedo, 2000).

Understanding the links between schools and their wider communities

Schools like to see themselves as social sites which teach “democratic values while demanding social control” (Giroux, 2001, p. 54). However, teachers often fail to notice and make explicit the links between the dominant society, its capitalist and patriarchal ideals, power, and students’ gender performances and achievements. Keddle (2007) makes note of this in her study of Adam who, as a

young boy, had his poor social behaviour excused “within a discourse of childhood as innocence (‘he’s only a little boy’)” (Keddie, 2007, p. 190). As a result, schools and their teachers can end up perpetuating social inequities inherited from the hidden curriculum operating within and beyond the school gates.

Giroux (2001) claims there is a certain irony to be found in discourses – such as poor boys’ and failing boys’ discourses – that blame teachers (often female) for creating institutions and classrooms that are inequitable. He uses the term “correspondence principle” (p. 56) to identify the repetition of society’s macro narratives at the school level and claims that the social practices and relations operating in the microcosm of the school often correspond to those operating outside of the school in the workplace and broader society. However, according to Giroux (2001), too often there is no recognition of this:

There seems to be little or no understanding of how the social, political, and economic conditions of society create either directly or indirectly some of the oppressive features of schooling. (p. 55)

An earlier study conducted by Beckett (2001) demonstrates how this works. Through her case study of Caleb, who had been a high achieving student in his primary years, Beckett shows how cultural gender expectations discursively re-shape, or reconstitute him. By his high school years Caleb has become “a youth obsessed with manliness, basketball, showmanship and girlfriends, all to the detriment of his school work” (p. 69). Beckett posits that narrow constructions of masculinity can place some boys in the position of resisting schooling and, like others (Dillabough et al., 2008; Francis & Skelton, 2008; Keddie, 2003, 2004; Keddie & Mills, 2007; Keddie & Mills, 2009; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2005; Martino, 1997), she argues strongly for schools to make teaching time available to students for the critiquing and problematising of gender discourses authorising hypermasculine practices and heteronormativity. This approach can also work to benefit the lives of females (Francis, 2008b; Keddie, 2010; Keddie & Mills, 2009).

Transformative possibilities

Instead of schools reinforcing narrow and oppositional constructs of gender with students, Keddie (2004, 2006) suggests that teachers problematise with their students how community discourses might be constructing and constricting their gender performances. She argues that such an approach enables students to gain deep and critical understandings of how they are being positioned to perform their gendered roles within and beyond the classroom. Problematising gender discourses involves educators exploring, deconstructing, rebuilding, and critically analysing community stories and popular culture texts with their students (Keddie, 2004, 2006; Keddie & Mills, 2007). By connecting with students and the stories and texts that they value, educators and their students are given opportunities to challenge the taken-for-grantedness of social systems fuelled by masculine hegemony (Keddie, 2003, 2004). This paves the way for broader, less restrictive, interpretations of masculinity – and through relational ontology, femininity. Such an approach is potentially transformative.

Transformation and renewal, in the form of changing classroom pedagogy takes time. Luke and McArdle (2009) claim that an effective professional development program can span over two decades and cites Queensland's Year 2 Diagnostic Net program as an exemplar. School renewal and transformation "requires sustained, local opportunities for teachers to learn, reflect and translate their learning into changed practice" (p. 237). I would posit that, if long-lasting and far-reaching cultural change is to be achieved around issues of gender, then it is necessary for educators to move beyond schools and into the wider community that supports them. Keddie and Mills (2007) seem to hint at the value of doing this when they state:

Schools do undergo change ... school structures and procedures are not fixed by their histories and are always open to transformation. However such transformations require a knowledge of and engagement with the local community. (p. 204)

The 'Post' Postmodern Era

In order to establish this study's conceptual contribution, it is necessary to acknowledge what has gone before. In the following section I explore research evolutions and emerging trends in qualitative research.

Moving from prediction and prescription to disclosure and dislocation

From the mid 20th century on, qualitative research aimed at deepening understandings of human complexity has come to be classified as postpositivist in design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b; Guba & Lincoln, 2008) and postmodern in thought. This type of research reconceptualises traditional approaches to research by arguing that what we do is not always what we want to do; how we perform is not always a measure of our abilities; what we say is not always what we are thinking or feeling; and our thoughts and actions are not always logical, rational, conscious, or necessarily in our own – or others' – best interests (Berry, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Steinberg, 2006). Observing or measuring us using traditional positivist methods such as standardised tests, surveys, questionnaires, or even interviews is not only fundamentally flawed but can lead to false conclusions being drawn. For instance, if I were to rely solely on quantitative data to inform my own study a conclusion could be reached that boys in the Wheatville community are less intelligent than girls. I would argue strongly that this is dependent upon how "intelligence" is constructed.

Traditional approaches applied to social science research are often criticised by those embracing postpositivist designs – and their postmodern concepts – for their tendency to maintain the status quo, be reductionist rather than focused on improving the human condition, and assume the voice of the researcher to be neutral and objective (Giroux, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008; Lather, 1992). More than twenty years ago, Lather (1991) was promoting postmodern thinking and its associated research designs using advocacy and disclosure paradigms. She pilloried so-called "neutral" approaches to social science research for drawing on paradigms of prediction or prescription describing them as "largely behaviourist in ... psychology and positivist in ... philosophy" (p. 90). Speaking in absolutes when researching human beings and their cultural

beliefs, contexts, and practices dissolves “the notions of intentionality and historical context ... within the confines of a limiting quantifying methodology” (Giroux, 2003, p. 35). It is not possible for researchers to quantify human feelings at a point and place in time; to score beliefs and practices; to calculate a growth in human consciousness, or triangulate social inequities.

For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, positivism has been used as a means of documenting the behavior patterns of minority groups and isolated civilizations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). The researchers’ lenses have been white imperialist ones – usually male – with the voice of the all-seeing researcher faded out to that of unbiased observer (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). Whilst traditional qualitative research has run the risk of editing out the voice of the researcher and creating as fixed truths the behaviours, gender and sex roles, social systems and beliefs of those being studied, new turns in qualitative research are embracing transparency of researcher subjectivity and the concept of cultural fluidity. These emerging designs reject an authorial approach whilst accepting that if beliefs and practices are culturally entrenched then they are shared, repeated, and passed on across and between communities from generation to generation. However, this is not to suggest that culture is static or immovable, or that the researcher’s interpretations, representations, and analyses of it are all-seeing and impartial. Instead interpretations offer but one perspective at a moment in time. Culture is forever temporal and fluid (Lather, 1991).

Seeking transformations

Members of The Frankfurt School are recognised as the first to argue for social inquiry aimed at identifying contradictions in society by analysing what is and suggesting what could be (Giroux, 2003; Kincheloe, 2008). Theorists from the School, such as Horkheimer, Habermas, Adorno, and Marcuse, progressed from orthodox Marxism and its focus on class struggle to develop a theory of individual consciousness focussing on issues of subjectivity and the oppression found in everyday life (Giroux, 2001). Kincheloe (2008) credits them with laying the foundations for critical epistemologies and Giroux (2001) posits that they were responsible for developing a form of theoretical resistance theory which combines

“radical consciousness raising” and “collective critical action” (p. 110). This *disclose and dislocate* approach is achieved by “unmasking” (Giroux, 2003, p. 35) and then destabilising previously unquestioned regimes of power. A new turn in social science research, it takes the research act from one of hypotheses, observation, and analysis to that of unpredictability, social intervention, and personal growth. Kincheloe (2008) encapsulates how this thinking differs from positivist research approaches:

The knowledges that emerge from a critical complex epistemology are action-oriented modes of practical cognition. Such knowledges depend on a rigorous knowledge of a phenomenon and the contexts that shape it rather than a set of abstract rules developed to solve neatly formed and abstract problems. (p. 238)

Instead of identifying a problem as something to be fixed, critical theorists began using alternative ways of thinking with transformative potential.

Becoming literate ... politically speaking: Freire's contributions

Freire (1971, 1985, 1987) drew on *The Frankfurt School's* theoretical developments when linking criticalist approaches to literacy and education with his *Pedagogy of the oppressed*; concept of liberatory pedagogy; and practice of *conscientizacao*. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire (1971) claimed that teacher and student should be considered equal. He challenged teaching practices that dehumanised students by treating them as “containers” or “receptacles” (p. 58) waiting to be filled with knowledge by their omnipotent all-knowing teachers (Freire, 2000b). He referred to this as the “banking concept” (p. 58) of education, claiming that a characteristic of oppression is its projection of ignorance on to others. This, he posited, reduced education to a form of indoctrination and a “submersion of consciousness” (2000b, p.75). Freire argued for education to be understood as a process of mutual inquiry capable of inspiring an “emergence of consciousness” (p. 75). His approach encourages the literacy learner to “read the word” as a way of “reading the world” (1987, p.69). Freire used these conceptual understandings to create classrooms that could simultaneously improve Brazilian peasants’ literacy levels whilst inspiring transformative thinking and political movement.

Freire (1971) encouraged teachers to incorporate popular culture texts into their literacy teaching. By collaboratively critiquing non-academic texts with students, teachers can connect with their worlds and its multiple representations more fully. Ana Freire and Macedo (2000) claim that liberation hinges on an ability to know ourselves through our cultures and the other. They are critical of “ivory tower academics” who “occupy themselves with high-sounding words and descriptions of ideas, rather than with a critical understanding of the real world” (p. 79). By simply describing cultures, academics fail to change anything. Instead they make “rigid value judgments which are always negative towards the culture which is unfamiliar to us” (Freire, 2000a, p. 203). A. Freire and Macedo (2000) condemn those who study cultures from afar and fail to get their hands dirty by seeking to understand the day-to-day lived realities of their participants. They maintain that strategic action is necessary for the confrontation of dominant and oppressive cultures and set about developing a process for doing so. Firstly the oppressed must recognise their oppression⁶ and, secondly, the taken-for-grantedness of the dominant social order’s power and control must be exposed and thwarted. Freire (2000b) contended that “the more completely they [the oppressed/students] accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited to them” (p. 69).

Dialectical teaching and inquiry processes that incorporate reflective dialogue and critical co-investigation for humanising and emancipatory purposes are central to Freire’s (1985) philosophy. Tied to this is his idea of *conscientizacao* which encourages teachers to develop within their students a shared consciousness and knowledge of the world. This enables students to problematise representations of reality and power relations, in turn empowering them towards emancipatory acts of resistance capable of bringing about social transformations that improve lives. Freire (2007a) argued that “when men and women realise themselves as the makers of culture ... they become literate politically speaking” (p. 7).

⁶ Freire (2000b) defined oppression as, “any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person” (p. 55).

Whilst Freire has been criticised by some (e.g., Jackson, 1997) for creating binaries out of oppressors and oppressed (in his case, capitalist ruling classes and Brazilian peasants); his overuse of the term *men* – particularly in his early work – to signify humankind; and his naiveté in failing to acknowledge or problematise the ideological or political positioning of teachers, there is still much that can be borrowed from his concepts of liberatory pedagogy and conscientizacao. The oppressed of Freire's world were illiterate peasants, but many of the approaches he outlined – once re-applied – are useful for supporting studies that focus on issues of power asymmetry, gender, education, and social transformation.

Giroux and theories of resistance

Theories of resistance (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003a, 2003b) echo aspects of Freire's thinking by employing "radical consciousness raising" combined with "collective critical action" (Giroux, 2001, p. 110). Giroux argues that "theories of resistance involve more than simply registering models of oppression; they also point to the possibility of productively intervening" (p. xxiv). Both Freire and Giroux conceptualise schools as political sites. However, Freire tends to focus on problematising the relationship between the student and the teacher, whereas Giroux (2001) is more concerned with problematising school sites and revitalising the role of the teacher from that of "de-skilled corporate drone" to that of "oppositional intellectual" (p. xxii). Crucial to Freirian thinking is the centrality of literacy education of the oppressed as a means of collectively emancipating them from their oppressors. Giroux's focus is on creating the fertile conditions to grow a form of cultural literacy or social awareness which in turn encourages individuals to understand "[w]hat it means to live in a radical multicultural democracy, to recognize anti-democratic forms of power, and to fight deeply rooted injustices in a society and world founded on systemic economic, racial, and gendered inequalities" (p. xxvii). Giroux (2001, 2003) argues that such understandings empower individuals to be agentic in designing and re-designing their own futures.

Like Freire (1971, 1985), Giroux (2001) too is scathing of traditional approaches to education that ask educators and their students to unquestioningly accept the dominant society's beliefs and values as benevolent, neutral, and

natural. He argues that educators too often focus on the “how” (pedagogy) of transmitting knowledge in classrooms and fail to problematise the “what” (curriculum). This means teachers become responsible for perpetuating the ideologies, values, and beliefs of the dominant social order. Knowledge and its cultural representations become something to be learned rather than critiqued and challenged. Giroux encourages educators to create a pedagogy that locates and problematises ideologies embedded in the texts, discourses, and social practices of their classrooms and wider communities:

It is important that students come to grips with what a given society has made of them, how it has incorporated them ideologically and materially into its rules and logic, and what it is that they need to affirm and reject in their own histories in order to begin the process of struggling for the conditions that will give them opportunities to lead a self-managed existence. (p. 38)

He identifies with the emergence of liberal critiques of schooling in the United States and England in the 1960s and 1970s. However, Giroux argues that they do not go far enough. These inquiry based pedagogical approaches question the neutrality of the knowledge and social practices being transmitted and reproduced in schools. Giroux (2001) makes reference to a growing awareness of a “hidden curriculum” (p. 52) that perpetuates a discourse of gender discrimination. Liberal critiques of the 1960s and 1970s argued that such things as text books, task presentations, and gender stereotyping were leading to girls’ schooling underachievements (Spender, 1989). Ironically, over the past 30 years a similar argument has been mounted by neo-liberalists as a way of explaining boys’ schooling underachievements. Those adopting liberal critiques of education seem to believe that, by simply uncovering and changing instances of discrimination at the school level, all will be sorted with girls and boys positioned equally upon leaving school. What this approach ignores is what is going on outside the school gate and how the institution of schooling itself can be used to reproduce macro social, economic, and political structures founded in patriarchy, capitalism, racism, sexism, and homophobia (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003b).

Merging theories of resistance and radical pedagogies

Since the mid 1980s, a radical theory of education has been emerging that emphasises the importance of examining historical contexts and ideological hegemony when attempting to understand or influence schooling practices and performances (McLaren, 2003b). McLaren (2003a) has labelled this emerging field “critical pedagogy” (p. 185) and claims that schools are never “antiseptically removed from the concepts of power, politics, history, and context” (p. 186). He says that they are not “apolitical” or “value-neutral” places (p. 189). Instead, they are points of indoctrination where particular social practices, ideologies and discourses get perpetuated and legitimised. Schools are situated in historical, political, and cultural contexts. They have rules, legends, benefactors, past students, teachers, parents, hierarchies, traditions, honour boards, and students and teachers who are elsewhere for 130 of their 160 plus hours a week. Such thinking has much in common with Giroux’s (2001) description of radical perspectives of schooling which emphasise the role of schools’ cultural contexts in serving to “reproduce and sustain the relations of dominance, exploitation, and inequality between classes” (p. 56). Schools and their hidden curriculums cannot help but be influenced by the ideological, political, cultural, and discursive structures of the communities in which they are embedded.

However, Giroux (2001) issues a warning to researchers addressing issues of academic underachievement using radical perspectives by themselves. He argues that such approaches simply expose power imbalances whilst doing little to change them and therefore need to be paired with acts of intervention: “Most of them stress social and cultural domination while almost completely ignoring theories of cultural production and political struggle” (p. 60). In his view, radical perspectives do not go far enough and are imbued with a deep cynicism, despair, and passivity that accepts domination and social inequity as inevitable. To him these perspectives of schooling are undialectical, inert, and without hope. Consequently, Giroux encourages educators to complement them with resistance theories as a means of provoking social transformations. At the heart of Giroux’s theory of resistance is his desire to empower and give hope, to inspire “students

to learn how to govern rather than be governed” (p. xxii) and in so doing reconfigure their histories.

Radical perspectives and resistance theories share similar epistemological ground in that they both acknowledge multiple truths and the subjective nature of reality (Giroux, 2001). However, those using resistance theories wear their criticalist lenses to move beyond cultural excavations and understandings: They set about actively disrupting power imbalances and social inequities through their revelations, questioning, and destabilising of the dominant social order (Giroux, 2001). This is a highly politicised and potentially revolutionary approach to education that is capable of transcending inequities and transforming lives. McLaren (2003b) argues that, “In addition to questioning what is taken for granted about schooling, critical theorists are dedicated to the emancipatory imperatives of *self-empowerment* and *social transformation*” (p.189).

Theories of resistance use criticalist lenses to encourage educational researchers to get involved, take risks, question the status quo, challenge the dominant social order, and collaborate with their students as they do so (Giroux, 2001, 2003; McLaren, 2003b). Whilst radical perspectives ask the researcher to set about deepening understandings of the social constructedness of human identity and performance, theories of resistance focus their efforts on the researcher as activist and harbinger of hope. A merging of the two paradigms enables researchers to firstly understand and then seek alternative, potentially infinite, and more socially just ways of co-constructing the self (Francis, 2008b; Lather, 2006). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) describe this approach as “always evolving, always encountering new ways to irritate dominant forms of power” (p. 306). Giroux (2001) dubs it radical pedagogy.

Radical pedagogy merges critical and cultural paradigms to create informed practice centred on disclosing and dislocating the hidden curriculum of schooling. Challenging the hidden curriculum becomes a form of liberatory practice, “grounded in the values of personal dignity and social justice” (Giroux, 2001, p. 61). Giroux encourages educators to work with students to interrogate the vehicles of power by exposing and problematising social structures, community

discourses, and dominant ideologies. He recommends critically considering such questions as “where such a culture comes from, whose culture is being implemented, whose interests it serves, and how it gets inscribed and sustained in school discourse and social practices” (p. 64).

This approach also places an expectation for critical self-examination on educators. Adopting Giroux’s (2001) concept of radical pedagogy to problematise the cultural beliefs and practices of the community in which they live and work, means that educators need to be reflexive enough to identify and problematise their own beliefs and practices. Giroux argues that:

If teachers are to move beyond the role of being agents of cultural reproduction to that of being agents of cultural mobilisation, they will have to critically engage the nature of their own self-formation and participation in the dominant society, including their role as intellectuals and mediators of the dominant culture. (p. 68)

By applying Giroux’s principles of radical pedagogy, educators set themselves the task of making transparent *and* interrupting the discourses, ideologies and power asymmetries that have, over time, become naturalised and subsequently invisible in their communities. These can function to restrict individuals’ schooling achievements and lives. By adopting Giroux’s approach, research has the capacity to transcend inequitable beliefs and practices and, ultimately, transform lives.

Giroux’s theory of ideology critique

Giroux’s (2001) theory of ideology critique merges radical perspectives with resistance theories. It is organised around the principles of reproduction, production, and reconstruction. Reproduction refers to the ideologies embedded in the texts and social practices “whose messages, inscribed within specific historical settings and social contexts, function primarily to legitimate the interests of the dominant social order” (p. 157). The production phase examines how reproductive ideologies are mediated through the texts and social practices of a society and interpreted, or read, by individuals and groups. The reconstruction phase occurs when the reproductive ideologies are disassembled and challenged through a process of critiquing which leads to re-interpretations, re-assemblage and – ultimately – social transformations. Thus the main aim of ideology critique

is to produce new ideologies that interrupt and supplant the old reproductive or normalising ones.

By embracing Giroux's (2001) theories of radical pedagogy and ideology critique, educators become political activists capable of inspiring transformative thinking, emancipatory action, and real social change in and across their communities. Khasnabish and Haiven (2012) endorse Giroux's thinking when they advocate for new research approaches they label "prefigurative research" (p. 413). These nascent activist pedagogies are capable of bringing communities together by creating "new spaces and possibilities for dialogue and debate and new zones of possibility, reflection, contention, dissonance, and discovery" (p. 413). They draw on the tenets of "horizontality, collectivity, self-reflexivity, and a commitment to radical social justice struggles" (p. 412).

By linking the personal to the political and the political to the personal, educators and researchers can seek to understand, resist, and transform how power is being mediated and reproduced within and across school sites and their wider communities. Giroux (2001) argues that the utilisation of these concepts gives teachers a way of moving schools from sites of indoctrination to sites of active citizenship for the mutual enlightenment and benefit of all: cultural reproduction becomes cultural re-invention. This involves interrogating a community's culture so that its ideological and political structures can be revealed, challenged, and reconstructed. It is an approach that embraces culture as "both a structuring and transforming process" (p. 90). In reshaping restrictive beliefs and practices, communities position themselves to rewrite their futures and give birth to the concept of human agency. Radical pedagogy – and Giroux's theory of ideology critique that it embraces – helps to conceptualise such emancipatory praxis.

Kincheloe (2008) captures the excitement and revolutionary nature of emerging multidimensional epistemological approaches when he writes:

I am profoundly excited by this trek into an evolving consciousness, the pluriverse, a world where dominant power is challenged, an education more exciting than any theme park ride, and a critical complex epistemology. The socio-pedagogical ride

I'm describing involves more than being involved in a political movement to end human oppression and suffering – although this is a central dimension of it. It involves both a journey inward and a journey outward. (p. 210)

He encourages researchers using complex critical epistemologies to “jump head first into the bloody fray” (p.64) and suffer the consequences of emotionally engaging with their research experiences for the betterment of humanity:

As one identifies the structures of power, he or she must both interpret and experience their affective consequences. Without this emotional dimension I believe that it is hard to change the oppressive social order in a way that creates history. The impediments to such a transformative activity are so great, the work so hard, the personal costs so high that it is much easier for individuals to opt for an easier and more personally aggrandizing path. (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 225)

Denzin and Lincoln (2008b) have labelled these emergent forms of research ‘post’ postmodernism.

A Rationale for the Approach Used by the Study

It is in the interests of all that power asymmetries, and their manifestations into practice, are made visible and challenged in institutional and community forums. Oppressive ideological constructions diminish lives as they insidiously shape what we believe, what we say, what we do, and who we become. Creating the conditions for the *unlearning* of deeply entrenched and limiting cultural codes of conduct is not easy, but neither is living with them. If educators fail to interrupt and unsettle these limiting ideologies and the discourses in which they are embedded – often humourously – they too run the risk of colluding in the production and reproduction of restrictive messages and manifestations into practice. If long lasting social reforms are to be achieved then life-limiting assumptions and beliefs must be made visible and collaboratively critiqued within and across communities. To address them solely from the classroom reduces and constrains possibilities for transformative thinking and action to the confines of a single institution, time, place, and cohort of students. Whilst necessary, it is unlikely that this will be sufficient to inspire deep and long lasting social change across communities.

A Conclusion

This chapter has explored historical and contemporary discourses surrounding the crisis in boys' education. It has presented and critiqued essentialist discourses and linked them to students' resistance of schooling, sexist humour, violence against women, homophobia, femiphobia, and misogyny. Alternative ways of thinking about and addressing some boys' schooling underperformances have also been presented. These use a social justice framework underpinned by poststructuralist and feminist thinking to encourage educators to critique and problematise limiting gender constructs with their students. Finally, the chapter has explored the works of theorists who blend and blur conceptual paradigms to problematise, challenge, and transform limiting beliefs, practices, and discursive constructions. Specifically, theories of resistance, ideology critique, and radical pedagogy have been evaluated and discussed for their transformative potential. Chapter 3 builds on this knowledge by developing a multi-theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter 3

Mining and Morphing Theories to Conceptualise Complexity

An Introduction

This research is complex. I first realised just how complex when, in reviewing the literature, I found myself investigating and traversing multiple and varied fields. In Chapter 2 I explored current and historical thinking around issues of gender and education, social justice, and nascent activist pedagogies. The chapter drew on Freirian concepts, theories of resistance, radical pedagogy, and dialectical and ideological critique to advocate for making explicit, problematising and challenging essentialist discourses and their limiting gender constructs. This chapter addresses the study's theoretical influences. It mines and morphs traditional and postmodern thinking to conceptualise a study of complexity: a study that continues to evolve as it re-focuses, re-sees, rethinks, and re-shapes itself. It also explores the usefulness of bricolage as a framework for scaffolding such a study.

Conceptualising the Study from its Beginnings

My concern over the disproportionately high number of boys performing poorly at Wheatville's schools quickly evolved into a complex qualitative *study of a study* of the gender beliefs and practices of a rural community. For years I had been working collaboratively with teachers to develop and implement curriculum programs within and across the community's schools, in an attempt to address concerns about boys' disengagement and poor academic performances [e.g., *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools* (BELS) program (2003-2005); *Successforboys* (2007)]. I used federally funded multi-site programs to encourage authentic task-based learning as a way of re-igniting boys' passion for their schoolwork. This was something experience – and data collected from local primary schools during the BELS program (2003-2005) – had taught me began to diminish for many of our local boys in about Year 4. With the advantage of hindsight, I now suspect that, whilst these programs did improve behavioural and academic outcomes for some students at a moment in time, they were unsustainable and generally had no long-

term impact on boys who were resisting classroom learning. As soon as funding cut out and the programs finished, students (and sometimes teachers) would move on to their next class where they would usually revert to their previous practices and performances.

From the beginning of my doctoral study, I began adopting socio-cultural understandings of gender as discursively constituted and constituting. This allowed me to rethink and re-design my approach. I focused on the gender messages our boys were receiving from home, sporting clubs, and others in the community, to see if I could understand what it was they were valuing if it was not their schoolwork. In embracing this approach, I was forced to lift my head up and look – through critical lenses – beyond the school gates, at the ideologies embedded in the practices, institutions, texts, and discourses of the community.

I can still remember consciously training myself to do this in the early days of my study. One weekday afternoon, after I had finished reading a journal article exploring masculinities and discursive constructions of gender, I sat in the grand stand at junior rugby waiting for my sons to finish their training. From this position I began to look at things with new eyes. I had always admired the dedication of the coaches – many of them fathers and retired players – for the time and effort that they put into training their sons and other children each week, but on that day I was re-seeing things. It did not take me long to notice one of the coaches taunting a group of young boys for “tackling like a mob of girls.”

Observations like this triggered a cycle of evolving criticality that has been ongoing. Kincheloe (2008) describes evolving criticality as:

Dedicated to a never-ending search for new ways of seeing, for new social and cultural experiences that provide novel concepts that we can use to better understand and change the world in a progressive way In the process, we can develop forms of transformative, critical knowledges that at present do not exist. (pp. viii-ix)

I found myself pondering what the long-term social impact was on boys – and others in the community – of messages such as girls are weak and, if you are a boy, being called a girl is a putdown and excelling at school is not cool for boys but football is. Barker (2001) argues that:

The myth of masculinity suggests that men are strong physically and mentally with the latter marked by emotional stoicism. Myths work by naturalizing culturally contingent codes into unchallengeable commonsense. (p. 5)

Boys' poor schooling performances were inextricably linked to a broader cultural curriculum being produced and reproduced in the wider community. I had come across an ideological seam in the schoolyard and began mining it only to discover that it was connected to an enormous mother lode on the other side of the fence. I started to have radical dreams of *What might happen?* and *What might be possible?* if limiting and oppressive gender binaries founded in masculine myths, ideologies, practices, and discourses were to be located, excavated, and publically critiqued. This interventionist approach and its transformative agenda grew to shape and dominate my research.

Crossing Conceptual and Physical Borders

Whilst originally triggered by performance issues inside the school gate, my foci quickly grew to incorporate an understanding, unsettling, and transforming of the gendered world beyond school. I believe that any changes to pedagogy, thinking, and practices made within the microcosm of the classroom will, ultimately, be insufficient to bring about long lasting social and educational benefits to students unless wider community gender beliefs and practices are also addressed. This thinking is supported by Giroux's (2001) claim that:

Schools cannot by themselves change society ... teachers have a dual role to play in the struggle for a new society. That is, they can work both within and outside of schools to help illuminate both the value and the limitations of radical teaching. (p. 235)

My intention was to incite unrest in and across Wheatville: Unrest that would challenge the status quo and provide alternative ways of thinking about and doing gender. I recognised that the four-year span of the study would act as a significant limitation to it. I also recognised that my approach would be highly complex, controversial, political, and risky. However, I believed that the option to do nothing was, ultimately, even more risky. I came to understand that the interventionist approach I was thinking of using would be worth documenting for the contribution it could make to educational praxis and emerging forms of

qualitative research: particularly research using critical praxis with a transformative agenda.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008b) posit that emerging designs in qualitative research belong to a 'post' postmodern era which promotes "[a] new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation" (p. 35). Their description of 'post' post research succinctly captures the paradigmatic stance I have taken in positioning my own research: research that is highly political and incorporates both complex epistemological challenges and personal growth. In setting out to discover *What can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender?*, I have needed to grasp how my research is working to extend and transform taken for granted cultural beliefs and practices, knowledge about research praxis, and myself.

Encouraging others to rewrite their gendered futures in ways that will allow them to flourish is not always appreciated. Making the invisible visible and contemplating what could or should be can be risky work. I have come to understand that creating a shift in thinking tied to "a collective commitment" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 569) can be unsettling, unpredictable, and life changing. However, in making a contribution to new forms of knowledge in the fight for social justice I have needed to take on the guise of an "epistemological desperado" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 58), developing and documenting my praxis so that it can further our knowledge about transformative critical epistemologies and radical pedagogies.

In consummating my ambitious project, I have needed to employ both a multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approach. This in turn has helped to mitigate "the blindness of relying on one model" (Steinberg, 2006, p. 120) for interacting with, and interpreting, the world. The diverse but strategic paradigmatic scavenging I have employed to conceptualise my research has fashioned a qualitative study underpinned by an "evolving hybridity" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 304) of cultural, critical, poststructuralist, and feminist

understandings. These understandings have been realised as “radical consciousness raising,” “collective critical action” (Giroux, 2001, p. 110) and the problematising of my insider activist role. This role has seen me operate variously as critical ethnographer, public pedagogue, and social activist seeking transformational change within and beyond the school gate. My approach provides an alternative to more traditional educational approaches. These tend to stay within the boundaries of the school-yard making use of monological (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) and essentialist thinking to inform their praxis [see Chapter 2 for a more detailed exploration of essentialist approaches].

Going public

Whilst the term public pedagogy has been used by some to describe the ideological messages transmitted by media and popular culture texts – including billboards (see Hickey, 2010) – the interpretation I have chosen to embrace defines it as “a theoretical construct that specifically informs both counter-hegemonic inquiry and collective agency oriented toward a democratic ethic of social justice” (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010, p. 642). Hill (2010) refers to those practising public pedagogy work as “individual(s) whose intellectual production is articulated to a non-academic community” (p. 593). Giroux (1992) refers to public pedagogy as politically-engaged cultural work. Such interpretations of public pedagogy focus on engaging members of the public in an inquiry, disruption, rethinking, and socially transformative process. In doing so, they are highly relevant to my research.

Based on these interpretations, two of the world's best known public pedagogues would be Martin Luther King Jr and Mahatma Ghandi. Both of these men made strategic use of media platforms in their quests to disrupt and transform the injustices they saw in their respective communities. Performing their works of social justice on a mass scale, King and Ghandi seemed to intrinsically understand that:

Popular culture and the media representations it generates often function as educative public sites through which hegemonic knowledge claims are produced, circulated and reinscribed Just as clearly, these sites can also serve as avenues for the

disruption of dominant cultural discourses and productions of alternate imaginaries of democracy, ethical citizenship, and social justice. (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010, pp. 640-641)

By adopting the role of a public pedagogue – albeit on a much humbler scale than King and Ghandi – I have worked to expose and challenge the ways in which hegemonic masculinity produces and reproduces itself in a rural Australian setting. King and Ghandi were able to ignite extensive public debates and combine these with gestures of defiance that enabled them to challenge the ideological and political structures of the dominant social orders of their respective cultures. Both men inspired others with their activist ideals and turned their quests for social justice into collaborative acts. O'Malley and Roseboro (2010) offer a summation of this approach by describing it as a “collective interruption of hegemonic discourses and material structures via a location of meaning in difference and agency for justice” (p. 641). In describing it in this way, they frame public pedagogy in both theoretical and activist terms. Whilst I accept there are risks associated with public pedagogy work – King lost his life performing it – I regard its contributions as outweighing its risks.

Of particular use to me is public pedagogy's emphasis on re-using the media to publically interrupt discourses and representations that legitimise “dominant cultural and ideological structures” (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010, p. 642). Also useful is its provision of alternatives which dispute and dislocate such structures and its focus on public activism as a tool for seeding counter-hegemonic social transformations. Adopting praxis that uses the principles of public pedagogy has the capacity to elevate educators beyond the role of deskilled corporate drones to positions whereby they become transformative intellectuals (Freire, 2000a; Giroux, 2001). However, Hill (2010) warns that academics using such approaches run the risk of being labelled “professional heretics” and “social pariahs” (p. 598) for violating the purist ethic of traditional intellectual work by engaging non-academic publics and real-world problems. This can sometimes make public pedagogy work difficult to recognise as academic work. It can appear too invasive of the research site, too provocative, too rebellious, or too non-scholarly (Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). Despite these concerns, public

pedagogy provides a good fit for my assumed role as gender justice advocate within my own community. Therefore, I enthusiastically embrace its seditious nature.

Re-representing conceptual fluidity and evolving hybridity

Guba and Lincoln (2008) acknowledge the “controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences” (p. 255) of contemporary qualitative research and encourage researchers to move fluidly between paradigmatic borders. I have attempted to capture this fluidity of movement in Figure 3.1. In line with my scavenger approach, I have been inspired by a North American Hopi Indian symbol to co-create⁷ an artistic interpretation of the conceptual fluidity and evolving hybridity of this research. In Hopi Indian culture, an ever-widening spiral is the symbol for life’s journey and an individual’s growth of consciousness (hooks, 1990) on that journey. The blue spiral emanating from the centre of Figure 3.1 is deliberately fluid, ever widening, and organic to symbolise my growth of consciousness on my research/er journey. The four overlapping geometric shapes surrounding the spiral correspond to the theoretical lenses – poststructuralist, feminist, critical, and cultural – through which I look as I interpret and interact with the world on this learning journey. The geometric shapes are fragmenting as they undergo a process of reconfiguration. This symbolises the emergence of new ways of thinking and seeing. In representing scientific paradigms of thought the geometric shapes are more rigid and linear than the blue spiral; however, the layering of the geometric shapes over the spiral operates as a metaphor for the study’s relationship between theoretically informed practice and the researcher’s growth as a human being.⁸

Paradigmatic allegiances

Whilst I have spent many sleepless nights attempting to categorise or label my study – Is it a critical study? A critical social one? A feminist study? A poststructural feminist one? A transdisciplinary study? An example of critical

⁷ A colleague/friend/artist, Lesley Hawker, created the image shown in Figure 3.1. She based her artistic interpretation on conversations we had about what I wanted it to represent.

⁸ An artist friend of mine and fellow teacher painted this conceptual model for me based on the concepts I was attempting to communicate.



Figure 3.1. Image representing my growth of consciousness and criticality

ethnography (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Steinberg, 2006)? Perhaps participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005)? – I have come to realise that attempts to paradigmatically or epistemologically label it in are futile, limiting, and misleading. It is suffice to say that my study synergistically integrates four theoretical approaches – poststructural, feminist, cultural, and critical – blending, blurring, and cross-pollinating them to produce research enriched by hybrid vigour but somewhat unpredictable because of it.

Unlike Lather (1992), who places gender at the centre of her vision of feminist theorising, I place the disclosing and dislocating of asymmetries of power in one's own community at the centre of mine. Hence the paradigmatic lenses through which I look are underscored by a need to understand the risks and rewards of publically disrupting ideologies and discourses perpetuating power inequities; incorporate a multi-voiced methodology which values the personal experiences and stories of self and others; and create spaces for individuals to rethink, transcend, and ultimately transform their lives. In addressing these needs, and striving to extend the usefulness of this study's design to others, I make a number of assumptions. I assume that those whose lives I touch are capable of re-seeing and rethinking their gendered realities; that I am able to create the conditions necessary for inspiring transformative thinking (Lather, 1991); that what I am advocating constitutes an improvement of the human condition; and that I am able to rigorously and openly critique my own journey. Reflexivity tied to an evolving criticality and total researcher immersion in the gender politics of the research site are basic premises of my research and support my quest to "transform the world in the service of human flourishing" (Guba & Lincoln, 2008, p. 261).

For the purposes of this study I am embracing Guba and Lincoln's (2005) understanding of reflexivity as:

A conscious experiencing of self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself. Reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with

our selves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting. (p. 210)

Being reflexive acknowledges that I am culturally constituted and constituting. This means that everyone, including me, are constantly in a state of flux or evolution. By applying a process of self-critical reflective practice I am able to continue to deepen understandings of, and impacting on, both myself and the world. Goldstein (2007) uses the term “alterity” (p. 27) to capture the idea of knowing ourselves better through a process of critically reflecting on how others relate to, and shape, us. Citing Fine (1994), she claims that it is essential for those using critical praxis to do this as “[i]t is the failure to interrogate the ways in which we are the ‘other’ that create the points at which our own critical liberatory practice ceases to become empowering” (p. 26). It is not enough to understand my contribution to a destabilisation of power hierarchies and the re-constitution of others; I need also to understand how this study works to re-constitute and re-position me.

Reflexivity supports a continual decentring of self (Berry, 2006) and ongoing personal growth. Whist linked to emerging research trends that embrace feminist and poststructuralist thinking, it has been criticised for its overemphasis on the power of individual agency and its failure to acknowledge “the impact of the social on inequalities of outcome and experience, in education and elsewhere” (Francis & Skelton, 2008, p. 317). In adopting the principles of reflexivity, I also acknowledge Connell’s (2001) concept of “fixing mechanisms” (p. 8) such as race, gender, and class [see Chapter 2 for a further discussion of these]. These inhibitors act as barriers locking individuals into life-limiting roles that restrict their capacity for self-critical reflective practice and, ultimately, self-improvement and human growth.

Merging theories to create socio-cultural, poststructuralist, feminist, and critical synergies

This research is political, having been founded on activist principles. Butler (2004) argues that theory alone is incapable of bringing about social or political change. She encourages researchers to strategically challenge accepted social norms and institutionalised value systems that are inequitable and do harm. In

conceptualising my research, I have drawn on Giroux's (2001) theories of resistance and dialectical and ideology critique [see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of these]. Giroux proposes a radical classroom pedagogy that integrates theory and practice to disclose and dislocate normative discourses, ideologies, and practices that fuel social inequities. In implementing a radical pedagogy, he advocates for the use of dialectical critique, a non-conventional and sometimes provocative method with links to social activism.

Dialectical critique is based on the principles of "negativity, contradiction and mediation" (Giroux, 2001, p.64) and the belief that "individuals and social classes are both the medium and outcome of ideological discourses and practices" (p. 157). It has the set purpose of confronting discourses of neutrality and objectivity in order to "see through" the dominant culture's "ideological justifications and explode its reifications and myths" (p. 64). Giroux wants teachers to work with students to critically decode those elements of the hidden curriculum that contribute to the limiting of students' schooling and life performances and the drafting of them into culturally and academically predetermined roles. Part of the process of dialectical critique involves exposing the links and overlaps between the school's hidden curriculum and the wider community's hidden curriculum. Contradictions that arise in the forms of gaps, tensions, and anomalies are considered invaluable for providing alternatives with radical and emancipatory potential. Giroux refers to these as "contradictory pluralities" and claims that they provide "possibilities for both mediation and the contestation of dominant ideologies and practices" (p. 115). Using dialectical critique gives me a way of exposing and interrogating seemingly unquestioned gender beliefs and practices in Wheatville. This in turn interrupts the status quo and inspires others to join me in acts of resistance. In this way, the momentum for creating social change capable of rewriting gendered futures is ignited.

Whilst this study makes transparent certain aspects of the hidden curriculum operating within local schools, it recognises that schools are significantly influenced by the ideologies, discourses, and practices of the wider communities in which they are situated (Giroux, 2001, 2003; Keddie & Mills, 2007; McLaren,

2003b). Therefore, dissimilarly to most studies of an educational nature, my activist emphasis is on illuminating and unsettling the hidden curriculum being produced and reproduced outside of Wheatville's schools. Adopting such an approach means that I have needed to insert myself into the wider community of Wheatville to make visible, interrogate and interrupt ideological manifestations of power that seem to be mediated by local discourses, social structures, and media texts.

My actions have been carried out with the set purpose of transforming and transcending culturally entrenched gender beliefs and practices that diminish and oppress the lives of some students and community members. Such politically motivated actions invite reciprocal actions, meaning that my behaviours and thinking will be constantly challenged and re-shaped by others. Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) argue that how we are constituted is a result of a connection between signified and signifier which is arbitrary but informed by cultural, historical, and economic forces. Individuals act as signifiers and learn to produce, reproduce, or challenge the signifying practices of their cultures (Belsey, 2001). In accepting this notion then – as with gender identities – culture's reproductive qualities make it constitutive and re-constitutive. Linking this poststructuralist understanding to critical action for gender justice has assisted me in finding a way of disrupting hypermasculine discourses to re-distribute power in my community. My pursuit of gender justice – and its associated goal of power realignment – is subsequently documented and problematised as a means of adding to new knowledge about transformative pedagogy and insider activist work.

My research has been built on a fundamental belief that there are more risks involved in idly waiting for the shifting forces of culture, history, and economy to more equitably re-align power asymmetries than there are in seeking intervention myself. However, to challenge and disrupt without providing alternatives could be considered nihilistic. Irrevocably linked to my understandings of intervention are the provision of alternative ways of thinking about and doing gender (Giroux, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Lather, 1988). I understand that "to critique sexist

images without offering alternatives is an incomplete intervention” (hooks, 2000, p. 35).

This research is *not* anti-male. hooks (2000) draws the distinction that feminism is not anti-male; rather, it is anti-sexism. Steinberg (2006) describes feminism as “the quintessential postmodern discourse” (p. 127) and applauds it for grounding its critiques in the experiences and lived realities of individuals’ everyday lives. By merging feminism with poststructuralist, socio-cultural, and critical understandings, I am able to implement a research praxis that excavates and interrupts modern patriarchal exclusions and power asymmetries whilst attempting to respectfully represent dominant and divergent thinking on the issue. By combining collective consciousness-raising with a communal disruption process, my research sets out to rethink local gender beliefs and practices, a rethink capable of improving the lives of those it touches. Whilst creating the conditions for liberatory praxis is a central plank of feminist thinking, it also has ties to critical theory. Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) applaud research focused on liberatory intentions, claiming that “critical research can be understood best in the context of the empowerment of individuals” (p. 406).

My approach creates, documents and problematises an insider activist journey and its liberatory intentions. Such research has the potential to be socially and conceptually transformative. It is risky, political, agentic, and creative. I am reconceptualising critical approaches to educative research by overlaying them with poststructural, socio-cultural, and feminist lenses. Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) encourage such hybridity, claiming that it is necessary for the “revitalisation and revivification” (p. 417) of communities. They argue that, by blurring and blending paradigms of thought, researchers create “a politics of difference that refuses to pathologise or exoticise the other” (p. 417). The disrupting and dislocating of phallogocentric discourses of white male entitlement, as a means of reshaping socially inequitable and culturally entrenched gender beliefs and practices, might make for unpredictable – and at times uncomfortable – research but, in my view, it is important work. It enables me to make transparent how power works within and across my community to discursively construct and

constrict lives. This illumination is linked to a disruption process which has the potential to trigger cultural transformations and enrichment. By problematising my insider activist journey, I am also able to extend the growing body of knowledge of 'post' postmodern research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a). Harvey (1996) claims that research exploring subject positionality "opens the flood gates for a lot of personal self-indulgence as well as useful critical reflection" (p. 77). I make no apologies for my personal self-indulgence, as I believe the knowledge gleaned from this "reflexive form of fieldwork" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b, p. 35) is valuable.

My research does not pretend to be neutral, cold, or rational. It is complex and risky research conducted by a passionate scholar (Steinberg, 2006). In setting out to excavate phallocentric discourses of white male entitlement, unsettle the power inequities inherent to them, and create moments of conceptual insight and personal growth, it is inevitable that this research will have its *prickly* moments. The multi-theoretical, multi-methodological, and multi-perspectival approach of the study means the knowledge which is generated is fluid, fragmented, complex, and contentious; the multiple sources of evidence always available for re-visiting, re-interpreting, and rethinking. Steinberg (2006, 2012) terms this process discovery and rediscovery and recommends bricolage as a useful frame for researchers wanting to explore how power asymmetries are manifested and maintained within and across communities.

Using Bricolage to Frame the Study

What is bricolage?

The term bricolage describes an essentially qualitative research approach which strategically and creatively harnesses an array of methodological tools and theoretical lenses in order to deepen understandings of the world and promote the will to act (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) hint at the unsettling potential of bricolage when they posit that:

Bricoleurs attempt to remove knowledge production and its benefits from the control of elite groups. Such control consistently operates to reinforce elite privilege while pushing marginalised groups farther away from the centre of dominant power. (p. 318)

Bricolage merges the philosophical tenets of cultural, critical, poststructuralist and feminist thinking and embeds them in a modern discourse (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Steinberg, 2006). It is grounded in social theory, critical theory, and philosophy (Steinberg, 2012) supporting highly political research that encourages those who embrace it to do more than identify and pontificate over problems from the ivory towers of academia. Bricoleurs need to position themselves as provocateurs who generate responses from others in order to deepen cultural understandings and self-knowledge but also to challenge and disrupt the taken-for-granted. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) assert that a basic concept of bricolage is “confrontation with difference” (p. 318). Lather and Smithies (1997) and Kincheloe (2002) have both made potent use of this multi-methodological research approach to publish texts that confront social inequities and disrupt power imbalances. *Troubling the angels* (Lather & Smithies, 1997) incorporates the moving stories of American women infected with HIV and dying of AIDS, whilst *The Sign of the burger* (Kincheloe, 2002) examines the impact on others of the global monopoly that is the McDonalds’ phenomenon. Bricoleurs begin by positioning themselves through the telling of their own story (Steinberg, 2012). Using bricolage gives me a framework for troubling the status quo as I seek out injustices, making them transparent, and publically contesting them in order to bring about social change (Berry, 2006).

Joyce and Tutela (2006) espouse the benefits of bricolage for researchers who want to delve deeply into “complex splintered pieces of information” (p. 79). Steinberg (2006) portrays bricolage as a multi-theoretical research method that draws on critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodern epistemologies, hermeneutics, feminism, and psychoanalysis in order to interpret, critique and deconstruct worlds. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) call bricoleurs “detectives of subjugated insight” (p. 318), with Kincheloe and Berry (2004) expounding the advantages of bricolage as a framework for researchers who are looking for “a practical way to construct a critical science of complexity” (p. x).

Bricolage enables me to combine, blur, layer, juxtapose and critique multiple – and sometimes conflicting – discursive constructions of gender as a means of

understanding, disclosing, and dislocating “the historical and social ways that power operates to shape meaning and its lived consequences” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 208). By employing bricolage I become a conceptual and methodological negotiator who is creatively and reflexively engaged in the world and the research process, forever seeking further clarification and new ways of knowing, re-presenting (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) and re-shaping my world.

Whilst the eclecticism embraced by bricolage can falsely give the impression that the research – perhaps even the researcher – is superficial, ill disciplined, and uninformed, I contend that this is not the case and offer as testament this dissertation. In assigning researchers multiple options, bricolage overlooks gaps in paradigmatic knowledge as long as the ideas which are borrowed from a particular system of knowledge are useful to the researcher and used appropriately (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Its emphasis is on providing a suite of thinking and data collection tools that enable the researcher to remain flexible, fluid, and reflexive to the human situation under study.

The job of bricolage is to make sense of the complex ways that discursive forces operate to shape lives in specific contexts. This means that context plays a pivotal role for any bricoleur. According to Berry (2006),

Because bricolage considers research to be a complex act embedded in and contested by a host of social, intellectual, historical, economic, institutional, local global and political beliefs, values and relationships, it is imperative that contextualisation plays a major part in the bricoleur’s construction of knowledge through research. (p. 105)

Berry cites as many as five research models used by bricoleurs in attempting to do this – theoretical bricolage, methodological bricolage, interpretative bricolage, narrative bricolage, and political bricolage – but warns against adopting a hard and fast linear approach for studies using bricolage. He claims that this can impede the interconnectivity and intended richness of the research design. Instead, he recommends that bricoleurs pick an eclectic but strategic path through a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches, visiting and re-visiting them when necessary. In this way, bricoleurs are able to transcend reductionist research

designs that limit them to monological lenses, pre-determined end points, and institutional settings.

Bricolage operates as a counter to positivist and rationalist approaches that attempt to explain social and cultural phenomena with objectivity and from a distance. Such approaches either deliberately ignore, or fail, to understand multi-dimensional systems which are “interconnected and interdependent” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 42). Bricolage is especially useful to my study because of its reliance on the principles of “relationality, multiplicity, complexity and, most importantly, criticality for social action and justice” (Berry, 2006, p. 113). As a practising bricoleur I have used:

[m]ultiple ways to collect, describe, construct, analyse and interpret the object of the research study; and, finally, multiple ways to narrate (tell the story about) the relationships, struggles, conflicts, and complex world of the study that maintains the integrity and reality of the subjects. (Berry, 2006, p. 90)

Steinberg (2012) argues that if a researcher is looking for answers than bricolage is not a good choice. It is an intuitive method rather than a positivist one for conducting research. The frustration of bricolage is that it asks more questions than it answers and it is never truly finished. It has the capacity to illuminate, problematise, and interrupt the cultural norms, ideologies, discourses, and practices being produced and reproduced in communities, but it can leave the researcher with a sense of incompleteness (Steinberg, 2006). Serious challenges faced by bricoleurs include how to avoid distorting or exploiting others’ lives through the re-telling of their stories or the questioning of their belief systems (Lather, 1988, 1991); how to remain permanently flexible, elastic, and open at all times to alternative viewpoints, re-presentations and data gathering opportunities (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) – despite being openly biased and passionately connected to the research; and how to avoid replacing old inequities with new ones (Lather, 1988).

How am I using bricolage to frame my study?

I have embraced bricolage to document my insider activist journey as I set about disclosing and dislocating hegemonic masculinity and its associated power

asymmetries in a rural Australian setting. The multiplicity of conceptual and methodological tools that bricolage makes available to me has been put to use to excavate, making transparent, and irritate phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement as well as to document and problematise my emotional and experiential journey along the way. My actions work to make visible and destabilise hypermasculine discourses and the ideologies embedded in them. This reduces their capacity to continue unchecked. What I say and do incites others to act – some resistantly – in an ongoing cycle of community dialogue. I document and analyse this, to find out what can be learned from my interventionist approach.

In building my bricolage I have borrowed from four different theoretical positions. The adopting and adapting of these creates a multi-purposed and multi-focused research act. Central to my study are the influences of critical and cultural approaches and poststructuralist and feminist thinking. Critical and cultural approaches are evident in my use of radical and public pedagogies (Giroux, 2001; Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). Poststructuralist and feminist ways of thinking inform my understanding of the fluidity and constitutive nature of both culture and gender and the importance of multiple ways of knowing (Francis, 2006; A. Jones, 1997; Lather, 1988, 1991). My approach enables the “invisible artefacts of power and culture” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 2) to be gradually revealed for self and others. My activist role within the community is used to publically contest limiting gender binaries as a means of inspiring new ways of thinking about and doing gender. My feminist and critical voices capture and critique the emotional and experiential journey I undergo as an insider activist researcher. This approach merges theories and methodologies to blur the lines between emancipatory inquiry and liberatory pedagogy (Lather, 1991).

Bricolage supports the principles of reflexivity by asking me to be continually “reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the human as instrument” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210) and coming-to-know through the process of research. I am constantly checking myself for personal biases: Do I too belong to a privileged or dominant group? Do I need to rethink, reconstruct, or re-negotiate my identity or

interpretation of the known world? Have I excluded voices which need to be heard (Berry, 2006)? How is my research affecting my life or the lives of others (Lather, 1991)? Upon setting out on my research journey, I cannot know how or where I might be situated at its completion. Likewise, I cannot know how my public activist work will impact on or inspire others. I can only hypothesise that those of us involved in the research act will be affected in ways that cannot be predicted.

Essentially, this research parallels its human participants by being full of contradictions: complex but transparent, eclectic but strategic, insightful but expansive, purposeful but evolving, accomplished but never finished, disruptive but soothing, scholarly but literary, biased but ethical. Steinberg (2006) captures the paradoxical nature of bricolage when she describes it as a “complex collage” (p. 120) “which transcends any one field” (p. 117). There is a certain irony to bricolage in that it embraces paradigmatic complexity as a means of understanding human complexity. It is a very useful framework for uncovering asymmetries of power that reside – often invisibly – within communities, their social structures, and their institutions.

Unlike more traditional approaches, mine is the research of the optimistic philosopher-cum-activist, forever seeking to know myself and others better through a cyclical process of inquiry, intervention, and self-critical reflective practice. I understand that “philosophers don’t just rely on reason, as their essential tool for making an argument, but they use other tools that are just as important: intuition, emotions, imagination, and their communicating and relating skills” (Thayer-Bacon & Moyer, 2006, p. 143). The cyclical process I follow in my pursuit of inner and outer knowledge has been adapted and extended from Kincheloe and McLaren’s (2008) concept of the *Who am I?* being used to inform the *What is?* which in turn is used to inform the *What should be?* My further additions – *What can I do about it?* and *How do others see me as a result of what I’ve done?* – create a feedback loop foregrounding the activist and reflexive nature of this research. They are in keeping with my commitment to an evolving criticality with links to personal growth. Figure 3.2 introduces this cycle of inquiry,

intervention, and self-critical reflective practice (or self-discovery). Kincheloe and Berry (2004) support this cyclical approach claiming that “the adept bricoleur sets up the bricolage in a manner that produces powerful feedback loops – constructs that in turn synergise the research process” (p. 27).

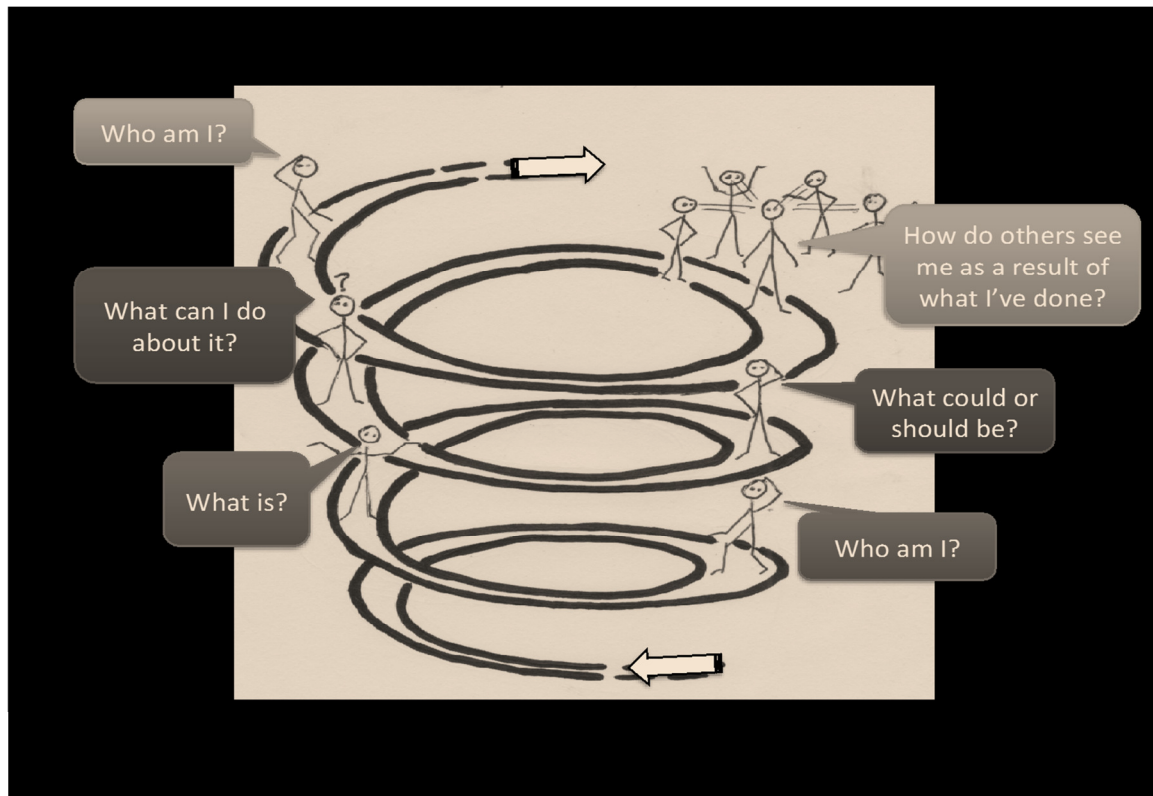


Figure 3.2. Cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery

The journey of the bricoleur is deeply rooted in the tenets of poststructuralism which argue that meaning – and life performances – are never natural but instead individuals, as living texts, are continuously being inscribed by their cultural contexts (Steinberg, 2006). As a bricoleur, I am also a living text. I am responsible for driving the research act; however, at times I also need to distance myself from it, rising above the research task to ask: How am I influencing the lives of others? How is my life being influenced by this research? What am I learning about myself/the community/the world? (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).

The versions of reality I collect, and sometimes provoke, analyse, and syncretise from the community under study, build a text created by a passionate scholar who is capable of eliciting passionate responses from others: an individual

who is emotionally connected to – and empathetic towards – the community I am seeking to know and understand more deeply and the cultural beliefs and practices I am committed to unsettling and transforming (Steinberg, 2006, p. 127). Lather (1988) issues a warning to researchers using poststructuralist tenets when pursuing cultural transformations. She stresses the importance of not supplanting old and harmful ideologies with their own reifications. She encourages us to consider that we are all “permanently partial” (p. 577) and that we need to train ourselves to act in socially just and liberatory ways. Like Freire (1971, 2000a) and Giroux (2001, 2003), she urges researchers to adopt a cycle of self-sustaining critical reflection and analysis when seeking emancipatory action for those who are marginalised and oppressed.

In adopting a bricolage framework I merge aspects of the postmodern ethnographer with those of the transformative intellectual and ‘post’ postmodern theorist. I am driven by an evolving criticality to understand the potentials and pitfalls of being an insider activist researcher on a quest to make transparent, question, and unsettle limiting discursive constructions of gender in a rural Australian community. My role is to identify, problematise, and co-construct “perceptions of the world anew ... in a manner that undermines what appears natural, that opens to question what appears obvious” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 321). This constant questioning and unsettling creates research that is, by nature, never-ending. Each new *find* offers a fresh and varying interpretation of a particular lived experience which can be critiqued and re-thought. The evolving nature, constant digging, shifting evidence, re-questioning, and re-positioning can make my research appear haphazard. Lather (1991) defends the inherent messiness of this type of research claiming that, “while we need conceptual frames for purposes of understanding, classifying research and researchers into neatly segregated ‘paradigms’ or ‘traditions’ does not reflect the untidy realities of real scholars” (p. 11).

In using bricolage, I purposefully distance the study from positivist and rationalist approaches to research. My primary focus is to reconceptualise research through an exploration of the risks and rewards of being an insider

activist researcher. In this way, the study operates as a protest to oversimplified and monological approaches that dehumanise self and others by ignoring pluralities, feelings, connections, and cultural contexts when investigating complex educational and social issues. Such evidence-based approaches concern themselves with systematic processes, sound measurements, rigorous data analyses, validity issues, researcher recommendations, and the transferability of findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008). The strength of this study lies not in its ability to be generalised and reapplied to other communities – although there are elements of it that will prove useful to educators wanting to understand and/or interrupt hegemonic masculinity and its associated limiting gender beliefs and practices. Instead, the study's strength lies in its capacity to purposefully draw on an array of conceptual tenets, tools, and techniques to create an holistic understanding of boys' schooling underperformances, whilst beginning a process of disrupting those beliefs and practices that work to limit lives. In this way, the study functions to extend the growing body of knowledge underpinning contemporary and emerging forms of educational research.

Another Representation of the Concepts Underpinning the Study

In Figure 3.3 I have attempted to muster together the principal theoretical tenets underpinning this study. In doing so I have again used a wordle [see Chapter 1] (Feinberg, 2011) as my chosen tool of representation. This contemporary digital device parallels the synergistic nature of my research. Wordles appear messy and chaotic. They consist of incomplete *snatches* of interrelated information that, when combined, communicate the essence of an idea or concept. In order to interpret a wordle, it is necessary to look at it from a multitude of perspectives. In these ways the wordle acts as a visual metaphor for the bricolage I am using. This framework blurs and blends paradigms of thought to achieve epistemological epiphanies (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).



A Conclusion

This chapter explored the theoretical influences informing the study: A study which locates itself within the emerging field of ‘post’ postmodern qualitative research. It outlined how I set about mining and morphing critical, cultural, poststructuralist, and feminist understandings to build a study of complexity and evolving criticality focused on what can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher. A case was made for using radical and public pedagogies to move beyond the school gates, to excavate, publically interrogate, and interrupt discursive constructions of gender that work to limit some boys’ schooling performances and restrict community members’ lives. I also argued for the importance of documenting and problematising this process for the contribution it can make to new and emerging research designs.

The next chapter uses the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 3 to build a plan for action. It re-visits the study's research questions (see Chapter 1) and details how multiple sources of evidence will be collected, generated, represented, and analysed.

Chapter Four

Constructing a Study of Complexity

An Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined the theoretical constructs underpinning the study and included a discussion of the study's use of bricolage to provide "a practical way to construct a critical science of complexity" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. x). This chapter builds on Chapter 3's conceptual foundations by explicating how such a complex and multi-theoretical approach has been methodologically consummated. Chapter 4 elucidates how a merger of critical, cultural, poststructuralist, and feminist understandings have translated into practice to action a 'post' postmodern (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b) study with a transformative agenda. The chapter finishes by exploring how issues of trustworthiness, ethics and goodness have been addressed by the study (S. Jones, Arminio, & Torres, 2006).

Actioning the Study

As outlined in Chapter 3, this study has set out to excavate and dislocate asymmetries of power and their accompanying ideological frameworks, discourses, practices, and social structures. Initially triggered by a desire to address the disproportionately high number of underperforming male students in Wheatville's schools, the study has evolved so that its primary purpose is to address the question:

What can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender?

Whilst the study stands as an alternative to reductionist approaches that favour essentialist understandings (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), quantitative data – often associated with such approaches – have been of some use to the study. I have made use of statistical reports and graphs to identify performance anomalies and to trigger the inquiry process. Statistics comparing boys' and girls' academic and behavioural achievements have been used to highlight a contradiction and to

provoke a series of questions. These questions have been adopted and adapted from the work of Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) and they have guided the conceptual and epistemological development of the study. They include: Why is this so? How has this situation come to be? Who might be being advantaged/disadvantaged? What are the social implications of these results? What alternatives are there? What would be a better outcome? How might this be achieved? What happens if I try to challenge or change the status quo?

By making phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement transparent and interrupting them, I have worked to inspire others in my community to rethink and transcend limiting gender beliefs and practices. Connolly (2004) claims that “the key factor to address in terms of boys’ poor educational performance is masculinity itself” (p. 61). I would posit that in excavating and unsettling discourses steeped in masculine hegemony this research has been able to do this. In this study I have made use of school reports, human stories, researcher-generated texts, and the public platform provided by the local newspaper. My actions, observations, and interactions with others have been documented, analysed, and woven beside and against a tapestry of community texts, analyses, and personal revelations. My complex approach has worked to give new insights into hegemonic masculinity – and its method of using power to privilege and oppress – as well as to illuminate the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher.

This (un)finished⁹ dissertation has incorporated transcripts of interviews, researcher observations, digital and media texts, school behaviour reports, destination studies, critical analyses, and reflective moments of personal discovery and rediscovery (Steinberg, 2006). A constant layering, weaving and revisiting of multiple sources of evidence has built the bricolage whereby “the rearrangement and juxtaposition of previously unconnected signifying objects are reorganized into new codes of meaning”.... [to] “produce new meanings in fresh contexts” (Barker, 2001, p. 6).

⁹ As a bricoleur I am constantly digging for more evidence and revisiting and rethinking old evidence. This on-going inquiry and analysis process makes the study a potentially limitless life work (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Steinberg, 2006).

Giroux (2001) has suggested that it is “the liberatory moment that needs to be further understood and extended” (p. 165). In this study I have set about creating such a moment and then sought to understand it, myself, and the culture to which I belong better by documenting how I position others – and am positioned by others – during the course of this moment. The approach I have used makes for a complex and highly reflexive design, but I am confident that its breadth and depth supersedes anything I could have achieved had I taken a more traditional or non-confrontational approach to my studies. The unpredictable and evolving nature of the research has been kept on course by three overlapping and non-linear foci.

Establishing the research questions and foci

Figure 4.1 encapsulates the inquiry process I undertook in my quest to extend qualitative research by furthering understandings of the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher. The pictogram, first introduced in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3.2), outlines the questions that have guided my research. However, in this chapter I have colour-coded it so that it visually aligns with the study’s three research questions and their associated foci. Figure 4.1 uses six colour-matched questions (two blue, two red and two green) located at different points along a cycle of inquiry, intervention, and discovery. Each colour represents a paradigmatic shift in my thinking: The blue questions – *Who am I?* and *What is?* – rely on socio-cultural understandings; the red questions – *What could or should be?* and *What can I do about it?* – merge critical thinking with aspects of radical and public pedagogy; and the green questions – *How do others see me as a result of what I’ve done?* and *Who am I?* – foreground poststructuralist and feminist thinking and researcher reflexivity. The fluidity and flexibility of the research design means that, whilst my knowledge of self and culture has continued to grow and evolve, I have been constantly moving backwards and forwards between the questions. I acknowledge that the static nature of a picture or diagram does not show the messiness of this process.

Focus one: *Who am I?* and *What is?*

Before initiating a transformative agenda, it has been necessary to deepen understandings of how ideologically dominant – and non-dominant – gender beliefs and practices are being discursively and culturally constituted within and across Wheatville. Giroux (2001) claims ideologies can be viewed in two ways: They are “concretised” (p. 143) in the texts and institutional practices of our worlds and also present in human consciousness, manifesting daily in our behaviours, discourses, and lived experiences. It is for this reason that I have made use of a combination of ethnographic, autoethnographic, and critical discourse analysis techniques to explore and problematise both the media texts and social practices of the community and the personal beliefs, experiences, and stories of its members. As an insider researcher this has incorporated the sharing of my own personal beliefs, experiences, and stories.

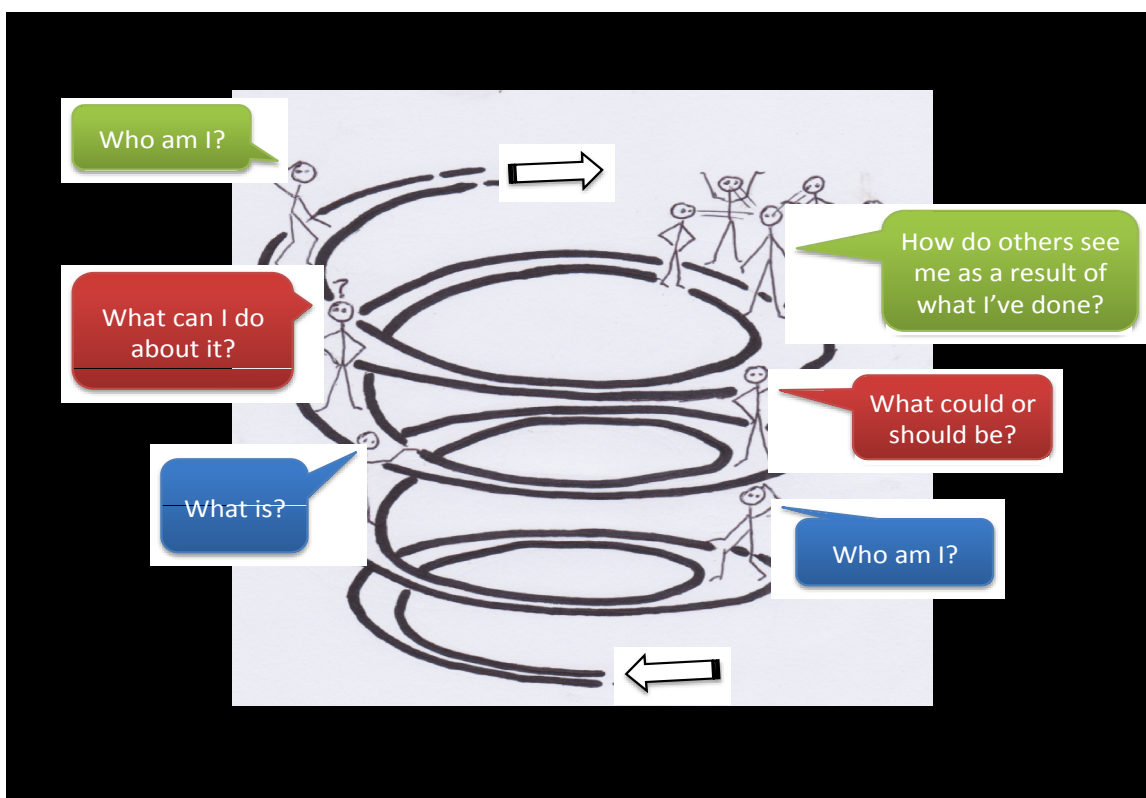


Figure 4.1. A colour-coded pictogram representing the alignment of the cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery with the study's three foci.

Key to the trustworthiness of the research has been my ability to situate myself and my biases within the community under study in a way that does not

reify my thinking (Berry, 2006) or diminish the views and humanness of others. As the author of this dissertation, I have consciously worked to ensure that my perspective is never put forward as the correct one or, alternatively, that a view contrary to my own is presented as the incorrect one. I have done this by deliberately and regularly layering my thoughts and beliefs alongside and against the gender beliefs and experiences of others. I also have ensured that I am constantly rethinking and questioning my beliefs and actions. Whilst my feminist leanings and gender justice lenses are clearly evident, perspectives divergent from my own can also be found – respectfully represented – within the pages of this dissertation.

Essentially, Focus 1 of the research act has set out to answer the *Who am I?* and *What is?* questions from the cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self discovery introduced in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3.2). The research question emanating from this focus is:

1. *How is gender being ideologically produced and reproduced through the texts, social structures, and cultural and discursive practices of a rural Australian community?*

Focus two: *What should or could be?* and *What can I do about it?*

Focus 2 has centred on disclosing and dislocating discourses and cultural practices perpetuating hegemonic masculinity. It has done this by publically exposing and challenging these limiting ideologies and offering alternatives to them. Giroux (2001) claims that “ideology functions not only to limit human action but also to enable it” (p. 145). In exposing and disrupting limiting ideologies being mediated through the community’s discursive and cultural practices, an opening has been created for reconstructing and transcending them. In addressing Focus 2, I have taken on the role of a public pedagogue, with the set purpose of provoking social change. Such counterhegemonic praxis has introduced an activist flavour to the study (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). Focus 2 is aligned to the *What should or could be?* and *What can I do about it?* questions from the cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self discovery (see Figure 4.1). It is underpinned by the research question:

2. *What transformative thinking or action is possible through a communal unsettling of phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement in this community?*

Focus three: *How do others see me as a result of what I've done? and Who am I?*

A further focus of the research has been to explore how others discursively position me – and I them – as I have set about exposing, unsettling and offering alternatives to phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement. I am of the opinion that such discourses have become naturalised (Fairclough, 1995) in Wheatville and often pass without notice or comment. By documenting my experiential – as well as my emotional – activist journey, I have been able to extend understandings of how power is operationalised to construct and constrict challengers to the beliefs and practices of the dominant social order.

Holman Jones (2005) claims that “emotions are important to understanding and theorising the relationship among self, power, and culture” (p. 767). By deliberately and publically irritating the forces of hegemonic masculinity within and across Wheatville, I have been able to experience first hand the process of being othered. In documenting both my experiences and my emotional state throughout this process I have drawn on ethnographic and autoethnographic techniques. These tools have enabled me to deepen understandings of the way power is wielded to maintain – or in some cases to destabilise – the beliefs and practices of members of the dominant social order. They have allowed me to capture what happens and how I have been made to feel when the forces of hegemonic masculinity are assembled against me. The documenting and problematising of my insider activist journey have been fundamental to understanding how cultural and ideological forces that operate within and across communities shape all who live there – including those who would resist dominant hegemonies and their manifestation into commonsense practices. In support of my approach, Ellis and Bochner (2000) claim that:

Autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a

vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

Focus 3 has addressed the *How do others see me as a result of what I've done?* question from the cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self discovery and re-asked *Who am I?* (see Figure 4.1). However, this time my identity query has evolved to incorporate a much deeper level of understanding of how I discursively position others in my community and am positioned by them.

The research question emanating from Focus 3 of the study is:

3. *How am I positioning, and being positioned by, others in my community as a consequence of my actions?*

The research process

In summary, the three foci of the study are: to deepen cultural understandings of gender beliefs and practices in and across the research site; to disclose and disrupt phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement as a way of inspiring transformative thinking and action; and to document and problematise how I discursively position others and how I am positioned by them as a result of my activist work. Figure 4.2 gives a pictorial overview of this complex process. In it I have chosen to adopt a mining metaphor because of the parallels between my study and mining's preoccupation with the excavation, examination, refinement, reshaping, and transformation of materials/objects that lie hidden beneath the surface for extended periods of time.

The pictorial labelled "Cultural digging" addresses Question and Focus 1 of the research. In the pictorial, I am represented as a blue stick figure executing a cultural excavation. My job is to mine the gender discourses and cultural practices of the community as a way of making transparent ideological productions and reproductions of hegemonic masculinity and its more equitable alternatives. Such discourses and practices are to be found within the texts, gender beliefs, social relations, institutions, material practices and manifestations of power operating within and across the research site (Harvey, 1996). In excavating them I rely on my observations and recollections, as well as purposefully collecting and critically analysing local media texts and community members' stories, beliefs, and

The Process

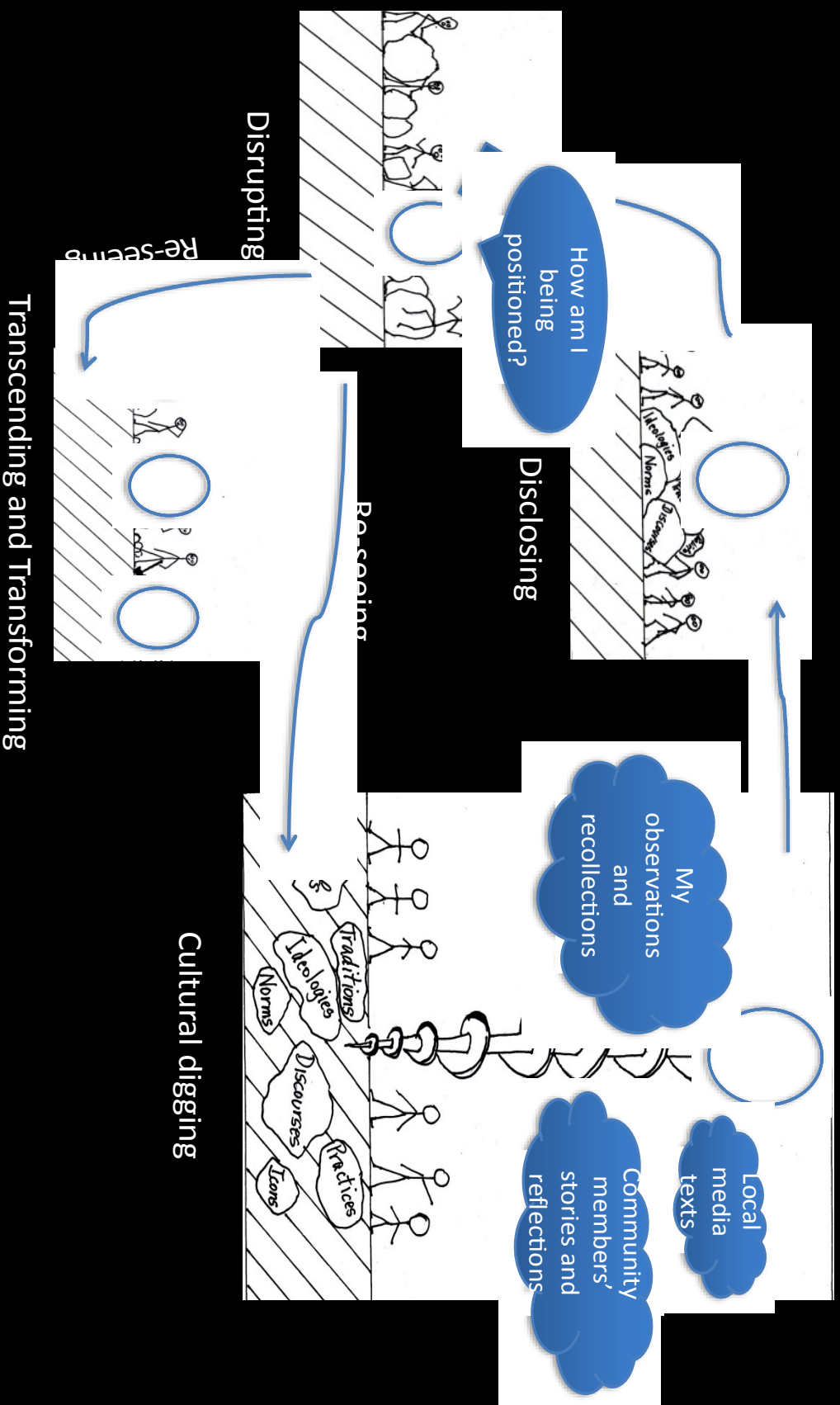


Figure 4.2. Pictogram showing a process for addressing the research questions and foci

reflections. The fusion of critical, cultural, poststructuralist, and feminist lenses I am wearing are symbolised by the addition of eyes to my figure. Members of the community are represented by the other stick figures. Whilst I am fully cognisant of community members having already formed opinions and beliefs, I have kept the faces of these stick figures devoid of features, to demonstrate that they may not yet have looked at cultural beliefs and practices and discursive constructions of gender through the same lenses that I am wearing.

Once I have deepened my understandings of how gender is being culturally and discursively constituted and performed in and across Wheatville, I begin the process of publically disclosing and disrupting hegemonic masculinity and its ideological productions and reproductions. This process is represented by two more pictorials labelled “Disclosing” and “Disrupting”. In each of these I am again positioned within a blue circle. In the “Disclosing” image I have been given a voice as well as eyes and the stick figures representing community members have also been given eyes. This is because they are now being asked to interpret texts and cultural practices through my lenses. In the “Disrupting” image all community members have been given eyes and voices. This symbolises communal participation in activist dialogues as we search for new meanings in our efforts to transcend old ones. I have attempted to visually capture the differing reactions of individuals by using a diversity of body postures – some representing support, others uncertainty, whilst others demonstrate resistance. The cyclical movement of the arrows between the three pictorials demonstrates the non-linear nature of the research and its evolving criticality. As I initiate dialogic conversations with members of the community in my role as a public pedagogue (Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010), I not only deepen understandings of the culture to which I belong but I also gain valuable personal insights. I witness and experience both anticipated and unanticipated responses and reactions and I am made to reflect, re-see, rethink, and re-act. This, in turn, inspires me to dig further.

In the fourth step in the process, labelled “Transcending and Transforming,” I am shown dismantling and re-shaping the boulders representative of beliefs, social relations, institutions, material practices, and manifestations of power

(Harvey, 1996). However, I am no longer acting alone. A number of community members have joined me in my activist endeavours. As in the “Disrupting” pictorial, they – and others – take up various positions representative of the diversity of reactions to being asked to rethink and transcend previously unquestioned beliefs and practices. The process I am using encompasses radical (Giroux, 2001) and public pedagogies (Ayers, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010) and, whilst uncomfortable for some, it is potentially emancipatory.

A Set of Tools for Enabling Transformative Thinking and Action

Bounding the research

Whilst recognising the permeable and elastic nature of my research, I also recognise that it has needed to operate within some version of a boundary so as to avoid the risk of becoming so tangential and broad as to lose depth and direction. Steinberg (2006) suggests critical ethnography as a useful methodological tool for researchers using bricolage. In embracing this idea, I have borrowed from aspects of Merriam's (1998) ethnographic case study tradition which limits the object of study to a single entity or unit whilst interpreting evidence using a socio-cultural lens. In furthering understandings of the gender beliefs and practices of Wheatville, and interrupting those that are limiting lives, I have immersed myself in a critical exploration of the complexities of Wheatville's context and culture. The town of Wheatville has a population of nearly 5000 and is understood as encompassing all peoples residing within the town boundaries. The district of Wheatville incorporates those who live on the surrounding farms and in the nearby smaller settlements outside of the town's boundaries. Incorporating just under 6000, these district members use Wheatville as their major service centre for such things as education, shopping, entertainment, and business. Wheatville and its surrounding district encompass an area of 19284 square kilometres. When reference is made to the Wheatville community it encompasses both the town residents and those from the surrounding district unless I specifically stipulate that it is otherwise.

Merriam (1998) claims that the ethnographic case study “offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential

importance in understanding phenomenon” (p. 41). Case studies bound systems for “intensive, holistic description and analysis” (p. 12). Ethnography as a hermeneutical science uncovers and describes belief systems, values, and attitudes which unite to constitute group behaviours or cultures within these bounded systems (Ellis, 2004). As such, a merger of ethnographic and case study approaches has provided me with a naturalistic and holistic framework for viewing cultural and discursive practices and beliefs in Wheatville (2004). Overlaying ethnographic and case study traditions with critical, poststructuralist, and feminist lenses has allowed me to further my understandings of masculine hegemony and question, disrupt, and transcend its manifestations within and across this community.

Vital to my research has been a need to understand the cultural context and the relationship between it and those who live in it (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In achieving this, I have needed to remain flexible, responsive and always open to new directions, sources of evidence, and understandings. Yin (2006) argues that critical case study approaches permit the simultaneous collection and analyses of evidence. I have embraced this notion by using unanticipated responses in an interview to provoke new strands of questioning; unexpected observations to see and think about things in new ways; and incidental encounters with others as opportunities to extrude more sources of evidence.

Initiating dialogic discussions

When generating and collecting sources of evidence, Kincheloe and Berry (2004) recommend the use of Point of Entry Texts from which a bricoleur can manoeuvre to other texts and back again in a cyclical process known as feedback looping. This process helps to bring to the surface what may at first lie hidden and to create what Kincheloe and Berry have labelled a Butterfly Effect in which a number of hermeneutical circles are activated to provide the researcher, and those whose lives she touches, with the conditions necessary for deeper and deeper levels of clarification and understanding. My research design has used two Point of Entry Texts which are shown in Figures 4.3 and 4.4. Figure 4.3 was used as a stimulus to excavate the stories and beliefs of individual community members

as I set about exploring how gender was being ideologically produced and reproduced through the texts, social structures, and discursive practices of Wheatville. Figure 4.4 became the subject of a communal letter I wrote to the local newspaper with the intention of unsettling phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement.

Linking ideology, hegemony, power, and discourse

In order to uncover what could be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher, I needed to become one. Over the course of this study, I have excavated and made transparent gender beliefs and practices being discursively and culturally produced and reproduced in Wheatville, before unsettling those that promote phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement. My method of doing this has been to discursively construct and publically broadcast an “oppositional” (McLaren, 2003a, p. 81) ideology using the platform provided by the local newspaper. hooks (1990) supports this approach encouraging researchers to create “spaces of radical openness” (p. 129) from which counter-hegemonic discourses can be launched as a means of reconstructing those discursive and cultural productions which limit and confine us.

Ideological hegemony is not always transparent or obvious. It is discursively and culturally constituted and constituting, sustained in the social situations we encounter in our everyday lives (Harvey, 1996). Often invisible, it is located in the subtleties of a conversation, the written word, values, morals, a tradition, domestic and work roles, an image, a cultural icon, the routines of an institution, and/or the day-to-day practices of individuals and groups within and across communities. Jones and Collins (2006) claim that ideological hegemony is mediated and policed in communities through “the ownership of property, wealth, rate, and intensity of exploitations, rights and privileges under the law, institutional authority, political organizations, and so on” (p. 35). It is the format through which power is exercised and reproduced, and discursive and cultural practices, more often than not, the vehicles which drive it (Harvey, 1996). This means that any critical understanding of ideological hegemony must, by necessity, excavate both discursive and cultural ideological constructions.

I have added to this excavation process Freire's (1985) concept of *conscientizacao* which supports shared understandings of the world so that power relations can be problematised as a form of liberatory praxis. I have also linked Giroux's (2001) concepts of radical pedagogy and ideology critique which encourage the researcher to disclose cultural and discursive excavations and disrupt ideological hegemony for the purposes of reconstructing and transforming. (See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of Freire's and Giroux's concepts.) In unsettling and transcending hegemonic masculinity and its associated power asymmetries, the cultural and discursive practices of Wheatville have needed to be mined, made transparent, and publically critiqued.

Mining cultural and discursive practices to reveal their ideological seams: Two approaches

Aspects of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1989, 1995, 2008) and Wodak's discourse-historical approach (2002a, 2002b, 2004) have been useful to my study in methodologically supporting the excavating and critiquing of hegemonic practices linked to power inequities. In their work, Fairclough and Wodak make use of an analytical technique known as Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA. CDA provides the tools and structure necessary for illuminating and problematising limiting ideologies from the cultural texts and language practices of the institutions or communities under study, so that alternative ideologies are able to be co-constructed (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2002a).

Fairclough's approach

In his seminal work, *Language and power* (1989), Fairclough develops an approach for linking social to linguistic analysis that has come to be known as CDA. This approach describes, interprets, and explains the discourses in texts for their connections between language, power, and ideologies. In elucidating power as being partly ideological and partly discursive, and then developing a systematic approach for excavating and analysing it, Fairclough (1995) has provided me with a useful tool for this study.

The purpose of CDA is to question "commonsense normalcy of mundane practices as the basis for the continuity and reproduction of relations of power"

(Fairclough, 1995, p. 136). Fairclough (1989, 1995) claims that media texts in particular are adept at vocalising and perpetuating dominant discourses that work to empower some whilst subordinating others:

The social function of the media ... is to legitimise and reproduce existing asymmetrical power relationships by putting across the voices of the powerful as if they were the voices of 'common sense'. (1995, p. 63)

This thinking aligns with my own understandings and helps to validate the extensive use I have made throughout this study of local newspaper texts.

Fairclough (1995) recommends three layers of analysis: a description of the linguistic properties present in the text; an interpretation of the relationship between the discursive practices involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of the text; and an explanation of the relationship between the discursive and social practices evident in the text. My study has adopted and adapted these layers to analyse a selection of Wheatville's media texts and community members' stories. Specifically, it has asked:

- What are the linguistic and/or visual properties of the texts?
- How do they discursively construct relationships between males and females?
- What ideological messages are being produced and reproduced as a result of these constructions?

Fairclough's method of analysis has been particularly useful to me when addressing the first of the research questions and foci, as it has provided a systematic process for uncovering and critiquing discursive constructions of gender located within the media texts and language practices of Wheatville. This, in turn, has helped to expose the ideological seams embedded within these texts.

Wodak's discourse-historical approach

Wodak (2002b) argues that there are three conceptual links which "figure indispensably in all CDA: the concept of power; the concept of history; and the concept of ideology" (p. 3). Unlike Fairclough, Wodak's (2002a) interpretation of CDA emphasises the social over the linguistic. She posits that research using CDA "must be multitheoretical and multimethodical, critical and self-reflective" (p. 64).

This notion channels many of the key principles of bricolage and, subsequently, my own approach.

Wodak (2004) aligns with aspects of Fairclough's (1995, 2003, 2008) and Giroux's (2001, 2003) thinking when she claims that:

Discourse is the place where language and ideology meet, and discourse analysis is the analysis of ideological dimensions of language use, and of the materialisation in language of ideology. (p. 204)

Wodak (2002a) has developed the discourse-historical method for exploring discourses as a form of social critique. Aspects of Wodak's discourse-historical approach have been useful to me in addressing Foci 1 and 2 of this study. They have provided me with a structure and appropriate tools of inquiry for understanding and challenging limiting gender binaries which are mediated through the discursive and cultural practices of Wheatville.

In seeking to understand and expose limiting gender binaries, I have made use of a series of five questions developed by Wodak (2002a) to scaffold socio-diagnostic critique. I have included these questions in their entirety because of their significance in guiding my analyses of the media texts, stories, and researcher-generated texts produced and collected during the course of this study:

1. How are persons named and referred to linguistically?
2. What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?
3. By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify and legitimize the exclusion, discrimination, suppression and exploitation of others?
4. From what perspective or point of view are these labels, attributes and arguments expressed?
5. Are the respective utterances articulated overtly? Are they intensified or are they mitigated? (pp. 72-73)

To these questions I have added some more:

- What prior knowledge do I need to make sense of the community's texts and discourses?
- How are readers being positioned?

- What social/political actions are being discursively produced or reproduced in community texts?
- Who might be benefitting from these actions?
- Who might be disadvantaged?
- Are there alternative constructions?
- How might texts be rewritten so that they are more inclusive?

These additional questions have been informed principally by one of the literacy practices described in Luke and Freebody's (1999a, 1999b) four resources model. This model situates the reader as breaking the codes of texts; participating in the meanings of texts; using texts functionally; and critically analysing and transforming texts. It is based on an understanding of literacy as a social practice shaped by the heterogeneity and fluidity of cultural contexts and the relations of power operating within these contexts – "relations that may be asymmetrical, unequal, and ideological" (p. 2). The framing of textual interpretations as highly complex social processes laden with multiplicities of meaning sits comfortably with the conceptual underpinnings of this study. It also helps me to understand why others can interpret a text differently from me.

Whilst the questions I have adopted and adapted from Fairclough's (1995), Wodak's (2002a), and Luke and Freebody's (1999a, 1999b) work have been useful in guiding the analyses of multiple sources of evidence – and in helping me to generate new evidence – I have not applied them in a regimented or uniform fashion to every text I have critiqued or constructed. Instead, I have selected from them as needed in order to shape, layer, flavour, and direct my analyses and research in its emancipatory endeavours. This has been in keeping with the flexibility and eclecticism that is the fundamental privilege of the bricoleur.

Structuring the Research

The eclectic, evolving and non-linear nature of my research has meant that it has the potential to become rather unwieldy, repetitive, and chaotic. Cycles of discovery and rediscovery, feedback loops, textual re-visitations, and the inclusion of multi-perspectival sources of evidence can start to evoke an impression of circular perpetuity. In creating a sense of direction, cohesion, and evolution out of all of this chaos and complexity I have chosen to adopt and adapt a structuring

device recommended by Wodak (2002a). She advocates the use of “three interconnected aspects” of analysis – “two of which are primarily related to the dimension of cognition and one to the dimension of action” (p. 64) for researchers conducting social and cultural critiques. She has labelled these the socio-diagnostic critique, the immanent critique, and the prognostic critique.

Conducting a socio-diagnostic critique

By employing Wodak’s (2002a) understandings of a socio-diagnostic critique, or inventory, I have been able to contextualise the research site and begin exposing and demystifying its cultural practices and discursive constructions. This has involved locating and situating community practices and discourses in their social, historical, and political settings as a way of making their “manifest or latent – possibly persuasive or ‘manipulative character’” transparent (p. 65).

In conducting my socio-diagnostic critique I have made use of quantitative data and qualitative sources of evidence and injected into these my emic commentary. I have combined demographic data, school reports, a selection of local media texts, and my insider knowledge to illuminate community discourses and explore Wheatville’s significant historical, economic, political, and social influences. This has worked to contextualise the study and give it breadth. I have covered a broad range of issues and offered my summary perspective of the *what is* of Wheatville’s dominant discourses, current economic challenges, and master narratives. I have built bridges between texts, their readers, producers, and historical and social contexts (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter (2002) claim that “setting and context should be recorded as accurately as possible, since discourses can only be described, understood and interpreted in their specific context” (p. 159). In doing this I have also situated myself within the cultural landscape that is Wheatville.

Whilst necessary, a socio-diagnostic critique lacks the polyvocality, reflexivity, and dialogism of immanent and prognostic critiques. It might provide insights into cultural practices, beliefs, and influences, but it does little to increase understandings of how and why particular gender beliefs and practices are being constituted and maintained; what the social impact of these might be on

individuals' lives; how a divergence from the norm might be realised or, alternatively, suppressed; or the difficulties and rewards of operating as an insider activist researcher. These complexities are left for the immanent and prognostic critiques to cogitate.

Identifying contradictions and instances of resistance

Another interconnected aspect of Wodak's discourse-historical approach is its embracing of the notion of immanent critique. Wodak (2002a) claims that "text or discourse immanent critique aims at discovering inconsistencies, (self)-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse-internal structures" (p. 65). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) explain that "within the tensions of difference rest insights" (p. 319). This study has embraced the notion of immanent critique – or *what could or should be* – by strategically weaving together local media texts and personal stories that reproduce and resist dominant ideologies and discursive constructions of gender in Wheatville. Those that resist have served to challenge the status quo by providing alternative ways of thinking and doing gender.

Incorporated into the dissertation are the moving stories of individuals who have been constricted or physically harmed by practices informed by hypermasculine beliefs and limiting gender binaries. Also included are media articles and interview transcripts foregrounding the personal stories of individuals who have challenged or resisted these oppressive gender regimes. One of the stories is my own as I have documented the experiential and emotional journey of publically disclosing and dislocating phallocentric discourses of white male entitlement from within my own community. It is through these alternative constructions and oppositional discourses that the "transformative potential" (Giroux, 2001, p. 144) of the study has been realised.

The third interconnected aspect of Wodak's (2002a) discourse historical approach is her vision of a prognostic critique for action. She describes this as a form of critique which "contributes to the transformation and improvement of communication" (p. 65). Wodak's prognostic critique concerns itself with creating a product or text that helps to embed transformative practices within institutions.

Whilst my research has moved beyond the institution of the school to take on a whole of community focus, in adopting and adapting Wodak's concept of prognostic critique I have composed a series of letters and published them in Wheatville's local newspaper. These letters have functioned to generate an activist dialogue with transformative potential. Likewise, the dissertation itself operates as a text for inspiring transformative praxis within and across educational settings and their wider communities. Its multi-theoretical frame and intricate epistemological design serve as a challenge to monological approaches for addressing complex cultural and educational issues. In this way the study extends the boundaries of qualitative research.

Using forays into autoethnography to document my journey and gain personal insights

Autoethnography is an emotionally charged, disruptive, evocative, sometimes confessional, therapeutic, and epiphanal form of cultural-critical research. Its proponents (Ellis, 2004; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Holman Jones, 2005) argue that this highly literary technique operates as a legitimate, serious, and ethical means of creating new knowledge from which to deepen and challenge understandings of the world and individuals' connections to it:

Autoethnography writes a world in a state of flux and movement – between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement. It creates charged moments of clarity, connection, and change. (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764)

This study has interwoven autoethnographic moments beside and against interview transcripts, critical analyses and reflection, and digital, media, and community texts representing divergent and/or oppositional thinking to my own as a way of furthering “universalistic theoretical knowledge and local practical knowledge” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 217). Not only have I documented, problematised, and unsettled the actions and language practices of Wheatville's community members, but I have also documented my emotional state throughout this activist journey. In line with the ‘post’ postmodern nature of this study the writing itself has become a “process of discovery” (Ellis, 2004, p. 3). Autoethnography is capable of linking the personal to the cultural, social, and political and is particularly useful for researchers wanting to stand inside, rather

than outside, the researched object (Ellis, 2004). I have made use of autoethnographic techniques and critical reflection in this study for four reasons: to further understandings of how hegemonic masculinity is being used to emotionally and discursively position community members in Wheatville (including myself); to clarify my thinking; to document my growth of consciousness, and to make transparent the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher. By blurring the boundaries between academic and literary writing so that my emotional state is illuminated to the reader, I believe I have been able to add to knowledge reconceptualising the role of the researcher-cum-transformative intellectual and social activist.

Addressing the Foci

Initially, and somewhat naively, I believed the actioning of this study would occur over two discrete phases. I planned for these to follow on sequentially from one another with Phase 2 making use of the evidence generated by Phase 1. Phase 1 would deepen understandings of local gender discourses and ideologies and Phase 2 would actively disrupt discourses and ideologies that limit lives. I intended to explore discursive constructions of gender for approximately a year and then offer a series of workshops over a six month period to influential community groups. These workshops would present and problematise community texts that discursively perpetuate practices steeped in hegemonic masculinity. However, as the study evolved I came to realise that it was taking on a life of its own and that the problematising of the research journey itself would make a valuable contribution to new knowledge.

In the process of addressing Focus 1 of the research (*Who am I?* and *What is?*) an event serendipitously presented itself. In conjunction with the interviews I was conducting, certain actions I had taken were already positioning me as a “radical feminist” in the community and creating public spaces for critical reflection, dialogic exchanges, and transformative thinking and action to occur. I started to realise that the workshops would no longer be necessary – or perhaps even viable. It was important to be flexible enough to capitalise on these new opportunities.

Deepening understandings

In addressing Focus 1 of the research design – deepening understandings of how gender performances are being ideologically produced and reproduced through the discursive practices of a rural Australian community – I have collected an extensive and disparate array of evidence. This evidence includes an archive of local newspaper articles, researcher observations and recollections, school and community members’ stories, school reports, and destination studies and demographic data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Before collecting evidence from the school site I have been careful to inform my employee of my intentions (see Appendix A) and seek the appropriate approval (see Appendix B). Methodological tools used for collecting and generating the study’s multiple sources of evidence have incorporated unstructured interviews,¹⁰ Point of Entry Texts (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), memory work, purposeful sampling of media articles, digital searches of local and national websites, and field notes recording observations and encounters relevant to the research topic (Wiersma, 2000).

In analysing evidence I have been guided by a series of pre-developed questions [see section, this chapter, “Mining discourses to reveal their ideological seams: Two approaches”]. Common themes, bifurcations, and interdiscursive links (Fairclough, 1995) emerging during analysis have helped to provide a system for sorting, layering, juxtapositioning, and re-presenting the evidence. This has resulted in a woven tapestry of digital and media texts, critical analyses, reflections, stories, school reports, demographic data, and observations. My approach has served to deepen understandings of how power is being mediated and maintained in this community whilst simultaneously critiquing it.

Whilst I have been resolute about what it is I am seeking to explore and analyse, there has been an element of improvisation about my research. A lack of structured interview questions becomes a deliberate ploy for avoiding predetermined responses: interviews evolve into conversations between two friends or acquaintances in naturalistic settings; elaborations and digressions are

¹⁰ Unstructured interviews, “involve spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of interaction, and where the interview is driven by the interviewee rather than the interviewer” (Australian Government, 2007, p. 26).

encouraged; and disruptions welcomed as opportunities for all involved in the research act to drill more deeply for alternative meanings (Kincheloe, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). By critically sifting through multiple and varied interpretations of lived events and identifying points of congruence or bifurcation, the dominant ideologies and imbalances of power coursing through the community that is Wheatville have begun to bubble to the surface.

After completing a brief socio-diagnostic critique of the community as a means of contextualising the research (Wodak, 2002a) [see Chapter 5], I have set about addressing Focus 1 of the study. This has been done by selectively collecting and critiquing local media texts, destination studies and high school reports, and the personal experiences and beliefs of community members. The visual and linguistic properties of media texts offer powerful cultural clues as to which gender practices and performances are being reified by the community and which are being censured (Lennon, 2011). Destination studies and behavioural reports from the local high school have given valuable insights into how gender beliefs are manifesting as practice; and the stories, observations, and experiences of past and present community members have given insightful, divergent, and multi-perspectival interpretations of Wheatville's gender beliefs and practices. In short, a combination of "information culled from people with information culled from texts" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 12) has been used to deepen understandings of how gender is being constituted within and across the research site.

Selecting media texts for analysis

The local Wheatville newspaper is a weekly publication that has a circulation of approximately 3,000. This means that its reach extends to most of the households within and across the community. Texts from this paper have been collected and analysed over a period of two years from the beginning of 2009 until the end of 2010. Texts have been chosen for their usefulness in illuminating how local gender beliefs and practices are being discursively produced and reproduced within and across the community, because they make reference to issues of an educational nature, or for both of these reasons. It has been important during the collection of evidence that I also remain receptive to the collection of local media

texts that resist dominant discursive constructions and offer alternative ways of thinking about and doing gender in this community.

Making selections about which media texts to select has been informed by how individuals or groups are represented in them. If I have been uncertain as to whether a text should be included in the evidence bank or not, I have performed a simple role reversal reading whereby I have imagined the article with an alternative gendered or cultural representation. For instance, in my mind I have replaced the male subject of a story with a female subject or an Indigenous person. If I have felt this alternative reading would be considered abnormal or confronting for many in the community I have kept the article and added it to my bank of evidence. Likewise, if I believe an article would challenge local gender norms I have included it in my bank of evidence.

In making these interpretive and highly subjective decisions, I have relied on my substantial insider knowledge of local customs and cultural gender expectations. The simple replacement strategy I have outlined has enabled me to re-see and rethink the gendered and enculturated world in which I live. McLaren (2003b) makes reference to acts of “pedagogical surrealism” whereby the researcher makes “the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (p. 189). I have found mentally swapping the gender or ethnicity of the subjects of certain media texts a very useful ploy for quickly identifying what would be considered strange by many in Wheatville and subsequently locating the dominant ideologies and discourses in a text. Nevertheless, I still acknowledge the deeply ideological, political, and subjective nature of the choices I have made in collating and analysing the study’s multiple sources of evidence.

It should be noted that it has never been my intention to vilify or denounce the local newspaper for causing community gender inequities or some boys’ schooling underperformances. That would be a ludicrous response to a very complex issue. Whilst acknowledging that the media serves to constitute, reflect, and perpetuate wider community discourses, beliefs, and practices (Fairclough, 1989, 1995, 2003; Wodak, 2002b), in this study I have also embraced its potential as a medium for challenging social inequities. Viewing media texts as cultural

artefacts turns them into potent tools for making transparent, and questioning, power imbalances and social inequities. These can polarise in communities, to manifest as binaries that serve to limit and restrict lives (Lennon, 2011). Not only have media texts provided this research with a means of exploring and questioning oppressive binaries, but they have also given it a platform for presenting alternatives that splinter and dislodge such binaries (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010).

Selecting and interviewing participants

Initially I drew up a list of 20 prospective interviewees whom I set about approaching to be part of the study. Some were members of the teaching profession; some were long term community residents; others were local professionals and business owners; a few were relatively new to the community; and some were past students of mine. Those on the list varied in age from 25 to 61, with the majority in their 30s, 40s and 50s. Four were male and the rest female. Fourteen were parents and seven of these had sent their children away to private boarding schools. Some were from what could be considered middle-class (often private school) backgrounds; others from lower socio-economic (often state school) backgrounds. Whilst I believe those on my original list were representative of a diversity of genders, educational backgrounds, and life experiences and were therefore able to provide multiple perspectives, I am also conscious of gaps in the choices that I made. Members of non-dominant gender and ethnic communities were not included nor were the voices of local Indigenous people. Later, I did attempt to organise an interview with a female Indigenous artist; however, time and a lack of response from the potential interviewee meant I eventually abandoned this option.

As the study has evolved, and more in the community have become aware of my stance, I have found that I am regularly approached by community members wanting to tell me of a related incident that they have witnessed or in which they have been involved. These serendipitous moments of spontaneous revelation have increased since I published a letter in the local newspaper questioning the gender messages being broadcast by an iconic local image (see Figure 4.4). If I

have felt a particular individual has specific knowledge or expertise that would be useful to my study I have asked if they would commit to being interviewed at a later date. If agreeable, I have followed up on this new and unexpected source of information. The flexibility afforded by the research design has meant that I never have worked my way through all those on my original interview list; however, I believe the reflexivity and spontaneity of the study have given it a richness and dynamism that would not have been there had I been obdurate about doing so.

Community members involved in interviews have been encouraged to consciously reflect on, consider, and articulate some of the ways that their community constitutes gender at school and beyond. I have based my interviewing techniques on Kincheloe and Berry's (2004) concept of reflexive dyadic interviews. These allow for the incorporation of the interviewer's story as long as it does not overwhelm the interviewees' stories. Reflexive dyadic interviews help to reduce the hierarchical nature of interview situations and work to establish the interviewer and interviewee as equals (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Foley and Valenzuela (2005) concur with this thinking, having tested it in the field: "A more open-ended, conversational interviewing style generated more engaged personal narratives and more candid opinions. It also tended to humanise the interviewer and diminish her power and control of the interview process" (p. 223).

Whilst initially I had planned on using a series of set questions and a Point of Entry Text (see Figure 4.3) to guide these conversations, I soon discovered that this was rarely necessary. Most interviewees have been very keen to tell me their stories and needed little prompting. I have carried a list of pre-prepared questions and the Point of Entry Text to every interview but these have been used as a standby or fall back position to re-ignite an interview if needed – not as a way of controlling or directing the interview. Included in my standby questions are:

- Can you talk to me about your schooling experiences here in Wheatville?
- How would you answer the question posed by this local newspaper article? (see Figure 4.3)
- What does it mean to be a male in this community?
- What does it mean to be a female?
- How do you feel about this?

I believe that my extensive history in the community has been invaluable in helping me to excavate Wheatville's gender beliefs, practices, and traditions. Being an insider researcher studying the cultural beliefs and practices of my own community has meant that all interviewees have known me and most have known of my feminist leanings and passion for education. Foley and Valenzuela (2005) claim that "good cultural critiques usually are based on a number of intimate collaborative relations with research subjects" (p. 223). My research approach has permitted me to draw opportunistically on my accumulated background knowledge and pre-existing social and professional networks. I understand that I have been privileged and advantaged to have had 25 years to develop a shared history with, and connection to, many in this community. I also know that the close relationships that I have formed over these years have meant that I have been able to personalise my interviews in a way that would have been difficult for an external researcher to do.

Whilst I recognise that my first few interviews lacked a certain fluency or naturalness, as I have gained in confidence and grown into my role as a critical ethnographer (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005), the interviews have become more naturalistic and conversational. The interview extracts included in Chapter 6 are clustered thematically, and not ordered chronologically, but they are dated so that it is possible to trace this researcher development through their progression.

Even though I have had many unplanned conversations, I have recorded 13 interviews with past and present community members. These have taken place over a 12 month period. Ten have been with women and three with men. All of those interviewed have been previously known to me either professionally or socially. Once a potential interviewee has been identified and agreed to be part of the study I have given him/her an information sheet outlining the study (see Appendix C) and a statement of consent seeking written permission to be a participant in the study (see Appendix D). The individual has then had a cooling off period of a week to reconsider whether or not to be involved before I contact him/her again.

Individuals have been approached to participate because they have already contacted me and demonstrated that they can offer valuable insights; or because my prior knowledge of the community mean that I know they have lived through an experience that would further understandings of Wheatville's gender beliefs and practices. The dialogic nature of the interviews has given participants significant control over the evidence being elicited. In this way the research has become a mutually empowering process. Its reciprocal and reflexive nature has combined with its methodological elasticity to allow all participants opportunities to explore, reflect on, and gain new insights into how gender is being constituted and policed in Wheatville.

Participants have been informed before any interviews begin of the likely time commitments and possible future use of their interview transcripts. Whilst interviews have varied in length and frequency they usually have lasted about 30 minutes. With participants' permission, conversations have been recorded digitally and duly transcribed. The capturing of these conversations has enabled me to keep re-visiting and rethinking them – a process of discovery and re-discovery (Steinberg, 2006) that I have found invaluable.

In transcribing the interviews I have consciously limited my interpretive decisions or value judgements concerning non-linguistic observations. Therefore references to intonations, emotions, facial expressions, body language, and pauses or sounds such as sighs, laughter, or "ums" have been minimal. I believe that emphasising such details involves me in making value judgements (What constitutes a pause? A sigh? Laughter?), has the potential to distance me from the interviewee, and positions me as clinical and superior. An emphasis on non-verbal details can also work as a distraction to the interviewees' stories. As these details are extraneous to my research intentions and "the textual data will never fully encompass all that takes place during an interview" (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003, p. 64), I have focused instead on providing "in-depth descriptions of the knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, or experiences" (McLellan et al., 2003, p. 67) of those whom I interview. For this reason interview extracts included in the dissertation are often lengthy. Any observations I have made about the non-

linguistic features of an interview have been kept to a minimum or have been included in a brief introductory note placed immediately before an interview transcript.

In all instances, transcripts of interviews have been given to participants within two weeks of an interview being conducted. At this juncture participants have been given a further two weeks to read, respond to, and edit their transcripts. Reflection opportunities have presented themselves when participants check, edit and approve – or disapprove – the transcripts of their interviews, and during follow-up discussions. Kenway and Fitzclarence (2005) suggest that this approach encourages participants:

To search for alternative stories – to search for accounts that contradict or resist the dominant individual and socio-cultural stories through which their lives have been constructed and through which they have constructed their lives. (p. 50)

This search lays the foundations for inspiring transformative thinking and practices (Freire, 1971; Freire & Shor, 1987; Giroux, 2001) and is therefore potentially liberatory (Freire, 1971).

Some final thoughts on addressing Focus 1

The intention of Focus 1 has been to use a layered account consisting of personal narratives, experiences, school reports, and media discourses to emphasise connections and begin “disturb[ing] the master narrative” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 208). I understand that the language and stories people choose to help explain their belief systems, gender practices, experiences and circumstances are both significant and deliberate. Such choices reveal the way they see and interpret the world in which they live and act (Gilligan, 1982). I also understand that, as the researcher, I bring my own perspectives and constructions of reality to the research and that this influences the way participants respond to me and the way I re-present their stories and choose to weave and layer them beside and against other texts. How I do this has the capacity to foreground or, alternatively, diminish particular discourses and/or voices.

In re-presenting and analysing my own and others’ voices and media texts I have looked for interdiscursive links, common themes and bifurcations amongst

the sources of evidence. Whilst this has meant that many of the interview transcripts, observations, and personal reflections are presented in a splintered or fragmented format, it supports the bricoleur's efforts to present multi-perspectival and multi-dimensional insights (Berry, 2006) by reorganising them "into new codes of meaning" (Barker, 2001, p. 6). The end result presents as a carefully crafted collage of community gender beliefs, practices, and discourses.

It is obvious that this type of research is not without its challenges. Interpretations of discursive practices and events are just that – interpretations. Narratives have fictive elements; interpretations lack certainty; and individuals carry biases (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). The knowledge built by Focus 1 of the research has been variously processed and reshaped through a multiplicity of lenses and voices: "Certainty and interpretive finality are simply not possible" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 31). However, the polyvocality inherent to the research does work to build into it an element of ontological authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Through the presentation of a multitude of perspectives and texts, a kaleidoscope of realities have been generated to convey the essence of a community, its beliefs, and its practices. This collusion of knowledge fragments has worked to produce reality as an effect in much the same way that daubs of colour work synergistically to evoke the image of a natural landscape in an impressionist artwork.

Whilst the primary purpose of Focus 1 has been to further understandings of how gender is being ideologically produced and reproduced in the texts and discursive practices of this community, the process of doing so has achieved much more. Through an eclectic but purposeful layering and analysing of selected media texts, stories, school reports, observations and recollections, I have been able to build a tapestry of Wheatville's gender beliefs, practices, and community discourses that enable a questioning and re-seeing of them. By disclosing commonsense assumptions that lock individuals into limiting life performances, a starting point has been provided for moving beyond gender binaries to a more socially just and equitable world. Fairclough (1995) argues that, "from awareness and critique arise possibilities of empowerment and change" (pp. 82-83). Once the

What is? has been critically explored, it is inevitable that some involved in the study will begin asking *What could or should be?*

This evolutionary inquiry process reinforces the interconnectedness and permeability of knowledge, including the foci of this research. The foci have not represented discrete or self-contained stages but overlapping moments of disclosure, dislocation, and transformational thinking that synergise to further understandings of the complexity that is the human condition.

Disclosing and disrupting with transformative intent

Whilst Focus 2 of the study (*What could or should be?* and *What can I do about it?*) continues to deepen the cultural and gender understandings generated by Focus 1, its primary purpose has been to disclose and disrupt limiting gender binaries being produced and reproduced by the community's discursive practices. In addressing the second of the research questions, I have set about publically critiquing and contesting phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement in the community of Wheatville. This has been done as a means of encouraging others to rethink and reshape their gendered lives. Focus 2 blends and blurs the cognition and activist endeavours of Wodak's (2002a) discourse-historical approach (see section, this chapter, 'Wodak's discourse-historical approach'). It has been underpinned by a critical epistemology that encourages the researcher to borrow from both radical (Giroux, 2001, 2003) and public pedagogical frameworks (Ayers, 2010; Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). Focus 2 is methodologically addressed by integrating discursive critiques with political actions to inspire transformative thinking and social change (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010).

Becoming a social activist and public pedagogue

Specifically I have taken on the roles of social activist and public intellectual and set about making transparent and destabilising commonsense assumptions and inequitable social practices perpetuating gender binaries. These binaries have become naturalised in Wheatville and are subsequently invisible to many. My actions work to build collective agency (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010) capable of stimulating transformative thinking and practices. In carrying out my activist work I have made use of the platform provided by the local newspaper to facilitate an

ideological debate, whereby members of the public become “critical co-investigators in dialogue” (Freire & Macedo, 2000, p. 75). The popularity of the local newspaper has provided me with an opportune vehicle for reaching a substantial section of the community. I have used this to challenge limiting gender binaries and reconstruct new and more equitable ways of thinking about and performing gender.

In carrying out my activist work I have publically critiqued a revered local icon (see Figure 4.4) as a way of making transparent and unsettling phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement. My public critique provokes a whole-of-community dialogue. In encouraging others to consciously re-see and rethink the way gender is being constructed, represented, and performed in Wheatville, new insights for understanding and doing gender have been able to emerge (Dillabough, McLeod, & Mills, 2008). The letter I write is deliberately constructed to provoke critical conversations and emotional and intellectual responses from community members (Lather, 1988). Many of these responses use competing voices and opinions to my own. It has been vital to include these responses in their entirety as a means of illuminating the plurality of ideological gender frameworks operating within and across the community of Wheatville. Incorporating complete text versions of responses also promotes the study’s transparency and trustworthiness. By inspiring critical reflections, dialogic exchanges, and collective agency, my research is unsettling as well as potentially emancipatory (Freire, 2000a; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Whilst my approach has been unpredictable and risky, I recognise that an approach like this, which Giroux (2001) would call radical pedagogy, “means taking risks” (p. 242). It is the price paid for research harbouring emancipatory ambitions.

Some final thoughts on Focus 2

My first foray into public pedagogy has attempted to create “a critical public engagement that challenges existing social practices and hegemonic forms of discrimination” (Brady, 2006, p. 58). In doing so I have been conscious of the presence of competing ideological frameworks and the need to create a space

where one informs the other (O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). This means ensuring that multiple perspectives have been presented and juxtaposed, including those that oppose my own. The two texts I create for publication in the local newspaper have been very deliberately couched in non-academic writing to maximise their impact and increase their readership. Hill (2010) argues that:

By rendering our empirical work more public, educational researchers not only contribute to a more educated citizenry, but also increase the influence of educational research in political deliberation, democratic dialogue, and concrete social change. (p. 592)

One of my letters has been designed to disclose and dislocate hegemonic masculinity, the other to offer an alternative to it. In writing these letters, I have been influenced by Foley and Valenzuela (2005) who pointedly ask, “How can academics possibly serve the people they write about if their subjects cannot understand what they write?” (p. 224). I understand that, in attempting to transform and transcend gender inequities from within my own community, it has been vital that I connect with the language use and texts of that community.

Documenting the activist journey

My activist journey has been interesting, insightful and – at times – emotional. Whilst Focus 2 is primarily concerned with disclosing and dislocating phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement, Focus 3 (*How do others see me as a result of what I've done?* and *Who am I?*) is more interested in exploring how others see me as a result of what I am doing and illuminating my learnings about being an insider activist researcher. In addressing this focus, I have recorded the emotional and experiential journey I undertook as I worked to contest phallogentric discourses and their encryptions of power from inside my local community. By documenting and problematising the psychological subtleties and mitigated forces of hegemonic masculinity as they were assembled against me, I have been able to extend conceptual understandings of what it means to be constituted as an insider activist researcher who is challenging the status quo.

In documenting my activist journey, I have made use of autoethnographic and critical ethnographic techniques. These tools have made transparent how I

am being discursively positioned and how I am positioning others. This has been achieved in a number of ways: by storying my past experiences and observations, by using diary style entries to capture my activist journey, and by inserting self-revelatory excerpts exposing my emotional and psychological state at various points along this journey.

Goodness, Credibility, Authenticity, and Ethics

Qualitative research by its nature involves people's lives and the stories and meanings people give to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). Whilst it is risky business, its ethical imperative is to "do good" (S. Jones et al., 2006, p. 155). Indeed, this study has relied on *goodness* (S. Jones et al., 2006) and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) to ensure its trustworthiness and credibility.

The study has demonstrated its goodness in a number of ways. It has aligned theories with methods. It has acknowledged researcher bias. It has included multiple perspectives. It has been reflexive. It has used a multi-methodological approach as a way of giving it a sense of trustworthiness (S. Jones et al., 2006), and it has considered the implications of the research for others seeking transformative thinking and action within their communities.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) argue that critical theorists using postmodern approaches to explore and critique life's conflicts and evolutions need to replace the positivist concept of validity with authenticity. They cite as many as five different criteria useful for qualitative researchers seeking authenticity of research: ontological authenticity; educative authenticity; catalytic authenticity; tactical authenticity, and fairness. My research has achieved ontological and educative authenticity through its creation of new – and publically accessible – knowledge. Catalytic and tactical authenticity are evident in the study's commitment to transformative social action and through its ability to involve others in achieving this. Fairness has been addressed by the creation of a polyvocal text that provides a range and balance of voices and perspectives.

As a means of reducing "personal or social harm" (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003, p. 71) to participants, my study has maintained participants' anonymity at all times. To mask the site and participants' identities, pseudonyms

have been used for the names of all community members, landmarks, and local publications – from the point of initial collection of evidence through to the writing of the dissertation. As a way of ensuring the integrity, or goodness, of my findings I have deliberately made use of multiple methods of evidence collection and analysis, including participant editing and scrutineering (S. Jones et al., 2006). All interviews have been digitally recorded, transcribed, and returned to participants for approval/alterations/additions before being analysed, sorted, stored, extracted, and woven into the study.

As much of the material collected and generated by the study has been of a sensitive nature, it has been of the utmost importance to protect participants and community members' identities. Recordings, transcripts and electronic communications – such as emails and blogs – have been stored digitally in a password encrypted computer to which I alone have had access. In re-presenting others' lives, broad descriptors have been ascribed to those who have generously shared their stories with me. For example, the term "local health worker" has been used instead of "local doctor" or "school nurse". If participants have provided life details that are unique to them and could act as identifiers, these details have been carefully altered or removed so as not to detract from what is said. These alterations have been regrettable but participants still should be able to recognise themselves and their stories (S. Jones et al., 2006). In one instance, a participant who has won a number of very prestigious state awards alludes to these during our interview. Because these references would make her immediately identifiable to some readers, they have been removed from her story without altering the integrity of her contributions. In another interview, a participant makes reference to her long-term employment as a teacher aide at one of the local primary schools. Again, for reasons of confidentiality, I reluctantly delete this reference from the final transcript.

I have been careful to ensure that all interviewees are informed as to the purpose, significance, and intent of the research and that they have given their written consent to participate prior to involvement. They have known that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the evidence

collection phase and could have requested that their contributions be excluded from use in the final document. No-one selected these options. Instead, a number of participants indicated that being given the opportunity to share their lives and experiences has been cathartic. One mother in her mid 40s told me that, for many years, she had wanted to talk openly to someone about a particularly disturbing and violent incident that occurred earlier in her life, and was pleased to finally be given a supportive forum within which she could do so. I have made myself contactable to participants during and after interviews, to answer questions related to the study that do not breach the confidence/trust of others. For those who have requested it, a copy of the finished dissertation is to be made available.

No school-aged children have participated in this study nor have any members of my immediate family. I have been cognisant at all times of the national guidelines for the ethical conduct of research (Australian Government, 2007) and had approval to conduct this study (Approval Number: H09REA145). Despite some initial concern – owing to the activist nature of the study – I also received approval from the state’s education department to collect and use data from the local high school.

I acknowledge that, as the principal author of this document, I am empowered by, and responsible for, the process of capturing, sorting, selecting, editing, and weaving together my own story fragments with those of others. As a result, bias is inevitable (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). I accept and acknowledge it as fundamental to the research process that is bricolage.

A Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how the research manifests as practice to explore what can be learned from the role of an insider activist researcher. It has made explicit the questions guiding this research and aligned these questions with three overlapping and non-linear foci. The epistemological approach I have used places me at the centre of the study and assigns me multiple roles. One of these has been to identify and problematise the gender binaries that appear – often uncontested and legitimised – in and across the research site so that “the invisible artefacts of power and culture” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 2) can gradually be

revealed for self and others. Another has been to work as a social activist within my community to publically contest gender binaries and transform thinking and action; and yet another has been to capture and problematise the emotional and experiential journey I have undertaken as a result of my public activist work. The next chapter, Chapter 5, offers a broad socio-diagnostic inventory of the *What is?* of Wheatville's macro-narratives, demography, social and cultural practices, and economic influences so that both the research and the researcher are contextualised.

Figure 4.3. The first *Point of Entry Text* (Thistle, 2006)

Figure 4.4. The second *Point of Entry Text* (*The Wheatville Times*, 2009)

Chapter 5

Demystifying a Cultural Landscape: One Perspective

An Introduction

Whilst Chapter 4 outlined the inquiry process I am using to explore what can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher, Chapter 5 continues to unfold this emic journey. In this chapter, I make use of a wide-angle lens to address the *What is?* and *Who am I?* questions from the cyclical process of inquiry and self-discovery guiding the research. Using a socio-diagnostic critique (Wodak, 2002a), the chapter sets out to demystify the cultural landscape of Wheatville and my location within it. The intention is to succinctly render – through the eyes of an insider – the values, beliefs, traditions, customs, influences, and practices of life and living in this proudly traditional rural Australian community.

Who Am I?

I arrived in Wheatville as a first year teacher over 25 years ago and have continued my association with the local high school ever since. Within three months of arriving I had met my husband-to-be at the local picnic races. Within three years I was married. My husband is the owner/manager of the property on which I live: the property on which his older brother and grandparents have lived before him. Many of my professional female friends are also married to farming men and, likewise, their husbands have inherited the properties on which they live from their parents.

I find that I am located in an interesting position in Wheatville – a position that can give a sense of leading a double – if not triple – life. Professionally I am “just another chalkie”,¹¹ socially I am “a cocky’s wife”¹² and, more recently, I have been referred to by some as “an academic” or “intellectual”. Whilst I could keep adding to these socially and culturally constructed roles and identities (e.g., mother, student, professional peer, friend, sister, neighbour, auntie, daughter,

¹¹ A slang term used by locals to refer to teachers

¹² A *cocky* is a colloquial term used to describe owners of large tracts of land. Once considered derogatory, the term is now so commonplace that it rarely causes offense.

daughter-in-law, boarder parent representative, feminist, avid gardener, bird watcher), I recognise that the boundaries between my multiple roles and identities can and do blur. I am also informed by the poststructuralist notion that the way I am perceived by – and perceive – others is constantly in a state of flux.

What Is?

The community

The town of Wheatville operates as a service centre supporting the surrounding industries of dry land cropping, grazing, cotton and irrigation. With a town and shire combined population of more than 8000, Wheatville has managed to remain a thriving rural community despite prolonged droughts and recent record-breaking floods. The local newspaper, *The Wheatville Times*, discursively represents Wheatville as a proud community – generous, friendly, compassionate, and a little bit special. Figure 5.1 shows a collection of articles from the newspaper making use of a self-congratulatory discourse to inspire a communal sense of pride and self-satisfaction at the town's sporting and fundraising achievements. This same paper is also quick to make links between the community's spirit and aspects of the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) legend. These links can be evidenced in the headlines from a selection of articles presented in Figure 5.2.

The Anzac legend uses essentialist notions of masculinity and hypermasculinity to discursively construct Australia's World War I soldiers with personal qualities such as resiliency, tenacity, physical strength, endurance, hard work, courage, practicality, risk taking behaviour, mateship, anti-authoritarianism, larrickinism, recklessness, a lack of education, and a suspicion of foreigners, the upper class, and the well educated. British war correspondents reporting during and after World War I helped to seed this legend by describing Australian soldiers as having:

[n]one of the discipline imposed upon our men by regular traditions. They were gypsy fellows, with none but the gypsy law in their hearts, intolerant of restraint, with no respect for rank or caste unless it carried strength with it, difficult to handle behind the lines, quick-tempered, foul-mouthed, primitive men,

but lovable, human, generous souls when their bayonets were not red with blood. They (sic) discipline in battle was the best. They wanted to get to a place ahead. They would fight the devils of hell to get there. (Gibbs, 1920)

Wheatville's hegemonic versions of masculinity intersect with many aspects of the Anzac legend. Figure 5.3 shows a collection of photographs and headlines from *The Wheatville Times* discursively constructing local males as physical, reckless, courageous, successful, and bonded to their teammates and male friends through activities such as football and drinking. Just as the Anzac legend is founded in hypermasculine ideals (Connell, 1995) that marginalise females, my experiences of living in Wheatville have taught me that so too are the gender beliefs and practices of Wheatville.

Figure 5.4 presents a selection of articles discursively constructing female roles in Wheatville. Images of females serving food and drinks and young women being presented to the community as debutantes and show girls help to perpetuate a particularly traditional and heteropatriarchal version of femininity in this community. Females are discursively constructed in these texts as servile, nurturing, and decorative. The collages of newspaper articles presented in Figures 5.3 and 5.4 begin to hint at the power structures operating in and across Wheatville: structures that legitimate masculine hegemony and its accompanying subordination of females. These power hierarchies will be explored more fully in later chapters.

The diversity and scale of enterprises on offer in Wheatville have made this rural community resilient to withstanding fluctuations in world commodity prices and harsh seasonal conditions. However, a recent prolonged drought has seen many in the community struggle to remain financially viable. Figure 5.5 depicts articles from *The Wheatville Times* identifying some of the financial and seasonal issues local farmers faced when coping with the extended drought. Empty shop fronts in the main street and sales of farming properties that have remained in single families for generations – sometimes more than a century – are becoming more common as are well-attended community seminars and workshops focusing

on overcoming depression. The bush vernacular for this condition is “tying up the black dog.”

Figure 5.6 presents a collection of local media articles reporting on some of the financial and social issues currently impacting on Wheatville. Exacerbating farming families’ sense of vulnerability is the pressure placed on property owners by mining companies that want to sink exploratory test bores as they chase coal seam gas deposits. Articles represented in Figure 5.7 discuss some of the ramifications for the local community of this new industry. In an attempt to improve public relations, mining companies have offered scholarships to rural students to attend universities in regional and capital cities. In 2011 they distributed games and educational materials associated with the mining industry to all students in Wheatville’s primary schools.

Wheatville is a community inhabited by fourth-, fifth- and sixth-generation white Australians. Whilst not providing a gender breakdown, demographic data obtained from federal government sources (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008b) indicate certain anomalies when comparing Wheatville to other regional centres (see Table 5.1). Per capita, Wheatville and its surrounding shire have a higher rate of employment than do other regional centres across the state. They also have a higher percentage of managers and labourers than other regional centres. Additionally, per capita, Wheatville has fewer professionals and community members with post school qualifications than other regional centres across the state. Nonetheless, Wheatville enjoys a reputation for affluence. This can be evidenced in how it has been constructed by articles appearing in two separate newspapers: the first, located in a neighboring district’s local paper; the second, in a statewide newspaper. *The Western Warbler* describes Wheatville as:

the rich cotton and grain town where they get 24 inches of rain most years and prefer the private school game of rugby union. It’s bountiful country stocked heavily with silvertails. (Edington, 2010, p. 1)

Australian Bureau of Statistics data		2004	2005	2006
Population	Regional centres across state	3 901 811	3 996 564	4 091 546
	Town of Wheatville	4994	5006	5019
	Surrounding shire of Wheatville	2984	2996	3046
Unemployment rates	Regional centres across state	6.2	4.9	5.0
	Town of Wheatville	4.0	2.9	4.0
	Surrounding shire of Wheatville	2.8	2.1	2.6
Average wage and salary income	Regional centres across state	35917	37569	-
	Town of Wheatville	32096	34638	-
	Surrounding shire of Wheatville	31241	33563	-
Persons with post school qualifications as a % of total population aged 15 years and over	Regional centres across state			50.4
	Town of Wheatville			44.2
	Surrounding shire of Wheatville			41.8
Occupation of employed persons as a % of total population aged 15 years and over	Regional Centres across state:			
	• Professionals			17.1
	• Managers			12.4
	• Technicians and Trades			15.4
	• Labourers			11.9
	Town of Wheatville			
	• Professionals			11.8
	• Managers			13.3
	• Technicians and Trades			16.3
Indigenous Population as a % of total population	• Labourers			14.3
	Surrounding shire of Wheatville			
	• Professionals			8.5
	• Managers			39.3
	• Technicians and Trades			7.8
	• Labourers			14.9
	Regional centres across state			3.5
	Town of Wheatville			5.7
	Surrounding shire of Wheatville			1.3
% of total population born overseas	Regional centres across state			19.2
	Town of Wheatville			4.0
	Surrounding shire of Wheatville			4.5
% of total population who speaks a language other than English at home	Regional centres across state			8.2
	Wheatville and surrounding shire			1.8

Table 5.1 Demographic data for regional centres of the state, Wheatville, and the surrounding shire of Wheatville, 2004 – 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008a, 2008b)

Another explains that:

[t]he town's prosperity derives from its role as a commercial, service and recreation centre for a vast agricultural and pastoral sector which produces some of Australia's best wheat, beef cattle, wool and cotton for domestic and overseas markets. ("Communities on the Move," 2011, p. 55)

Whilst many local males find work in the agricultural sector and its support industries, there are of course exceptions to this. One is the local barber – a colourful and well-known Wheatville identity. His shop, replete with red and white barber's pole and antique leather dentist's chair, has become something of a community icon. I remember my earliest visit to it for the ritual of my oldest son's first haircut. I was met with the standard line: "Cash only. No appointments lady. Just put the boy in the queue." The reading choices made available to my two year old son and I while we waited were motor-bike publications, *The Wheatville Times*, and a selection of semi-pornographic magazines.

Wheatville is over two hours from its closest regional city. Its nearest settlements are an Aboriginal mission and a mission town, both less than 20 minutes away. These Indigenous communities are separated from Wheatville by a state border. This means that Wheatville has no financial or civic responsibility for a significant proportion of people who consider Wheatville their service centre. Whilst over 5% of Wheatville's population is made up of Indigenous peoples (see Table 5.1), those who have chosen to live in the town are often described by locals as "more white than black." The geographic and social barriers resulting from the state border, combined with a long history of racial othering, has led to tensions in the past culminating in race riots and an infamous noosing incident involving white landowners and an Indigenous youth.

Wheatville's relatively monocultural nature becomes evident when analysing data presented in Table 5.1. According to the 2006 Census, only 4% of Wheatville's total population has been born overseas. Of this 4% only 1.2% speaks a language other than English at home. This compares to other regional centres in the state with populations born overseas totalling 19.2% and languages other than English being spoken at home totalling 8.2%. Members of Wheatville's

4% migrant population include the operators of the local Chinese and Thai restaurants, a number of English women who have married local landowners, an Israeli irrigator, two Zimbabwean families working on local farms, a Spanish family, an Irishman, two South African doctors, and itinerant European backpackers seeking seasonal work.

The schools

Within the town of Wheatville there are two well-resourced primary schools and a secondary school. However, traditions and distances of more than 100 kilometres preclude many who live on farms from sending their children to these schools. A number of smaller one- and two-teacher schools exist in the outlying regions of the shire to cater for primary students who would otherwise have to travel excessively long distances. These schools are constantly under pressure to maintain their student numbers or risk the withdrawal of funding and support services – possibly even closure. The local secondary school tends to draw its clientele almost exclusively from the town of Wheatville with only a small number of students traveling in from surrounding properties and settlements. The sending of local landowners' children to prestigious private boarding schools in the state's capital and regional cities for their upper primary and secondary years has become a tradition for many farming families in Wheatville. Some of these children represent the fourth generation from one family to attend the one school.

Every two years the local high school's history department organises a school trip to visit the battlefields of the Anzacs. This community-sponsored trip, which in the past has gained local, state, and national media coverage, focuses on honouring the gravesides of local soldiers who have lost their lives fighting for the allied forces during World War I. The trip is organised by a young female Head of Department at the school with many more girls than boys participating in it. This gender disparity can be directly attributed to the higher numbers of girls electing to do history in their senior years of schooling.

School gender disparities can also be evidenced amongst the teaching population. Whilst the Principals of Wheatville's three town schools are all male,

the majority of the schools' teachers are females. Many of them are in the early years of their profession. In a long-held tradition, new teachers to town are photographed, named, and introduced to the rest of the community via the medium of the local newspaper. I can still remember being horrified to find a clipping of my own introductory photograph in which I was surrounded by seven other new arrivals displayed on the fridge at a party I attended in my first few weeks in Wheatville. Five of us were young single females. The male occupants of the house had given each of us a rating from one to 10 based on our appearances and this was written in ink above our heads.

A Conclusion

This chapter has briefly explored the cultural terrain of Wheatville and my place within it. Specifically it has used qualitative evidence and quantitative data to establish who I am and what the political, educative, economic, and social forces, fluxes, and flows of the community are at a point in time. Discursive practices, beliefs, traditions, and Wheatville's economic influences have been excavated from local newspaper texts, demographic data, and my own personal experiences. Chapter 6 intensifies this drilling by linking ideological hegemony to community discourses and asymmetries of power. It does this by weaving community members' stories beside and against more newspaper articles, electronic communications, school reports, and my own emic commentary and analysis. Whilst Chapter 6 continues to address the *What is?* question from the inquiry process underpinning the study (see Figure 4.1), it also begins to explore the *What could or should be?*

Figure 5.1. Articles that use a self-congratulatory discourse when referring to Wheatville (*The Wheatville Times*, 2008 – 2010).

Figure 5.2. Articles that discursively link the Anzac legend with the community of Wheatville (*The Wheatville Times*, 2008 – 2010).

Figure 5.3. Discursive constructions of local males (*The Wheatville Times*, 2008 – 2010).

Figure 5.4. Discursive constructions of local females (*The Wheatville Times*, 2008 – 2010).

Figure 5.5. Articles that detail issues for local farmers of a recent extended drought (*The Wheatville Times*, 2008 – 2010).

Wombat

Figure 5.6. Articles that detail current economic and social issues facing rural Australians (*The Wheatville Times*, 2008 – 2010).

Figure 5.7. Articles that discuss the impacts of the mining boom on communities in rural Australia (*The Wheatville Times*, 2008 – 2010).

Chapter 6

Deepening Understandings and Beginning to Unsettle Things

An Introduction

The major focus of this chapter is to address the first of the three research questions: *How is gender being ideologically produced and reproduced through the texts, social structures and discursive practices of a rural Australian community?* Chapter 6 hones and extends the work undertaken in Chapter 5 as it focuses on excavating the *What is?* of gender discourses, beliefs and practices in Wheatville's schools and wider community. Part A of the chapter explores how gender is being constituted and performed in schools: Part B explores how gender is being constituted and performed in and across the wider community. The two parts of the chapter weave a selection of local media articles beside and against a series of interview extracts, destination studies, school reports from the local high school, and electronic communications. Connecting these multiple evidence fragments are researcher analyses, observations, and reflections. This approach allows for a multitude of perspectives to be presented and supports the study's concept of goodness [see Chapter 4](Jones, Arminio, & Torres, 2006).

As the chapter evolves, it becomes evident that the reflexive dyadic interviews (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) I am using are working to do more than just excavate the *What is?* of gender beliefs and practices in and across Wheatville. They are also providing spaces for a collaborative rethink of long held assumptions and beliefs about gender to occur. In making "asymmetries of power and privilege" (McLaren, 2003b, p. 193) transparent, those of us involved in the research act cannot help but question them. We begin to re-see, reflect on, and rethink previously unquestioned social norms, assumptions, and discursive constructions of gender. This leads to a re-imagining of what could or should be. Such reconceptualisations transgress into elements of the second research question – *What transformative thinking or action is possible through a communal unsettling of phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement?* This blurring of paradigmatic boundaries between critical ethnographic practices and critical

consciousness-raising is in keeping with the complexity and interconnectivity of the bricolage design I am using.

A way of drilling beneath the surface

Figure 6.1 depicts a section of a front page from *The Wheatville Times* (McKay, 2009b, p. 1). In Chapter 5 it was used to support the observation that the town of Wheatville is particularly proud of its sporting heritage and community spirit (see Figure 5.1). However, this time the page has been extended to include the contents section to the right. In doing so a self-congratulatory discourse being mediated through the lead article is suddenly challenged. The references in the contents section to an attack on a woman (“Woman fights off attacker in laneway”), an image of a fluttering Australian flag, “Men of Vision”, and the photographic portraits of high profile white males from the community now begin to unsettle the self-congratulatory tone of the lead article. These visual, semiotic, and linguistic representations hint at some of the gender issues and asymmetries of power operating in and across Wheatville. The singular reference to a female portrays her as a victim. The two males are represented, visually and linguistically, as far-sighted and heroic. The fluttering Australian flag atop of one of the photographs of the men works to increase his standing by discursively linking him to notions of nation building.

Whilst it is highly unlikely that the editor of the newspaper intended for his front page to be read through critical, feminist, and/or post-colonial lenses, Figure 6.1 illuminates how easily evidence can be manipulated or edited to serve the purposes of the researcher. In attempting to redress this issue, and to increase the study’s fairness and authenticity, my research presents a range and balance of voices and perspectives alongside my own. Whilst I acknowledge that some of these reinforce my interpretations, others do not. Figure 6.1 also serves to demonstrate the impact that the juxtapositioning of words and images can have when exposing and critiquing hegemonies. Chapter 6 sets out to make strategic and deliberate use of such a technique – but on a much larger scale. It juxtaposes a range of texts, artefacts, comments, and analyses in order to deepen

understandings of existing gender beliefs and practices, illuminate social inequities, and begin unsettling things a little.

Part A

In the Classroom

I begin my exploration into local gender discourses, beliefs and practices as I began this study: in the classroom. Part A uses a diversity of texts and voices to provide a multi-perspectival interpretation of what the schooling experience is – and was – for some of Wheatville’s students, teachers and parents. The polyvocal nature of this chapter and its use of the “emotional, affective, value-laden tension of dissimilar narratives and interpretations” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 34) adds to the study’s ontological authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and goodness (Jones, et al., 2006). By merging others’ stories with school reports and my observations, I am able to deepen understandings of life’s complexities. As students’ behaviour reports, researcher observations and community members’ experiences and beliefs are layered and juxtaposed beside more reports, observations, experiences and beliefs, connections and contradictions start to spark off each other. This fosters critical insights that progressively work to deepen – and challenge – understandings of how gender is being constituted and performed in and across Wheatville and its schools.

The local high school has received a number of awards for its highly regarded traineeship program. This program allows its students to complete a Trade Certificate course whilst also remaining eligible for a Senior Certificate in the final year of their schooling. Committing to the program means spending two full days a week in the workforce effectively reducing students’ contact hours for some of their subjects – including English and Maths – by one third. Students are expected to “catch up” on any work they have missed with their teachers in their own time. In the past teachers have been encouraged to refrain from introducing “new work” to students on the days that their trainees are out in the field. This structure can lead to a valorising of the world of work over that of the classroom.

Text type: Internal memorandum

March 3, 2010

Circumstance: Emailed to all staff at Wheatville High by a member of middle management

Hi all

Scott will now be a part time student. He has organised a job at Wheatville Transport (the old Truck Centre) and has been going really well. The boss is going to put him on Tuesdays and Wednesdays starting next week (he has been working there full time this week while he has been suspended).

Scott will only come to school on:

- ☐ *Monday for lesson 3 and 4*
- ☐ *Thursday for lessons 1 and 4*
- ☐ *Friday for lessons 1 and 3.*

He will be only doing:

- ☐ *Prevocational Maths with Harrison*
- ☐ *English Communications with Emily*
- ☐ *Engineering with Adrian*

Please let me know if this is a problem. He will miss the Tues/Wed lesson of each of his classes, so he will only be in two classes a week.

Thanks, Kylie.

Extract 1 from Elizabeth's interview transcript February 10, 2010

Experienced teacher and mother of three adult children – one of whom is a male artist – Elizabeth is in her late 50s, is married to a professional, and has recently retired. She has been a Wheatville resident for over thirty years.

Sherilyn: *Thankyou for agreeing to be involved. In part, what originally instigated this study was this newspaper article (refer Figure 4.3: First Point of Entry Text) and an attempt to answer why the girls from this community seem to value their schooling and tertiary education more than the boys. However I am also hoping to explore what it is that the boys from this community value and what the consequences of that might be for their education and on our community as a whole. I also want to explore how those who don't fit this community's gender norms cope or survive or perhaps flourish. So, at this stage of the study, you could say I am trying to capture the "What is?" of our community and I am wondering if you could offer your perspectives, drawing on your extensive experiences as a mother and teacher in this community?*

Elizabeth: *I am wondering if it starts with education itself or perhaps in the home.*

Sherilyn: *Maybe you could start by discussing if you have noticed a difference in how boys from this community approach their education when compared to the girls.*

Is there anything that stands out to you as obvious?

Elizabeth: *Well, yes. In fact I think many of the boys don't want to stand out and I think the influence on young boys to leave school and get an apprenticeship is very seductive ... to want to be seen as a man who earns his living and takes his place in the world.*

Sherilyn: *And how do you see this community defining "a man"? What is "a man" for this community?*

Elizabeth: *(Pause) Mmm, that's a hard one because as soon as I say what it is – the ocker who drinks or goes pig shooting – I then instantly think of many many exceptions to that rule so I do think young men have role models who aren't that way inclined but some of this other business is very pervasive.*

Sherilyn: *And what happens to those who aren't that way inclined? Do they find their niches?*

Elizabeth: *I think it's difficult for those who don't have that inner self-confidence to just be who they are because I think you could*

certainly think of boys who could fit with pig shooters and all the others, play sport, but still do their academic studies and just be confident in themselves. To me that must come from their home environment I guess. I was thinking of a head boy here and he seemed to fit in and you and I know some others.

Sherilyn: Yes. I can think of a few straight away. But do you think if those boys hadn't been good at sport or good footballers as well life could have been different for them?

Elizabeth: I think if they were purely academic or perceived to be bookish perhaps they would have been labelled as a poofa and I've seen that happen; especially with good looking boys. They cop it from the minute they arrive at high school and that saps their confidence I think and you can see them questioning. They don't know which way to go; which group to hang out with; whether to curry favour with one group or the other. They become lost souls.

Sherilyn: So this macho perception of how to be a male that you're inferring exists here, who polices that? Is it females as much as males or is it something that the boys decide to be and do?

Elizabeth: I think it's something that the boys decide to be and do and I have sometimes wondered whether, from primary school having so much to do with women teaching them, whether it's a little reaction against all of that. That's something that's occurred to me.

Sherilyn: Like a perception that school is a feminine place?

Elizabeth: Yes! Yes! And women have this power over them; their mothers do and their teachers do as well and it's a little bit of rebellion to emphasise their maleness. I find some of the girls quite intolerant of the boys when they do behave in this way but it doesn't seem to matter to the boys.

Sherilyn: So if boys are rebelling against feminine authority and power what sorts of models of power do you think they are aspiring to? Who is it okay to be dominated by? What's male power look like?

Elizabeth: I think sports stars or people who are popular on television but mostly sports stars. Maybe their parents or their fathers. I don't know.

Sherilyn: What about financial wealth and business entrepreneurship? Do you think that drives our boys at all? What are they opting for?

Elizabeth: They are opting to have that car, you know, have that status of being a man. Having a car and taking their place in that drinking world as well so in that way they're driven but whether they're forward thinking in that I don't know. You know, "In the short term I can get the car and perhaps I can put a down payment on a house" but then again this seems to make them happy so – but I don't know for how long. There's a couple I know who left before graduating and did apprenticeships and I hear that they're successful. They have this house and that house and a car and a boat. But I know there is something more intellectually that they have and I'm wondering what happens if they don't get to realise it later.

Representatives from private boarding schools make regular visits to Wheatville and often use the local media as a platform for marketing these visits and their schools. The article depicted in Figure 6.2 (McKay, 2009a, p.12) reports on a public talk given by a private school principal from an elite metropolitan boarding school. I attended the talk and spoke to him afterwards. He implied that, whilst his school enjoyed attracting rural enrolments because of country boys'

supposedly superior sporting prowess, issues of alcohol abuse were often a significant issue with these boys. In the headline depicted in Figure 6.2 the principal is quoted using a determinist argument to essentialise boys and their behaviour. Another article on the same page makes reference to an issue of growing concern in rural Australia: drought (“Farmers are urged to visit the drought bus,” 2009, p. 12). Boarding schools in metropolitan areas are increasingly struggling to fill their dormitories as ongoing droughts and severe floods cause financial problems for those in rural areas. Some professional and farming parents have opted out of boarding altogether and are now choosing to either move to the city for educational purposes or use the local high school as an alternative for their children once they have finished their primary school education.

Text Type: Observation + Field notes

May 12, 2009

I attended the talk referred to in the article represented by Figure 6.2. Listed below are some of the comments made by the principal during his public lecture and captured in my field notes. Many of these comments discursively constitute boys using essentialist arguments:

- *Boys are hardwired differently.*
- *There has been a feminisation of education in the States, the UK, and here – not that that is bad but if you have a predominance of female teachers they think it’s fine to let boys sit and not move for long periods of time whereas male teachers know to break the Maths lesson up with some push-ups.*
- *My theory is that boys’ naturalistic and spatial intelligences are overdeveloped in country boys and men.*
- *Boys don’t complete their brain development until 22 or 23. This is what the research is showing ... prefrontal cortex development. A lot of boys don’t have a direction in their life because of this.*
- *Leonard Sax is telling us that things are getting worse for boys not better.*
- *Boys do not hear as well as girls.... Female teachers of boys must talk more loudly.... If my wife’s off in the kitchen, “blah blah blah,” then I don’t hear her.*
- *Boys are much much more competitive than girls ... Girls talk so much with each other they forget the score.*
- *Country people are almost to a person anti-drugs. Unfortunately country people are not anti-alcohol. Our drug problem at [name of school] is alcohol – not drugs – because of our high country boarder population.*
- *Boys learn if they like the teacher*
- *Challenge the boy code that it is not cool to do music or drama.*
- *Teachers need to understand that kids have different learning styles.*
- *It’s pretty easy to think that you’re dumb at school.*

Extract 1 from Gloria's interview transcript January 19, 2010

Gloria is a leading educator who has been recognised nationally for her work in the field of training and education. Whilst she no longer resides in Wheatville, she was a Wheatville resident for over twenty years. (The interview with Gloria was the first I conducted for this study.)

Sherilyn: Gloria, you were a teacher and administrator in Wheatville for a long time. How would you describe the ideologies or value systems that you came across?

Gloria: The big thing about Wheatville as the centre of a rural community is that the traditions and cultures of that community are very patriarchal and so rural communities – by their definition because of the economics and labour of those communities – means that male leadership and male dominance has permeated that community probably since its inception. You know, from when they first started to spray out the prickly pear, I suggest, and farm the country. You're actually talking about exploring a subject which has probably become a contemporary issue as that district has started to attract more and more educated females and how that has started to impact on, I guess, hopefully diversification of the future of that community but I would say from the outset that I do think the cultural icon, the cultural nuance, the cultural definition of that community – and I don't think it is any different to other rural communities – is very patriarchal.

Sherilyn: Which brings me to this article (refer Figure 4.3: First point of entry text). If the nuance of the community is patriarchal and the male voice is so strong then why do you think so many more females are going on to university than males and so many boys underperform in the classroom?

Gloria: And again I wonder whether that's defined by the Wheatville community and I think that it's important that your study reflects that the Wheatville town community is quite different to the Wheatville rural community because in the rural community young people go to boarding school predominantly and so their impact is possibly not felt on the actual Wheatville High School. So if you are talking specifically about the school you are actually drawing from the town community which again, its economy is underpinned by the broader farming

community so the labour force or workforce that actually make up that Wheatville community is very much a service oriented community but again a male driven one so it's a lot about mechanics, it's a lot about fertilisers, it's the type of services that support that agricultural economy. In fact female employment opportunities are quite limited perhaps in terms of retail and the health and education sectors.

I know when I was there that the demographics showed that the greatest mobility in that community was between the ages of 16 and 25. So that was the group that actually left the community and the incoming group was dominated by people arriving in the 25 to 40 year age group.

We would know anecdotally that during that period of time, certainly in the 20 years that I was there, we saw a very high turnover of young families who came out with their kids, were happy to work in the community for a few years – particularly when their kids were primary aged – but once their kids were ready for high school they would leave the community and go to a bigger centre where they could send their kids to what was perceived to be a better high school. So I guess the demographics really influences what is then picked up by the education at the High School.

I think the High School is fortunate in that some of its staff are long term community members so there's a sense of history, there's a sense of tradition, there's a sense of culture, there's a sense of ownership and belonging about that. But if you look at the entire staff, and I think all up it's probably a workforce of about 60 if you include your paraprofessionals and other people who work at the school, you would still have to say that 80% of that workforce is mobile. So you get a lot of teachers who come into that community to teach who are very driven by the curriculum demands and it takes a long time for teachers to learn the interface between the community and what they're teaching so they can actually give a broad education. In giving a broad education you actually have to teach the deficits of a

community as well as teach the positives, don't you?

Sherilyn: And what would you say would be the deficits?

Gloria: Well I think that the deficits are very much around the gender issues. They are definitely about the gender issue and again you'd need to look at the data about the level of educational attainment of the parents which would be well below the state average. In most cases it's the man who doesn't have any formal qualifications. Look he might be a tradesman or something like that but if you were looking for a university education you would find very few. There's a sense of contentment in that role modelling; there's a sense of "We do well. We're comfortable. Life is good." I also think that rural communities by their very nature can limit people's perspectives if they are not very mobile so that if they're not travelling or getting out to the city they can have quite limited perspectives and, obviously, that then permeates the teenagers as they go to school and they have that as their experience. I mean you and I could reflect on trips when we took kids away and they had never been on an escalator before. That's not that long ago. I suspect there are still kids from the Wheatville community who haven't been on escalators.

Sherilyn: So if you were to describe the role modelling that is coming through to these kids what would you say that the community teaches you as a male to do, or be, or think and is this the same or different for females?

Gloria: For the males it's about affirming a pattern of long held community values around, particularly, sport. It's interesting that that community has three codes of football. The notion of sport, physical activity, and the alcohol thing are all permeating their life. We've all seen the recreation of pig chasing and that sort of thing. They're very strongly endemic characteristics of what the stereotype of a male would be. A lot of that is not about school attainment. Certainly, it's not about university attainment at all. University would a) mean leaving your community and b)

being an academic is not, well, we don't see that in a rural community very often at all.

In the Wheatville town in particular we've had no female mayors, we've got no female CEOs, no female councillors at all. However, I could talk about the rural women quite differently. They are very much an educated workforce who've come into the community and have fostered their own cultural identity I guess through the arts predominantly. That's both fine arts as well as the broader cultural art community. That seems to be where their education culminates or ends up being valued. "Yeah, it's good if the girls are running the local art show. We've got to farm this weekend because it's wet but we'll make sure we come into the show." Or all the teenagers come into the show, because it's a ritual, a rite of passage in that community. But it's about cementing that pathway of, "You will do this and become either a farmer or a person who works with the farming community" and it's quite accepted.

There is a lack of female leadership. Quite often the only female role models kids in the community see beyond their mothers are their teachers. Teaching has become quite feminised. A lot of the teachers, if they are permanent residents, are attached to someone in the community who is perhaps a farmer.

Sherilyn: Do you see that as an issue which feeds into boys disengaging. Perhaps they see school as a feminised place?

Gloria: Absolutely, but the other thing I was going to say is that when you've got that mobility underpinning your teaching workforce, say a mobility of 50% who are leaving, a lot of them are young. They're first years. They don't actually engage in the broader sense of community or even a deep understanding of what the cultural impacts of their teaching are and they can be quite foreign to the kids in the classroom so then kids look at them and go, "Well, you don't even know or understand this town" and they can actually disengage quite quickly because they don't see an alignment between that teacher's values and their values and their parents' values. This sets up of course immediate issues around behaviour management and engagement in the learning.

Text type: Email circulated to all staff by female teacher in her mid 30s
March 10, 2010

A SPANISH Teacher was explaining to her class that in Spanish, unlike English, nouns are designated as either masculine or feminine.

'House' for instance, is feminine: 'la casa.'

'Pencil,' however, is masculine: 'el lapiz.'

A student asked, 'What gender is 'computer'?'

Instead of giving the answer, the teacher split the class into two groups, male and female, and asked them to decide for themselves whether 'computer' should be a masculine or a feminine noun. Each group was asked to give four reasons for its recommendation.

The men's group decided that 'computer' should definitely be of the feminine gender ('la computadora'), because:

- 1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic;*
- 2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else;*
- 3. Even the smallest mistakes are stored in long term memory for possible later retrieval; and*
- 4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.*

(THIS GETS BETTER!)

The women's group, however, concluded that computers should be masculine ('el computador'), because:

- 1. In order to do anything with them, you have to turn them on;*
- 2. They have a lot of data but still can't think for themselves;*
- 3. They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they ARE the problem; and*
- 4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you had waited a little longer, you could have gotten a better model.*

The women won.

Send this to all the smart women you know ... and all the men that have a sense of humour.

Teachers at the high school are required to document all serious behaviour incidents on the school's electronic data base. The following selection is typical of the nature of these incidents. The vast majority of reported incidents involve boys.

- *Justin refused to follow classroom direction despite multiple warnings, re-directions and consequences for behaviour outlined. Student was offered a choice to follow direction or go to another classroom to complete work, to this he became increasingly defiant and abusive until he left the room and wandered the school. (Male teacher: Incident 89, February 2010)*
- *Brett sat next to Steve Smith. I told him to sit somewhere else since he and Steve have not been working well together. Brett argued and said NO after repeated*

requests. I sent Brett outside. After 5 minutes I spoke to Brett and he came in and sat on the other side of Steve (still next to him). I sent him out again. I told him to go to Mrs Brown as my buddy teacher for the lesson. Brett refused repeatedly and sat on the verandah. After 30 minutes I asked Brett if he could come in and sit by himself. He did no work. (Female teacher: Incident 212, March 2010)

- *Miss Jones informed Miss White that two Year 9 students were truant from the travelling sports show and were walking around the school grounds refusing to return to their designated activities claiming they were yr 10 not 9. Miss White saw the students, they ran from her past the F-block port racks and towards Banner St. The students were asked to stop and go to the office. While Miss White found the Deputy [a female] the boys were walking away from the office. The deputy restated the expectation, the students were argumentative and then Troy walked away from the deputy and refused to return. Miss White asked Troy to return to the office. He refused until he got to Coventry [a building] then turned and walked to the office. (Female teacher: Incident 313, March 2010)*
- *While I was on playground duty, I walked past Mike, who in conversation with his friends, loudly said "cunt." I called him over to me and we talked about how his language was inappropriate. As a consequence for his language, I asked Mike to pick up 10 pieces of rubbish. He refused, despite multiple redirections, and said, "I'm not fucking picking up rubbish." He was then taken to administration. On the way there he was continually mouthing off, saying phrases like "This is bullshit." (Female teacher: Incident 489, March 2010)*

Qualitative and quantitative data retrieved from the local high school's electronic data bases (see Figures 6.3, 6.4, & 6.5) would appear to support Gloria's observations about local boys' attitudes to schooling and tertiary education. The data represented in these figures indicate that some boys' resistance to schooling is manifesting in their behaviour, academic performances, and post-school choices. Figure 6.3 uses a bar graph to show students most frequently reported for disciplinary offences by teachers in Term 1 of 2010. Each of the forty bars is representative of a student: Thirty-nine are male. Of the 414 transgressions accrued by this *Top 40*, 98.2% can be attributed to boys. The majority of all reported offences in Term 1 of 2010 were for disruption, defiance/threats to adults, non-compliance with routine, refusal to participate in a program of instruction and verbal misconduct. Further data obtained from all students' Semester 1, 2010 report cards reinforces disparities in boys' and girls' behaviour. Figure 6.4 gives a gender breakdown of all students receiving five or more D or E ratings on their end of semester reports. When completing students' semester reports, teachers rank student behaviour on a five point scale: "A" represents

excellent behaviour and “E” represents very poor behaviour. In Semester 1, 2010, boys as a cohort were far more likely than girls to score poorly for behaviour.

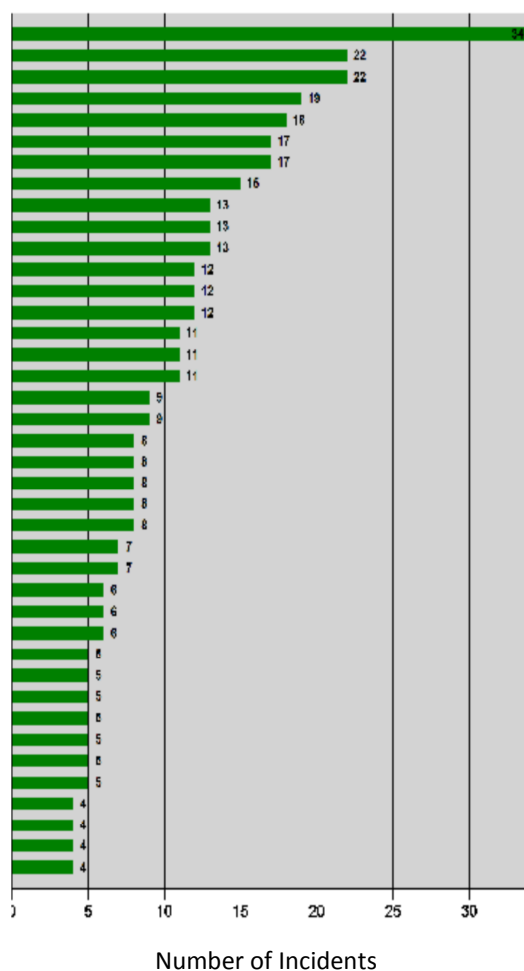


Figure 6.3. Bar graph representing individual High School students with multiple documented behaviour incidents in Term 1, 2010.

Also supporting Gloria’s observations about local boys’ disengagement from, and resistance to, schooling are data showing that senior boys at the local high school are significantly less likely than girls to perform well in their tertiary entrance exams or pursue university courses post-school (see Table 1 and Figure 6.5). At the completion of Year 12, students wanting to attend universities are rank ordered against their peers by a state-based educational authority. Of the 13 highest performing senior students at Wheatville High in 2010 only two were boys. They were positioned 7th and 11th.

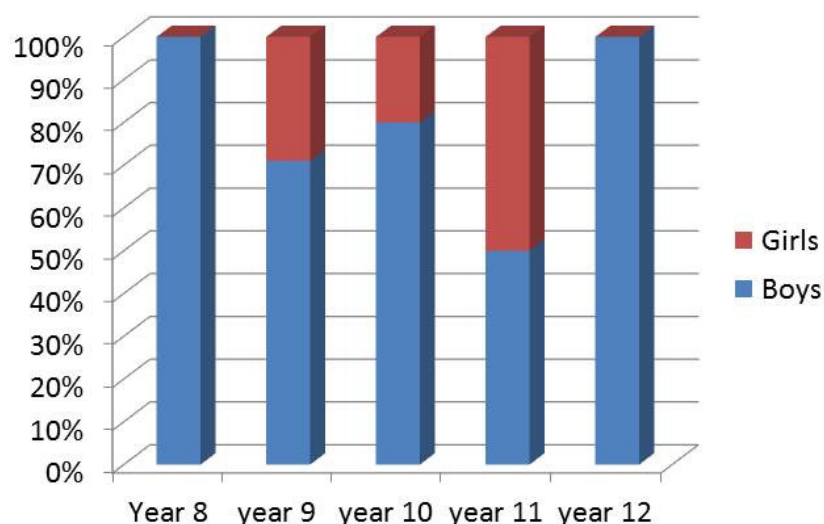


Figure 6.4. Gender breakdown of students receiving three or more Ds or Es for behaviour on end of semester report cards

Figure 6.5 collates data generated by two state government reports on the destinations of Year 12 students after their final year of schooling (Next Step Team, 2009, 2010). The original data were collected directly from students via a phone survey conducted six months after they had graduated from their senior years. In both 2009 and 2010 over 85% of Wheatville's graduates responded. I acknowledge that the graduates who chose not to respond, or could not be contacted, may have skewed the data but it is unlikely that this skewing would have been significant. According to the destination reports, in 2009 and 2010 all graduates obtaining apprenticeships in Wheatville were male. The lower status – and financially less rewarding – positions of traineeships were all taken up by female graduates in 2009 with very few post-school traineeships on offer at all in 2010. The reports also indicate that a significantly higher percentage of males than females were able to obtain full time work in both of these years. Correspondingly, female graduates were more than twice as likely as males to be employed part time and, subsequently, have lower incomes. These statistics may help to explain why longitudinal data I have been tracking at the high school for many years consistently demonstrates that girls are twice as likely as boys to apply for university positions post-school (see Figure 1.1). It would appear that high

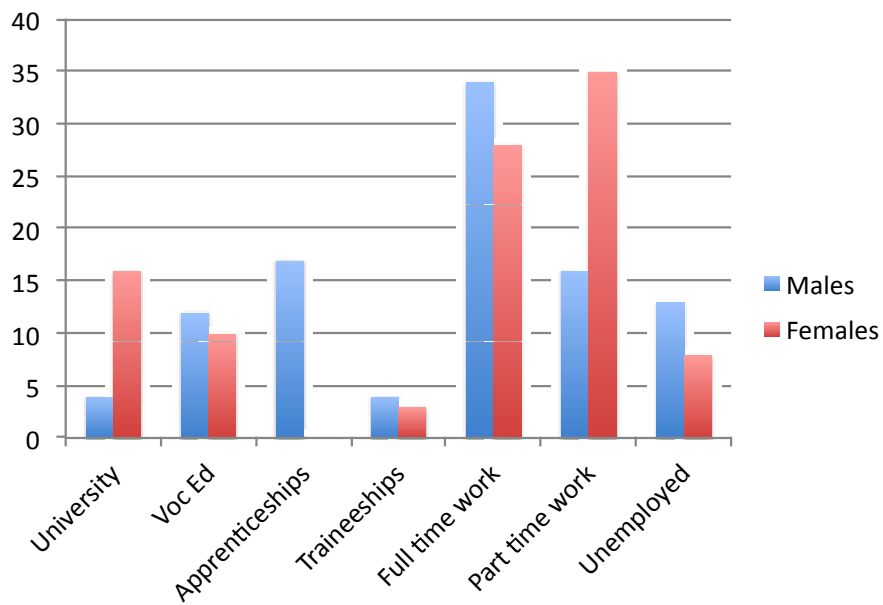
achieving female students are making the choice to leave Wheatville in order to enhance their post-school opportunities and future earning capacity.

A selective reading of the data presented in Figure 6.5 could have been used to support a poor boys' discourse which constructs boys as disadvantaged because they are less likely to go to university and more likely to be unemployed than are girls. However, an holistic analysis of this data provides an alternative reading: one that reveals the relative financial disadvantage experienced by many of the girls who choose to stay in Wheatville. Worryingly, this does not appear to be the only form of disadvantage to which girls are subjected in this community. Humour is often used by members of this community to trivialise females by discursively constructing them as impractical, servile, and/or as objects (see text boxes this chapter dated February 23, 2010; February 14, 2010; March 8, 2010; and May 1, 2010). Males are constructed as powerful, insensitive, and predatory.

Text type: Personal Recollection
February 14, 2010

A female friend, who is married to a local farmer and works casually as a supply teacher at the local schools, related an incident to me that occurred during one of her lessons. The students she was teaching were practising public speaking and had each been asked to select and prepare a joke to share with the class. Past experience had taught the teacher to censor students' jokes before permitting their delivery. A ten year old boy told her a joke that he claimed his mother considered acceptable. The joke: "Why did the woman cross the road?" The answer: "That's not the point. What was she doing out of the kitchen!" Permission to share was declined.

Destinations of Year 12 students 2009 (%)



Destinations of Year 12 students 2008 (%)

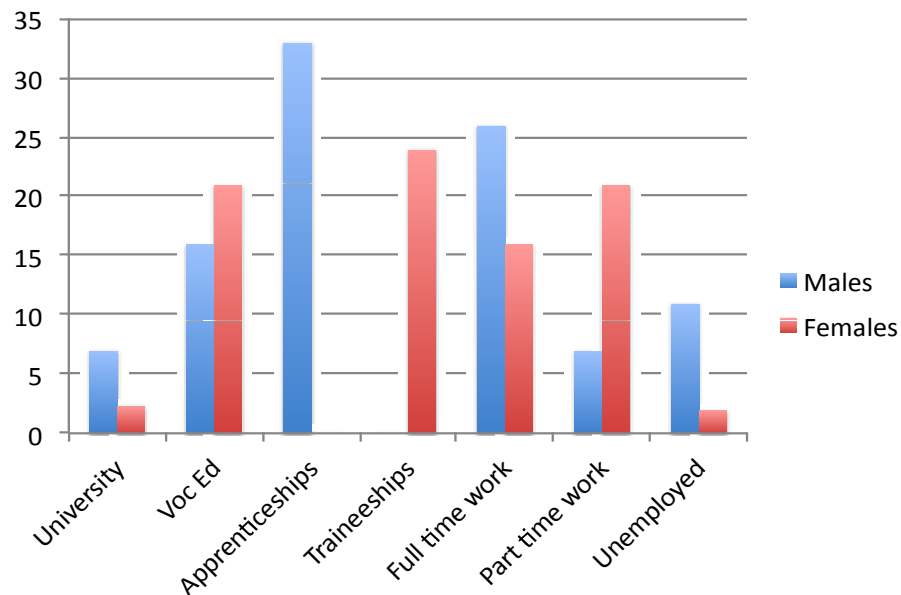


Figure 6.5. Destination data for Year 12 graduates of Wheatville State High School 2008 – 2009.

Text Type: Joke emailed to all staff by female teacher in her mid 30s

February 23, 2010

MALE VS FEMALE AT THE ATM MACHINE

A new sign in the Bank Lobby reads:

'Please note that this Bank is installing new drive-through ATM machines enabling customers to withdraw cash without leaving their vehicles. Customers using this new facility are requested to use the procedures outlined below when accessing their accounts. After months of careful research, MALE & FEMALE procedures have been developed. Please follow the appropriate steps for your gender.'

MALE PROCEDURE:

1. Drive up to the cash machine.
2. Put down your car window.
3. Insert card into machine and enter PIN.
4. Enter amount of cash required and withdraw.
5. Retrieve card, cash and receipt.
6. Put window up.
7. Drive off.

FEMALE PROCEDURE:

What is really funny is that most of this part is the Truth!!!!

1. Drive up to cash machine.
2. Reverse and back up the required amount to align car window with the machine.
3. Set parking brake, put the window down.
4. Find handbag, remove all contents on to passenger seat to locate card.
5. Tell person on cell phone you will call them back and hang up.
6. Attempt to insert card into machine.
7. Open car door to allow easier access to machine due to its excessive distance from the car.
8. Insert card.
9. Re-insert card the right way.
10. Dig through handbag to find diary with your PIN written on the inside back page.
11. Enter PIN.
12. Press cancel and re-enter correct PIN.
13. Enter amount of cash required.
14. Check makeup in rear view mirror.
15. Retrieve cash and receipt.
16. Empty handbag again to locate wallet and place cash inside.
17. Write debit amount on cheque register and place receipt in back of chequebook.
18. Re-check makeup.
19. Drive forward 2 feet.
20. Reverse back to cash machine.
21. Retrieve card.
22. Re-empty hand bag, locate card holder, and place card into the slot provided!
23. Give dirty look to irate male driver waiting behind you.
24. Restart stalled engine and pull off.
25. Redial person on cell phone.
26. Drive for two to three miles.
27. Release parking brake.

An analysis of some of the gender jokes presented in this chapter demonstrates how males are being discursively constructed by some in Wheatville as highly sexed, thoughtless, irritating, emotionless, stupid, immature, deceitful to women, yet powerful and practical. Females are being constructed as servile, vindictive, incomprehensible, spendthrift, disorganised, and extremely impractical. In one email the female teacher responsible for sending the joke claims that, “What is really funny is that most of this ... is the Truth!!!!” (see text box this chapter for February 23, 2010). Whilst the original authors of the jokes are unlikely to be members of the Wheatville community, what is of significance is that – in the spirit of harmless fun – these jokes and their limiting gender messages are being reproduced within and across Wheatville’s schools and the wider community. Giroux (2001) makes the point that “the relationship between inscribed messages and lived effects is a tenuous one” and warns against a conflation of the two (p. 159). However, what these jokes do attest to is the place of humour in reproducing commonsense values and beliefs supporting narrow constructions of gender. They also reinforce the “general tendency for people to laugh about the world from a male perspective” (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 18).

**Text Type: Joke emailed to all staff by female teacher in her mid 30s
March 8, 2010**

For all those men who say, Why buy a cow when you can get milk for free. Here's an update for you: Nowadays, 80% of women are against marriage, WHY? Because women realize it's not worth buying an entire pig just to get a little sausage.

1. *Men are like laxative. They irritate the crap out of you.*
2. *Men are like bananas. The older they get the less firm they get.*
3. *Men are like weather. Nothing can be done to change them.*
4. *Men are like blenders. You need one but you're not quite sure why.*
5. *Men are like chocolate bars. Sweet, smooth, and they usually head straight for your hips.*
6. *Men are like commercials. You can't believe a word they say.*
7. *Men are like department stores. Their clothes are always ½ off.*
8. *Men are like government bonds. They take so long to mature.*
9. *Men are like mascara. They usually run at the first sign of emotion.*
10. *Men are like snowstorms. You never know when they're coming, how many inches you'll get, or how long they'll last.*
11. *Men are like lava lamps. Fun to look at but not very bright.*
12. *Men are like parking spots. All the good ones are taken. The rest are like parking spots.*

Now send this to all the remarkable women you know, as well as to any understanding good-natured, fun kinda guys you might be lucky enough to know!!

Extract 1 from Andrea's interview transcript March 24, 2010

Andrea is a non-teaching professional who makes regular visits to a number of schools in rural communities – including Wheatville State High. She is in her late 20s and is a member of the High School's counselling and support team.

Sherilyn: Andrea you've worked as a visiting professional dealing with young people and schools in our community now for quite a few years. How would you explain the absence of boys receiving prizes at Wheatville's academic awards nights (shows Figure 4.3: First Point of Entry Text)?

Andrea: No. I can't explain it. I've seen it. I know it happens. I think our boys in years 11 and 12 aren't there because they're doing traineeships¹³ and they're working. They just come to school to get their grade 12 certificate that says they've been at school. But they don't have to do well academically. You know, whether they do well at school or not they know that the day they finish grade 12 they'll get a job. Whether it's through their traineeship or not. It's pretty easy to gain employment in Wheatville – especially for boys.

Sherilyn: Do you think that our employer groups are sending a message to our boys that formal learning isn't important?

Andrea: Definitely. You know this town struggles to get its workers. You just have to look at the number of people who come up to the school saying, "We need a worker. We need a worker." So they come up because they're just after a worker. They want a labourer. They don't need them to have this academic qualification or that one or be able to have good English skills or things like that because they just need a worker. You know, they need a labourer that can pick up the brick. I don't even know if we have enough people to fill our jobs.

Sherilyn: So that makes us unique in some ways to other rural communities that are struggling to survive and have high unemployment amongst the school leaving age?

Andrea: We are different too because I work in some other rural communities and the kids in some of these communities – some of which have schools which only go to grade 10 – will tell you that they need to go to a different town so that they can do grade 11 and 12 or they need to do TAFE or they need to go somewhere else because there won't be any jobs where they are.

Sherilyn: So they recognise early that they have to get an education to get out or –

Andrea: Yes. They realise that they have to do something else because there are no jobs for them in the town. And their parents realise that too. There would only be a very small percentage who go to grade 10 and don't go on. They realise that if they want a job at all, they have to leave (their town). They actively go out looking to get more skills.

Sherilyn: So in some ways the culture and affluence of this community defeats formal learning being valued?

Andrea: Yes. I would agree with that. I think in one small community I go to they really value education and they realise it's important to go on. A lot of working class parents in that community sacrifice a lot to get an education for their kids. Then I work across another community where they would like their children to go on. Whilst they do think that education is important, for some, it is financially impossible. That's just due to very sad circumstances I guess. Then if you come to Wheatville it's all about jobs. Yeah, it's so easy to get a job. And I also think, from what I've seen, when kids leave school, if you talk to the boys and say, "What are you doing these days?" Well they're employed. If you talk to the girls, "What are you doing?" Well, they're not employed. Go over to the training centre – I was only over there last week – and the whole place is full of girls doing certificates in business and all these extra courses to try and gain employment because there just doesn't seem to be a lot of

¹³ Traineeships provide school based pathways into vocations/trades

employment for girls in the unskilled labour field. You know, your childcare and all that sort of thing. It is nearly impossible for them to get a job. You know if a student says to me, "I'm interested in childcare." Well I say to them, "Well you may as well go somewhere else because it's highly unlikely that you'll get a job in childcare here." But the boys. Well for them it's just easy. The boys always get a job. They've nearly always got a full time job and it's a labouring style job. They seem to be able to get employed really easily. They're not having to fight or compete against anybody to get jobs. There's no competition like there is with the females. I think people just take it for granted that there are going to be jobs there for their boys; that they don't need for their kids to have school. There are a lot of boys, I was only talking to a boy yesterday, who I was saying to, "Why aren't you at school?" and I spoke to the parents and they say, "Look, we've got to harvest our crop. We need him at home." So he goes home to harvest the crop. There's a lot of parents that, well, the value for education is just not there. It's going to cause a lot of problems in the future. I just don't quite know what they are.

Sherilyn: Do you think parents in this community treat their boys and girls differently?

Andrea: There's a real culture of, "You lock up your girls and the boys can do what they want." There's always a great fear that a girl will get pregnant. The way you stop a girl from getting pregnant is you lock that girl up and you don't let her out. We don't care what the boys do. They're fine. We're not worried about them and that is a massive part of the culture.

Sherilyn: That being allowed to sew your wild oats thing?

Andrea: They are expected to sew their wild oats. It's not just allowed to, they are expected to live their life whereas the girl isn't because there is always that worry of pregnancy which scares most parents. So I think that is a big part of the culture. It's just that – I don't know – we have no expectations of our boys.

Sherilyn: But do we perhaps have an expectation that they make the money?

Andrea: I think we just have an expectation that they get a job. I don't think that even that much money comes into it because we're quite happy for them to get a job at the supermarket and work there for years and years and years. We're not asking them to aim for big bikkies. Their parents aren't even saying, "You've got to have a trade." It's just, "You've got to have a job." You talk to the girls about what their parents want for them and they can tell you that their parents want them to behave in a certain way and not have children until they're a certain age or to get married when they're older. You know, they can tell you what's expected of them and the boys can't tell you what's expected of them. They don't seem to have clear pathways.

Sherilyn: So it's almost like the boys have got a short term destination and the girls have got a long term destination?

Andrea: Yeah. And we do everything for our boys which is something that I've really noticed. I think a classic is – this cracks me up – we send our school kids off to play sport on a Wednesday afternoon. We send a busload of boys and girls. The boys play football and the girls play netball. The girls go and get the netballs, they get their bibs, they make sure they're there and they get on their bus and the boys? Well they just get on the bus. At the other end the school provides the boys with their jerseys. They provide them with their water bottles. They fill their water bottles up for them. They provide them with their socks. They wash their jerseys. The girls bring their own water bottles; have their own shirts. So they are expected to do everything themselves and we don't even expect our boys to bring their own water bottles.

Sherilyn: So this is coming from the school culture as well?

Andrea: Yeah. We do everything for the boys. That's quite funny.

Sherilyn: The boys get completely nurtured?

Andrea: Yep. And the girls are taught, "You've got to be independent. You've got to be able to do it." And yet the boys are, "We'll

do it for you.” Really interesting thing to look at.

Sherilyn: So what does unemployment look like in a girl’s life out here? What happens to her?

Andrea: What I find with a lot of the girls who are unemployed is that they end up on that vicious cycle where they can’t find a job, therefore they need finances. Well when you need money what do you do? Well you have to find a partner who’s got money. So you team up with someone who’s got money but they don’t necessarily wish to stay with you. So you somehow have to cement – you’ve got to make that relationship permanent. So you’ve got to find some way that you can make sure that that person stays with you so that you have access to their finances; so that you have a house to live in and a car to drive. And the easiest way to achieve that is to have a child with them so you fall pregnant. And once you fall pregnant well it automatically means – well it doesn’t mean that that person is going to stay with you – but it does mean that you will receive more benefits. It means that you are a bit more cared for and it gives you a – well I guess you’re not going

around saying you’re unemployed now – so it makes you acceptable.

Sherilyn: So it gives your life a meaning?

Andrea: Yes it does. It gives you something to do. It’s acceptable to not have a job if you’ve got children. So that’s what happens. They are looking for some stability; some finances and stuff like that.

Sherilyn: What does that do to the status of females and males in this community?

Andrea: It all comes back down to the money situation. Because the males have the money and have the things the female wants, she will put up with behaviours that she wouldn’t normally put up with because she needs what the male has to offer. I think that is quite common. And if they’ve got a young child in that house then they’re learning traits of how relationships work and then they’re learning that the father has the more powerful role because he has a job and he has money and it’s alright that he talks to Mum in a certain way. That can start to be mimicked when they leave school, those kind of behaviours.

The high school’s complicity in perpetuating gender binaries is illuminated in my interview with Andrea (see entry this chapter entitled ‘Extract 1 from Andrea’s interview transcript March 24, 2010’). In relation to the high school’s extra curricula program, Andrea claims that the girls “are expected to do everything themselves and we don’t even expect our boys to bring their own water bottles.” Martino and Meyenn (2001) help to make sense of these divergent expectations claiming that:

Women are often cast in the role of caretakers of the learning environment and of boys’ needs ... whereby the functions of caring, nurturance and emotional support are seen as belonging to women. The way both boys and girls live the curriculum, in its broadest sense, reinforce this sexual contract. (p. 11)

“Sexual contracts” would appear to be manifesting for girls in Wheatville through practices perpetuating domestic servitude and the nurturing of others and for boys through “contracts” endorsing a sense of white male entitlement. When left

unchecked these practices and expectations become naturalised. Giroux (2001) argues that culture is ideological and political – not anthropological. Boys are not biologically incapable of washing their jerseys or filling their water bottles. Girls are not born with naturally superior organisational, cleaning, or nurturing skills. As an outsider to the community Andrea is well positioned to see the inherent gender inequities present in some of Wheatville High’s schooling traditions. As an insider I must confess to having been blinded to many of them until they were made visible for me.

Extract 1 from Judy’s interview transcript April 19, 2010

Judy is a teacher in her early 30s who resides on a farm outside of Wheatville.

Sherilyn: *You were telling me earlier of an encounter you had in Wheatville with a group of senior boys a few years back. Would you mind describing what happened for me?*

Judy: *At the time I was teaching full time at the High School and had a senior class. Late one Friday night I woke up to the sound of my roof being rocked. I got up and looked out the window and there were these boys that I taught calling out from the street: “Miss Heathrow come outside. We want to fuck you.” They were drunk and there was no way I was going out there.*

Sherilyn: *What happened?*

Judy: *Eventually they went away. The following Monday I went to the Deputy Principal –*

Sherilyn: *Who was a male or female?*

Judy: *It was Brian and I told him what had happened and that I wanted some action.*

Sherilyn: *And what was Brian’s response?*

Judy: *First he tried to placate me by telling me they were just being silly, you know, boys will be boys and to ignore them. There was almost a suggestion that if I made a big deal*

of it it would end up being worse for me in the long run. Better to leave it alone and let it go away sort of stuff.

Sherilyn: *How did you respond to that?*

Judy: *I was pretty angry. I told him that if he didn’t act on it I would make it a police matter. He didn’t like that so he got the boys to give me an apology and promise not to do it again.*

Sherilyn: *Do you think that had an impact on them? Did they understand why their behaviour had been inappropriate?*

Judy: *Well they never did it again but I don’t think they really thought they had done anything wrong.*

Sherilyn: *Did it make teaching them uncomfortable for you?*

Judy: *No. Not for me. I have always been very professional and clear about teacher/student relationships and boundaries. I can’t speak for them though. I just treated them the same way in class as I always had. Who knows how they were feeling.*

The social and cultural implications for males and females of all ages of living and learning in a community that associates being male with belligerence, anti-

authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism, vulgarity, risk-taking behaviour, and female harassment and predation are many. It is not only females who are at risk from such narrow constructions of masculinity.

Extract 1 from Sally's interview transcript February 23, 2010

Sally is a mother of three primary aged sons and a practising artist. She and her family have recently returned to Wheatville from elsewhere in the state.

Sherilyn: *Now Sally, you have three sons who are primary school aged so I'm just wondering if you could talk to me about your children's experiences in Wheatville – both in and out of school? Maybe you could start with their experiences outside of the classroom.*

Sally: *We started playing football when my eldest son was five and he was not enjoying it. He got trampled in the game and we decided it was not for him and we play soccer now. It was just - well, the training sessions were for two hours for a five year old in the evening in winter which I thought was ridiculous and it was highly competitive. Very competitive sport and if you didn't keep up you were just – not wanted basically. You know, we were not encouraged. So we decided to stay away from that code of football.*

Sherilyn: *And would you say he was different to the norm for boys in that sport?*

Sally: *He's an extremely sensitive child. He's in grade 6 now and we have been through some bullying over the years with the state school and, a little bit, in the private system where we are now but it's being dealt with properly.*

Sherilyn: *And what initiates the bullying?*

Sally: *Just that the children can see that he's different; he's wrapped differently. He doesn't muck around. He's more involved with books.*

Sherilyn: *So he takes his learning seriously?*

Sally: *Yes. I think he does. He's more interested in History – you know like war history – and he's a more mechanically minded person so sport is not his priority. So he finds it difficult to make a connection with*

the other kids (boys) because all they want to do is play football and hands on sports and he's not that type of kid. He's more a creative mind. He's amazing with his art. His drawing abilities are quite amazing for a boy of his age. He just thinks differently and we should celebrate that – the fact that he is a little bit different. And John, my husband, is different to the typical rugby type of guy. I don't think I would ever have gone for a typical rugby union player anyway. I think he senses things. He's an artistically minded person as well. I'm sure he would probably have dealt with bullying during his schooling as well because he went to school out here and then was sent to a private boarding school.

Sherilyn: *Does that worry you that your sons are growing up here?*

Sally: *It concerns me because we are heading towards high school soon and I know that it is a totally different land to the primary school so I worry about his ability to cope with bullying in the school environment. But I do think he'll find his feet because I know there are possibilities of getting involved with other things; for instance Manual Arts and that sort of thing, hopefully. And History – the History subjects will be great for him. He struggles with Maths and English but he's got such a love for learning.*

Sherilyn: *Is there a group that he does feel comfortable with?*

Sally: *He has one-on-one friends but, the friend he's friendly with at the moment, he's a bit athletic, a bit interested in football. So I think he finds it difficult to meld into that framework so he often goes to the library instead of running around. He plays handball with the girls. He loves doing that. He's got a soft spot for a girl so he plays handball with*

her although she's a bit of a shy thing too so I'm glad he's found something there.

Sherilyn: *So, generally, are the girls more accepting and tolerant of his difference?*

Sally: *Yes, I think so. He quite enjoys female company. He doesn't like being tormented by some of the boys so he prefers to be with the girls. I don't think they torment him the way the boys do so it's funny how he copes with his difference.*

Sherilyn: *Has he ever tried to fit the norm for boys out here?*

Sally: *He does try but I don't think it comes off as well as he wants it to come off. He's just not being himself and it's hard for him to keep that up.*

Sherilyn: *Could you give me an example of him doing that?*

Sally: *Well he tries to play cricket but he just doesn't like it. It doesn't sit well with him and so he just gives up I think. He tries but he doesn't enjoy it. He usually ends up drifting off to what he does enjoy talking about like aircrafts and he'll go somewhere into the library and draw his drawings of dragons and stuff. He finds he fills his own time up with doing the things that make him feel happy rather than trying to do things to fit in to the norms. I mean he does try but I don't think he really tries overly. I think he finds it too exhausting so he's not accepted as much as he'd like to be. He often says he just plays handball and some of the boys will join in. I guess there is a group of boys who like the softer way; the others typically run off and play football and whatever.*

Sherilyn: *And you left Wheatville to go to a remote town, a mining town, for a few years and then you came back. Could you give me some insights into what you noticed as culturally different between that place and Wheatville?*

Sally: *It was different there. More accepting. There was no limit placed on – no limit placed on – you could just be who you were. You didn't have to fit into a round hole. If you were a square peg that was fine. You didn't have to fit in with the rugby union scene. I*

just enjoyed the way that it was a melting pot of people from all cultures, from all walks of life, and we just got on with enjoying ourselves and we went to a smaller state school for the kids. It had 400 children and everyone came to school with a smile on their face. There were no bullying issues. It was just a different world. It was so different. Then we came back here and we were confronted with more bullying than ever before and it was just so exhausting. Me trying to find some peace for Simon from the bullying and nothing was ever done. So we decided to remove him from the state school system and join the Catholic school system.

Sherilyn: *So when you say nothing was ever done, what was your expectation?*

Sally: *He was just physically abused. He was physically abused by a child who held his hands behind his back while this particular kid instructed another child to kick and punch him in the stomach and he [Simon] was so terrified that he would spend most of his mornings in tears before going to school. It was horrible.*

Sherilyn: *And when you approached the school?*

Sally: *They got suspended for three days and they were back on the fourth day and so the children knew where to pick on him; when it was safe to pick on him. He still got bullied, and actually, this incident happened during classes. It wasn't at a lunch break. It was during classes. In the period between moving from one classroom to another classroom for a different subject and there were no teachers around.*

Sherilyn: *So was there a sense that the bullies were punished with their suspension so everything was okay. Was there any attempt to address why these kids believed it was okay to bully other students?*

Sally: *Thankfully a little girl spotted the incident and so that's when action was taken with the suspension for three days. But the child [the bully] knew he could continue. You know, he was reprimanded, but nothing long term was done and the mother didn't think it was his fault. Didn't think her child was a bully so – [shrugs].*

Extract 1 from Mark's interview transcript June 9, 2010

Mark is a past student of mine and a property owner's son. He is also a successful and highly educated scientist in his mid 30s. Recently he has been considering changing careers in order to pursue his passion for creative writing and photography. When I caught up with him, it was the first time I had seen him for almost 20 years. His recollections of his school and home life made me reflect deeply on how disconnected I had been from my students' lives and experiences at the time that I taught him.

Sherilyn: Tell me about your early influences?

Mark: Mum was brought up with books and reading whereas Dad I don't think had ever actually read a book. I think he would have had to read books at school – not that he probably ever did either – but it was sort of like the cliché of the wife coming home and the husband saying, "Is that a new dress?" and she says, "Oh, no. I've had this one forever" after taking the tags off. It was sort of like that with books. You know, "Did you just waste money on books again?" So I had to lie about buying books because books were a waste of money and that was the background on books and reading that I had so writing was well out! The focus was on doing something real and "Give all that crap up and do something useful that's productive. Don't just waste your time."

Sherilyn: Do you think your father has come around over the years?

Mark: He's definitely mellowed with age. I think so. He's different to his grandkids than what he ever was as a father. Well he says the same about his views of my grandfather. He would say, "Oh, you guys think the sun shines out of his arse but you didn't see what he was like as a parent." And it's like, "Oh, dude. Here's a great big mirror."

Sherilyn: Mark, this study has been prompted in part by trying to answer the question this article asks [shows Figure 4.3: First point of entry text]. Could you talk to me about your schooling experiences in Wheatville. What was it like for you?

Mark: Yeah. I think doing well academically just wasn't important –

Sherilyn: To whom?

Mark: It didn't seem important to anybody. It was more important to be doing well with football so I did [rugby] union for a semester and that was sort of, you know, been there, done that, you know. Not interesting. Moved on and there was this sort of little rebellion. I had Garrick [pseudonym for a student who now works for NASA] and Tracy and a few other people to compete with academically so –

Sherilyn: Yes. I remember there was quite a good academic group that year.

Mark: So after doing Myers Briggs it made understanding my life a lot – well – it was almost revelatory.

Sherilyn: You'd have to be a different personality type than your brothers, wouldn't you?

Mark: Yep. I think, I don't know if you remember all four of them or whether you see them much around the place, but I think Alan was an NT –

Sherilyn: That's 'Intuitive Thinker,' isn't it?

Mark: Yeah. They break it down so there are 16 types and four temperaments and –

Sherilyn: And you would have been a thinking type wouldn't you?

Mark: No. No. So that was part of the revelation. It was actually a two day course I had to do for work and I was in violent denial thinking that this test is stupid. I couldn't possibly be anything but a thinking type. You know, I grew up on a farm. I'm male. This is so wrong and it took me almost half a day before I went "Well, maybe." It was sort of like this big turning point. It was like I went, "Oh, okay. Well maybe I don't have to try to fit in so much. Maybe I am different to everyone else around me."

Sherilyn: So you had a reasonable academic group, and there was another boy who was very academic, but what would you say set you apart from most of the males in your year group at high school?

Mark: I think it was more the academic challenge of it all. If I was going to be challenged I needed to be competitive intellectually rather than sports wise. I had to do the subjects which were – I don't know about whether from the teaching side you see some subjects as bludge subjects which offer easy options. Anything that was labelled a bludge subject automatically meant I couldn't pick it for my own thought processes which had gotten me to that point. Unfortunately, that ruled out Art, History, and Geography which were all the things that I was actually good at. Even Biology because that was a bludge subject. You know, I'd be in Biology rather than Physics or Chemistry.

Sherilyn: So what subjects did you select?

Mark: Well it was pretty much Maths/Science with Computing. It was Maths 1, Maths 2, English, Physics, Chemistry and that Information Processing which was then the subject I latched on to and enjoyed and went off and enrolled in Computing Science.

Sherilyn: Was that because it was creative?

Mark: I think so because we were doing programming and things like that and designing systems. So you know that was interesting.

Sherilyn: And you would have loved Art, wouldn't you?

Mark: Yeah. We had an Art teacher. I can't remember her name. And I really clicked with her and liked her but she left and I just dropped Art dead and did Graphics which I also was getting As for but then I dropped Graphics and ended up in Year 11 and 12 in Maths–Science. I think I got the award for Geography in [Year] 8 or 9. So all these things I was doing well at, you know, Art, History, Geography. You know, it was just stupid.

Sherilyn: There also may have been the pressure as a boy to do certain subjects and

then as an academic boy in particular to do certain subjects, I imagine.

Mark: I guess if I had to be competitive intellectually I couldn't do anything that was a life subject which was more the deciding thing. Yeah. I basically had to drop all of those other things. I even did a Business course [after school] which was awful and it overlapped with Computing Science as well but it was awful. I think in the class there were three doing computing programming and six doing more a business course but I don't think I even turned up for the exam. By then I had met all these people who were into medieval re-enactments and Goths at Uni and I disappeared into that world. So [after failing Uni] I got dragged metaphorically by the ear back to Wheatville at the end of that semester so I was banished to the farm very literally because I had no car and no licence so I couldn't leave; couldn't go anywhere. I was working for a neighbour from sunup to sundown for 30 bucks a day but that was still more pay than I got working for Dad. I had the weekends off but I still couldn't go anywhere so that meant the weekends off were working for Dad then. So I had six months of that before it was like, "Oh, my God," because I'd been working on the weekends for my Uncle when I'd been doing computing and then he got these big landscaping jobs so he gave me a call and said, "Hey, I need some help for a month or so if you want to come."

Sherilyn: Was he in the city?

Mark: Yeah. So I'm like, "Hell yeah!" And that turned into 18 months of work until I went back to Uni. I just latched at Uni. I had to go to Uni. I don't know why. There was just this big inspiration to go to Uni.

Sherilyn: So where did that come from because your brothers don't seem to have it?

Mark: I don't know.

Sherilyn: What age were you when you came to school in Wheatville?

Mark: I was eight. So Grade 3. Yeah.

Sherilyn: I'm just wondering why you seem to value formal education more than your brothers.

Mark: I'm wondering if it has more to do with personality typing. You know, if you go to Myer Briggs again. I don't know.

Sherilyn: So, as the oldest brother, you don't think it was something that impressed you, and not your brothers, before you came to Wheatville?

Mark: At that age, I don't think so. Whether it was a way of getting out of town. I know a lady at work that was escaping her small town in the same way. It didn't matter what she did, she just had to do something that couldn't be done in the town she grew up in so that she could justify to her parents that she had to leave town.

Sherilyn: So doing well at school was a way of getting out of town.

Mark: Yes, whereas mine wouldn't have been that conscious. It was just that I sort of valued higher learning. It wasn't that I had to have a degree. It was just that I had to go to Uni to do something. I just didn't value – and still don't value very highly – trades. I've got plenty of friends who do those sorts of things but it just doesn't interest me.

Sherilyn: I'm interested to hear you mention getting out of small towns through the Uni pathway because if you look at the gender breakdown of high school students leaving town to go to Uni there are twice as many girls going on to Uni as boys and it makes me think that perhaps Wheatville hasn't got as much to offer its girls as it has its boys.

Mark: Yeah. I was talking this morning about catching up with you and Angelique (Mark's wife) was shuddering at the idea of living in Wheatville. But I haven't actually ever lived in Wheatville. It's been outside of.

Sherilyn: Yes but this study is looking at the district, not just the town. One of the interesting things to come up in some of my other interviews has been the country/town binary; the idea that there is status in living on a property outside of the town.

Mark: Yes. We used to do the Christmas holidays working for the cotton cockies when cotton was actually valuable and they were buying their new landcruisers every year. You know. We were the workers out there

chipping the weeds while they sat up there in their landcruisers on the ring tanks watching us with binoculars.

Sherilyn: And you come from a farming background but you see hierarchies amongst farmers?

Mark: Yeah. You know, I think there was only one family we were friendly with who grew cotton who weren't as pretentious whereas a lot of them, well, seemed to think it was important to appear to have wealth.

Sherilyn: So what would you say was considered the norm for male behaviour at the local high school in your day? What sorts of things did males value and what didn't they value?

Mark: Well school. I don't think anyone really studied ever. Maybe Garrick might have been the only one.

Sherilyn: What? Even the girls?

Mark: I don't know. I know Tracy used to just bluff her way through in Maths 1 and 2 classes. She was bold enough to argue with the teacher and say, "That's stupid. I don't understand it. You explain it to me now." Whereas no-one else in the class would really take that approach. But then I guess she never ended up at Uni; whereas some of the others did.

Sherilyn: So let's talk about your brothers. They stayed in Wheatville and seem to have absolutely embraced the life out there. So does that make you the odd one out or maybe even the black sheep in the family?

Mark: I don't know. There must be some level of that. I think they were extremely pleased when I ended up at Uni doing something relating to Agriculture and Horticulture. And then I ended up working for the DPI in the area of sorghum first.

Sherilyn: Did that mean that in a way you were coming home? Still in agriculture? Still in their field so to speak?

Mark: I think so. In a way it was something they could understand I guess. George [youngest brother in his mid 20s], I put a lot of time into. There was the four of us so

there were two factions, two pairings: me and George against the other two. And I put a lot of work into George thinking that – he was pretty bright – and thinking that he should go on to Uni and do something but I was unsuccessful. But I think in the end it was easier for him not to; you know, it was easier to just get into the sport and switch the brain off and become, I don't know, physical and macho it up, and become one of the larrikins of Wheatville and have fun drinking and all that sort of thing rather than be different or be academic and leave town. I don't know, it's almost like a religious cult [being a boy in Wheatville]. There's sort of safety in conformity; it's easier if you're going to live there because it's such a small community and if you're on the outer, well, I can't imagine that would be a good place to be so it's easier to conform. It's almost like a religious cult. You might try and break away but then you don't know anybody so then it's, "Oh, I'll conform. It'll be easier."

Sherilyn: So you started in Maths–Science and you're now moving into photography and creative writing. So why is that? Was there an epiphanal moment in your life for this change to occur?

Mark: Yep. There probably pretty much was. But there was a counter point to that. There was an anti-epiphany when I was a teen as well when I sort of shut down on all of that. When I made a concerted effort to conform. As a kid I used to write. I would still read in my areas of interest – escapist fantasy – but when I was younger I used to write in my area of interest as well. But I dropped all of that because I was Maths–Science and therefore English wasn't important so I didn't focus on that at school either. I think I only just scraped through. But I used to write fantasy as a kid, you know, create my own illustrated books in the styles of whatever I was reading at the time and I just shut it down. I can put up a front when I have to and some people have told me I can be hard to know.

Sherilyn: So do you think you got used to wearing a mask?

Mark: Yes. I've actually written a short story based on that idea. I call it "Social Camouflage."

Sherilyn: I like that. So how long is this short story?

Mark: Oh, not much. 800 to 1000 words, something like that.

Sherilyn: And is it loosely based on your life?

Mark: Oh, yeah yeah. I had a moment when I burnt all of that [childhood creative writing]. It's all gone. I used to like art. I do remember I wanted to – I regretted at the end of Year 12 that it was all gone and I hadn't done Art – so I went, "Okay, I can recapture that through TAFE and do high school level art and just pick up that subject." But I think that the people I spoke to were confused about what I wanted and thought I was trying to get into a certificate course or something following on from school so I think there was a lot of confusion and I sort of went away going, "Oh my God. Where's my portfolio? That's not what I want. I just want to build up to that point." And it all just got too hard so I made an effort and I went to the city and the people I'd spoken to lined me up with an interview where they thought I wanted to get into an Arts course. But I had no back ground in it because I hadn't done Art since Grade 8 so that all finished and it was this sort of frantic scrambling to find something to keep me in the city which failed until I got the lifeline of gardening and landscaping which was in the city but it was still a tangent. But the writing. Yeah. I used to do writing and drawing and all that sort of stuff. Then there was a point when I just burnt it and went, "Alright. I'm going to make life easy on myself. I'm going to do Maths–Science. I'm going to be good at this and –"

Sherilyn: So what age were you when you were doing this?

Mark: I don't know. Early teens. I can't remember. I just can't remember. But I had little exercise books of things.

Sherilyn: That is really tragic. It's like some sort of symbolic letting go of – or destruction of – who you really are isn't it?

Mark: I think I had the idea that being different was my fault and that's where Myers Briggs was a revelation for me. It was like, "Oh, it's not that we all have to be like this."

Sherilyn: Yes, I think that is a distinct benefit of personality typing. It makes you realise that there are lots of different ways of seeing, being, and relating to the world.

Mark: I think so. I think because I had been pushed so far, or subdued or suppressed, I had an internal revolution against everyone who was different from me. You know, the counter thing, but I still get in trouble. Angelique doesn't like it anymore because I use it [personality typing] as a weapon. But what was good about it was that, after 30 odd years of being made to be like everybody else, it was a rebellion against it.

Sherilyn: So at what point was the rebellion?

Mark: Only after doing Myer Briggs. Four years ago maybe. I've had two years as a writer and now two years as a photographer.

Sherilyn: So would you call yourself liberated now? Have you unshackled yourself? Can you ever unshackle yourself from the cultural conformity that began oppressing you in your teens?

Mark: I think I have.

Sherilyn: And was there a moment when you realised you were free? When you realised that you didn't have to be someone you didn't want to be anymore?

Mark: Yep. Definitely. It's funny you know. If I had tried to persevere straight into an Arts career out of school maybe I would have more confidence now, maybe, but maybe I would have been too fragile and delicate and not been able to cope with any level of the criticism and just given it away thinking it was a failed path and then never gone back to it.

Sherilyn: And why do you say you were fragile and delicate?

Mark: I think my personality type is hypersensitive to criticism. Although it was sort of slapped out of me by my upbringing of "toughen up; harden up; shut up."

Sherilyn: The real boys don't cry thing?

Mark: Yeah. Yeah. All of that. Like I was saying before, I thought the problem was me

and I had to be like everyone else so I'd adapt. So that was a turning point when I took on that persona. I didn't really enjoy school at all. I only felt like I started to enjoy where I was going when I got to Uni even though I was doing Science. It was still a different crowd. It was a more academically oriented crowd regardless of what the study was.

Sherilyn: And at Uni as a male I guess you are expected to be a bit studious?

Mark: Yeah, but then again Uni is all about the party life as well. And there were Business and Food Science courses which had some eccentric people in amongst them when I was there before they shipped them off to another uni and they helped to moderate the Science-Ag crowd.

Sherilyn: Can we go back to a comment you made earlier when you said in your first six months in the city you got into the Goth scene. I'm imagining the white painted face and black clothes and hair. How were you received when you came home to Wheatville dressed like that?

Mark: I think it was such a "Oh, my God" because I thought music was awful growing up in Wheatville. I didn't know what music was until I got out of Wheatville. I sort of missed the whole 80s music scene because I just tuned out. So I discovered music. I discovered alternative culture and Triple J and medieval re-enactments with swords and things, because the fiction I used to read was all fantasy-horror-sci-fi, so it sort of overlapped with something I was interested in. The Goth was Horror and people were living and walking in these genres and with this music and I thought, "My God. I like that." There was a whole side of culture that I had never seen before.

Sherilyn: And how did your parents handle all of this?

Mark: I think I was probably always like that to them. I was like the odd one out. It probably did get a bit embarrassing for them for a while. Because, going to family things, I sort of embraced that for a while as much as for a desire to provoke.

Sherilyn: And that was probably in some way a subconscious challenge to a culture that was just so impenetrable.

Mark: I think so. I didn't care anymore. It was like, "I don't care what you say or what you think."

Sherilyn: Because you had discovered something else; or were old enough; or were acting out of desperation?

Mark: I think I was needling you know. Have a go at me, you know. Do something. I guess I was trying to pick a fight. Undirected anger. Looking for an avenue to lash out. So it was the 18 months that I was doing the PhD write up that I was procrastinating and I did Myers Briggs and I guess I was in denial initially because I guess I had just about set the mask in place that solidly that I had become used to it. Of the two day course, the first half day was pretty much denial, you know, "What crap!" until I went, "No. Wait." And I started thinking and remembering back to, "Hey, I used to write. I used to draw. I used to, you know, do all these things." So then it gradually sunk in so I just started writing again. I went, "Alright, I'm going to start writing." I made a conscious decision that I was going to start writing again or start writing because I don't think the earlier stuff really counted.

Sherilyn: Because it had been burnt!

Mark: Well I was so young so it was bound to have been awful anyway. It would have been more an historical thing to still have it [childhood writings]. It wouldn't be useful. It would have just been sentimental. So I started a diary to document the process of writing the PhD. That [starting diary] was my procrastination. I wasn't writing my PhD. That [diary writing] was my escape. I was still writing so it didn't feel like I was wasting time – like I wasn't watching a movie. I was actually doing something that felt, almost, like what I was meant to be doing but it was a creative escape. Whereas with Science, the creativity is in the planning – not in the execution or the writing up – so most of the creativity happens at the beginning and then it's just report writing so the PhD was like that as well. All the creativity had already happened. So I poured all my imagination into the writing so that when the PhD

finished, I'd given up so much to get the PhD done. I'd given up Martial Arts. Since Wheatville, that was the only interesting sport that I had pursued. Although Dad got me kicked out of the club by refusing to take me in one day.

Sherilyn: So why was that?

Mark: Oh, he decided on the spur of the moment that we had to go and muster cattle instead and it was a Saturday demonstration so the instructor had organised all these routines and we all had a role in this routine so with me not being there meant that routines didn't work so he basically just went, "Nah. You're out of the club for letting the club down." Yeah it was like, "Orr, thanks Dad!"

Sherilyn: I can't imagine Martial Arts in Wheatville having the social status of football. Although it wouldn't be as socially suicidal as being an academic boy I suppose.

Mark: Back when I was at school there were people like Garrick who performed well academically but, socially, I guess was pushed to the side more to be mocked than to be admired for his academic prowess. And Stephen Black was the arty farty little one where the common thing would be, "Oh, well. He must be gay. He's arty so he must be gay."

Sherilyn: And being arty would be lower in status than a non-football playing boy or an academic one?

Mark: Yeah. Definitely and I guess he must have been confident enough and enjoyed art enough or I guess for him, there was no – he had no interest in sport – so he wasn't even going to bother trying to get fit and compete. You know, become an equal in a sporting sense. You know, I think he just wrote that off as a lost cause and buried himself in doing art stuff.

Sherilyn: And what, put up with the flack that came with that?

Mark: Yeah. The cool crowd could have a degree of academic performance and that was like Tracy – but I guess that's the female prerogative again. You know, it's okay for

them to be academic because they're not playing football.

Sherilyn: So how did the females respond to people like Stephen?

Mark: Oh, ignored! Yeah. That's the social pecking order. Yeah, so you don't get a girlfriend. That's how it would have worked for Stephen. Yeah for Stephen there's no girlfriend – or for Garrick. Yeah whereas with the sporting heroes the girls would be down on the sidelines watching the boys play the football. Yeah so the attractive girls would be sort of the cheerleaders – not in the American stereotypical way, not to that level of organisation – but I guess there was still like the attractive people, who it didn't matter how they did academically to a degree because they were attractive – and then in Wheatville there's the thugs – who don't necessarily perform well at sport either because their IQ is too low to be able to perform physically, to be co-ordinated, to think strategically. So there were people who were part of the cool crowd and part of sport but then could perform at an adequate level [academically] and I can think of a few people in that mid-range academically who performed well socially and on the sporting field and they were the school heroes. And then there were the brain dead people who would enjoy competing for how many VLAs [Very Low Achievement] or LAs [Low Achievement] or complete failures they could have on their report card and finding out who was the biggest failure academically because that was a badge of honour to these sort of people. So to not try and to egg each other on to not try academically and these sort of

people would then in the school yard I guess enforce gender stereotypes by going and smacking the crap out of people. I don't know if you remember Oliver Mathison?

Sherilyn: Yeah Yeah.

Mark: Well he had the crap beaten out of him after school one day by one of the more macho types because he just didn't like him because he [Oliver] was not the Mr Macho, Mr Poor Performing [academically] Guy. So the more macho types would have a real thing against those sorts of people and, I don't know, just sort of try and pound them and sometimes literally.

Sherilyn: I had no idea. And you saw that as a way of them verifying their own versions of masculinity?

Mark: I think so. Yeah. "Here's the pecking order. We are stronger. We can beat you up so don't try and assert yourself or don't try and climb the pecking order because here's your position and it's below the rest of us."

Sherilyn: So what does that do to the people who don't fit the dominant mould?

Mark: Yeah, well it's better to be in the C grade of the football and perform badly because you're still part of the crowd. And then I guess outside of school they can just embrace the football drinking culture and keep playing in the C grade and be a part of that. They're still in the football culture and that's all good too. They can run on; do badly; have a beer and everything's cool.

Mark's story had a profound affect on me. I had never seriously considered the long-term impact on males of being forced to live their adolescent and adult lives in 'borrowed clothes'. The male students I had noticed, respected, and felt for at school had been those like Stephen, Garrick, Oliver (see section entitled, "Extract 1 from Mark's interview transcript June 9, 2010"), and Sally's eldest son (see section entitled, "Extract 1 from Sally's interview transcript February 23, 2010"): Boys who pursued the Arts, Social Sciences, or academia and in so doing openly defied community gender norms that construct them as football players and

resistant to schoolwork. The price these boys paid for transgressing gender normativity was often exclusion and sometimes physical violence. Mark, whilst intelligent, had always seemed to me to be much more accepted by his peers at school. At the time I did not realise the price he was paying – and continued to pay – for such acceptance.

Discursive constructions of teachers

In 2009 a number of articles were published in the local newspaper, *The Wheatville Times*. These perpetuated discourses implying that an excess of female teachers might be impeding the quality delivery of educational programs in the region. One father of school aged children complained: “It’s hard to attract ‘quality teachers’. We don’t want a girl who’s going to get pregnant after six months and go” (Walsh in Thistle, 2009a, p. 15). Another proffered, “I believe teachers should be better paid. A good wage will attract *quality teachers* and we need to get more *male teachers* into our schools” [emphasis added] (Unknown in Thistle, 2009b, p. 6). It is quite possible that the journalist reporting these comments identified their discriminatory nature and deliberately inserted them into her articles as a way of foregrounding their sexist overtones and challenging community thinking. Indeed, a week after making comments about not wanting female teachers because they get pregnant and leave, the father who had been quoted – also a local councillor – wrote a letter to the newspaper editor defending his opinion and complaining that his words had been taken out of context (Walsh, 2009, p. 6).

Whilst *The Wheatville Times* appears comfortable to question the absence of male students amongst academic award winners (see Figure 1.4) and publish comments questioning female teachers’ abilities and commitment levels, it does not appear to recognise its own contribution to the perpetuation and reification of patriarchal discourses. Many of the media texts presented and analysed in Part B of this chapter perpetuate patriarchal discourses constructing masculinity in opposition to femininity. Such discourses associate being male with power over others, a sense of privilege, physical prowess, risk-taking behaviour and the objectification, denigration and/or domination of females. As a critical pedagogue,

looking through feminist poststructuralist lenses, I find these constructions of gender binaries particularly worrying for their capacity to diminish lives.

A summary of Part A

Part A presented evidence to suggest that boys attending Wheatville's schools may devalue and resist a formal education because school can be considered a feminised place unnecessary for a boys' future success in life. As Andrea stated, "Well for them it's just easy. The boys always get a job." Other evidence indicated that some boys who do not conform to the community's dominant constructions of gender may be bullied and/or burdened in Wheatville's schools by pressure to conform to hypermasculine ideals. Whilst oppressive gender beliefs and practices may encourage some boys to pursue a university career as a means of escaping the community's limiting ideological constructs, for others it would appear that their lives are being substantially diminished by the ways gender is being constituted in Wheatville.

The normalising of limiting gender constructs would also appear to be impacting on the lived experiences of, and options made available to, Wheatville's girls. Evidence presented in Part A and Chapter 1 (see Figure 1.1) suggests that Wheatville's girls are more likely to value formal learning than are its boys. Upon finishing high school, girls are more likely than boys to leave the community and pursue a university education. Limited employment opportunities made available to those girls remaining in Wheatville can place them in positions whereby they feel the need to attach themselves to a male as a way of gaining financial security. In some cases this may lead to girls choosing pregnancy and motherhood as viable alternatives to working (see Andrea's interview).

A preliminary exploration of evidence presented thus far demonstrates the educational and social impact on individuals of the multiple ways that Wheatville is choosing to ideologically and discursively construct gender. Of significance is the impact dominant constructions of gender are having on teacher/student relationships, life-limiting choices, and the oppression and/or subordination of some members of the community. The next section, Part B, furthers connections between school-based problematics and wider social constructions of gender.

Part B

Looking Beyond School to the Wider Community

As is often the case in Australian farming communities, traditional heteropatriarchal values and expectations strongly influence the hierarchical structures, cultural practices, gender performances and employment options of those living in them (see Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2004; Coldwell, 2010; Johnson, 2001). Sources of evidence already presented in this chapter indicate that Wheatville's dominant constructions of masculinity, boys' devaluing of schooling, and employment options post-school are linked. Part B of this chapter focuses on discursive constructions of masculinity and femininity within and across the wider community. By making transparent Wheatville's hidden gender curriculum – and the discourses that support it – further links are made to cultural practices normalising high-risk behaviour for boys and the subjugation and/or objectification of Wheatville's females.

Figure 6.6 depicts a photograph of elected council members from Wheatville and its surrounding districts. Through feminist lenses, what is most salient – and troubling – about this image is the complete absence of female representatives. Three local women did campaign for council office, with one being successful. However, she resigned before completing her full term. Figure 6.7 depicts a campaign advertisement published in *The Wheatville Times* a few months prior to the elections (Davidson, 2009). It was used by one of the unsuccessful female candidates in her attempt to influence community members to vote for her. Her marketing spiel is: "A female who can actually read a balance sheet and a business paper" (p. 4). The candidate's choice of words implies that she considers herself a rather exceptional and exemplary female for being able to do so. The inference being that financial prowess and business acumen are qualities inherent to men but rare in women. This text serves to illustrate Freire's (1971) observation that those who are oppressed often reproduce ideologies supporting their own oppression.

An observation I have made over many years of living and working in this community is that the females in Wheatville are valued for their nurturing and/or domestic skills with many of the town's professional women located in the teaching and nursing professions – however, the principals of all three schools in the town of Wheatville are male. Over the past decade, I have noticed a significant increase in the number of professional women infiltrating work places traditionally considered the domain of males. These professional women include doctors, chemists, physiotherapists, lawyers – specifically in the field of family law, occupational therapists, radiographers, and veterinarians. As with the female dominated teaching and nursing professions, much of their work is associated with the nurturing and/or welfare of others or animals. Such employment represents acceptable ways of performing versions of professional femininity in this distinctly heteropatriarchal culture.

Extract 2 from Elizabeth's interview transcript February 10, 2010

Experienced teacher and mother of three adult children – one of whom is a male artist – Elizabeth is in her late 50s, is married to a professional, and has recently retired. She has been a Wheatville resident for over thirty years.

Sherilyn: *Does the community value its women as much as it values its boys?*

Elizabeth: *I think it does. I mean I haven't really seen any blatant examples of women not being valued in our community. I mean if they want to become members of our town council and leaders in our community they can be. Mind you, having said that, and having spoken to a couple of ex-female councillors and because they are in a minority they have come across that attitude of, well, that's emotional business. "Don't be emotional about this topic or subject."*

Sherilyn: *Is this a way of dismissing their views in council meetings?*

Elizabeth: *Yes. This is in council meetings and when they [females] are trying to push forward the arts or whatever. They're coming up against it a lot so I've contradicted myself haven't I?*

Sherilyn: *Do you believe women in this community are largely responsible for pushing the arts?*

Elizabeth: *Yes.*

Sherilyn: *So what are the male responsibilities for civic leadership? What do they push?*

Elizabeth: *Their responsibility is to decide where the money goes.*

Sherilyn: *So financial control?*

Elizabeth: *Yes. Financial control.*

Sherilyn: *Whereas women are seen as being more emotional?*

Elizabeth: *Yes. That's what they [male councillors] think. But then again a lot of women in this community have raised a lot of money for different causes and the Arts as well. They've supported lots of projects. You know it's typical of the men. They think that, you*

know, when we have staff meetings, that the women want to talk about an issue and discuss it and come to a conclusion as a group, whereas a man feels like it is his job to say “yes” or “no” or this is right or wrong.

Sherilyn: *Instead of negotiating?*

Elizabeth: *Yes. Instead of negotiating. That’s right.*

Discursive constructions of masculinity

Whilst the all-male Wheatville Shire Council elucidates how power asymmetries can manifest as male domination of the public sphere, *The Wheatville Times* often chooses to construct local males using hypermasculine discourses. Males are frequently portrayed as men or boys of action fervently pursuing sport, risk-taking behaviour, social activities and alcohol consumption.

In Figure 6.8 a photograph published in the social pages of *The Wheatville Times* shows four young men smiling whilst holding half full glasses and bottles of red wine. The caption beneath the image uses an essentialist discourse to claim that “boys will be boys” (“What a Day It Was,” 2009, p.30). This caption directly links being male to consuming alcohol as does the following contribution to the gossip column (a regular feature of this paper):

Two brothers we know ... one of whom was renowned far and wide for his ability to hit red cricket balls ... played golf recently.... [They were] watching as opposition tipped back beer after beer and struggled to remain vertical. But while they sank the beers, they also sank the shots Both [brothers] are back in serious ‘training’, but has nothing to do with golf. (“The dying dingo,” 2009a, p. 11)

Figure 6.9 shows a photograph and headline from the back page of *The Wheatville Times* (“Ducks power in to finals,” 2009, p. 36). The article the photograph and headline are linked to describe a “gruelling encounter” between the local rugby side and another team. The headline, image, and text work together to discursively construct the players as powerful, successful, and dominating. In another article from the newspaper a more playful side of masculinity is represented. Figure 6.10 shows a photograph of a group of three men attending a local social event cross-dressed as women. The headline reads “Fun and Games at Boolaroo”¹⁴ (2009, p.

¹⁴ Boolaroo is the name of a large farming enterprise in the Wheatville Shire

11). The article is intended to be humorous. Whilst infrequent, published photographs of men cross-dressing for a joke do appear in *The Wheatville Times*. My experience has been that photographs of women cross-dressing do not.

Of more concern is an article published in *The Wheatville Times* reporting on a junior tennis tournament. Figure 6.11 shows a section of this article and includes a photograph of three primary school-aged boys who appear to be drinking out of beer bottles immediately under the declarative headline “Wheatville Tradition Continues” (2009, p.14). Whilst the caption clarifies that the boys are only drinking ginger beer, a first glance at the image – and the wording of the headline – can invoke a different response from the reader: a response associating the Wheatville “tradition” with male alcohol consumption and inferring that another generation of young males is learning to perform masculinity appropriately. As a means of reinforcing this message, and perhaps co-incidentally, a liquor advertisement using the slogan “Great Mates” is located immediately below the image (“The Bottle-O,” 2009, p. 14).

One reading of texts such as these is to see them as celebrating, and perhaps romanticising, Wheatville’s strong and successful male sporting traditions and camaraderie. However a visual and linguistic count of the references to alcohol in many of *The Wheatville Times’* articles quickly identifies another form of interdiscursivity and hence a different interpretation. In this community being male, participating in sport, socialising in male groupings, and drinking alcohol are all closely related and normalised as acceptable male practices.

Extract 1 from Katrina’s interview transcript April 22, 2010

Katrina is a professional woman and local resident who is married to a farmer. She is in her early 40s and has three children; a boy and two girls. They all attend elite private boarding schools in the state’s capital city.

Sherilyn: *You’ve lived in the community a long time. You’re a mother, a farmer’s wife, an educator, a local. What can you tell me about your observations of what males and females value in this community?*

Katrina: *Well as much as I’d like to think it’s changed, out here I think it is still very*

traditional. It is still very much a man’s world and men are defined through, essentially, very masculine expectations and actions. They’re still big rough tough guys and a lot of them aren’t great communicators. That’s valued. They’re big drinkers. And as much as I’d like to think things have progressed, I’ve now got a son who’s turning 16 very soon

and I'm realising, by watching him go through these gates, that those things [values] are still very much alive; they're very tangible and they're impacting on him. He's had that around him all this time.

Sherilyn: So are you implying that there is a sort of initiation into being a man in this community?

Katrina: Yes. Rites of passage sort of thing. For instance we've just been at a pony camp that he's been attending since he was about five. He's boarding away now but he sees this same group of kids every year; it's an annual thing.

Sherilyn: All country kids from properties?

Katrina: All country kids from properties: boys and girls. So they've come up through the ranks. They started at about five and they're now all turning 16. This year was to be their last year. You know, essentially all the other kids look up to them and the pony camp's culture is one very much of role modelling. The little kids look up to the big kids. I like to think it's not so much about the horses and the competitiveness as it is about behaviour and the nice social things that come out of that.

Sherilyn: So it creates a community?

Katrina: Yes. It does. A sense of community and also how to behave and a chance to catch up with friends in a nice way. Lots of lessons learnt that have nothing to do with horses. Anyway, the kids got to their last night of camp and this was the last year for most of the 16 year olds. They've been together all this time. Anyway I arrived at camp on the last morning – I hadn't been staying overnight – and there was this terrible din about these kids causing trouble. They'd all been up all night drinking. What they did is they got a bottle of –

Sherilyn: Are these boys and girls?

Katrina: Yep. Boys and girls. They'd planned it all week. They got a bottle of rum which they'd got an older boy to buy for them who had finished last year so, in the eyes of the law, he was an adult. He'd come back as a responsible past rider to help the other kids. They had given him money to buy a bottle of

grog for them. They basically ran off and kept everybody awake all night with their drinking. One of them was sick and from what I can gather there was a hard core of them who kept getting up after they were put to bed; generally just created absolute havoc. Anyway everyone was furious with them the next morning. You know my son had been involved as well and I was really really cross and actually devastated about his behaviour. I'm not so naive to think that they're not experimenting with drinking. I really do think they have to learn some of those lessons and you have to be on the sideline to guide them. It wasn't the drinking that worried me so much as the culture of acceptance by these other adults. You know, I'd say to these parents, "I'm horrified. What are we going to do?" and the fathers just laughed and patted me on the back and said, "Oh, get over it."

Sherilyn: What, a sort of a boys will be boys attitude?

Katrina: Look the mothers' attitude was well – everyone just thought I was over reacting. The Mums' attitude was, "leave it to the men" and the men's attitude was "Don't make too much fuss because it's just embarrassing to make a scene. Let them have their ribbon day." It was their ribbon day. Nothing was mentioned about their behaviour. They were made to clean up I think or they had some kind of minimal punishment. They all rode their horses and got their ribbons and people all clapped for them and I was just alarmed at the lack of upset at their behaviour. There was just no response.

Sherilyn: To the point where you felt you were being gagged?

Katrina: I was. I was being vilified for being cross. You know, for instance, one of these kids who had been really naughty, vomited, and been totally dreadful was jumping in the A grade jump off – which is quite an esteemed place to be if you're that good – well he cleared this jump and everyone clapped and one of the fathers behind me yelled out, "Not bad for a bloke with a hangover." And they all clapped and roared laughing. They thought it was funny and it wasn't so much funny as pride. I just felt sick.

Sherilyn: The father was proud?

Katrina: It wasn't his father. It was another father.

Sherilyn: But is it like the men were proud that a new crop of young males were being initiated?

Katrina: It was as if to say, "Here they come all guns blazing." You know, I was cross that that boy had bought them the grog but really the law says he's an adult but he's just a child really. My son said to me, "Oh we put a lot of pressure on him Mum." And I said to this boy's mother, the boy who bought the grog, "What are we going to do. I'm horrified" and she just shrugged and just couldn't really care less. She said, "Oh, it happens." And my son said to me, "I don't know why you're so much more upset than the other parents." I told him it was his behaviour that I was just mortified at and he must go and apologise to everybody. But most of them just thought it was funny. The other thing he said to me which really upset me was, "It's a tradition Mum." He said, "It's always happened. It's just that the others haven't been caught." And it wasn't the drinking so much, it was the attitude that it was almost encouraged. It was encouraged and it made me sick. I guess

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to the next place. It scares me that it's almost expected of them to behave like that and it's so acceptable.

Sherilyn: What about the girls; the young girls?

Katrina: The young girls were the whistle blowers. This fascinated me. They're all on an equal footing at camp because the girls ride just as well as the boys and really, with riding, the girls tend to stay interested longer than the boys. The boys only come because the girls are there. So they're all on an equal footing. The girls were very much in on the planning stage. When I asked my son whose idea it was he said, "Oh, I can't remember. We planned it all week." One of the girls who was involved it was her brother who was the buyer of the grog. They were really in on it but they were the whistle blowers straight away. Once they were caught they were the whistle blowers and their mothers came up to me and said, "My daughter said they were all in on it and they can't lie." So they were very quick to come and say once they were caught, whereas the boys were like the bunnies in the headlights.

Sherilyn: Did you feel the girls were just as applauded for their drinking adventure as the boys?

Katrina: No. No-one talked about the girls much.

Sherilyn: So the "Not bad for a hangover" comment would not have been levelled at one of the girls?

Katrina: No. I can't imagine anyone saying that because their grandmothers were there and they certainly wouldn't be condoning it. And their mothers would not think that was a great thing to say.

Sherilyn: Why is that? What's the difference here?

Katrina: I don't know. I can't tell you but I know that it just wasn't. It was considered far funnier – like I think one of the mothers

said, "I think my daughter needs a panadol but she can suffer." There was that attitude. It was considered funnier to mention the boys. I don't think they really knew how to react about the girls.

Sherilyn: So at the camp what was the adult behaviour modelling in relation to alcohol?

Katrina: There was a bar all week and I mean I had a drink most nights but I'm not a big drinker anyway. There was a bar most nights which would go until one o'clock in the morning.

Sherilyn: And who would be using that?

Katrina: The parents. Males and females. If you did a count there'd be more men but it's generally considered fun to stay up till midnight or more at these things.

Sherilyn: And all the kids, where are they?

Katrina: Well they're all sleeping in swags about 10 metres away. I don't mean to sound like a wowser. I've stayed there and had a few drinks. I said to my son, "Do you see me acting like that?" and he said, "No, you only ever have one or two drinks". I was trying to establish for myself why he thought it was funny [to get drunk]. I think part of it is trying to continue this tradition that they think is funny or masculine or moving toward being what is considered an adult male or if it could be just boys that are testing the boundaries. And I said to him, "Why did you do it? Didn't you think?" and he said, "Yeah, I just didn't think." He said, "It's our last year. It's tradition." And that really alarmed me because I thought of all those little kids who are watching that and he's learned this through watching the bigger kids. And this was scary too and interesting. There were a couple of kids from that age who were in that troupe who weren't included. One was asleep and his mother said, "What's wrong with you? You look very sour." And he said, "I missed out on going to the party because I slept through it." He wasn't relieved that he wasn't involved. Instead he felt as if he'd missed something.

Sherilyn: And what about the other child who wasn't involved?

Katrina: I don't think she was invited. This child who came from away and wasn't in the pack of kids who'd known each other forever, she wasn't included.

Sherilyn: So there was a sense of exclusivity about the drinking?

Katrina: Oh yeah. There was a little crew of about seven or eight of them. All local diehards I would say and all lovely kids by themselves. You know nice kids. I said to my

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but his father didn't want to have anything to do with it. He said, "I will handle it in my way. I don't think you handle it well." And I said, "Well, it's better than not handling it at all." Because it was like a white elephant in the room I thought.

And I know I can sound like a mother over-reacting but what upset me was that he had taken in this male culture by osmosis and there was not a thing I could do about it. And it's as if the men are taught one way to behave and it's like wearing a suit. If that suit falls off, you've got nothing else to wear. It limits who they are and how they behave and it really frightens me. It's just not a healthy way to develop as a male. That's what alarmed me. He was going down this path into this rum drinking feral and I couldn't do anything to halt it because the people that mattered to him were cheering him on. And that's the other men. The adult men. You know, to get peer male cheering. It's a tribal thing. You know. You've only spent ten years raising/hatching them, and with what impact?

Sherilyn: *So the cultural curriculum takes over?*

Katrina: *It depends on where you live I guess but I realised at that point the other day that the men have a lot of say; that they are very*

powerful out here. It's like the air is thick with testosterone. You don't think it's there and then every now and then you get a dust storm and you think, "Holy Jesus. Where did that come from?" And there's no watering that down.

Local hierarchies

A significant number of my female friends are married to rural property owners. Their husbands have inherited – or will inherit – the properties on which they live from their fathers. In the community of Wheatville the passing of agricultural land through the paternal line is something that has become naturalised over generations. I can think of only a few exceptions to this cultural tradition and these situations have tended to result from property owners not having had sons or family trusts which have been created as a means of reducing taxation. In the second instance, female co-owners are mostly silent partners – many living elsewhere after having married men who also own farms.

Majority male ownership of rural enterprises leads to a financial situation whereby the majority of assets – including the family home – are owned and/or controlled by the husband or his ascendants. If wives have off-farm incomes these tend to be regarded as disposable: useful for such things as supplementing household expenses, renovating the homestead, or contributing to the payment of boarding school fees and/or holidays. The consequences of these arrangements can work to financially disempower women as they are excluded from day-to-day decision-making regarding the running of the family farm(s) and events that can impact on their lives. Coldwell (2010), in his review of a number of studies into rural masculinities, makes the point that good farming practice is often associated with masculine hegemony, masculine power, and the regulated subordination of women. I recently had a conversation with a highly educated female friend who has been married to a “man on the land” for over 30 years. Her husband is in the process of selling their property to move to an isolated rural community hundreds of kilometres away. When I asked her how she was feeling about this move she replied resignedly, “Sherilyn, what were my options? I had none.”

Despite the limitations for women – and men – of living in a culture shaped by masculine hegemony and strongly delineated gender roles, perceptions of the lifestyles enjoyed by those living on rural properties can be the cause of local envy. This was affirmed for me one day during a Year 11 English class. The students and I were having a discussion about social class systems in the United States and I asked them if they thought that the community of Wheatville had its own class structure or hierarchy. All students agreed that it did, claiming that farmers and their wives were dominant. The conversation went something like this:

Me: *So if there is a class structure operating in Wheatville which group sits at the top?*

Students: [In general agreement] *Oh definitely the cockies and their wives.*

Me: *That's interesting. So how do you identify them?*

Students: [A chorus of answers] *They own properties ... drive big four wheel drives ... the men all dress the same in RM Williams boots, moleskins, and akubra hats ... they follow the rugby ... are always having big parties ... send their children to expensive boarding schools ... their wives wear gold fob chains and designer clothes ...*

Me: *So who is positioned next on this list?*

Students: *The doctors and lawyers*

Me: [Surprised] *So you believe that the cockies – who have often had no more than a Year 10 or 12 education – are socially positioned above those who have spent five or six years studying at university?*

Students: *Yes*

Me: *And you're all comfortable with this?*

Students: *Yes*

Me: *No-one here thinks that a university education and profession gives you more status than owning a farm or being married to someone who owns a farm?*

Students: *No*

Me: *Can you understand that I might have a problem with this?*

Students: *Yes Miss but it's true. You ask anybody.*

Me: *So where do I fit in? Where do teachers fit in? Or am I a cocky's wife?*

Students: *Oh no Miss. You're just a teacher and they're way down on the list with the bank johnnies¹⁵ and nurses.*

¹⁵ A slang term for bank employees.

After this discussion – which occurred about 12 years ago – I have made a point of initiating similar conversations with different groups of students at regular yearly intervals in an attempt to gauge movements in student perceptions regarding Wheatville’s social hierarchy. The last time I taught a Year 11 English class (three years ago) I was receiving the same messages from students. It would appear that the cultural curriculum of Wheatville values property ownership over a formal education.

Discursive constructions of femininity

In exploring representations of masculinity, it is important to consider representations of femininity as, through relational ontology, these also work to construct and police gender norms (Reay, 2001). Figure 6.12 shows an article published in *The Wheatville Times* to help promote a locally written cookery book. Its headline uses the imperative mood to tell its readers to “Try these, they’re great” (Thistle, 2008, p. 4). The remainder of the text details “three generations of cooks” (p. 4) who have contributed to the book. There are two accompanying images. The larger one is of three local women, described as “top cooks,” holding plates of biscuits and cakes towards the camera as though serving. The women are all well groomed and smiling. The smaller inserted image is of the cookbook and more biscuits. The headline, the accompanying photographs, and the ensuing story all work to position these women in roles associated with food preparation and servitude.

Figure 6.13 shows another article from *The Wheatville Times*. In this one, female students from the local high school are pictured at an evening celebrating the completion of their alcoholic beverages service course (“Here’s cheers to a top night out,” 2008). The only male in the photograph is smiling as he is served. The article informs its readers that the students have been taking part in a certificate program assessing bar course competencies. There is no explanation given as to why all those serving in the photograph are female. Gender representations such as these work to legitimate patriarchy and masculine hegemony. My experiences of living in Wheatville have taught me that it is the norm for females of all ages in this

community to take responsibility for preparing and serving food. This is often done as unpaid work.

An article reporting on another course offered by the local high school incorporates an image of a group of smiling female students holding battery-operated prosthetic babies on their laps under the headline “Students Get Lowdown on Motherhood” (McKay, 2008b, p. 11)(see Figure 6.14). Whilst “students” is a gender neutral term, “motherhood” is not – nor is the image accompanying the headline. It can be inferred from this text that the nurturing and caring of babies in the Wheatville community has been socially and discursively constructed as a female responsibility. My experiences of living here would support this inference.

Another article in the same edition reports on the annual debutante ball (see Figure 6.15). Its caption describes the debutantes¹⁶ as “enchanted” (“Debs were enchanting,” 2008, p. 19). The story is accompanied by two images: one, a studio photograph of a girl dressed in virginal white, smiling, styled, and posing for the camera resplendent in long white gloves and diamante ear rings; the other, an image of 22 debutantes standing respectfully behind the local bishop and matrons whilst holding their corsages of flowers. The text’s semantic and semiotic references to the girls as decorative, modest and innocent are many. The reference to them as “enchanted,” the long white dresses and gloves, the fresh flowers, the presence of a church representative, and the absence of any young males all work to construct a particularly pure, Christian, and traditionally western representation of young white womanhood. Aspects of this ideological construction are reproduced in another article featuring an image of some local show girls with the male show president (“We’re sorry about the odd man out,” 2008)(see Figure 6.16). The girls are dressed in their finery and are wearing their showgirl sashes and ribbons. The older male is dressed in a business suit and has his arms around two of the girls. The girls in a second image in this same article are described as “equally stunning” (p. 14). The images and captions used in this text work to

¹⁶ A Victorian term used to describe a young woman who is being introduced to society for the first time.

objectify women by perpetuating a discourse of females as decorative. The headline apologises for the male's presence with the caption claiming "this should have been the best looking page in the feature" (p. 14). The article then uses humour to describe the male, a well known local farmer and business owner, in the image as "a thorn between two roses" (p. 14). The implication is that the local show president is not particularly attractive. It would appear he gains his value in other ways: possibly those associated with power and white male entitlement. The smiling faces of the subjects in these photographs infer that they are quite comfortable with their roles and representations.

Discourses perpetuating local females as nurturing or decorative operate in stark contrast to those being mediated by the front page of the article shown in Figure 6.17. In it, the one word oversized headline "BASHED!" (McKay, 2008a, p. 1) makes use of the declarative mood, capitalisation, and an exclamation mark to arrest the readers' attention. The front page headline is placed above a large colour photograph of two unsmiling Indigenous women who are looking squarely at the reader. The one in the foreground has a visibly swollen and bruised right eye. She is wearing a t-shirt and black front zip jumper. The woman in the image standing supportively behind her is wearing a football jersey. The article's emotivity is increased through its referencing to children in the subheading: "Children watch from car while woman bashed" (p. 1). It goes on to detail the injuries received by one of the photographed women as "a black eye, a broken nose and a suspected broken cheek bone" and inform its readers that the incident may have resulted as a retaliatory response to an earlier verbal altercation between the victim and her attackers. The children who watched from the car are later identified as those of the attackers. The racial *othering* (Walkerdine, 1990) of the women who are the subject of this article is established using visual, semiotic, linguistic, and semantic cues. These cues work to construct those involved in the incident as "outsider(s) within" their own community (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 18). They are represented as violent, anti-social, and poor parental models. The article provides an example of how texts can work to disempower within as well as across genders.

Misogynist messages

Text type: Field note

May 1, 2010

Joke announced over the PA system at the local Wheatville show during the bull riding competition:

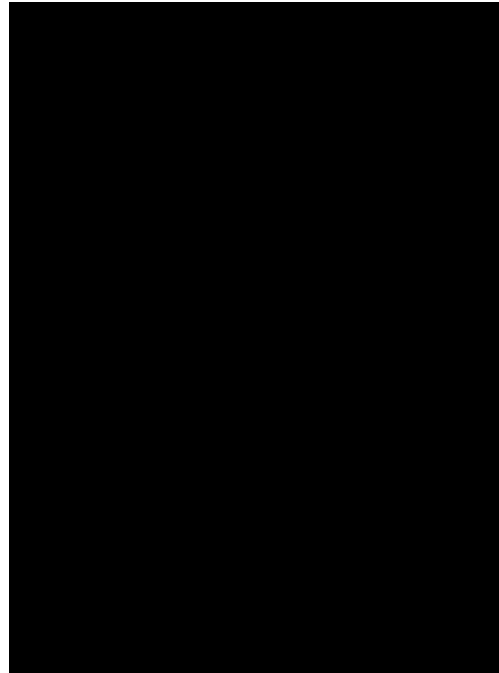
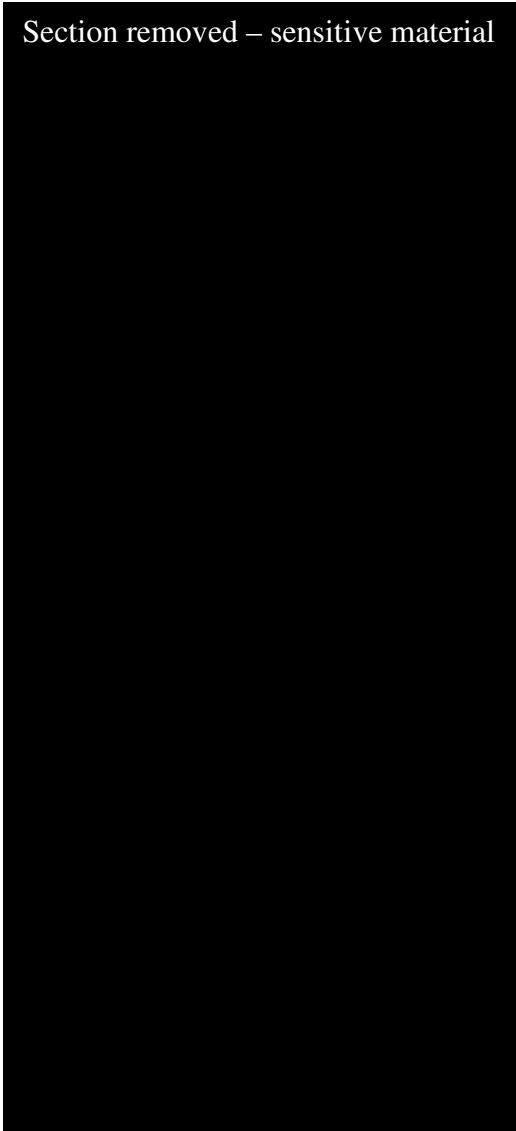
Question: *If your wife and your dog are both yapping at the front and back door to be let in, which one do you let in?*

Answer: *Your dog because at least it'll shut-up once you let it inside.*

Extract 1 from Angela's interview transcript July 13, 2010

Angela is a professional woman in her late 40s who is recently divorced from a local farmer. She is also the mother of three sons who attend a prestigious boarding school in a metropolitan centre. Angela and her ex-husband share parenting responsibilities.

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Sherilyn: *Earlier you were telling me about a conversation you had with another of your sons –*

Angela: *Yes. During the holidays he's been spending time with Wheatville boys that he grew up with and who still go to school here and I asked him about this party he went to the other day. He's been going to lots of parties.*

Sherilyn: *So how old is he again?*

Angela: 17. And I was asking, "What boys were there at the party?"
 And he said, "Oh, this one and this one."
 And I said, "Oh, was Liam Johnson there?"
 And he said, "No. He was at his place."
 And I said, "Oh, aren't you all friends with him anymore?"
 And he said, "No. He's gone soft."
 And I said, "What do you mean? He's gone soft?"
 He said, "Orr, you know. He doesn't like to hang with his friends anymore. He's just gone soft."
 And I said, "What have you had a fight?"
 And he said, "No. He's just got a girlfriend. And he's just not hanging around with his friends and he's gone soft."
 And I was thinking, "What a sad reflection that when a boy has chosen to spend time with his girlfriend, and put her before his friends that his friends all criticise him for his actions, that pack mentality, you put your mates before all others – and I think they grow up with this attitude. You know it starts obviously in adolescence."

Sherilyn: Oh. I would even argue before that in the modelling provided by older adults at home and in the community; when they are children in primary school.

Angela: Yeah. That it's not really that cool to stop seeing your mates and try to keep your girlfriend.

Sherilyn: You mean to put her first?

Angela: Yeah. To put her first.

Sherilyn: She should come second?

Angela: Yes.

Sherilyn: Because there is some irony here in that I would have thought that it was important to have girlfriends. Do you think it gives you status as a boy to have girlfriends in Wheatville?

Angela: Well as long as they don't interfere with your boy time. I thought, "Oh my God. The notion that the important women in your life are not your primary concern and mates and work come first, women come in second. It's starting already." I don't suppose I'd ever really noticed it or talked to him about it but it's started already. I was thinking as I was

driving down your road that it was one of my expectations in my married life that I was constantly let down on. And that is that I was not always first. I was second or third to the job and his friends and his socialising – and the kids and I were always second or third. And I know in my father's life, my mother and us, we were the most important people.

Sherilyn: Your father wasn't off the land was he?

Angela: No. So it was a big disappointment for me that there was this expectation that, you know, wasn't met.

Sherilyn: Don't think you're alone. I've heard this theme quite a few times from others.

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Sherilyn: And I suppose that behaviour is generational. So the challenge for us as parents of sons growing up in this culture is, how can we break the cycle? How do we make a difference for the wives of our sons and the quality of our sons' relationships as well? Or do you think it is just too entrenched?

Angela: Well that was the shock for me when I heard my son say that [that his friend had "gone soft" because he was putting his girlfriend first]. I look at life through my happy eyes and think everything is golden and then you start thinking, "Oh no. Don't do that. Don't be like that." Even when they were younger I remember Hamish had a friend out for a stock sale we were hosting. He would have been 10 or 11 at the time and Harry, his friend, came out. When his mother was picking him up after the event I said to him, "Did you enjoy yourself Harry?" And he said, "Well it would have been alright if Hamish hadn't been playing with the girls. So I didn't have fun because Hamish was just playing with the girls."

Sherilyn: What do you mean he was playing with the girls?

Angela: You know he was being with the girls. Hamish is more your sensitive type and being with a girl doesn't bother him. He's a totally different child [to the other boys]. He might become more aware of it as he grows up. I don't know. He might be more aware of a woman's needs because he's very thoughtful of mine. You know, he'll come and kiss me at night or I'll sit down after dinner and he'll bring me a cup of tea. He's more sensitive of a woman's needs I think.

Sherilyn: Did you say anything to your son when he made the, "He's gone soft" comment or did you just process it?

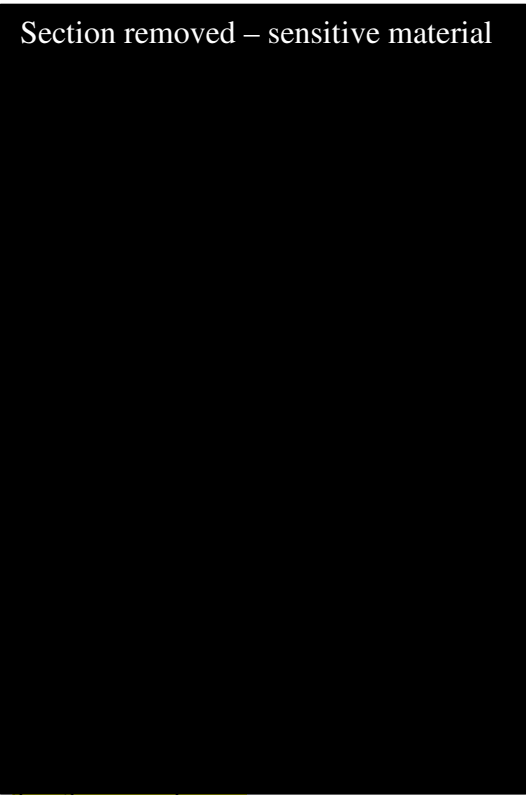
Angela: I started to process it and I was thinking – you know, I'm going to get back to him on that.

Sherilyn: What will you say?

Angela: Well. I'll say, "Don't you think it's important that he spend time with his

girlfriend? He doesn't have to be with the boys all the time."

Sherilyn: What does your new partner make of these entrenched male attitudes?



Sherilyn: It's interesting isn't it because I think Australian men, particularly the ones out here, are fiercely loyal to their mates so they know they have nothing to fear from their mates –

Angela: Because they're all in the bar with him.

Sherilyn: Not only that but because you would never do the dirty on your mate and pinching his Sheila would be doing the dirty on him. Somehow I don't even think it's necessarily based on respect for the women that they don't cross those boundaries. It seems to be based more on loyalty and respect for your mate and his possessions.

Angela: Yes. That's another way to look at it.

Sherilyn: So how did you come to terms with your new relationship? With being treated differently by your partner than what you had become used to in Wheatville – different to the norm out here?

Angela: Yeah yeah. To be number one; to be the total focus of someone's attention is almost a little overwhelming.

Sherilyn: Do you think women get used to not being number one out here?

Angela: Anthony sees himself as the Master of Ceremonies for me. Every need I have will be met; will be catered for. "What do you want to do?" You know? And yeah. I'm not used to that so you're sort of thinking, "Whoah." You do. It's totally different. If he is going to do something he wants to do it with me. He doesn't want to do it on his own or with his mates. He wants to do it with me. I'm his mate.

Sherilyn: Why do you think we women can slip so easily into these preset gender roles out here? Why do we often offer so little resistance when our partners put their mates or work first?

Angela: It's because we – it's what you get used to. It's what you see around you. It's how you fit in.

Sherilyn: It meets the community's expectations of you?

Angela: It's how you fit in. How you mould yourself into that person you're supposed to be. We both came from different situations and you eventually think, well, this is the way it is. This is how you can fit in whether you like it or not. It's a form of being accepted.

Sherilyn: A way of belonging to the community? And what happens if women resist?

Angela: We're banging our heads against a brick wall.

Sherilyn: So our only option is to allow it?

Angela: We allow it. We allow it. And I think it was me disputing that fact so constantly that lost me my favour in my marriage because I was getting beyond accepting it and was making demands. I don't know. But that's a whole different story.

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Sherilyn: And was part of making that realisation possible your travelling?

Angela: Yeah and you know being with Anthony. You know you remember the person that you used to be. I used to travel a lot and I travelled adventurously –

Sherilyn: Before marriage?

Angela: Yeah. Yeah. And also I have a need to create – not another life – but another me because, you know, you have been in this narrow field where you have been – well I was Mrs Strathdownie [Pseudonym for the name of the well known district property Angela lived on with her husband and children]. Everything that you have to do with that home - the people that come and

go. Strathdownie was as busy as any property so that is who I was and you have to go through this grieving process of losing all that and having to redefine who you are and what your purpose is. And I'm sort of in the middle of that and I still constantly grieve for what I have lost. That's very difficult but I have gained things as well.

Sherilyn: Because life is a journey of discovery isn't it?

Angela: [Nods] But it's a tricky one because

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Sherilyn: So from your position of experience, if you could give advice to the women out here who are married to these rural males what would it be?

Angela: Don't want too much! My ex

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much. I mean life, wherever you lead it, is going to have its ups and downs no matter where it is.

Sherilyn: But it's okay to want equality in a relationship isn't it?

Angela: Equality in a relationship. Oh yes.

Sherilyn: See I don't know if that is how I would describe some of the relationships out here.

Angela: No. But how do you get that in a marriage out here. You tell me. I mean, you're an intelligent person. You can't buck the system and all you see ahead of you is a man who wants to stay on the land and where you live and how happily you live there depends on the quality of your relationship. You know I'd happily retrieve my marriage if the quality of our relationship could be worked through.

Sherilyn: So would you still like to be married to a rural man?

Angela: No. I'm not that forward thinking but I don't think I want to again. No.

Sherilyn: Because you would have to lead their life rather than the other way around?

Angela: Yes but then that's who I have been for so long. Creating your own direction is very hard and that's a bit of what I'm struggling with at the moment. Creating

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Sherilyn: So everything is up for grabs for you at the moment isn't it?

Angela: Yeah.

Discourses perpetuating misogynist messages are regularly found within the pages of the local newspaper. An entry in the gossip column of *The Wheatville Times* ("The dying dingo," 2009a) and an advertisement for a forthcoming Bachelor and Spinsters ball¹⁷ [B&S] ("Book now online," 2009) both make use of

¹⁷ Bachelor and Spinsters' balls are events unique to rural Australia. They are usually held in isolated paddocks or sheds and require all attendees to be single. Often associated with binge drinking and risk-taking driving exhibitions commonly referred to as 'circle work,' in recent years insurance

phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement to broadcast their gender messages. As with the earlier gossip column entry ("The dying dingo," 2009a, p. 11), this entry has also been written using a familiar conversational tone in order to give it a person-to-person quality:

A buck's party went off recently with boy's [sic] digging deep to buy some scantily clad entertainment. Front-row seats were hard to come by but boys made way to let some elderly mates have a better vantage point. Perhaps they were worried their eye-sight might not have been up to it if they were too far back. No truth however that there'll be a "health inspection" for party-goers at the next family bucks' show. ("The dying dingo," 2009b, p. 13)

Fairclough (1995) has noted the use of informal spoken language in media texts as a growing tendency of formal public discourses.

Whilst the modality used in this entry is hesitant ("Perhaps"), even negative ("no truth"), and the identity of the male participants ("boy's" [sic], "party-goers", "elderly mates") and female participants ("scantily clad entertainment") are protected, what can be illuminated through one interpretation of this text is that it is assumed amusing, newsworthy, and socially acceptable for adult males of all ages to pay for, and spectate at, "family bucks' show(s)" involving erotic female entertainers. The further inference to male party-goers as needing "health inspection(s)" could be interpreted as meaning that some male attendees have contracted a sexually transmittable disease from the females responsible for the "entertainment". The reference to females as "scantily clad entertainment" and the inference that they may have been responsible for spreading sexually transmittable diseases is dehumanising, objectifying, denigrating, and trivialising. This text prickles with its misogynist undercurrents and is, through gender justice lenses, a troubling one indeed.

The advertisement for an annual ball is also unsettling when read using these lenses. Figure 6.18 shows a cartoon image of a male bird (the emblem of the local football team) holding a can of beer and towering over a prostrate female bird with legs splayed ("Book now online," 2009). It invites local youth to book online for the

restrictions have limited their number and some of their activities. A proportion of the funds raised at these events are donated to charities.

annual B&S ball. The female bird in the cartoon is sporting high heels, long eyelashes, and a bewildered facial expression. Her prostrate position, a reference in the caption beneath the cartoon to a plucked bird, and the surrounding flying feathers infer that a possibly non-consensual sexual act has just occurred between the two animals. Masked by humour the implicit messages are clear. The dominating pose and aggressive glare of the male figure leave the reader in no doubt as to which gender holds power and how male and female roles are to be enacted on the evening in question. The cartoon advertisement and the extract from the local newspaper's gossip column use humour to make palatable patriarchal discourses of white male entitlement and broadcast their harmful gender messages.

Extract 2 from Andrea's interview transcript March 3, 2010

Andrea is a non-teaching professional who makes regular visits to a number of schools in rural communities – including Wheatville State High. She is in her late 20s and is a member of the school's counselling and support team.

Sherilyn: *What about young females and males and how they treat each other. Do you see inequities there? Does one hold power over the other?*

Andrea: *I think it's quite funny. I think that at school the males generally treat the females with respect. I don't think it's until they leave school that there becomes inequity in the relationships.*

Sherilyn: *I wonder if that's because whilst they're at school the culture is to value academic performance and therefore the girls are often seen to be more successful and then when they leave school the pendulum swings and other things get valued?*

Andrea: *Yeah. It could be that. I'm not sure why it swings. I couldn't give an opinion on that but I know that it does swing because you see at school our males being quite sympathetic and caring towards our female students. I really do see that.*

Sherilyn: *So you don't see much misogynist behaviour or language?*

Andrea: *No. Actually they're quite funny. If they feel that the girl deserves their respect then I find that they're very respectful. I think in their eyes there are a few situations where they mightn't think that a girl deserves their respect. So if they assume that a girl has many sexual partners or she steals other people's boyfriends then she wouldn't get respect or they would give her verbal abuse. But when they don't see that in the girl then I find them quite respectful of her. They can be quite caring. But it does change I think once they leave school. I don't know how or where the power differential comes in but you do find the males more powerful than the females then.*

Sherilyn: *Maybe in your role you're seeing the girls who have been abused by their partners more than the other girls. Maybe you're getting skewed data?*

Andrea: *Yeah. I probably am getting into a tinier demographic. You're most probably right there. I honestly believe that most of the problems come from alcohol in this community. I really believe that. I honestly believe that a lot of the problems are alcohol fuelled. If there was no alcohol in this*

community I would see half the number of incidents of violence in homes. You know, kids coming in to see me. I think the numbers would drop by half. You know, their problems are always alcohol induced.

There was a sexual assault case which involved five males and they sexually assaulted one female at a party. Alcohol obviously was involved. They were school aged between 16 and 17. The girl was, say, 15. The boys were 16 and 17. There was a sexual assault case and I had a lot to do with it. What happened was that we [authority figures/counsellors/law] sat down with one of the boys and his parents and we were discussing at a round table discussion what had happened and the parents' opinions of what had happened was – and there was a clear case of sexual assault – “Well, what do you expect. Boys will be boys.” And we, the people in that room, were quite shocked by that actual opinion. And then out of the four families that we had a meeting with, three of those families agreed amongst themselves that, “Well, boys will be boys and she was a female from, well, not the most desirable social class. She was one of the lower socio-economic females and therefore it really didn't matter.” The boys came back to school. Everything was fine and the girl had to leave town. I get one to two cases like that every year in this community and it is always put under the cover. You know, “Oh, well. Boys get up to some mischief. That's life.” And it is always the girl that ends up having all the repercussions from it.

Sherilyn: What about the other girls? Where do they stand? Are they in the same camp of “She was asking for it. She deserved it.” Are they policing this too or do they give some sympathy to the victims?

Andrea: There's no sympathy passed between the girls and it's quite funny because when it is a really serious case, like the ones I deal with, the girls don't speak about it. It's not spoken about amongst the girls. They don't talk about it. They don't gossip about it or anything like that.

Sherilyn: Is that a form of denial?

Andrea: I think it is. I think they just refuse to recognise it's happened. Whereas a really

common thing with the boys is to actually boast about it. So there's always a lot of boasting. These sexual assaults are texted around; their pictures are on phones and things like that. Whereas the girls just don't involve themselves. They just don't talk about it. It's quite interesting. It's kind of like, “If you don't speak about it, it never happened.” Sometimes they'll say, “Oh yeah. Well you know that girl. She does get around a bit. She's had a few boyfriends. She probably deserved it.” But generally it's just a closed book. The girls just don't talk about it.

Sherilyn: Have you ever seen this image advertising the local B&S [shows second point of entry text]?

Andrea: No I haven't but that sums up Wheatville to me. And that's what I see with my sexual assault cases out here you know. It's alright because the man is supposed to be that dominant person. You know, he thinks of women as a bit of a joke. He does. You know, it's alright to have the joke on the female because they're not really truly equal. That logo is the community not recognising its problems. Like when I stand up and say to parents, “You know there's an alcohol problem in our community. Our kids are out getting absolutely plastered drunk every Friday and Saturday night and you're buying them the alcohol” and they just say, “No. It doesn't happen. There's nothing wrong with what we do.” It's that absolute ability to not recognise what is in front of their face.

Sherilyn: And that's because it's become so normal it is invisible?

Andrea: Yeah. It is completely alright to buy your 15 year old child – usually your 15 year old son – half a carton of rum for his Friday night. That is absolutely considered to be normal and it is considered to be good parenting. It is. It's good parenting to buy them alcohol. I just think it is absurd. They just can't see what is happening blatantly in front of their face. I find that a really difficult thing to have to deal with and then this is not just coming from our lowest end of society. It's our higher class that are driving this and they can't see it.

Andrea's depiction of the life of some females in Wheatville carries with it themes of subjugation and an overriding desire to fit in. Andrea is much more explicit and direct in her thinking about why this is happening than is Angela: "Because the males have the money and have the things the female wants, she will put up with behaviours that she wouldn't normally put up with because she needs what the male has to offer" (Andrea, Extract 1). Andrea implies that pregnancy is a means for some unemployed females of gaining acceptance in the Wheatville community. However, her most troubling comments relate to an incident involving the video recording and broadcasting of a sexual encounter between a 15 year old schoolgirl and five local boys (see Andrea, Extract 2). She explains that after the incident "the boys came back to school. Everything was fine and the girl had to leave town" then adds:

I get one to two cases like that every year in this community and it is always put under the cover. You know, "Oh, well. Boys get up to some mischief. That's life." And it is always the girl that ends up having all the repercussions from it. (Andrea)

It is at this point during the interview that I show Andrea a picture of the B&S logo (see Figure 4.4). Whilst she claims not to have seen it before (as a weekly visitor to the town she does not buy the local newspaper), her immediate reaction is to state "that logo is the community not recognising its problems" (Extract 2). This thinking resonates with my own and validates my use of this image as my second point of entry text (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).

Extract 1 from Mary's interview transcripts June 25, 2010

Mary is in her early 40s and a married mother of two children. One attends the local high school; the other the local primary school. She works in the hospitality industry.

Sherilyn: *Mary you've lived in this community on and off for longer than I have. You were telling me of an incident that you were involved in a few years ago that you are reminded of when you see this image (shows Figure 4.4, second Point of Entry Text) which is currently being used to market the local B&S. What's your reaction to that sort of image?*

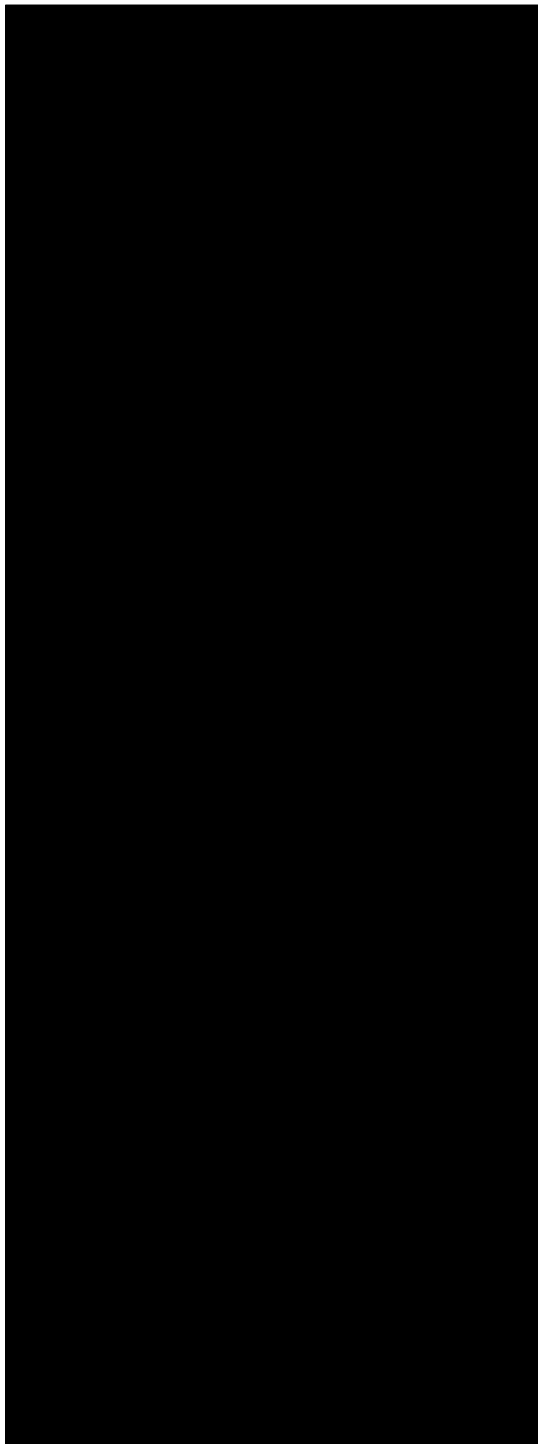
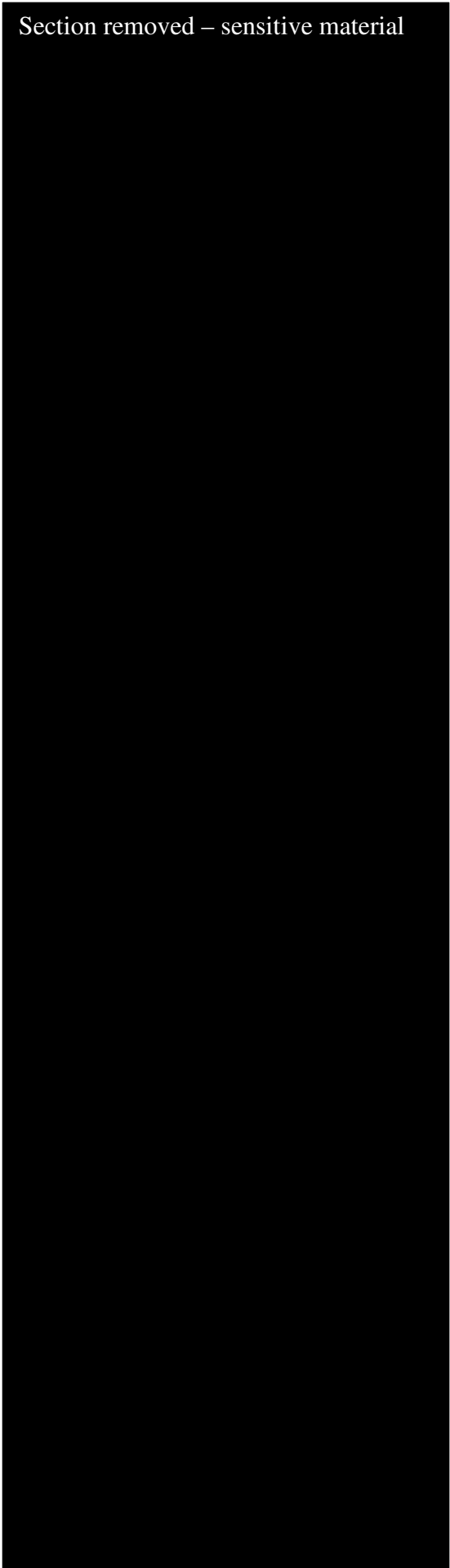
Mary: *I'm not happy with that image. It degrades females. It's really quite*

confronting to me because I have had an experience which is connected to that group of people.

Sherilyn: *Would you mind elaborating on that.*

Section removed – sensitive material

Section removed – sensitive material



Sherilyn: *And you didn't follow through with any legal action?*

Mary: *No. I didn't follow through.*

Sherilyn: *Did you at any stage think perhaps you had somehow been responsible for the attack?*

Mary: *No. I knew I hadn't been responsible for it because I had John with me. He walked me home. I had been seeing John for months and he would have known that. Robbo would have known that. And Paddy. They all knew I*

was seeing John. So I don't know why - they were drunk – and they were looking for entertainment I suppose and so they knew where I lived and thought they would try and see what they could get.

Last year I had to waitress – as my second job at that stage I was waitressing – and Paddy was a guest at the wedding and I actually had to serve food to him. It irked me to know that I had to do this but I held my head up high knowing that I am a better person for doing that. I am confronted by this all the time because they are locals and I work in the environment of hospitality and I will rub shoulders with them again and again in public and I will not allow them to make me feel degraded. I just can't go there.

Sherilyn: So do you think that this community actually sees women in roles that –

Mary: Oh men do. Men see women in the role of waitressing as lower class.

Sherilyn: And what about women? Do you think in this community that women see the job of serving as part of their role?

Mary: I don't myself. I just do it because I see it as a creative industry that I like to be involved in and I have a bubbly personality and I like working with people, but I do know that some girls out here do not enjoy it because they feel like people are looking down on them. It's a shame men seem to think we are from a lower class because we are serving them in hospitality situations because it should not be regarded as that.

Sherilyn: Can we go back to a bit earlier when you talked about your attacker as

coming from a high status family. In this community, in your opinion, what gives a family high status?

Mary: I see them as graziers who come off the land and for some reason they think they're superior. And because he's involved with the rugby union crowd –

Sherilyn: So it's the high status sporting group in this community?

Mary: Apparently. I don't see them as that. I just see them as people who regard females as low status and they see themselves as being some sort of Gods because they play football. But you see I followed the football code back then because it was a very social network and that's how I met my husband. He was also a football player. But he doesn't regard women in the same light. He's a different personality altogether.

Sherilyn: But would you say your attackers' value system is the dominant one?

Mary: Oh absolutely. Well how many people are involved with that football code who see themselves as having higher standing than the average person in town. Generally they are from the land and they have always felt that way. I can't really pinpoint why they feel that way but they tend to have that value system already set because when I first came to town it was all like, "Be involved with the Rugby Union. They're the ones to be with." And then I saw the ugly side to that and now I don't even go near them. Ever since that attack basically, I regard it safer for myself to be away from that environment.

What are some alternative representations?

The final media texts to be analysed from the pages of *The Wheatville Times* offer discursive constructions of gender which broaden performance possibilities for local community members. These texts move beyond heteropatriarchal models of white male entitlement relegating females to the private and domestic spheres. They are valuable to this study because they offer alternative ways of being and doing gender. They also work to address the *What could or should be?* question

from the cyclical process of inquiry, intervention, and self discovery (see Figure 4.1).

An article reporting on the death of a 55 year old local Indigenous man who was, allegedly, assaulted in a nearby regional city incorporates a picture of a smiling well groomed man above a headline referring to him as a “family man” (“This family man died,” 2010, p. 1) [A copy of the article incorporating an image of the deceased has not been included in this dissertation in deference to the beliefs of some Aboriginal cultures]. The front page headline directs readers to another article in the same issue which describes the deceased as “well respected” and “much loved” (Thistle, 2010, p. 13). His funeral is reported as being “one of the biggest funerals ever seen in Wheatville” and he is remembered by one family member as being liked by all “because he made people laugh” (p. 13). Whilst the article goes on to suggest that members of the family of the deceased man are seeking justice for what they believe to be discriminatory police practices, it can be inferred from the images and lexicalisation in the text that the Indigenous subject central to the story was popular, well liked, embraced by his family, respectable, and respected. Whilst this representation of an Indigenous assault victim operates in stark contrast to that of the Indigenous subject reported in the article depicted in Figure 6.17, it also works to depict a nurturing model of masculinity thereby moving beyond limiting gender binaries using hypermasculine constructions.

In another article reporting on three Indigenous women’s successes in the art world an Indigenous woman states “making artwork makes me feel good about being an Aboriginal person, I am able to create works that express how I feel inside” (“Becky’s family affair,” 2009, p. 11). Figure 6.19 shows how the article has used visual and linguistic references to discursively construct the artist as productive and supported by her family. The accompanying photographs portray smiling Indigenous women surrounded by family members and the art work they produce. The visuals and celebratory tone of the written text combine to represent the women as successful, creative, connected, and valued members of both family and society. Whilst the text perpetuates a discourse of women being associated with the arts, the representations of Indigenous women in this text are significantly

different to that used in the article covering the story of the Indigenous woman who has been bashed (see Figure 6.17).

Whilst Wheatville's artists and supporters are often constructed as being female, occasionally a newspaper article will work to challenge or disrupt this discourse. Figure 6.20 depicts an article making use of visual and semantic cues to celebrate the artistic achievements of a former Wheatville resident ("Christopher makes his mark," 2010). The article reports on the male artist's recent successes at two arts events: one the local Wheatville art show and the other a prestigious exhibition held annually in the state's capital city. The successful artist is photographed dressed casually in jeans and T-shirt, smiling whilst resting against one of his sandstone sculptures. A smaller image of a prize-winning painting is overlaid on to the larger image. The artist credits Wheatville with inspiring much of his work: "I want to capture the mood of the town" (p. 8). The representation of the artist resists discursive constructions of artists as female and, in so doing, provides an alternative version of masculinity for Wheatville's males.

Extract 3 from Elizabeth's interview transcript February 10, 2010

Experienced teacher and mother of three adult children – one of whom is a male artist – Elizabeth is in her late 50s, is married to a professional, and has recently retired. She has been a Wheatville resident for over 30 years.

Sherilyn: *Elizabeth, could you talk a little bit about your own son. You've got a son who, I would think, tends to break the mould of the macho man because of his artistic talent and success and his musical talent. Could you talk a bit about your observations of how he has, or hasn't, fitted into this community over the years? Was he ever marginalised because he was seen as a male pursuing interests that were considered by many in this community to be feminine?*

Elizabeth: *I really don't know. Because he didn't show any inclination towards art all through secondary school. This was something that happened when he got older; his interest in the arts. He didn't study art at school. He studied Science and Maths and was very talented in those areas although he always had an interest in music and singing and then when he went to Uni, he decided*

then that he would study live drawing so that's what started the art.

Sherilyn: *He was at an all boys' private boarding school wasn't he?*

Elizabeth: *Yes. At an all boys' school and I said to him, because we had arranged singing lessons for him then, and I said to him when he was a lot older, "Why didn't you keep that up?"*

Because he'd said to me, "I wished I'd studied that in school." And he said, "Mum it was just peer pressure." No-one else in their boarding house did that sort of thing (singing lessons). A couple did the piano so he could do that, but none did singing and the push there was to play football – which he did quite successfully – but not happily I don't think.

Sherilyn: *So what age was he before he really started following his true passions?*

Elizabeth: *Well he kept that art and music going all through his Arts degree and then he travelled overseas and then when he came*

back he decided he would study art full time. So he probably would have been 23 or 24 by then. That's when he did a Diploma of Art and kept his music up by playing in a band.

In Figure 6.21 a newspaper article is depicted providing an alternative construction of masculinity to that of resisting schooling. The article reports on a year 12 boy from the local high school who is being feted for winning a prestigious statewide traineeship award ("Top class," 2010). Whilst acknowledging that this representation of male success is associated with a non-academic school based subject, the article nonetheless constructs the boy as a high achiever in his chosen field of learning. In doing so it provides an alternative to discourses perpetuating heteropatriarchal and hypermasculine ideals.

The final newspaper article to be explored in this chapter is a half page promotional feature article profiling six local businesswomen (see Figure 6.22) ("Wheatville women making waves," 2010). The women in the article are represented using the first person narrative to describe how they came to be living and working in Wheatville. They work in fields as diverse as butchering, sales, photography, accountancy, and screen printing. The article discursively constructs the women as enterprising, passionate, and well educated community members who are proud of their achievements and excited about the business opportunities available to them in Wheatville: "Wheatville is a vibrant, outgoing and supportive community and I'm proud to say now I'm a local" (p. 12). Whilst three of the women make reference to the challenges of balancing family life with work, the article presents an alternative version of womanhood to articles perpetuating discourses of women as servile and/or decorative. The women represented in this article appear to be considered newsworthy because they challenge and resist Wheatville's gender norms. Fairclough (1995) claims that it is through an awareness of contradictory positions such as these that possibilities for empowerment and change are created.

Extract 2 from Gloria's interview transcript January 19, 2010

Gloria is a leading educator who has been recognised nationally for her work in the field of training and education. Whilst she no longer resides in Wheatville, she was a Wheatville resident for over 20 years.

Sherilyn: *In many ways you and your husband broke the mould for what was traditionally seen as acceptable in a patriarchal community such as Wheatville. You were the larger wage earner, had a more prominent leadership role in the community and were actually his boss. Did that cause any conflict or make it difficult for either of you at a personal or professional level – that's if you're prepared to talk about it?*

Gloria: *I think in many ways it was a good thing for the community because they saw a different role model – particularly because Jack was so macho and so strongly connected to that community in that he pursued the same social habits as that community. He was respected as a footballer but he also loved pig chasing and the things that the kids did. So the kids accepted him because they saw him in their league and then they saw him with a female who had a leadership position in the school. I don't think they had any capacity to make a judgement about that. They just thought that was the way it was but because I was his wife it almost gave me a bit of respect and because he was my husband it gave him a bit of respect if you know what I mean so it sort of rubbed off on us both ways. It seems quite strange but I almost think the reversal of roles helped us and was very good in that particular situation particularly for my relationship with teenage boys at that school.*

Sherilyn: *Whilst you say that you and your husband's roles positioned you in a largely favourable light within the school community, what about the community in general? Were there any sections that simply couldn't understand that you could be your husband's boss?*

Gloria: *I think that was more obvious in people who were new to the community, new to the school, who hadn't been part of the wider Wheatville community. Sometimes I would get a throw away comment about it.*

You know, "Oh, so you're your husband's boss? Oh, gee, what's that like?" Beyond the community it was made a lot more of. I'd be at education functions and someone would ask, "So what does your husband do?" "Oh, he's a teacher." "Not on staff is he?" They would often make judgements about it. It came more from there than from Wheatville. I think in many ways it was because we were in the town when I was getting promoted anyway so there was a slow steady understanding of it.

Sherilyn: *Okay Gloria, in closing the interview I was wondering if you could do a little summary for me and use some words to describe the dominant characteristics of the males you had experiences with in Wheatville and the dominant characteristics you saw in females.*

Gloria: *Males - patriarchal – I would have to say dominating. I don't know if there is such a word but leaderful I would say. The other thing, probably uncompromising and very sure of themselves. There's no identity crisis in the bush. We might talk about males having an identity crisis and all those sensitive new age guys but there is no identity crisis in the bush and I think that stereotype has been maintained for a while. One thing I would say though is that I think it has moved over the last 50 years or so and that the more successful the farmer is I think the more educated the wife is. I am seeing a correlation there. I suspect it is because they have a sense of education and intelligence themselves that they want an educated wife even though they treat her as if she doesn't have an education. I sense that it is very important to them to have an educated wife – a very well educated wife in most circumstances.*

Females in Wheatville – underachieving – limited. I'm thinking particularly here about the girls at the High School. Afraid and – insecure probably.

A summary of Part B

Part B presented evidence to suggest that Wheatville's dominant constructions of masculinity are contributing to beliefs and practices that advantage some members of the community whilst disadvantaging others. Discursive constructions of gender, often cloaked in humour, would appear to be perpetuating hypermasculine ideals and a sense of white male entitlement that trivialises, objectifies, and/or oppresses females whilst normalising high risk behaviour, physicality, and excessive alcohol consumption for males. Evidence provided in Part B suggests that power asymmetries are impacting on male/female relationships and roles, property ownership, and areas of civic responsibility. Some alternatives to dominant constructions of gender were also explored in this section. They indicate that there are other, more socially just, ways of performing gender within and across Wheatville. It is in extending and harnessing these alternatives that limiting ideological constructs can be challenged.

A Conclusion

Specifically this chapter has attempted to make transparent and critique how gender is being ideologically produced and reproduced through the texts, social structures, and discursive practices of a rural Australian community. Using researcher observations and recollections, destination reports, school reports, and the personal stories of past and present community members, Chapter 6 has worked to excavate a diversity of local gender beliefs and practices. Whilst some of these have provided alternative and less restrictive models for thinking about and performing gender, others are worrying for the ways in which they sanction and perpetuate restrictive gender binaries founded in hegemonic masculinity and discourses of white male entitlement. Chapter 6 also began a process of unsettling and denaturalising these restrictive ideologies and discourses. Ultimately, what emerged from the chapter was an understanding of how multiple, varied, complex and interconnected are the discourses and ideological belief systems underpinning Wheatville's gender roles and performances.

The next stage of the research journey builds on the unsettling work begun in this chapter as I metamorphose from my role as postmodern critical ethnographer to that of public pedagogue and social activist. In Chapter 7 I capture my emotional and experiential journey as I publically challenge a revered local icon that broadcasts a phallocentric discourse of white male entitlement. My public questioning is done as a means of initiating a community dialogue that opposes and interrupts the prevailing masculinist discourses described in this chapter.

Figure 6.1. A front-page article published in *The Wheatville Times* on February 4, 2009 uses a celebratory discourse but also hints at some of the gender issues which exist in Wheatville (p. 1).

Figure 6.2. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on May 20, 2009 (p. 12) uses an essentialist discourse to construct boys.

Figure 6.6. A photograph of the all-male local council published in *The Wheatville Times* on March 31, 2010 (p. 3).

Figure 6.7. An advertisement by an, ultimately unsuccessful, female candidate published in *The Wheatville Times* on August 19, 2009 (p. 4).

Figure 6.8. A photograph from *The Wheatville Times* published on September 16, 2009 (p. 30) discursively links alcohol consumption and being male.

Figure 6.9. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on August 12, 2009 (p. 36) incorporates a headline and photograph discursively connecting sport, masculinity, and power.

Figure 6.10. An article from *The Wheatville Times* in September, 2009 (p. 11) depicts men cross-dressing as women for a joke.

Figure 6.11. Sport, youth and an illusion of alcohol consumption combine to form a tradition (*The Wheatville Times*, 2009, p. 14).

Figures 6.12. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on April 30, 2008 (p. 4) shows a group of women serving food.

Figure 6.13. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on May 12, 2008 (p. 7) discursively constructs females as serving others.

Figure 6.14. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on May 12, 2008 reports on a group of students learning the skills of motherhood (p. 11).

Figure 6.15. An article published in *The Wheatville Time's* social pages on May 12, 2008 reports on the local debutante ball (p. 19).

Figure 6.16. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on May 12, 2008 depicts local showgirls surrounding the show's male president (p. 14).

Figure 6.17. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on July 23, 2008 (p. 1) depicts an alternative representation of rural womanhood.

Figure 6.18. A classified advertisement published in *The Wheatville Times* on September 2, 2009 (p. 27).

Figure 6.19. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on August 19, 2009 (p. 11) discursively constructs an alternative representation of Indigenous womanhood.

Figure 6.20. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on May 12, 2010 (p. 8) recognises a male artist for his achievements.

Figure 6.21. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on August 11, 2010 (p. 1) celebrates a male student's success.

Figure 6.22. An article published in *The Wheatville Times* on June 23, 2010 (p. 12) constructs local businesswomen as exceptional.

Chapter 7

Using Activist Dialogues to Unsettle Representations of Gender and Encourage Transformative Thinking

An Introduction

Chapter 6 focused on deepening understandings of how gender is being ideologically produced and reproduced in and across the community of Wheatville in ways that both privilege and oppress community members. This *show and tell* approach made use of “information culled from people with information culled from texts” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 12). Those of us involved in the research process were challenged to question and rethink long held assumptions about the *What is?* of gender beliefs and practices in Wheatville. This rethinking process began to stimulate radical thoughts about *What could or should be?*

This chapter describes my activist journey as I address questions drawn from Focus 2 and Focus 3 of the cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery (see Figure 4.1): *What can I do about it?* and *How do others see me as a result of what I’ve done?* Chapter 7 favours a more literary style than the other chapters. Adapting this style further personalises my experiences for the reader. I tell my story using a diary entry format which includes what I did, how others responded to me, and how this in turn made me feel, re-see, and re-act. My critical and feminist lenses are foregrounded as I invoke autoethnographic techniques to deepen understandings of the risks and rewards of being an insider activist researcher. Whilst others’ views are represented in this chapter via a selection of media articles and interviews, the emphasis is on understanding how I am positioning others and being positioned by others. My actions are informed by theories of public pedagogy, resistance, and radical feminism.

The chapter addresses the second of the research questions – *What transformative thinking or action is possible through a communal unsettling of phallogocentric discourses of white male entitlement?* As the activist researcher I draw

on Butler's (2004) work to combine theoretical knowledge with a practical process of intervention capable of inspiring social transformations around issues of gender. I do this by publically questioning one of Wheatville's revered cultural icons. Drawing on Giroux's (2001) thinking I:

Break apart the ideas and structuring principles in a cultural artefact and then reassemble them in a different framework that allows the limits of specific ideas and formalistic properties to come into view, while simultaneously discovering the new and vital elements in them that could be appropriated for radical purposes. (p. 155)

The Letter

Thursday February 4, 2010: *I am standing outside the office of the local newspaper feeling anxious. I have come to deliver a draft of the chapter I am writing for a book on educational research to the editor of the newspaper. I have spoken to him on the phone and he has agreed to read it. Much of the chapter's content is drawn from critiques of gender representations and implicit ideologies located in articles, not only published in his paper, but written by him.¹⁸ I am curious about how he is going to respond. The female administrative assistant at the front desk gestures for me to enter his office. He is sitting behind a computer screen at a messy desk. He is affable. I have had dealings with him before when he has covered stories and advertised forthcoming events for the local high school.*

I hand him a printed copy of the chapter and ask if he could find time to read it and give me some feedback. I explain that it is a draft and, as such, is open to redrafting. I let him know that the chapter is part of a larger study I am conducting which seeks to explore and disrupt local gender discourses, ideologies and, ultimately, practices which can contribute to boys' schooling underperformances. I am talking too much and hear myself sounding apologetic and obsequious: "I hope you are not offended by what you read I will be very interested in your feedback." The disruption process is beginning and it is I who am feeling unsettled.

The following is an extract from the chapter's introduction:

¹⁸ The male editor is the only full time journalist employed at *The Wheatville Times*. Two female journalists work part-time as well.

This chapter will argue that some students' poor schooling performances can be attributed to influences beyond teachers and their classroom practices. It will put forward a case for linking some boys' schooling underperformances to the ideological messages they are receiving from community discourses and practices that promote narrow masculine hierarchies and have, over generations, become entrenched. This chapter will further submit that a purposefully conducted critical examination of community discourses with students can work to make visible and disrupt limiting cultural beliefs and practices whilst offering liberatory alternatives. Such a process is capable of inspiring transformative thinking which can, ultimately, lead to improved student outcomes.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the media's role in constituting, reflecting and perpetuating potentially restrictive gender binaries before narrowing its focus to make transparent some of the discourses and ideological messaging located in the texts of a small rural newspaper in Australia. Specifically the linguistic and visual features from a selection of this newspaper's texts will be analysed for how they are discursively constructing relationships between males and females and for the ideological messages which might be resulting from these constructions. Whilst acknowledging that generalisability from such a singular approach is problematic, the chapter's content should be viewed as a demonstration of the potential usefulness of media texts as resources for disrupting gender binaries which work to limit and oppress lives. (Lennon, 2011, p. 196)

Friday February 5, 2010: *I receive the following response from the editor. It is sent as an email.*

Sherilyn

In response to your chapter

To me this seems an oversimplifying of what you yourself say is a complicated issue. Re the academic success, or not, of boys in education. It's an attempt to mould what you regard as the facts to suit your own ideology. As you admit you have "a gender justice lens". I however don't think "justice" has anything to do it with it. It is quite simply a "bias".

Your inference of "racial othering" is offensive. If you mean by visual cues that there is a photograph of an indigenous woman who has been bashed, then indeed you are correct. But I would argue strongly, that if the woman had been white, had approached us to do a story and had had her photograph taken, the story would not have been handled any differently. The facts are what they are and I'm happy to give examples of similar reports where there is no indigenous person involved.

To suggest that there were “linguistic or semantic cues” is, I believe, nonsensical. And while I am not an academic, I’d suggest that to use “semiotic” in this sentence is grammatically wrong.

The real offence though is the sense throughout the article that this paper, and the media in general, has an almost sinister-like agenda. There is “complicity” – to do what? Report the news? To entertain? To be a forum for the debate of important issues such as why boys “appear” to be falling behind girls academically? Guilty as charged. I reiterate, to suggest, even vaguely that there was an attempt to “construct the indigenous women as violent, anti-social, and poor parental models” is a nonsense and a poor attempt at twisting examples to suit your own argument. You have extrapolated from one story and come up with nothing more than a generalisation. A generalisation, which I may add, neglects the context of location.

At the time this story was written there was, and still is, a concern about the level of violence in the streets where this woman lived. And I guess that is where I have the most difficulty with your work.

As you admit your examples are “strategically” chosen. To say that this will be addressed later is like saying that the “cheque is in the mail.” I can only comment on what’s before me.

However that all said, newspapers and the media live by a simple defence: Don’t shoot the messenger and we can’t buck too much when that is also used against us. There are a number of points you raise that is fair comment and which newspapers and editors everywhere need to address. Perhaps surprisingly to many, that topic would be discussed everywhere from the coffee room at *The Wheatville Times* to the Fairfax boardroom.

Papers do attempt to be fair in their reporting. They are conscious of gender issues and stereotyping. And there is certainly an attempt, at least in *The Wheatville Times*, to show positive images of boys and girls in sport, in the classroom, and wherever they may excel. Could we do better? Of course.

The example of the “Plucked Duck logo” (something which we have no control over by the way) is a fair and strong argument (although the “health check” had absolutely nothing to do with what you obviously thought and was only a reference to whose bucks party it was). But that’s not the point. The point is that is how you perceived it and newspapers and editors and journalists have to be more wary.

I can’t use that to defend your assertion that the story of ----- [name deleted] and co depicted them “in servitude”. Again I’d suggest that this is your own “gender lens” (bias) shining through. And while I see your point about “motherhood”, I must quite obviously be a misogynist pig because I thought the nurturing and care of babies is something important in all communities, not just Wheatville. To say this is a non-positive view and that this is somehow limiting women in their life choices, is, and again in my own personal view, drawing a long bow. Should women who do see these as positive attributes take offence? If you mean there should have been a boy in

the picture then that's another matter. It's a valid point, but only if the class was offered to the boys as well. Perhaps it was ... I don't know. And again, that may very well be your point?

However the crux of the article, I gather, is how the media is reinforcing stereotyping of boys, and girls, in a way that is limiting them. And this certainly does deserve clinical review. Binge drinking is a blight on our society and must be addressed, at home, in the school and in the media. No doubt. And it is.

And again, this is where I take exception to the "strategic" examples you give. There is no mention of the many stories that tackle this issue not just in *The Wheatville Times*, but media Australia-wide. In the end it, by acknowledging these efforts you actually strengthen your own argument. If the media itself sees that's there is a problem it obviously supports your view that there is as well.

Instead you attempt, or so it appears, to do little more than defend women teachers when, I would suggest, from the vast majority's perspective it is not "uncommitted women teachers" that are the problem but "uncommitted teachers" full stop. And again this is a view held by many if the number of letters that appear in newspapers across the country are anything to go by.

And finally, you tend to see the media as an entity acting alone despite a paragraph which says otherwise. Or at least that is the perception I get from the overall text. In many ways, all media is just a mirror of the society it serves. It is an easy mark. What I get from this piece is an overriding purpose to defend teachers and the education system as a whole and find reasons to maintain the status quo. Some would say "excuses". Perhaps that is my own bias?

The status quo Sherilyn isn't working as well as it should and while it's easy to defend and say that it is complicated, and that the media is to blame, it is much harder to look critically at your own backyard and find fault, especially if you limit yourself by putting on that gender lens 'bias' of yours. Why aren't there more boys achieving to the same academic standards as girls at the Wheatville State High School? Why don't boys make it on to the stage to accept academic awards to the same level as girls?

From the examples you gave and the arguments you raised I see only limited reason to blame the media and society's stereotyping, not that I don't believe that they are out there. We only have to watch video hits on a Saturday morning to appreciate that and as you have shown even the pages of *The Wheatville Times*.

You also attribute assertions and views in the paper as the views and assertions of the paper itself. There's only one place to discover the views and assertions of the paper itself, and that's in the editorials. The suggestion seems to be that the media is the one promoting a campaign to denigrate women teachers. You ignore, or seem to ignore, the real concern by parents, and some educators, about the lack of male mentors in the education system.

This is not driven by the media. We report the concerns and we'd be doing a disservice if we did otherwise, especially to the ones that none of us want to "limit", our kids.

However I genuinely take on-board that the media has its place in dispelling those stereotypes which do limit the expectations of boys and girls, and the media is willing to be used, and should be used to achieve that end. Or as you say "disrupt" the stereotyping. Improving those efforts will only come if, we, or others such as yourself, look critically at how we do our job.

But to come up with a real solution to the limitation society imposes on our children and young adults through stereotyping, then all sections of the community have to be willing to undergo the same analysis. That includes the academics and the politicians who bestow their expertise upon us and our children through the various education systems in each state. And that includes teachers whether they are male, or female.

Mark Smith

Editor: *The Wheatville Times* [personal communication]

Monday February 8, 2010: *I ring the editor and thank him for his feedback. I ask him if I can incorporate it into my study. He readily agrees and sends me written affirmation. I agree with him that I have been too narrow in my choice of articles and let him know that my redraft will incorporate more examples drawn from The Wheatville Times of images and articles that serve to disrupt and challenge gender binaries. I also agree to explicitly acknowledge in my book chapter that direct quotes used in some of the articles I have analysed are not necessarily representative of the views of the journalists writing the articles. I can see that these alterations will help to give the chapter more balance. However, we agree to disagree on some things. I have found the editor's feedback provocative but insightful. It would appear he has been incensed by some of my assertions; however, over the phone he is still courteous and businesslike. Perhaps he is thinking he has offended me with his forthright feedback. He has definitely made me rethink some things. I wonder if the process will encourage him to rethink how he represents males and females in his newspaper. During our phone conversation I ask the editor, if I were to write a letter to the editor disrupting gender binaries, would he be interested in publishing it. I explain that I want to write something that could initiate a public dialogue around some of the limiting gender messages being*

broadcast within and across our community. I am thinking of critiquing the Plucked Duck B&S logo. He is most keen for me to write a letter on this topic. I suspect he is operating from the vantage point that any controversy is good for newspaper circulation. I know the paper sometimes struggles to fill its opinion column. My idea is to write the article as a process of “consciousness raising” (Giroux, 2001, p. 110).

Wednesday February 10, 2010: *My letter has been published in the local newspaper (see Figure 7.1). I am pleased to see an image of the logo inserted into it. I believe the logo viewed in this context increases the letter’s impact and will encourage others to re-read – and perhaps rethink – the logo’s gender messages.*

Thursday February 11, 2010: *At school the principal approaches me to comment on my letter. He was initially a little uncertain about giving my study ethical clearance but tells me that he is finally starting to “get” what my study is about and what I mean by the term “disrupting.” He goes on to tell me that he has just come back from a committee meeting with a school/community group and that the letter was responsible for generating quite a lot of discussion. One of those present (a professional from the community working in the field of agriculture) told the Principal that it was his brother-in-law who actually drew up the original logo many years earlier. The Principal speaks very positively about the discussion the letter generated and congratulates me for writing it. I am feeling reassured.*

On the way home from school a friend of mine who is a primary school teacher and married to a property owner rings. She has read the letter and is very supportive. She keeps repeating, “You are so right”. She is keen to see how her husband reacts to it when she gets home and promises to let me know. He is a staunch rugby supporter. Before she hangs up she applauds my bravery for writing it. I am surprised at her use of the word bravery. I am keen to see if I get any feedback in next week’s paper and, if so, what form it will take.

That night I receive two more phone calls – both from female friends. One is from a professional colleague of over 20 years; the other from a mother of four who is

married to a land owner. My professional colleague tells me that her husband has always had a problem with “that logo.” (Her husband is a local health professional.) The mother of four is also very supportive. She tells me that she and her husband “are with you 100%” and asks “Where do we vote?” She is astounded when I tell her that the logo has been in use for nearly 20 years without comment. She has never noticed it before.

Sunday February 14, 2010: *I return from a weekend in Brisbane to clear my phone messages. There is one there from the former President of the B&S committee. He has also been, at various times, the president of the State School Parents and Citizens Association and the president of the rugby club. Mr President leaves a message to tell me that he wants to talk to me; that he thinks I am wrong in the views I express in my letter; and that my letter “has certainly generated a lot of debate in this household.” I sense he is trying hard to sound unaffected and affable. I take a deep breath and ring him back. I am relieved when I have the opportunity to leave a message as well. I lie when I say that I look forward to having a conversation with him about the issue and inform him that I will call again later.*

Wednesday February 17, 2010: *There are two responses to my letter in the letters to the editor section of the newspaper this week (see Figure 7.2). One is from Mr President. The other, a much smaller letter, is from a New Zealand resident.*

Thursday February 18, 2010: *My mother-in-law has asked me to come to a meeting to help organise a large family function. Whilst at the meeting one of the other committee members – a property owner in his late 70s – approaches me to discuss the letter. I recognise him as a staunch rugby supporter and I feel myself tense. He begins: “When I first started reading your letter to the editor I thought, “Here we go: Another feminist rant.” But after I read it all, I found myself agreeing with you. You are absolutely right.” I am buoyed by his support, relax, and thank him for taking the time to give me feedback. His response pleases me immensely. It indicates to me that my disrupting is having an impact on local thinking. Others overhear our conversation and join in.*

A 65 year old widow tells me that she has read my letter and it has made her look closely at the logo for the first time. She admits she has seen it hundreds of times before without really seeing it. She describes it as “inexcusable.” This prompts yet another woman – a property owner’s wife who has a university degree – to comment “And how ridiculous was that response to your letter trying to justify the logo? Oh please!”

That night a young female teacher approaches me at a staff dinner. She tells me that she has attended the B&S and looked at the logo “a hundred times” and never thought about it until I questioned it. She is now appalled by it and tells me that it has made her look more closely at other marketing campaigns for similar events. I am interested to hear from her that our local logo is not the only one being used by rural events to market misogynist gender messages. She exclaims quite passionately that “It has to stop!” I drive home feeling reassured, vindicated, supported. It is comforting to know that others are noticing and reading the logo’s gender messages in the same way that I am.

I arrive home late and tired and begin to clear the emails from my inbox. One intrigues me as it is from a well-known male identity and property owner in his late 40s. Interestingly, he too has been president of a number of community organisations including the junior rugby club. He has two sons attending private boarding schools in the metropolitan region. At first I mistakenly think he is writing a letter of support. He uses humour to mitigate his words but his oppositional views become clear.

Sent: Thursday, 18 February 2010 7:35 PM

To: Sherilyn Lennon

Subject: Letter to the editor

Sherilyn,

Re your letter in last week’s *Wheatville Times*:

Yes I think it is just you!!

Funny how people see things differently. I had always looked at that logo and thought it epitomised a young man standing protectively over a young girl who had obviously over indulged and needed protection from those evil people (both male and female) who prey on the helpless. The wild look in the

eye of the protective male I thought was a warning to those nasty people that “they had better stay away or else!!”

Never in my wildest dreams (and I do have some of those!!) had I thought that the prostrate female had that “just raped “ look about her.

However, now that you have brought it to my attention and made me look closer at the logo I do see it somewhat differently than I had previously. Now I see a prostrate female who has obviously had a carnal encounter of some sort, but I don’t think it is a look of someone who has just been raped. Rather than an expression of fear or terror or humiliation that you might expect from someone just raped I see a look of satisfaction and possibly surprise, as if to say “well that was better than I expected.” And the look on the male to me is more one of disappointment, as if he has been invited by the female for “a good time.” He has obviously delivered his part of the deal and is now disappointed that she has not reciprocated. His look says to me “get up, bitch” which under the circumstances I don’t believe is too harsh at all!!

I’m pleased that you sent your letter to the editor as it has made me, and probably many others, realise that there are often different ways to interpret images.

I hope it has also helped you to make that realisation.

Good letter but!!

Cheers

Malcolm McDougal [personal communication]

His words unsettle me. I email him back straight away asking if it would be alright to include his email in a study I am conducting on gender roles in our community.

Friday February 19, 2010: *One of the neighbours rings to talk to my husband about some cattle that have swum the creek and are now on his place. The neighbour is a country male in his 60s who has quite a reputation in the district for being cantankerous. He is one of the few people I know of with whom my husband has had “words.” I am surprised when he offers support for my letter. He goes on to tell me that, not only does he want the logo banned, but he also wants the B&S banned. He argues that “It is only ripping off young people.” I tell him that I don’t have a problem with the event, just the advertising, and hand the phone to my husband. Then I start to wonder if that is really how I feel.*

Later in the afternoon I receive a phone call from Malcolm McDougal. He informs me that he is “happy” to have his email included in my study and to forward him

any necessary paperwork. He tells me that he is pleased he has been able to help and asks if there is anything else he can do. I don't tell him that his words have made me feel uncomfortable. Instead I hear myself saying, "It is an interesting perspective. Worth documenting. Although, I'm sure you will understand, that I don't necessarily agree with it." I try to reflect on why I am not being totally honest with him about how his letter made me feel. Am I worried about what he will think of me or am I more concerned about him withdrawing permission for me to use his email in my study?

Sunday February 21, 2010: *I am at yet another meeting. This one is a bus conveyancing meeting and is being held in a tin shed on a neighbouring property at 4.30 in the afternoon. It is the middle of summer and very hot. I find myself seconding motions rapidly in order to get back home to the pool. When the meeting breaks the bus driver, who is a woman in her 60s, approaches me. She places herself so that no-one else can hear her and almost whispers to me. "I read your letter in the paper and I just want you to know that I really understood where you were coming from. I used to have a bit to do with all the footy clubs in Wheatville 20 years ago and I can tell you those rugby union players were by far the worst. I would have to drive them home after their away games and the way they talked to me – and about women generally – well it was really disrespectful and disgusting. In the end I refused to work for them anymore. I rang their President up and told him that he could drive the bus himself in future because I wouldn't be. I didn't want to have to put up with their rubbish anymore. They made me feel really dirty and low."*

Wednesday February 24, 2010: *This week's issue of The Wheatville Times has devoted its street poll opinion section to the logo controversy. There are five photos of local residents who have been randomly interviewed in the street. Three are male and two are female. They have been asked "What do you think of the B&S logo?" (p. 4). Their responses are recorded as follows:*

- It doesn't affect me and I think I'm normal (*Local property owner in his 50s, father, ex-rugby player and successful local businessman*)
- Each to his own (*Ex-rugby player, local junior rugby coach, chemical rep and father in his 50s. He has coached one of my sons*)
- To be honest I'd never noticed it until Sherilyn pointed it out (*Local property owner and father in his 40s*)
- Perhaps they could come up with a new logo that isn't offensive to women or ducks (*Teacher, mother, and partner of a local cotton grower in her 30s*)
- I don't think it's very nice (*Young female shop assistant*)

I am at a friend's house for dinner that night. She is no longer working in education, but is a trained primary school teacher who has recently returned from traveling overseas. She is laughing as she says "And haven't you stirred up a hornet's nest? I was still at the airport in (capital city) being picked up by Adam and Barbie when they said, 'Have you read Sherilyn's letter?' They were pretty cranky and I said, 'No, but I'd like to.' When I got to ----- (provincial inland city) to visit the Brennans I was confronted with it again: 'Have you read Sherilyn's letter?' They even had a copy of it. It had been emailed to Ralph from someone out here. Apparently it is being emailed around quite a bit."

I am surprised at how much attention my letter is generating. I note that it appears to be those associated with the rugby club – past and present – who are having the most issue with it. I find myself trying to analyse why this might be. I start to feel a little uncomfortable.

Wednesday March 3, 2010: *I have been told by one of the female journalists at The Wheatville Times that the paper has a blog site and that my letter has attracted a comment. When I come home I search for it. Whilst it was published a few weeks earlier, I decide to respond anyway and make a mental note to check the blog regularly from now on. The blog site is headlined "Plucked Duck Logo Gets You Talking."*

This logo has been used for a long time and you are a bit slow in your observation of it – get over it. Posted by Donagh, February 10, 2010 9:00:36 PM

Donagh, does the fact that something has been in use for a long time and passed without comment mean it is appropriate or untouchable? Posted by Sherilyn, March 3, 2010 9:22:41PM

There is another letter to the editor in the newspaper this week (see Figure 7.3). It has been written by my friend, Sonya, the farmer's wife who is the mother of four. I ring her and thank her for her public support. I am pleased to see that an image of the logo has again been published with the letter. I feel its repeated publication in this context will work to further the disruption process.

Thursday March 4, 2010: *I am in town to conduct an interview when I run into a colleague of mine who used to work at the local high school. She is now a mother of three young children and her partner is a local property owner. She has been following the debate in the paper and, whilst she endorses my view, she also challenges me: "If you are going to question something in the community you really should be prepared to offer an alternative." Her words keep replaying in my mind as I drive home.*

That afternoon my husband comes home from town where he has been seeing one of the local mechanics. They have had a conversation about the impact of the letter. The mechanic tells my husband, "Christ! Am I ever sick of blokes coming in here tearing their hair out over what your wife's been writing in the paper. They keep asking me 'What's wrong with him? Why can't he control his wife?'"

My husband tells me that he has retorted with, "They obviously don't know my wife!" We laugh about it but a sense of unease settles over me.

Friday March 5, 2010: *The jackeroo¹⁹ is at the main house for morning tea. He is in his late 20s and is telling me about a conversation that took place on the sideline at his touch football game the night before. Many of the players in his team are also members of the local rugby club. He tells me they are quite incensed about my questioning of the logo. I ask him how he reacted to their comments. He says, "I told them they don't get what you're on about. They're missing the point. They*

¹⁹ A term used to describe a male who works with stock in rural Australia.

think you're attacking their club and the B&S. Lots of them haven't even read the letter. They're going on what they've been told by others. It's causing quite a stir in there Sherilyn."

Sunday March 7, 2010: *I have just picked up the jillaroo²⁰ from the bus stop. She is my husband's niece and a single mother in her late 30s. She has spent the last year with us. She is relating a conversation to me that she has had with a passenger on the bus: a local farmer's son in his early 20s. I know him and his family. He has told her that he is really disappointed in me for "knocking" the B&S committee after all their hard work. The jillaroo asks him if he has read my letter. He replies, "No. But I have heard all about it."*

Monday March 8, 2010: *I am at school when a young female teacher approaches me to tell me about her weekend. She says she was at a party where there were a number of rugby players and, "They were all going off about your letter." She laughs as she repeats what they were saying: "Isn't that Jock Lennon's missus? What's his problem? Can't he control her?" Outwardly I laugh with her but inwardly I feel my sense of unease return.*

Wednesday March 10, 2010: *I log onto the blog site. There is another comment. It has been posted the previous Friday. I respond.*

Sherilyn, are you also suggesting the big M of the McDonalds' logo looks like a set of women's breasts? Come on love. Lighten up. Let's not make issues out of this. In fact, let's save our energy for something that needs it. Posted by Donagh, March 5, 2010, 7.30 PM

Donagh, haven't got a problem with McDonalds big M logo or women's breasts for that matter (unless they are being presented in a way which demeans and/or objectifies women). However, I think humour which uses sexual domination of – and violence against – females to pack its punch needs challenging. I don't find it harmless, amusing or innocent. Instead I find it dangerous and derogatory. Imagine if the female (or male for that matter) emu in the image was Indigenous or Indian. Would we think that was okay?

²⁰ A term used to describe a female who works with stock in rural Australia.

Or would that be considered inappropriate or possibly racist? Well why is it okay – or considered funny – for the logo to represent females in this way? Sorry, but not laughing at this one. Too serious! Posted by Sherilyn, March 10, 2010, 12.54 PM

Just as I push the post button my husband walks in the door with The Wheatville Times. He has returned from a trip to town. He hands the newspaper to me and says, "You've hit the jackpot this week." There is a letter to the editor (see Figure 7.4) and an editorial (see Figure 7.5). I open the paper to read them. The letter to the editor attempts to trivialise my concerns and tells me to "lighten up." In attempting to remain neutral the editor has turned the issue into a generational one. The letter to the editor is the same one to which I have just responded on the blog site. Again the editor has inserted the logo into it. I ring the editor, thank him for keeping the debate going with his editorial, and ask that my blog response is not published in next week's paper. I am getting concerned at the level of hostility in the community and let him know that I worry my original letter is being misinterpreted. He tells me that he has only ever seen the community so absorbed by an issue once before and he has been working at The Wheatville Times for nearly 30 years. He encourages me to write another letter that will restate my position for readers who may have missed the original letter. I suspect his primary motive is that he is enjoying increased interest in his paper with the controversy that the letter has created but take him up on his offer anyway. I am concerned the debate is being deflected away from a questioning of local gender messages and practices to a debate about the merits of rugby or whether to support – or not – a particular social event. I agree to write another letter offering an alternative logo and clarifying my standpoint.

Tuesday March 16, 2010: *Today I conduct an interview with a local businessman. He is in his mid 40s and has two daughters away at boarding school. He also owns a property. His replies to my questions are very measured. He chooses his words carefully and speaks slowly. I sense he is slightly uncomfortable being digitally recorded discussing cultural gender issues. The interview gives me valuable insights into how my letter is being received by others.*

Sherilyn: Tom, you were telling me recently of a discussion which was going on in your morning tea break about the logo being used for the Wheatville B&S. Would you mind elaborating on that?

Tom: Yes Sherilyn. I'm an equity holder in a business in town. We employ 15 staff and most of these are women under the age of 25. I was having a morning tea conversation with these women and brought up the topic of the logo which had had a series of articles written about it in the local paper. I wanted to know whether it offended them. And what I found interesting was that the young women in the firm couldn't understand why there'd been such a reaction to the logo. They really felt that it wasn't a significant issue and that there were other causes in our community that were perhaps more important than the image of women.

Sherilyn: Do you mean they actually thought of it as a bit of light fun?

Tom: I think that's really what they did feel. They felt that it was light fun. It was all in jest; a bit of a joke; that this is the sort of thing that, you know, happens when you're young.

Sherilyn: So some of these women attend this B&S?

Tom: Yes. Some of the women – I think probably three of the staff - attended the B&S. They told me of an incident that occurred at the B&S which amazed me – you know – their reaction. Apparently, according to what they were telling me, one of the young women at the B&S was having

sex with multiple partners and the boys were actually tag teaming – there were about 10 boys who had sex with one girl in the back of the utility.

Sherilyn: And when they were telling you this, what would you say was their attitude to that event?

Tom: I think their attitude was they certainly wouldn't partake in that sort of activity but they saw it as being quite amusing that a girl would and that the boys were having such a great time. And I did get the impression that it's not necessarily uncommon; not that it would happen on every occasion but, perhaps, on a big occasion like the local B&S these sorts of things do go on. I also got the impression that, perhaps, not everyone would have been aware of it. Obviously these things can occur and you not be aware of it unless you're in the area I suppose.

Sherilyn: So as a man in your 40s who is a father of daughters what's your take on that logo? How do you feel about it or see it?

Tom: Look I think to be honest with you I'd never really noticed the logo but I'd probably agree with the interpretation that it's not the best choice of logo. I think it does depict women in a poor light. I understand that there was some history to the formation of the logo in a cartoon series and that, if you saw the logo in series it would probably have less of an impact, but when you see the logo in isolation it certainly looks as if the female ostrich is being poorly treated with her feathers flying everywhere

and her legs spread and the male ostrich or emu standing over the female looking very satisfied.

Sherilyn: *Why do you think the questioning of that logo in a public forum has attracted so much attention in this community?*

Tom: *I suppose it's hard to say and comment on how everyone reacts to it, but you'd assume that you are always going to get various reactions and I would think that a big part of the negative reaction that we've felt in the community has probably been brought about by the fact that people feel threatened that their sport or their image is being portrayed wrongly and they obviously feel passionately about that –*

Sherilyn: *Sorry to interrupt, but when you use the word "negative", do you mean my comments were the negative comments or the reaction to the questioning of that local icon was negative?*

Tom: *The negative reaction to the questioning of that icon. Yes. I think people would have felt, you know, particularly people close to the sporting organisation, would have felt threatened – that it was threatening their image. When people feel threatened often their first form of defence is attack unfortunately rather than recognising how others in the community might see the logo and then seeking to address that in an open way rather than in a defensive way – which is what I think we've witnessed in the local paper.*

Sherilyn: *One of the first and most hostile reactions I got was from an ex-*

footballer who was originally involved in helping to establish the B&S and, I'm assuming, its marketing campaign. Why do you think he reacted so aggressively in his response to my letter.

Tom: *I think the reason for that is that when you are part of an organisation, you give very much a group response rather than an individual response so an organisation will band together and, if there is a negative sentiment within the group, then usually the negative sentiment will be fanned and therefore the group will bond together and fight as a group rather than stopping and reflecting as individuals. So you get, I believe, a momentum which then carries your reaction beyond what would necessarily be the reaction of an individual. It becomes more of a group mentality. I think unless someone within the group is wise enough I suppose to ask the group to reflect more broadly then you get a very narrow minded response.*

Sherilyn: *Do you think that drawing attention to this logo has achieved anything?*

Tom: *Yes I do. I think it's great that we raise these issues in a community. A community needs to think about these sorts of issues and unless you've got people brave enough to raise them then it's never part of the debate. I think sometimes we need to reflect on our values and the things that we do in a community and for that reason I think it's important that these various issues are raised. You know, what better issue than raising how we treat our women within the*

community. I think this is an excellent example. I think, hopefully, over time while the reaction from a lot in the community has been very negative ... I think over time, and particularly as those individuals age, their view will be impacted and as these sorts of things are talked about for a long time. No doubt it will be brought up in

conversation in years to come and when that happens, as individuals age, their attitude will change over time. Therefore I think you'll see less heat in the argument and more of a reflection about how their values have changed and how they might have reacted differently.

Wednesday March 17, 2010: *My second letter is published in The Wheatville Times alongside a cartoon I have sketched (see Figure 7.6). I have deliberately kept the letter brief. My intention has been to offer a possible alternative to the existing logo so that my original letter can no longer be misinterpreted as part of a campaign to end the B&S or smear the rugby club. This letter to the editor has been submitted before my interview with Tom. I now find myself reflecting on whether I should have submitted it. Why did I feel the need to justify and defend myself? After hearing Tom's story, do I still support the event? The editor has also included a brief statement regarding an offer of \$500 for a new logo. It has been offered by the colleague who earlier challenged me to come up with an alternative.*

Thursday March 18, 2010: *I am at a business house in town for a work related reason and approach one of the administrative assistants. I am consumed by other thoughts and do not notice – until I am speaking with her – that it is Mr President's wife. When she sees me she begins talking animatedly about the ongoing media debate over the logo. As she speaks the frustration in her voice builds: "I am so sick of all this stuff in the paper about the logo. I refuse to buy or read The Wheatville Times any more. I'm over it. Your first letter was enough and Mark's response – well, that was just ridiculous. But why we have to keep going on about it now I don't know. Enough is enough. Point made. Now let's move on!" When I am outside I try to analyse her reaction. I wonder what others may have said to her or her husband. Has he, like me, been challenged by others over his public comments? Is he regretting them? Rethinking them? Then I wonder if perhaps my second letter was unnecessary. I drive home feeling unsure.*

Friday March 19, 2010: *I receive a phone call from a colleague who has offered to pay \$500 prize money for a new logo. She tells me that The Wheatville Times wants to do a story on her offer but she is uncomfortable with the exposure and would rather just use the letters to the editor section of the newspaper to advertise her offer. I question, given my own experiences, whether a letter to the editor is any less conspicuous than a news article. However she is adamant and wants me to draw an alternative to the current logo to include with her letter. She tells me she didn't like the picture I drew previously because it looked like the emus had just had sex. I reply, "I don't mind if they have just had sex as long as it was consensual and respectful." Somewhat reluctantly I agree to sketch another logo design based on her instruction.*

Wednesday March 24, 2010: *My colleague's letter to the editor is published (see Figure 7.7). Again the original logo has been inserted.*

Wednesday March 31, 2010: *This week's editorial is commenting on the complete absence of female councillors representing our community (see Figure 6.5). I wonder if the ongoing gender debate in his paper has had any influence on the position the editor has taken. There is also another letter to the editor regarding the logo (see Figure 7.9).*

Friday April 9, 2010: *I receive a phone call from Sonya's brother. He owns and runs a newspaper in a neighbouring district. His sister has told him about the ongoing logo debate in our community and we begin talking about it and my motivations for generating it. Half way through our conversation I realise he is taking notes. I ask him why and he tells me he is going to do a story on the controversy for his newspaper. My initial reaction is to begin censoring my words and I can't help but see the irony in suddenly being positioned as the interviewee. I can now empathise with those who have been generous enough to participate in my study. I ask him to let me think for a minute about whether I want another story appearing in a newspaper about the logo and my objections to it. I feel I have done enough public*

unsettling. However, eventually I agree, consoling myself in the knowledge that his publication is not circulated in the Wheatville district.

Wednesday April 14, 2010: *Sonya rings me to tell me her brother is sending 30 copies of his paper to the local Wheatville newsagency this week. I suddenly feel panicked and express my concerns to her that members of our community have heard enough on this topic. We hatch a plan whereby we will buy 15 copies each as soon as the newsagency opens.*

Thursday April 15, 2010: *By the next morning I feel less panicked and ring her to cancel the plan. I resign myself for any fallout. I have re-thought my actions and am starting to understand why my friend called me “brave” for publically challenging the logo. The story is on the front page of her brother’s newspaper (see Figure 7.10). It spreads over two pages. Again I am pleased to see that an image of the logo has been inserted into the article.*

Big Ruck Over Plucked Duck

B&S cartoon under the magnifying glass

A fine controversy has raged for a couple of months a few districts further east around the rich cotton and grain town of Wheatville. Where they get 24 inches of rain most years and prefer the private school game of rugby union. It’s bountiful country stocked heavily with silvertails.

Every year Wheatville runs a big and boisterous B&S called The Plucked Duck. Strictly black tie, \$80 at the gate, \$65 prepaid. The noise for last year’s ball came from a DJ and two bands, notably Wheatville hard rockers Hammer Heads, pulled a crowd of 3000 and funnelled 45 grand to the local Ducks rugby club and various charities.

The Plucked Duck ball’s logo is a cartoon of a bachelor bush chook clutching a can of XXXX [beer] and standing over a spread-eagled spinster in stilettos. The rampant male sucks on a mouthful of feathers while more float in the air around him.

Few appear to have taken issue with the B&S emblem since it went into circulation 18 years ago until high school English teacher Sherilyn Lennon tendered her interpretation in a letter to her local rag on 10 February. She suggested in *The Wheatville Times* the female emu looked like she’d just been raped. While the cartoon’s creators would defend it as a joke, she believed such humour entrenched gender messages undermining women. She also

made the connection with last year's group sex scandal involving highly-paid NRL [National Rugby League] players.

But the 46-year-old mother of three and farmer's wife was also careful to praise the work of the B&S organizers and their efforts for charity, and pointed out three members of her family had played for the Ducks.

"My concerns lie not with the event or the club. They are with the sorts of messages that images like this send to our community about what is acceptable, or possibly even expected, behaviour for males and females on evenings such as these," Sherilyn wrote: "Am I being too harsh? I would be interested in what others think."

The Wheatville Times editor Mark Smith said the letter caused a huge furore. One of the first to return fire was ex-Emu and founding president of the Plucked Duck movement, Mark Burr. He accused Sherilyn of an alarmist and nihilistic view of youth behaviour. "The absurd association that Mrs Lennon makes between rape, violence, rugby and our very successful B&S is ridiculous in the extreme," he retorted in a letter to *The Wheatville Times*, telling her to lighten up.

The 41-year-old agronomist told our publication he was not defending the logo so much as defending the B&S and rugby club. "The debate has moved on and now everybody's looking at the logo. But to me it was not about the logo, it was about rape and violence and the B&S."

Mr Burr said the cartoon was created by a talented local artist whom he declined to name. It was meant to be provocative while representing the spirit of having a good time at the B&S. "Twenty years ago, it seemed cutting edge and offensive," he said. "It's about the younger generation sticking it up the older generation. It's a shame it's taken 20 years to get a reaction."

Reigning Plucked Duck president Harvey Brown, 28, said the cartoon had not upset anyone before and claimed the debate was being largely driven by a handful of older people well past attending B&S knees-up. "I don't see a problem with it to be honest and I think there are bigger issues in the world to worry about. All the kids I've spoken over the years have not paid much attention to it. To say it condones rape ... well, those people need to grow up a bit."

Harvey said the modern B&S was a tightly controlled event unlike the shenanigans of B&S balls of decades past. "I can proudly say we have not had one major incident. The worst they've had is drink driving and last year it was a record low of three."

While he didn't rule out a change to the design, if the B&S committee was in favour it was unlikely this year as marketing of the next ball in September was well advanced. "A lot of people in town who've been part of the B&S committee feel very strongly about keeping it."

But Sherilyn said the issues ran deeper and wider than a mere cartoon and that her criticism was also seen as a challenge to male behaviour in a macho, highly patriarchal society.

She was unprepared for the hostility the letter aroused. District stalwarts have told friends they can't comprehend her stance. She'd heard reports that many of the men around town were ropable. Ducks players have vowed to attach the cartoon to their jerseys in defiance of political correctness.

"It's caused a lot of anger in the community," Sherilyn said.

The letter derived from her researches for a PhD thesis probing cultural differences between the sexes. Her choice of topic was inspired by the way boys underperformed at Wheatville High despite programs over the years aimed at motivating them. Some boys denigrated school achievement as a girl thing and were more interested in excelling at sport, making money and business success, Sherilyn said.

A farming family in the district has pledged \$500 for a competition to design an alternative Duck. The easiest way out appears to be a straight swapping of roles, with Emma emu rampant and a sozzled Eddie supine on the ground. Sherilyn has sketched a hen and a cock back to back under a languid moon. Both are smashed – her idea of B&S equality and youthful exuberance. (Edington, 2010)

Saturday April 17, 2010: *I am at the home of a successful district cotton farming family. It is the male's 50th birthday party. The garden is extensive and well maintained. The party is being held under a marquee located beside a naturally occurring lagoon. Bar staff have been hired to serve the guests. The party has been underway for a number of hours and some of the guests are rather inebriated. One of the guests, a male cotton farmer, approaches me. He wants to talk to me privately about the ongoing logo debate: "I just don't understand it Sherilyn. Why did you need to stir up all that trouble over the logo? I just don't get it. Help me understand why you did it."*

I tell him I have written the letters for two reasons: "Firstly, because I believe in what I am saying – there are certain practices out here that need challenging – and secondly, because it is part of a cultural gender study I am conducting through my university."

I am surprised by his reaction. His whole demeanour suddenly lifts and his face breaks into a smile: "Now I get it. It's commercial. There's something in it for you. You're getting something out of this. That's why you're doing it." He seems reassured, as if he hasn't misjudged me after all.

I quickly reiterate that I believe in everything I have done and said but go on to admit that I probably would not have gone public with my thinking if it had not been for my study. But he does not hear these words. He is not listening to me anymore. He has heard what he needed to hear. His reaction plagues me for days, weeks, after. Are my motives ethical? Why am I really doing this? Who is my activism helping? Am I being honest with myself? With my community? Or am I just using my community for my own personal gain? What is my real purpose? Uncertainty settles over me again.

Later at the same party I am talking to another male farmer. We are discussing the pros and cons of private schools when I hear my name being called. I turn. Standing behind me is a group of six men. Robbo (refer Chapter 6) is standing confidently in the middle of them. He taunts me: "Sherilyn, we're just talking about your letter. Why don't you come over here and defend yourself?" He is grinning at me from the centre of the pack. I reply that I would, except that I am involved in another conversation, and turn my back on him. I try to appear composed and to exude an aura of confidence but inside I am feeling extremely vulnerable and small.

Saturday May 1, 2010: *I am at the local Wheatville show and a friend of mine approaches me to talk. She is the executive member of a school board at an elite private boarding school in the state's capital city and is appalled at the contents of a sexist joke she has just heard broadcast over the public loud speaker system (see Chapter 6 "Researcher observation May 1, 2010"). She wants to talk to me about it as she is aware of my public stance on gender issues. During the course of our conversation she makes a decision to use her influence to remove her school's financial support from the association running the event and responsible for broadcasting the joke. Her reasoning: "The school doesn't need to be associated with that sort of thing and unless we start acting on these things nothing will ever change. I would rather see the money used to support a different cause that doesn't think it's okay to publically demean women." I endorse her thinking and feel reassured that the public irritating I have begun is inspiring others to genuinely rethink and transform their actions.*

Tuesday May 11, 2010: *The next week my friend drops in to see me on her way home from work. We are having a glass of wine and discussing the psychological impact of the ongoing drought on our farming husbands when the phone rings. It is a pig hunter who occasionally shoots on my husband's farm. I have spoken to him briefly on the phone before but never met him. I try hard to finish the conversation so I can get back to my friend: "I'm sorry Harry but Jock isn't home at the moment so I really can't give you permission to shoot here until I speak to him and see if anyone else is shooting tonight. Maybe you could try his mobile number." I start to recite it when he interrupts –*

"I don't quite know how to say this so I'll just go right ahead and say it. You're the one who's been writing them letters in the paper about that logo aren't you?"

Instantly I am intrigued and just a little apprehensive. "Yes."

"Well I just wanted to say that I reckon this district needs more women like you. That's all I wanted to say. I'll ring back later and speak to Jock." I thank him and feel a flush of guilt over how ready I was to dismiss him. I am surprised at how comforting I have found his words.

Wednesday May 12, 2010: *The next day there is a full-page article in The Wheatville Times about the controversy surrounding the logo (see Figure 7.11). It has been written by a local female cadet journalist in her early twenties.*

B&S is laughing all the way to the bank over logo uproar

Budding journalist and B&S veteran Rosie Gloster gives us her view on a controversial issue: The B&S logo ...

Hello, I'm 22 and a proud fan of the Wheatville B&S. (This feels strangely like a confession). And I'd like to say that the "Plucked Duck" logo is iconic, a harmless representation and a good old-fashioned laugh. No judgement please.

Oh go on and say it. I've heard it already: the logo is not socially acceptable anymore, it suggests offensive and inappropriate behaviour, the negative gender misconception labels are a mile long and it's a joke that's been taken too far...

Well, I'd like to say that the political incorrectness is the genius of it. Speaking from personal experience of a few very memorable (well "memory" is coined loosely) nights at the famed annual Wheatville "Plucked Duck" B&S, I must say I'm jolly proud to have that bright orange sticker in all its outrageous glory plastered to my old station wagon.

For as long as I can remember, the Wheatville B&S was always that party that I couldn't wait to attend when my 18th birthday rolled around. A black-tie event means a new black dress. Everyone who is anyone is there. An outrageous band is lined up to play those classic country anthems, which means shameless, shameless dancing all night long!

Who ever said anything about rape, physical violence, misogyny, objectification of women, dangerous or offensive behaviour and the comparison of the Duck's Rugby Club to national rugby players?

According to some who have written in to *The Wheatville Times* over the past few months, these are all the suggestions that the "Plucked Duck" logo supposedly represents? Could have fooled me.

The "plucked duck", to me, has never meant anything more than the chance to misbehave (innocent, harmless fun – keep your pants on), drink too much and enjoy the company of 2000 of my closest acquaintances. Never have I sat down and considered, "Ooh hang on, this logo is offensive to me!" To a young woman such as myself, it certainly doesn't seem dangerous.

My memories of B&Ses past (alright they're a bit hazy) are clouded with champagne, dust, dancing, and who I thought at the time, were dashing young men. Does that sound dangerous? I hardly think the meaning behind the logo is one for encouraging violence, rape or behavioural misconduct.

The same name has stuck for more than 15 years and has fashioned the Wheatville B&S into a very successful, very popular, very SAFE social event for the town. The B&S website describes the event as "a great opportunity to catch up with mates from all over".

And there can be romance amongst the ruckus. Perhaps people don't trust the behaviour of today's youth? Are they really suggesting that the B&S is about sexual conquest and nothing more?

Now personally I'm getting a little old for the B&S scene – I am 22 after all. But there comes a time when that dusty, dirty hangover is something you no longer savour. However I have plenty of older friends, both the blokes and the ladies, who still love to travel out for this great big party, and who have never had any negative experiences that some people attribute to the so-called "derogatory" "Plucked Duck" logo.

And to those who dare challenge changing the logo, I put this question to them: Do they also dare to come face to face with some of the girls who frequent the Wheatville Plucked Duck B&S? Let me assure you that "socially acceptable behaviour" goes right out the window for some "bush birds" at the B&S. The ladies have learnt how to ruffle their feathers in public too.

And they aren't afraid to squawk. B&S does stand for bachelors and spinsters after all.

The logo might deem the bloke emu as the dominating gender and armed with a can of XXXX [beer] but there are plenty of birds out here equally capable of drinking the men under the table, no problem.

Maybe the logo should be reversed? Would there be any qualms then? Now to me – that sounds like the danger! Gender misconstruction plucked upside down. And isn't that what today's world is all about, equality amongst men and women and freedom of action. The blokes get tied to all the negative gender misconceptions. Give the lads a break.

So the logo has got to go you say? And what would it be replaced with? "Two Ducks Sitting in a Swag", "Responsible Ducks Ball", "The Luv-a-Duck Ball"... I don't know about you, but to me, they just don't seem to have the same ring.

The simple fact is that to most people of my age, and gender, the Plucked Duck logo is a harmless cartoon. It has been around for years already and never ruffled any feathers ... until now. And my take is this, there would be even less feathers ruffled, if older generations stopped drawing attention to it.

Leave the Ducks to their own and let the B&S goers get back to good old-fashioned partying. (Please don't make us think too hard). They will anyway, no matter what anyone else says.

Coming soon – What really happens at a B&S. (Gloster, 2010, p. 4)

Thursday June 3, 2010: *I meet Sonya for an interview at a local coffee shop. Sonya was one of the first to publically respond supporting the ideas presented in my original letter (see Figure 7.3). I am keen to find out what her experiences have been since.*

Sherilyn: *Sonya I'm interested in why you chose to get publically involved in the logo debate. Can you talk to me about that?*

Sonya: *Well your article was the first time I had been made to notice the logo. I'm not in the B&S going age group anymore so when it was pointed out to me – the logo – I went "Ohh". Now whether it's me being an artist or something I noticed the subtleties in the image which were just so blatantly*

wrong to me. I thought they were really really wrong.

Sherilyn: *Wrong in what way?*

Sonya: *Well, what they represented. You know the logo represented obviously to me a very aggressive male astride a not very happy, you know, what she was involved in was not consensual sex. To me it was just very easy to see that. You know, I saw the image and I went "Ohh der!" And I*

thought, "Yes Sherilyn. I'm so with you on that one." To me it was very straightforward.

Sherilyn: And you'd never noticed it before?

Sonya: Never noticed it before.

Sherilyn: So you saw it as a condoning of rape?

Sonya: Yes, definitely.

Sherilyn: And the use of that as a marketing tool?

Sonya: Definitely. Definitely. You've pointed it out. You've made me look at the logo with new eyes and I went, "Not good! Can't be done. No longer. Might have been funny years ago. Can't be done." There would have been racist cartoons out and about years ago. They're not allowed to be used publically or as a form of promotion at all. So then, both Andrew (Sonya's husband) and I said, "Yeah, you're so right Sherilyn. We're so with you". And then with Mark's reply I thought it was just so unsophisticated and insensitive and he covered a whole lot of stuff that wasn't your initial concern. He brought in a whole lot of other things.

Sherilyn: Why do you think he did that?

Sonya: Guilt? I don't know. I think he sort of felt that you were questioning the use of the emu and the use of this and that and therefore the use of the Rugby team to use it as their local emblem on their jersey because they are the Ducks. I think he got it wrong. He just went "Bang". And I think that

when you get a knee jerk reaction like that it's because they're finding it unsettling and that maybe well, they're not brave enough or man enough to say, "Well, yeah. I can see that point. I can sympathise with you. I get it. Because it does look like rape. I think you're probably being a little bit over-reactive but, yeah, I get it. I can see your point." So when I read his article I then went, umm. I felt he was trying to probably bully you into silence by the way he mentioned that you, personally, must have had a bad experience at a prior B&S because how could you possibly find this B&S logo so offensive. I think he completely missed your point and why somebody would completely miss a point like that is maybe because they do have a little bit of guilt or responsibility associated with the logo. I don't know. So having read his article I was then continually surprised that there wasn't more "We get you Sherilyn. We really get you. Come on Mr. Burr [Mr President]. Have a look at it. Take a deep breath. They have pointed out that it's an aggressive male that has just, you know, done the wrong thing. This has been pointed out to you. It's a general concern. Deal with it." And I have been very surprised and saddened at how insensitive the general public has become to that sort of image because they don't see it. Even when we point it out to them.

Sherilyn: So your response was then to –

Sonya: My response was then to try to get him back on track and say "Let's just deal with the logo. How can you possibly see that logo for anything but what it is depicting which is rape of a

female – non-consensual sex?” And it was also important to use humour because I didn’t think he had that much humour in his article. I think he got a little bit dirty and a little bit personal. That was a very important thing that I wanted to get across in my letter that “Let’s not get personal. Let’s not get dirty. Let’s stick with the facts. It’s been pointed out. It’s not appropriate. How can you not see that image for anything but what it is depicting?” So, yeah. I was blown away. I thought, “How thick are these people?” or “Why aren’t they going uh-huh alrighty” – It depicts rape. You know. Here you are, voicing a very real concern, and I’m just surprised that it hasn’t been taken more seriously.

Sherilyn: *One thing that I have noticed is that people who are supportive often speak about it quietly to me.*

Sonya: *But why? Why are they afraid to speak out because it’s Okay. Society has said time and time again, “It is Okay to voice your concerns. It is Okay to step up.” Like where would paedophilia be. Uncovering the dreadfulness of paedophilia has come such a long way. It had to start somewhere.*

Sherilyn: *You mean people had to question it?*

Sonya: *Yes. And it was about the church. So that’s a big body to challenge.*

Sherilyn: *So do you think it’s got something to do with certain people or groups holding power in the community that makes others worried*

about having a voice or questioning things?

Sonya: *Do you know what? I don’t think they realise how dangerous that sort of thing [images such as the logo] is. I don’t think they realise it.*

Sherilyn: *So you think these sorts of jokes in which women are publically denigrated have become so acceptable and normalised that they just don’t get it when you question it?*

Sonya: *Well there would have been a lot more support for your letter and my follow-up letter if they did.*

Sherilyn: *So how does that make you feel?*

Sonya: *I’m really worried.*

Sherilyn: *Worried?*

Sonya: *Worried. I don’t want my children to look at that image and be insensitive to what it is depicting and this is what your article has really shown me. How insensitive the community is to that sort of image or, if they are sensitive to it, if they do get what you and I are saying, they still don’t feel that they have a right to say “It’s wrong.”*

Sherilyn: *So would you go so far as pointing that out to your kids when they’re old enough to understand what the image is representing?*

Sonya: *Absolutely. Why not? Why not? I would be feeling very concerned for my children if they can’t see that image and be responsive to what it is actually saying and know where I stand.*

Sherilyn: Do you think you would have preferred to remain 'unknowing'?

Sonya: No. Not for a second. Not for a second.

Sherilyn: So knowing has put you in an uncomfortable place at times hasn't it? You've had to defend your position at times haven't you?

Sonya: Oh, yes. All the time. And it's quite extraordinary you know. We were with a group of people and I could see somebody was obviously sympathising with your way of looking at it and she didn't say anything. There was another girl who was very vocal.

Sherilyn: Was this in mixed company?

Sonya: Yes. Mixed company – and she was saying, "I don't find a problem with it." And she was out there vocalising this and I said, "How can you not look at that image and see it's representing non-consensual sex?" But this woman felt more comfortable to voice her opinion, and yes, it was mixed company. It was mixed company and it would have been interesting to see if she had been equally as comfortable voicing her opinion if it was all females. Because I bet you this other woman would have piped up if it had been all girls.

Sherilyn: So do you think that the male presence cowered her?

Sonya: No I think she was trying to gain kudos with them by saying it was fine.

Sherilyn: No. I was referring to the one who stayed silent. Do you think

the male presence had an effect on her?

Sonya: Well she smiled rather vaguely and just hoped that the subject would change. And I knew she was getting uncomfortable so I just ended it by saying, "Well, yes. It's interesting and I have been quite surprised."

Sherilyn: What do you think has given you the courage to speak publically? Why aren't you silent?

Sonya: Because it's so bloody obvious, Sherilyn.

Sherilyn: Now?

Sonya: Well, had I seen it before or ever really looked at it I would have had exactly the same reaction. The only reason that I've only had the reaction now is that I wasn't aware of it. And this is, as you say, the dangerous thing. You've actually put it out there to people; made them take notice; made them look at it; made them really explore it – and, excuse me, you really don't have to look that hard. It is pretty obvious. And despite that people just don't want to – I don't know why. I know how I feel about it and I hope my children are sensitive to the image and they can see it for what it depicts. I would be very upset if they looked at the aggressive stance and the aggressive look on that emu and found that okay. If they don't get that and they don't feel "Oo gee. That's not right" then I'm not doing my job as a parent.

Sherilyn: So final question then. You have actually already been an activist in that you have written a letter; you've indicated to me that you are

challenging people on their thinking in conversations in social forums; and you are prepared to talk to your children about it as they get older. So this has fired you up hasn't it?

Sonya: *Yes.*

Sherilyn: *That's exciting. That's exactly what I set out to do with my original letter.*

Sonya: *Because nothing's changed. And then you get gorgeous little rose tinted glasses – gorgeous girl that she is – and she writes an article defending the logo describing a part of the B&S that is a part of it but your problem was never with the B&S. Your problem*

was with the logo and how it can be interpreted. That was your concern and that is where it stopped and started. I get a feeling that all these people are thinking your questioning the use of the emu and the use of drinking or even the right to have sex – I really think society needs to be checked and made responsible for all those sorts of images because they are insidiously sitting under the surface feeding, I think, society's depreciation of behaviour, of their morals, of everything and this is why I get so cross with so many people in our community. You know when they say, "Oh, where's the harm in that?" They're trying to say it's benign. It's not. It's very nasty.

Thursday August 5, 2010: *I am in a nearby regional city at the funeral of the father of one of my closest friends. On the church wall in front of me is a plaque claiming "Community is knowing and being known; loving and being loved." I can identify with the first half of this statement but wonder about the second half. Five priests are celebrating the life of the deceased: a true community man. The church is packed. Mourners spill outside.*

Once the service is over I begin mingling with the other mourners. Many I have not seen for over 20 years. One of those present is an ex-Wheatville teacher in his mid 40s. I was his Head of Department for many years when he taught in Wheatville. He left Wheatville High seven years earlier and is now teaching at a private secondary school in the city. At this school he is the head rugby coach. We have always had a rather strained relationship.

I bite the bullet and approach him to say "Hullo." Immediately he tells me he wants to talk to me about the B&S logo. As usual I find his manner aggressive and try to deflect the conversation by telling him I would be very interested in talking to him about the logo but would prefer to do so elsewhere and when I could record the

conversation for a study I am conducting. I think this might make him back down but instead of being put off he becomes more insistent.

“Yes. Yes. You do that. I would like you to record what I have to say very much.” I find his manner bordering on menacing now. At this point a mutual friend joins us and the subject changes. I am grateful and make a mental note to myself to avoid the male teacher should he attend the wake.

It is 10 o’clock at night. The wake has been going for more than five hours. I have stayed inside the house and not ventured outside where many of the men have gathered around a bar. I try to convince myself that this is not cowardice; that it is the cold and not the thought of bumping into Him that has kept me inside. Then He is suddenly there and has started again: “Do you even know the history of that logo?”

He has caught me unawares and I stumble to find words: “Ah – well, I know it has been used to market the B&S for nearly 20 years and – ”

“But do you know its history? Where it came from? Do you even know that?” He is being very aggressive. Very insistent. He is standing over me and in his hand is a can of beer.

I do not want to incite him further so, again I stumble a reply: “Well I have heard that it was drawn up by the brother-in-law of Michael – ”

“Jonathon Smith-White drew it up when he was in Year 10 and yes, he is Michael Black’s brother-in-law. Jonathon was in my English class and I asked him to draw it up.”

I am repulsed, intrigued, mesmerised all at the same time. Why is he telling me this? Why is it so important to him that I know this? I try to sound calm, non-plussed: “How did Jonathon come up with it? What guidance did you give him? What made him draw it like that?”

He knows I am hooked and He is smiling now. Gloating. “Because I told him I wanted him to draw a male emu standing aggressively over the top of a female emu with a beer in its hand. I told him I wanted it to look like the male emu had just drilled the female emu and for there to be feathers flying around. Underneath it I

told him I wanted the words, 'Come to the Wheatville B&S and pluck-a-duck.'" As an afterthought he adds, "but for some reason the committee decided to change it to The Plucked Duck B&S. They thought that was less offensive."

I am confounded. Speechless. Mortified. I feel like the ground is shifting from under my feet. I have spent the past two years excavating and unsettling some of Wheatville's limiting gender beliefs and practices inspired by concerns I have had over boys' schooling performances. Now here in front of me is a former teacher telling me that he had a student create the logo: the logo that, for me, discursively supports one of the most toxic ideological belief systems to be produced and reproduced within and across Wheatville. And perhaps He knows this. Perhaps this is why He is telling me. Perhaps this is why He seems to be revelling in divulging the origins of the logo to me. Perhaps He is enjoying the power He has over me right now, right at this moment, knowing how sickening I am finding it that the logo was designed by a 15 year old boy in my own backyard and on my own watch.

A Conclusion

This chapter has documented my emotional and experiential journey of using the local media as a platform for initiating activist dialogues around representations of gender. I have merged aspects of autoethnography with personal reflection to personalise the research and expose the covert and overt ways that hegemonic masculinity is legitimated, reinforced, perpetuated and, occasionally, destabilised. By documenting my vulnerabilities, feelings, thoughts, and actions, I have been able to provide insights into how I am positioned by others, and how I am able to position others. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) support such an approach claiming that, "Life ... simply cannot be understood without careful attention to the emotional, affective, and value-laden aspects of human behaviour" (p.34).

The next chapter conducts a meta-analysis of the multiple sources of evidence presented in Chapters 6 and 7. By doing so Chapter 8 provides further insights into the operational forces of hegemonic masculinity whilst making explicit instances of transformative thinking and action.

Figure 7.1. My first letter to *The Wheatville Times* (Lennon, 2010b, p. 6)

Figure 7.2. 'Mr President's' response to my letter (Burr, 2010, p. 6; Watt, 2010, p. 6)

Figure 7.3. A supportive response to my letter (Sonya, 2010, p. 6)

Figure 7.4. A letter to the editor
attempts to trivialise my concerns
(Donagh, 2010, p. 6)

Figure 7.5. An editorial responds to the ongoing community dialogue (Smith, 2010b, p. 6)

Figure 7.6. My second letter is published (Lennon, 2010a, p. 6)

Figure 7.7. Another alternative and a financial incentive to change (Bowen, 2010, p. 6)

Figure 7.8. A local editorial explores gender bias and political appointments (Smith, 2010a, p. 6)

Figure 7.9. The debate continues (Daniels, 2010, p. 7)

Figure 7.10. A neighbouring newspaper joins in the discussion (Edington, 2010, pp. 1-2)

Figure 7.11. A full page newspaper article continuing the public dialogue over the iconic local logo (Gloster, 2010, p. 4)

Chapter 8

Mining the Evidence and Making Further Discoveries

An Introduction

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 presented the bulk of the evidence for this study. They merged personal and public stories, observations, recollections, destination studies, school reports, critical analyses, and my experiential and emotional journey of being an insider activist researcher as a means of coming-to-know *Who am I? What is? What could or should be? What I can do about it?* and *How others see me as a result of what I've done?* (see Figure 4.1). The purpose of this chapter is to conduct a macro-analysis of the evidence gathered and generated by Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Just as moments of analysis can be found scattered throughout the evidence in these earlier chapters, Chapter 8 also blurs the boundaries between analysis and evidence. It re-visits, re-examines, and problematises the evidence presented in the previous chapters whilst looking for points of overlap and bifurcation. Chapter 8 makes explicit the links between discursive constructions of gender, ideological belief systems, power asymmetries, and the capacity the researcher has for inspiring transformational thinking and action.

The first section of Chapter 8 fossicks through the evidence as it addresses the research question: *How is gender being ideologically produced and reproduced through the texts, social structures, and cultural and discursive practices of a rural Australian community?* The second section fossicks through the evidence as it addresses the research question: *What transformative thinking or action is possible through a communal unsettling of phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement in this community?* The final section fossicks through the evidence as it addresses the research question: *How am I positioning, and being positioned by, others in my community as a consequence of my actions?*

The neverending nature of bricolage (Steinberg, 2006, 2012) means that my critical analyses unearth more sources of evidence as I continue to make connections, reflect on the stories of others, rethink personal experiences, receive

feedback from community members, and make new discoveries. Whilst sometimes repetitive, this feedback looping – or Butterfly Effect (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) – allows me to continually re-mine evidence in order to obtain deeper and deeper levels of clarification and understanding. It is not only consistent with the principles of bricolage, but also the mining metaphor I have been using throughout my study.

Illuminating Ideological Gender Productions and Reproductions

The first of the three research questions shaping this study focused on locating, exploring, and problematising how a rural Australian community's gender performances are being ideologically produced and reproduced through its texts, social structures, and discursive practices. In addressing this question I explored and analysed newspaper texts, electronic communications, and school reports. I took field notes and made observations. I also conducted a number of reflexive dyadic interviews (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) with both current and past community members. Not only did these interviews permit me to deepen understandings of how gender was being constituted and performed in Wheatville; they also worked to provide spaces for interviewees to genuinely question and rethink local gender beliefs and practices.

I now recognise that in my earliest interviews, when wearing my critical ethnographer's hat, I was guilty of a certain level of procedural arrogance. I went into these interviews with a list of questions from which I drew anticipating the evidence I would retrieve. In my haste to obtain the anticipated data, I sometimes missed opportunities or shut down conversations that could have led to more insightful interpretations and discoveries. Over time I grew to understand what Kincheloe and Berry (2004) mean when they state that "interpretation is a productive, not a reproductive activity" (p. 95) and "if a hermeneutic method were to be proceduralised, our interpretations would become increasingly disconnected from the lived world" (p. 97). By the time I conducted the later interviews, my interviewing style – and my approach to the research in general – had become much more spontaneous; my thinking much more tangential. Consequently, I regard the evidence I generated and collected as more insightful and illuminatory.

An evolving criticality

In my interview with Katrina (see Chapter 6) and a follow-up conversation I had with her later (Feedback session, June 19, 2010), evidence of her rethinking can be found. During the interview Katrina told me of her concerns over an alcohol related incident involving her 16 year old son and some of his friends. The interview gave Katrina the space she needed to process her feelings, make conscious the subconscious, and develop critical understandings. It also helped her to position herself in relation to some of Wheatville's taken-for-granted gender beliefs and practices. Her use of hedging in the following extract gives evidence of Katrina's evolving criticality:

I was trying to establish for myself why he thought it was funny [to get drunk]. I think part of it is trying to continue this tradition that they think is funny or masculine or moving toward being what is considered an adult male or if it could be just boys that are testing the boundaries. (Katrina, see Chapter 6)

Whilst this rethinking and re-seeing process illuminated for Katrina her powerlessness against the forces of hegemonic masculinity and was therefore confronting for her, it also deepened her understandings of how these forces were sustained and reproduced in her community:

It was encouraged and it made me sick It scares me that it's almost expected of them to behave like that and it's so acceptable what upset me was that he had taken in this male culture by osmosis and there was not a thing I could do about it. And it's as if the men are taught one way to behave and it's like wearing a suit. If that suit falls off, you've got nothing else to wear. It limits who they are and how they behave and it really frightens me. It's just not a healthy way to develop as a male. That's what alarmed me. He was going down this path into this rum drinking feral and I couldn't do anything to halt it because the people that mattered to him were cheering him on. The adult men. You know, to get peer male cheering. It's a tribal thing. (Katrina, see Chapter 6)

In this extract Katrina illuminated how a hidden cultural curriculum promoting alcohol consumption and high risk behaviour for its boys was being constituted and policed by older males. Using a suit metaphor she detailed the insidious pressure placed on teenage boys as they are encouraged into the world of hegemonic masculinity.

A few weeks later, when I returned the transcript of this interview to Katrina for editing I fully expected her to alter or withdraw some of her comments as she had been quite emotional on the day of the interview. Admittedly, she did waver. However, she decided to leave her interview intact saying,

You know Sherilyn, that's exactly how it is out here. I still stand by everything I said. If we aren't brave enough to call it then we can never move forward. We need to be having these conversations with each other and as a community. No. You know what? Forget about the changes I just asked for and leave it [the transcript] as is. There's no point watering this down. Things have been left unsaid for too long in this community and it doesn't help anyone. You've got the ball rolling; let's keep it rolling. (Katrina, Feedback session, June 19, 2010)

Kenway and Fitzclarence (2005) might concur with Katrina's thinking. They argue that abusive behaviours need to be explicitly confronted in order to prevent them from becoming generationally ongoing. Documenting them, problematising them, and challenging them are the first steps in this process.

Back to school: Ideologies and practices that shape boys

Not all of Wheatville's boys perpetuated discursive constructions of masculinity that promoted high risk behaviours. Some boys resisted these limiting hypermasculine ideals and, as a consequence, often found themselves marginalised at school. Throughout the course of my study I heard stories of young boys being coerced and/or bullied because they were perceived by others as bookish, or feminine, or because they did not play football (see Chapter 6). These stories made me question the roles of teachers and schools in re-inscribing or challenging hypermasculine discourses and hegemonic masculinity. Whilst I found evidence to suggest that some teachers were using gender justice approaches to interrupt limiting gender binaries, there was also evidence to suggest that some teacher and school practices were – sometimes unintentionally – sustaining and/or perpetuating limiting gender constructions.

One of the more disturbing examples I encountered of a teacher reproducing and broadcasting toxic gender messages occurred one night in August, 2010 (see Chapter 7). On that night an ex-Wheatville teacher, and former representative rugby player, informed me that he had been the creative engineer behind a well-

known local logo perpetuating a phallogentric discourse of white male entitlement (see Figure 4.4, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7). The same teacher also admitted to instructing a 15 year old boy from his English class to draw the logo. Whilst I felt confident that the teacher's attitudes and practices were not typical of the teaching profession, the encounter did seem to affirm the role of teachers in perpetuating limiting gender binaries. Other evidence I collected re-inforced this thinking. For example, sexist jokes were regularly emailed to all staff at the local high school from an experienced female colleague in her mid 30s (see Chapter 6).

In contrast, a female teacher working at a local Wheatville primary school prevented a male student from delivering a sexist joke relegating women's roles to those of domestic servitude (see Chapter 6). This simple preventative act functioned as a circuit breaker – or challenge – to humorous discourses that perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and gender inequities. This teacher drew on gender justice frameworks and, most likely without even realising it, Giroux's theory of resistance (2001) to prevent the student broadcasting a joke that trivialised women and their culturally constituted roles. In doing so, she interrupted the limiting gender ideologies being reproduced by the joke.

Jokes relegating women's roles to those of domestic servitude or, as in the case of the logo, being sexually dominated help to cement hegemonic masculinity, trivialise or objectify females, and oxygenate all male worlds (Kotthoff, 2006). Unfortunately, students' abilities to critically reflect on, and rethink, these discursive constructions of gender are largely encumbered by parental – and sometimes teacher – endorsement of them. Still, it is reassuring to know that some who teach do capitalise on classroom opportunities to disrupt the status quo.

A retired high school teacher, Elizabeth, reflected on the possible long-term implications for Wheatville's male students of adopting narrow constructions of masculinity that endorsed a devaluing of school:

There's a couple (of boys) I know who left before graduating and did apprenticeships and I hear that they're successful. They have this house and that house and a car and a boat. But I know there is something more intellectually that they have and I'm wondering what happens if they don't get to realise it later. (Elizabeth, see Chapter 6)

She went on to tell me the story of her own son – a man now in his early 30s and a successful artist and singer – who felt obliged to play football and study Science and Maths at school “because he didn’t show any inclination towards art all through secondary school. This was something that happened when he got older, his interest in the arts.” Whilst Elizabeth seemed comfortable in her belief that her son’s interest in the arts emerged later in life – as opposed to having his creativity suppressed in his schooling years – she did acknowledge that he played football “unhappily” and later regretted abstaining from singing lessons at his private boys’ boarding school as a result of peer group pressure.

This same theme of creative suppression was also apparent in my interview with Mark, a past student of mine who attended the local high school. Viewing his high school days retrospectively he claimed, “It was just stupid” (Mark, see Chapter 6) that he had pursued a Maths/Science agenda at school instead of a Social Sciences/Arts one. Mark went on to elaborate using metaphors such as “social camouflage” and the wearing of a mask to describe how he had deceived himself and others in his pursuit of the Sciences – first at high school and later in his career. In acquiescing to, what he saw as, the dominant social order’s ideals of masculinity, he spent 15 years of his life employed in a field that he found unfulfilling. Even more tragic was his story, as a young teen, of burning all of his childhood writings. This act represented a symbolic letting go of that part of his identity that he felt was being outlawed in a community valorising an exaggerated form of masculinity for its boys.

Mark’s story had a profound effect on me. I had never seriously considered the long-term impact on adolescent and adult males of the unrelenting forces of hegemonic masculinity. The boys I had noticed, respected, and felt for at school had been those who had pursued the Arts, Social Sciences, or academia and, in so doing, openly defied gender norms constructing them as football players and poor students. The price these boys paid for transgressing gender normativity was often exclusion and sometimes physical violence (Francis & Skelton, 2008):

Well he had the crap beaten out of him after school one day by one of the more macho types because he just didn’t like him because he [Oliver] was not the Mr Macho, Mr Poor

[academically] Performing guy. So the more macho types would have a real thing against those sorts of people and, I don't know, just sort of try and pound them and sometimes literally. (Mark, see Chapter 6)

Mark, whilst intelligent, had always seemed to me to be much more accepted by his peers at school. I did not realise at the time the price he was paying – and continued to pay – for such acceptance.

Ideologies and practices that shape girls

Whilst some of the evidence presented in this study demonstrated how males are regulated and oppressed in Wheatville, other evidence revealed how the lives of females are affected. Angela, a professional and divorced mother of three, spoke of her married life to a Wheatville farmer and her disappointment when she realised that, for some males in this community, “the important women in your life are not your primary concern and mates and work come first, women come in second” (Angela, see Chapter 6). She rationalised local women's acceptance of this hierarchical arrangement as being:

How you fit in. How you mould yourself into that person you're supposed to be How you can fit in whether you like it or not. It's a form of being accepted. (Angela, see Chapter 6)

Angela then reflected on why her own marriage had failed:

I think it was me disputing that fact so constantly that lost me my favour in my marriage because I was getting beyond accepting it and was making demands.

Whilst Angela was in a place to be looking back critically at her prior life, I found her terminology intriguing. The concept of losing someone's favour and another statement she made later regarding her new partner's beliefs about how to treat a woman – “If I have a woman I want to be with her. I want to look after her. I want to make sure no-one else takes her” – inferred to me that, despite Angela's evolving criticality, she still viewed women in roles as dependent on male approval and/or as possessions.

Angela's discovery later in life of, “the person that you used to be I used to travel a lot and I travelled adventurously,” echoed Mark's rediscovery of himself during his personality-typing course: “And I started thinking and remembering back to, ‘Hey, I used to write. I used to draw. I used to, you know, do all these things’”

(Mark, see Chapter 6). Both of these statements reiterate the cost to individuals of the dominant culture overwriting them. Both Angela and Mark reshaped themselves in order to conform to the dominant culture's gender expectations of them and gain broader community acceptance. In the process they lost a part of themselves. The poststructuralist concept of the fluid self capable of multiple reconstitutions (Davies, 2005) is an integral theoretical component of this study. Unfortunately, our making and remaking is not always governed by emancipatory acts of re-invention. At times it is more accurate to describe this process as our unmaking (Davies, 2005) or *anti-liberation*. This was certainly the case for many of the Wheatville females described by Andrea – a non-teaching professional who made regular visits to the community – and for Mary – the victim of a sexual assault (see Chapter 6).

Sexual exploitation of, and violence against some females, would appear to be condoned by both males and females in Wheatville – particularly if the female in question is considered overly promiscuous. Andrea, a non-teaching professional, claimed that the attitude seems to be “she does get around a bit. She’s had a few boyfriends. She probably deserved it” (see Chapter 6). Keddie and Mills (2007) claim that sexual harassment normalises certain versions of masculinity and femininity leading to an association of femininity “with vulnerability, sexual objectification and passivity” and masculinity “with predatory behaviours, power over girls and women, and sexual desire” (p. 34). Their understandings are reflected in Mary’s story.

Mary had been the victim of a break and enter followed by an attempted sexual assault at about the same time that the logo was first used. Whilst she initially had the courage to fight off her attacker, Mary had balked at the prospect of pressing charges against him. Her reasoning was:

Because he was [from] such a well to do family in town in such a small society it would have been hard for me to take it through the courts because of my [lengthy pause] accounting in town. I was known as a bit of a party girl. (Mary, see Chapter 6)

Mary believed that her past behaviour had constituted her as “fair game” for her attacker. She also believed that her attacker’s status in the community would have

made pressing charges against him extremely difficult. Her story reveals all too clearly the psychological and physical dangers of allowing a class driven version of hypermasculinity to reign unchecked. The power differentials and potential for harm evident in situations such as hers are obvious and intolerable. They need to be challenged at a whole of community level.

Qualitative data and quantitative evidence presented in this study excavated multiple instances of male performance in Wheatville being constituted as risk taking, resisting schooling, powerful, financially successful and controlling, physically and sexually dominating, and the eschewing of all things female. Similarly, they excavated instances of female performances being constituted as subservient, powerless, nurturing, decorative, objectified, and successful at school. The diversity and complexity of difficulties faced by males and females in a culture where sex and gender are conflated in these ways can be overwhelming. At its worst the conflation of sex and gender can lead to the vilification of those who would resist these limiting gender constructions. As evidenced in this study, misogyny, homophobia, femiphobia, predation of females, and physical and verbal bullying are likely by-products of such worlds. It is essential that educators problematise limiting gender binaries and explore alternatives to them so that these harmful ideologies, and their manifestations into practice, can be interrupted. A failure to do so diminishes our students' and our own lives.

Unsettling and Transforming

The second of the research questions guiding this study focused on unsettling phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement within and across the community of Wheatville. My activist intention was to ignite instances of transformative thinking and action around issues of gender. Whilst this component of the inquiry process explicitly set out to disrupt and dislocate community gender norms, the interviews I conducted were also responsible for creating spaces for transformative thinking to occur.

An instance of transformative thinking

One of these moments occurred during an interview I had with Elizabeth – a retired teacher in her early 60s. Elizabeth had seen me present at staff meetings

and knew of my feminist leanings. During our interview she had been choosing her words very carefully and seemed determined to present Wheatville as a socially just community where males and females are given equal opportunities: “I haven’t really seen any blatant examples of women not being valued in our community” (Elizabeth, see Chapter 6). However, as the interview progressed, she began to extrapolate on her claims by citing examples of local women who had been devalued after attaining positions of civic leadership within the community.

It’s typical of the men. They think that, you know, when we have staff meetings, that the women want to talk about an issue and discuss it and come to a conclusion as a group, whereas a man feels like it is his job to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or ‘this is right or wrong.’” (Elizabeth, see Chapter 6)

This statement draws on a different discourse: one that uses a gender binary to make explicit relations of power. In the process of rethinking her position, Elizabeth eventually proclaimed, “So I’ve contradicted myself haven’t I?”

Elizabeth recounted instances of female councillors being told by their male counterparts “don’t be emotional” and informed me that at a local government level it was expected for the women to look after the arts whilst the men decided “where the money goes.” This attitude creates a binary in which men are viewed as emotionally neutral, rational, and in control and women are allocated the characteristics of being overly emotional, irrational, and financially irresponsible (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2005). Elizabeth finished the interview in a very different mindset from the way she had begun it confirming the capacity dialogic discussions have for germinating instances of transformative thinking. Whilst not all instances of transformative thinking were as overt or immediate as Elizabeth’s, there were a number of times during – and after – interviews when participants admitted to having been made to rethink the legitimacy of particular gender beliefs and practices that had become naturalised in the community.

Becoming a social activist and beginning to unsettle

One of my first experiences of critical agitating came in the form of a series of conversations with, and emails to, the local newspaper editor (see Chapter 7). The resulting dialogue with the editor made me reconfigure the activist component of

this study. (Initially I had intended offering a series of workshops.) With the editor's encouragement I wrote a letter that was published in the local newspaper. My letter challenged what I considered to be a particularly disturbing representation of gender being used by a local logo to advertise an upcoming social event (see Figure 4.4). The logo's use of humour worked to degrade and objectify females. Humour used in this way can forge powerful gender binaries which both privilege and oppress. The interviews I conducted were helpful in illuminating for me how this subversive brand of humour operates in communities to control, marginalise, and/or oppress those who do not belong to the "exclusive group knowledge" (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 7) or dominant social order. As my research progressed, I began to understand how fundamental the sexist humour being used by the logo was in contributing to a discourse normalising and perpetuating hegemonic masculinity. Mary's story of being the victim of predation and sexual assault (see Chapter 6) re-inforced for me the dangers of allowing these limiting gender representations to go unchecked.

Whilst I personally was never the victim of a physical assault, there were times throughout the course of my research when I felt intimidated and/or uneasy as a result of my activist work (see Chapter 7). In each instance males who were, or had been, affiliated with the local rugby club were involved. Ideological practices founded in hegemonic masculinity and hypermasculinity have the potential to manifest as violence against males and females who do not conform to the dominant social order's ideals. They can fuel versions of reality that consign machismo, power over others, and the subjugation, domination, or devaluing of the feminine to appropriate behaviour for males. Quite simply, in the interests of human flourishing, they cannot be tolerated and must be challenged.

Just as this research seeks to resist and challenge limiting gender ideologies and discourses, the cartoon image being used by the logo was designed to resist and challenge what constitutes appropriate gender representations for a public forum. Sometimes theories of resistance overlook that not all expressions of opposition are founded in powerlessness (Giroux, 2001): some may in fact be an expression of power as I believe to have been the case here.

Using an only joking motif to legitimise and perpetuate phallogocentric discourses of white male entitlement, the image had always irritated me. However, at the time of writing my letter (in February 2010) I believed – somewhat naively – that, as I was critiquing a cartoon image, my comments would not be interpreted as a condemnation of the gender beliefs and practices of any particular groups or individuals within the community. I was not prepared for the community's response. At the time I had not read Kotthoff (2006). If I had, I might have understood more fully the implications of what it was I was challenging. Kotthoff writes of humour being used in public forums as a way of affirming social dominance over others and "high situational status" (p. 11). She posits that "[s]ome contemporary studies ... show that those highest in the hierarchy more often take the liberty to indulge in certain forms of humor at the expense of those below them" (p. 11). It did not take me long to realise that my words had upset certain members of the dominant social order.

Uncomfortable places and lessons in subjugation

One of the earliest responses I received to my act of political intervention came from Mr Burr. It was left on my message bank within days of my first letter being published and before the publication of his response to it. His message inferred that, whilst Mr Burr might publically disagree with my interpretation of the logo, in the confines of his own home perhaps not all were aligned with his thinking: "Your letter has certainly generated a lot of debate in this household" (see Chapter 7, field notes for February 14, 2010). These comments confirmed for me that the unsettling I had begun with my original letter had created uncomfortable places for many – in both our public and private lives. Mr Burr's message, and his published letter (see Chapter 7, field notes for February 17, 2010), expressed an oppositional ideology to my own; however, there were those within the community who supported my stance.

Some of the more insightful sources of evidence I collected came from the many unplanned face-to-face and online exchanges I had with members of the local community. These, often serendipitous, encounters illuminated for me that there were multiple ways of thinking about gender representations and multiple ways of

interpreting the logo. They also illuminated for me how the dominant social order operates to subvert those who would resist.

The brevity and clandestine nature of some of the conversations I had quite possibly reflected the fear that some community members felt at appearing to collude with a challenger to the rights of the dominant social order. Supportive comments often took the form of a very private, quick, or whispered conversation: “Well I just wanted to say that I reckon this district needs more women like you. That’s all I wanted to say” (see Chapter 7, field notes for May 11, 2010). In conceptualising fear, Shor and Freire (2003) argue that:

Fear is a sign that you are doing your transformational work well. It means that you are making critical opposition, engaging the status quo in a contention for social change. Your dream is entering reality, contending in history, and provoking unavoidable reaction and risk. (p. 482)

This thinking helps to explain my own fear at times as a result of the hostility I invoked from some members – past and present – of the local rugby club (see Chapter 7). It also helps to explain why so many of the conversations that took place throughout the period of my study were of a covert nature.

One of these covert conversations occurred one afternoon with a local bus driver. During the course of the conversation the female bus driver recounted an incident she – and members of the local rugby club – had been party to some years earlier:

I would have to drive them home after their away games and the way they talked to me – and about women generally – well it was really disrespectful and disgusting. In the end I refused to work for them anymore. I rang their President up and told him that he could drive the bus himself in future because I wouldn’t be. I didn’t want to have to put up with their rubbish anymore. They made me feel really dirty and low. (see Chapter 7, field notes for February 21, 2010)

This exchange illuminates how asymmetries of power – discursively produced and reproduced through community discourses – are able to manifest as practices that marginalise some whilst authorising others. In discursively and ideologically representing the world from the perspective of male sexual dominance the reality that is created as an effect (Fairclough, 1995) puts some community members in

very uncomfortable positions. This conversation gave evidence of hegemonic masculinity manifesting as practice to subordinate and degrade others. It also helped me to understand which social group had the most to lose from my questioning of the gender representations being discursively reproduced by the logo.

A significant number of community members with connections to the local rugby club had publically and/or privately challenged my public questioning of the B&S logo (see Chapter 7). Keddie and Mills (2007, 2008) claim that there are links between football and misogynistic and homophobic harassment. Epstein (2005) argues that “the misogyny and generally offensive sexist behaviour of groups of men in rugby clubs is legendary” (p. 259). Her use of the term “legendary” refers to the stories and myths of players’ sexual conquests that often proliferate in these all-male institutions. Epstein goes further, linking misogyny and homophobia together and arguing that they both work to normalise and perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. In publically challenging a discourse of white male entitlement, I had unwittingly challenged the rights of those who police and perpetuate it.

In hindsight, the reaction I received was inevitable. I had been responsible for naming and renaming the dominant social order’s gender beliefs and practices: beliefs and practices that were steeped in ideologies of white male entitlement and female subjugation. By publically re-interpreting and problematising the logo and suggesting that it was perpetuating gender messages promoting violence against – and the oppression of – women, I was responsible for igniting political unrest that manifested as acts of resistance and hostility towards me, across the community, and beyond (see Chapter 7). Kincheloe and Berry (2004) claim that “forces of domination will often reject ... power-literate insights, as such awarenesses undermine the unchallenged knowledge assertions of power wielders” (p. 12). Freire (2000a), who was exiled from his homeland for his “power-literate insights” claims that:

If we go far beyond the bounds of what is acceptable, we provoke the natural reaction from our environment which we have ... invaded. And when we invade territory which is not our own, we are punished. You are constantly learning. (p. 205)

Unbeknowns to me, I had trespassed on to fiercely protected cultural terrain and was about to absorb the full impact of my punishment for this public border crossing (Giroux, 1992). I had selected – and then publically challenged – a revered cultural symbol reifying ideals founded in hypermasculinity, white male entitlement, and phallocentrism. This propitious act laid:

The groundwork for a critical encounter between oneself and the dominant society, to acknowledge what this society has made of us and decide whether that is what we truly want to be. (Giroux, 2001, p. 149)

The first clues I had to the extent of the disruption that my letter had caused came exactly a week after its publication with the response from Mr Burr and then on the eighth day after my letter's publication in an email I received from Malcolm McDougal. In both instances, these men used humour and/or sexual innuendo to mitigate their words and dismiss the cartoon as "just good clean fun" (Burr, 2010, p.6). Between fanciful interpretations of "Eddie" (the male cartoon figure) rescuing "Emma" (the female cartoon figure) from drugrunners and afterwards celebrating with an energy drink, Mr Burr manages to call my interpretation of the logo "alarmist" and "nihilistic" (p. 6). His assertion that my "dim view" of the B&S suggests "some unpleasant past experience" (p. 6) and the associated implication that I have been physically and/or sexually assaulted, seeks to diminish my standing and voice within the community. By positioning me as a possible victim, Mr Burr implies that my opinions are somehow irrational or less worthy. This inference draws on a phallocentric discourse of feminine subjugation. Mr Burr's choice of the singular third person pronoun "she" in reference to me, and plural first person pronoun "our" in reference to the collective community he appears to be representing, work to position me as a lone outsider in a community united against me. As Sonya later observed, "I felt he was trying to probably bully you into silence" (see Chapter 7, field notes for June 3, 2010).

Throughout his attack on my interpretation – and reputation – the modality of his letter keeps up a jocular front. I believe that this was his way of trivialising my words whilst asserting his power. Kotthoff (2006) claims that, "while it is typically considered impolite in most societies to humiliate others, humorous, indirect

attacks are subtle ways of circumventing social rules of courtesy and much harder to respond to” (p. 13). Fortunately by now others had joined the public debate and there was no need for me to respond personally to Mr Burr’s accusations, interpretations, or inferences.

Malcolm McDougal’s email response to my letter uses a distinctly salacious tone. In dismissing the discursive dangers implicit in the logo, McDougal states, “Never in my wildest dreams (and I do have some of those!!) had I thought that the prostrate female had that ‘just raped’ look about her” (see Chapter 7, field notes for Thursday February 18, 2010). Later he describes his interpretation as being that the male emu has:

Obviously delivered his part of the deal and is now disappointed that she has not reciprocated. His look says to me ‘get up, bitch’ which under the circumstances I don’t believe is too harsh at all!!” (see Chapter 7, personal email February 18, 2010)

His final lines return to a more courteous formality in which he claims to be “pleased” that I had published my letter “as it has made me, and probably many others, realise that there are often different ways to interpret images.” Whilst I must agree with this statement, I find the tone of his next line menacing: “I hope it has also helped you to make that realisation.” It can be difficult to deduce from a written document the tonal authority and/or intentions of the author; however, I experienced this line as patronising, paternalistic, and somewhat threatening. The comfortability with which Malcolm McDougal is able to express his misogynist views was, in many ways, more troubling than Mr Burr’s public condemnation of my feminist ones. McDougal’s response, perhaps unwittingly, perpetuates a discourse of white male entitlement and female subjugation. However, of even more concern, is his position of authority within the community and his subsequent influence over others.

“Come on love. Lighten up”: Discourses of dismissal and complicity

Just as oppressors sometimes do not know they are oppressors, the oppressed sometimes do not have a deep understanding of how their actions are working to support their own domination (Freire, 2000b). Evidence collected throughout the course of this study indicates that the oppressed will sometimes

actively seek to thwart a challenge to those inequitable practices which diminish their lives. By valorising the beliefs and practices of their oppressors, some Wheatville females actively work to continue their own subjugation (see Chapter 7). Their reward for this comes in the form of approval from the dominant social order and inclusion within its inner sanctum. Such behaviour has the effect of policing or fortifying ideological hegemony and reinforcing the power-base of the dominant social order. Activist dialogues that disclose and dislocate ideological hegemony and its associated power inequities can work to transcend these self-sabotaging and blindly loyal practices. Whilst Giroux (2001) relates this concept back to the classroom, it could easily be applied at a broader community level:

It is important that students come to grips with what a given society has made of them, how it has incorporated them ideologically and materially into its rules and logic, and what it is that they need to affirm and reject in their own histories in order to begin the process of struggling for the conditions that will give them opportunities to lead a self-managed existence. (p. 38)

What I noticed about many of the written responses I received to my letter was the *lighten up* message embedded in them. Attempts were made to trivialise my questioning of the logo as representative of someone who cannot take a joke, is deliberately stirring up trouble for the sake of it, is pandering to political correctness, or has lost touch with their sense of humour and today's youth (see Chapter 7). In one instance a blogger alludes to my gendered identity by using the word "love." Opening with a rhetorical question she discursively attempts to ridicule and dismiss my interpretation by parallelling it to a radical interpretation of the McDonald's emblem. I interpreted the tone of her entry as patronising:

Sherilyn, are you also suggesting the big M of the McDonalds' logo looks like a set of women's breasts? Come on love. Lighten up. Let's not make issues out of this. In fact, let's save our energy for something that needs it. (see Chapter 7, field notes for March 10, 2010)

Interestingly, if bloggers' pen names are indicative of their genders, the online responses resisting and dismissing my interpretations of the logo are both written by females. This aligns with my belief that some of Wheatville's women are complicit in policing their own subjugation.

In one memorable, full-page response published by a young female journalist writing for the local newspaper, the logo is described as “iconic, a harmless representation and a good old-fashioned laugh” (see Chapter 7, field notes for April 15, 2010). The journalist goes on to issue a challenge to those who would publically resist this interpretation:

And to those who dare challenge changing the logo, I put this question to them: Do they also dare to come face to face with some of the girls who frequent the Wheatville Plucked Duck B&S?

She goes further with:

Let me assure you that ‘socially acceptable behavior’ goes right out the window for some ‘bush birds’ at the B&S. The ladies have learnt how to ruffle their feathers in public too. And they aren’t afraid to squawk.

Her implication appears to be that Wheatville’s local females are just as sexually aggressive, predatory, and promiscuous as are its males.

As females attempt to claim higher social status by reflecting or duplicating bawdy masculine behaviour in public places, they become complicit in their own sexual exploitation and degradation (Keddie & Mills, 2007). Evidence of this can be found in Tom’s story:

One of the young women at the B&S was having sex with multiple partners and the boys were actually tag teaming – there were about 10 boys who had sex with one girl in the back of the utility. (see Chapter 7, interview March 16, 2010)

Tom, a businessman in his 40s, is unsettled by the easy acceptance young female employees at his workplace exhibit to another female’s participation in a public sex act with multiple male partners: “They told me of an incident that occurred at the B&S which amazed me – you know – their reaction.” Stories like Tom’s give evidence of women in Wheatville colluding with males to perpetuate practices steeped in phallocentrism. These practices use the phallus to reproduce masculine hegemony and female subjugation.

Providing alternatives

Just as it was important to seek out alternatives to masculine hegemony when I was deepening understandings of how gender is discursively constructed in Wheatville, it was also important to provide alternatives to hypermasculine

discourses and gender representations when I was pursuing the activist component of my study. I understood that the letter had gained mythical status when I received reports that some past and present community members affiliated with the rugby club were digitally sharing, commenting on, and condemning the letter for views being attributed to it (see Chapter 7). In some instances those condemning the letter's views had not read it. I found this frustrating. It concerned me that the intent of my original letter was being diverted to become a debate about the merits of a particular social event or football club. I tried to analyse, "Whose interests are being served by perverting the ideas expressed in my letter?" and, "Is this being done deliberately or does my original letter leave itself open to these alternative readings?"

This thinking led me to write another letter in which I provided an alternative to the original logo (see Chapter 7). I did this in order to visually and linguistically restate my concerns with its gender representations. Whilst, at the time, I convinced myself that the primary motive for writing this second letter was to clarify my position and move community thinking forward on the debate, upon reflection the letter was also a defensive reaction to what I felt was a growing public backlash against me.

Making the invisible visible and building collective agency

I realised I was having an impact on members of the community when I read, and heard, comments such as, "To be honest I'd never noticed it until Sherilyn pointed it out" and "Your article was the first time I had been made to notice the logo" (see Chapter 7; field notes for February 24, 2010). Giroux (2001) claims that one of the major tasks of critical theorists is to "disclose and challenge" (p. 186). I had set out to make an invisible artefact of power and culture visible (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) and comments like these confirmed that I was indeed doing so.

Despite the irritation and unsettling caused by my public challenging of the logo, I found succour in the knowledge that there were many in the community who now saw the logo differently. Dialogic spaces questioning gender norms opened up within and across the community. These took the form of letters, newspaper articles, blogs, debates, whispered conversations, and, occasionally, manifested into

resistant or emancipatory acts (see Chapter 7). The \$500 public offer for a new B&S logo made by one farming family and the withdrawal of funds from a local organisation because of its use of sexist humour confirmed for me that the disruption process I had begun had indeed gathered collective agency within and across the community. It is impossible to document, or be certain of, every instance of unsettling, rethinking, or transformative action that has, and will, result from this study, but I am confident that it has, and is, occurring. I am also confident that the logo and its phallogentric messages no longer repose innocently and invisibly in the cultural landscape that is Wheatville. Tom, a local Wheatville businessman and interview participant, articulates why it is vital for communities' futures that they have people who are willing to challenge and unsettle the status quo:

I think it's great that we raise these issues in a community. A community needs to think about these sorts of issues and unless you've got people brave enough to raise them then it's never part of the debate. I think sometimes we need to reflect on our values and the things that we do in a community and for that reason I think it's important that these various issues are raised. (see Chapter 7)

Positioning Others and Being Positioned by Others

It has taken me numerous planned and incidental encounters with others and extensive reading to arrive at these conclusions and demystify why the letter provoked such controversy within, across, and at times beyond the community, and why it is still so topical more than two years after its publication. I know I will be permanently positioned by many in the community as "the woman who upset the district by challenging our logo." I have been introduced by friends of mine to newcomers in the district using almost this exact phrase. Immediately I was met with, "Oh, was that you? I read all about that. How fascinating. You were so brave" (Field notes for October 2, 2010).

I have also had to peel numerous stickers depicting the logo off my car and mail box. The stickers were placed there, more than likely, as a joke by someone protesting my public stance. Conflicting comments and actions such as these – and others related in Chapter 7 – are signals that the radical and public pedagogy

approaches I adapted and adopted provoked a community discourse around gender that was unsettling for some and transformed thinking and actions for others. Gender beliefs and practices that were once invisible have been made visible; others in the community are rethinking their views of the world; and I will forever be positioned by some in Wheatville as a “radical feminist.”

Repositioning myself along a power continuum

Despite being positioned in this way, I am also viewed by many as a professional female, a partner in a farming enterprise, and white. There are some in my community who would read these identity markers as assignations of power that give me material and social privilege over others. Quite possibly these perceptions deterred some in the community from approaching me to discuss local gender issues, made others uncomfortable when they did, and mobilised some to challenge and suppress me. Whilst enacting my role as a public pedagogue and social activist I was positioned along a continuum from powerful to powerless. I felt variously confident, directed, supported, encouraged, uncertain, subordinated, oppressed, and marginalised. Moore (2003) helps me to understand this erratic positioning within the community:

While women are “free” to choose to resist, this freedom is not embedded in a ‘no-consequence, no-risk’ context. That is, there are material consequences for those who step out of line in an environment dominated by powerful phallogentric discourses. (p. 63)

In September 2011 I was asked to give a lecture to a Year 10 English class at the local high school. The teacher wanted me to present a case to her students for the need to be critically and culturally literate. Throughout this lecture I made use of evidence I had collected for my study. Unexpectedly, at the end of the lecture, I received a spontaneous round of applause from the class. The next day the class teacher rang me at home to tell me that members of the class – particularly the female students – had told her afterwards that they considered me to be “a very powerful woman” (Field notes for September 14, 2011). This perception surprised me but it also helped me to rationalise why so many in the community were unsettled by my public irritating of local gender representations. Not only was I an

insider but, perhaps, to some I was also perceived as a powerful – and therefore more influential – insider.

There is often a yawning gulf between how we perceive ourselves and how we are perceived by others. Perceptions of power are just that – perceptions. However, they can “mediate how an individual or group relates to the wider society” (Giroux, 2001, p. 171). It is impossible to be certain of how I was – and am – perceived by others but my roles as a long term member of the community, local professional, and farmer’s wife may have helped establish me in the eyes of some as a powerful and/or influential local female. This would further explain why my activist work was so threatening to some.

To continue or not to continue

One of the things that surprised me most about my research was how often I was – and continue to be – approached by community members who position me as an “expert” on boys’ education and gender issues. In one instance a fourth year education student and Wheatville resident approached me “after the three hundred and thirty-ninth person told me I must speak to you about this topic” (Field notes for October 4, 2011). Even more recently a local businesswomen’s association approached me to speak at their annual breakfast on my area of passion (Field notes for April 28, 2012). These conversations and requests are reassuring, illuminating, and humbling. Whilst some community members have positioned me as an expert, others have not and, occasionally, I have felt threatened or oppressed by the ways in which I have been positioned. During these darker moments I have found myself questioning the ethics of what I am doing and my capacity for continuing (see Chapters 7 and 9).

I now realise the importance of my trips to a regional university where I was enrolled in my doctoral studies. These trips to *the outside* provided a momentary refuge from the intensity of feelings being unleashed across the community as a result of the unsettling and transforming process I had begun. In order to ensure its own survival, members of the dominant social order had subversively and discursively isolated me. This positioning worked to erode my confidence. In

contrast, my university colleagues were always supportive and interested in my activist journey. They functioned as my external support system when my emotional resilience wavered. A supportive comment from an unexpected source, or a trip to the university and an opportunity to share my experiences with fellow students and academics in a sympathetic forum external to the study site, were key to giving me the strength to continue with my insider activist work. Dialogic exchanges with like-minded others rejuvenated me and vindicated for me the importance of what it was I was doing.

It is only now when I re-see and reflect that I recognise how crucial these supportive comments and systems were to the continuation of my journey. If I had not had access to them, I believe I would have capitulated to the forces of hegemonic masculinity and given up on the study that I had begun so enthusiastically 18 months earlier. My interaction with my university colleagues and likeminded others gave me a space to regroup and replenish. This gave me the courage to continue. Freire (in Shor & Freire, 2003) captures the difficulties and levels of determination needed by social activists when he writes:

You just know that in that moment it is impossible to walk one kilometre. So, you walk 800 meters! And you wait for tomorrow to walk more, when another 200 meters can be walked. Of course, one of the serious questions is how to learn the *position* where the limit is. You don't find that in books! With whom do you learn how to establish limits? You learn by practicing it. You learn by experiencing. You learn by being punished! (pp. 482-483)

About mid-way through my doctoral studies I began to realise the value of documenting this punishment. Giroux recommends linking "the personal and the political so as to understand how power is reproduced, mediated, and resisted at the level of daily existence" (Giroux, 2001, p. 238). In documenting my emotionally reflexive journey I have been able to deepen understandings of the myriad incremental ways in which hegemonic masculinity operates to fuel power imbalances that menace, silence, and oppress those who would resist.

A Conclusion

This chapter provided a macro-analysis of the multiple sources of evidence gathered and generated by the study and in so doing addressed the study's three research questions. The chapter made explicit, and problematised, the complexity of interconnected and contradictory gender discourses and ideologies embedded in the texts, institutions, and public and private stories of a rural Australian community. It also critiqued the effectiveness of moving beyond the school gates to disclose and unsettle phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement. Evidence suggests that the approach used by the study is capable of generating collective communal agency, transforming thinking and action, and, ultimately, empowering individuals to advocate for change. The final section of Chapter 8 focused on the research journey itself – particularly my positioning of others and by others in the community as a result of my insider activist work. Chapter 9, the last chapter of this dissertation, focuses on the epistemological and ontological contributions the study can make to emerging research designs and nascent activist pedagogies.

Chapter 9

Blurring Boundaries, Reconceptualising Research, and Self Discoveries

An Introduction

Chapter 8 provided a macro-analysis of the multiple sources of evidence collected and generated by this study. In doing so it demonstrated how the study has been able to address the three supporting research questions. This chapter, the final chapter, addresses the overarching research question: *What can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender?* It blurs the boundaries between critically reflecting on my personal journey and trying to understand the contribution of this research to the field. Such a balancing act is complicated.

The chapter elucidates who I am at the end-point of my doctoral studies, how I have been able to impact on others, and what I can contribute to ‘post’ postmodern research designs as a result of my journey. In making explicit the epistemological and ontological contributions of the research, I give a brief overview of the study, revisit the previous chapters, and explore how my learnings can be used by others to construct and conduct insider activist research. It is in this way that my study makes a contribution to meta-theory (Giroux, 2001).

Throughout the chapter I switch from the impersonal voice to the highly personal and back again as a means of sharing personal, methodological, and conceptual insights. This changing modality reinforces my ongoing commitment to multiple ways of knowing and highlights my struggle to balance goodness (S. Jones et al., 2006) and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) with research that is partial, political, personal, and complex. Whilst not multi-voiced, my approach in this final chapter is multi-registered as I alternate between the first and third persons and critically reflective moments and a more academic prose. Chapter 9 continues to generate more questions than it answers, reinforcing the never-ending journey of discovery that is fundamental to bricolage (Steinberg, 2006, 2012).

Smoothing Over the Mess to Make Sense of Complexity

I have tried to write this chapter many times and in many ways and always I come unstuck. Why is it that this – the piece de resistance, the climax of the study, the culmination of the entire journey – is so difficult for me to write? I have so much more to say and yet I feel sadly empty – as if I have lost something. Why do I feel like this? I have gained so much. I now have a much deeper understanding of who I am and where I am positioned within my community. I have discovered emotions, cultural practices, belief systems, discourses, ideologies, theories, and theorists I did not know existed just a few short years ago. I have been moved by the stories and experiences of others and been challenged by my own. Are my insecurities a result of having been forced to rethink my sense of connection to this community, my place within it, my beliefs about it? I have become acutely aware of the steep price that I have paid for my growth of consciousness. I understand now that ignorance is oftentimes a more comfortable bedfellow. But what is it that prevents me from finishing? With so much personal and epistemological growth why am I struggling to capture it? Share it? What is preventing me from telling all? Opening up? Celebrating the destination reached? Planning for the future? Giving the study closure? Signing off? Moving on? Why am I so hesitant? Am I really a cultural vanguard or am I a vandal who has been prepared to sacrifice myself and my own community in my greedy thirst for knowledge? Am I in mourning because I have lost so much more than I have gained? Do I even belong here anymore? Sometimes I feel so alone, so disenfranchised, and so afraid of the future.

Researchers are human beings and as such are as capable as anyone of succumbing to insecurities, social pressures to conform, misinterpretations, misrepresentations, and poor judgement. In carrying out the transformative intent of activist research, it is necessary to work from inside a community to disclose and destabilise power asymmetries. This means that researchers need to make choices about how to act. They will make mistakes, suffer the consequences, and learn from personal experience. The insider activist researcher will also learn from others: from community members, research participants, friends, family, and

professional and academic colleagues. This type of researcher is a vulnerable researcher; shaping others and shaped by others; at times powerful, at times powerless. The inner and outer journeys of discovery accompanying insider activist research have the capacity to contribute to personal, conceptual, and methodological growth.

What have I been doing?

This study was complex. It was knotty research that challenged traditional approaches to qualitative research by blurring theoretical and methodological boundaries. In this way it reconceptualised research and the role of the researcher. At various moments – and sometimes simultaneously – I interpreted and/or interacted with my world in ways akin to a critical ethnographer, autoethnographer, social activist, feminist, public pedagogue, reflexive learner, insider, and outsider. My adoption and adaption of multiple roles made for messy but exhilarating work. I was constantly switching and reconfiguring the lenses through which I viewed the world – only to switch back again or layer another lens over one that I had already used. In some ways my researcher journey mimicked that of a prospector's. I fossicked, mined, discovered, rejected, re-mined, re-discovered, and improvised from a paradigmatic and methodological smorgasbord as I extended my conceptual understandings, boundaries, and tools of discovery. I increased critical understandings of my community and my place within it; exhumed and challenged “patriarchal exclusions” (Steinberg, 2006, p. 126); and contributed to knowledge about emerging ‘post’ postmodern research designs using critical and radical praxis.

Revisiting the chapters

Chapter 1 introduced the research and research site, positioned me within it, presented a glossary, and outlined the contents of the pursuant chapters. **Chapter 2** explored discursive and historical constructions of gender and established connections across gender, education, rurality, social justice theories, and emerging forms of ‘post’ postmodern research. **Chapter 3** introduced the study's conceptual underpinnings and liberatory intentions. It also championed the use of bricolage as a framework for a study wanting to explore human complexity, make a difference,

and extend conceptual and methodological boundaries. **Chapter 4** presented the cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery used to guide the research and outlined the process for action used to address the research questions and foci. This process involved a cultural excavation of the community's gender beliefs and practices, a public unsettling of hegemonic masculinity, and a transcending and transforming of its ideological constructions and manifestations. The chapter was also responsible for introducing the study's tools of inquiry.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 were the data chapters. They embraced storytelling, alternative ways of knowing, oppositional discourses, diversity, and a self-conscious and subjective researcher who was vulnerable, uncertain, passionate, and partial. These chapters captured how the study was able to unsettle ideological hegemony by making the invisible visible, destabilising cultural norms, and challenging the status quo. Chapter 5 contextualised the research and my location within it. Chapter 6 deepened understandings of how gender was being constituted within and across the community in ways that empowered some whilst oppressing others, and Chapter 7 documented my emotional and experiential journey of being an insider activist researcher challenging phallogentric discourses of white male entitlement. The chapters incorporated evidence that exposed links between hegemonic masculinity, the subjugation of females, homophobia, femiphobia, poor schooling performances, anti-social practices, high-risk behaviour, and power imbalances.

Chapter 8 conducted a macro-analysis of the evidence. It made explicit the ways in which hegemonic masculinity was ideologically and discursively being produced and reproduced in Wheatville through media texts, community discourses, and commonsense practices. Chapter 8 also problematised the insider activist approach used by the research and examined its capacity for initiating moments of transformative thinking and action.

Learnings

This study deepened understandings of how oppressive ideologies and asymmetries of power are operationalised within and across communities and what happens when a researcher – acting from inside - seeks to destabilise and

transcend them. Such learnings made the study complex, political, risky, and personal.

Personal learnings

There were times throughout my research journey when I felt extremely uncomfortable and was on the verge of giving up. Being publically branded a “nihilist” and “alarmist” (Burr, 2010, p. 6) in my home town was unsettling. I came to understand that when the dominant social order is challenged its members do not retreat. Instead they attack discursively, isolate, and/or intimidate those who would threaten their power base. Being positioned in this way made me empathise with others who had shared their stories and experiences with me. It also made me recognise the value of having an external support system: a retreat or sanctuary where I could momentarily retire and rejuvenate when the dominant social order bore down. This support system provided a buffer or safe haven for me as I learned to manage the resistance and resentment that is an inevitable by-product of cultural questioning.

The learning journey I undertook throughout this study was both an inner and an outer one. At the study’s conclusion I was positioned differently from where I had been positioned at the beginning. I had a much deeper understanding of how hegemonic masculinity was being produced and reproduced within and across Wheatville and how it discursively sustained power for some and over others. These understandings gave me new insights into my community and myself enabling me to grow as an activist researcher, critical pedagogue, and human being. The decision to document my emotional and experiential journey captured this evolving criticality and growth of consciousness.

In carrying out my emancipatory endeavours, I learned to listen empathetically to others and value different perspectives – some oppositional to my own. I shared moments with some who had broken the community’s gender rules, with some who had been broken by them, and with others who happily complied with them. The stories I heard and collected were insightful and sometimes disturbing. In some instances the process of collecting the stories enabled a reshaping of knowledge and a re-seeing of community beliefs and

practices to occur. These transformative moments served to remind me that reconceptualisations can emerge at unexpected times and in unexpected ways for all involved in the research process. By facilitating an environment in which community members became “critical co-investigators in dialogue” (Freire & Macedo, 2000, p. 75), the contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege lying hidden in the community’s cultural landscape were able to be mined, made transparent, and publically contested. This process shifted my thinking – and, at times, the thinking of others.

My personal learnings were both arbitrary and extensive. I now have a much deeper understanding of the impact on those who challenge or resist ideological hegemony from within their own communities. I have come to realise how much of the emotional self is invested in the role of the insider activist researcher and how pervasive and all pervading the forces of hegemonic masculinity are when harnessed by members of the dominant social order for use against an interloper. I have learned how debilitating the immanent threat of social exclusion can be on the human psyche and how it can work to seed feelings of self-doubt and insecurity that in turn dissuade and deflect emancipatory endeavours. Somewhat paradoxically, all of these learnings work to further empower me.

Why am I avoiding finishing? Is it because, once finished, I can no longer hide behind the mask of the research and must expose my new self naked in a community to which I am no longer sure I belong? A community that I have encouraged to feel uncomfortable about itself? Why am I so sensitive? Where once I laughed easily at inappropriate digs and sexist jokes made by male friends deliberately trying to irritate or provoke me, now I recoil, am affronted, and feel prickly. I have become hyper-sensitive and hyper-aware of the dangers of ‘only joking’ discourses used to denigrate women. Have I lost my sense of humour in a community which relies on it for its cultural identity? Am I too sensitive? When a member of the rugby club whom I have known for years crosses the street or fails to make eye contact with me my inner voice begins to undo me: Is he angry with me for questioning a community icon and cultural symbol of female oppression? Is he avoiding me as a form of silent protest? Have I lost his trust? This community’s

trust? I am constantly questioning my own and others' actions; thinking and rethinking them; inventing reasons in my mind for certain behaviours and actions. Am I becoming paranoid? An interloper in my own backyard? Have I betrayed my community? I am riddled with insecurities and feelings of false-face. At times I feel like the Disney character from Pocahontas; living in two worlds, unsure of either, and incapable of returning from whence I have come. Is this displaced person the price I must pay for new knowledge? Can I ever fit in this community again or have I been banished to exist in the ether of cultural exile? Why is it that my deep understandings make me feel so hollow; so malcontent? Has my study only served to distance me from my home? At times there are no words to express the growing emptiness gnawing in the pit of my stomach.

Epistemological learnings

This research provides educators wanting to address social inequities from within their own communities with both a model for inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery and a process for action. In unsettling what is, the conditions for what could or should be are enabled. Through excavating, disclosing, and dislocating power asymmetries that lock individuals into limiting school and life performances, an insider researcher using critical praxis can become a catalyst for social change.

This study extends the purposes of bricolage beyond cultural excavations and critical understandings to social activism with transformative intent. By providing a model for inquiry (see Figure 9.1) and a process for action (see Figure 9.2), it makes a contribution to nascent activist pedagogies and, subsequently, meta-theory.

A model for inquiry

Figure 9.1 re-introduces a figure previously referred to in Chapters 3 and 4 (see Figures 3.2 and 4.1). This figure captures the evolving cycle of ongoing questioning that was central to this research and its quest to deepen understandings, interrupt the status quo, realign power asymmetries, and extend personal learnings. It adopts and adapts a feedback loop informed by Kincheloe and McLaren's (2008) concept of the *Who am I?* used to inform the *What is?* which in turn is used to inform the *What should be?* This feedback loop is extended with

the additional questions: *What can I do about it?* *How do others see me as a result of what I've done?* and *Who am I?* These additional questions take the bricolage beyond phenomenological and hermeneutical understandings to incorporate political and/or public acts of intervention and disruption.

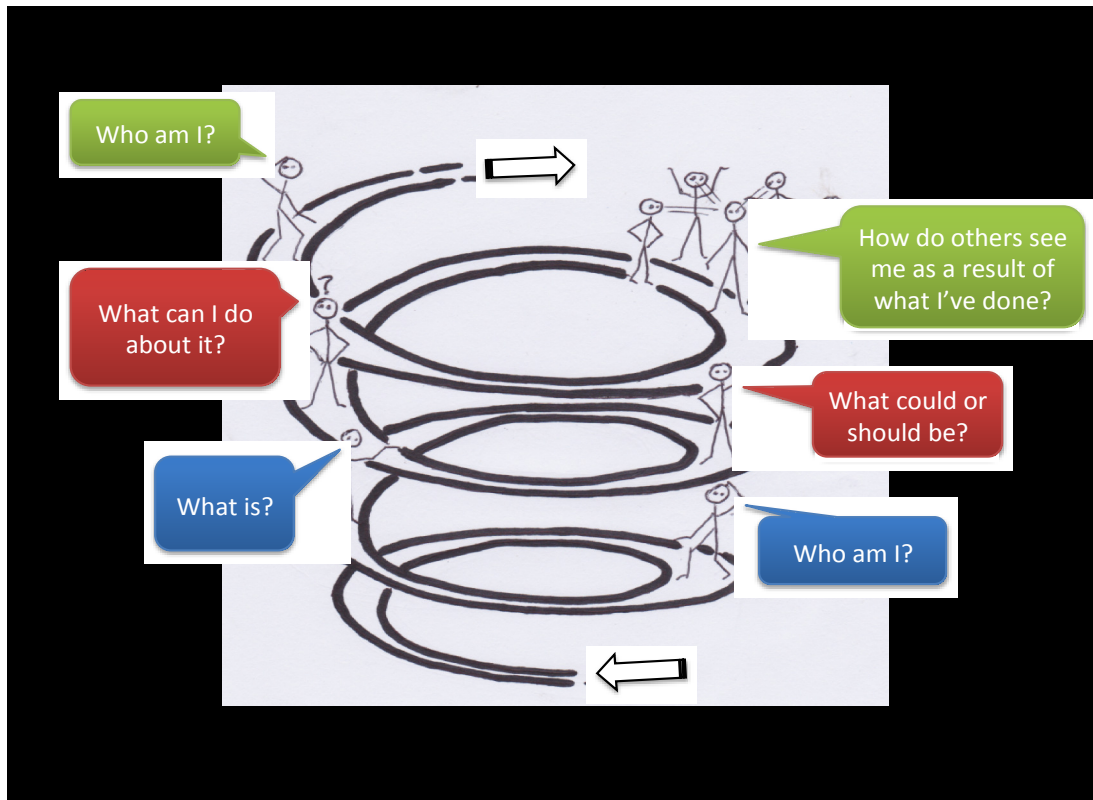


Figure 9.1. A cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery useful for guiding critical praxis with transformative intent.

The six questions making up the extended feedback loop show how a merger of four theoretical paradigms – poststructuralist, feminist, critical, and cultural – can work to guide a model of inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery. This model combines critical understandings with activism for transformative purposes and a re-conceptualising or re-discovery of the self through others. Whilst potentially never-ending and complex, it is also personally and politically liberating. If adopted and adapted it does not confine a researcher to one school of thought and definitive answers. Instead, it enables the researcher to conceptually blend and blur, focus and re-focus, question and re-question. The result is research that keeps evolving and growing; that reconstitutes itself over and over again; that is

organic and limitless. The emphasis is placed on momentum-building rather than arriving at an end point with fixed findings. Using this model for inquiry creates living research, deeply rooted in – and influenced by – its shifting cultural context. Its impact continues to unfold long after the research proper has ended.

A process for action

Figure 9.2 re-introduces the process used by this study to excavate, dislocate, and transcend power asymmetries that had become naturalised in the community under study and were working to limit lives. The process provides a useful method for exploring, understanding, challenging, and transcending social inequities that can manifest in communities as student underperformances and/or the oppression or subjugation of individuals/groups. It methodologically aligns with the cycle of inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery (see Figure 9.1) used by this study and would be of use to educators/researchers using social justice frameworks to work from within their own communities to make a difference.

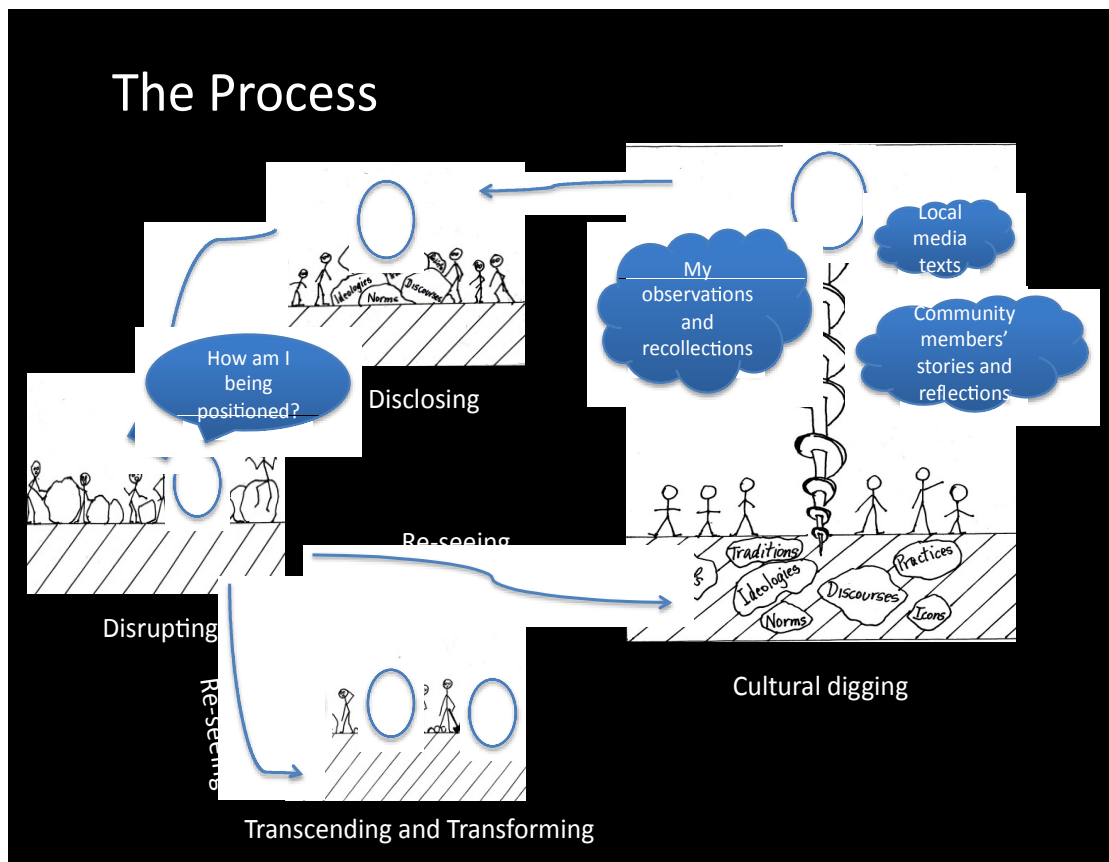


Figure 9.2. A process for action

Revisiting some useful tools

Using forays into autoethnography and moments of critical reflection I have been able to *write through* my research experience and, in the process, document my *de-acculturation* or *unlearning* of the community's hidden gender curriculum. The emotional and experiential journey I capture in this study illuminates how I have been re-configured and transformed through others. Writing is an important tool for clarifying thinking and reflecting on how the insider activist researcher positions others and is positioned by others. This study indicates that using a feminist voice embracing storying, multiple perspectives, personal experiences, and feelings is a particularly useful way of describing and capturing the emotional rollercoaster and personal and cognitive growth that comes from insider activist research. Sharing stories is quite simply cathartic. It is in the living of our stories that we learn: It is in the telling of them that we heal.

One of the more challenging aspects of insider activist work is its unsettling component. It is risky and, at times, confronting work. As a means of reducing these risks, this study made extensive use of newspaper texts and digital forums. These modes of communication had a number of advantages over face-to-face encounters. They gave all who were involved in the communal dialogue initiated by the research time to think, re-draft, and rethink before making a public commitment. They also provided the research with a platform capable of reaching an extended audience (the local newspaper's readership). Hill (2010) identifies knowledge compression as a problem of print and digital mediums, arguing that researchers need to work hard at avoiding over-simplifications, conflation, or misinterpretations of their perspectives and representations. Whilst media and digital platforms may limit opportunities for author clarification – thus increasing the risk of readers mis-interpreting the intended meaning, their ability to provide spaces for reflecting and rethinking before re-engaging is welcomed. Such a luxury is prohibited in the face-to-face encounter.

Another advantage of newspaper and electronic communications is that they allow the researcher to document verbatim others' responses. During unplanned interviews and incidental encounters, a researcher can rely only on memory work

for recording what has just happened or what has just been said. How this is done involves making value judgements (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Memory work increases the potential for researcher bias and can diminish, reify, or pathologise the other's voice. Harvesting evidence from newspaper and digital forums helps to balance such risks. The inclusion of largely uncensored and lengthy versions of newspaper and digital texts – some constructed by those who resisted and/or opposed my interpretations of the world – worked to increase this study's authenticity, goodness, and fairness. Whilst I recognise the media's role in reproducing ideological hegemony (Fairclough, 1989, 1995), I also value its usefulness in providing a medium for making visible and interrupting power asymmetries that can become naturalised in a community.

Being an insider activist researcher: Risks and rewards

My study would suggest that a researcher's extended personal and professional history within a community benefits emergent research designs embracing transformative agendas and liberatory intentions. The insider activist researcher has a ready-made knowledge of the community under study and its economic, educative, political, and social forces, fluxes, and flows. Time spent living and working on site means that this type of researcher is not a passive spectator or innocent bystander. I believe that this provides a significant advantage over an external, or fly-in-fly-out (FIFO²¹), researcher. An insider activist researcher has lived the gender, racial, ethnic, and class politics of the site and has built established networks providing easy access to potential sources of evidence. Once power asymmetries have been challenged, an insider activist researcher is hard to dismiss because he/she will not be abandoning the research site once the study is completed. The insider activist researcher has lived and worked in the community and is familiar with local customs, traditions, and commonsense practices. However, instead of choosing to reproduce and affirm cultural norms, the insider

²¹ A term used to describe Australian miners who fly-in-and-fly-out to complete shift work on isolated inland mining sites. There is a growing tendency for these miners to fly in to work and complete a series of shifts (perhaps 2 weeks on followed by 2 weeks off) whilst staying on-site in temporary accommodation. At the completion of their shifts they return to their families who are usually based in larger centres on the Eastern seaboard.

activist researcher invades hallowed spaces in order to make visible and transcend social inequities.

Whilst insider activist researchers cannot predict how their research will impact on others, likewise they cannot predict how they will be re-positioned by their communities as a result of their actions. Evidence from this study would indicate that, as a consequence of the public unsettling initiated by insider activist work, a researcher can be shunned by some and sought out by others. Whilst some may position the insider researcher as a social pariah, others are likely to view him/her as an advocate for much needed social and cultural change. The presence of the insider activist researcher operates as a corporeal symbol of ongoing resistance to ideologies and practices that limit lives. This type of researcher is a physical and discursive reminder to others that it is possible to think and act differently; to question and challenge what is; to transcend power asymmetries.

The insider activist researcher is constituted by – and constitutive of – the community's discursive constructions and cultural evolutions. Whilst well positioned to begin unsettling commonsense beliefs and practices that can limit community members' lives, the insider activist researcher needs to recognise that any perspectives may be sullied by the apparent normalcy of beliefs, traditions, and practices that have gained cultural currency in a given community. The insider activist researcher must develop the capacity to consciously decentre (Berry, 2006) the self in order to understand how individuals can be discursively shaped by the cultural landscape and the power asymmetries hiding, naturalised, within it.

It can be extremely difficult for a researcher who has a long personal history in a community to critique local injustices and/or re-imagine more equitable alternatives. The insider activist researcher must work to avoid accepting as neutral and/or normal gender inequities, hegemonic beliefs and practices, and local customs and traditions. Documenting personal experiences so that they can be processed and revisited later is invaluable in helping to expose ideological hegemony, as is a simple role-swapping technique. Using this technique, sources of evidence are re-imagined with alternative gendered, ethnic, or cultural representations. This re-imagining excavates and makes transparent

commonsense understandings and practices that become naturalised in communities and can work to limit lives. Re-seeing a community's cultural beliefs and practices – from inside – makes for a synchronously liberating and unsettling journey.

As borne out by this study, one of the major advantages of public pedagogy work is that, once a counter-hegemonic discourse has been ignited in the public arena, it is very difficult for the power elite to subdue or control it (Hill, 2010). However, this advantage has a counter point: It is also very difficult for the instigator to withdraw or re-configure it. The flame I fanned by publically challenging phallocentric discourses of white male entitlement in Wheatville started a fire not easily smothered or redirected. At times it was burning out of control and in ways that I could not have predicted.

My original letter to the editor was just 384 words in length but spawned thousands of words in written responses and many more in face-to-face conversations. Some responses came from individuals who had not even read the original letter. Many of them were highly emotive. These responses reinforced for me the unpredictability and precarious nature of public pedagogy work. The risks associated with this type of research are increased with the emic researcher who is historically, socially, and emotionally connected to the community and the issue under study – however, so too are the rewards.

I have come to the cross-roads. My study is all but over and it is time to start making life decisions. With what can I live and with what can I not live? If I were to leave where would I go? If I stay will I ever be able to truly reconnect with this community? In learning about myself I have learned that I don't necessarily fit where – or how – I thought I did. I know that it is impossible to go back – to unlearn – and I know that I would not want to but can I find – or make – a space in this community where I feel comfortable again? Where I do fit? Where I want to be? Or is it too late? Do I know too much? Have I become too cynical? Too paranoid? Too obsessed? I find I am making more and more trips to the city: Finding reasons to leave my community – my home – more and more often. Has my deepening understanding of this community's gender beliefs and practices consigned me

forever to disconnection and displacement? How do I re-ignite my passion for all the things that I loved about Wheatville? The rugby. The races. The parties. The laconic and irreverent humour that is at its core. Why is it that its inequities and injustices are now foregrounded instead? Is this what happens to a social activist? Is it how I must feel and think from now on? Is this edginess, this testiness, what makes me effective? My husband tells me my study has changed me. He is right. I have grown. Become more politically literate, more intense, more attuned to seeing and exposing injustices, demanding change. I grimace now at things that once genuinely amused me. I struggle particularly when I know the humour is coming from a place that trivialises or subjugates women. And I am not alone. Some of my female friends are also feeling it. Making comments. Have I infected them with my malcontent? Complicated their lives as well? Turned them into outsiders in their own community? I know I am responsible for starting a ripple of dissatisfaction: a desire for change. Have I betrayed my community or enriched it? There is a bittersweet irony in knowing that I began my research journey because of my unwavering passion for, and commitment to, this community and its students and here I am ending it by wondering whether I even belong here anymore. For the first time in my life I am considering alternatives; imagining different futures in other places. And then I hear my soothing self say, "You have made a difference. You are making a difference. Just give it another year. One more year and see what happens."

Some limitations of the study

Ideological constructions such as hegemonic masculinity, phallocentrism, and patriarchy will manifest differently given different contexts, situations, ethnicities, and cultural, historical, and political informants. Therefore, generalisability from such a site-specific study is problematic. Communities, and those of us who live in them, act in unpredictable and unanticipated ways. We have our own histories, cultural icons, discourses, traditions, hierarchies, beliefs, and practices. These help to constitute and shape us in ways that normalise particular behaviours, structures,

and systems whilst outlawing others. Each community has its own flavour, its own stories to tell, and its own evolutionary processes to follow. The usefulness of this research lies not in trying to replicate it and superimpose it on to other communities, but in adopting and adapting its model of inquiry and process for action and making connections between the stories presented in this dissertation and those from elsewhere.

Was it right for me to continue receiving emails perpetuating limiting gender discourses from a senior high school teacher without saying anything? Was I responsible and respectful to the lives of others in publishing their stories? Did my partialities mean that I was guilty of mis-representing my community? Did I blindly favour some sources of evidence over others? Should I have tried harder to incorporate the voice of an Indigenous woman and not given up so easily when I did not receive a reply to my initial overtures? Did my desire to obtain a doctoral degree sometimes override my sense of compassion for others? Is it enough for me to identify these omissions and commissions or – as the local editor pointed out to me – is that like saying “the “cheque is in the mail” (see Chapter 7). My activist journey has been a finely tuned balancing act in which I have had to make decisions about what to foreground and what to leave out; about when to intervene and when to let go. I recognise that, at times, I could have tried harder or done things differently.

I am a different person to the one whom I was at the beginning of this study. If I were to start again I would start with a different perspective and from a different position. I would do some things differently and some things the same. However, ‘getting it right’ was never one of the goals of this research. Instead, it was about becoming “more fully human” (Freire, 2000b, p. 55) through a process of coming-to-know myself better through others.

Not only are communities influenced by their belief systems, so too are researchers. It could be argued that this study has been limited by my value judgements in deciding whose stories to include, whose to exclude, what actions to take, and how I responded in given situations. Not all sections of the community were given a voice in this study and not all voices were weighted evenly. There were some whose stories were excluded because they were not sufficiently substantiated (gossip) or were just too troubling. There were others whose stories were excluded because they diverged from the direction in which the study evolved, and yet others whose stories were excluded because I happened upon them after the data collection phase had passed.

Any act of provocation with transformative intent is fragile and ultimately vulnerable to the complexities of the human condition. Whilst I, and others, have been moved to think and act differently as a result of this research, there are some in my community whose thinking has not changed nor is it likely to change – although I have no doubt that in many instances it has been challenged and confronted. Beliefs and practices steeped in hegemonic masculinity can be obdurate. At times breaking through their defences can feel like trying to knock through a three-metre castle wall with a hammer. The invader needs to use repeated, well-timed, and well-directed blows. Whilst a four-year study does not provide the space to fully implement and/or document cultural change, it is capable of giving a taste of what could or should be.

Significance of the Study

Whilst I acknowledge that consciousness-raising is of itself not transformative, what this dissertation has demonstrated is that making visible and problematising commonsense beliefs and practices – which have become naturalised and normalised over time – is capable of triggering a process of evolving criticality. This can be harnessed to transform community members' thinking and actions, ultimately leading to a re-balancing of power asymmetries. By embracing the poststructuralist notion of cultural fluidity, the study has shown how an insider activist researcher has been able to borrow from radical and public pedagogies to interrupt and transform thinking and action related to issues of

gender. The study should not be viewed as a blueprint for conducting insider activist research, but instead an exemplar. It is research from which others can borrow and learn – not mimic. Both Wheatville and I are complex, contextually idiosyncratic, and constantly evolving. Others using this study as a point of reference will need to consider different theoretical compositions, different disruption processes, different tools of inquiry, different forms of oppression, and different researcher standpoints. The study's primary contribution has been in providing a model for inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery, a process for action, and a reconceptualising of how research and researchers can behave and be viewed. In this way it has contributed to new knowledge in the fields of gender and education, transformative social justice pedagogies, and 'post' postmodern research.

Ongoing Impacts

Whilst originally I had concerns over the study's capacity to build community momentum, I have been surprised and inspired by the impact it has had – and continues to have – on many within and across my community. Whilst the logo is still in use and the \$500 offer to replace it has not yet been taken up, I am confident that the logo – and its gender messages – are now visible. This confidence comes from being frequently approached by community members expressing outrage that "they are still using it." I am now positioned by some in the community as an 'expert' on gender and education and am regularly approached by community members, friends, and/or colleagues to critically co-investigate or discuss issues relating to this field. These encounters work to continue a communal "emergence of consciousness" (A. Freire & Macedo, 2000, p. 75). Evidence of this surfaced one day after I had been invited to help mentor students in a senior History class at the local high school. One of the students wanted to investigate gender roles in Wheatville for an assignment he was doing on feminism. The boy's teacher later informed me that he had confided in her after my visit, "Miss, I don't know if I should be admitting to this but I think I turned into a feminist today." Stories like this affirm for me the ongoing nature and impact of the study and its capacity for transcending restrictive gender binaries.

My study has unleashed a potentially neverending cycle of evolving criticality and an ongoing growth of consciousness across my community. This growth of consciousness leads some to think and act in ways that challenge and resist hegemonic masculinity and places others in positions whereby they feel the need to defend and/or legitimise it. I understand now why “certainty and interpretive finality are simply not possible” and why “learning the bricolage is a lifelong process” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, pp. 31-32). The study stands as an example of the limitless possibilities for insider activist researchers wanting to challenge power asymmetries from within their own communities in the pursuit of social justice.

Future Research

Whilst others can make use of the conceptual and methodological innovations spilling out of this study, as an insider activist researcher I am committed – and restricted – to working from within my own community to effect change. My work positions me as a transformative intellectual focused on interrupting hegemonic masculinity and promoting alternative ways of thinking about and doing gender.

Throughout the course of this study I have had many opportunities to learn from others and also opportunities to share my learnings with others. Whilst some opportunities have been fortuitous and informal, others have been planned and more structured. The conversations generated by these opportunities have worked to reinforce my feminist stance within the school and wider community as well as provide incubatory spaces for alternative discourses to hatch. It is important to capitalise on these opportunities when they present.

I am also keen to formalise a program for students at the local high school to make visible, problematise, and unsettle local gender hegemonies. Ideally this program would be embedded into the curriculum and take place over a number of years and year levels. This would create an opportunity to conduct longitudinal research documenting shifts in students’ behaviour, attitudes, academic results, and post-school destinations; evidence that would be useful in helping to evaluate the success of the program.

A Conclusion

This study set out to inspire transformative thinking around issues of gender and education within and across a rural Australian community. However, as it evolved, it became a study about what can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations. In this way the research became a 'study of a study' that problematised and reconceptualised the roles of the researcher and the boundaries of qualitative research.

Throughout my research I performed variously as sympathetic listener, interpreter, observer, interviewer, co-contributor, critical analyst, self-analyst, author, negotiator, transformative and oppositional intellectual, co-learner, and political activist. I looked critically at my own and others' thinking and practices. This enabled me to merge moments of self-discovery with social activism and synergistically combine my growth of consciousness with an evolving criticality across a whole-of-community. By excavating and problematising the implicit ideologies located in the culturally and discursively constructed texts and practices of the community, deliberately and publically unsettling phallocentric discourses of white male entitlement, and engaging with my own alterity, I was able to address the research questions and their associated foci.

Mine was an erratic and emotional yet highly rewarding journey. The complicated, political, and context driven approach was conceptualised using critical, cultural, poststructuralist, and feminist understandings and framed by the principles of bricolage. I know that I will never see things – or be seen – in my community in quite the same way again. I now have a much deeper understanding of how gender is discursively constructed and policed in this rural Australian setting. This knowledge, combined with my activist learnings, has placed me in an uncomfortable yet influential position within my community. I now know that this is the price paid for insider activist work.

Ultimately, my research has functioned to extend the boundaries of qualitative research. It provides both a model for inquiry, intervention, and self-discovery and a process for action for educators wanting to challenge asymmetries

of power from within their own communities. Whilst complex and fraught with risk, what journeys of discovery are not?

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What is the impact on students' attitudes to schooling of their gender beliefs and practices? Knowing this, what can we do to improve students' learning and life outcomes?

Principal's Information Sheet

Researcher:

Sherilyn Lennon

PhD candidate, University of Southern Queensland

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Phone: 46 712238 Mob: 0427 712238

The Project

An Overview: Statistics related to literacy, numeracy, suspensions, and retention rates are often used as evidence to support the argument that boys are not performing as well as girls in our schools. The media and politicians have been known to attribute boys' poor schooling performances to such things as schools having lost touch with boys' needs or a shortage of male teachers and role models in boys' lives. But is this the whole story and does a poor performance at school always correspond to a poor performance in life? This study will explore and question the gender beliefs and practices of our community with a particular focus on how our gender beliefs and practices may be working to shape our attitudes to schooling and our life choices.

How will this be achieved: This study will encourage those who participate in it to think deeply about what is considered normal or acceptable behaviour for males and females in this school and the wider community. It will ask participants to examine their own, and other community members', behaviours and attitudes to see how these may be limiting or enriching schooling and life choices.

Anticipated Outcomes: In creating a deeper understanding of how our gender beliefs and practices can shape/limit/enrich our lives, this study will equip participants and teachers with new possibilities and actions for improving students' schooling outcomes and, ultimately, life outcomes.

Your Contribution: The researcher seeks your support in conducting this study. Participation by staff members in interviews and/or the workshop will be completely voluntary and conducted at a mutually agreed time so as not to interrupt their work performances. No school data collected over the duration of the research will be included in the final report without your consent.

Confidentiality: In order to maintain the anonymity of all participants the school, staff, and any community landmarks will be given pseudonyms. Any recordings, transcripts, or field notes I collect will be kept securely locked in my filing cabinet draw or stored in my computer, accessible by password only.

Appendix B

Principal's statement of consent for on-site research

Concerns/Complaints: If you have a concern regarding the implementation of the project, you should contact The Secretary, Human Research Ethics committee USQ or telephone (07) 46312956.

I, the Principal of Wheatville State High School, give my consent for Sherilyn Lennon to collect data from the school community for her research project. I am aware that, during 2010, Sherilyn will be working on site to:

- Interview a small number of staff
- Collect data related to year 12 destinations, student behaviour, and academic performance, and
- Conduct an interactive workshop for all staff presenting her findings

By signing below I acknowledge that I:

- Have read and understood the participant information sheets for interviews and the interactive workshop
- Understand that I can contact Sherilyn if I have any additional queries about the research on 46 712238 (Home), 0427712238 (mobile), or slenn1@eq.edu.au
- Understand that participation by staff in this research is voluntary and staff are free to withdraw at any time – without comment or penalty
- Understand that I can request for any data collected from the school during the research process be withheld from publication in the study
- The school, its students, and staff will not be identifiable in any publications resulting from this study
- Will receive a copy of the final dissertation upon completion

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Participant's Information Sheet

Should you have any concern about the conduct of this research project, please contact the USQ Ethics Officer, Office of Research & Higher Degrees, University of Southern Queensland, West Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350, Telephone (07) 4631 2690, email: ethics@usq.edu.au

Research topic: The impact on attitudes to schooling of gender beliefs and practices in a western Queensland community

Researcher: Sherilyn Lennon
PhD candidate, University of Southern Queensland
Sherilyn.Lennon@usq.edu.au
Phone: 46 712238 Mob: 0427 712238

The Project

An Overview: Statistics related to literacy, numeracy, suspensions, and retention rates are often used as evidence to support the argument that boys are not performing as well as girls in our schools. The media and politicians have been known to attribute boys' poor schooling performances to such things as schools having lost touch with boys' needs or a shortage of male teachers and role models in boys' lives. But is this the whole story and does a poor performance at school always correspond to a poor performance in life? This study will explore and question the gender beliefs and practices of our community with a particular focus on how our gender beliefs and practices may be working to shape our attitudes to schooling and our life choices.

How will this be achieved: This study will encourage those who participate in it to think deeply about what is considered normal or acceptable behaviour for males and females in this community. It will ask participants to examine their own, and other community members', behaviours and attitudes to see how these may be limiting or enriching community members' schooling and life choices.

Anticipated Outcomes: In creating a deeper understanding of how our gender beliefs and practices can shape/limit/enrich our lives, this study will equip participants with new possibilities and actions for improving students' schooling outcomes and, ultimately, their life outcomes.

Your Contribution: **Participation in this study is completely voluntary.** If you agree to participate you will have total control over your input. Whilst I would like to digitally record our conversations/discussions, you can ask me at any time to switch the recorder off or delete something you may have said which you would feel uncomfortable about including in the final report. Within 2 weeks of an interview I will give you a transcript of what has been recorded for you to review, add to, alter, and/or edit. **Nothing you have said will be included in the final report without your consent.**

Appendix D

Participant's Statement of Consent for an Interview

Confidentiality: In order to maintain your anonymity, you, and the community under study, will be given pseudonyms. Any recordings, transcripts, or field notes I collect will be kept securely locked in my filing cabinet draw or stored in my computer, accessible by password only.

Concerns/Complaints: If you have a concern regarding the implementation of the project, you should contact The Secretary, Human Research Ethics committee USQ or telephone (07) 46312956.

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in this study which will explore:

The impact on identity of gender beliefs and practices in a rural Australian community

Researcher: Sherilyn Lennon
PhD candidate, University of Southern Queensland
Sherilyn.Lennon@usq.edu.au
Phone: 46 712238 Mob: 0427 712238

By signing below I acknowledge that I:

- Have read and understood the participant information sheet
- Have had any additional questions answered to my satisfaction
- Understand that I can contact the researcher if I have any additional queries
- Understand that I am free to withdraw at any time – without comment or penalty
- Understand that I will be involved in a semi-guided conversation which will be digitally recorded, transcribed, and returned to me within 2 weeks for editing at my discretion
- May be asked to be involved in follow-up conversations
- Will not be identifiable in any publications resulting from this study

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Should you have any concern about the conduct of this research project, please contact the USQ Ethics Officer, Office of Research & Higher Degrees, University of Southern Queensland, West Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350, Telephone (07) 4631 2690, email: ethics@usq.edu.au