



I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM  
*IDENTIFY FORMATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF  
INFORMAL LEARNING FOR REGIONAL YOUNG PEOPLE*

A Thesis submitted by

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## Abstract

*“the primacy of culture’s role as an educational site where identities are being continually transformed, power is enacted, and learning assumes a political dynamic as it becomes not only the condition for the acquisition of agency but also the sphere for imagining oppositional social change” (Giroux 2004 p. 60).*

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“Youth” or “the young person” is an abstract concept; used often, unthinkingly, but without concrete, or universally agreed upon definition. Are young people the future or the ‘problem’ with society? Varying discourses define the young person in a number of ways, with the formative features of young derived from their social position and status, age and demographic, and role in wider social hierarchies. Adding to this complexity of definition, young people themselves also define themselves and the idea of ‘youth’ in a variety of ways. How a young person forms an identity<sup>1</sup>, and on whose terms, is hence a vexed problem.

The research that guided this dissertation aimed to explore how the idea of the young person was constructed, represented and viewed within three informal learning settings located in regional Queensland. The first cohort included a group of ‘disengaged’ young people within an alternative educational setting. This group was identified by the case school as disengaged and in need of a remediation program to ‘get them back on track’. The second cohort included a group of young people who attended a fortnightly LBGTQI social support group. The group, founded by headspace Toowoomba, met with the aim of providing a social opportunity for LBGTQI identifying young people, aged between 12 and 18 years old, to be able to connect with each other in a supportive environment. The third cohort was a group of mountain bikers who

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this thesis identity will be defined as per Jenkins (2004 p4-5) as *the ways in which individuals and collectives are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities. It is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectives, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference... our understanding of who we are and of who other people are and, reciprocally, other peoples understanding of themselves and of others.*

would get together, 'hang out' and ride their bikes together. This group formed based on the desire for a group of young mountain bikers to 'hang out', practise their riding, and teach each other new skills.

Via these three 'sites', the experience of these groups of young people was examined in an effort to understand the dynamic nature of identity formation, how young people come to develop a sense of *Self* and, more generally understand their place within wider social contexts. This research highlights that young people have a profound understanding of their 'place' in the world and the challenges that confront them. Significantly, young people contend with a range of social views and stereotypes that pathologise and position young people in 'fixed' ways. This thesis outlines how a more comprehensive understanding of young people might develop and how opportunities for informal learning,<sup>2</sup> engaged by young people, can mediate this process.

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this thesis I consider informal learning as learning that is not highly structured and that occurs outside of the traditional classroom setting.

## **Certification Page**

This Thesis is entirely the work of Tanya Pauli-Myler except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Andrew Hickey

Associate Supervisor: Professor Lorelle Burton

Student and supervisor signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Certification Page .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
List of Figures .....	ix
Publications and Conference Presentations .....	x
Preface.....	xi
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 <i>The Public Construction of the Young Person</i> .....	1
1.2 <i>The Image of the Young Person</i> .....	7
1.3 <i>The Young Person</i> .....	9
1.3.1 <i>The Young Person and Learning</i> .....	13
1.4 <i>Rationale for the Study</i> .....	14
1.5 <i>Theoretical Framework</i> .....	16
1.5.1 <i>Critical Theory</i> .....	16
1.5.2 <i>Critical Pedagogy</i> .....	20
1.5.3 <i>A Social Theory of Learning</i> .....	22
1.6 <i>Research Objectives</i> .....	24
1.7 <i>Research Problem and Research Questions</i> .....	24
1.8 <i>Project Design</i> .....	25
1.9 <i>Outcomes</i> .....	26
1.10 <i>Summary of Chapters</i> .....	27
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>28</b>
2.1 <i>The Young Person</i> .....	28
2.1.1 <i>History of the Young Person</i> .....	29
2.1.2 <i>Conceptualizing Youth today</i> .....	38
Psychomedical Perspective.....	38
Sociocultural Perspective.....	41
Youth in the Media .....	43
The “Official” Perspective in Australia.....	52
2.2 <i>Learning</i> .....	54
2.2.1 <i>Formal Learning</i> .....	55

2.2.2 Non-Institutional learning .....	56
Non-formal learning .....	56
Informal learning .....	57
Sites of Informal Learning .....	58
Summary .....	65
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>67</b>
3.1 Method and Methodology .....	71
3.2 Data Collection Techniques .....	81
3.2.1 Fieldwork .....	81
3.2.2 Interviews .....	83
3.2.2.1 Recording and Transcription of Interviews .....	85
3.2.3 Observation .....	86
3.2.3.1 Visual Capturings .....	87
3.4 Participant Groups .....	88
3.5 The Sites .....	90
3.5.1 Site 1: Skills for Success: Bike Build .....	90
3.5.2 Site 2: headspace Toowoomba GLBTIQ Social group .....	96
3.5.3 Site 3: Mountain Bikers .....	99
3.6 My Position .....	101
3.7 Ethics of working with young people .....	104
3.8 Challenges of the Research .....	105
3.9 Analysis .....	114
3.9.1 The Analytic Model/style .....	115
.....	115
3.10 Coding .....	116
3.11 Rigor/ Validation .....	117
<b>Chapter 4: Analysis .....</b>	<b>119</b>
4.1 Overview .....	119
4.2 Bike Build .....	123
4.2.1 The Unexpected Sites of Engagement: A walk to 'the shed' .....	131
4.3 GLBTIQ group .....	140
4.3.1 Facilitation, Intervention and Mediation: The role of the adult participants .....	148
4.3.2 Adult Intervention and the Constraints of Group Facilitation .....	149
4.4 Mountain Bikers .....	151
4.4.1 Constraint and the long reach of adult facilitation .....	154
4.5 Summary .....	160
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>205</b>
History of formal learning .....	205

<b>Appendix B</b> .....	<b>220</b>
<b>Appendix C</b> .....	<b>221</b>
<b>Appendix D</b> .....	<b>224</b>
<b>Appendix F</b> .....	<b>242</b>

## **List of Figures**

### **Chapter 1**

**Figure 1.1: Corey Worthington interview Image**

**Figure 1.2 Herald Sun headline image**

**Figure 1.3 Components of a Social Theory of Learning**

### **Chapter 2**

**Figure 2.1 Brisbane Times headline image**

**Figure 2.2 News.com.au headline image**

**Figure 2.3 ABC News headline image**

### **Chapter 3**

**Figure 3.0 Bike Build research site image**

**Figure 3.1 Bike Build research site image**

**Figure 3.2 Bike Build research site image**

**Figure 3.5 Mountain bike research site image**

**Figure 3.8 Analytic Model**

### **Chapter 4**

**Figure 4.1. Bike Build research participant image**

**Figure 4.2 Bike Build research site image**

**Figure 4.3 Bike Build research site image**

**Figure 4.4 Facebook cover photo image**

**Figure 4.5 Toowoomba Chronicle headline image**

## Publications and Conference Presentations

- Hickey, A., Pauli-Myler, T., & Smith, C. (2018). Bicycles, 'informality' and the alternative learning space as a site for re-engagement: A risky (pedagogical) proposition, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education (CAPJ)*. DOI 10.1080/1359866X.2018.1504281
- Hickey, A., Pauli-Myler, T., & Smith, C. (2018). On the Edges of Encounter: Walking, Liminality and the Act of Being Between. In K. Snepvangers & S. Davis Eds). Embodied and walking pedagogies engaging the visual domain: Research, creation and practice in A. Rourke and V. Rees (Series Curators), *Transformative Pedagogies in the Visual Domain: Book No. 8*. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks. (In Press)
- Hickey, A., Pauli-Myler, T., & Smith, C. (November 2017). *New horizons: re-imagining space, identity, learning and bicycles*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Re-imagining Education for Democracy Summit, Springfield, Australia.
- Hickey, A. and Pauli-Myler, T. (2017) *The constraints of youth: young people, active citizenship and the experience of marginalisation*. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2017.1351920
- Pauli-Myler, T. (December 2015). *The Walking Interview: Capturing Young Peoples' Views of Community*. Presented as a component of the joint presentation *Sensory Mobilities: Walking as a Methodology for Educational Research* at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Freemantle, Australia.

## Preface

“I’m a bad kid” are the four words that have been with me throughout my whole research project. These words came from the mouth of one of my first research project participants and were relayed when I was helping him rebuild his bike. Zac<sup>3</sup> and I had been working on his bike as part of a school-based alternative learning program. The program used the repair and restoration of old bicycles to re-engage young people who were deemed to be less than effective learners. I asked how he came to be in the program: “I’m a bad kid” was his reply. It was in this moment- this moment of collaboration with a young person who I had grown a little close to, and who I enjoyed working with, as we set about repairing his bike, that I learnt something myself. Zac had, through a series of fraught, sometimes trivial, but nonetheless traumatic encounters with formal education and learning, come to define something about himself. Perhaps because he had been positioned this way so many times previously, this young man- this funny, engaging and kind young man- who was working with me, had learned to see himself in a certain, pathologised way. Learning and identity worked hand-in-hand in this moment, and had unfortunately left Zac with a less-than-positive sense of Self.

This thesis focuses on the way that young people come to learn and engage a sense of Self, and in particular, how this learning occurs *informally*. Experiences such as those with Zac left me with the view that there is a divide between those formal sites of learning that young people encounter (with school as a key expression of this) and learning that happens more informally, perhaps ‘organically’, as part of the everyday interactions and encounters young people have. How this learning contributes to their own sense of identity hence becomes a crucial consideration.

Further, young people are often viewed by society in dichotomous ways, with a broad conceptualisation of the young person portrayed as either the ‘hope for the future’ or a threat to the very fabric of society. This binary representation emerges in all aspects of the young person’s life but is especially

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<sup>3</sup> Not his real name

evident in the ways young people see themselves represented in a world that is largely not of their own making. These informal sites of learning are locations of stark representations and dominant narratives around who the young person is and should be, but equally, are also sites within which young people can readily assert a sense of Self and confront prevailing, dominant narratives of young people.

Three case studies that each look at a different site of informal learning, are discussed in the chapters that follow and explore how young people engage with each other and set about learning their place in the world. These sites demonstrated the tensions that confront young peoples' engagement with the world and how it is they come to learn about themselves but also assert their own agency in naming their identities.

This thesis will suggest that learning occurs in forms that extend well beyond those commonly seen in schools and other formal locations of education, and that processes of socialisation, personal growth and development and community well-being are resultant from these encounters with informal learning. Informal learning allows young people to assert agency in practices of interaction and engagement in-the-world, which not only opens a space for young people to develop rich understandings of Self, but to actively contribute to the building of more open, dialogic and participatory public spheres.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Identities are not given, but need to be constructed and negotiated*  
(Gauntlett 2008, p. 189)

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### 1.1 The Public Construction of the Young Person

In January 2008 in Narre Warren, Australia, a teen party, with an estimated 500 young people in attendance, led to the host, Corey Worthington, becoming infamous. The neighbourhood ended up being vandalised after the party got 'out of control' with the police, including the dog squad, called and a helicopter offering air assistance. When asked to comment, by a reporter, about the party and the subsequent damage, Corey's reply was "I can't remember. I was just off my head. Can't remember" (ABC News, 2008). The story could have ended there, but the following days and weeks saw a flurry of media attention, including the Nine Network's then leading current affairs program, *A Current Affair*, undertaking an interview with the party host. This interview also subsequently became infamous and was shared on YouTube as *Best Street Party Ever-Parents Yet to Find Out* (Tonkin, 2008) which, ten years later, has over three and a half million views. In this interview the program's host, Leila McKinnon, asked Worthington to remove his sunglasses (as seen in Figure 1.1) and apologise to his parents and neighbours; Worthington responded "nah, nah, I'll leave these on, I like them".



Figure 1.1: Corey Worthington (Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=968yNvFiVH0>)

In a particularly unedifying moment, McKinnon then demanded he accept responsibility for the damage associated with his party and again told him to take off his glasses and apologise to everybody that he frightened, the police and community. The interview proceeded as follows:

Worthington: I'll say sorry but I'm not taking off my glasses  
Reporter: Why not?  
Worthington: Cause, they're famous  
Reporter: Because your glasses are famous?  
Worthington: Yep  
Reporter: Why are your glasses famous?  
Worthington: I don't know; everyone likes them so I'm not taking them off  
Reporter: You're pretty happy with the way you look and the attitude you've got, are you?  
Worthington: Yeah, my parents aren't, but I am  
[Pause] .....  
Reporter: I suggest you go away and take a good long hard look at yourself  
Worthington: I have, everyone has, they love it.

McKinnon's deeply paternalistic stance, one geared toward assumptions that many of the viewers, and indeed the Australian population, would share somehow didn't receive the anticipated response. The interview was labelled "farcical" by one media outlet (Hornery & Tibbits, 2008), with McKinnon branded as a "moralistic schoolmarm" (KakMi, 2016), who was "steam-rolled" by Worthington (Johnston, 2008). The reporter's authoritarian tone backfired, transforming Worthington from wayward schoolboy to global celebrity.

Within days of the interview the media coverage escalated, with *The Guardian* portraying Corey's 500 attendees as "marauding teenagers" (Pidd, 2008) and subsequent coverage of the story appearing in the *Courier Mail*

(Hastie & Higginbottom, 2008), *Herald Sun* (Hastie, Walliker, Collier, & Crawrod, 2008) and *Daily Telegraph* (Drill, 2008). The *Age* was still covering his story a week later with the headline “*Legend, moron or just a naughty boy*” (Farouque & Cooke, 2008) with the story also making front page news on the BBC website, describing the party as a “rampage” (Mercer, 2008).

The Worthington party has remained in the public memory. The party was also mentioned in the Winter 2012 edition of the *Marxist Left Review* under the title *Disturbing the peace: riots and the working class* (Armstrong, 2012). The focus of this article was on whether or not this party constituted a genuine ‘riot’ or indeed was an example of moral panic, encompassing seemingly out of control young people in all manner of illicit behaviour. Although connecting with broader stereotypes of young people out of control, the tenor of this article was nonetheless critical of wider assumptions regarding Worthington’s demonstration of anti-social behaviour and the threat to social order that this represented. The hyperbole assumed by some sections of the media sought to cast this party as a riotous threat to social order, with the party characterised in one key example from the article as the “Corey Worthington house party riot of January 2008” (Armstrong, 2012).

Various media and social commentators pointed to Worthington as proof of a generation out of control, highlighting that, not only did he hold the party without parental consent, but refused to apologise for the subsequent fracas that ensued. *The New York Times* (Johnston 2008) called Worthington’s overnight fame “a modern morality tale, but it is one that reverses traditional values, rewarding disrespect for parent and property with the holy grail of Generation Z endeavours: celebrity” (p. 1). His infamy led him to having ‘celebrity agent’ Max Markson approach him to host parties throughout Australia (Taylor & Fogarty, 2008). Later that year Worthington appeared on Australian reality TV series *Big Brother*.

But read from a different perspective, away from the hyperbole of commonly held perceptions of young people ‘out of control’, (Hickey & Phillips,

2013) one questions whether or not Worthington was actually this self-absorbed and naïve. Were his actions in fact a demonstration of agency in a world where the enactment of young people's capacity to enact will is constrained and limited? When viewed from the perspective of his manipulation of the media, it is possible to position Worthington as expertly crafting his own narrative; displaying the sort of self-actualised agency that Steinberg et al. (2006) describes as an "affective oppositional stance" to adulthood (p. xvi). As Kathryn Herr (2006) notes:

A model of separation and individuation as the developmental pathway for youth can serve well the goals of a capitalistic society where "success" depends on self-reliance, competition with others and self-enhancement (p. 52).

By playing up to and exaggerating the image that the media ascribed, Worthington successfully reappropriated a sense of the parody made of him by both playing into and resisting the idea of the young person as out of control.

The Worthington case is not an isolated case of the negative portrayal of young people in the media. The mainstream mass media, as one of the more visible avenues where debate over the role of young people in society is expressed, not only defines youth culture but is also defined by it. Goldstein (2006) highlights that news reports often portray the young people on opposite ends of the spectrum, either as high achieving contributors to society or, more often, as deviant and dangerous and in need of intervention.

A further example of this form of media pathologisation of young people appeared in *The Herald Sun* on the front page of the May 22, 2014 issue. Figure 1.2 depicts the story.



Figure 1.2: Herald Sun headline for student protest, May 22, 2014.

Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/slackers-or-delinquents-no-just-politically-engaged-youth-27218>

The photo, along with the condescending headline “Hey Mum, look at me” provides a stark representation of young people. This headline strengthens existing perceptions of young people transgressing their expected *place*, with statements within the report from the Melbourne Lord Mayor, Cr Robert Doyle such as “If that young woman had sat down and from her honest perspective written directly to the PM.... I would be much more inclined to pay attention to that to see her being dragged away from a protest” and following up on 3AW radio stating “I never like it when I see children protesting in that way, I think it’s inappropriate” demonstrating the expected roles young people should play. The reference to the students at the rally as children and particularly the student referred to as ‘Tallulah’, the young person at the centre of the coverage of this report, as a child, presents as both paternalistic and condescending. Tallulah was at the time a 15 year old secondary school student. Although Cr

Doyle said the teen was within her rights to protest, he believed there were more appropriate methods to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the suggested education policy. The students were protesting suggested cuts to higher education in the then federal budget, an act that would clearly affect many of those protesting, including high school students.

Berents (2014) suggests that protesting is one of the few methods that under 18s (that is, those too young to legally vote) have to display political participation. However, in reply to the student protests and when asked what alternative existed for these young people to voice their concern, Doyle suggested that it would be more appropriate to “write a polite letter” to the Prime Minister than protest, stating “I mean, who likes seeing a schoolgirl being dragged away by police officers” (p. 1). This response by the media and representatives of government parallels Giroux’s (2012) suggestions that young people operate with severe limitations to their possibility for “critical citizenship” (p. xvii).

These cases point to the complex dynamic that exists around the social expectations bestowed upon young people. In *Disposable Youth: Memories and the Culture of Cruelty*, Giroux (2012) indicates that young people are “lauded as a symbol of hope for the future while scorned as a threat to the existing social order” (p. xvi). What then is a young person to do? When castigated for any display of agency that falls beyond the remit of social expectation, but equally cast with the responsibility for a world not of their making. Young people are positioned in ways that limit displays of personal agency; displays that ultimately work to frame further the idea of the young person in prescribed and limiting ways.

## 1.2 The Image of the *Young Person*

This thesis will proceed to highlight how these *dominant*<sup>4</sup> representations of young people function and gain meaning within society, from a typology that young people are predominantly represented in terms of being either *resistant or compliant*. As indicated in the examples above, *compliance* responds to the view the Mayor of Melbourne, Robert Doyle, held; that is, that young people should accept a place laid out for them, not challenge prevailing authority or speak out as critical active citizens. As a counter to this end of the spectrum, a resistant positionality is highlighted by the active determination of the student protest and Corey Worthington's challenge to Leila McKinnon.

However, the binary of resistant or compliant is complex and consideration of the factors that influence the determination of each typology is needed. Though both case examples detailed above highlight forms of resistance they cannot be considered in the same manner. It is questionable whether Worthington was actually demonstrating agency with his resistance to mainstream media or simply enjoying and cashing in on his infamy. This is quite a contrast to the students protesting, who were, by the very act of protesting, demonstrating a more articulated political orientation to their resistance. Hickey and Phillips (2013), discuss this form of agency in terms of young people balancing social inequality by testing and pushing socially accepted barriers and creating new forms of participation in society. Whether or not Worthington, or the protesting students, succeeded with this is arguable, however the point remains that in asserting agency, and maintaining a viewpoint of their own, the young people depicted in these examples both demonstrated their resistance to prevailing social order whilst also inducing the force of adult censure.

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<sup>4</sup> There is general consensus that the media portrays young people as problematic with 80% of young people surveyed believing that young people are never, or only sometimes portrayed accurately, with young people often portrayed as either anti-conformists, dangerous, displaying inappropriate behaviour or has very high achieving (Australia & Young People, 2010; Australian Law Reform Commission, 1997). The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc, 2003) found that, based on research by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, young people are discriminated against or misrepresented as either 'evil vs innocent' or 'no-hoper vs high achiever' (Adelaide, , 1992)p. 40).

In terms of activating a resistance to normative formulations of behaviour and conduct, the plight for young people is markedly more problematic. Resistance, in and of itself does not, as demonstrated in the two examples above, result in a celebration of young people's ability to call truth-to-power or engage as active citizens. Instead, more often than not young people are marginalised for demonstrating agency; especially if this is contrary to prevailing adult views (Barker, 2000; Ibrahim, 2014). Therefore, can one assume that it is necessary for a context of compliance to be not only present but considered the norm, in order for resistance demonstrations of agency to occur? This binary positioning of the young person as either resistant or compliant will be explored and will drive the focus of this thesis.

This thesis will further mobilise this inquiry into how young people are represented and the effects that marginalised positionality (such as that held by young people) exerts. This will proceed via the consideration of the role that informal learning plays in enabling young people space to assert agency, self-determine their own activity, and ultimately, engage with their world as cognisant and active citizens.

Informal learning, or more particularly, the sites and practices of informal learning engaged in by selected groups of young people, will provide the basis of this thesis' assertions. The representation of young people as active citizens, where young people can enact their agency and not feel the restrictions of their socially constructed representations, provides a further focus.

Core to the early sections of this thesis will be the definition of the idea of the 'young person' and the practices of 'informal learning' that shape and inform young peoples' identity formation and experiences of the world. This chapter introduces these concepts as the launching point for inquiry presented throughout this thesis. Accordingly, an overview of both concepts is offered to orient the tenor of what follows in this thesis, prior to attention turning to the rationale, research problem and research questions that frame this study. An

overview of the research design and research outcomes will follow, with a summary of the chapters constituting the thesis detailed.

### **1.3 The Young Person**

There is no singular, concrete definition of the young person, highlighting that the idea of the 'young person' functions as a somewhat fluid socially and culturally constructed category. That the young person exists in a liminal phase, somewhere between dependent childhood and autonomous adulthood (Levi & Schmitt, 1997) further adds to the complexity of definition. According to Vishnevskii and Shapko (2007, p. 8) 'youth':

is not a reality that exists objectively but merely a sociological conception, an artificial psychosocial construct that is determined in different ways for each society depending on economic, cultural and social variables

Parsons (1962) long ago asserted a similar notion when indicating that youth, as a distinct social category, emerged as a result of changing roles alongside the emergence and development of western capitalism. This emergence saw the identification of youth as a moment of "structured irresponsibility" (Barker, 2000, p. 319); a site of flux and change between childhood and adulthood.

This construction of the young person has also facilitated the development of distinct youth cultures, particularly in Western contexts. Certain formulations of style, image, modes of consumption and civic participation stand as demonstrative of 'youth culture', with the meaning dependent on the site and context in which it is enacted (Barker, 2000; Watkins, Noble, & Driscoll 2015). For example, Barker (2000) suggests that the notion of *youth* has developed according to "agencies of social control", including the role of formal societal institutions such as government, law and schooling. Hickey and Phillips (2013) similarly argue that young people come to be represented according to themes of care and 'safety' in a world perceived as dangerous for young people.

Conceptualisations of youth as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood often cast later childhood as a rebellious phase, within which youth are to be *feared, controlled and contained* (Steinberg, 2014, p. 427) and concomitantly requiring of professional help, advice and support to ensure a successful transition to adulthood (P. Cohen & Ainley, 2000; P. Cohen & Murdock, 1997; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Such discourse have their theoretical roots based in works such as Freud's personality theory. Freud (1923) believed that that the experience of childhood shaped ones adult life and personality and that the young person is often not aware of the experiences at the time and needed guidance to become a successful adult. However, Hickey and Phillips (2013) suggest the pathologisation of youth as *out of control* and in need of *surveillance and regulation* denies the full expression of young people's agency.

While rebellion and disruption are often cast as *problems of youth*, these pathologies gain meaning according to prevailing logics surrounding the idea of the 'good' young person. As Milner (2013) identifies, classifications of the 'good' young person are often imposed within institutional settings, such as the school and wider community contexts, where set identity types function to frame the concept of the young person. For instance, Milner (2013) goes on to note that at the opposite end on the scale to rebellion, the *geek/nerd*, often characterised by conformity and a '*goody two shoes*' attitude, presents as the antithesis to the out of control rebellious young person.

This binary highlights how dominant representations of young people function and gain meaning within society; in this case as either *resistant* or *compliant*, with these binary definitions of *youth* reproduced across the spectrum of society and enacted by such apparatus as formal policy, legislation and curriculum. This is particularly evident in education, where young people 'learn' not only what the organising principles of those worlds they participate within are, but also *who* they are and *who* they can be. Educational institutions, particularly schools, function as microcosms of society and reproduce the roles and stereotypes found within society-at-large. McLaren (1999) posits that

school culture is influenced by *class-specific, ideological and structural determinants* of society (p. 4). Accordingly, young people within these institutions form and explore their own socially constructed identities, influenced by parents, peers, friends and popular culture that respond to wider societal expectations of normative socialisation (Adler, McCormick, Springen, Pederson, Joseph, Figueroa & Dickey, 1999; Brady, 2004; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1995; Harris, 1995; Mayes-Elma, 2006).

Mayes-Elma (2006) found that, just as in broader society, young people within a school setting were identified as either 'traditional/normal' or 'deviant'. The 'normal' participants in Mayes-Elma's study into identity and academic achievement identified themselves as 'just like everyone else' whereas the 'deviant' group identified themselves as 'different' (Mayes-Elma, 2006). This dichotomy is also suggested in Eckert's (1989) analysis of peer group formulation in American public high schools. Eckert identified two distinct groups, labelling the 'leading crowd', the ones who happily participate in school, and the 'rebellious crowd' who reject the hegemony of school and feel displaced within the school setting (Eckert, 1989). Other labels over the years have included 'hoods', 'greasers' or 'burnouts' to describe those that would be considered rebellious and 'jocks', 'nerds' or 'collegiates' to describe the middle class students who 'get good grades' and actively participate in school and would presumably attend college (Brady, 2004; Eckert, 1989; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1995).

Harris (1995) found that there is a hierarchy within schools in which the level of *dominance* and *popularity* are the two main predictors of status and, to a lesser extent, level of involvement in school, socioeconomic status and the difficulty of the subjects the student is enrolled in play a role. Social power and popularity were additional key factors in status differentiation and that once assigned to a certain status within the hierarchy it was difficult to change that perception (Brady, 2004; Harris, 1995).

Brady (2004) found that group membership, either perceived or real, influences the way the students are treated, not only by their peers but also by the school hierarchy and teachers. The students who belong to a low status group, not only experience rejection by their peers, but are at greater risk of being ignored or encountering disparate treatment from the school hierarchy (Brady, 2004). Considering the difficulty in changing status perception, this treatment poses the potential for those in a low status group, just as in society at large, to become self-fulfilling prophecies. Where are young people afforded the opportunity to develop their own identity without institutional influence?

Whilst formal educational settings function as a site of prescribed identity formation, informal learning environments provide potential for the determination of self-identity by young people themselves. Informal learning is a fundamental aspect of the young person's 'lifeworld'<sup>5</sup> (Habermas, 2015), however, unlike formal education, often isn't given consideration as a marker of socialisation, engagement in social networks, and space for active citizenship and identity formation.

This thesis will explore the idea of the young person as a socially mediated construct, imagined and portrayed in all manner of social discourse, and lived as the experience of individuals of a 'certain age'. The specific point of focus of this thesis lies with the role informal learning plays in shaping the identity of young people and the effects that this mode of learning has in shaping young peoples' experiences of the world. The thesis will posit that informal learning provides the site where the young person <sup>6</sup> can explore their identity and enact their agency without (or at least, with lesser) predetermined expectation of roles being enforced on them by an imposed, hierarchical system.

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'lifeworld' originated with Edmund Husserl when he introduced the concept in 1936 to explain a person's experience of themselves in the world as an intersubjective experience (Husserl 1970). For this thesis I am referring to the Habermasian notion of lifeworld, that is the world of everyday social interactions (Habermas 2015). In this thesis, the lifeworld corresponds with the assemblage of activities, interactions and encounters that confront young people in the ordinary conduct of living life, with this context providing a key focus of analysis for how young people are received and engaged as members of society.

<sup>6</sup> I have intentionally used the term young person, in place of the collective term young people, to demonstrate that I view the young person as an individual and not a collective entity.

### 1.3.1 The Young Person and Learning

When talking about young people's engagement in learning, a prevailing assumption links learning as synonymous with *formal* education and, more specifically, schooling. Although these distinctions will be worked through in detail later in this thesis, a foundational typology that frames the analyses cast here positions formal learning as (typically) characterised as a planned and highly structured interaction within an institutional setting where the teacher imparts knowledge centred on an explicit curriculum (Marsick & Watkins 2001). This model assumes that, drawing on conceptualisations of the young learner as *tabula rasa* (Locke, 1690), that young people are blank slates that require mediation of an adult teacher to shape and fill their mind. However, Illich (1971) highlights that learning is a natural behaviour that doesn't need interference, saying "Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting" (p. 39).

Further, in recent years a focus on learning that occurs beyond the sites of formal education, and that considers modes of informal learning via popular culture, multimedia and public spaces has emerged (Ellsworth, 2005; Giroux, 2004; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). These "public pedagogies -spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside the walls of the institution of schools" (Sandlin et al., 2010, p. 1) are constituted by relationships that occur within community; between individuals, and the spaces they inhabit.

Informal learning is typically unstructured, experiential and non-institutional, and, consequentially is not always recognised as 'learning'. This thesis is focussed on exploring the sociocultural dynamics of informal learning and engaged by selected groups of young people in three distinct sites. Within this thesis, a sociocultural approach to informal learning highlights the essential role that social and cultural interactions play in the development and application of knowledge (Callanan, Cervantes, & Loomis, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 2001), with the nature of the relationships that form within the informal learning dynamic of particular interest. Gauvain (2005) indicates that

the individual's level of engagement in the social dynamics of the learning context, and peer relationships play a vital role in determining the nature of participation in learning. The cultural dynamics of the group function as the principal organising structure through which learning is mediated (Gauvain, 2005). For this project, the informal learning site functions as a "space where teens and other youth learn how to define themselves outside the traditional sites of instruction such as the home and school" (Giroux, 2012, p. xvii).

An explicit focus of this project is the exploration of the formation of identity and social experience of groups of young people in regional Queensland, particularly as taken from the perspective of their relationship to learning outside of formal, school-based education. This project considers three case sites (as specified within the analysis chapters of this thesis) as key sites of informal learning and the ways that peer group and popular culture function as points of learning.

#### **1.4 Rationale for the Study**

Three key assumptions drove the research that underpins this thesis, including:

1. The formal distinction of the young person as typically categorised in terms of defined demographic characteristics; predominately, the determinant of age. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), for instance, defines young people in these terms; as 'those aged 12-24 years' (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). For this thesis a far more dynamic problematisation of this categorisation will be deployed with dimensions beyond age alone.
2. Informal learning provides a key site for the formation and expression of identity and agency for young people. Steinberg (2014) suggests that "youth is now an identity process in which a story is created about their own lives, where persons use the environment around them, ... to create the story of who they are" (p. xvii). The formation and maintenance of

identity as integrally linked to the sociocultural context within which an individual is located drove the inquiry outlined here<sup>7</sup>.

3. Informal learning occurs 'organically' as a response to the world engaged in by individuals who seek inquiry into that world. Friere (1970, p.519) refers to this process as conscientizacao (conscientisation), one where the process of people "as knowing subjects, achieve deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality".

These three assumptions will guide the development of this project and its inquiry into the ways that young people engage in informal learning.

Additionally, the following heuristic guides this study; I suggest that:

- young people have agency, however, aren't often afforded the opportunity to deploy it in ways of their choosing. The world is structured as fundamentally an adult space or as Phillips (2010) suggests, young people are often viewed as "*citizens of the future*" (p. 365).
- in a world of limited capacity for the demonstration of agency, learning provides an opportunity for the affordance of agency. Informal learning in particular provides spaces for the transition to autonomous learning, where one is able to exercise agency and take part in the production of identity (Batsleer, 2008).

This thesis will assert that it is with informal learning that the possibility for exploring young people's agency presents. The rationale underpinning this thesis, drawn from these assumptions, suggests that informal learning offers a key site for the expression and enactment of identity.

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<sup>7</sup> Identity and the Individual are not fixed concepts in this thesis but are useful theoretical constructs to explain interactions with/between people. An 'Individual' comes to be known in-relation to an Other, with the lifeworld lived by the individual useful for considering how one's experiences and accounts of life come to be formed as 'identity'.

## 1.5 Theoretical Framework

This thesis draws on several sociocultural theories; however, theories that address the role of power, agency and learning in individuals, communities and populations and are fundamental to this thesis and include *Critical Theory*, *Critical Pedagogy* and *Social Learning Theory*.

### 1.5.1 Critical Theory

*Critical Theory* draws from Marxist social theory to suggest that power dynamics are inherent in societal organisation, and that ideology will position subjugated members of society in a marginalised way (Wiggershaus, 1995). Central to Marxism is the examination of societal formation, including social class and societal conflict, in relation to the power relationships at play (Barker, 2000; Boucher, 2014; Giroux, 2003). Capitalism in relation to class division is pivotal to Marxism with Marx hypothesising that capitalism would fail and that a more communal ownership would develop and end class division (Boucher, 2014). However, the perceived failure of traditional Marxism, due to the belief by some that it was to be responsible for the Marxist-socialist totalitarian dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, provided the impetus for considering new ways of conceptualising domination and emancipation (Barker, 2000; Boucher, 2014).

The Institute for Social Research, the original base for what is colloquially known as The Frankfurt School, was established in the 1920s in Frankfurt, Germany. The Frankfurt School focused on the role socioeconomic and cultural structure, especially capitalism, played in everyday society and how it mediated the various forms of domination (Giroux, 2003). The outcome was the development of *Critical Theory*, first demarcated by Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School. Critical Theory was differentiated from *traditional* Marxist theory in that it aimed to not only explain the subjugated economic circumstances in which people find themselves but to “*liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them*” (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244). *Critical Theory* examines constraints placed on individuals and populations, originally against class designations and the symbolic meaning that came with assuming

social identities (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997), with more recent incursions into gender and sexuality (Butler, 1996), ability (Charlton, 1998) and ethnic and racial difference (Fay, 1987; hooks, 1992; Zou & Trueba, 2002). Critical Theory provides a theoretical lens that, for the purpose of this thesis, provides context of the cultural and ideological aspects of power and domination that young people face in society today.

In this thesis, Critical Theory will be deployed to explain the place and social designation of young people. In particular, Critical Theory will be used to explore and identify the means by which the social identities young people have ascribed to them and the ideological formulation of the idea of 'young person' function. Giroux (2012), in *Disposable Youth: Memories and the Culture of Cruelty*, suggests that, additionally, youth is an 'invisible category' that is increasingly marginalised and denied their contributions as active citizens, to the point of being treated as disposable entities. In these terms young people exist according to tightly defined ideals of 'young person', with these expressed ideologically through broader discursive modes of address, presented through and amongst popular culture, media and other institutional structures. A key aspect of this thesis is the exploration of the role informal learning plays in the life of the young person, specifically how the site enables the young person to form their identity and enact their agency beyond these institutional contexts. Critical Theory will be deployed to acknowledge that sites of informal learning function as potentially resistant, where articulations of the identities young people formulate might more readily be enacted.

Structural Marxist Louis Althusser (1976) identified two types of mechanisms that those in power use to control the masses; namely *Repressive State Apparatus* and *Ideological State Apparatus*. *Repressive State Apparatus* describes the state as a repressive force that serves the interests of the oppressor, essentially the ruling class, in the form of the structural function of state institutions (Althusser, 1976). This extends to the concept of cultural hegemony as a core feature of the *Ideological State Apparatus*, within which the symbolic idealisations of the state and its ideological hold functions to present

'the norm' (Gramsci, 1992; Lears, 1985). It is in the treatment of the *idea* of the 'young person' that clear articulations of what it means to be a young person and how the identity of young person is configured as a social category are apparent. For example the '*repressive state*', of the law and law enforcement, defined by Althusser as '*a force of repressive execution and intervention in the interests of the ruling class*' (Althusser, 2009, p.90) was evident in the police action against the student protestors identified in the case example in Section 1.1 above. But significantly the role of the media in crafting an image of the young person was also crucial to this enforcement of the idea of the young person mediated in this instance. This was the operation of the *Ideological State Apparatus*, with the young people in this instance cast as reckless and irresponsible. This formulation of the young person provided the ideological basis of the reporting and, in Althusser's terms, gives society a way of 'thinking about' subjects (Althusser, 1976, 2009).

Althusser's conceptualisation of 'interpellation' has resonance here. Interpellation draws a theoretical frame for thinking about how subjects are 'called-out' by culture. Leila McKinnon's addressing of Corey Worthington, as discussed in 1.1 above, provides an example whereby McKinnon was attempting to interpellate Worthington by asking him to apologise, but he didn't! This ideological construction of the young person carries through the examples highlighted earlier in this chapter and will be used as a theoretical prompt for considering the ways young people come to be positioned and understood in socially contrived ways. Interpellation offers an important lens for considering the ways that these ideological constructions function to also incorporate the subject of the address, and how young people themselves assume senses of self that work from and through wider ideological characterisations.

A further theoretical lens for this thesis is taken from DuBois (1903), who describes how identity can be understood in terms of a 'double consciousness'; where people come to see themselves according to how they are interpellated. The term 'double consciousness' was coined by Du Bois in the

early twentieth century to describe the internal conflict experienced by oppressed groups in society (Du Bois, 1903). As DuBois (1903) notes:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (p. 8)

Du Bois (1903) suggested that this double consciousness fostered doubt, self-critique and inhibition. Although Du Bois (1903) specifically viewed double consciousness as a theoretical model for understanding the psycho-social divisions that exist in American society based on race and class I deploy this model to consider other oppressed groups; in particular, and as the focus of this thesis suggest, to understand the place of young people. Young people are often identified by government, media and society in a variety of, often contradictory, ways; therefore, it is difficult to associate with one consistent identity. This thesis will explore these societally dictated factors and the influence they have for young people when forming their identity and enacting their agency.

Extending these theoretical points of reference Paul Willis (1977), within his study of the 'lads' in 'Learning to Labour', gave another example of how young people view themselves as they are interpellated by society. Willis explained that 'working class kids get working class jobs' due to symbolic and structural conditions, including societal expectations and public policy (Willis, 1977). However, through their defiant resistance, these young people inadvertently reinforce their position within the working-class structure by resisting schooling; via not seeing it as pertinent to extending beyond their 'expected' working-class lives post school.

Critical theory, when examined within a learning setting, highlights these dynamics as part of the learning process. According to McLaren and Kincheloe (2007) the aim of teaching is to encourage students to become critical thinkers who explore and examine the relationship between theory, practice, and the

world in which they live, with Giroux (2003) asserting that “it is a constitutive feature of the struggle for self-emancipation and social change” (p. 29). Shor (2012) addresses some of the power dynamics that may occur in learning settings by stating “education can socialize students into critical thought or into dependence on authority” (p. 13) or, in other words, encourage intellectual autonomy or passive conformity. Apple (2011) further suggests that the formal education setting is politicised and consists of unequal power relations and therefore teaching cannot be and is not a neutral act. Critical theory, when applied to educational practice, stresses the importance of the learner in enacting change. It provides a theoretical lens to critically examine the *lifeworld* of young people and the repressive contexts they find themselves within, mediated by, amongst other things, the institutions of society and common assumptions around ‘who’ the young person ‘is’. Drawing on the philosophy of Critical Theory, this thesis asserts that informal learning provides a site where young people can explore their identity, enact their agency and subsequently emancipate themselves from the constraints placed on them by society.

### **1.5.2 Critical Pedagogy**

*Critical pedagogy*, inspired by critical theory, draws attention to how education comes to be framed as ideologically constructed, and how this specifically applies to learning and institutionalised education. The central aims and purposes of critical pedagogy draw on notions of democracy, emancipation, social justice, critical thinking, empowerment and social change and social justice as its foundation points (Apple, 2011; Breuing, 2011; Butler, 1996; Freire, 1996). Freire (1996), recognised as the founder of critical pedagogy, suggested that learners have agency and the capacity to think critically about their learning and undertake their own formation through “conscientisation”. Conscientisation involves reaching a greater level of awareness of the oppression of an individual (regardless of that individual’s position within social stratification) and consequently acting to change the nature of this oppression to one of emancipation. Freire enacted the Frankfurt School focus on theory and applied practice by questioning the role of power, culture and oppression within an educational setting; in particular, via the concept of

banking *education*<sup>8</sup>, to describe the teacher as the authority on subject matter and the student as passive recipients of knowledge (Freire 1996). In this context, Freire considers the student the *oppressed*, with the aim of education to keep the oppressed under the power of the *oppressor*. The oppressor in this setting is not, as one may assume, necessarily the teacher as the teacher is working within a setting designed by those in power. Freire (1996) indicates the purpose of education is to indoctrinate the students to “adapt to the world of oppression” (p. 78) and that often the teachers are not actually aware of the pivotal role they play in reinforcing the status quo.

Educational institutions, as microcosms of society, mirror societies’ cultural values that favour the dominant class, whereas *Critical Pedagogy* aims to provide equal opportunity to all (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). *Problem-posing education*<sup>9</sup> is seen as the antithesis to banking education in that it encourages critical thinking among students, not only to increase their knowledge of the world but also to liberate them (Freire, 2003). Giroux (2010, p. 335) identified that *Critical pedagogy* provides one of the few opportunities for young people “to develop and assert a sense of their rights and responsibilities to participate in governing, and not simply being governed by prevailing ideological and material forces”. The role of informal learning, that is, learning without oppressive institutional structure, will be examined in this thesis as a critical pedagogical site in which young people can enact their agency. Giroux (2000) termed this *public pedagogy*.

Public pedagogy sits as that which interpellates; where people learn who they are, but also who they might be, and who they should be within broader socio-cultural contexts. Public pedagogy highlights that schools are not the only site of learning and, in some instances informal learning sites are in fact more influential, (particularly popular culture and peer groups) (Sandlin, Schultz & Burdick, 2010), in young people’s lives. Importantly however, sites of public

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<sup>8</sup> “Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator” (Freire 1996, p. 56)

<sup>9</sup> ‘Problem-posing’ education is an approach in which the learner is an active participant and not considered an empty vessel to be filled (Freire 1996).

pedagogy might also maintain a liberatory potential. Informal learning comes into this as a site of public pedagogy that offers potential for further experimentation than formal education allows. This assumes that informal learning offers the space for the greater demonstration of agency. This thesis will posit that critical pedagogy provides a useful lens for considering informal learning as a site where the young person can explore their own power, identity and sense of agency within society, a site where the constraints of institutionalised learning, as a microcosm of society, are not overpowering or dominant.

### **1.5.3 A Social Theory of Learning**

*Social theory of learning* provides another theoretical framework that aligns with the focus of the research, highlighting the phenomena of learning as a social construct. Principle to this theory is that learning is innate in humans and social participation forms the basis of learning (Wenger, 2009). In this context, participation refers not only to engagement but also “being active participants in the practice of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). This theory posits that learning is not just about developing new skills but also about evolving into a certain person within the community context (Wenger, 2010). The components of the social learning theory are highlighted in Figure 1.3 (Wenger, 2009, p. 211) and include:

- *Meaning* - a way of talking about our (changing) ability, individually and collectively, to experience our life and the world as meaningful.
- *Practice* - a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.
- *Community* - a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognised as competence.
- *Identity* - a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

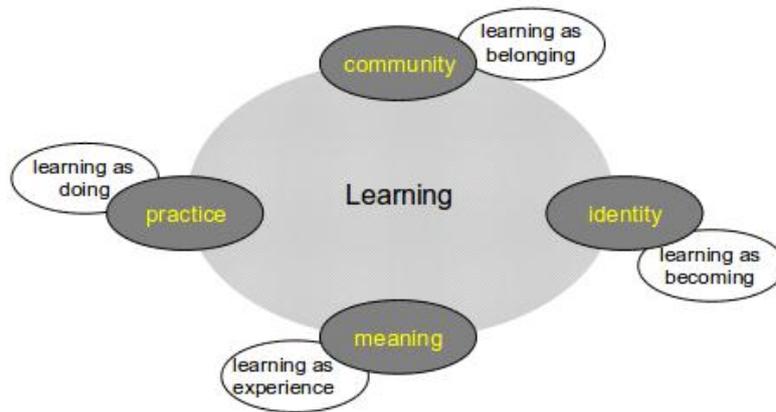


Figure 1.3: Components of a Social Theory of Learning: an initial inventory adapted from Wenger (1998) by Coevolving Innovations (2016). Retrieved from <http://coevolving.com/blogs/index.php/archive/systems-thinking-systems-that-learn-and-learning-in-service-systems>

This theory is evident to the project as each component of the theory is integral within the sites of informal learning examined. The young people involved in the research experienced combinations of formal and informal learning; but within which the practicality of informal learning (framed as *learning as doing*), provided a learning experience more amenable for the young people to express themselves without the constraints of the classroom present (which corresponds to *learning as becoming*). It will be highlighted throughout this thesis that, within these learning situations, the young people felt that they learnt something that applied readily to their lifeworld (*learning as experience*), and that learning was mediated as part of the group dynamic (*learning as belonging*). These formulations of learning will be examined in depth in the *Discussion Chapter*.

A further aspect of the social theory of learning, as detailed by Wenger (2009) is that of the ‘community of practice’ with the sites of learning within this research identified in this way. Communities of practice are the foundation to social learning and are characterised by a group of people “*who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly*” (Wenger 2006). Communities of practice integrate the

components of the social theory of learning in Figure 1.3 and can occur anywhere (Wenger, 2009, para. 3).

This thesis will explore the interrelatedness of the aforementioned components, specifically how they are enacted by young people within the sites of informal learning examined in this thesis.

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

The specific objectives identified for this research project included:

- The identification of the nature of informal learning for young people in regional Queensland;
- The understanding how peer networks, popular culture, and community function as sites of learning for young people;
- The understanding of the role that informal learning plays in identity formation and on the lives of young people in regional Queensland communities.

The thesis will highlight the influence informal learning has in shaping the identity and lives of young people in regional Queensland.

## **1.7 Research Problem and Research Questions**

This research project focused on the ways that young people responded to prevailing forms of identification through dominant social assumptions and institutionally mediated education. The role that informal learning played in identity formation provided the primary point of investigation and analysis. Accordingly, the project explored young people's engagement with informal learning, according to the following research questions:

- ***What is the experience of being a young person in regional Queensland?***

This question was oriented to enable an understanding of what it means to be a young person in regional Queensland. The question sought to explore how the experience of being the 'young person' is mediated as a social construction, derived as this is from the unique conditions of regional Queensland.

- ***How do young people engage in informal learning in regional Queensland?***

This question was designed to determine the various ways that young people initially engage and interact with the informal learning space. The question aimed to discover the barriers and enablers to learning, specifically informal learning in regional Queensland and how the young person navigates this space.

- ***What impact does informal learning have on the life of the young person in regional Queensland?***

This question was about investigating the impact informal learning plays in the overall lifeworld of the young person in regional Queensland. The question sought to examine a possible link between informal learning and the development of self.

These questions informed the relationship between informal learning and identity formation and accordingly provided a frame for the inquiry as set out in the subsequent chapters.

## **1.8 Project Design**

The research that informed this thesis was based on an ethnographic study with multiple case sites and employed the use of ethnographic observation, interview and conversation.

The participants were accessed via various informal learning programs within a Toowoomba secondary school, a LBGTQI peer support network, and via a previous association with young mountain bikers.

During ethnographic fieldwork, data collection techniques including video and audio recordings for the observation and interview/conversation components were utilised. Three case sites were located within the Toowoomba region. The results section that grew from the analysis of the case sites are divided into separate case studies as detailed in Chapter 4 and analysed further

in Chapter 5. The methods used in this project are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## **1.9 Outcomes**

The research reported in this thesis provides an enhanced understanding of the role informal learning plays for young people in regional Queensland communities. The project explored the ways that young people came to engage networks of learning and the various 'knowledge ecologies' (Lesser & Fontaine, 2004) that exist *informally* in family, community, peer networks and popular culture. In particular, this project was interested in charting how different spaces and sites of informal learning shape the experience of being a young person in regional Queensland.

Through the understanding of young people and informal learning that this study uncovered, this project has implications for broadening what counts as *learning*; including how governmental policy directives may better represent the informal learning opportunities that present in regional Queensland; and, significantly, how young people might remain as engaged and resilient members and learners within their community.

## **1.10 Summary of Chapters**

This thesis comprises seven chapters in sequential order.

**Chapter 1 -*Introduction***; establishes the context of the study, introduces the research problem and research questions, and gives an overview of the project design.

**Chapter 2 -*Literature Review***; provides an overview of the literature related to this project. The chapter is divided into two categories with literature on the young person and learning examined.

**Chapter 3 -*Methodology***; specifies the methods utilised for data collection and analysis.

**Chapter 4 -*Analysis***; introduces the case studies *Bike Build* Case Study, *GLTBIGQ Group* Case Study, *Mountain Bike Park* Case Study.

**Chapter 5 - *Conclusion***; provides an overall discussion of the findings and contributions to the field of study, as well as limitations of the research and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

*No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are* (Freire, in de Figueiredo-Cowan, & Gastaldo, 1995, p. 1)

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This literature review will detail the key literature on the representation of the young person, particularly in relation to learning, via the exploration of the related concepts of *education and learning*. This conflation of learning with the representation of the ‘young person’ is intentional and builds on the discussion outlined in the previous chapter on the formative capacity education and learning have on young peoples’ identity development. In particular, a survey of traditions in critical education studies, and critical pedagogy will be offered in order to situate the case studies detailed in the subsequent chapters.

### 2.1 The Young Person

The *young person* or *youth* is not a universally agreed upon concept but does derive from socially mediated constructs; that is to say, ‘young person’ is a cultural construct and socially mediated category of identity. Historically, cultural anthropologists broadly considered youth as liminal-the transitioning stage of life between childhood and adulthood, between childhood dependency and adult autonomy- and focussed on the socialisation process (Turner, 1987, Van Gennep, 2004). Early in the twentieth century, youth emerged as a distinct category as a response to capitalist industrialisation and the subsequent changing roles for young people within familial and societal context; especially as these related to ideal of autonomy, consumption and citizenship (Ibrahim, 2014; Kellner, 2014; Levi & Schmitt, 1997; Parsons, 1962). Even within present day society the concept of youth is not concrete but, as Buckingham et al states (2015, p. 269), “seems to have become ever more elastic”. Contradictory accounts of young people growing up too fast, particularly in terms of the sexualisation of the young person contrast with accounts of the inability young

people seemingly demonstrate in choosing to leave home and take on 'adult' responsibilities (Buckingham, 2015; Arnett, 2000).

According to many formal, governmental and educational agencies, youth, is identified according to biological age, with common interests, traits and abilities further articulating the identification of a 'young person'. Streaming by age group rather than attainment in schooling presents as one expression of the ways young people come to be defined by age, for example. Further, youth are often portrayed according to social *pathologies*, for example, when 'youth' is represented as involving a rebellious phase that requires professional assistance to make the *successful* transition to adulthood (Barker, 2000; P. Cohen, 1997). However, Levi and Schmitt (1997) suggest 'youth' presents as a *social artefact* that cannot be defined by biological or social criteria as it is dependent on economic and sociocultural conditions. In order to understand the concept of the young person today, it is hence necessary to first look how the idea of 'young person', as a distinct demographic and identity category, with its own perceived nuances has developed over time<sup>10</sup>.

### **2.1.1 History of the Young Person**

Historically, the transition from child to adult involved rites of passage, in some cases with an extended period of 'youth' in between. The ancient and medieval eras, for example, were heavily focused on formal rites of passage (Goldberg & Ridy, 2004; Pangle, 1980; Schnapp, 1997). More recent conceptions of youth emphasise personal development and transition from irresponsibility and in-ability to adult responsibility and social place, and indeed the transition from inactive social roles to civic accountability (Hickey & Phillips, 2013). These transitions have become less formalised in some ways, including in social interaction, but also more heavily mediated and 'measured' via schooling and/or the attainment of formal qualifications for example.

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<sup>10</sup> In this thesis, the terms 'young person' and 'youth' are both used, and in some senses, interchangeably. Although it is acknowledged that 'young person' infers a wider sense of individuality, and 'youth' stands as a categorical definition of a collective, both terms will be applied throughout this thesis.

The liminal positioning of the young person, where they were not viewed as adults and yet no longer considered a child, was particularly evident during the ancient and medieval times. In Ancient Greece, for example the young person, particularly the males, were expected to undertake *paideia* (education) for a successful transition from childhood to adulthood. This process could take several years, and *paideia* was considered “The education from childhood in virtue, that makes one desire and love to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled with justice” (Pangle, 1980, p 24). One could view this as one of the earliest examples of manipulation by the controlling class, with *paideia* designed to instil values that would ensure and maintain status quo. The intent of *paideia* was to mould the young person into future citizens by embedding qualities considered necessary to become fully functional members of and, contributors to society (Jaeger, 1986; McEvelley, 2012; Schnapp, 1997). The desired qualities, including courage, responsibility and justice were developed through specific exercises, especially those displaying physical prowess, including gymnastics, hunting, horse riding, activities only available to those undertaking *paideia* (Golden, 1998; Jaeger, 1986). Military training, involving hunting, racing and mock combat, also formed a significant role in the transformation from child to manhood. Simultaneously, pederasty, specifically the sexual relationship between a man and young male, served as a rite of passage for the young male to be recognised and have access to privileges, including festivals, gymnastic competitions and civic meetings only for those of a certain standing (Percy, 1998). It is interesting to note that in modern times pederasty, now considered paedophilia, carries considerable public angst and legal implications that would have been simply unimaginable for the ancient Greeks.

Examining the representations of young people in ancient and medieval times- the touchstone of later Western civilisations- males are typically the dominant representatives in literature and cultural artefacts; this highlights the perception of the gender-based roles that emanated from that era (Blundell, 1995; Golden 1998). Females were rarely referenced as exerting overt social roles or public ‘capacity’ as members of a populace within text or art from that

era, in fact women, as with children, were not considered citizens (Blundell, 1995; Schnapp 1997). The limited art works, with females depicted, do occasionally portray females as poets, musicians, dancers and occasionally gymnasts (Blundell, 1995; Golden, 1998).

The gender distinction is further highlighted in the rituals for females that are documented, typically involving rituals that had to be undertaken before marriage, a rite of passage for a female, and often undertaken when younger than 10 years old (Dodd & Faraone, 2013; Schnapp, 1997). The most known ritual was that of *arkteia*, a pre-marriage rite, where young girls would take part in festivals to prepare them for motherhood and domestic servitude. It was only after taking part in these rituals that a young female was permitted, or indeed forced, to marry (Dowden, 2014; Schnapp, 1997).

Similarly Roman history demarcates youth as a category delineated by age for males and by social or physical status for girls; *virgins* (before marriage), *uxores* (after marriage), *matronae* (with children) and *anus* (old woman) (Fraschetti, 1997). As girls and women were the possession of a male family member, father or husband, age as an indicator of status was inconsequential. Moiser-Dubinsky (2013) notes that women throughout Roman history were defined, legally and socially by the traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother. Once a girl reached puberty, and in some cases before, she was eligible for marriage and therefore no longer considered a child (Fraschetti, 1997; Laes & Strubbe, 2014).

In contrast men were defined by very distinct stage categories that reflected their political and social status. According to Fraschetti (1997) *infantia* (childhood) lasted till a boy was seven, followed by *pueritia* up until the age of around 14 years, then *adulescentia* (adolescence) from 14 to 30 and *juventus* (youth) from 30 to 45. The likely reason for these categories, particularly the for the prolonged adolescence and youth, is related to paternal power relations. In Rome during this period fathers held the balance of power over the stage of life of all his children, until such time that he died (Saller, 1986). Adolescence and

youth were subsequently prolonged to demonstrate the subservient role of sons to their father (Harlow & Laurence, 2002) and the father often dictated that the transition from youth did not occur prior to the age 45 (Laes & Strubbe, 2014); predominantly to maintain the balance of power. At a time, determined by his father, a young male would be given a *toga virilise*, a manly toga, to signify the end of childhood and beginning of 'youth' (Laes & Strubbe, 2014). The exception to this rule was that, for young males from the upper class the end of youth was signified when he became eligible for magistracy, typically at the earliest 34, after the required ten years military service (Scullard, 2012). Though there are a few recorded cases of young males entering the first level of magistracy, *quaestorship*, as young as 30 years of age (Harlow & Laurence, 2002), but this was very much the exception to the norm.

As with ancient times, defining 'youth' in the Middle Ages is equally ambiguous and dependant on social class and gender. There is little mention in the literature of the equivalence of modern adolescence, however, earlier age categories do hold some resemblance; for instance with *infans* including up to the age of seven, the *puer* up to the age of puberty (around twelve to fourteen) and *adolescens* that could last until twenty five or older (Goldberg & Riddey, 2004). Historical researchers note that there was a category that followed *adolescens* named *gioventute* which could last until the age of forty-five (Heywood, 2013; Shahar, 1990). Once again these age categories did not apply to females as their stage of life were, once again girl, wife and mother and dependent on puberty (Goldberg & Riddey, 2004). Leading on from the Middle Ages and into the early modern age there was more focus on 'youth' as a distinct stage before adulthood.

Prior to the modern age, particularly before industrialisation, youth was identified as a quite different stage than current, 'modern' meanings. As previously mentioned, the period of youth could span anywhere from seven until up to forty-five in some societies (Fraschetti, 1997; Laes & Strubbe, 2014; Scullard, 2012). Age was still a greater predictor of the transition from

childhood into adulthood in the pre-industrial and modern era, even though class and gender still played a role in the transition.

During this period the roles were, as in ancient and middle ages, that the young serve and the elders rule. This was partly due to the thought that wisdom came with age and that as the body became less capable the mind grew more wise (Koops & Zuckerman, 2003). The preference for age-based ranking was evident in institutions which valued hierarchy, including universities and government. Universities had designed a system to ensure young men (women weren't admitted to university in this era) couldn't progress quickly and in government it required, by statute, that the young regents be at least thirty to practice law (Thomas, 1976). During the same era status within the community was also determined by age, with the elders of society choosing everyone from the School Master/Principle to the local Pastor. Knowledge, both academically and culturally was considered to be only imparted from the old to the young as the young were considered unfit to teach youth (Ben-Amos, 1994; Gillis, 2013; Thomas, 1976).

An important feature of the evolution of the idea of young person derives from Gillis' (2013) observation that the major junctures in the formation of the idea of 'youth' throughout history have occurred due to influential economic and demographic transformations and transitions; including the influential role played by the family and other social institutions in the young person's life. This is particularly evident in the industrial period of capitalist expansion where two schools of thought on the transition from childhood to adulthood. The first model, developed from the burgeoning sociological literature of this period, suggests that the transition from child to adulthood occurs at a younger age than was previously the case (particularly in terms of Greek and Roman adulthood) and functioned as a largely straightforward transition. The second model follows a viewpoint that positions the transition to adulthood over several years (Ben-Amos, 1994). Both models agree, however that the family unit and particularly the father, was the most influential factor in shaping the young person's life, with the young person having little to no personal

autonomy regarding education or future occupations (Gillis, 2013). These two models significantly, maintained a class dynamic. Typically, the former corresponded to young people within 'lower classes' and for whom the capacity to gain employment and undertake work necessitated treatment as an adult (Ben-Amos 1994; Gillis 2013). The second model indicated associations with 'upper classes and the development of one's personal deportment prior to 'entry' into a social and political adulthood (Ben-Amos 1994; Gillis 2013).

Importantly however, there was no strict timeline applied in either model and 'youth' typically lasted from the point when the child showed some independence, generally around seven or eight, to the point of total autonomy, often associated with marriage, generally around the mid to late twenties (Ben-Amos, 1994; Gillis, 2013). Although there was no direct age correlation, it is quite clear that youth was considered the liminal space between childhood dependence and adult autonomy.

Rousseau in the 18<sup>th</sup> century bridged the space between childhood and adulthood by stating that "We are, so to speak, born twice: once to exist and once to live; once for our species and once for our sex" (1762, p. 211). The child (in Rousseau's case this continued to be the archetypal male child), leaves childhood behind and "he disregards his guide and no longer wishes to be governed" (Rousseau, 1762, p. 211). However, though Rousseau is often credited with being the first author to officially identify the period of youth; Kett (1971) states there are numerous earlier references to 'youth' found in sermons from as early as the seventeenth century, however the terms youth, children, young people and young men were often used interchangeably. Rousseau's modern concept of the 'adolescent' from a physiological and psychological perspective demarcated something new.

This conception of the young person was supported by G. Stanley Hall and his colleagues in the 1890s where adolescence was described as a life phase, evident by a marked increase in moralistic ideals, chivalry and hero worship (Kett, 1971). Hall (1904), unlike other scholars at the time who

considered adolescence to commence age at 10, considered adolescence as commencing at 14 and ending at 24. This period was considered a stage of 'storm and stress', a period of emotional and behavioural turmoil he considered a core component of adolescence before reaching the relative stability of adulthood. Adolescents were seen as confused, fluctuating between contradictory behaviours of risk taking, moodiness and rebelliousness followed by periods of apathy and laziness (Hall, 1904). Both Rousseau (1762) and Hall (1904) considered that upon the completion of adolescence a 'new birth' occurred and that a more complete human was formed; one possessing desirable adult traits.

As has been noted earlier, the lack of official literature specifically relating to the terminology of 'adolescence' does not suggest that it did not exist; only that it was not an *official* phenomenon prior to 1900. The evolution of adolescence in a cultural sense is evident by the different usage of the term 'youth' over the ages. As mentioned earlier the term *youth* carries different connotations and timeframes from the ancient times, middle ages and through to the pre-industrial era, although common to all was that it was a stage of life between childhood and adulthood. The literature suggests that girls, unlike boys, during this stage didn't experience adolescence from a sociocultural perspective but experienced an onset of sexual maturity, i.e. puberty, during which preparation for marriage was the key purpose (Ben-Amos, 1994; Gillis, 2013).

The modern age, particularly in the West, signified changes to the structure from childhood to adulthood, particularly due to industrialisation. During this time the traditional societal and familial roles for young people were expanded and the young person no longer necessarily had the security of their familial environment. By around 14 years of age the majority of young people in this era would have been living a somewhat independent life with young people spending most of the youth away from their family homes as servants (either farm or domestic) or apprentices (if not apprenticed by their father), and some

as students boarding away from their own family (Ben-Amos, 1994; Gillis, 2013).

Urbanisation and the dissolution of previous family structures in the late nineteenth century are seen as the catalyst of the emergence of adolescence as a distinct category and stage of life, as defined by Hall (Demos & Demos, 1969). Combined with the changing economic conditions due to the industrial revolution and, with the expansion of schooling the modern understanding of youth and adolescence evolved (Bessant, Watts, & Sercombe, 1998).

Much of the literature about this era focused on the urbanisation and the *social problems* that developed due to urbanisation, particularly among the young. Due to the technological advances in manufacturing, employment among young people became increasingly difficult to secure, which led to an increase in the number of young people not occupied by work or attending school (Bessant et al., 1998). The visible youth presence on the streets led to concern about juvenile delinquency in industrialised areas. There seemed to be consensus that city youth were more unruly, more irresponsible and much harder to control than their country counterparts (Ben-Amos, 1994; Gillis, 2013), possibly due to the youth in the rural areas still being engaged in some sort of familial farming role. The importance of the peer group was summarised by Hall in Puffer's book on boy 'gangs' – "The gang spirit is the basis of the social life of the boy....A boy must have not only companions but a group of companions in which to realise himself" (Hall, 1912, p. xi).

As a result of this perceived delinquency in the early 19th Century three developments occurred to reinforce and recognise adolescence as a particular stage of life; child labour laws, compulsory education and, legislation within the legal system to deal with 'juveniles' (Jensen, 1985; Steinberg, 1993). In the United States, laws were passed prohibiting child employment for those under 14 years of age and limited the hours of employment, in conjunction legislation was introduced requiring all children to attend school. Compulsory education was introduced to keep young people off the streets and separate from "the

more distressing influences of city life” (Jensen, 1985, p. 11) and a separate court system was created, the ‘juvenile court’ (Bakan, 1972; Steinberg, 1993). Foucault (1995) highlights compulsory schooling for young people was initiated along the same line of thinking as that of prisons, that is, to cultivate passive citizenry via disciplinary action. Compulsory schooling was in itself a ‘disciplinary response to the need to manage growing populations’, populations at times deemed to be ‘out of control’ (Deacon, 2006).

The introduction of compulsory full time (five days a week) schooling in Australia occurred from 1915, and was considered a triumph, in that it kept young people under close surveillance (that is off the street and out of trouble), and, due to lack of income, dependent on adults (Wimshurst, 1981). Accordingly, Steinberg (1993) suggests that the introduction of compulsory education was seen as a way of improving the life of the poor and working class and a means of social control. Compulsory education is often considered the most significant influence in the institutionalisation of adolescence and the ‘young person’ and led to the current age related groupings within schools in western societies (Koops & Zuckerman, 2003). This concept of how to *manage* young people still holds today with the idea that the young person belongs in the educational setting from around the ages five until at least they are 15 years old.

This thesis focuses on a normative western construction of the young person drawn from the current late-capitalist conjuncture from which this research was conducted. The rituals and social customs elucidated here are hence specific to the context of the research- contemporary Australia- and speak to the immediate context and normative behaviours and values that demarcate the identity locations that young people encounter in these settings. However, it should be noted that other cultures include rites of passage or rituals from childhood to adulthood, particularly in many indigenous cultures. In many pre-industrialised societies, children do not have the type of education system identifiable in the west and are often prone to prescriptive social mores not as prevalent in western contexts; for example, marriage at a young age (Chen and

Farruggia, 2002). The corresponding rituals often signify the immediate transition from childhood to adulthood.

### **2.1.2 Conceptualizing Youth today**

There are a number of discourses<sup>11</sup>, some competing, around the concept of 'the young person'. For instance, two prominent (and prevailing) formulations of 'the young person' derive from psychological and medical/health discourses. Psychological framing predominantly configures the young person in terms of cognitive developmental stages (Côté, 2006; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009) while medical discourses as indicated by Spear (2002) primarily position the young person according to the physiological development of the human body. These discourses surrounding the young person carry certain assumptions and frame the idea of the young person as an individual experiencing change in their cognitive, physical and psychological development.

### **Psychomedical Perspective**

The psychomedical approach to the young person is framed around the developmental transition from childhood to adulthood, the transition of adolescence. A medical or biological definition for adolescence is marked by the commencement of puberty, with physical measures, including development of pubic hair and breast development in girls or commencement of the period, of becoming capable of reproducing defining this stage (Jensen, 1985; Kimmel & Weiner, 1985). The Lancet commissioned a report on the future of adolescent health and wellbeing and indicated that 10 to 24 year olds were considered adolescents, with the age range divided into categories: 10-14 years- early adolescence, 15-19 years late adolescence and 20-24 years young adulthood (Patton et al., 2016). The World Health Organisation identifies young people aged between 10 and 19 years as *adolescents*, divided into stages: early (10-13

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<sup>11</sup> For this thesis discourse corresponds to the work of Michel Foucault whereby a discourse finds mobilisation within a specific language formation that works to define a way of knowing. As Foucault notes discourse is "a way of speaking....."(Foucault 1972, p. 193) and are constituted by "...practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, p. 49). As Weedon highlights discourses are "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (1987 p. 108).

years); middle (14-16 years); and late (17- 19years) adolescence (World Health Organization, 2015). Accordingly and, for most part, adolescents are considered under the aged-based definition of a 'child' adopted by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). However, even the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation uses differing definitions of youth dependent on context, although for statistical consistency the United Nations refers to youth as those aged between 15 and 24 years of age (United Nations Educational, 2015). Although age-based definitions of adolescence are somewhat consistent throughout the health and medical field it is recognised that it is only a convenient method to define adolescence and not an absolute. The World Health Organisation acknowledges that it uses age as a measure for biological changes but that it is less appropriate for social transitions which are more dependent on the sociocultural setting (World Health Organization, 2015).

The psychomedical literature does however reach consensus that adolescence is recognised as a period of physical or biological changes, neurodevelopmental, cognitive changes and psychosocial change maturation. The most obvious component of the biological transition is *puberty*- the change in the young person's reproductive ability, evidenced by breast development in females, the growth of facial hair in males and the development of pubic and axillary hair in both sexes (Blakemore, Burnett, & Dahl, 2010; Hayward, 2003; Steinberg, 1993). During this stage neurological and cognitive developments, linked to hormonal changes, are also occurring. Blakemore et al (2010) suggest that neurological behaviour changes during this time may be directly linked to changing hormone levels and the subsequent influences with the brain development while other changes may be resultant of other multifarious factors, including response to physical changes and social influences. Whilst some researchers suggest this is a time for the emergence of more sophisticated reasoning abilities (Luna, Garver, Urban, Lazar, & Sweeney, 2004; Steinberg, 2005) others consider it a time for risky decision making and behaviours (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008). These two schools of thought are not mutually exclusive. Functional MRI has shown that young people demonstrate higher

levels of intellectual capability earlier than they demonstrate higher levels of impulse control (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Casey et al., 2008; Reyna & Farley, 2006). The focus on youth as an arbitrary transitional stage assumes that there is a linear pathway from childhood to adulthood and deviation from the expected predetermined path is cause for concern and intervention. Such a view does not however account for varying individual biology, psychology or social context in the individual.

As aforementioned, adolescence is frequently portrayed in psychological and medical literature as a troubled stage interspersed with phases of withdrawal and loneliness and pathological behaviours (Jensen, 1985; Kimmel & Weiner, 1985). As previously mentioned, the notion of adolescence as a tumultuous time has been associated within the discipline of psychology since 1904 when Hall described the period as a time of 'storm and stress'. According to Casey et al (2010) this viewpoint has been held for over a century by many within the field as data indicates that the development of many psychiatric conditions occurs during adolescence. This hypothesis is supported by research indicating the emergence of these psychiatric conditions appears occurs concurrently with changes associated with adolescence, including increased brain development, physical maturation and heightened emotional state (Arnett, 1999; Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Casey et al., 2010; Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Merikangas & Walters, 2005). Whilst there is evidence that there is some level of storm and stress amongst adolescents, not all experience the perceived risk taking, and disruptive behaviour often associated with young people. Although various types of behaviours researchers often associate with storm or stress, including conflict with adults, and, in particular, parents, moodiness and risk taking are more likely to arise during adolescence than at other ages, this appears to be a cultural phenomenon more prevalent amongst western culture. Arnett (1999) found that the role social and cultural context has on the transition of adolescence cannot be underestimated and that there are "cultural variations in the pervasiveness of adolescent storm and stress" (p. 317). In an analysis of several preindustrial cultures it was reported that the majority of 'traditional' cultures encounter less prevalent storm and

stress behaviours amongst their young people, when compared to western cultures (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). According to Chen and Farruggia (2002) cross cultural studies on adolescent development have doubled in the last forty years providing some explanation as the possible causes of the prevalence of storm and stress in different cultures. The key differences between traditional cultures and the western experience of storm and stress in adolescence centre on the level of independence allowed for young people (Schlegel & Barry 1991). This is particularly evident in the western world when there is a longer period of schooling, legislated by law, before young people are 'allowed' to participate in the adult world (Chen & Farruggia, 2002). Mead (1928) challenged Hall's claim of adolescent storm and stress as being universal as she found in her study that Samoan adolescents showed little to no signs of storm and stress, which she attributed to Samoan children taking part in tasks that they would continue to perform as adults (eg. looking after siblings, preparing food, working in the fields etc). Whether the pathologised version of Hall or the romanticised version of Mead it is evident that culture plays a role in how a young person experiences adolescence. Accordingly, the sociocultural perspective takes on a more holistic approach to the idea of youth.

### **Sociocultural Perspective**

The western concept of youth as a transitional stage of life, a liminal period between childhood and adulthood, as noted above, has been challenged, particularly in the field of Youth Studies. Researchers in this field highlight that the notion of youth is an arbitrary concept, originally developed in response to the industrial revolution and not a natural or evolutionary phenomenon (White & Wyn, 1997; Woodman & Wyn, 2013). With this formulation 'youth' is considered a relational concept, as it gains meaning 'in relation to' the concepts of childhood and adulthood. White and Wyn (1997, p. 11) argue that "the concept of youth, as idealised and institutionalised.... supposes eventual arrival at the status of adulthood". This assumes that young people are *citizens in waiting* undergoing a transformative change of 'growing up' in which adulthood is the point of arrival. This assumption of a linear progression is fraught with

questions about what 'adulthood' looks like as the end point of childhood, and concomitantly, how one knows when one has 'arrived' at his life stage.

The term "Emerging Adulthood" was coined by Arnett in the year 2000, as a concept to explain the period of time from the late teens through to the early twenties (specifically between the ages of 18-25), which further compounds the notion of youth and young adulthood. Emerging adulthood is characterised by "having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood" (Arnett 2000, p. 469). However, like 'youth', emerging adulthood is considered a culturally constructed concept that is not universal and static (Arnett, 2000). Again, this causes tension between the universality of youth and the highly individual nature of this life stage. However, the defining of the young person according to a predefined transitional stage doesn't consider that the meaning and experience of youth is constructed through societal conditions.

Social and cultural contexts, economic conditions and political circumstances play a pivotal role in how the young person is perceived and how they perceive themselves (Mizen, 2004; Wyn & White, 1997; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Class divisions in particular remain central to understanding life experience and, in turn, identity formation in young people, with different social classes applying different expectations of how the young person should be defined and expected to enact this identity (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Mannheim, 1928; Mizen, 2004; White & Wyn, 1997). This is most evident when examining the social indicators of health, education, income and mortality rates, which are considerably worse in lower socioeconomic status young people. Class, according to Wyn and White (1997, p. 28) "does not operate as some kind of 'external' social reality. Rather, it is integral to the processes whereby individuals interact, negotiate, contest and collude with the institutions of society". One of the largest institutions of society, the education system, is perhaps one of the most evident for the effects of class differentiation for the young person.

It is clear that not all young people have the same experience of the education system with a strong correlation between social class, the schooling experience and dropout rates. According to Wyn and White (1997) in Australia, educational participation rates decrease in relation to familial income levels. In particular young people from low socioeconomic background exit the schooling system earlier than their high income family counterparts (Lamb, 1994; Rumberger & Lamb, 2003). This in turn influences the trajectory for future employment and hence income, both major determinants of health and wellbeing. Education is strongly correlated to key determinants of health such as risky health behaviours and engaging in preventative health measures (Feinstein et al., 2006). Those who face the negative effects of inequality are usually not only aware of the inequality but then have to navigate the conditions placed on them by society due to class, gender and race. It is within these prevailing constraints imposed by society that young people construct and negotiate their identity.

Identity and a sense of self is further shaped by the way that young people interact with the media. The case examples in Chapter 1 demonstrate the influential role that media plays in society, in particular when it relates to the formulation of perceptions and stereotypes of young people. Conversely, the way the young person interacts with the media, can allow them to choose how they want to present to the outside world.

### **Youth in the Media**

The relationship between the media and young people is complex and compounded by the multifarious roles young people play in society. Bessant et al. (1998) identify three main roles that influence identity formation amongst young people; i) young people as subjects, ii) as producers, and iii) as consumers. There has been extensive research on the way young people are represented by media outlets, particularly within mainstream broadcasting media such as the evening news. As outlined in Chapter 1, and in the case of Corey Worthington and the protesting students, media representations assert

an influence in reinforcing prevailing stereotypes of young people and limiting the expression of agency.

The media's representation of young people within society is pertinent as the media plays a considerable role in influencing the way society perceive who young people are and what they stand for. The way the media portrays young people is not only a manifestation of popular opinion but also reinforces particular representations or stereotypes of youth, which in turn informs conceptualisations of young people and the meanings that associate with the idea of 'youth'. Major themes in mainstream media reporting include stereotypes of young people as 'delinquents' who are a risk to society, or alternatively as vulnerable and in need of protection. This is of concern as the binary representations of young people in these formulations in turn influence how they are perceived by society. Wyn (2005) describes how the media portray young people as "both a potential threat to the stability of society and as a symbol of hope for the future of society" (p. 24). These contradictory discourses have to be navigated by the young person when exploring who they are and who they want to be.

Representations of young people by the media are influenced by two intertwined factors, with generational differences and social change fundamental in the representation (Wyn 2005; Furlong & Cartmel 2007). A focus on either factor, without due consideration to the other only tells part of the story.

Stories about youth often imply that there is an intergenerational power struggle between adults and young people with young people represented as "dangerous social beings" (Ibrahim, 2014) requiring monitoring and reform. This is not a new phenomenon with Karl Mannheim, in his essay "The problem of generations" (1928) indicating that the inter-generational struggle is flawed, and that using the previous generations as a benchmark does nothing to examine the context specific consideration of young people growing in times of constant social flux. Furlong and Cartmel (2007) found that "the experiences of

young people growing up in the contemporary world are quite different from those encountered by previous generations” (p. 138) and that the pace of social change means that more traditional transitions from childhood to adulthood no longer apply (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; White & Wyn, 1997). Previous generations cannot expect youth to follow the same trajectory when this is impossible given differing social conditions. Hence, viewing young people according to the generational gap with the stereotypes of young people ‘at risk’, ‘delinquents’ or ‘failed transitions’ is flawed. Young people are perhaps not victims or the problem as often portrayed but are negotiating and modelling a ‘new adulthood’, creating new identities based on economic changes and social changes with the disappearance of previous traditional structures (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001).

Contemporary conceptualisations of youth are influenced by the way young people are ascribed a variety of identity descriptors that differ to those applied to previous generations. Intergenerational (mis)understanding can lead to a misrepresentation, which in turn is perpetuated and reinforced via social institutions; the media being particularly prominent. Young people as cynical, apolitical, ignorant (at best), (at worst) delinquent, narcissistic and criminal conflate with views that position young people as ‘incapable’ and, requiring of remediation and care, emerge as the ends of a limited range of options that feature as predominant (the examples identified in Chapter 1 provide examples). These stereotypes are, according to Giroux, derived from “the desires, fantasies and interests of the adult world” (1998, p. 23) and do not accurately reflect the young person’s view of the world, nor their place in it.

Recent research demonstrates that a link between the way young people are represented in the media and the way they are perceived in the community (Berger, 2012; Wyn 2005, White & Wyn, 2008). According to Stuart Hall (1997) representation functions by attempting to “say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully to other people...it does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things” (p. 15). The problem for Hall, rests with the ‘approximations’ that come to be made about

the identity characteristics an individual is perceived to hold. These representations rely-on a slippage of meaning between the experience enacted by actual, living human beings and the images that circulate of them; what Hall identifies as “... the production of meaning through language” (p. 16). In other words, the meanings that society forms about young people are influenced by the representations that circulate around young people. Media stereotypes often centre on negative representations of young people as ‘out of control’ and a ‘risk to society’. Bessant et al (1998) notes that the relationship between young people and the media has a long history with the representations about young people’s delinquency, lack of respect and employability evidenced as long back as hundreds if not thousands of years ago. Although media changed significantly over recent years, with popular representations produced and distributed through a range of mass media formats, including digital media, television, video, music and film, the representations have varied little.

The aforementioned case studies in chapter one are but two examples of how media uses representation as an expression of power from their ideological perspective. A more recent example appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald (Crockford, 2017) with the title “Schoolies trash hotel room, post gloating video on social media”. Figure 2.1 provides an accompanying visual taken from this article.



Figure 2.1 “Schoolies trash hotel room, post gloating video on social media”.Brisbane Times, 25 November 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/schoolies-trash-hotel-room-post-gloating-video-on-social-media-20171125-p4yx7k.html>

Yet, apart from this sensationalist headline, the accompanying article notes that this was an 'isolated incident' and that 'schoolies have been very well behaved this year' (Crockford, 2017). Further, the local Police District Inspector declared that the schoolies celebrations 'seem to get better every year' and that police were 'very happy' with the behaviour of schoolies in 2017. So why then does the title only refer to one negative incident and not the positive overall behaviour of the young people? Many examples of adult misadventure and delinquency (for example, during events notorious for poor behaviours such as the Melbourne Cup and the Gold Coast Indy 500) exist but with a very different reporting. For example, news.com.au reported on the 2017 Melbourne Cup with the title "Cup Day flashing, falling and brawling as punters celebrate in traditional style: Punters celebrated the race that stops the nations in traditional style. Flemington was awash with hilariously messy behaviour" (news.com.au., 2017). Figure 2.2 provides reference to two of the accompanying visuals



Figure 2.2 November 9 2017. "Cup Day flashing, falling and brawling as punters celebrate in traditional style: Punters celebrated the race that stops the nations in traditional style. Flemington was awash with hilariously messy behaviour" Retrieved from

<https://www.news.com.au/sport/superracing/melbourne-cup/drunken-melbourne-cup-day-antics-begin-in-flemington/news-story/ac3e68e16bdece10f6bb57f69d26a776>

This is clearly very different reporting to that aimed at young people, with young peoples' behaviour pathologised while adults are not only excused for, but almost celebrated for similar behaviour. One might speculate on the fact

that these representations are constructed by adults and reflect their concerns, anxieties and needs, whereas imagery of delinquent youth reinforce the construct of *deviant* youth behaviour, reinforcing the ideology that young people need protection from themselves via surveillance, monitoring and intervention.

This partisan reporting of young people has a long legacy, with prominent attention in the literature. In the 1970s Stanley Cohen described media representations of young people in terms of the representation of young people as 'folk devils' inculcated in the proliferation of 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1987). Research undertaken in Australia in the nineties on youth representations in print further reinforces the typecast of the young person needing remediation (Fyfe & Wyn, 2007; Sercombe, 1995; Wyn & White, 1997). This research illustrated that the most frequent mention of young people was linked to crime, and particularly where the young person is the criminal. This is especially the case with reporting of young males (Sercombe, 1995).

Further supporting the suggestion that the media overwhelmingly portray young people in a negative light, there have been several studies of the representation of youth in the media in Australia over the previous decade with the general consensus that the media representation of young people is biased, with too much emphasis on negative traits of youth. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) released a policy paper following a forum in 2003 that examined the relationship between the media and young people and found 'the problems of youth' (p. 2) featured significantly more often than positive stories (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc, 2003). In addition, a study undertaken by the Service to Youth Council (SYC) in 2013 found that there are significantly more negative stories published by the media about Australian youth, with seven out of ten articles portraying young people in a negative manner (HEYWIRE, 2013).

This (mis)representation and demonisation of young people by the media only adds to the public discourse of youth as out of control. As Giroux (2012) argues in media representations 'youth becomes an empty category',

constructed by adults to serve the needs of adult society and that do not necessarily reflect the reality of 'youth'. Mainstream media typically communicates ideas about the dominant ideology of that society and that work to "serve particular interests which they tend to present as universal interests, shared by the group as a whole" (Bourdieu, 1991 p. 167). According to Hall (1997), media are an important medium in establishing hegemonic formulations of identity that produce and sustain wider societal consensus; or what Gramsci (1992) would suggest is the production of the 'subaltern' classes.

Media representations provide a particular interpretation of youth related to broader discourses, but for the purposes of this thesis, the duality of young people represented as either the 'hope for the future' or deviant and delinquent drives the focus of analysis in the chapters that follow. The media is instrumental in the way society see young people and are a pervasive presence in the young person's life, influencing the way young people see themselves.

How is it that society, under the influence of media, tell young people who they are, to the point that young begin to align with this label? As one theoretical framework that seeks to respond to this question, Bandura's social cognitive theory of mass communication suggests that media portrayals, whether accurate or not, can influence 'real world' behaviours in the audience (Bandura, 2001). For Bandura (2001), the media exert influence in the form of modelling behaviour, with the portrayal by the media shaping the beliefs and perceptions of reality of the audience; young people included. This is a form of subjectivation where young people engage-with and enact the forms of prescribed identity locations.

A further way of understanding the influence of the media on identity formation derives from Louis Althusser's formulation of 'ideology', and in particular, the work of 'interpellation'. For Althusser, interpellation corresponds to 'hailing', whereby the subject, as a cognisant member of a society, understands the self through the prescriptive identity categories enacted in that society. According to the interpellation process, the young person sees

themselves *in terms of* the portrayed ideology of the young person enacted in that social context and therefore becomes complicit in their own representation (Althusser, 1976, 2009).

From a related theoretical perspective, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that the homogeneity of mass media interpellates and subjectivates passive subjects such that the subject “insists on the very ideology that enslaves them” (1997 p. 10). This tradition in media studies, derived from Marxist modes of analysis and concerns for false conscious, ideology and denial of individual agency, emphasises the positioning of a largely ‘passive’ media audience, upon whom the effects of media are ‘enacted’, and from which, passive citizenry ensues.

More recently Gauntlett (2008), while acknowledging value in these Marxist perspectives, and describing how media consumers negotiate media positioning, extends this analysis to note that young people can indeed be ‘active’ recipients of media messaging. Although influential and in some ways prevailing representations of young people permeate the media landscape, it does remain that young people maintain the capacity to name themselves, resist these dominant images, and demarcate their own lifeworlds (Hickey & Phillips, 2013).

Further, young people might also see themselves as part of an ‘active audience’ where they are active producers of meaning based on their own context of society and where they fit within such society. Especially within the web 2.0 context of the present moment, this might extend to young people themselves being active in making the very media they come to engage with; a phenomenon Axel Bruns describes as that of the ‘produser’ (Bruns, 2008; Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007).

It remains that the media are omnipresent in the lives of young people and although prominent media representations of young people are largely negatively geared, positive depictions of young people do circulate in the media.

For example, coverage of the Young Australian of the Year and outstanding achievements such as the coverage of Alyssa Azar as the youngest Australian to climb Mount Everest (see Figure 2.3) stand as prominent examples.



Figure 2.3 ABC News, 23 May, 2016. Retrieved from

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-21/alyssa-azar-mount-everest-climb-youngest-australian/7434258>

However, Bessant et al (1998) questions whether the positive representations such as these counter the negative stereotypes so often portrayed by the media or whether they indeed provide the binary of a 'positive' category of youth that maintains the category of the young person as the 'other'. Bessant et al (1998) pose the question of how effective positive representations of young people can indeed be, and whether entrenched stereotypes are in fact so persuasive that any attempt to repair the image of the young person as anything other than rebellious, impulsive and at times deviant can be achieved. This is a somewhat reductive argument, but one that nonetheless carries significance in explaining current representational politics of young people and the durability of pathologised views of young people.

Whilst traditional or transmissive media (TV, newspapers, radio, magazines etc) are still influential in young people lives, with the evolution of 'new media' (and in particular social media ) there are more varied roles for young people, and importantly, platforms upon which young people can actively produce their own accounts and representations of life as 'young people'. Bruns

(2009) suggests that with the advances in technology young people can now participate and collaborate in media productions and shape their own identity as more than passive consumers.

Social networking sites such as Facebook, twitter, instagram, and others, play an important role in how young people see and portray themselves to the world. Within these acts of self-representation, important markers of identity emerge, whereby the role-play of identity locations offered in social media representations come to provide avenues for the agentic expression of self. Identity can be viewed as a constant process of becoming, something that is flexible and subject to change, and when examined in context of identity theory, social networking sites provide a vessel for self-expression within which the young person can define who they are and how they want to be seen (Pelling & White, 2009). Social networking sites also play a dual role in the broader construction of identity, both in defining and testing identity individually, and as part of a community. In this thesis, social media did not provide a primary focus of analysis, but was invoked in the participants' relay of experiences and discussions around where they gained a sense of self and identity. This thesis does however emphasize the 'active' capacity these young people asserted in shaping their own identities.

### **The "Official" Perspective in Australia**

Just as the classification of a young person varies between disciplinary discourses, it is further mediated by formal governmental applications, including local and state government strategies and frameworks relating to youth. These provide an example of what Apple (1993) terms "official knowledge". 'Official knowledge' for Apple (1993) refers to authorised knowledge, as "the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable, class, race, gender and religious groups" (Apple, 2014, p. 47). In this project 'official' governmental perspectives of the young person provide important contextual touchstones on who the young person *ought to be*.

As a prominent point of definition for situating the idea of the young person, age stands as a significant marker, typically informed by the aforementioned psychomedical perspective. Yet some variability permeates this seemingly fixed definitional marker, with the definition of young people according to age dependent on which governmental department or office it corresponds with. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) define young people as ‘those aged 12-24 years’ as indicated in their 2011 report on the health and wellbeing of young Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). However National Youth Week is targeted to young people aged 12-25 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Between the states there is even further variation as to the definition age of a young person, ranging from 12 up to 25 years of age (ACT Government Community Services, 2015; City of Melbourne, 2015; Department of Communities, 2013; Government of Western Australia: Department for Communities Youth, 2010; Northern Territory Government, 2015; NSW Government Office of Communities Youth, 2015).

The ‘official’ concept of youth can also be viewed according to *transition or phase of life*, as previously discussed (Cohen & Murdock, 1997; Mizen, 2004; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Once again signified by age, these transitional definitions of youth reinforce the notion that youth are a group who are in flux, and transitioning from childhood to adulthood, or irresponsibility to responsibility, to become ‘contributing’ members of society. Young people may also be overlooked as *citizens in waiting* in official terms, especially when democratic participation is gear to voter age and active citizenry is considered (Osler & Starkey, 2009).

Mizen (2002) describes this approach to the definition of as *putting politics back into youth*, and suggests that “it is the political importance attached to age that in many respects shapes young people’s lives” (Mizen, 2004 p. 20). Kelly (2000) reinforces this idea by arguing that the concept of youth is a result of the process of governmentality, with a series of actions aimed at regulating young people. Articulations of these views are witnessed in statements such as the following made by former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot in 2014:

I say to people who are about to leave school, 'earn or learn', because what is unacceptable to our community - and should be unacceptable to you - is leaving a school to go on a welfare benefit. That is no way to begin your life. It is no way to begin your life as a constructive contributor to the Australian community (Cook, 2014, p. 1)

This largely pathologising view of young people as fundamentally belligerent and only useful as an active member of society if learning or earning provides a useful case example of the ways young people are positioned in official discourse. This example also highlights the need to understand what constitutes learning in Australia and its effects on the definition of the young person.

## **2.2 Learning**

That young people are associated with learning (and in particular schooling) is no mistake and, draws from wider assumptions that young people require the developmental instruction that education and schooling provide. Fundamental to many definitions of learning is the idea of learning as a process of acquiring knowledge or skills through instruction, study or experience (Carter, 2013; Folkestad, 2006; Rouvrais, 2012; Valtonen, Hacklin, Dillion, Vesisenaho, Kukkonen & Hietanen, 2012). Psychological definitions draw evidence of education in lasting change in behaviour as a result of the experience (Schacter, Gilbert, & Wegner, 2011). A sociocultural approach to learning places emphasis on the role that social and cultural experiences have in the “acquisition, organization and use of knowledge” (Gauvain, 2005).

Two influential paradigms have emerged from the idea that context is influential to learning: “socially distributed cognition” and “situated learning”. These paradigms posit that learning not only occurs *within* the individual but also *among* the social context of the activity. *Socially distributed cognition* occurs in group activities and each participant has a role in advancing the goal of the activity, according to their level of competence and social status (Maynard,

2005). However, learning is not always deliberate and often occurs informally within the social setting, with this termed *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This type of informal learning is particularly important for transferring skill across generations and between peers and is an influential component in the formation of young people's lives. Situated learning is particularly significant to this thesis, with the later chapters identifying how case groups of young people set about engaging in learning as a social practice.

There are three distinct categories of learning that are consistently represented in the literature; formal, non-formal and informal learning (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003; Thompson, 2012). Young people gain identity across these three domains of learning. Formal learning, typically in the form of schooling, has a major influence on the young person's identity formation, due to the significant amount of time spent attending. Additionally, a large part of young peoples' social interaction and interpersonal relationships, a core component of identity, are developed in schools. Significantly, this initial distinction between the 'formality' of schooling and 'informality' of peer group mediated forms of learning provides a major distinction for this thesis and the analysis outlined in the later chapters.

### **2.2.1 Formal Learning**

Formal learning is intentional, planned, organised and structured with clearly defined learning objectives that often occur within an institutional setting (Harvey, 2014; Malcolm et al., 2003;). School, university, colleges and similar provide typical examples of the institutional settings where formal learning occurs. Workplace learning, particularly planned professional development, is also considered formal learning (Choi & Jacobs, 2011). Formal learning is often seen as being synonymous with *education* with this association prefacing formations of teaching and learning that occur within an institutional setting, are designed as codified and proceed as intentional, structured, and evaluated and led by a teacher. For a comprehensive history of formal learning, particularly in relation to the schooling/education throughout Britain, the United States and Australia system see Appendix A.

Formal learning, enacted within the setting of the school site, plays an integral role in identity formation for the young person. A significant amount of time is spent at school and many of the young person's social interactions and interpersonal relationships are initiated and occur within the school setting. Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006) found that school plays an important role in "how students see themselves, their behaviour, and their learning achievements" (p. 85). Formal school sites are of only tangential interest to this project however, it is acknowledged that for most of the participants of this project, school functioned as a major site of socialisation and identity formation. That schooling constitutes a major component of the daily routine for most young people in Australia, its influence, including in moments of informal education and learning, must be considered.

### **2.2.2 Non-Institutional learning**

Literature on non-institutional learning is typically categorised as either non-formal or informal learning. The definitions of both can be indistinct and overlays of both types of learning appear in many articles on learning. For the purpose of this thesis I have defined them below. The sites of learning play a significant role in how learning proceeds and are not necessarily just physical or virtual places but, are also social constructs.

#### **Non-formal learning**

Non-formal learning is the area of learning with the least consensus in the literature. Non-formal learning is considered to fall somewhere between formal and informal learning, with specific learning objectives, and undertaken in an organised manner (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015), often with the aim to support or complement formal education (Thompson, 2012). Malcolm, Hodgkinson & Colley. (2003) undertook a "major literature trawl" (p. 313) and found that the terms non-formal learning and informal learning are often used interchangeably depending on the setting. Non-formal learning, as a term, is more frequently, though not exclusively, used in the political arena as a process to empower underprivileged learners, in a variety of settings, while informal learning is the label typically assigned within

the research community in relation to learning outside educational institutions (Malcolm et al., 2003). Examples of these include affirmative action programs and learning support initiatives within schools. Non-formal learning was not a specific focus of this project due to the ambiguous terminology and meanings.

### **Informal learning**

Although the notion of informal learning is largely recognised, identifying a firm definition is more ambiguous. Frequently the term informal learning is compared and contrasted with formal learning. Whereas formal learning is typically considered to be institutionally based (within school or workplace), occurring within a set location and under explicit instruction (Carter, 2013; Choi & Jacobs, 2011), learning in informal settings highlights the importance of viewing learning not just at an individual level but at a social and cultural level (Callanan et al., 2011; Carter, 2013). Marsick and Watkins (2001) use the term informal learning to explain learning, including incidental learning, that is not typically institutionally based or highly structured and where the control of learning lies with the learner. Lave and Wenger (1991) hypothesize in their *Situated Learning Theory* that learning is not always intentional and is situated within the social setting in which it occurs. Social interaction and co-participation are pivotal elements of the situated learning process with this termed “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Identity is core to the *Situated Learning Theory*, in that learning is considered to be, not only about developing knowledge and skills but, also a process of understanding who we are and where we belong. As a social process, informal learning characteristically involves more than learning of one subject; it also features peripheral learning at a more encompassing level (Folkestad, 2006). In addition, and integral to informal learning, is the *Social Learning Theory* which postulates that learning is a cognitive process that occurs in a social context via observation, imitation and modeling (Bandura 1977). The theory highlights that human behaviour is a constant, reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and socio-environmental influences with indirect experiences and reinforcement playing a central role (Bandura 1977). The ability to learn via enacted practice is fundamental in informal learning, with modelling providing

the pedagogic dynamic of this mode of learning. Modelling can take place via demonstration, verbal instruction or symbolic stimuli like the media. Another important component of the social learning theory is the importance it places on self-regulation. Bandura (1991) suggests that humans can control their own behaviour through self-regulation by self-monitoring, making judgements about our environment, ourselves and our response and, in turn shape how we perceive ourselves and how others see us. The nature of informal learning, at an individual, social and community level, means that it occurs in many forms and across various sites (Callanan et al., 2011; Carter, 2013; Erstad, Gilje, Sefton-Green, & Arnseth, 2016; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2017). Erstad et al (2016) found that 'learning identities' developed over time, across different sites and trajectories and used the term 'learning lives' to encapsulate learning as a 24/7 phenomenon, both cognitive and social, that continues throughout the lifespan and, in various sites. Particularly in sites of 'informal' learning, the formative development of individuality and identity is pertinent.

### **Sites of Informal Learning**

Informal learning is typically defined as being socially mediated and situated; taking place according to the individual's participation in situated social settings and practiced as the result of social interaction (Kumpulainen & Mutanen, 1999). Locations including the home, peer groups, popular culture and community are key sites of informal learning. In a sociological sense, *socialisation* and *enculturation* within family, community and wider public settings exert immense influences over the identity formation of individuals and it is within these that informal learning occurs (Giddens, 1984) . As the individual negotiates the social settings of the home, community and wider society, processes of learning place and social practice are enacted within wider dynamics of interaction and socialisation. In this sense, informal learning has a marked influence of identity formation and the individual's emergent sense of self and being-in-the-world.

Sociologist of education, Paul Willis (1977) noted some time ago that the role of informal learning within formal, school-based education, was significant to the

social dynamic of the classroom. More recent studies by Sefton-Green et al (2017), Biesta (2012) and Miles et al (2018) also demonstrate the influence of informal learning. The argument at the center of this research is that informal learning occurs spontaneously-even within sites of otherwise formalised education and learning-as a relational and socially mediated act. McGivney (1999) found that the relationships through which this learning was enacted were often more significant than the actual content and, that informal learning holds the added benefit of greater community participation. In turn, the sites of learning exert a major influence over how the learning proceeds. Learning spaces are not necessarily physical or virtual places, but 'constructs of the person's experience in the social environment' (Kolb & Kolb, 2005 p. 200). The Situated Learning Theory supports this concept by considering the learning process not only as an individual one but a social one; one that provides the opportunity to develop an identity and which in turn provides a sense of belonging (Lave & Wegner, 1991).

Whilst the 'learning lives' of young people are influenced by the full array of sites they participate in, this thesis examines three specific sites, in which young people were engaged as learners, with the aim to offer insight into how these specific locations frame different understandings of what counts as learning and how this proceeds.

### **Peer Group**

Sociocultural perspectives on learning place emphasis on the role of social interaction in the movement from interpersonal to intrapersonal functioning and development of knowledge (Kumpulainen & Mutanen, 1999). Interaction with a peer group, composed of individuals of similar age, background and social status, will likely influence a person's beliefs and behaviour (Ennett & Bauman, 1994; Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore, & Brown, 2007). Due to the homogenous nature of peer groups, peer group influence may positively or negatively impact learning or influence learning in areas not considered desirable (for example adolescent smoking and drinking).

Ennett and Bauman (1994) propose that the homogeneity of peer groups can be explained by *influence and selection*. Influence suggests that peer groups cause the behaviour, positive or negative, whereas selection indicates that behaviour causes the formation of the peer group. The importance of peer group pressure as a determining factor in a young person's behaviour and attitude is widely noted with McNeish (1999) citing peer influence as a key factor for young people "who may be more likely to take account of the views and behavior of their peers than of adults"(p. 15). The role of selection, that is, selection of peer groups based on behaviour is less often reported. However, Ennett and Bauman (1994), when studying smoking behaviour of young people, did find that selection contributes equally to influence in smoking among group members. Regardless of whether influence or selection is responsible for the homogenous nature of peer groups, the importance the peer group plays in the learning environment is significant.

### **Popular Culture**

Experiential learning occurs for the young person on a daily basis via engagements with popular culture(s), which in turn influences their world view. The concept of "popular culture" emerged in the nineteenth century and was understood to mean the culture of the multitudes (Guy, 2007). The term was frequently used to derogatorily contrast with 'high culture' (Storey, 2006). More recently Guy (2007) described popular culture as a "complex interplay of cultural products and meanings placed in circulation by differently positioned persons" (p. 16). Supporting this idea Storey (2006) suggests that popular culture is often a commercial culture produced for consumption by the masses though, in some instances, it "originates with the people" (p. 7) and is circulated through media, including music, television, radio, magazines and social networking sites to name a few (Cheung, 2001; Duncan-Andrade, 2004). Popular culture provides a medium for the young person in forming their view of self and understanding how people differ and fit into certain roles within society based on race, class and gender (Giroux, 2012; Guy, 2007). Giroux (2012) states that one cannot underestimate the "power of representations, texts, and images in producing identities and shaping the relationship between

the self and society in an increasingly commodified world' and that "mass advertising has become the site of a representational politics that powerfully challenges our understanding of what constitutes pedagogy, the sites in which it functions, and who speaks under what conditions through its authorizing agency" (p. 3-4). Conversely the agency of the young person within popular culture cannot be underestimated, with young people often a more cognizant and conscientious audience than typically perceived (as outlined above, with regard the capacities young people have as themselves 'active' consumers and producers of media and popular culture) (Buckingham, 2002).

Popular culture is an important avenue for informal learning. According to Trifonas (2010) popular culture, in the form of digital culture, has become "the means for enacting forms of public pedagogy through which we learn to read and engage others and the world around us"(p. 180). The role of digital technologies, in particular, over the last few decades had had implications for how and where learning occurs and this in turn influences how learning is conceptualised (Erstad & Sefton-Green, 2013). Digital games, for example, are both an exponent and vehicle of cultural transformation as a form of public pedagogy. They not only form a segment of the popular culture industry but also lead to transformation in other domains such as learning. Through playing games the participant acquires skills, including digital literacy skills, which can then be applied into 'real world 'situations and been able to interact with others both on and offline alters the self-expression of the young person (Buckingham, Bragg, & Kehily, 2015; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2017). In addition, young people often play these games in communities of practice, that is they are part of a 'community' formed who share a "concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger 2006, p. 1). This notion of the community of practice (which will be discussed further in the below section) is crucial to the formation of a sense of self and a site where participants' sense of identity might find bearing.

## Community

Research in the area of informal learning (Apple, 1993, 2011) and more recently, public pedagogy (Sandlin et al., 2010) demonstrates that the effects of informal, non-school based learning on community are profound. As significant sites of informal learning, communities provide the context for interpersonal relationships and connection to space. In providing the basis of these connections to space and others, community then is situated as a *crucible of learning*; a location for learning self, other and space.

Various definitions focus on community as a geographical location (Hillery, 1955), or a group of people living in a particular place (Howarth, 2001). Others see a community as an area of common interest (Howarth, 2001; MacQueen et al. , 2001; Meyrowitz, 1986; Wenger 2006). In early theoretical accounts, communities were somewhat limited to specific geographical or spatial locations (Durkheim, 1972; Keller, 2003; Tonnies, 1957) but more recent definitions suggest that a community can exist across physical and geographic boundaries (Castells, 2004; Grange, 1999), including the disembodied spaces of the web (as demonstrated by Web2.0 technologies and social media as two examples). Communities can also exist virtually and in online environments where individuals interact through social media without actually having any direct physical contact. Regardless of the definition of community as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) states “It feels good: whatever the word ‘community’ may mean, it is good ‘to have a community’, to be in a community” (p. 1).

Furthermore, Anderson (1991) suggested that communities are ‘imagined’ entities, ones where the members have an understanding of what their community is and how it functions, even in the absence of direct interpersonal contact. Cohen (2004) further expands on this by stating that community is where individuals learn and practice to “be social” (p. 15); that is community is site where we learn about friendship community and identity outside of kinship.

Just as there are various, often conflicting, definitions of communities there are also different 'forms' of community. One such example is that of the community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 2006). Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the concept of 'communities of practice' within their model of 'situated learning'. The model hypothesised that learning centres around a process of engagement in a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991).

According to Wenger (2006) communities of practice must have three characteristics -

1. The *domain* – A CoP has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest and membership implies a commitment to the domain.
2. The *community* – CoP members engage in joint activities and discussions help each other and share information, build relationships and learn from each other.
3. The *practice*- CoP members develop a shared collection of resources, including experiences, stories, tools, ways to address typical issues, it is a shared practice.

In this project communities of practice provided the foundation of a social learning system in which the value lies in the informal practices and importantly the relationships and experiences that inform shared practice (Wenger, 1999, 2000). For the young person, a community of practice provides a connection to others and as a context of learning (Austin & Hickey, 2007; Wenger, 1999) . For example, in the settings encountered in this project- and discussed in detail in Chapter 4- the 'domain' constituted the initial 'prompt' for the group's gathering; the reason for learning. In each of the sites explored in this thesis, this was largely prompted by a concern for learning about identity and connection to place that those encountered young people shared. The 'community' was formed by the participants themselves, and although differently constituted in each case, nonetheless identified as a 'community' through mutual association and cohesion around the practice of their learning. The 'practice' was then constituted by the act of undertaking those activities-the 'stuff' of the learning- enacted in these moments and, bound by the setting in which this was undertaken.

Whilst the concept of the 'community of practice' is well understood and utilised within the field, Gee (2005) proposes an alternative; called the 'affinity group'. Whereas Communities of Practice focus on belonging or 'membership' to a community, affinity groups focus on the *space* in which people interact around a common interest. Affinity groups are the "learning system built around popular culture practice" (Hayes & Gee 2010 p. 188) such as collaboration, production in addition to consumption of knowledge where identity is enacted without the use of 'labels'. This thesis will consider both concepts in the broader context of learning and identity. When considered in terms of regional Queensland the way regionality informs these concepts will be key to the type of learning that occurs.

### **Regionality**

Much like community, *regionality* is a concept without fixed definition. It can be thought of as a *place*, a "sharply tuned spatial logic whose muscled core is an affective attachment to place so powerful that it's as if there's an invisible gate at the town line" (Stewart, 2013, p. 276). Tönnies (2012) would describe this as *Gemeinschaft (community)* - a community "organized around family, village and town" with emphasis on interpersonal relationships existent between community members, as these function according to specific connections to a defined geographic location.

According to the Regional Australia Institute (2015) *regional* is a term used to refer to the non-metropolitan areas that lie beyond the major capital cities and their immediate surrounding suburbs. To further specify the context for this study, communities that were explored are located in 'regional' settings. For this study the Toowoomba Regional Council area has been selected as a case site. The Toowoomba Regional Council area covers 12,973 sq km of south-east Queensland, from Toowoomba in the east to Cecil Plains in the west and from Clifton in the south to Yarraman in the North (Toowoomba Regional Council 2014 (See Appendix B for map detail).

In this study both 'community' and 'regionality' provide framing concepts that give meaning to the sites within which young people and informal learning occur. Importantly, however, both regionality and community also provide a sense of the underlying 'logics' attached to what it means to live in regional Queensland. Community and regionality in this regard function as both sites and expressions of ways of living and play a major role in how the young people engaged in this research came to position themselves in the world and how they enact their identity.

### **Summary**

The review of the literature has concentrated on the idea of "young person" as a social construct and the role that learning plays as a key 'site' for identity formation and enactment of agency. The literature review does have limitations as it is not exhaustive, and might have explored areas including, for example, additional 'sites' of learning and interaction including such as the digital lives of the young person. However, the focus of this project on the ways that young people learn in-person in real-time and, given that the case sites included groups of young people working in this way, further sites of interactions were not explored. While I acknowledge the literature in these fields, and in particular Carrington and Robinson's (2009) views that young people 'demonstrate key principles of informal learning as they play out around these emerging technologies' (p. 4), it remains that understanding how young people negotiate informal learning as a mode of personal interaction drove this project and its ethnographic inquiry.

In the following chapters I draw upon this literature review to examine how regionally based young people engage in various types of informal learning, according to site and the role this plays in identity formation. In particular, this thesis applies the theoretical concepts discussed in this Chapter to theorise the nature of identity formation in young people and the role informal learning plays in such formation. The key concepts examined, via case studies, include; the notion that the 'young person' is a societally determined concept influenced by the media, popular culture, peer group and institutional influences and, how

the young person is viewed by society can, in turn, influence how they view themselves.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

*Critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meaning that make a difference in others' worlds" (Madison, 2011, p. 10)*

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The methodology chosen for this project drew on a qualitative interpretivist approach and sought to uncover a 'phenomenological' account of the experience of being a young person. Specifically, this project was interested in uncovering a sense of those informal networks of learning that groups of young people, located within regional Queensland settings, accessed and used to define their sense of self. The project centred around three case sites, with multiple participants, using ethnographic fieldwork with associated data collection techniques, including observation, participation and interview to explore how informal learning influenced young people's self-perception.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the focus of this research was to identify the nature of and role that informal learning plays in identity formation for young people in regional Queensland. Therefore, the method I selected and applied to conduct this research corresponds to this question. Given that, this project was field-based, ideographically oriented toward understanding the lifeworld of participants and inductively analytical. The research was geared toward understanding experience; in particular, that of the young people who fulfilled the role of participants for this project. How it was that these participants went about engaging with processes of learning, as a situated and peer-mediated practice, formed the basis of this project and consequently defined the method.

I undertook ethnographic engagement with the groups of young people using Geertz's method of 'deep hanging out' (Geertz, 1998). This form of participatory observation provided a method of choice due to; not only to the ability that such an ethnographic method allows for understanding the rich complexity of participant life-worlds, but also the opportunity it provides to

build trust and rapport with the participants over an extended period of time. Via immersion in those groups I encountered, and the social experiences they enacted at an informal level, I was able to gain insight into how practices of interaction and negotiation of the social contexts these young people encountered provoked certain modes of learning. In turn, this provided insights into the role informal learning played in the lives of the participants.

Verification of the validity of data, due to subjectivity and biases of the researchers, is a commonly cited downfall of this method (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). However, Madison (2011) suggests that, providing researchers contextualise their subjectivity and are “transparent and vulnerable to judgement and evaluation” (p. 9.), this mode of research remains accountable and credible. I kept a fieldwork diary (see example in Appendix C) to reflect on my experiences with each participant group and spoke frequently to my supervisor to ensure I maintained a level of reflective practice. This *reflexive analysis*, the acknowledgement and awareness of one’s own practice, is an essential component of qualitative research where the researcher recognises how their position and interest as a researcher affects all stages of the research process (J.S. Fontana, 2004; Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009). To ensure I maintained my reflexive practice I had regular weekly meetings with my supervisor, with whom I was a co-researcher on previous projects and for whom my conduct as a researcher was familiar. Accordingly, my supervisor had a close insight into my research practice and conduct, both as an ethnographer and in terms of the analytic approach I took. In addition, I had further impromptu meetings with my supervisor if I felt that I needed an opinion on how I was conducting the research process or to discuss initial findings. My associate supervisor has acted as a ‘critical friend’ throughout this process and has provided a balanced opinion of draft material in light of collected data and the conceptual framing of the project. There was no direct involvement in any of the three case sites by my associate supervisor and therefore this feedback took a more ‘impartial’ perspective.

As an additional component for ensuring 'reliability' beyond the formulation of field notes, capture of interviews and wider participation in the case sites, I also incorporated a reflexive accounting for my research practice and generated data via the process of producing reports for organisations associated with two or the three case sites. I authored or co-authored reports for these organisations (the school involved in the Bike Build Program and headspace Toowoomba for the GLBTIQ group) and followed up to ensure that they felt I had represented the site accurately. I undertook this form of dissemination of the research findings for these partner organisations as an act of reciprocity and openness about the project data. I also felt a personal sense of obligation to these groups and their organisers and wanted to 'give something back' from this research to inform these groups practices and ongoing conduct.

These reports contributed directly to this thesis, and, in particular, the way that data was considered, by allowing me to consolidate my thinking around these sites prior to the development of this thesis. These reports formed an early opportunity to analyse the data and take stock of findings as they emerged. They also allowed me to establish the bona fides of my research practice with the research participants and involved organisations. Appendix D includes an example report drawn from one of the case sites.

Beyond the production of these reports, the larger dataset compiled for this project was analysed according to my own positionality as a researcher within this, enabling a rich understanding of how my research practice came to be enacted and how it was received 'in the field'. By taking this approach to considering my role, I became acutely aware of my own *positionality* as a researcher. This reflection is essential in ethnographic research as it compels the researcher to recognise their own power base and biases and how it can influence the outcomes of the research (Madison, 2011). Furthermore, Noblit et al (2004) state that "Critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study"

(p. 3). I resonate with Rosanna Hertz's (1998) description of the implications for her research:

After delving into issues of voice and reflexivity, I find myself freer to think about how to incorporate my own voice into a piece of work where I have no personal experience. I want a reader to understand that... I bring to the topic my own history and perspective. I still believe that my primary obligation as a social scientist is to tell the stories of the people I have studied. But I also find that the accounts they tell have been constructed through the dialogue that my respondents created in conjunction with me (cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2003 p. 579)

For example, I was not an insider in any of the case sites: I was not a student for the bike build site; I was not a member of the LBGTQI community; and although a mountain biker, I was not 'in' the friendship group of the mountain bikers I interviewed. I was, however immersed in each of these groups as part of this project and came to develop a rapport and sense of camaraderie with these participants as part of the first stage of the fieldwork. This familiarity and development of familiarity as a co-participant in the groups was crucial. As Creswell (2013) notes, qualitative authors need to acknowledge that the reporting of qualitative research cannot be separate to the author and all reporting is "positioned" according to the context of the author's life, including their gender, social class, personal politics and cultural background. Fetterman (2010) suggests an ethnographic researcher 'enters the field with an open mind, not an empty head' (p. 1) and to maintain validity the context needs to be acknowledged. In all, this approach to the research enabled me enough distance in order to be able to look afresh at the experiences of these young people, but equally enough rapport to build meaningful connections. I further discuss my position and the implications of the insider/outsider status later in this chapter.

### 3.1 Method and Methodology

For this project I chose a field-based ethnographic method that utilised participation, observation and interview techniques to seek an understanding of the experience of engaging in informal modes of learning from groups of young people. Within this, participant observation and interview provided key data collection techniques. Participant observation is widely considered an effective way to collect qualitative data whereby researchers actively participate to learn about the behaviour and activities of participants (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Madison, 2011; Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Participation in the activities, interactions and events by the researcher facilitates a greater understanding of the 'culture' of the site (Musante & DeWalt, 2010; Spradley, 2016). Spradley (2016, p. 56) suggests that the participant observer requires a *heightened sense of awareness* and approaches the research site with a *wide angle lens* to effectively understand the relationship between the site and the participants.

The challenge for the participant observer is to ensure they do not influence behaviour change, sometimes referred to the Hawthorne effect<sup>12</sup> (Oswald, Sherratt, & Smith, 2014). To mitigate the effect of participant observation in ethnography involves establishing rapport within the participant group and 'blending' into the site so that the participants will act naturally (Kawulich, 2005). For this project my level of participant observation could be considered on the scale between *moderate* and *active participation*, that is I engaged in almost everything that the participants were doing as a means of trying to engage and learn the cultural mores of the site (Spradley, 2016). Although I actively engaged with the participants (see Figure 3.0), my participation was limited to activities predetermined by the site; i.e. rebuilding bikes at the bike build site, participating in an LBGTQI support group during their set gatherings, and at the mountain bike park and a local McDonalds

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<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of this project The Hawthorne effect is when there is "a change in the subject's normal behaviour, attributed to the knowledge that their behaviour is being watched or studied" (Oswald et al 2014, p. 53).

restaurant with the mountain bike group. This participant observation set the context for the interviewing component of the method.



Figure 3.0 (T. Pauli-Myler, personal photograph taken by Andrew Hickey, June 6, 2016)

Interviews were also central to this project due to opportunity to elicit in depth information from the participant group. I utilised the *responsive interviewing* model whereby interviewees are considered partners in the research process and not just subjects or objects of research (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Core to this method is the development and maintenance of reciprocal relationships developed via conversations between the researcher and participant over time and as part of the fieldwork (Knapik, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). This will be discussed in detail in section 3.2.2

The use of these techniques, along with the reflexive analysis of my own positionality, enabled verification and confirmation of the data via the 'triangulation'<sup>13</sup> these datasets provided. Further, the data was gathered over the course of extended periods of time and consequently was analysed back-and-forth to establish a sense of how participant viewpoints emerged and developed over the full timeframe of the fieldwork. The aim of this application of triangulation was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon through the careful comparison of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

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<sup>13</sup> It is acknowledged that 'triangulation' carries positivist overtones, however I use the concept as per Cresswell (2013) to deliberately but carefully denote a mix of methods to enable the analysis used in this project.

For example, I compiled field notes and then compared my notes with the interviews that I had undertaken and also reviewed the photographic evidence to see if these different data sources aligned. In addition, I would 'debrief' after every session of the bike build program with my PhD supervisor to establish if we had a sense of the data and how interpretations of this data could be generated. In all, these multiple data collection techniques, enacted over the course of long-term engagement with each group, and interpreted and made-sense-of according to the research questions that guided this project, enabled a rich analysis of the observed experiences of the young people engaged in this project to emerge.

### **Stages in the Research**

The research was undertaken to explore the ways that young people draw on and engage with informal networks of learning in community, peer network and popular cultural contexts. The focus of this research was centred on understanding the ways that young people experience informal learning opportunities within these contexts. Accordingly, I chose three case sites to explore the differences and similarities each case site played in the formation of young people' identities. For each site I followed Singleton and Straights (2005) stages in field research:

- Problem formulation
- Selecting a research setting
- Gaining access
- Presenting oneself
- Gathering and recording information

This approach provided a cohesive means by which to approach and undertake the research within each site, and more-so, provided a level of consistency by which the method utilised in this project could be enacted across each site. Although each site contained its own idiosyncrasies and uniqueness, having these common points of reference for conducting the research enabled the production of a data set that 'spoke' across each site and the experiences these groups of participants encountered. This approach also allowed for

cohesion in the analysis of the data, and a point from which the data from each site could be considered against the larger concerns of the project's research questions.

### **Problem formulation**

This stage concerned defining the main focus of the study by formulating the problem or issue in focus (Singleton & Straits, 2005). My interest in identity formation and the enactment of agency by young people began many years ago in my professional practice in public health, and was reignited at a seminar addressing the 'issues of youth' in my home city, and the city I've conducted this project within, Toowoomba. There was lengthy discussion about how important it is to 'keep young people in the education system as long as possible to ensure better outcomes', particularly in terms of future employment and overall contribution to society. I recognised the importance of formal education, it was a topic that has been extensively studied over the recent years, particularly in relation to how young people might be engaged in formal education. However, I was left wondering what happened to those who don't fit within existing, institutional education systems; are there other, informal learning sites where the young person can formulate and enact their identity? At this same seminar I met with two professors from the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) and we discussed the possibility of undertaking research to understand the significance of the role that informal learning sites plays in the lives of the young person. It was from this that formal entry to the PhD program commenced.

Following formal enrolment into the program, further refinement of the 'problem' proceeded, and in conjunction with my supervisors, I set about defining a focus on the role that informal networks and sites of learning play in shaping young people's sense of self and educative horizons. At this point, I was equipped with a focus and set about identifying sites from which this problem might be examined.

## Selecting a Research Setting

Once armed with an idea of the focus of this research, I set about finding sites and bracketing my study 'population' (Denzin, 2001; Soyini Madison, 2011). From my initial meeting with the professors I had been referred to another academic at USQ, Associate Professor Andrew Hickey, who had a research history working with young people and had an opportunity to undertake a project within an 'alternative learning program' set within a school; *Bike Build*. This project involved the school and a collaboration with and the local government youth programming section "YouthConnect"<sup>14</sup>. Upon our first meeting it was decided that it would indeed be the perfect setting to undertake research into informal learning and identity formation by young people. Andrew became my principal supervisor and together we discussed the possibilities of extending the sites to others outside of this school-based institutional setting. Various other sites were explored (which I go into depth in the 'challenges' section of this chapter) but two emerged as viable: an LGBTQI social group and a group of young mountain bikers both located in Toowoomba. From the collaboration with Youth Connect and, in particular, my early contact and key participant Sam<sup>15</sup>, each site was selected and confirmed for this project. Each group met my criteria for suitable young people exploring their identity in an informal site. Importantly, each provided a slight nuance in function and 'mode' of informality.

The Bike Build group, although auspiced under the jurisdiction of a school site, still functioned 'informally' and from a deeply 'student centred' approach where learning and engagement was negotiated and directed by the students. Importantly, this program was also conducted 'away' from the main school site, and as will be discussed later in this thesis, this separation from the main

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<sup>14</sup> YouthConnect is the branding given to a team of programs run under the Community Development Branch of the Toowoomba Regional Council. The YouthConnect program works with young people in the Toowoomba region and delivers classes, programs and events. YouthConnect identifies need and issues that young people and works in collaboration with other organisations to address these needs.

<sup>15</sup> Not their real name- pseudonyms have been applied throughout to protect participant's identities.

campus of the school added to the informality the alternative program suggested.

The LGBTIQ support group, also auspiced under the institutional presence of the local headspace office, functioned as a negotiated space; albeit as one that remained heavily influenced by participating adult facilitators. Each provided an excellent case example of how young people negotiated spaces such as those presented in schools and social support networks, but equally offered scope to explore how young people negotiated these structures.

The third group, the mountain bike group, were another cohort who met the criteria, however with even less formality and institutional presence associated with their organisation. This group met without any formal educational or organisational oversight and constituted a peer group; meeting up to learn techniques in mountain biking from each other. It is important to note that this group was predominantly one built around 'friendship' and while learning was indeed occurring within this group dynamic, it was less overt, and instead emerged as a consequence of the sociality and interaction these participants shared when cycling together.

Importantly these three cohorts of participants and the distinct sites they operated within provided a tiered approach to my research. The overlay of formal institutional presence in the first site (Bike Build), and to a lesser extent the second (the LGBTIQI group) and finally, the autonomous formation of the group in the third (the Mountain Bike group) provided a further dynamic for considering the role that formal structures and institutional and systemic arrangements in which young people work and learn. I discuss this aspect of each site in further detail below.

### **Gaining access**

Now that my topic and sites were decided I needed to gain access to each group. As my topic had originally come at the time when my supervisor was already in talks with a local secondary school regarding a bike rebuild program,

some of the formalities of scheduling and enacting the research had already been undertaken. I stepped into a program that was ready and waiting and was introduced to the school as the project's co-researcher. Having this site already prepared by my supervisor was indeed serendipitous and alleviated many of the issues that can arise when searching for a research site, such as finding contacts that are willing to work with you as part of a research project. This initial training was invaluable and also established my credentials as an ethnographer.

For the LBGTQI site I was introduced through my contact at "YouthConnect", Sam who I had also happened to be working with on the Bike Build project. Sam was an adult participant in the headspace Toowoomba GLBTIQ<sup>16</sup> Social Group and introduced me to the group and vouched for me. This made my transition into the group easier as there was a level of acceptance from the first meeting and, whilst I was questioned about my research, I was not interrogated; the bona fides of my character and capacity as a researcher, not to mention my affinity for this group charter had been established through this introduction.

I had informally known the mountain bike group for over two of years and approached a group of them at a local club race event to ask if they'd be happy to participate in my project. Having a pre-existing knowledge of me helped in establishing trust. After this initial contact, I followed up through social media message services to organise our catch ups.

### **Presenting oneself**

Prior to approaching the case sites, I had earlier prepared a Participant Information Research Project sheet as per USQ ethical clearance processes (see Appendix E). In addition to this however, I also presented a 'Lay Summary' to my participants, as per Madison's (2011) format, to use as a 'less formal' document and prompt (in conjunction with the formal ethical clearance forms) and from which I could talk when meeting the research organisations and participants.

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<sup>16</sup> The headspace LBGTQI group is titled "GLBTIQ Social Group" this is reflected throughout the document when referring to the group.

The summary provided a guide that I could use to explain to the research subjects; who I was, what I would be doing, and how my participants would be involved in the research. This lay summary was adapted to be context specific for each group.

The points I addressed in the Lay Summary as per Madison, (2011) included a brief summary of the following:

- Who am I?
- What am I doing, and why?
- What I would do with the results of this study?
- How participants were selected.
- The possible benefits or risks to participants.
- How I would assure confidentiality and anonymity.
- How often I would meet for observation and interview.
- How and in what manner I would ask permission to record participants actions.

From the outset, I had decided to present myself as a researcher and co-participant in each of the sites. This dual role was important to note, given that I was, as is often the case in ethnography, not solely fulfilling the role of 'researcher' (Cresswell 2013). For the Bike Build site, I was a co-facilitator, participant and researcher and accordingly fulfilled the responsibilities of each of these roles. The participants were also cognisant of these multiple roles; for instance, at the first session I was asked if I was a 'cop' or a teacher and once my participants found out I was neither and instead was just someone from the University who likes bikes, and was involved in order to facilitate the session but also to "seek opinions on informal learning and young people" I was provisionally accepted. For the GLBTIQ Social Group I positioned myself again as someone from the University who wanted young people's opinions on informal learning and identity. This group also provisionally accepted my presence after this introduction. With the mountain bike group my participants had already some knowledge of who I was and what I was about; that is, as someone who is a regular in the mountain bike 'scene' and who my participants had some prior

contact, I became 'just' another mountain biker who also happened to be doing some research about young people, learning and identity. Consequently, my participants in this group were happy to participate in the project. Accordingly, with all the sites, although I was the researcher, I was also a participant who proceeded to work 'into' the dynamic of each site and the activities these hosted. Given that I made it clear that my research was about a dialogue and gauging my participants' opinions this dual-role worked particularly well and provided me the 'space' to elicit insight into my participants' worlds.

Although a participant in the sites, I considered my role as the researcher participant as neither 'insider' nor 'outsider' to the case sites. As previously mentioned, I was not a member of the participant groups that I was interacting with and although I spent between six and twelve months with each of the participant groups, that status was not about to change. That is, I was not going to become a secondary school student, nor a member of the LBGTQI community or a member of the mountain biker's friendship group. This overcame some of the issues that can occur when the researcher is an insider in the research site.

There is an array of literature (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, Labaree 2002, Saidin & Yaacob 2016, Singleton & Straights 2005) that focuses on the benefits and issues relating to both insider and outsider status of the researcher. It is often expected that insider status provides better opportunity to understand the inner workings of the participant group. According to Labaree (2002) the intimate knowledge that comes with insider status is assumed to offer greater insight into the group that would be challenging or unachievable for an outsider to gain. However the risk for an ethnographer when fully immersed in their research site includes unintentionally altering the context of the research and losing sight of ones role as a researcher, or 'going native' by over identifying with the group being studied (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

The concept of insider status can be seen as ongoing process, based on building trust and developing strong relationships, not as a recognised or 'achieved' status (De Andrade, 2000; Labaree, 2002). For this project I follow the

conceptualisation that I was positioned at a point (or points) along a continuum from insider status to outsider status (Breen, 2007; Surra & Ridley, 1991). From the beginning of the project, although I participated in the case sites, I was an outsider. However, by the end of the project I was accepted by the participants and although not considered an insider, in the truest sense, I was no longer an outsider either, or as Breen (2007) puts it I was a researcher 'in the middle' (p. 163).

I spent many months developing relationships with the young people within the sites before actively generating data, although I was recording notes in my ethnographic field diary during this stage. I did this in order to develop a rapport with each of the young people so that both they, and I, would feel comfortable talking about their views and opinions. Writing in this reflexive diary gave me the opportunity to further question my 'place' and role within the site and examine my positionality in relation to the participants. For the Bike Build Project, I worked on the bikes alongside the participating young people and spent that time getting to know the participants in a practical environment. For the GLBTIQ group I spent six months attending the weekly meetings and participating in discussions about the group and its activities before requesting individual interviews with the members; again, this was to ensure that they were comfortable enough with me to be open and honest with their views. I had informally known the mountain bikers for a couple of years, so this ensured they already had some level of trust in my motives for the interviews. After spending time to develop rapport with the young people I moved on to actively gathering 'data'.

### **Gathering and recording information**

I did not set about visibly recording my observations in each site on initial visits as I did not want my participants feeling scrutinised or to adjust their behaviour. After I left these early site visits, I would write my field notes up as soon as practicable; usually immediately after each visit had occurred and while I sat in my car preparing to leave the site location. During these moments I would jot down key moments and instances for later, fuller recording.

Beyond the capture of field notes, within the Bike Build sessions a video recorder of the sessions was captured (with participants' approval), and further, I also carried an iPod and captured impromptu interview discussions (also with participants' approval). The participants were aware that I was capturing data in this way and, would sometimes broach conversations and point out topics of discussion. I didn't record any of the GLBTIQ Social Group meetings, and chose to simply participate in the meetings; this decision was made largely due to the sensitivities of topics broached in this group and the fact that, for some of the group, outward declaration of their sexuality had not yet occurred. However, I did record one-on-one interviews with participants on the iPod. I also recorded discussions with the mountain bike participants.

To collate and organise this interview and field note data, all the files related to the project and sequencing of data was stored on a 'Bitrix' project management file. Only the individual and confidential data was stored separately on a password lockable hard drive. I will discuss the specific data collection techniques in detail below.

### **3.2 Data Collection Techniques**

As idiographic research interested in the lifeworld of participants this research was undertaken according to my positioning as a researcher in the field. Accordingly, the techniques for generating data focused on data collected during the period of fieldwork designated for this project.

#### **3.2.1 Fieldwork**

In this project, fieldwork constituted the overarching 'method', as is typical of ethnography. Within this, the data collection techniques of interview, participant observation and photographic and videographic recording of case site fieldwork, along with audio recording of interviews, generated the project's dataset.

The fieldwork for this project involved travelling to the case study sites between July 2015 and December 2017; weekly for the Bike Build Program, fortnightly with the GLBTIQ Social Group, between August 2016 and July 2017 and periodically with the mountain bike group between July 2017 and January 2018. The specific case sites will be further discussed in section 3.5. Fieldwork is most directly defined via the process of collecting data, predominantly through observations and interviews (Fetterman, 2010). For the purpose of this project, interview, in the form of informal discussion and semi-structured interviews, and observation were the key data collection methods utilised, with photographic evidence utilised to support and give context to the interview material. As with much contemporary fieldwork, my fieldwork involved a high degree of participation in addition to observation. This level of participation can be useful in helping establish a greater rapport with the research subjects (Angrosino, 2007). Cresswell (2013) notes that as an observer/participant the ethnographer may change their role during the fieldwork period, for example starting as an observer and moving into a participant role. This was the case, especially for the GLBTIQ Social Group with me acting as an observer for the initial meetings before I felt the participants were comfortable enough with my presence to take on a more active participatory role within the group.

The overlapping of roles of researcher and participant can lead to a number of multifaceted dilemmas, both ethical and practical in nature, with the researcher "*being with and for the other, not looking at*" (DeLaine 2000, p. 16). The proximity and shared experience in this type of research requires the researcher to demonstrate a more authentic and sensitive approach (De Laine, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Somekh & Lewin, 2011). With all the case sites I was upfront about my purpose for being there; effectively, to gain an understanding of the role informal learning played in my participants' lives and how this shaped their identity. I acted as a bricoleur in this sense, and by using the tools, techniques and resources available to me to piece together representations of the situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The dataset came to life as a version of the experiences my participants were encountering, and from which a sense of what it means to learn informally, and in group contexts

emerged. For this thesis, I present this representation of the data, as collected via fieldwork, and as influenced by my positionality as researcher-participant, in the form of a narrative account of the instances I encountered, with this discussed in depth in the following chapters.

### **3.2.2 Interviews**

Madison (2011) provides a useful account for the way that interview was enacted in this project:

The ethnographic interview opens realms of meaning that permeate beyond rote information or finding the "truth of the matter." The interviewee is not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story. Interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue as they construct memory, meaning, and experience together (Madison, 2011, p. 25).

To uncover the participant's perspective of the role that informal learning had on their identity formation I used ethnographic interviewing, enacted as an open dialogue between myself and my participants. This method allowed me to explore "what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to make a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). This involved spending time with the participants to understand their worlds from an *emic* perspective. This form of interview prefaces the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee where the information that can be gathered places the story and experiences of the participant as central to the dialogue (Fontana, J.H., 2008). The benefit of this method was that it enabled an insight into the 'lifeworld' of the participant; something that would be difficult, if not impossible, using other methods, such as self-administered questionnaires (Gray, 2005).

In this instance, ethnographic interviews were the most appropriate method not only to elicit in-depth information about the experience of informal

learning but also to explore the stories and perspectives of the participants, whilst allowing for nuances to be captured and questions to be clarified (Gray, 2005). I applied a 'conversational' ethnographic approach to the interview, as Spradley (1979) proposes; "It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants" (pp. 58-59). These interviews were semi-structured with a mix of open and closed questions as this provided me the opportunity to build rapport before exploring the topic of informal learning in greater depth (Arskey & Knight, 1999; Spradley, 1979). Broad prompting questions were deployed to initiate conversation and from which further questions and points of inquiry were explored as themes emerged from the discussions (Seidman, 2006). Although there was a list of themes covered, drawn from the research questions (discussed in further detail in the following chapter), additional questions or topics for discussion naturally evolved throughout the process as determined by the participant responses (Madison, 2011).

The building of rapport was a vital element of the interview process to ensure that the participants were comfortable talking at a deeper level. As Madison (2011) states "above and beyond techniques for designing interview questions and charting out the field study, one of the most important considerations is the ethnographer's own demeanor and attitude in the field" (p. 31). As previously discussed, I used reflexive practice to examine my own beliefs and values as related to the sites in the project. Within all the case sites I ensured that the participants felt respected and heard by actively listening and gently probing for additional information if relevant.

I chose not to take notes during the interviews to minimise distraction and strengthen rapport with the participant. Madison (2001) notes that "being a good listener is an art and a virtue" (p. 31) and I felt that if I was taking notes it would appear that I wasn't fully engaged and listening to the interview participants views. Additionally, these discussions were audio recorded, not only to remain engaged with the participant, but also for the purposes of

confirming the views articulated in the interviews; it therefore wasn't necessary to take notes during the interview. I asked permission to conduct, and record, the interview at the beginning of each individual interview and/or discussion and capture recordings using an iPod. According to the explicit request to conduct these interviews and engage in this research, it was imperative that I developed rapport with my participants; to remove some of the anxieties that come with research participation and to ensure that my participants relayed what they genuinely felt; a point that is touched on further below.

### **3.2.2.1 Recording and Transcription of Interviews**

As soon as practicable after the interviews I extracted my audio file from the iPod and stored it on my portable hard drive, in addition to my PC and listened to the files. I typically added notes whilst listening to the interview in order to add any additional insight and recall key moments from the interview.

The interviews were then transcribed. I transcribed all first interviews with participants, with subsequent recordings transcribed professionally by the professional transcription service, *Pacific Transcriptions*. My transcriptions used a 'denaturalised' approach whereby attention was focussed on the 'speech-acts' of the interviewee, with little contextual mention made of the physical features of the interview space, with other activities tangential to the interview only noted as these directly impacted on the interview (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). As the interviews typically took place in busy areas, ranging from an agricultural shed (Bike Build) to coffee shops (GLBTIQ participants) and McDonald's restaurant (the mountain bike group) describing every detail of the context would have led to an inordinate amount of excess, and often not relevant, information in each transcription piece. Additionally, these contextual elements were noted in my filed notes which I re-read prior to undertaking my transcriptions. For those transcriptions prepared by the commercial transcription service, I reviewed and read each transcription alongside my field notes to ensure accuracy. Appendix F outlines an example.

The interview data constitutes a primary dataset in this project, with observation offering contextual nuance and insight that reinforced perspectives outlined by each participant.

### **3.2.3 Observation**

It is a mistake to say you are doing ethnography and just do interviews. I think the idea is that it's a series of strategies, whatever gets you the information, such as census reports, or asking the postmistress, or what have you. But if anything, it must include participant observation in some way (Sandelowski in Morse 1994, p. 158).

In conjunction with the interviews, overt ethnographic observation was utilised (Gray, 2002). Interviews and participant observation were concurrent and much of the information gathered during participant observation occurred during the interviews. Angrosino (2005) indicates that even with studies in which the methodology is primarily interview based, observational methods are often utilised to note body language to support the meaning of the words of the participant. Gray (2002) notes that observation adds a 'descriptive context' that supplements and enhances the information gained from the participant which would not necessarily be revealed by interview alone. Given that interviews captured in this study were undertaken in-situ the opportunity existed to also explore these sites and to compile an ethnographic account of their workings and nature. Observation and interview worked hand-in-hand to frame the understandings of young people's engagement with informal learning elicited in this project.

I noted personal observations of the participants, such as demeanour and presence/comfort, within their setting during the course of the interviews. Additionally, I took notes on the actual setting, specifically the layout and built environment. The field notes were compiled after the interviews, in accordance with the format specified by Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein (1997):

1. Date, time and place of observation
2. Specific facts, numbers, details of what happens at the site

3. Sensory impressions: sights, sounds, textures, smells, taste
4. Personal responses to the fact or recording field notes
5. Specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations and insider language
6. Questions about people or behaviours at the site for future investigating
7. Page numbers to keep observations in order.

Further to this I utilised Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) suggestions on techniques to assist in developing field notes:

1. Ethnographers should take note of their initial impressions
2. Researchers can focus on their personal sense of what is significant or unexpected
3. What those in the setting experience and react to as significant or important
4. How routine actions in the setting are organised and take place.

Further defining these observational notes were photographs and video of settings of fieldwork and interview, (where appropriate given ethical consideration around the identification of individuals within captured images), to so as provide a visual cue to my notes and recollections.

### **3.2.3.1 Visual Capturings**

I also took photographs and video of the fieldwork workshops and other sessions I attended/convened to supplement my observational field notes to complement the ideas generated from my observations and interviews. I took a series of photographs on my iPhone and catalogued according to date on my PC and backed up on my external hard drive. The photographs acted as a visual record of the group interaction and informal learning taking place. The photographs also supported my observation in adding visual context to the layout and use of the space. I suggest that, as with all ethnography, the visual images from this project are not in themselves 'truths' nor 'reality' but a snapshot of a moment in time as represented by the researcher (Harper, 1998; Prosser, 2005). Harper (1998) suggests that photography should be thought of

“as a reflection rather than an interpretation” (p. 27), highlighting that the researcher has already decided on the importance of a certain image by the very act of taking the photograph or recording that moment. However as Pink (2013, p. 35) notes visual ethnography “should aim to offer versions of the ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced”. This often involves confirming with the participants their experiences in order to produce a faithful representation of them and the situation (Pink, 2013; Prosser, 2005). In this project the photographs provided additional prompt for understanding the context of the study and were particularly relevant for confirming interpretations of interview and observational data; these acted as prompts for the ‘recall’ of the moment and context. Permission to take photographs was sought from the school, the students, and in the case of the Mountain Bike cohort the riders prior to undertaking field work. I did not seek further permission for each capture as I felt it would produce inauthentic photographs with the subjects overtly knowing they were being photographed. Example applications of selected photographs are contained in Chapter 4, with these images providing visual cues to the analysis.

### **3.4 Participant Groups**

The participant groups were selected via a purposive sampling (Creswell 2013) using existing professional connections and knowledge of the groups studied. I chose purposive sampling to ensure a greater chance of recruiting participants with a wide range of experiences related to informal learning. The selected sites and participants were considered to provide a strong cross-section of young people, as well as useful sites for exploring the way that learning happens in informal ways, outside of ‘formal’ institutional sites of learning. The initiatives and sites themselves are not the focus of the project but do provide context for participant identification, as well as broader considerations around access and participation.

The demographics of each of the groups were varied. The students in the Bike Build program were attending a secondary school located in a lower socio-economic status area. Prior to entering the Bike Build site, the school staff provided a briefing on what 'type' of young person would be in the group. We were informed that the young people were either 'orange' or 'red' level students and that some were on their 'last warning' before suspension or exclusion. We were told to prepare for some rambunctious behaviour and that we may find it hard to engage with the students.

With this in mind, we approached each site with a very open demeanour and engaged the young people from a 'relaxed' and interactive perspective. Once it was established that I was neither a teacher nor a police officer the students engaged in the project and rarely did I see any of the negative behaviour that we had been pre-warned about. Beyond some expressions of basic disruption and distraction, such as 'roughhousing', the sessions proceeded very positively, with the students fundamentally 'engaged' in the task of repairing their bikes. Hickey et al (2018) highlight that this type of 'irreverent form of expression' (p.2) allows the possibilities for atypical types of interaction to occur, as was evident in the case of the Bike Build group.

I had limited previous knowledge or discussion about the GLBTIQ group other than a suggestion from Sam that 'they are a great group of kids'. I found this to be the case and the group were very interested in my research and generally very respectful of each other and their opinions. The group demographics ranged from a twelve-year-old at an exclusive private school to seventeen-year olds from lower socioeconomic areas, with all still currently engaged at some level in the education system.

As previously mentioned, I had prior knowledge of the mountain bike group so knew that they were willing to participate in the research and would be, hopefully, reliable participants. The nature of mountain biking is that most young riders come from middle to upper socioeconomic status groups as, from personal experience, the bikes can cost upward of \$5 000 for a 'decent' bike.

### **3.5 The Sites**

The data collected from the project is presented as a series of 'case studies' in the following chapters. Stake (1995) notes that the case provides a useful means for illustrating field encounters via indicative instances and moments drawn from the full dataset. For this project, these cases illustrate the ways that the participants understood and engaged with informal learning (whether consciously recognised as 'learning' or not) by the participants themselves, as well as providing a sense of the ways that regional Queensland settings enable informal learning to occur. From this exploration of the views of the young people themselves and, those held by the youth service providers and other adults engaged with the young people, responses to the research questions outlined for this project were drawn. The sites are introduced as follows:

#### **3.5.1 Site 1: Skills for Success: Bike Build**

The *Skills for Success: Bike Build Program* was a planned initiative organised through the YouthConnect team of the Community Development and Facilities branch of Toowoomba Regional Council, in conjunction with a local state secondary school and the University of Southern Queensland. The project's aim was to explore the conduct of this alternative learning program as set within the context of a large state secondary school in Toowoomba, Queensland as an informal learning space located *within* the school as means for re-engaging disengaged students. The program focused on the sociocultural learning environment and was underpinned by the philosophy that re-imagining the school setting could promote democratic educational practices and lead to a more collaborative approach to learning. The project used the rebuilding of old bicycles, for two years of the program, and old motor bikes for one year of the program, as a tool to enable informal relationships and learning opportunities within a workshop that was located within the grounds of the school.

The *Skills for Success: Bike Build Program* was a part of a suite of programs aimed at 'disengaged' students by the high school. My supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Andrew Hickey, supported this project as a co-researcher/co-

facilitator and was involved in convening eight, once weekly, workshop sessions (as a defined 'unit of work') per year for the first two years, with an additional researcher/facilitator, Carly Smith from the University of Southern Queensland, joining the team in the final year-2017. The first workshop session of each year was dedicated to introductions and setting some ground rules. The participants themselves came up with the 'rules of engagement' and included suggestions including 'respect the tools, respect each other'. The component of the research, for my thesis focused specifically on the role that the informal learning site played in identity formation in young people. I explored the role that this program, as an informal learning opportunity, played in shaping young people's identity. Beyond the immediate focus of this PhD project and its focus on the role of informality in learning we also utilised the sessions to undertake research into how young people engage in the community as active citizens and the role that such programs have on learning and engagement within school and the community. Typically, the Bike Build sessions were convened over a 2-hour period with further later discussions, usually over lunch, providing opportunities for discussion and interview with the participants.

The participants for this program were within the age range from 13-17. The majority of the participants were male with only two of thirty-four participants, over a three year period identified as female. We, as researchers/facilitators, had no role in selecting the students, with the school preselecting participants based on behaviour, attendance and engagement records.

As a participatory research project, where the workshop sessions formed the basis of data collection, we utilised a participant/observer role and undertook interview and dialogic engagement in the conduct of the workshop sessions to obtain the dataset. My specific role was focussed on engaging dialogue with the students and generating the dataset that informs this project. This participatory role allowed us to gain insight into the dynamics of the setting as well as the interpersonal nuances engaged in by the group. This collective approach to the convening of the workshops also enabled me to

check-in with my co-facilitators to discuss and share what I interpreted from the sessions. This further layer of analytic oversight provided me with further confidence that the dataset I was compiling reflected the nature of these sessions and that the analysis I was generating remained valid. The methods used for gathering the dataset that informed the analysis included:

### **Direct participant observation**

Field notes noting the key observations were a key component of this dataset. Photographs and video were also taken to provide a visual record of the setting as an informal learning opportunity.

As previously noted in section 3.3.3 the field notes were compiled shortly after each workshop session. In addition to the standard date, time and place alongside number of participants information, I also noted my impressions of how the sessions worked and whether there was anything of significance or unexpected occurred as per Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein (1997) and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) recommendations. In addition, I used these reflective notes to remind me to question my own positionality and how it influenced my view of the world as researcher.

A video recorder was initially utilised in the Bike Build setting to capture the overall use of space for the sessions, however its use highlighted validity issues. Although the students had been forewarned that we would be recording both visually and in the form of recording the interviews, they seemed a little rattled initially with the presence of the video recorder. Once I explained that it was recording the general layout and the school wouldn't have access to the recording, some 'played up' to the camera, going up close and poking faces and dancing around it. This is one of the criticisms of visual ethnography when used in isolation and not undertaken as a component of greater fieldwork. Banks (1998) states that "Beyond altering their behaviour in front of the camera (or indeed, refusing to 'behave' at all) the film subjects have little or no control over the process" (p. 10). This can lead to issues of (mis)representation, interpretation and validity and raises questions about the ethics of visual

ethnography; particularly as the participants didn't have access to the material and therefore cannot provide their own representations (Banks,1998). From the second week the videorecorder was placed in an unobtrusive location so as not to further impose on the sessions and, for the purposes of this project I didn't utilise the video recordings other than to provide a visual cue to the general layout of the site. The interview material formed the primary dataset, with video recorded material providing a reference- a further contextual cue- to orient my analysis and 'check' on my findings. This material provided a point of reference for a 'triangulation' of the data.

Photographs were taken either by myself or, in the case of the images with me in them, my co-facilitator, Andrew. Therefore, they are our representation of the site of Bike Build as we saw it, from our perspective. I found that reviewing the photographs, in particular the ones with me acting as a participant, assisted by providing additional contextual reference. For example, the scenario outlined in Figure 3.1 corresponded to an instance where methylated spirits were being used to clean bike parts. I had just 'magically' taken the lid off the methylated spirits bottle, something that the three boys in the photo were having great trouble doing thanks to the child proof lid! I look back at that photo and realised that it was with that simple action and us all laughing about why they couldn't undo a childproof lid (I've had lots of practice being a mother and having navigated childproof lids for years) that I was accepted into their inner circle at a deeper level. What you can't see is the expression on the boy's face in the black shirt facing away from the rest of us. He was laughing hysterically at being shown up by me; especially given that he had spent a few minutes trying to get the lid off before I offered to help. Looking back over this, among many of the other photos reminds me how not only of the enjoyment of working on the project but also the relationships I developed with the boys over a period of time. It was with these relationships that I could delve deeper to gain greater insight into the role informal learning played in identity formation in young people.



Figure 3.1 (T. Pauli-Myler, personal photograph taken by Andrew Hickey, June 3, 2016)



Figure 3.2 (T.Pauli-Myler, personal photograph taken by Andrew Hickey, May 11, 2016)

The use of this image, and others like it (see Figure 3.2), adds visual markers of the relationships that developed throughout the bike build project. Whilst I am not suggesting that the photographs are ‘evidence’ or ‘proof’ of how the entire program ran they do offer a glimpse into the research site of bike build and how the interaction between myself, as the participant/researcher and the students, as the subjects functioned. However, in this project the photographs and video recordings are only one representational strategy and, when combined with interview, provide a greater picture of the site and its nuances.

## Interviews

Informal ethnographic interviews were held with participants throughout the sessions. In total, 36 interviews were conducted across the three year period of Bike Build's conduct. Typically, interviews ran for no longer than 30 minutes and were opportunistically gathered; that is, they were convened as opportunities to discuss, one-to-one, with students their experiences of the sessions, school and their aspirations. These interviews took place either within the workshop or walking to the storage shed to collect/return the bikes at the beginning and end of each session.

As previously discussed, the interviews followed the 'deep hanging out' (Geertz 1998) methodology and involved talking to the participants as we were working on the bikes together. Although I had mentioned that I would be recording our discussions at the first session I didn't overtly emphasise that our discussions were recorded at the time of taking them to avoid the risk of the participants 'behaving' in a way they thought they should, as opposed to just 'having a chat'.

As with all the interviews I undertook, I asked open ended questions to get some background information and develop rapport. Whilst pulling apart the bikes I would ask general questions including, *"tell me about yourself- what grade are you in?"* and *"how did you get to be chosen to participate in this program?"* The fact that we were engaging in conversation whilst also undertaking a task made the conversation flow better than it would have had we been sitting across a table from each other with me asking questions (Somekh & Lewin, 2011; Madison, 2011). In addition to talking whilst working on a bike I found that I gained deeper insight whilst walking and talking on the way to collect the bikes at the beginning of the workshop sessions.

The act of walking provided the opportunity for discussions that would have otherwise proven difficult, if not impossible within the confines of the agricultural shed. "The movement of walking provides the stuff of the inquiry by opening new terrains for exploration, and a chance for new modes of

engagement between the researcher and researched to emerge” (Hickey, Pauli-Myler & Smith 2018, p. 22). Walking between the workshop and the shed where the bikes were stored offered the opportunity for the participants to speak openly without the presence of teachers or otherwise ‘expected’ modes of behaviour required in more formally organised area of the school dictating the dialogues. This meant I could engage with the students at a deeper level. I discuss specific case examples of these encounters in the Analysis chapter.

As initially outlined in Chapter 1, the specific interview questions, asked after the initial rapport developing questions, loosely followed the research questions identified for this project:

- What is your experience of being a young person in Toowoomba? What do you do and what do you think of Toowoomba as a place to grow up?
- Beyond school, where do you ‘learn’? What I mean by this is, are there groups or other people who teach you things?
- What sort of impact does this type of learning have on you? Is it important and does it help you in particular ways?
- How do young people come to ‘learn’ about their identities within the school setting?
- What impact does having a group of like-minded individuals have on the life of the young person in regional Queensland when exploring identity?

These questions led to various additional questions formed around the ideas that the participant had suggested. The combination of observation and interview for this project, conducted over the three iterations of Bike Build allowed an extensive analysis of how informal learning- enacted within the setting of formal schooling- is placed in the life of the young person and will be discussed in depth in the Analysis chapter.

### **3.5.2 Site 2: headspace Toowoomba GLBTIQ Social group**

The **headspace Toowoomba GLBTIQ Social group** was the second site chosen for this project. The purpose of this group, as per its promotional flyer, was to support LBGTQI young people, aged 12-18, by providing a safe and

inclusive space. The group grew out of an identified need for young people who identify as LBGTQI to have an opportunity to meet other people their safely, and without fear of judgement (Johnston, personal communication, 2017). The initial aim of the group was to provide an environment that is welcoming to young LBGTQI people and remove any real, or perceived, barriers that make the formation of such a network accessible. The group was initiated to be driven by the young people as ‘a safe place to just be’ (Johnston, personal communication, 2017) and evolved, and continues to evolve, on the directions and desires identified by the group itself.

In addition to the participating young people, a number of adult members, in this case all over the age of 30, of the group were also engaged in the social group gatherings<sup>17</sup>, varying from one to four at any given gathering. The adults in the group provided insight into their experiences of being an LGBTIQ identifying person, and the history of the LBGTQI community and acted as informal mentors to the younger members.

The group met fortnightly within the data collection stage of the research (August 2016-July 2017) in a room of a major community service provider located in Toowoomba. The YouthConnect branch of the Toowoomba Regional Council provided catering- typically pizza and drinks- for these gatherings, with YouthConnect personnel also participating in the group early on and then periodically during the research period. Scheduled sessions usually ran for one hour, with participant observation occurring within these times.

Methods used for generating the data set from this site included:

### **Direct participant observation**

Although not identifying as a LBGTQI person, I participated in the group gathering and was directly engaged in the group discussions. This was particularly valuable in enabling me to fulfil the dual role of researcher-

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<sup>17</sup> This report uses the terminology ‘social group gathering’ or ‘gathering’ rather than the term meeting or similar to reinforce the informal nature of the group.

participant within the group setting and facilitated an in-depth insight into the group dynamics.

Field notes detailing key observations were developed, though I did not take any field notes during the gatherings but as soon as possible afterwards. Photographs were not taken within the group as I felt it was inappropriate given the participants in that group were reserved and cautious about exploring their identity; some had not 'come out' to their friends or family. Though the field notes were supplementary to this case site, the interviews formed the primary method of data collection.

### **Interviews**

In addition to general discussion with several GLBTIQ Social Group members at the social gatherings, ethnographic interviews with three core participants occurred throughout my involvement with the group, in addition to an interview with the Manager of headspace, who initiated the group. These interviews took place over a period of six months, beginning six months after my introduction to the group and involved four members of the group. The interviews were held in either a café of the participants choosing or, in the case of one participant, in the car on the way home from meetings; I drove one participant home after each meeting. The interviews commenced six months after my initial contact with the group and participation in the sessions. It was felt that, at this stage, the group would be more willing and open with their responses due to knowing me well.

The broad focus of these interviews was:

- What is the experience of being a young person, and in particular an LBGTQI identifying young person, in regional Queensland?
- How do young people come to 'learn' about their identities as LBGTQI identifying individuals?
- What impact do group such as the GLBTIQ Social Group have on the life of the young person in regional Queensland when exploring identity?

In addition to the interviews was a fortnightly 'catch up' with a key informant- the participant I drove home following each weekly session. Although we convened some more 'formalised' interviews during these times, the drive home also provided a key moment to more generally talk and for me to develop my understanding of the group, its dynamics, and the experience of this participant. These unplanned chats proved invaluable in me gaining additional insight into how the group formed and how the participants understood its function. The opportunity to talk in the car aligned with the 'deep hanging out' (Geertz 1998) method. Spradley (1979) highlights that these occurrences offer the chance for a series of friendly conversations where one can gain a deeper insight into the participants thoughts. The culmination of the interviews, observation and informal chats will be discussed in-depth in the following chapters.

### **3.5.3 Site 3: Mountain Bikers**

The mountain bikers were a group of school aged friends from in Toowoomba, who would organise to meet up and ride their mountain bikes and practice new skills. They were aged from 15 to 16 years old at the time of the interviews. Whilst there were some similarities in their background with all of the attending 'elite' private schools, there were other differences in that two of them were living in Toowoomba to attend private schools, whilst their family members owned and worked on properties further west, and the other was a Toowoomba local.

Methods used for generating the data set that inform the evaluation included:

#### **Direct participant observation**

I met the boys at the local mountain bike park for the first interview where particular focus was given to participant interaction. Whilst watching the boys ride some more technical sections of the tracks, I took field notes detailing key observations about the space and how it facilitated the interaction of the

participants. At this stage I also took photos (see Figure 3.5) and video of them riding these sections.



Figure 3.5 (T. Pauli-Myler, personal photograph, August 12, 2017)

### **Group interview**

In addition to general discussion with the participants at races or out riding on the local tracks, I held ethnographic interviews with three core participants over a six month period, between July 2017 and January 2018, although we had several informal chats in the preceding six months and following six months as well. The first interview occurred at one of the more difficult tracks at the local mountain bike park. I met them at the car park, and we had a general chat about recent race results and what tracks they had been riding lately. Once we got to the part of the track they wanted to ‘session’<sup>18</sup> I took out my iPhone and told them I’d take some photos and video of their riding. I showed them the photos and videos and they began analysing their own and each other’s technique, which was a great segue for discussion on informal learning.

The broad focus of the subsequent discussion was:

- What is the experience of being a young person, and in particular a mountain biker in regional Queensland?
- How do young people come to ‘learn’ about their identities as mountain biking individuals?

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<sup>18</sup> Session is the term mountain bikers use when practicing the same section multiple times

- What impact does having a group of like-minded individuals have on the life of the young person in regional Queensland when exploring identity?

The follow up interview was held at a McDonalds restaurant a couple of months later. There was quite a bit of post ride discussion about new sections of the track and new techniques that they hadn't used before. Although I know of some of the tracks- my husband (as a member of the executive group of the local mountain biking club) helped build them- I had never actually ridden these specific tracks. Accordingly, the first part of the discussion revolved around my participants 'getting me up to speed' and suggesting that I should go out one day with them and ride the new sections. I laughed and told them my ability was certainly no match for theirs and told them the last time I attempted a jump I ended up with a broken wrist! This tale of my woes was really useful in developing additional rapport as then the boys all relayed their worst mountain bike injuries and we all had a good laugh.

I then spoke to them about what we discussed at our previous session and asked for further clarification or if there was anything they would like to add about their experience of learning informally, beyond sites like school, not only in the mountain bike setting but in general. The findings of the cumulative interviews will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **3.6 My Position**

As the researcher, I acknowledge my own biases, values and experiences that influence my interpretation of the fieldwork. Firstly, I am a 'white', middle-aged heterosexual female from a 'middle class' socio-economic background. I have been married for over a decade and have two children under the age of 12. On this level, I have very little shared experience with any of the participants. To begin with I am not 'young' (by official definition) and have children of my own; in addition, especially relating to the bike build cohort, my socio-economic position is different. Also, I am a married female heterosexual; with the LBGTQI group all having a sexual identity and/or gender identity different to mine and

at the time of the research many were unable to marry a person of their choosing in Australia<sup>19</sup>. For the mountain bikers, I was 'old' and 'a girl'! How could I possibly develop a rapport with the groups to get a glimpse into their world and have them open up to me about their identity and the role of informal learning in shaping it? I did question my ability to access the groups according to the attributes of my (perceived) identity as noted. In two of the case sites, Bike Build and the Mountain bike group, I was the lone female and for the Bike Build program my 'whiteness' was also evident with around half of the participants identifying as male and as Indigenous Australians.

It is notable that none of the participants made a big deal out of me a) being female or b) being very obviously 'white' and 'middle class'. I think most of this is due to the fact that we met on 'common ground', that is, a neutral space and one that I did not choose I came to them in their space and was interested in what they were doing. This openness and interest enabled rapport to be built, and in turn, my participants developed interest in what it was I was doing. They were interested in this research, how PhD research was conducted and why, and how the process of 'going to university' proceeded. They were also interested in why this collaboration was formed and how it was that I came to work with them.

Throughout this research I continually examined my positionality from a psychosocial perspective to ensure not only that I was interacting ethically but also that my participants felt comfortable with my presence. As noted by Erikson et al. (2012) field notes and reflexive journals are an essential component of ethnographic research as they involve critically making sense of and interpreting situations from the researcher's perspective. In addition, Mruck and Breuer (2003) suggested that researchers talk about "their presuppositions, choices, experiences and actions during the research process" (p. 3). I have included a component of my ethnographic diary under the challenges section 3.8 to outline my personal experience of some of the challenges that can occur when undertaking ethnography. I used my ethnographic diary/reflexive journal

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<sup>19</sup> The Marriage Act was changed in December 2017 to allow same-sex couples to marry legally.

to reflect on my research design and data collection process. As discussed in detail later in the methodology chapter, I chose informal interview methods as my primary data collection method as it allowed a genuine reciprocal interaction whereby the participants could voice their opinions in a safe place without the fear of recriminations.

Regardless, the approach I took to the research enabled me to participate in the groups and over the period of the research there were a few instances where it was clear that I'd been accepted by the participants. One particular instance included the first year of the bike build program where a group within the cohort had developed their own secret handshake. Towards the end of the workshop series the boys taught me their 'bro handshake' and we then proceeded to greet each other with this handshake for the remaining weeks of the workshop sessions. A further example of this acceptance occurred during the final session where the boys raced their newly refurbished bikes at the local BMX park (a setting for a final 'break up' celebration of the program). The boys insisted on having a race between the adults that had participated in the workshop but also insisted that I race against them. This was interesting as I've never raced a BMX before; needless to say, I came in last as my self-preservation kicked in, as well as a clear lack of skill, and we all had a good laugh about it.

The reason I chose the 'deep hanging out' method for my research, apart from being a method that I resonate with, was to allow the conversations around identity and informal learning to happen organically. This worked both ways, however. While I got to know my participants, they got to know me, and, in turn, we developed a rapport and connection. I am passionate about young people, and in particular how the experience of young people is mediated in relation to social justice and social capital. This approach to the research enabled this interest to emerge and flourish.

### 3.7 Ethics of working with young people

Working with young people in participatory research raises a number of ethical and access challenges. Whilst ethics approval was obtained from the University of Southern Queensland (approval number H15REA224) to undertake this research, this is only one component of ensuring ethical research practice when working with young people.

Research relating to young people has seen a shift in recent years, from research focused *on* young people, to participatory research *with* young people (ARACY and the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009; Wall, 2017; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). According to the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and the NSW Commission for Children and Young People successful participatory research is “respectful, builds trust, is flexible and adaptable, transparent and accountable, and brings benefit to children and young people (p.v)”. Young people have a unique insight into their own lives and contribute valid opinions as capable citizens when given the opportunity (Harcourt and Sargeant 2011). Additionally, young people have differing perspective to adults, which can lead to disjunction (Thomas and O’Kane 1998). Hence, it is essential for the voices of young people to be heard regarding research relating to them. Whilst gaining young people’s insights there are many ethical and methodological considerations with young people as co-producers of research. Informed consent is essential to any ethical research project but even more critical when dealing with young people. It is important to ensure that the participants are fully informed what their participation in research involves the level of confidentiality of the information they provide (Mishna, Antle, & Regehr (2004). For the purpose of this thesis I developed an information sheet that addressed issues such as confidentiality and what participating in my research meant, alongside any potential benefits to be read before consent forms were signed. I was also active in discussing these processual aspects of my research with my participants as opportunities arose through the fieldwork. For example, I would raise consideration of how the data generated from the project would be used during conversation and interview.

On other occasions, my participants would ask how photographs would be used, which opened opportunity to discuss this aspect of the research.

Power dynamics are another major consideration when working with young people; particularly young people may feel 'powerless' to participate in the research (Morrow 2008). This could have been a potential issue, particularly with the Bike Build program and the GLBTQI group. The Bike Build program was held within the school setting and there was some level of expectation that if the students participated in the program then they would to some extent be participating in the research. Additionally, I made it clear from the outset that although I would be using the information provided by each of the participants that they would be in no way identifiable and that the school wouldn't have access to any individual interview recordings or notes. I reminded the participants that what they said to me was entirely confidential, unless there was some risk to their safety or wellbeing and, in which case, with their permission, I would help them seek help from the appropriate person. The same held for the GLBTQI group as I participated in their meetings. However, in both case sites I made it clear that, if uncomfortable, I would not individually interview each person and they most certainly had the right to ask to be excluded from the research without prejudice.

### **3.8 Challenges of the Research**

As is the case with many research projects I faced some challenges, in both recruitment of sites and, later on, within one site. When I started my PhD in 2015, I had a very distinct idea of how my project would look. I would have one site within a school setting (the Bike Build site) and another site would be at a community art studio. The studio regularly hosted art exhibitions and were responsible for an arts festival that has become part of Toowoomba's art scene. More importantly for me, the studio was also the hub for young artists and ran a series of art workshops for young people. I met with the owner/curator in November 2015 to gauge their interest in having me tag along as a researcher in one of her series of workshops to chat to young people about how the space functioned as a site of informal learning. I interviewed the owner and it emerged that the site provided a neutral environment where from the first

session to the last you could see the participants coming out of their shell and in the end going above and beyond expectations. The owner attributed this to the staff being open and providing their expertise free from judgement and allowing time (the workshops ran over several weeks) for the participants to get comfortable and practice the skills. The owner suggested that as it was informal it was less intimidating to the young people, some of whom were unsure about their future and if their artistic ability could lead them to a career. Many of these young people came from low socioeconomic families where they were ostracised for their focus on art; for example, family members were reported as saying 'you can't earn a living doing art, why don't you concentrate on real skills' (personal communication February 2, 2015).

This all sounded like they would be a perfect participant group to work with and I organised for the owner to contact me when the next workshop series was being held. A few months passed and I contacted the owner again, only to be informed that their funding had been cut and they weren't holding youth workshops anymore. I was, obviously, disappointed; there went my participant group, but more so for the young people who would miss out on the opportunity to explore their talent in a safe and open environment.

I met with my supervisor and we considered other options. I had heard about a 'midnight basketball' competition from my council contact who I worked with on bike build so I contacted the local representative to have a chat to see if it was a site where I could undertake my research.

Again, this sounded like an ideal participant group to undertake my research with and in December 2015 I met with the local representative who had been involved for many years with the group and was a member of the Management Committee and unofficial mentor. We talked about my research and how it fit well with the model of young people learning formally about basketball and life skills workshops but also how there was informal learning also involved, especially from peers. However, again bureaucracy got in the way and the next series of tournaments were cancelled.

So, it was back to the drawing board again with my supervisor. Andrew suggested I look closer at my existing networks and that's when I decided to try to get together with the young mountain bikers, whom I had known for many years. They were keen to meet up and take part in my research.

I also talked to my council YouthConnect contact about other possibilities and she suggested the "GLBTIQ Social group". The group was initiated with the aim to be an inclusive site where young people from the LBGTQI community could meet up in a non-judgemental setting. This group again sounded like an ideal participant group for my research and in June 2016 my initial contact Sam met me at one of their meetings to introduce me. She introduced me as Tanya, a researcher from the University and a 'cool chick'. I explained my research was about informal learning and how it influences identity and asked if it would be ok if I attended their social group gatherings and had a chat to them individually further down the track. There was a resounding yes and I subsequently asked the group to fill in consent forms.

I participated in their gatherings for 12 months and one month in started to undertake informal interviews with one young participant in particular, Max. It also happened that Max needed a lift home from every meeting to be able to attend and I was the only one able to do it. This provided me with the opportunity to have a 20 minute chat with Max after every gathering. We talked about how he saw the gatherings going, whether he was getting anything out of them, if they helped him figure out or solidify his identity. Over a period of time I gained a greater understanding in how the group helped him to form and accept his identity (I talk about this further in the Analysis chapter). Later in 2016, I interviewed three other participants and was starting to see a common theme; one where the young people just wanted to be seen as 'normal' and 'not different' or meeting certain perceived stereotype of the LBGTQI community and just wanted to hang out without any judgement or specific goal.

At the same time, I sensed that the two consistent adult facilitators were getting increasingly uncomfortable that the group didn't seem to have any direct goals, apart from hanging out. They queried whether the young people would prefer that each gathering have a specific focus or theme. One facilitator in particular felt the group lacked clear direction and that this should be addressed at the next gathering. I informed them that my research with the young members was such that it was suiting them perfectly as they enjoyed the fact it was a safe place to simply hang out and just chat.

The aforementioned facilitator mentioned that she wasn't sure what the young people wanted from the group and asked for their input. There was some mention about it being about watching movies, YouTube' and listening to music with LGBTIQ themes. I saw the newest member of the group getting uncomfortable (considering she had only told me the week before she didn't want it to all be about sexuality) and said casually something along the lines, *but it doesn't have to all be about sexuality as there's more to everyone than just their sexuality*. I got a couple of nods from the other participants who had also expressed that the best bit about the group is that it's not stereotyping them and it's not all about sexuality. But I felt a sense of unease; that I had inadvertently over-stepped the boundaries. The manager of headspace was there and also picked up on the tension created and said, 'yes but it is a safe place to explore sexuality without judgement' and asked them what else they thought. I got the sense that by trying to give voice to the young introverted members, who would unlikely say 'that's not what we want' I had inadvertently overstepped my perceived boundaries. Below is an excerpt from my ethnographic diary of what happened next.

\*All names have been changed to protect identity

Today I got a phone call from my council contact, Sam saying that certain adult members on the GLBTIQ Social Group had concerns over my involvement in the group. They were concerned that I was too involved and was making the young people uncomfortable, and that complaints had been made by the young people. This was brought up at the local youth

consortium and Sam wanted to give me a heads up, so I wasn't bombarded at the meeting by the two involved. Firstly, I was disappointed that they didn't bring it up with me or at least the headspace manager privately. The fact they brought it up with a consortium of youth practitioners first I found very disconcerting. Luckily, I've worked with some of the members previously and, apparently, they suggested that I would not be intentionally offensive or overstep my boundaries and perhaps the facilitators should talk to me directly about the concerns.

Firstly, I called Andrew (my supervisor) to have a debrief before the meeting but he wasn't available. So, apart from feeling disappointed and confused about it all I looked back on my practice and analysed it in depth. I most certainly do sit there and offer input when appropriate, I do not just sit back and observe and take notes. It would appear that this is causing issues with the adult facilitators. I feel that they may have an issue with me been heterosexual and having an opinion on LBGTQI topics. Although my opinions are not offensive and certainly have nothing to do with discriminating around sexuality, I do understand that I do not have the same 'lived' experience as the members, so may be a little naïve at times. I feel like \*Claire is feeling threatened that I might have too much input in the group, however my input typically reflects on what the participants have told me in their individual interviews so I'm just giving voice to the issues they've previously mentioned.

I feel like \*Jack is not happy with my interaction with the group either. I sense that he views me with suspicion and, as I've been seemingly accepted by the young people quite readily, he's not happy. The young people and I laugh and joke around but when he makes a joke, he sometimes gets strange looks. He's

made the comment on more than one occasion about being 'just the old guy in the corner'.

So, I went and saw the headspace manger, \*Dave about this apparent discontent before the meeting. He was fantastic and first thing he said was 'I want you to stay part of the group I think you've been really good for them. It's been good for them to have a straight adult who has no judgement based on their sexuality'. Dave said his only concern was about the validity of the research if the group saw me as one of them. I explained that with ethnography that was the best possible outcome as it ensured a more genuine dialogue and better research as they would open up more. Dave said he'd never heard of ethnography and was going to look it up and he said it sounded like a good method of research and that I certainly had achieved success in that aspect. He mentioned that the previous meeting he's sensed some hostility after I made the comment that it doesn't all have to be about sexuality. I totally agreed with him and explained that I had made that comment as all my interviewees had said they wanted to be known as individuals and not just about their sexuality. He was like 'I totally get that; I'm just thinking that the adults in the group might be more invested into identifying very heavily as gay or bisexual and it may have upset them as they do perceive it as their identity ie. I'm a gay person vs I'm a person who happens to be gay'.

I told Dave if there was an issue, I would leave the group and he said he didn't want that to happen as he not only enjoyed me being there but thought I was good for the group dynamics as well. He did say that the other two had said I have made some members of the group uncomfortable been there to which I said that I certainly didn't want that to be the case.

I have asked each interviewee if they are happy for me to be part of the group or does it upset the dynamics and all of them have basically said I'm a 'cool chick' and they don't hold the fact that I'm straight against me. Dave said that he hadn't had a single complaint from a young person and that perhaps Jack and Claire were using the young people as 'pawns' to get their own point across. I told him if there was ever an issue to let me know and I would address it.

In the end I told Dave I would be more mindful of Jack and Claire as I didn't want to make them feel uncomfortable as they are long standing members of the group and will be there long after I leave. I also suggested that I talk to Jack about sharing his story with the young people, not only to give him more a sense of belonging but also as a couple of people have mentioned that they'd like to hear the adult members stories. He thought that was a great idea.

Dave and I went and joined the group. I asked three more people if they'd be open to interviews and all were very keen, so my gut tells me I haven't intimidated too many of the group.

After the meeting I dropped Max home as usual and asked if I'd overstepped any boundaries or made him, or to his knowledge anyone else, feel uncomfortable at the previous meeting about direction and he looked at me and said 'no, not at all, you're just part of the group now'. As we have developed a rapport over an extended period, I do believe he was been honest with me and not just telling me what I wanted to hear.

As evidenced by my language when I wrote this in my diary, I was disappointed with how Claire and Jack chose to approach a clear grievance with my presence and research approach. Upon reflection, whilst I am still

disappointed with how the situation unfolded, I can now see it from their perspective too.

They questioned the validity of my research as I had become so 'involved'. I saw it as giving voice to the young people who weren't comfortable in expressing to the facilitators what they had explained to me in their individual interviews. Perhaps my input was a version of 'going native'. Haniff (1985) describes the importance of been considered an insider, and the effects it can have:

It is only when we are perceived and accepted as an insider that we can truly understand the meaning of the lives we study. An insider or native must take this status seriously. Its methodological implications are profound, for it is this group who can either do the most harm or the most good (pp. 112–13).

In addition, Madison (2011) posits the idea of the *knower and the known*, where the researcher acknowledges that they must leverage what they do know with that they don't and must rely on the 'knowers' knowledge and trust that Rubin and Rubin (2011) describe this interaction as one of *conversational partners* where the researcher and participant are engaged in "the performance dynamic of dialogue" (Madison 2011, p. 40) to develop a deeper understanding. Through the process of dialogue, I came to understand aspects of their life world and how my life perspective intersected with theirs. The social and cultural point of reference became clearer the more we learned about each other and continued to seek clarification on each other's positions.

Although, as aforementioned, I didn't consider myself a total insider but somewhere on the continuum between insider and outsider I felt it was my role as an ethnographer to 'give voice' to the young participants so they could get what they wanted and needed from the group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). However, I recognise there has to be a balance and questioned if my immersing myself in the group unintentionally influencing the context of the research.

Therefore, I asked to meet with my supervisors the following week to discuss the scenario and get their input and advice.

I debriefed with both my supervisors about the whole scenario and how I handled it by meeting with Dave. Both my supervisors supported with my approach to just put it out there and see if there was a way to move forward. Lorelle, my associate supervisor challenged me to see it from the facilitators perspective too, which helped in reflecting on my research process. Lorelle, also asked if I would do anything differently if I had my time again. I thought about it for a while and decided that the young people were my interest and I had not heard from them that I'd made them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, I wouldn't do anything differently as it would be seen as not being genuine by not having any input into the group. Andrew said to view this experience as a 'good thing' as it made me examine my practice in further detail and made me more aware of the role I had within the group. It also reinforced that the young people that I spoke with were happy with my participatory role within the group.

I finished up with the group one month later as the numbers had been dwindling and at times, I was the only adult actually turning up. I discuss the reasons for this in Chapter 4. I compiled a report for headspace Toowoomba with my findings about the group function and dynamics and spoke with the Manager after he had a chance to read it. The manager accepted my findings and said he would take my suggestions back to the group to further action (see Appendix D for a full copy of the report).

Field-based ethnography clearly has its challenges, but I would still choose this method as it allowed deeper understanding of participants and their experiences. Ethnography, in particular 'deep hanging out' inevitably raises some ethical considerations and poses some challenges, as discussed. The most pertinent consideration is undoubtedly whether 'deep hanging out' is an authentic reciprocal process in which the power dynamic is equal (Walmsley 2018). I believe the ethnographic emancipatory action research (Ledwith 2007) approach, in which I immersed myself in; the workshop setting for Bike Build;

the social gatherings for the LGBTQI group; and just generally hanging out with the Mountain Bike boys, lead to as equal power balance as possible. Ingold (2007) notes that immersion by the researcher with the participants 'in an environment of joint activity' (p.82) is a way to equalise the power dynamic. Was my very presence and being there and talking with the young people in all the sites actually altering the way they perceived their identity? It is appropriate again to reflect on my positionality throughout the research process. I kept an ethnographic diary on my place in the field and how it could inadvertently influence each participants' sense of self. Based on the reflections on my interactions with the participants and noting the reciprocal and dialogic nature of the interviews. I personally don't believe that my presence altered the way that the participants viewed themselves but rather enabled an opportunity for them to personally voice and express their identity.

Another ethical and methodological challenge of ethnography and one that I found myself facing was the tendency toward empathy and advocacy in addition to that of undertaking objective research (Johanson & Glow 2015), particularly with the LGBTQI group as discussed. As Evans (2012) noted when going into the field one of the greater challenges is to remain objective whilst immersing oneself in the field. By voicing the opinions of the young people was I inadvertently causing tension between them and the adult facilitators, the facilitators who would be there long after I left the field? Regardless of the challenges, I cannot envision any other research method that would have provided me with the in-depth knowledge that I gained directly from the young people regarding their informal learning and identity. Upon reflection ethnography would again be my method of choice as it is amenable to open inquiry, something I see as essential when undertaking research with young people.

### **3.9 Analysis**

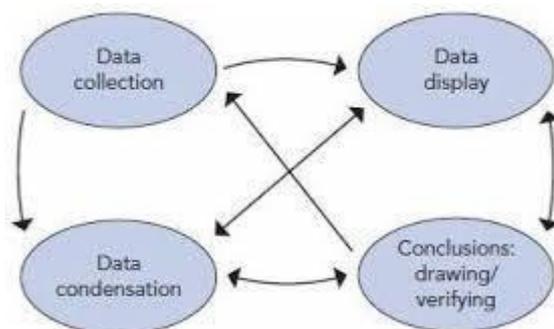
The data was analysed using thematic analysis, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)(Smith, 2009) to identify explicit ideas and experiences from the interview and observational perspective. Interpretative

phenomenological analysis provides the opportunity not only to describe the participants' knowledge of informal learning but also the chance to understand their experiences (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The phenomenological thematic analysis was the analysis of choice for this project as it focuses on the human experience subjectively and also useful for comparing theme frequency, identifying theme co-occurrence and highlighting relationships between different themes. The rationale behind this analytic choice is that the purpose of IPA is to explore individuals' perceptions within a given context and to provide a detailed examination of experience (Smith et al., 2009). In addition, Creswell (2013) notes that phenomenological analysis aims to provide a description of the nature of particular phenomena; in this case, informal learning by young people and the role that this form of learning plays in identity formation. The phenomenological thematic analysis was built around identified themes, as discussed in the Analysis chapter.

### 3.9.1 The Analytic Model/style

The analytic process for making sense of the data gathered from this project included a culmination of strategies from Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) and Creswell (2013). Miles et al. (2014) view analysis as three interactive flows of activity; data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing and verification (see figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8



**Note.** Reproduced from Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative data: an expanded sourcebook* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed) Thousand Oaks, CA Sage

Data collection is the first activity in this model; for the purposes of this project, and as discussed above, this involved observation, group discussion,

interviews and capture of photographic evidence. From these activities field notes were developed and discussions and interviews were transcribed. This data was concurrently undergoing a 'data condensation' process.

Data condensation is the act of choosing and/or transforming the data from field notes, interview transcripts and other supporting material (Miles et al. 2014). This process is integral throughout the research project and involves writing summaries, coding and developing themes and assists in sorting the data for analysis so that 'conclusions can be drawn and verified' (Miles et al. 2014, p. 12). Throughout the project, and in particular when reviewing interview transcripts, I was developing codes from the summaries which led into a group of themes being identified; with this discussed in the following chapter.

### **3.10 Coding**

Initially, I had planned to utilise NVIVO 11 to consolidate my dataset and provide a 'location' from which to launch the analysis. The multiple data types used in this project, including materials derived from interview, observation and participation, meant that NVIVO was initially well placed to enable analysis to proceed. It emerged however that the 'defined' nature of the data and my closeness with it that NVIVO became unwieldy and difficult to work with. As a result, I proceeded by undertaking a process of 'manually' coding. This involved using Miles & Huberman's (1994) data condensation and data display (for coding) processes. I examined the transcripts that formed my primary data source and the relationships they held with each other to develop the codes. As Saldana (2009, p. 4) notes a code "is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data". I undertook the process of "winnowing" the data during the coding process as not all the information collected was relevant for this project. I then worked with the relevant data to develop a number of categories that evolved into a group of themes, as discussed in the following chapters.

### **3.11 Rigor/ Validation**

My framework for establishing credibility and ensuring rigor of the project was drawn from Creswell's (2013) validation strategies. I adapted the framework as it related to the project:

*Triangulation:* As previously mentioned I utilised multiple data sources including observation, interview and visual sources of data to provide a comprehensive data set for analysis. I then undertook a systematic sorting of the data into themes from the entire data set.

*Researcher reflexivity/ Clarifying researcher bias:* Throughout this thesis I have disclosed my assumptions, beliefs and biases, in particular with the inclusion of the 'my position' section. My research diary provided a location in which to 'write-through' my positionality and how I came to consider my data and the analyses I was generating. Further discussion with my supervisors, co-facilitators and participants (via 'member check' processes) also enabled me to consider my practice as researcher.

*Prolonged engagement and persistent observation:* I maintained a prolonged engagement with the field with the study conducted over a three year period with three individual bike build sessions, a 12 month engagement with the GLBTIQ group and engaging with the mountain bike cohort over a 12 month period.

*Thick, rich description:* As a prolonged engagement utilising a range of sources including, observation, interview and visual sources the description in this thesis can be considered 'thick and rich'.

*Peer debriefing:* I utilised my supervisor as an 'external check' in form of peer review and debriefing for this thesis. As co-researchers for components of the data collection as well as having an in depth understanding of my interaction with the GLBTIQ and Mountain Bike sites he was familiar with the research undertaken. The debriefing occurred regularly, and my supervisor

would play devil's advocate and challenge my assumptions and question my methodology and analysis.

This thesis represents a narration of components of the three informal learning sites that were researched. By utilising the above methods, I ensured that the story to be told was an accurate and valid account.

I now move in the next chapter to outline the analysis that developed from the data. Major themes are presented and discussed, and initial findings in response to the research questions are detailed.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

*Humans seem to learn more deeply... when they learn outside of school in areas they choose and for which they are motivated (Hayes & Gee 2010)*

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### 4.1 Overview

What influence do those sites of learning that individuals engage in, as part of the everyday encounters and activities they experience, exert over who they are and can be? This question formed the basis for this research and was outlined in the preceding chapters. This chapter will move to explore three informal case sites; the Bike Build Program, an 'alternative' and informally constituted learning program aimed toward disengaged learners and set within a formal school setting, secondly, a support group for LGBTIQ identifying young people organised via a community-based social service and mental health support organisation, and finally a peer constituted mountain biking group, organised by a small group of teenage boys. It was within these groups that the young people involved in this project had the chance to explore the ways that different modes of learning and association influenced who they could be. Specifically, how learning, as conceptualised in the previous chapters, came to inform, frame and provoke the experiences and identities the young people engaged as part of these groups provides a specific focus of analysis.

An assertion presented in the early sections of this thesis argued that there is limited opportunity for young people to be who they 'are' and the social worlds they inhabit are largely organised on their behalf. This assertion claims that young people exist in a world not of their own making and that young people are constrained and obligated to 'be' in certain ways. The analysis that follows explores how these different constraints and obligations influence and frame the experience of young people in 'learning their identity' (Hickey & Pauli-Myler, 2017) and how this proceeded within the three case sites. Three consistent themes emerged from the data gathered as part of the fieldwork undertaken with these groups, with themes corresponding to *constraint*,

*institutional influence* and *adult intervention* identified throughout each case site, and as a prominent marker of the dataset. Although each theme varied in degree of prominence in each site, the analysis outlined below will demonstrate that *constraint*, *institutional influence* and *adult intervention* provide significant conceptual cues for understanding the experience of those young people encountered during this research.

The first theme, 'constraint', corresponds to the pressures that exist around 'who the young person *should* be' and that, concomitant with this, a sense of obligation for young people to 'be' in certain ways presents as a recognised social pressure. Experiences of this 'constraint' and the sense of 'obligation' the young people encountered in this project confronted are outlined in detail below, with further analysis offered to describe how this theme of 'constraint' and the limitations young people have to express their own agency, also more broadly speculated on.

Significantly, this theme is consistent with literature on the active citizenry young people enact, with Hickey and Phillips (2013) finding that adults predominately determine how young people "should be considered and what role they might be expected to play in public life" (p. 117) providing a sense of the context within which young people come to assert their agency and place in the world. Additionally, the literature draws the link between the sites young people participate in and how these sites hinder or support the expression of agency (Hickey & Pauli-Myler 2017, Phillips 2010, Hopkins 2013). To provide conceptual context to this analysis, the concept 'should' is used to refer to the ways that young people engage a sense of 'obligation' to participate in the world. The three case studies examined each contained their own expression of this idea of 'should', and the analysis that follows will outline how this formulation of a sense of obligation, marked by constraints, found form as an activation of 'should'.

Constraint can be viewed through another lens, that is one of *oppression*; oppression enforced by adults onto young people. Particularly in the area of

schooling, oppression can be seen via the system that 'perpetuate the existing structures of domination and exploitation' (Darder et al 2003, pp.4-5). Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction (1974) suggests that this perpetuation is partially resultant of reproducing existing power relations within society but also acknowledged that "it may be assumed that every individual owes to the type of schooling he has received a set of basic, deeply interiorised master" (p. 192-193). Therefore, the institution of school does in fact play a role not only in reproducing and replicating the dominant power relations but also being causal (Giroux, 2004). Furthermore, schooling is often viewed as a system in which the teacher *deposits* information into the student. This method of 'banking education' (Freire, 1970) assumes that the students are empty vessels that need to be filled via deposits from someone with authority. The students who are 'easiest to fill' are judged the better students whereas those students who either resist or have difficulty 'been filled' are seen as 'problem students' (Freire, 1970, 1992; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003). Apple (2014) further highlights that schools reproduction of official knowledge not only maintains inequality within in schools and society but promotes it as well, which leads on to the second theme identified of 'institutional influence'.

'Institutional influence' also emerged as a theme in each of the case sites and was conceptualised according to the 'structures' young people encounter as they engage the institutional spaces they inhabit- in particular, schooling and sites of 'formal' association. This theme was particularly prevalent amongst the Bike Build site, but still exerted influence in the GLBTQI group. Notably, this theme was also evident in mountain bike group; a group seemingly free from the constraints of formal, institutional oversight. As Illich (1971) surmises, learning is usually the result of participation and not direct instruction and "most people learn best by being 'with it', yet school makes them identify their personal, cognitive growth with elaborate planning and manipulation" (p. 39). This structuring of formal education applies a level of mediation that not only frames the experience of learning in specific (and sometimes peculiar) ways, but also delimits what counts as learning and the experiences young people might have.

Gramsci (1992) introduced a theory of hegemony, where desired change was enforced less by physical means and more via 'moral leaders' of society (including teachers). Hegemony within education system reinforces the 'common sense' notions of what is acceptable within society, including how a young person should act and what is considered 'truth' within society (Gramsci 1992; Darder et al 2003). Significantly, this structuring is not only evident within the school settings young people encounter, but also in a range of other institutional settings. In this study, evidence of structuring was evident, for example, in the second case example; the GLBTIQ group. Although this group was initiated as a 'safe place' for young people to hang out free from any preconceived notions of how it should operate, reality progressed to be somewhat different as will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

The third theme drawn from the data was centred on the role of 'adult intervention' in the formation of identity by young people. This theme was further conceptualised via a sub theme of 'facilitation'. Adult involvement whether via facilitation or intervention plays out in a variety of settings ranging from home, to school and larger society (Giroux, 2004; Ibrahim & Steinberg, 2014). However adult intervention or facilitation is more often associated with schooling and other sites where organisational hierarchy is evident. Giroux (2004), considers culture a site where identities are formed, power is enacted and learning can be a tool for social change. This is particularly relevant to this thesis as young people learn about who they are and who they can be, from, not only the institutions they attend, but also the people with whom they have contact. As previously discussed, this is especially the case in settings 'controlled' by adults. Goldstein's (2006) sentiment that "how a society views youth culture has an impact on the identity development of youth" (p. 9) and "adults need to simply close their mouths and hear what it is that young people have to say" (p. 10) has resonance on this front, and took form within the case sites (and in particular the Bike Build and GLBTIQ) as not only adult presence, but adult direction in the framing of activities.

Although each of these themes was evidenced in each site, it emerged that each site carried a predominant theme. In site 1: Bike Build, the theme of constraint, and more specifically the constraining effects of the school site were evident. In site 2: the GLBTIQ support group, the influence of institutional structures, as it related to adult intervention, was most clearly noted. In site 3: the Mountain Bike Group, adult intervention (or indeed, a seeming lack thereof) emerged as significant in shaping how the young people engaged in this project could go about those activities they were involved in. The discussion that follows will analyse these themes with reference to the data, and in particular interview excerpts from the project's participants.

#### **4.2 Bike Build**

As discussed in Chapter 3 the Bike Build program was initiated as a behaviour remediation strategy, within a school setting, aimed at re-engaging groups of 'disengaged' students. The philosophy underpinning the program suggested that by reframing the school setting to include a more collaborative and student focussed approach to learning, more 'buy in' from the students would result. Accordingly, the program engaged groups of 'at risk' students, each of whom had been 'identified' by the school's behaviour management leader and school support officers, in the development of practical, social and interpersonal skills via a bespoke alternative learning program; Bike Build.

For the students in Bike Build, one prevailing theme stood above all; school was a constraining place of restriction, largely enacted according to the enforcement of 'rules' that urged these young people to participate in the development of who they *should* be. This sense of 'should' corresponded to how the students were expected to behave in certain ways- and often not according to how they *did* happen to conduct themselves. School acted as a source of frustration for these young people and provoked the formation of subjectivities that were not these students' own. School was a 'should' place - an institution that had a rigid structure of performance and participation that the young people in Bike Build simply couldn't fit into. They felt constrained and

as a result, found themselves streamed into the Bike Build program; usually after developing a record of poor behaviour.

By comparison, Bike Build became a place where the students did have enhanced capacity to name the conduct of the sessions, and hence, assert a level of agency to 'learn' in ways that they affiliated with. The problem-posing education model of Bike Build, where the facilitator and student were jointly responsible for "a process in which all grow" (Friere 1970, p.80), opened new ways of learning and new ways for these students to explore their identity as learners. Bike Build provided the opportunity for students to work at their own pace and, often in small groups, to complete the designated task of rebuilding a bike. This program was an example of, when a culture of social interaction is encouraged in production of meaning, participants feel a sense of agency. As Gunster (2000) noted, "the insistence that any kind of critical education must be rooted in the culture, experience and the knowledge that students bring" (p.253) is fundamental to learning.

The peer led interaction allowed the students to explore their identities as students and learners, and indeed, as young people who had been burdened with a series of labels that corresponded with their behaviour and deportment at school. Within the 'safe' and 'supportive' environment of the alternative program, without fear of overt disciplinary action (providing that their interactions fell within the guidelines set out at the first session; as discussed in Section 3.5.1 in Chapter 3) new possibilities for these students to 'be' emerged. Furthermore, the Bike Build program demonstrated how critical pedagogy can not only change how young people view themselves, but also opens further possibilities to find their place in the world (Giroux 2004).

This exploration of identity and sense of place is highlighted in the case of Zac; as previously touched on in the preface to this thesis, and seen in Figure 4.1. Zac was a young student, aged 12 at the time of the first iteration of Bike Build. Zac and I had been working on his bike for a couple of weeks and had developed a level of familiarity and camaraderie that enabled me to delve a bit

deeper into his background and experiences of school. When I asked how it was that he became part of the program, he replied with the summation “I’m a bad kid” (personal communication, August 2015). When I probed further Zac informed me that he ‘knew’ this about himself as he had been told both verbally, and by what he interpreted from the actions of the school staff on more than one occasion. Zac noted that he’d been given ‘warnings’ and been suspended twice and that as part of the discussions and altercations that accompanied these admonishments for his behaviour, he had developed a clear sense of what this all meant for him. Upon further discussion Zac informed me that he was prone to outbursts in class, especially with certain teachers. I asked why *certain teachers* and he said, ‘they know how to push my buttons and do it intentionally to get me out of the class (personal communication, August 2015)’. I then asked why he thought they would want him out he again said, ‘because I’m a bad kid’. When I pushed further, noting that I hadn’t seen any ‘bad’ behaviour that made him a ‘bad kid’ he told me it’s because the Bike Build space was different. I asked why he felt this was so, and his response was that the group dynamic didn’t treat the students ‘like kids’ and allowed them the space to figure things out for themselves whilst offering support when asked for. For Zac, there was something in the way Bike Build was convened that removed some of the ‘should’- the obligation- and that allowed him to be a little more ‘himself’.



Figure 4.1 (T. Pauli-Myler, personal photograph, 12 August 2015)

Zac wasn't the only student who correlated 'bad behaviour' with the program. Tom told me during week seven of the first Bike Build that the criteria for getting into the program was 'you've got to be bad or something, to do something bad' (personal communication, October 2015). Again, it was evident that Tom had both assumed for himself and had been assigned by others the identity of the 'bad kid' and, accepted it. This aligns with Illich's (1971) sentiments that many students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, instinctively know their place within the school setting. The pupil is "schooled to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, and a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new"(p. 1) and those that don't fit the prescribed mould are considered outsiders or, a problem to be fixed.

When I asked later in the program what Tom thought of Bike Build, he said he preferred it to the classroom as we, the facilitators, just worked with the boys and didn't 'boss them around' (personal communication, November 2015). As facilitators and researchers, we were cognisant of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and as such we were very aware of the participants and their place in the program and greater world through our attitudes and behaviours. In addition, although by nature we were 'laid back' when interacting with the students, we were also aware of the implications of a perceived unequal power dynamic. We knew that if we acted like 'teachers' then the young people were less likely to engage with us or possibly view us with suspicion. Therefore, we drew from practice aligned with the tenets of critical pedagogy (especially that of Friere, Giroux and Willis) to monitor our interactions and ensure we maintained open and meaningful interactions; interactions that were built around dialogue, shared knowledge creation and participation.

The coordinating youth support officer responsible for the program noted that he was determined that this space was not to be constraining for the students, and that it was meant to open space for dialogue and interaction; a situation quite different to the 'regular' classroom contexts typically encountered by the students. As such, the Bike Build program was developed to

act as a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991), a place where the group shared an interest in the rebuilding of bikes and allowed the participants the space to explore their identity. The situated learning nature of the program, that is one where active participation was encouraged (Lave & Wenger 1991), was essential in building the types of relationships that allowed the participants to feel comfortable in exploring their identity. In fact, the key to the success of the Bike Build program was the reciprocal nature of the relationships formed as the program progressed. Indeed, Bike Build was in many ways focussed on repairing some of the poor relationships participating students had with school, each other and their teachers. To some extent, and while I avoid suggesting something of a psycho-analytical intent on this count, it was also geared toward having the students build better relationships within themselves; to nurture new senses of identity as learners and young people.

Relationships were central to these sentiments, and several of the students identified that having space to collaborate and engage with friends and the process of learning was a feature of Bike Build that was somewhat disorienting. The experience of the regular spaces of school typically didn't support these sorts of interactions- or at least to the extent that the students felt were important- and indeed applied further 'should' sentiment; that these students 'should' behave by not being vocal and disruptive; capacities that the interactions with friends amounted to in these spaces. Simon, one of the school's student support officers assigned to the Bike Build program, also recognised the importance of relationships to the interactions within schooling when noting the following:

because relationship is the key to it. For instance, I won't sweat on the small stuff at the start. No point burning the bridge. Build that relationship and once you got that then you can start addressing a few little things and they'll start listening. Where I think some teachers don't worry about that anymore, they're too locked down in, you know.....  
(personal communication, August 2016).

This ethos toward building relationships was also embodied in my own experiences with the program. Figures 4.2 and 4.3, along with the previous figure 3.0 and 3.1 demonstrate typical interactions between myself and the participants. As well as helping rebuild the bikes, I would also have lunch with the participants and have a general chat about their lives and interests. For example, Figure 4.3 shows me in discussion with the participant in the foreground telling me of his plans to go on to University to study Law. This student's experiences with schooling, and indeed, other institutions including the law, were particularly fraught; for example, he had some experience with the legal system through his father's recent altercations with the police. He noted during a lunchtime discussion with me some of the details of his father's experiences, and more pressingly, his own sense of the injustice that his father had encountered. He wanted to remedy this and by setting his sights on becoming a lawyer, felt that he would be in a position to ensure that these sorts of injustice would not occur again.

Yet, significant challenges confronted this student. When I asked about his understanding of what it took to become a lawyer, he remained unsure. He was not aware of what subjects he should be studying at school, nor how to go about gaining entry to university. Whether this student would have the capacity to gain entry to a Law degree was to some extent beside the point in this moment (but it did have to be recognised that his grades and current standing in his schooling would make this aspiration difficult; yet another constraint confronting this young person). What was at stake here was that he was expressing his aspirations for the future- something that he reported he had not done with anyone to that point (including family members). The problem lay in this student's ability to enact this aspiration; from my perspective, it all looked like a significant challenge, and one that would be difficult to overcome. Apart from being one of those moments of 'connection' that sometimes happen in fieldwork, this was a crucial moment. We had connected, and this student had relayed to me something significant. But I was left with a sense of hopelessness around how these students would ultimately meet their aspirations. We may

have had this connection through the enactment of dialogue and conversation, but this itself seemed to open a further set of problems and challenges.

It is also the case that these discussions and moments would have been very difficult to convene within the 'regular' classroom setting. The strict routine, compression of time, and focussed attention required in these spaces would have meant that time for something like this conversation simply wouldn't have been possible. This is somewhat extraordinary given that effective relationships between educators and students remain central to learning and, specifically, to student engagement (Wilms, Friesen & Milton 2009; Comber & Kamler, 2006). Yet, as van Manen (2016) points out, "in our increasingly technologically mediated worlds, the personal and relational dimensions of teaching-learning and interacting are at risk" (p. 12). What my discussion with this student provided was an insight; an insight into how he felt about his schooling, his positioning within the structure of the school, and his aspirations for the future. It also provided a clear indication of the difference between the ways that this student understood himself, and how he perceived prescribed views of others.



Figure 4.2 (T.Pauli-Myler, personal photograph taken by Andrew Hickey, June 3, 2016)



Figure 4.3 (T.Pauli-Myler, personal photograph taken by Andrew Hickey, May 11, 2016)

These incidental moments as part of the larger informal learning of Bike Build provided the participants the space to explore not only who they were at that moment but also who they wanted to be in the future. I asked this question of the students' aspirations of many of the participants over the three year period of Bike Build and the answers varied from aspirations for internships, apprenticeships through to tertiary qualified professions. Regardless of the participant, each had a vision of how they perceived their future to look; even Zac-the 'bad kid'- saw himself in full time employment, as possibly a mechanic or similar.

I followed-up with Zac one year after he had finished the program to see how he was travelling with his schooling. Since the previous time I had spoken to Zac he was now actually attending school on a full-time basis and was in much less trouble- he had no suspensions for behaviour since our last session together. When I asked Zac what had changed since during the previous year, his response emphasised 'a lot'. When I asked for further clarification, he said his relationship with the teachers had changed and that he just 'went to class and did his work' (personal communication, August 2016). Zac explained that he just ignored the teachers he didn't like and just 'did the work'. The change of attitude came about due to Bike Build -he said 'doing Bike Build helped me realise that if I want to be a mechanic, I need to finish school. So now I come to school and do the work- I want to get a good job' (personal communication,

August 2016). In some ways, this was a positive outcome, but in another way, I was heartbroken to hear this otherwise funny, articulate and engaging young man tell me that he was now simply 'enduring' school. Although he now had an aspiration, it remained that schooling for this student was constraining; something to be endured via time served, and not something dynamic, affirming and inspiring. Zac had learnt that "skills are valuable and reliable only if they are the result of formal schooling" Illich (1971, p.89) and therefore for him to find the job he desired meant that he must attend school, regardless of his interest in being there.

#### **4.2.1 The Unexpected Sites of Engagement: A walk to 'the shed'**

Further expressions of the ways that the informality of the Bike Build sessions worked to open different forms of engagement with schooling also occurred in a somewhat unexpected setting; the walk that the participating students and I took at the beginning and end of each workshop session to and from the storage shed where the bikes were stored. It was during this time that insightful, unanticipated and 'open' dialogues occurred, and a deeper interpersonal connection occurred. Below is an excerpt from my field notes (July 2015):

As we finished the session today, I walked with a few of the boys up to the shed where they keep their bikes, about 60 metres from the workshop where we build the bikes. I asked the boys if they had done any classes in the workshop before and they told me that, due to their behaviour, they weren't trusted to work with the tools (especially the sharp ones!). They were quite matter of fact about it and didn't seem concerned and actually laughed about it. This was such an interesting moment. The walk to the shed, away from the formality of the sessions and the presence of the guidance counsellors and other school staff gave me the chance for a different type of conversation. In that walk, I gained an insight that provided me with a greater sense of how the boys saw themselves and how they connected with school. The laughs and jokes about the sharp tools provided a denotative shield to our

communication, but what we were really doing in this moment was sharing a bit of ourselves and what we each thought.

I noted that I hadn't witnessed the 'bad behaviour' that they told me they were always in trouble for. We talked about this and the boys shared with me what they thought was the lot they had in school. In using the walk and the prompt for the discussion that the physical space provided, a dialogue emerged that gave me a much clearer sense of how the boys saw themselves.

The simple act of walking and talking created an opportunity for a more open conversation and visual prompts opened a whole new level of engagement. Evans and Jones (2011) found that information gathered during walking interviews were influenced by where they occurred, with visual prompts shaping discussions. Furthermore, Hickey et al. (2018) found that "Walking affords a shared sense of the experience of being together in place, played-out as this is through the shared practice of traversal; traversal of the terrain of the field, and traversal of the terrain of experience" (p. 24). In the above example the walk to the storage shed (via the agricultural workshop) was significantly influenced by the landscape, in this instance the workshop space and a discussion about 'sharp tools'. I asked the students whether they had been involved in classes in that space, and some noted that they had, but under restricted access because of the 'sharp tools'. When I asked what this meant, they replied that there was concern amongst some of the supervising staff around the safety of having these students in such proximity to tools that could cause injury! These walks provided the opportunity to speak more openly.

An example of how walking provided the space to explore knowledge and identity was captured in the following (September 2015):

Today I went to get a bike from the shed with one of the boy's 'D'. D had been suspended and absent for some of the previous weeks but was now back in the program. As we walked up to the shed where the bikes were stored, I asked where he'd been. He gave me the whole story

of how he was suspended due to fighting and, although he'd been back at school for three weeks, hadn't been allowed back in the program until he'd proven that he could 'behave'. We talked about what he thought of all of this, and then talked about where he wants to be after school, and generally what he thought of school. As had been the case previously, walking opened a chance to talk and to talk openly. The walk made conversation easier. It allowed for natural breaks in the conversation that were then prompted by the rhythm of our short walk to the shed. Visual cues along the way, like the sight of school buildings in the distance, prompted points for discussion, and with the crossing of this space between the workshop and shed, stood as a moment of openness and shared experience. I felt honoured to have been part of this to have had the boys share with me the things they did, and especially in D's case, to allow me this insight into what he thought.

These cases highlight how the act of walking- a practice not normally associated with the form of schooling the boys were taking part in- enabled deep and important accounts of experience to occur. It was during these deeply informal moments that different types of encounter were made possible and space opened for different types of interpersonal association (Phillips & Tossa, 2016). In this moment of walking with the students the usual structures of school were relaxed, with this opening insight into how 'the rules' of school permeated even the ways that individuals interacted and engaged with each other. Here, the theme of 'should' gained greater meaning in terms of the way that it shaped the lives of the participants; that is to say that the walks and dialogues exposed me to the ways that 'should' correlated as an obligation to behave in certain ways and enact certain behaviours (with the alternative being that these students knew that they 'would' be labelled and punished if they did not). The space of Bike Build disoriented the obligations of the regular school, and although it imposed its own, new obligations (for instance via the ways that the students were still expected to conduct themselves in certain ways, and still undertake the repair of their bicycles). The fracturing of existing ways of interacting and doing things opened the possibility for new forms of

interpersonal collaboration and demonstration of one's selfhood, and hence, new forms of expressing identity.

The facilitation enacted in these settings was crucial to this dynamic. In an interview with Simon, and in which we spent some time discussing the nature of interpersonal relationships in the Bike Build program, he noted that when working with students that "the relationship is key", particularly when working with students with 'behaviour issues'. Simon said for him the role was "like a calling or something that you're meant to do and when you work with kids, in my opinion, you've either got it or you don't" (personal communication, August 2015). Simon further expanded on his role by saying:

And the biggest thing in a role like this, I want to be in the game for a long time... and so... I remember talking to an old youth worker and he said, because I said to him, 'how do you deal with it', because he's been in the game a long time and a lot of kids have come and gone and taken advantage of the help. I said, how do you do it? He said, 'you help someone in that season, in that part of their journey, and they can take it or leave it... ten years down the track they might appreciate what you've done. They might not at the time, but a little bit of kindness goes a long way. I have no agenda apart from trying to... giving the kids some tools some strategies to help, take it or leave it, and I think some people, they want a result, they want a 'fix'.

One particular case that highlights the importance of effective relationship-building derives from discussions with Simon regarding the experience of one of the participating students; Tim. Tim came to the Bike Build program due to 'behaviour issues' and a notable "OneSchool" record; a student performance and progression aggregator used in Australian schools to assist schools 'manage key teaching and school administrative activities' (Queensland Government 2018), and where records of student behaviour are noted. Simon relayed the following during an interview regarding Tim's case (personal communication, August 2015):

Simon: Here's an interesting one for you; I saw Tim at Primary school last year, at [school], and he had a great relationship with his teacher and was never in too much trouble at all. Are you aware of OneSchool- the behaviour thing? Yep, well ok, his behaviour record was pretty clean, great relationship with the teacher and all that... he makes the move to this school, and he's been suspended 3 or 4 times and that nature of high school going from one classroom to another, it's not about relationships.

Interviewer: And that's in the space of the last year?

Simon: Yep, and I was lucky enough to see that [having been at both schools], and I stood back and thought, that's weird? Are we letting him down, as a person? So, to see that, the school system is like a factory mentality, and it's like one size fits all. And so, for the kids you are a bit more creative and geared in different ways...

Interviewer: it doesn't work so well for everyone?

Simon: Yeah.

Simon's reflection on the role and significance of relationships as core to the learning resonated with the purpose of the Bike Build program- to provide an alternative to the structured classroom encounters that students were experiencing and offer a more interpersonal experience. Simon noted that an informal learning setting often achieves outcomes that the schooling system cannot offer some students, and in this respect, paralleled themes that emerge in the literature (McGregor et al. 2015; Te Riele 2007).

Simon: I've had some success stories, one story down in Moree... and this always gives me hope this story, this one boy, he couldn't put together five days of school. You know, rough background, could swear with the best of them, and probably just couldn't work out when to turn that off. Um,

put him in a job site and he's fine. So, what we did was, we worked out that he was a great welder; the manual arts teacher spoke to me and we went, alright, let's see what we can do; we found him a work experience place at a boiler-maker... anyway they put him on two days a week, did three days of school. We noticed that he had this sense of belonging, his whole behaviour changed, his whole body-language changed. Next thing you know he's got an apprenticeship and things unfolded from there. School was... and this is what I say to the boys; school can be a great launching pad for you. It won't define you... but you can use it to your advantage.

Simon recognised that teachers are “intellectuals who are part of a specific class, group, or movement and who serve to give it coherence and an awareness of its own function in the economic, social, and political fields” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993, p. 155). That teachers as ‘transformative intellectuals’ need to be cognisant of the impact of the social environment on students but also the impact they too can have on shaping the lives of young people, is crucial, with Simon’s accounts providing insight into the formative influence that he exerted as an educator.

This feeds into the sense of identity that young people can gain in any setting, and it would seem, from Simon’s conversation, that school can be a constraining factor for young people in expressing their sense of self and agency and that, for some young people, a feeling that they cannot express themselves more fully within the school setting permeates their experience of schooling. Through my interviews with the students the theme of school as a place of constraint was further explored by several students. Jack, a student who had secured a school-based traineeship found that he ‘could be more himself’ at the panel beating shop (personal communication, August 2015). Jack relayed in an interview the following:

Interviewer: What do you mean you can be more yourself?

Jack: They don't treat me like a kid at work, they treat me like I'm just one of them.

Interviewer: How's that?

Jack: They just ask me to do the jobs and let me do them (after showing me) and we joke around and stuff.

Interviewer: How's that different to here at school?

Jack: The teachers are always checking up on you and thinking the worst.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Jack: Like the other day I was in math and zoned out because it was boring, and the teacher called my name out in front of everyone and told me to pay attention.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Jack: I was really embarrassed, it happens all the time.....I have ADD or something so I find it really hard to pay attention in class, especially Math and English.

Interviewer: So, what's different at the panel beating shop?

Jack: Because I am working with my hands, I don't get bored- I like working on cars and stuff.....

Interviewer: What's the plan now?

Jack: They offered me an apprenticeship last week, so I just have to get the school to sign off.

Interviewer: A school-based apprenticeship?

Jack: Yeah

Interviewer: Wow, congratulations that's great.

Jack: Thanks, they said me rebuilding motorbikes helped me get the job.

Interviewer: Your experience rebuilding motorbikes in the Bike Build program helped you get the job?

Jack: Yeah.... Thanks

Interviewer: You are most welcome. I'm happy that it helped you find a job that you like.

As is evident from the above transcript, the formal schooling system is not suited to every young person and in fact can be, in some cases, a site where a student can feel powerless. The fact that Jack found a positive sense of identity within the workplace that he didn't at school highlights the role that less formalised learning can play in the young person's life.

Through Bike Build Jack found that, not only did he prefer tactile, experiential modes of learning ( a learning as 'doing'), but that he could also develop skills in these moments that could be transferred into other avenues; skills in the mechanical repair, but crucially also, interpersonal communication. . Conversely, the level of adult intervention and institutional influence within the school setting only added to the constraint felt by Jack, particularly in terms of the restrictive singular nature of the tasks that had defined schooling for him. This theme was repeated in several of the interviews conducted with the student participants.

Dean was another who found the formal school setting constraining (September 2015).

Interviewer: So, this is better than the classroom?

Dean: Yeah...

Interviewer: Yeah. So.....

Dean: You get to use your hands and stuff-it's practical

Interviewer: You would rather do this stuff than be in a classroom?

Dean: Yeah

Interviewer: What don't you like about the classroom?

Dean: Other kids stir me up and the teacher blames me, even if I'm not doin' nothing.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Dean: Cause sometimes I play up and don't listen because I'm bored

Interviewer: Bored?

Dean: Yeah, I don't like Math and English and stuff and get bored, so I muck up

Interviewer: And how does that play out?

Dean: The teacher gets up me and sends me to the office or sometimes I just walk out of class

Interviewer: Walk out of class, then what happens?

Dean: I have to go to the office

Interviewer: So, do you- go to the office?

Dean: Yeah sometimes, but sometimes I just walk out of school and hang out somewhere else

Interviewer: Somewhere else?

Dean: Yeah, like go home and get changed and go hang out at skate parks and stuff

Interviewer: I see, so what's different about the Bike Build Program- because you haven't walked out on it- yet

Dean: You don't make me do stuff I don't want to do... you don't tell me what to do

Interviewer: Ok, so you feel you have more freedom in the program?

Dean: Yeah... and you guys are cool and help out but don't boss me around or get up me and it isn't rushed

This poses questions of structure, and from all accounts drawn from this program, it was the less structured format of the Bike Build program that afforded the participants the opportunity to explore their identity and enact their agency. Lister (2007) suggests that beyond being labelled as 'citizens in waiting', the sites they inhabit also constrain and shape the agency young people exert. Furthermore, Hickey and Pauli-Myler (2017) found that the constraints young people face are not limited to physical space but also in the "symbolic mediation of the young person as primarily incapable and in-need" (p. 4). School, and in particular its structuring, in line with the formality of curricula, strict adherence to fixed modes of interpersonal engagement and specified codes of personal deportment, functioned as a site of clear lines of constraint. Bike Build opened up some of these constraints, and while I am far

from suggesting that this program presents as an ideal expression of informality and openness, it did nonetheless demonstrate that the constraints present in a learning environment exerts a direct influence over not only what is possible in that learning environment, but also how individual learners develop a sense of their own persona as 'learners'. The Bike Build case example highlights the school as a site of constraint for the young person, a place where the symbolic and discursive constraints imposed upon them by adults and the 'system' played a role in their identity formation and, in addition, physically and structurally didn't allow the opportunity to exert their agency.

Another example of how the theme structure, along with adult intervention, was interwoven with identity was the headspace Toowoomba GLBTIQ group.

### **4.3 GLBTIQ group**

Following on from the informal structure and facilitation of the Bike Build program a core theme of the GLBTIQ group convened at headspace Toowoomba centred on the nature of the structure and facilitation of the group and more specifically, the way that forms of 'adult intervention' mediated this structure. As previously discussed, the GLBTIQ group was formed to provide an inclusive space for LGBTQI identifying young people to just 'hang out' and socialise.

The group consisted of small number of young people, usually up to ten, with the aim that the group was to be informally facilitated by the young people present. There was an additional adult membership of between one and four attendees per gathering. The role of adult members was to provide insight into their own experiences as LGBTQI identifying people and to act as informal mentors for the young people.

Unlike the Bike Build program, the GLBTIQ group didn't function as a community of practice *by definition*, although they identified as LGBTQI there was no identified shared 'concern or passion for something they *do*' (Lave &

Wenger 1991). In addition, there wasn't the impetus to 'do it better' due to regular interaction. There was, however, an implied form of legitimate peripheral participation, where the newcomers to the group, via ongoing participation in the group, would, in theory, eventually become mentors to the newer members or facilitators of the group. However, this did not necessarily occur within this group as described below.

During the first few months of my attendance at these social events, one young person (Ash) took the lead in conversation and involved everyone in the room. Prior to Ash's arrival the members chatted amongst themselves, but Ash commanded the room's attention. From the moment Ash walked in the room the group became a collective and would discuss some of the issues they were experiencing. Ash facilitated the group with an intentioned informality; Ash relayed that the purpose of this group was centred on each member having the space and freedom to engage as they felt comfortable doing so, and that a strict structure would merely work to constrain the group. In ways that were similar to the Bike Build structure, this group too recognised the connections between participation and the dynamics of the setting, and subsequently set about ensuring that space to 'be' and enact participation were open.

I undertook a first interview with one of my key participants, Mackenzie (personal communication, August 2016) at this time, and below is a component of the interview:

- Interviewer: How do you find the GLBTIQ group?  
Mackenzie: I like it  
Interviewer: What do you like about it?  
Mackenzie: I like how we all just have a chat about what issues were facing and can just talk it out with each other  
.....  
Interviewer: How do you find the adult participation in the group?  
Mackenzie: I think it's pretty good because it adds a difference to the age group and stuff. They're like they've been

through at a different time as well, so it tells this experience of how it used to be.

Interviewer: How do you find that? You heard some of the stories like Claire's<sup>20</sup>, she says 20 years ago she came out, or even Jack's<sup>21</sup> as he's older again. How do you find those stories?

Mackenzie: It's sad because back then they had a hard time, but it's also... it actually shows how much it has changed. Because it doesn't seem like it has been because I haven't been alive very long so it's like all this is bad for me, speed it up, but it's like yeah well it has changed a lot. So, it's like it will get there eventually so it's pretty good actually....

Interviewer: I know what you mean. That's good because sometimes having adults in the group can change things. Do you feel like it's just a group of people catching up or do you feel like there's a real power balance between the adults and the...

Mackenzie: No, I think it's pretty good with that. We're all just hanging out, you're not above us because you're adults, and we're just friends and chilling out.

Interviewer: Ok, I mean that's the purpose and that's what I find with the informal learning that power balance is what changes things. If you've got adults going 'well I'm the adult and I'm saying this', it changes the dynamics.

Mackenzie: Yeah, it would change the whole group.

Early on during my time visiting the group sessions, there was a level of adult participation that worked for the group members. The level of participation was viewed as an 'asset' to the group, in that the insights provided

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<sup>20</sup> Not real name

<sup>21</sup> Not real name

by the adult members added depth and context to the group, in addition to providing a valuable history into the LBGTQI movement. When Mackenzie spoke about the adults not being 'above us' it was evident that they felt that the group dynamics worked and that each member, whether young person or adult, were on a level footing. This is significant as, previously noted, this is not always the case. During later visits it emerged that 'adult participation' translated as 'adult mediation' of the sessions (Barker, 2000; Tilleczek, 2014).

Another interviewee, Pat (personal communication, September 2016), echoed the same sentiments about the group and, in particular, adult involvement.

Interviewer: How do you find the group, in particular adult involvement?

Pat: It's good... It's good to get an adult, who has already been through this, perspective. Especially hearing the stories about when Claire and Jack 'came out' and how their friends and family reacted. Jack still hasn't told his mother and he's like in his 70's or something.

Interviewer: Yeah, that must be tough for him, it sounds like he doesn't think his mother would understand- I guess she's from a whole other generation, one that probably wouldn't be as accepting.

Pat: Yeah, my parents still don't accept it and tried to get me to go to conversion therapy...

Interviewer: Conversion therapy?

Pat: Yeah, they took me to a priest who told them to put some voodoo thing under my bed and I'd become straight.....

Interviewer: That must have been hard

Pat: Yeah it was.....

Interviewer: So, you can actually relate to Jack's story of not wanting to tell his mother, because when you told your parents they tried to 'fix' you?

Pat: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, has having Claire and Jack in the group has been good as you can identify with what Jack has gone through?

Pat: Yes

Interviewer: Is there anything else about the group that you like?

Pat: Yeah, I can just hang out with my friends and catch up, without any judgement.

Interviewer: Judgement from who?

Pat: Anyone

Initially at least, the level and type of adult interaction was considered appropriate and in fact helpful. In this particular account, Pat related to and understood Jack's decision not to 'come out' as he himself had been through a traumatic experience by doing just that. The significance with Pat's account is that this type of relational interaction allowed the young people a sense of context, and of shared experience, with this in turn enabling the young people to feel more comfortable when 'opening up' to the group about their own experiences as members of the LBGTQI community.

During these months the group functioned as a social learning network, a safe place where political and moral practice was discussed and enacted within the group. Topics emerged from general discussion including the discrimination members of the group were facing, particularly within the school setting but also the wider community, bullying, again typically within the school setting. During this time the plebiscite for the same-sex marriage was a topic that frequently arose, with the discussions focusing on what had been reported in the media that week and how it affected the young people in their daily lives. The discussions were interactive and there was a sense of equivalency in the

power dynamic evident, with members each having an equal opportunity to have their say in a safe place

However, the dynamics changed part way through my term visiting the group, and coincided broadly with the departure of Ash, who left in order to concentrate on the production and management of a performing arts concert that Ash was involved in. Ash was a key facilitator of the group and had successfully managed to include the young people involved in the group into conversations, whilst also negotiating the level of involvement of the participating adults. Ash was a key influence- in a calm and considered way and exerted a sense of focus on the young people and drew upon the experiences of the adults in a collaborative, but participatory manner. In the absence of Ash, not only was the loss of a young participant-facilitator felt, but equally the number of young people in the group decreased. None of the remaining young people felt confident in taking over the role of facilitator. This led to some discomfort by the adult facilitators who voiced their concern to the other adult members about the group no longer having 'any direction'. One in particular, called a meeting with the other adult members to discuss the future of the group as they were finding it difficult to attend every gathering due to work pressures and, particularly when they too felt the group lacked a clear purpose.

It was at this meeting that I informed the group that, in my interviews with the GLBTIQ group, that the young people had felt that the group suited them perfectly the way it was, that it was a 'safe place to hang out and just chat' (personal communication, Max 2017) and that the structure and conduct as facilitated by Ash was effectively meeting the young people's expectations. However, it was decided that at the next gathering the group would be asked what they wanted out of the group and that this sense of tumult following Ash's departure needed to be 'fixed'. It needs to be mentioned that the adult members of this group were all volunteers who were giving up their time freely, and in some cases were leaving paid employment and similar commitments to attend these meetings; meetings some of the adults too felt lacked a clear sense of direction.

To add further context for the purpose of this analysis, it was with how the young people were reacting to the new suggested meeting structure, the role of the adult participants and, the general purpose of group that important insights into the place that adult mediation played in this group's dynamic begin to emerge. I reiterated what the young people had said to me during their interviews about the group been useful for them, especially as they felt safe to discuss their sexuality without fear or recourse, and that it didn't stereotype them. This changed however when the suggestion was made that the group be more focussed on advocating for diverse sexualities, in what was taken by some of the members as being a more 'authoritative' approach to the group's conduct and purpose. As noted in the previous Chapter this was instigated by two adult members and my response of 'it doesn't all have to be about sexuality' was not well received by them. I held additional informal interviews after this suggestion with the same participants as well as Max (who I drove home after each meeting), to see how they felt the meeting, and subsequent dynamics of the group unfolded. Firstly, I spoke to Max (personal communication, May 2017) immediately after the meeting in the car on my way to dropping them home.

Interviewer: How did you find the group tonight?

Max: It was a bit weird hey....

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Max: I thought the point of the group was to just hang out with friends in a 'safe place with no judgement' .....

Interviewer: mmmm

Max: and Claire just wants to make it all about being queer

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Max: I like hanging out and talking sh\*& with my friends... I mean I think it would be good to look at some 'gay' YouTube clips and stuff, but I thought the point of the group was to just hang out and not focus on that. I mean...I'm happy to watch some drag queen clips but I still just want to catch up with my friends too.

Interviewer: mmm..... I see what you mean. My interviews so far have been pretty consistent with you guys just wanting a safe place to meet up with your mates, hang out and explore your identity. Is that still the case or would you prefer more guest speakers, and watching videos etc?

Max: I'm happy to have speakers sometimes but still want to just hang out too.

This ties in again with the idea of facilitation in an informal learning setting and how “institutional forms of culture and power are mutually entangled in constructing diverse identities” (Giroux, p. 59) and, in turn, influence participation and the expression of agency. When I spoke to Pat next, he told me he wasn't going to be going to the group anymore as he wasn't interested in watching 'drag queen make up tutorials' or listening to 'gay music' that he was just 'a normal person who happened to be gay' (personal communication, August 2017). Mackenzie (personal communication, August 2017) expressed a similar sentiment, saying that it felt like the adults 'had an agenda' and that the group had changed from what it was originally set up to be, that is, a safe place free of judgement to hang out.

This highlights again the idea of what a young person 'should' look like and how they 'should' act. Giddens' (1984) concept of 'duality of structure', whereby structures can not only be enabling but alternatively constraining, was evident within this group at this point. The group structure had morphed from one where a young person was the core facilitator to one where there was a desire for more structure by two adult members around each gathering, and this was felt as a constraint by the young members.

From the interviews and general discussions in the gatherings it was evident that the young people identified as young people 'who happened to be LBGTQI' whereas some adult members perhaps perceived them (as they possibly perceived themselves) as 'LBGTQI identifying people'. Whilst the difference may be subtle when it comes to identity and perceptions of Self, it

may be a very important distinction. This perception was mentioned by Max (personal communication, August 2017) in one of our car trips he said “I don’t like to put a label on my sexuality as it doesn’t define who I am, but I think sometimes Claire and Jack are quite forceful in trying to get us to identify as bisexual or whatever”. When I probed further Max why he thought this was he said, “maybe because when they came out it was much tougher and they needed to have a label, I don’t know (personal communication August 2017)”.

#### **4.3.1 Facilitation, Intervention and Mediation: The role of the adult participants**

This situation brings to question the role of facilitation and how that can look to different people. There were two possible types of intervention at play as it appeared to me; a distinction that I cast as a difference between an ‘authoritarian’ versus a ‘facilitation’ approach. I explain this distinction in the following ways; the authoritarian approach played out when two of the adult members pressed the group to have a very distinct purpose and structure, even though my interviews with the young members had indicated that they wanted to ‘just hang out’ with their peers. Initially, before Ash left the group a facilitation approach was very much the model in play with Ash informally facilitating the gatherings by, for example, asking everyone what they’d been up to and sharing what had happened in the time since the previous gathering. Ash’s approach was geared around conviviality, and personal affiliation. However, as previously mentioned, once Ash left the group the level of facilitation moved from one end of the spectrum to very close to the other with, Claire in particular, suggesting the group to have more ‘structure’. This in and of itself was not a ‘bad’ thing, but did run contrary to the expectations the group had of the meetings. But still, this approach to structure and the ordered sequencing of meetings and topics of discussion ran contrary to the desires the young people told me they had for the group. Giroux believes that young people should feel free to voice their concerns and should be provided “the conditions-institutional, economic, spiritual, and cultural-that will allow them to reconceptualize themselves as citizens and develop a sense of what it means to fight for important social and political issues that affect their lives, bodies, and

society” (1997b, p. 31). In this case the institutional conditions weren’t such that allowed the members demonstrate their agency and explore their identity in their preferred manner. Consequently, the group began to splinter as they felt the higher level of adult intervention lead to a feeling of constraint.

#### **4.3.2 Adult Intervention and the Constraints of Group Facilitation**

Initially the young people were not only happy with the level of adult participation but genuinely appreciated their input. However, when the group dynamics changed after Ash left it is evident that the young people I spoke with started to feel constrained by the ideas two of the adult members had. Cultural theorists draw attention to how perceived authority and identities are constructed within particular types of social relations and the effect that has on meaningful participation (Freire, 1970; Giroux 2004; Hall, 1997). The feeling of constraint by the young group members led to the group slowly dwindling in numbers and then ceasing all together a few months later.

The young people were happy to be mentored by and involved in collaborative discussion with the adult members but were not so keen to be directed by them. This level of adult intervention was crucial to the group’s conduct, and in this instance, resulted in the group splintering. What all of this demonstrated were two key points. Firstly, under Ash’s leadership, the group convened as a group organised by and for young people, and in doing so, demonstrated that young people do indeed have capacity to organise themselves. Secondly, with the incursion of adult interventions that ran contrary to the young peoples’ interests, the forms of association that marked the group’s conduct to that point began to splinter and decay. The worry was however with the ways that this adult intervention was marked as an expected outcome for the group, and that adult views permeated the group’s conduct as much as they did (but again, to the point of destruction of the group).

Whilst there is little doubt that the adult facilitators of the group were good willed towards the younger members, it does bring to question their view of the competence of the young people to self-organise according to some adult

members expectations This was evident at times with only one, or on occasion no participants actually turning up to the gatherings. In addition, when young participants did attend there was no clear 'leader' after Ash left the group. Whilst the young participants informed me that this was their preferred mode of interaction, as previously discussed, some adult members felt that the unstructured nature of those interactions didn't meet the groups intended purpose. Additionally, society is bombarded with messages from the media and institutions indicating that, as aforementioned, young people are either in need of intervention or protection and, often inadvertently, this is evident in the way interactions with adults often occur (Bessant et al. 1998;Wyn , 2005; Giroux, 1998).

There is a recent history of advocating for youth engagement, however this participation is often seen as encouraging young people to 'have their say' without necessarily listening to their views (Black, Walsh & Taylor 2011). The implication is that young people are citizens in waiting that need more time to learn about the world before their views are valid (Raby 2008). Giroux (2009) calls this the 'assault against youth' where not only are the young person's views are dismissed, but also, disturbingly, where young people are viewed as incompetent or 'problematic' and in need of adult intervention. This view not only negates the value that a young person's opinions can add but also leads to questions of the young person's agency and prescribed identity (Friere, 1996; Giroux 2000; Biesta, 2012).

Furthermore, the demise of the group can be viewed according to Foucault's (1995) notion that power is intricately intertwined with resistance. In this case the young people resisted the level of adult intervention by leaving the group and looking to find a new meaningful space elsewhere. As something of a counter point, this then leads into the third and least 'adult facilitated' group the mountain bike group.

#### 4.4 Mountain Bikers

The mountain bike group was formed from the desire for a group of young males to 'hang out' and ride their bikes together. This was the most 'informal' of the participant groups, with the purpose of the group to just 'have fun with their mates'. As previously discussed, I had known this group of young mountain bikers through my long-term involvement in the mountain bike scene in Toowoomba via my husband who introduced me to mountain biking when the participants would have been young children. As we had interacted on the trails over the years, stopping for 'a chat' was something familiar. As such, this group seemed like a perfect cohort to discuss the notion of informal learning with.

The main themes for this group revolved around the seeming *lack* of constraint, structure and adult facilitation that permeated their activities. These boys were, after all, undertaking this pastime of riding their bikes free from adult supervision and facilitation; or at least, this is how it initially appeared. The reality was however somewhat different.

As the group was an informal group who chose to 'hang out' together around a common interest there was not the same level of constraint imposed by adults.

But on closer inspection, it remained however that their parents certainly did have expectations around their behaviour- for example, via the instruction that these boys should, for example, always wear a helmet and be home at specified times. Cast under a broader concern for 'safety', these requests were all entirely appropriate, but did nonetheless work to demonstrate that there is perhaps no space accessible to young people that are entirely free of adult intervention and oversight. As Hickey and Phillips (2013) note "an increased public concern for child safety that has had the effect of limiting children's participation in the public sphere (p. 115)" has been on the increase in recent years. The 'freedom' the boys had to 'do their own thing' was

still monitored, with the capacity to assert their own desires over the conduct of this informal group perhaps one of 'degrees of separation' from direct adult intervention. Where the Bike Build group confronted adult directives in their everyday encounters as quite deliberate mediations of practice (in both the settings of the regular school and even within the relatively more open Bike Build workshop spaces), and the GLBTIQ group in the facilitation of the group and structuring of sessions, for the mountain bikers, adult intervention was still present, albeit slightly more removed.

In one interview I asked two of the participants, Matt and Will, if they experienced any issues with riding when they wanted. o. The following was an unexpected, but nonetheless insightful response:

Matt: I had to choose between going to the World Mountain Bike Championships or the Rugby 'grudge match'. (A local rugby match with a long history in town)

Interviewer: That's a tough one.

Matt: Yeah, especially as I'd already paid to enter the Worlds

Interviewer: So, what happened?

Matt: I didn't think I'd get into the school's A Rugby team, so I paid for the mountain bike championships and then found out I was picked for the A side and the game was on the same weekend.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So, what did you do?

Matt: Well, I thought about it a lot, but I felt the pressure from the school, so I just cancelled the mountain bike championships.

Interviewer: Wow, that's huge- the championships are a massive deal, especially if you want to get on a sponsored team, like you mentioned earlier, what a tough decision.

Matt: Yeah, but I just couldn't let the school team down.

Interviewer: What about you Will, has something like this ever happened to you?

Will: Yeah, I knew I'd get into the A team for Rugby, so I didn't even bother registering for the worlds this year.

Interviewer: So, it was not even a consideration to go?

Will: No, the school made it very clear that if you play A grade you have to play all the matches.

Interviewer: That's tough, especially as you'd already won the Queensland round (of the Mountain bike series) by a lot so would have had a good chance of a podium at the Worlds.

Will: Yeah, but what you gonna do?

This interview highlighted that pressures from multiple locations permeated the capacity these boys had to convene and undertake their riding. Although not surprising in and of itself (and it is recognised that regardless of age, all people contend with a range of expectations and pressures on time in the day-to-day practice of living), the nature of this particular expectation and its connection to school was significant. It was simply expected that this school event would hold precedence; not least because this was a 'formally' sanctioned school event, but also because rugby was a prominent activity for these particular schools.

Although the boys didn't necessarily place a constraint on themselves it remained that one could still be imposed by an institution within which the boys were associated (that is, the school) and simply expected to participate. The crucial aspect of this dilemma is that when we discussed how mountain bikers were viewed by their schools both said they 'copped a bit of sh!t' from the rugby players, and yet they didn't want to let the team or school down. Rugby, under the official sanction of the school-as-institution, was viewed as holding greater significance than riding in this instance. This scenario demonstrates how "the political becomes pedagogical, particularly in terms of how private issues are connected to larger social conditions.....and through which identities are shaped" (Giroux 2004, p. 64).

#### **4.4.1 Constraint and the long reach of adult facilitation**

Whilst constraint appeared as a theme for the mountain bike group, informal facilitation, or indeed the lack of immediate facilitation and adult intervention was a predominant theme with the boys' accounts of riding as a group. When I asked the boys, along with a third, Sam, at a follow up interview, what the best bit of riding and learning from each other was, the responses centred around 'hanging out with mates and trying to outdo each other' (personal communication Matt, August 2017). Sam said the best bit was "trying to outdo each other with 'cutties' and just chillin with my mates" (personal communication, August 2017). Matt interjected, "doing jumps...one does it and then the others do it too to try to keep up" (personal communication, August 2017). All the boys said the 'group mentality' helped them gain the confidence to try new things, as once one of them proved it could be done the others didn't want to be the one not to do it. When I asked if it was any different than if they had specialised training to help them learn new skills they said it was as the 'peer pressure' (but in a good-natured way) that helped them develop skills and overcome fears and that it wouldn't necessarily be the same if it was with a coach and that it was "way more fun with a group of mates" (personal communication Matt, August 2017). Recognition of the informality of the grouping was made clear- the boys knew that this was what Gee (2005) calls an 'affinity group', and that they were responsible for its conduct. They were also aware that this was far more than a simple, leisurely gathering. The boys were actively coaching each other, trying new techniques on their bikes and perfecting their skills. There was clearly an element of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger 1991), involved in these activities, and while the structure and enactment of this learning took different form to the sorts of learning enacted in schools and similar 'formalised' locations, it was the case that the boys were 'developing' their skills.

The boys were responsible for enacting this learning, mediating how it proceeded and how expertise and status in the group functioned (for example, a 'distributed' understanding of expertise was present in the group, where each boy was known for expertise in particular aspects of their riding and drawn

upon for advice and demonstration accordingly). Yet it remained that, although in appearance a group that was free from outside (and especially, adult) interference and mediation, that influences beyond just group were still present and shaped how the group convened. One example in particular demonstrated how these interdictions of adult influence permeated the group.

Through 2017-2018, the regional council, in the city in which the boys were riding, approved the development of a, to that point informally constructed, 'jumps park'. The park had been constructed by a group of riders in a vacant, council owned, block of land, and contained a series of hastily prepared and constructed jumps connected by a network of tracks. Needless to say, some of these jumps were particularly unsafe-constructed from dirt and old pallets. The council had demolished the ramps and jumps on several occasions. However, a group of young people, including a couple of the boys I interviewed, approached the council to ask if the land could be dedicated to an Australian standard jump park if they helped design and build it. They also sourced a local bike park builder who was willing to help them build the park at a discounted rate. This group of young people then took the proposal to the council for approval, under the notion that a safe and properly built jump park was much safer than an illegal and poorly built one. To the surprise of many, least of all the boys, the jump park was approved, and the promise the boys gave to help build it and maintain it was kept. This whole process was undertaken by a group of young mountain bikers with support of council's infrastructure and resources and the local bike park builder, and in a demonstration of a productive partnership, resulted in a competition grade park being constructed.

This track has been utilised by thousands of bike riders since it opened, from young children all the way to professional jump park riders. Importantly, the park has been used by groups of young people like the boys I interviewed, with these groups of young people going about crafting their skills in much the same ways as the boys I interviewed. The park has enabled the generation of informal learning opportunities to proceed, whereby the resources are now available for young people to ride on a high-quality course and engage in the

practice of riding, whilst also just 'hanging out'. From this activation by a group of young mountain bikers a world class facility for the whole community to use has been developed, and this, of course, is a good thing. When I spoke to the boys about how this all panned out, they said it was amazing that a 'group of kids with an idea' (personal communication Matt, December 2017) could be taken seriously and meaningful resourcing and support provided to make this park a reality.

In all, this was a positive demonstration of an adult intervention. Council's involvement was largely consultative, and the young people were engaged closely in the park's design and construction. This council has since extended its area of youth consultation by undertaking an extensive consultation with over 200 young people in the development of their Youth Policy document and Strategy (personal communication council Youth Worker 2019). As Bessant (2003) notes a policy initiative that engages young people not only recognises their 'citizenship status' but also imbeds their right to be heard, a right that many adults take for granted. This case study also highlights that young people, when given the opportunity, are more than capable of undertaking a project or role that can benefit a whole community.

But there was one notable exception to this otherwise consultative process. As the park was completed and its official launch approached, significant media attention was generated. Interviews and other appearances on mainstream media invariably involved discussions with the local government's councillors whose portfolio areas this park was subsumed within. Perhaps the most notable expression of this is contained on the Facebook page for the park. The original cover photo for this page included several local councillors, including the mayor, the 'official' trail builder and a pro-rider (see Figure 4.4). Only one of the young people involved in the original concept of the park features in this image.



Figure 4.4 The Stenner Street Jumps Park Facebook cover photo  
(Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/stennerstreetjumpspark/>)

This poses the question where acknowledgement for the young people who proposed this idea in the first place and subsequently put in hundreds of hours helping build and maintain this park rests. In this instance, their presence remains barely visible, with the clear impression that emerged from much of the media reporting of this park giving the impression that this was an adult-driven, formally constituted, council undertaking. An article within a local newspaper further affirms this view. The article titled “City’s newest bike skills track taking shape” (Newton 2018) talks about a “world-class bike skills trail” under construction at a local bushland reserve. Whilst the opening sentence states “The project got off the ground after a group of young riders looking for somewhere to practice jumping petitioned Toowoomba Regional Council, and now, their dream is almost a reality”, the remainder of the article is dedicated to the trail builder’s insights. Whilst the trail builder did mention that the track was the result of “a lot of community involvement” the remainder of the article declared how ‘lucky’ Toowoomba was to get this type of track and how it would attract tourism dollars for the local economy. In addition, the accompanying image is that of the trail builder, with not a single young person involved in instigating the park to be seen (see Figure 4.5). The accompanying video footage has the trail builder talking about the youth in town “putting their energy into

something positive.....they were building jumps illegally, the council has given this space to be used ". The builder goes on to say he is hopeful that the "young guys pushing for this sort of thing will take ownership and continue maintain the park into the future". This posits the question, where is the interview with the group of young people who petitioned for the park and helped the trail builder by volunteering hours to help build it and are expected to maintain the park going forward. Not only that but there is the inuendo pathologising the young people, the fact that they were building the tracks illegally highlights the need for adult intervention rather than on the fact that they found an issue and took it to council (in the form of the petition) to enact a change.



Figure 4.5 Photo from the story "City's newest bike skills track taking shape" article in the Toowoomba Chronicle. Retrieved from <https://m.thechronicle.com.au/news/citys-newest-bike-skills-track-taking-shape/3380660/>

This points to an important disjoint, that even when adults, who aren't necessarily the primary instigators of community change, are still represented and publicly celebrated for initiatives of public good. Though it could be argued that, given this park was situated on council (public) land, and that council did approve the development, and a fair portion of responsibility for the development rested with the council, and the official trail builder (who did

dedicate much of their own time), it remains that this oversight of importance of the role the young people played in the concept and development of the park is notable. This gives the impression of the young people as beneficiaries of adult beneficence, and further cements the view that young people remain incapable of complex conceptualisation, decision making and active citizenry in the public good (Hickey & Phillips 2013; Bessant, 2003).

How then does this play into the identity formation of the young person? When I asked Will (personal communication, May 2018) what his thoughts were on the promotion of the jump park he said 'yeah, it's a bit sh!t that they (the councillors) are taking the credit for what we did, but I don't care that much .. at least we got the jumps park'. Although I could understand Will's position- he now had the park he desired- I was still left disappointed that this position of resignation was so easily adopted. Why wasn't Will more active in seeking recognition for his work; something here was wrong. Was Will so use to been ignored as a young person of value that he had come to accept it as status quo? I asked Will the question to which he replied (personal communication May 2018) 'yeah you get used to it, whenever we have a good idea an adult takes the credit, but..... if we have an idea, they think is bad then we get all the blame'.

The significance of this example rests in the ways that young people are not only positioned by the world at large, but also come to accept this positioning as somewhat inevitable. That young people cannot escape being represented in certain ways (or indeed, not at all) and denied influence and involvement. This lack of opportunity for young people to enact a sense of agency and identity is also noted in the literature (Alderson, 2008a; Bessant, 2003; Giroux 2004; , Hickey & Pauli-Myler 2017), but what the jump park case highlights specifically is that although a space may be open 'structurally' for the young person to engage, further constraints still exist in the realisation of enacting one's agency and identity. In this case, via the basic whitewashing of young people's presence after the facility was opened and 'gifted' to those same young people who were partly responsible for its construction.

#### 4.5 Summary

The influence that a variety of sites that young people engage in and enact and encounter a sense of their identity formed the focus of the analysis in this project. The case sites of Bike Build, the GLBTIQ group and, the mountain bike group demonstrated peer learning as a mode to explore identity, with the themes of constraint, institutional influence and adult intervention filtered throughout each of the case sites.

The Bike Build site, which also happened to be the most 'institutionalised' of the sites reported on here, highlighted that young people, when functioning within the confines of a structured environment often feel constrained, and consequently, have trouble expressing a sense of personal purpose. However, when placed in a site where the constraints are significantly less- for example, within the relatively more 'open' setting of Bike Build- not only do young people feel less constrained but also confident in exploring other facets of their experience and identity as young people. In this situation, the participants of Bike Build were able to explore identity positions that were separate to that of 'the student'. For the purpose of this thesis I refer to this as an 'institutional compression' whereby, what being young means ultimately came to compose a limited range of options for young people to 'be'. Core to this 'institutional compression noted in Bike Build was the presence of 'constraint', largely imposed on the young person by mandates and structures of the institutional setting (in this case, the school) and prescriptions for how these young people 'should' behave. This was seen in the Bike Build case whereby the participants felt so much pressure from the school system that they felt 'small' and unimportant, with school not enabling a sense of purpose or possibility. Inversely, within the Bike Build program, the students felt safe to explore and enact an agency and identity that provided options (or at least more possibility for options than was available within the confines of the 'regular' classroom).

The GLBTIQ group demonstrated how a functioning peer-facilitated group can flounder when institutional 'influence', particularly in the form of adult intervention, alters the dynamics of the group. The group no longer felt

their identity was one of their own making but was one forced upon them by participating adult members. There was what I refer to as an 'intersectioning of influence' that cut through the group and ultimately disrupted the young people's conduct. The adults may have had the best of intentions, but it remained that their influence and assertion of views intersected with the ideals of the young people, and ultimately disrupted the group dynamic to the point where the young people no longer felt 'safe' to share viewpoint or contribute to the group. This dominant positioning of (and by) the adult participants was also constraining, but beyond the effect that this had in reifying adult viewpoints as predominant, it also proceeded in terms of the young people feeling marginalised, incapable and incompetent; a position that denied that the young people themselves had, even at their relatively young ages, experiences and a sense of the world that were indeed valid and important.

The mountain bike case site demonstrated that even when a group of young people get together to just 'hang-out' constraints can still be imposed by external institutions and adult intervention. Matt and Wills' case showed how competing responsibilities (largely mediated by adult and institutional objectives) outweighed the interests of the boys. Additionally, this case also highlighted that even when a group of young people exert some agency to make positive change for their community, it remained that adult interests simply pervaded the experience to 'take over'. But perhaps the real tragedy here is that the young people had almost accepted that this would happen and that this sort of occurrence frequently happens. What I refer to as 'permeations of adult influence' featured in this case site whereby these young people couldn't escape the structures of adult presence and influence- this 'permeated' every aspect of their lives in one way or other- in requiring the boys be 'safe', that they would ride in a certain way and ultimately, how they would shape the physical environment in which they enacted their community of practice- the jumps park.

The three case sites highlighted the constraints of institutional compression, intersections of influence and permeations of adult influence and

how these features of the experience of being young affected the expression of these young peoples' agency and sense of self. Each informal learning site demonstrated at some level how adult intervention and institutional influence played a role in not only how young people were viewed within the community, but, in turn, how they viewed themselves.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

*“No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are.” (Paulo Freire)*

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*What counts as learning;* and how might learning be considered outside of formal schooling? Further, how might young people engage with informal learning as an act of identity formation and as a site for the demonstration of agency? These questions drove this project and provided the focus for the analysis outlined in the previous chapter. In the context of recent Australian federal government initiatives that require young people to ‘earn or learn’ (The Commonwealth of Australia 2014), emphasis at State level to ensure young people are active members of their community (The State of Queensland 2014) and local government initiatives to engage young people (Toowoomba Regional Council 2015), developing an understanding of what counts as learning, and how the experience of learning is engaged by young people is imperative. Insight into learning that occurs outside of the largely well researched area of formal education and more focus on the ways that young people enact civic engagement, active citizenry and identity formation through practices of informal learning stand as particularly important.

Learning is most often considered as synonymous with ‘education’ and, in turn, is typically ‘reduced’ to visions of schooling. However, learning occurs in far more dynamic ways and locations. As Sandlin et al. (2010) highlight there is an increased focus among educational scholars on learning occurring outside of formal school systems and that “position informal learning spaces such as popular culture, the Internet, public spaces..... as sites of pedagogy containing possibilities for both reproduction and resistance” (p. 2). Within this literature, recognition that schools are not the learning and indeed “perhaps not even the most influential” (Sandlin et al., 2010, p. 2) is fundamental, and broaches consideration of what counts as learning, where this might most effectively be performed, and how it comes to influence factors, including young peoples’

formation of sense of Self and community. Informal associations of young people function as significant sites of camaraderie, affiliation and (importantly), learning, and when it comes to identity formation and the assertion of agency, deserve closer scrutiny and (scholarly) consideration.

The focus of this project was to examine three distinct formations of informal learning to gauge an understanding of the ways that young people go about the practice of learning (with each displaying its own variations of what might be regarded as informality and learning), and how possibilities for the expression of identity, that are elsewhere not possible, might emerge. Central to this was the consideration of the space available-spaces away from direct adult-intervention- that these sites provided, and the formative potential these moments offered for young people to 'try on' different senses of themselves as agential beings; as young people with views on how their lives might be lived.

Taking this focus, this project applied theoretical frames from Critical Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, Sociology and Community Studies, to examine the ways that these practices and their concomitant spaces functioned and the impacts they had on the participating young people encountered for this project. From Critical Pedagogy I used the idea of dialogic engagement and the place of community as a site of learning and identity formation. Dialogic engagement, that is, one that is founded on the problem-posing approach to learning, was evident in each of the case sites to varying degrees, but more predominantly in the Bike Build site. The reciprocal nature of this learning, where students learn from teachers and teachers learn from students, was evident on more than one occasion with the students teaching me a thing or two on how to fix the bikes, in particular the year we worked on motorbikes. This highlighted the influence that the lived experience had, not only on learning, but also the formation of identity. As Darder et al (2003) noted lived experience is front and centre of a young person's experience and cannot be "ignored or relegated to the periphery in the process of coming to know" (p. 16).

From Cultural Studies, a speculative approach for considering the formulation of identity locations and those representative practices that define these was utilised. Cultural studies acted as a critical lens to view the role of informal learning not only as the antithesis of formal schooling but also in the formation of a learning identity. This was evident in all case sites as all of the young people were involved in some type of formal education in addition to their role in the informal learning discussed in each case site. Even in the mountain bike site, the seemingly least formal learning site, schooling featured as a constraint and influence on identity formation in the form of the 'choice' between a school 'grudge match' or the opportunity to race the Mountain Bike World Championships. This was evident as the boys were either told or 'just knew' that, as a member of that school their identity had been prescribed of that as a football player, in this case, over any other preconceived notions of identity the boys had of themselves.

From Sociology and Community Studies, a sense of the 'structural' dimensions of societal formation were outlined. Young people are often portrayed in a binary manner in the media which influences how society view them and in turn, as Giroux (1999b) notes, "how we understand and come to know ourselves and others cannot be separated from how we are represented and imagine ourselves" (p. 14). In each of the case sites the participants had to negotiate their identities as part of larger society and their place in it. The informal learning sites gave them space to explore parts of their identities that may otherwise have been deemed unacceptable to certain sections of society.

Communities of practice featured in the Bike Build and Mountain bike case sites with the boys gathering, not only over a shared interest, but also a desire to improve their skills (Lave & Wenger 1991). Legitimate peripheral participation was evident in the mountain bike cohort with them developing their skills over time to gain a level of mastery and in turn go on and mentor each other and newer mountain bikers on the skills they had mastered (Lave & Wenger 1991). As discussed, the GLBTIQ group was initiated with the notion that legitimate peripheral participation would naturally evolve, with some of the long-term members welcoming and mentoring the newer members, but this

didn't quite happen as planned. Therefore, the GLBTIQ group functioned more as an 'affinity group' (Gee 2005) where they all gathered as a group based around common interest.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, these different theoretical lenses provided a way of engaging this research and commencing an analysis that drew multiple points of input. Further, this research drew on these perspectives in order to understand how young people go about learning 'who they are' and the role informal leaning plays in that identity formation. The literature and data from this project highlight that this is predominantly a world not of young people's making and in asking questions of where young people find the space to not only 'be', but also enact their agency and demonstrate who they 'can be' emerged as significant scholarly undertaking; but an undertaking that required multi-perspectival points of view.

Similarly, and beyond the dispersed theoretical framework that these disciplinary foundations provided, this thesis deployed a method that remained speculative and ideographically oriented. The experiences of being young and engaging with the world, via the perspective of the young person, prefigured the approach outlined here, but in ways that did not seek to assert a specific rationale or hypothesis. As a mode of inquiry geared toward the discovery of the phenomenon of experience, this thesis argued that it is within informal spaces that young people find some possibility to enact an agency of their will and purpose, but, do so within a climate that is geared against these very undertakings. As the three sites analysed in this thesis show, the risk of adult-intervention, the application of 'rules' and, the basic inability to conduct one's Self in the manner of one's desire are ever present in young peoples' life-worlds.

The Bike Build program highlighted the constraints of institutional compression and noted that the possibilities that come from less structured learning opportunities- in this case a program set within the formal educative site of the school- provide real opportunities for young people to shape the learning experiences they engage with, and indeed, the wider structures of the

school itself. The findings drawn from this analysis are particularly pertinent for generating opportunities for young people who don't 'fit' the mold of the 'student' and who, like the participants engaged in Bike Build, find the routines and structures of school difficult and disorienting. The accounts detailed from Bike Build offered in this thesis show that significant potential exists for the development of skills and experiences that respond immediately to these students' interests and talents. A Freirean approach (1992) is relayed here, one whereby:

Educands [students] recognise themselves as such by cognising objects—discovering that they are capable of knowing, as they assist at the immersion of significates, in which process they also become critical “significators”. Rather than being educands because of some reason or other, educands need to become educands by assuming themselves, taking themselves as cognising subjects, and not as an object *upon which the discourse of the educator impinges*. (p.37; emphasis added)

As was the case in Bike Build, the development of practical skills without the overlay of time constraints, adult-centric views of what counts as curriculum and, imposed, restrictive schedules, opened the possibility for something different to occur. The structures of conduct that prescribed how students 'should' be within the school site were, in the Bike Build workshop, momentarily suspended, while modes of instruction and co-creation were opened as possibilities.

Bike Build worked toward this ethic and demonstrated that distinct possibilities are possible within formal sites of education. Further opportunities for research on this front- and, in particular, the exploration of the place that informality holds within formal sites of learning- should be further examined. As one expression of the sorts of alternatives that might be offered in mainstream schooling, initiatives that incorporate alternative learning pathways, and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships certainly offer options to students for whom the 'regular' classroom is a challenge. However, and under the types of formulations that are currently enacted, these are limited

in purpose and rationale (largely, in terms of being geared toward the repatriation of otherwise troublesome students). Instead, finding ways to ensure that a diverse range of modalities and methods for engaging students that are geared around providing space for students to negotiate how their learning might proceed presents as something valuable. As was evident with the Bike Build cohort, disengagement with school often occurs over a number of years. Many of the students encountered in Bike Build came with long histories of problematic relationships with school, and records of disengagement and exclusion. Finding ways of ensuring that this sort of disengagement does not occur to begin with is imperative. Finding ways to meaningfully incorporate the views of young people in the conduct of their own learning (Freire, 1996; Ranciere, 1991), hence stands as a vital consideration, and one for which Bike Build points positively. Sefton-Green (2011) notes that “engaging in learning is in and of itself a good thing and can be shown to stimulate a re-engagement in education” (p. 61), as was noted in Zac’s case.

Further, programs such as Bike Build, offer an option for reengaging young people before they reach the age of eligibility for school-based apprenticeships or traineeships. In addition, Hickey et al. (2018) found that the relationships built during alternative learning programs could open up new interactions and spaces which, in turn, create their own possibilities for greater group cohesion and understanding between students and their teachers. These relationships are critical to the engagement of young people at risk of disengaging in the schooling system. The analysis of Bike Build supports this concept with the importance of relationships threaded through the project. This “different way of doing school” (Hickey et al. p. 2) allowed the space for the young people to renegotiate their experiences of schooling, but crucially also, space to explore their identities as learners and agency as students in charge of designing the learning pathway they were on.

The GLBTIQ group also demonstrated that young people, when they feel unable to enact their agency and explore their identity, will disengage. It highlighted that it is vital to consider the way we listen to and hear what young

people are saying and recognise that young people hold their own views and that it is up to the adults to open space for them to exert their agency and not impose their own views. As Goldstein (2006) notes adults need to put aside their opinions and listen to what young people are trying to say to allow them to fully express their ideas and enact their agency.

As discussed in Chapter 4 peer interaction and support were considered vital to the initial success of the GLBTIQ social group, with the young members interested in hearing the life stories of the adult members. However, the group found it difficult to find a delicate balance of both peer and adult facilitation and subsequently began to crumble. Whilst the young people requested more 'life stories' from the adult members there was a suggestion for guest speakers from some of the adult members, which led to discontent among some of the younger members. Whilst, as previously discussed, the young people didn't have issue with guest speakers, they did however feel constrained by a sense of expectations around what it was that this group required from them. The young people reported that they began to feel 'pressure' to enact their identities as young GLBTIQ people in certain ways- a distinct issue when, for many of the group, they just wanted a safe space in which to 'hang out'. Additionally, the young people identified a desire to be seen as 'more' than their sexuality and felt that the suggested direction was a too prescribed and focused on this single aspect of their identities. This itself was a notable theme and perhaps spoke to the generational differences and experience of identifying as an LBGTQI person encountered by the adult and young members of this group.

However, the young people in attendance at the end of the research period, whilst comfortable telling me- their participant researcher- what they did and didn't want from the group, didn't feel able to assert their agency and tell the adult members what they needed the group to provide. Apart from presenting as an interesting dynamic from which this group functioned, it also opened a fraught research experience. Whilst I did relay the suggestions to the adult members from my interviews with the young people, it soon became apparent that this didn't appear to 'fit' what some of the adult members felt the

group *should* look like and therefore didn't seem to hold much weight with them. I was also left feeling that I had very much overstepped my limits; this wasn't my place to speak. This event not only highlighted the issues facing young people when trying to assert their agency, but also the intricacies of research with young people and the sensitivities that this requires.

Groups such as the GLBTIQ support group work due to openness and a structure that allows the participants to facilitate the direction of the sessions in a way that suits their needs. The threat to the success of these groups occurs when a power imbalance is displayed and one (or more) members attempt to direct the terms of the sessions. The dynamic of the group is especially a risk when dealing with young people who are reserved, lacking in confidence and by their very nature are not comfortable in questioning an adult (or even other group members). A further challenge in opening space for young people to enact their own will and engage in practices of learning that informal and unfamiliar corresponds with the fact that young people may not always have the capabilities to engage in these forms of learning immediately. Such is the effect of socialisation on young people, that consideration of the skillsets they bring to settings like the GLBTIQ support group is fundamental. Spaces that constrain young people within predetermined categories and ideals make it all the more difficult for the young person to learn who they are and further explore their identity; whether this be from the perspective of dominating young peoples' views of the world, or indeed, simply expecting young people to have the capacity to take the lead from the start.

The jumps park scenario offered a prime example of the ways that young peoples' involvement in shaping the world can be over-written and erased. The permeations of adult Influence were evident in that, whilst demonstrating agency- via, in this instance, the building of a network of unauthorized bike tracks- this was soon marginalized, and indeed, 'outlawed'. Perceived as a 'threat' to safety, these tracks soon drew official adult intervention to ensure the safety of the tracks themselves and for those using them (young people predominantly) could be maintained. As previously discussed in Chapter 1 the

jumps park case is yet another example of the marginalisation of young people as somewhat 'out of control' and requiring of adult-intervention. Again, this pathologisation, alongside the perceived necessity of 'surveillance and regulation', (Hickey & Phillips, 2013) hindered the possibilities available to the riders; possibilities that had hitherto not caused any major problems.

Many mountain bike tracks have been developed by groups of young people going out and start building illegal tracks only for them to be bulldozed or shut down in some way or other by a local authority. However, in many cases, years later those same tracks provide the foundation for sanctioned trails (usually after years of petitioning) and these same tracks (originally built by a group of young people), with some safety modifications, gain recognition and endorsement. Toowoomba's Jubilee Park trail network is one example of a mountain bike trails gaining this appropriated endorsement, after years of young people, along with some older riders, building unsanctioned tracks around the area. Perhaps the ultimate injustice however occurred when the histories of these trail networks was removed from any mention; as when media coverage of the Toowoomba jumps park attributed the park to adult councilors and community members whilst denying appropriate recognition of the young peoples' input, labour and use of these networks. Additionally, that it is indeed possible for recognition to be high jacked by the media and adults, suggests something of the 'lot' with which young people occupy the world.

### **What does all this mean?**

The Bike Build experience showed that when options for young people are limited in their schooling- when the range of ways to learn and engage in learning are compressed- problems emerge for those students who do not 'fit'. These students often end up becoming a 'problem' as they disengage in schooling, which in turn has the effect of limiting their future employment, social and financial prospects. What if, instead, these young people were engaged early-on and were provided the space to discover and enact their own desires for schooling? What possibilities might emerge? Could these young

people go on to achieve, not only in ways deemed acceptable to society, but of value to themselves, personally?

The GLBTIQ group demonstrated that when adults intervene and assert a will to 'know best', young peoples' will and view of the world quickly fall into disarray. These 'intersections of influence' upset the possibilities that young people have to assert their own will. This in turn can have the opposite effect of the intended purpose of actively engaging marginalised young people. As the GLBTIQ case site demonstrated the young people interviewed felt that the group had deviated from its original purpose of being a 'safe place to hang out with friends', which led to the eventual demise of the group due to poor attendance rates. The question could be asked as to why young people don't just speak up, and what influence the world exerts over young people according to its basic configuration. That the experience of *being* young person stops young people from speaking up, stands as a crucial consideration. As previously discussed, prevailing stereotypes and assumptions of young people largely position young people as requiring adult intervention to guide the successful transition from childhood to adulthood (Cohen, 1997). This in turn fuels the assumption that what a young person has to say is of little to no value and that they are 'future citizens'- citizens in waiting. Therefore, the young person themselves identify that, even if they did have something to say, the likelihood of being listened to and taken seriously is highly unlikely.

So, how then do we change these societal dynamics to give young people a greater voice, one that they can use to enact the change they want to see in the world? Again, this comes down to genuinely asking and listening to what young people have to say and not asserting adult-centric viewpoints on what is heard. Engaging young people at all levels of the education system, from input into policies and frameworks might provide a useful place to start, but again, ensuring that young people have the skills and are provided a nurtured opportunity to enact these viewpoints is equally vital. Given the freedom to explore and express their agency and identity, young people might just surprise society and become citizens of 'now' rather than citizens of the future.

This thesis asserts that the best way that we can support young people is to open spaces for experimentation and dynamic learning. The three case examples drawn upon here point to this. As such, the research findings may inform future policy and practice around the development of resilient communities and the formation of learning communities. It might also prompt the development of further case studies of young peoples' experiences, and begin a larger project of charting where and in what ways young people do find space to enact their own formulations of learning and active citizenry, and how meaningful support in these endeavours might be offered. The snapshot of the three case sites outlined here is a start for this project, but further research is now required.

To close, and to return in summary to those questions that drove this inquiry, this thesis asserts that young people, do indeed have capacity to assert their own views and will onto the world, and when engaged in ways that enable experimental learning and the opportunity to try-on ways of being and ways of knowing that are of their own formation, can develop sophisticated understandings of the their world. However, when adult intervention into these endeavours is close by, forever a 'risk' to these undertakings, young people are likely to withdraw. In short, we need to 'trust' that young people will get it right and ensure that space for them to undertake a project of learning themselves and their world are made available. In analysing how and why learning occurs in sites that are not typically considered learning, this study can add to the theoretical knowledge of not only learning but also how that can influence the identity formation of the young person. This can in turn has the potential influence educational policy and possibly reimagine 'other' types of learning.

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## **Appendix A**

### **History of formal learning**

Formal learning as schooling has a long and complex history. As aforementioned, in ancient Greece Paideia was integral for males as a component of the transition from child to adult. Paideia was both physical and intellectual and included, subject such as gymnastics and hunting alongside grammar rhetoric, mathematics and philosophy, with the aim to instill skills and virtues that would ensure the young person (males) would demonstrate active citizenship in the future (Jaegar 1986). Education was equally viewed as important to the Ancient Romans and is considered to have originated within the familial unit, with parents and relatives the 'teachers'. Fathers typically took the lead role in educating their sons, but in the event of a father's absence, for example due to military service or death, the mother was responsible for educating them either herself (if possible and educated herself) or by finding a suitable tutor or other relatives, usually grandparents, if still alive might educate the children (Bonner, 2012). Alternatively, for varying reasons, children may have been raised and educated by an aunt or uncle.

The access to tutors was available from those of the upper classes of society in Ancient Rome and according to Bonner (2012) focused on subjects such as literature, rhetoric and philosophy as an adjunct to the presupposed education of the basics at home such as mathematics and language. The more practical training on reading, writing and counting however was valued and in the cases where the parents didn't have the time, interest or ability to teach their own offspring they could send them to a primary school.

### **United Kingdom/Europe**

Although there was some form of educational system in the Britain during the Roman occupation when the Romans left it would appear that so did the education system. There is little information from the post roman era between around 450 and 600 or, as Lawson & Silver (2013) put it, remains a 'historical dark age. In 597 St Augustine and a group of monks arrived from Rome and established a church and school in Canterbury, with the aim to train

young men as priests (Leach, 2007). Two distinct types of schools were founded: the grammar school to teach Latin and English to priests in training and the song school where the aim was to train young men to sing in cathedral choirs (Gillard 2011). The grammar school, particularly the school at Canterbury, was well known for the focus on Latin, and also Greek, biblical exegesis, astronomy, and arithmetic, all adapted for specific Christian use (Lawson & Silver, 2013). Leach (2007) suggests that whilst grammar schools provided general education necessary to pursue a career as a lawyer, civil servant or within the priesthood, song schools were considered professional schools 'for those engaged in the actual performance of services' (p. 7). The motive of these first schools was purely religious with the purpose to train monks and priests and throughout the entire country the scale of the education system was small with only twenty or so schools known early in the eighth century (Lawson & Silver 2013).

During the eighth century schools expanded their geography and curriculum to include rhetoric, law poetry, natural history, geometry, music (Williams 1961 cited in Gillard 2011). However, these subjects were still centered on the teachings of the church. In the 9<sup>th</sup> Century education suffered from interruption by a series of invasions by the Danes and educated clergy all but disappeared (Lawson & Silver 2013; Gillard 2011). In 871 King Alfred, who valued education highly, began to rebuild the schooling system throughout England. Throughout the next hundred years education remained focused on vocational training with the intent to become monks or priests, however there are a few recorded cases of the younger members of royal and noble families attending education (Williams 1961 cited in Gillard).

The expansion of the education system occurred from 1100-1500 with schools attached to the all churches. Additionally, schools not attached to religious institutions were also formed in response to demand (Leach, 2007), therefore, although at that point in time education was more often associated with Christianity, education expanded into fields such as law and medicine (Gillard 2011). The change to the education system flowed on to the development of universities in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The oldest and perhaps most well-known university in the United Kingdom, Oxford University had some form of teaching in 1096. Over the next two centuries Oxford earned a reputation as the leading university with commendation coming from popes, kings and sages. During this time a group of Oxford scholars moved, due to hostilities from some townspeople in Oxford, to Cambridge and formed their own educational institution, which would later formally become Cambridge University. In the course of this period the church started to lose its monopoly on education, with various independent schools formed which would become known as private schools.

Over the following centuries the education system continued to expand and by the 12<sup>th</sup> century females were permitted to attend schools, although few did. Females were mostly educated by convents and early in the 12<sup>th</sup> century many girls from noble families attended Notre Dame de Paris (Guiseppi, 2007). However, although the opportunity to attend formal schooling presented itself, it was often confined to children from aristocratic families with the majority of young people, in addition to men and women, educated by and for employment, often through apprenticeships (Lawson & Silver 2013, Guiseppi 2007).

Social change mid 1500s had a profound influence on the education system of the time. The advent of the Church of England in response to the conflict between the Roman Catholics and Protestants saw a change in the delivery and access to education. Humanism developed with the expressed intent to cultivate intellectual, spiritual and physical abilities for the development of the 'whole man' (Lawson & Silver 2013p. 92). The lower class would have felt very little impact as most did not participate in the education system at the time.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation the Protestants established schools with the express purpose of educating the children of the poor in reading, writing and religion (Guiseppi 2007), however few members of the lower classes participated in schooling. According to Guiseppi (2007) the education system during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe remained stagnant with the content

focused on rote learning and little attention paid to increasing understanding. Again, few of those from lower classes received any type of schooling and those that did often were taught by teachers with very little education themselves.

There were however some philosophers throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century who developed learning theories based on their experience. One of the most influential philosophers at the time, John Locke, saw young people as a *blank slate* at birth and that with firsthand experience, versus purely book learning, knowledge and mental acuity could be achieved (Guisepi 2007). Other influential philosophers at the time including Helvetius and Goodwin espoused education as a way to become a fully functioning member of society. Goodwin (1979p3) stated that 'if education cannot do everything, it can do much' when explaining his approach to education. Conversely, Rousseau, another influential philosopher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century believed that the young person was inherently good but social institutions, including schools, tried to corrupt children by molding them in the desired image and therefore suggested that there the 'right education' was one which most protected the young person from the evils of society and suggested that learning should be determined by understanding the persons stage of development not by arbitrary age categories(Rousseau, 1762).

Regardless the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was the time of discovery of educational issues of mass education as well as those of educating the individual. There were two schools of thought about education at this stage with the suggestion that the state involvement in 'national education' would be biased as the state would manipulate education to reinforce its own ideals (Lawson &Silver 2013). The alternative view held was that education was too valuable to rely on philanthropy and should be publicly provided and funded (Lawson &Silver 2013). Both views were met with opposition as the upper class did not see the benefit in the working class getting educated and feared that if they were taught to 'think' they may realise the inequity of society and revolt. Additionally, as child labour was accepted practice, the working class families were not in favour of giving up the earnings of their children's labour. In response in 1880 the *Elementary Education Act* was passed to make school attendance

compulsory between the ages of five and ten or those who were older than ten but did not have a certificate of elementary schooling and prohibit the employment of a child under ten 10 (Coast, Floridi, & Sigle, 2018). However, as many parents could not afford to lose the income the child contributed, even though many worked outside of school hours, truancy was a common problem. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England had established a national system of elementary education, with many schools financed with public funds (Gillard 2011, Lawson & Silver 2013).

Throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century secondary education became increasingly popular with children from the age of ten to fifteen years eligible to attend secondary schools. In response to the rapid development of mass education throughout Europe and the United States of America a bill was introduced by Arthur Balfour, the newly elected Prime Minister. The 1902 Education Act met with opposition from both sides of government, however they were convinced that with mass education rapidly expanding throughout the world it was necessary to compete in world trade (Gillard 2011). As a result of the Act Local Education Authorities (LEA) were developed with authority of all schools. During this period there was debate over the function and purpose of schooling, in particular secondary schooling, with one school of thought demanding that the curriculum focused on english, history, geography, science and mathematics with the intent to promote traditional grammar, with the expressed purpose of preparing for university (Lawson & Silver 2013). The alternative school of thought was concerned with quasi-vocational education to develop the knowledge and skills to enter industry and commerce (Banks, 1998).

World war one and two had left the education system fractured and post wars there was a desire to reinvigorate the education system within the new environment, with the aim to *guarantee* free education for every child in England and Wales. The remodeling of the education system was centered around post-elementary education. Possibly the most prominent change was to raise the school leaving age to fifteen, and instigate access to a system of part-

time education beyond school leaving age, leading to the possibility of continuing education whilst earning income (Gillard 2011). Additionally, there was impetus to provide schoolchildren access to health and welfare services, including providing meals during the school day and health checkups (Lawson & Silver 2013). During this period teacher training also came under scrutiny with the aim to raise the quality and status of teachers.

Education undertook several reforms at this time with the recognition that intelligence testing, one form of school eligibility selection, could not be isolated from social determinants. It was evident that there was a distinct disadvantage to working class young people and educational opportunity. Lawson & Silver (2013) indicate that there were a disproportionate number of working class young people either dropping out of schooling or not attaining a satisfactory result in the required courses. In response politician and socialist and Shena Simon dedicated her time to educational reform with the aim to provide 'equality of opportunity', that is equal opportunity for all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, to have access to *suitable* education (Ku, 2018). The two major policies proposed to lead to equality included; raising the compulsory school leaving age to 16 and choosing to integrate secondary schools to be 'comprehensive schools', where 'technical' and trade subjects would be taught alongside 'academic subjects', such as science and history and students from all social classes could mix (Ku 2018). However, it would take decades for these policies to be fully implemented.

The 1950s saw a change in the education system influenced by changes in the economic and social trends. With more opportunities available due to economic growth people were more inclined to seek out education but also people saw a higher education as a way to job with higher income. During this time, and as a result of the society at the time there were more young people remaining the school system after the eligible leaving age, still 15 at this time (Lawson & Silver 2013). Over the next decade this had the flow on effect of the development of additional higher education courses to cater to those seeking additional education although not necessarily at universities.

The comprehensive schooling system, first campaigned by Simon, was introduced in 1965 and transitioning commenced with the option to become a state-funded comprehensive school or a fully independent school (Woodin, McCulloch, & Cowan, 2013). From the late 1960s through to the 1990s the structure of education system, as a whole, saw very little change in England. This is evidenced by the fact that schooling remained structured and segregated, with a clear distinction between private and public schools and clear delineation between primary and secondary schools, although in some cases these are situated on the same campus (Lowe, 1997). Credentialing the education system for roles outside post formal schooling increased. Lowe (1997) highlights that the education system from the 60s to the 90s preserved “its capacity to impost and sustain social class differences” (p. 23). Willis (1977), possibly one of the better known educational and social researchers at the time, studied this phenomenon in depth and found that the research participants (the lads) from working class families had no interest in schooling and considered the purpose of schooling to have a good time and ‘have a laff’. They stated the reason that they didn’t take education seriously was that they saw themselves as getting jobs in factories, which didn’t require any formal qualifications, just as their role models had done. In fact, they viewed white collar jobs, the higher paying jobs, as “cissy” (p147) and feminine and were determined to find *masculine* factory jobs. They called the more academic males ear’oles and looked down on them for following the school rules, respecting teachers and valuing education, which Willis suggested was their way of displaying agency in a system designed to see them fail.

In the years since, the English education system appears to on the surface have fared well when compared to international standards, however there are still major issues, including the widening gap in educational attainment between the lower and upper social classes. Social background is a clear determinant of staying on after post compulsory schooling age of 16 which, in turn, influences future career. According to (Johnson, 2004) the child of a professional parent is more than four times more likely to complete formal schooling than a child of a manual worker. Additionally, the inequity is highly

visible, with those from poorer backgrounds scoring lower on testing than their more wealthy peers and even the poorer children with high early *attainment* are much more likely to slip in attainment levels as they get older whilst their more affluent peers are more likely to improve (Feinstein, 2003). Feinstein (2003) has examined the links and although the education system is not the cause of the attainment differences, with the child's socioeconomic background playing a major role, it doesn't improve and even compounds the inequality experienced. This appears to be a common determinant throughout the English speaking countries of the world.

### **United States**

The history of mass schooling in the United States has a similar theme to that throughout Europe and the United Kingdom, that is the initiation of schooling was designed to 're-form' the moral fiber of the children and the introduction of high schools aimed to prepare the young people for their future lives in society, in the case of lower class to prepare them for a life of factory work and keeping young people 'off the streets' during the post war period by training them into lower-level positions. Essentially universal schooling was designed to reinforce and maintain social order and increase nationwide economic productivity.

With the setting up of a colony in the 1620s, consisting of pilgrims from England, in Massachusetts education came to the United States. With the arrival of the Puritans in the 1630s so did the advancement of education with the first secondary school in the United States founded (Danns & Span, 2008) . As with many early schools region and schooling were interwoven. In 1647 the Old Delude Satan Act was introduced to ensure that pupils could read the Scriptures as the Puritans believed that uneducated people with tricked by 'old deluder Saran' into sinning and that lessons in reading, writing and bible studies would stop Satan corrupting them and maintain their religious values (Wiburg, 2003). The Act required the establishment of an elementary school for every town with more than 50 families and in addition a Grammar school (secondary school) for every town with more than 100 families, at public expense (Danns & Span, 2008; Wiburg, 2003).

By 1936 Harvard was founded and 1707 Yale was established, and 1746 Princeton was set up, each with the principle aim to train students to become future clergymen (Danns & Span, 2008). This underscores the duality of education, not only to educate but also indoctrinate students in the religious ideals. The southern states did not develop publicly funding education until after the Civil war.

After the American Revolution there was a greater impetus for a three tiered universal schooling system by Thomas Jefferson: the first tier, elementary schools, would teach reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and history; and the second tier as for young males to continue their learning in mathematics, physical sciences, languages history and philosophy; and the third tier was for university (Danns & Span, 2008). Whilst Jefferson was focused on education in Virginia, Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster articulated the idea that schools should be used, in addition to academic pursuits, to promote patriotism, moral values and citizenship (Dann & Span, 2008).

Between 1820 and 1860 the schooling system expanded throughout the United States and by 1860 every state in the Union had passed law that made it obligatory to provide public schooling at the states expense. The aim was to have schools that were, “free, universal, centralized, and offer a common curriculum and quality schooling experience to students regardless of their background” (Dann & Span, 2008, p. 4). However, according to Urban & Wagoner (2008) ‘universal’ didn’t necessarily mean children who were ‘different’ or deemed inferior, including African American children or Irish Catholics. The schooling system had ‘White’ elementary schools and ‘Black’ elementary schools, with most often the White schools superior in their standards of both education and facilities. During the same period the Roman Catholic Church also opposed the ‘common school model’ in which the students were indoctrinated into the ‘common culture’, religion and expectations of Anglo-saxon Protestants, this led to the development of an alternative school model with attached funding, namely Catholic schools (Dann & Span, 2008; Wagoner Jr & Urban, 2008).

The Civil war (1861-65) had significant impact on the education system in America with the Southern states, who wanted to preserve and perpetuate slavery, unable to access funding that facilitated access to federal land for schooling. According to Danns & Span (2008) post Civil War it was, ironically, former slaves that pushed for educational reform in ensuring public schools were available in the south. The push led to public schooling for all children, not only African American children. However, as attendance rates for African American children was equal to or greater than non-African American children rose so did opposition to the schooling system from 'white southerners'. This led to the introduction of segregated schools in the south and 'white' schools advanced to the detriment of 'coloured' schools. The African American community, in the south, in the first part of the nineteenth century saw education as an investment that would 'empower them as citizens' however by the late nineteenth century they had become disillusioned and recognized that it would not get them equal treatment or respect from the 'whites' and started to withdraw from the schooling system (Debel 2012; Danns & Span, 2008).

Conversely, the schooling system in the North became entrenched to make school more accessible, standardised and compulsory to the age of 14, with the aim to make schooling a pathway to greater social and economic capital(Danns & Span 2008;(Nasaw, 1981). However, the reality was far from the idealised version espoused, with the social order determining who could attend high school and what would be learnt. Students from the middle classes attended 'college-preparatory' classes and students from lower classes were 'guided' into vocational programs to prepare them for a life of work with factories, workshops or working-class households (Nasaw, 1981). This two tiered system was duplicated for post-secondary education.

Urbanisation and Industrialisation saw perhaps with it one of the greatest changes to the schooling system, with the need to educate students for the new world order in an effort to compete in an industrialised economy. According to Danns & Span (2008) this saw the advent of two distinct groups

within education; the *administrative progressives*, who were concerned with running schools efficiently and *pedagogical progressives*, who were more interested in the pedagogical practices within schools. The administrative progressives were focused on cost effective school systems and school management and implemented a system (intelligence testing) to sort students into which 'stream' of schooling they would undertake, i.e. students who scored high on the testing were directed to the college track and those that scored lower were destined to be labourers or homemakers and took different classes accordingly (Labaree, 2005). This period saw the instigation of some processes that hold today including, tracking performance standards, testing and bureaucracy.

The alternate group of progressives, the pedagogical progressives, were more interested in the didactic component of schooling. As a whole they believed that the curriculum should be varied to meet student's needs, that learning should be less rote learning and more activity based and that content should be reminiscent of societal conditions as schools should be integral in resolving societal problems (Danns & Spann, 2008, Labaree, 2005). The pedagogical progressives believed that children had an innate nature to learn and that a skill-based curriculum, which focused on developing skills that could be used by the child to acquire knowledge, was the better form of education. This idea was clearly at odds with the administrative progressives who saw schooling as an apprenticeship for the young person to then participate effectively in greater society (Labaree, 2005).

Remnants of the pedagogical progressive remain but the schooling system today in America most closely aligns with the administrative progressive ideology. According to Labaree (2005) the reason for this alignment is threefold; firstly the system appealed to the people in power as it aimed to provide students with the skills required to be a contributing member of society, secondly it was promoted as a way to make schools the instrument to better serve society's needs, and thirdly the administrative progressives

asserted that their system was based on scientific evidence and used data from test and statistics to support their claims.

As with the United Kingdom, and many other countries, lower socioeconomic status students are more likely to attend vocational schools and community colleges than Universities and in turn earn less income upon graduation. Ivy League schools, considered to be the 'best' education are designed to favour the higher class and 'legacies' (those whose parents attended the school) are given preference, reinforcing the social hierarchy of society (Berg, 2016).

### **Australia**

The impetus for schools in Australia was imported from Britain alongside the first settlements in 1788. However, there is little evidence of schools until 1792, with a chaplain, concerned for the wellbeing of children, suggesting that educated people should undertake the position of teaching, funded from a charity fund. The first schools, supported by colonial administration, opened in Sydney, Parramatta and Norfolk Island around 1794 with students taught by convicts (Turney, 1975).

Again in 1796 concerns for the young people caused the then Governor (Hunter) wrote a "public school for the care and education of the children is much wanted to save them from certain ruin". However, the first public schools weren't fully functional until after 1800 and from 1810 schools were typically established by churches with State funding. At this stage they were independent and there was no formalised national 'school system'. A common perception amongst the upper social class in colonial Australia was that the children of the poor should only receive a minimum education as they believed that a higher level of education would increase their level of dissatisfaction with the status quo and would lead to social disruption (Maclaine, 1975). The aristocrats also believed that the education of the poor was a 'matter for the Churches' and that education was and should be linked to religious and moral training (Maclaine, 1975, p8). However, the philosophy held by the Liberals, at the time, was that

education could play a role in improving the lives of people regardless of class and that schooling should be available to every child and should be controlled by the government. Maclaine (1975) suggests that the policies that lead to formally established primary schools in each colony were resultant of liberal reforms highlighting the duty of the State to provide education.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw attempts to *civilize* the Aboriginal people by providing education to their children. This saw the adoption of young Aboriginal children by colonists, attaching schools to the missions, and sending them to boarding schools, away from the influence of their communities (Turney, 1975). Institutions were set up for Aborigines that typically consisted of a school, houses, prison and burial ground with the aim of enculturation (Turney, 1975).

The idea that everyone should have equal rights and opportunities in regard to education further expanded in the second half on the nineteenth century, particularly at the primary school level. However, there was little support among the working class and their trade unions for education beyond primary school, apart for the case of technical education, which they viewed as useful in training young people to be better workers, as opposed to a way of raising their social class (Maclaine, 1975). The working class held a distrust for additional education and considered “an inclination to regard the desire for a more prolonged education, except for the most utilitarian kind, as indicative of pretension to personal and social superiority” (Partridge, 2014, p .88). This attitude very closely aligns with the similar attitude of *counter school culture* held by the British ‘lads’ that Willis examined over a century later (1977). The counter culture of the working class that Willis researched valued practical knowledge and skills, life experience and ‘street smarts’ over the theoretical knowledge offered by schools, with the belief that manual labour was part of the ‘real adult world’ and intellectualism is feminine and for ‘cissys’(Willis, 1977).

Regardless of societal attitudes, in the early 1900s the minimum leaving age was raised to made it compulsory for every child between 6 and 14 to attend 225 full school days a year (McCallum, 1990). The government employed

'truancy officers' and prosecuted those responsible for a child's absence. Coinciding with the Act and ensure that young people weren't leaving school early for jobs, changes were made to the Factories Act (1904) to making it illegal to employ boys under 14 and girls under 15 years of age. During this time education was considered the responsibility of the state and remained this way until after the Second World War. According to McClaine (1975) the reason for the Commonwealth interest was captured by the slogan "education for efficiency and national development" (p. 13). That is the government saw an investment in education as a means to increase the level of training leading to more productivity and hence a better economy.

The following decades saw the continuation of the schooling to shape students as future citizens, identified and defined through examination, streaming and certification. In addition, students were socialised in cultural hierarchy, which often reflects that of society, especially in relation to power- via suspensions and exclusions-, and values (Marginson, 1997). While the practices of schooling may change the core purpose remains or as Foucault (1995) states "Schools serve the same social functions as prisons and mental institutions- to define, classify, control, and regulate people."

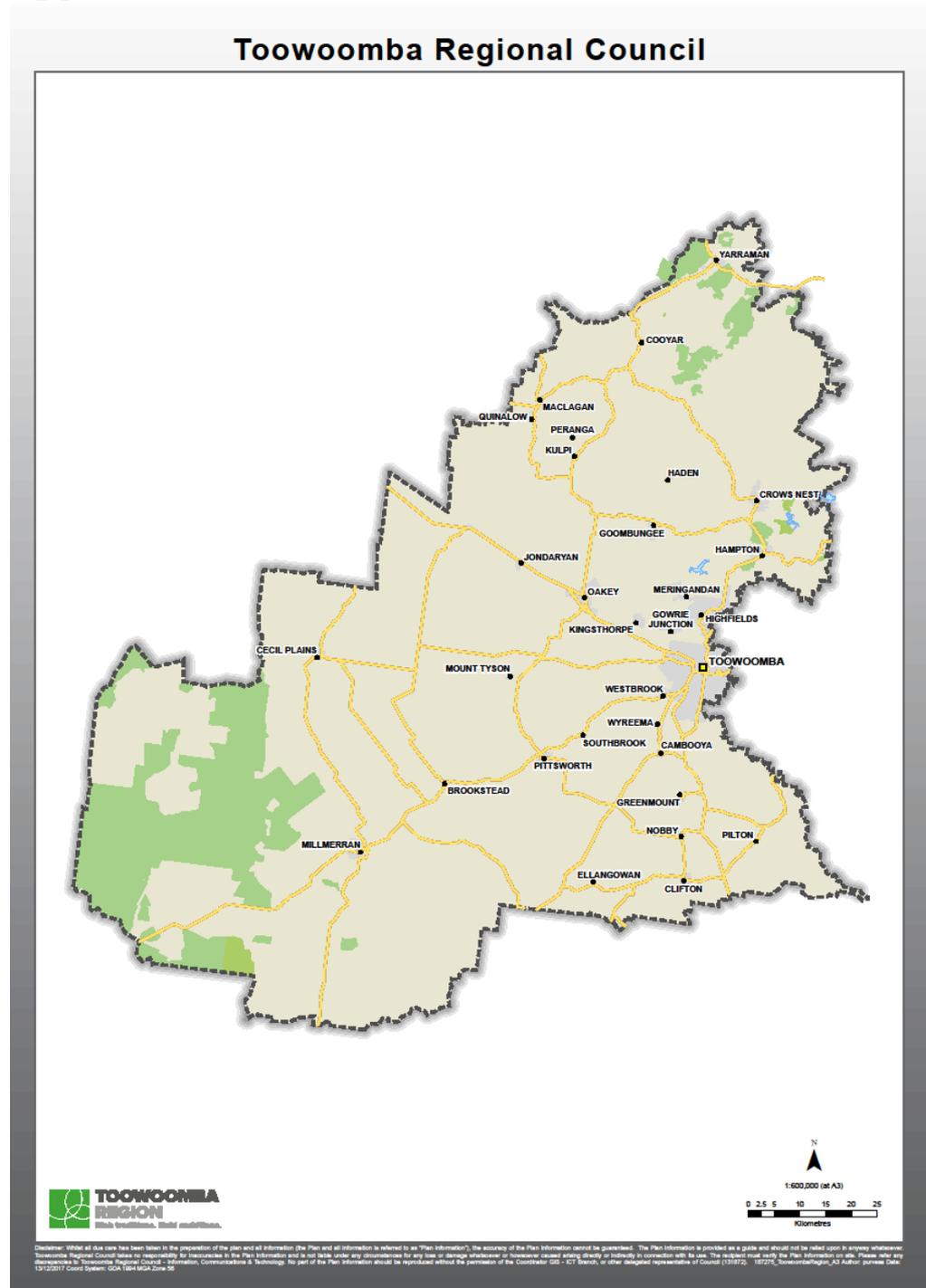
In Australia today schooling is compulsory to the age of sixteen, with on average 74% continuing on to post-compulsory education to complete year 11 and 12 (Lamb, Jackson, Walstab & Huo, 2015). However, according to Lamb et al, (2105) geographic location and socioeconomic status are key factors in year 12 completion rates, with 43% of very remote and 56% of very remote students not attaining year 12 or equivalent compared to 78% of students in major cities and those from low socioeconomic status background 61% school completion versus 89% for those from higher SES backgrounds. This is important because we know that those who do not achieve year 12 or equivalent have lower incomes and higher rates of unemployment. According to the ABS "year 12 attainment contributes to the development of skilled workforce, and in turn, to ongoing economic development and improved living conditions" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Conversely not completing schools leads to lower

income, higher unemployment, poorer health and higher risk of poverty (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Zaczacova & Lawrence, 2018). Additionally, education is widely accepted as a key social determinant of health and wellbeing (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2005) with research highlighting the correlation between education, health and resilience (Telfair & Shelton, 2012). Extensive research worldwide has demonstrated the links between low socioeconomic status (SES) students and aspirations for higher education. Young people are more likely to be unemployed, with the highest rate in the 15-19 year old age group (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). These are factors of the landscape of young people in regional Queensland.

The majority of the early research focused on financial constraints as the main barrier, however, more recently researchers have highlighted the importance additional and equally important *social* factors (Frempong, Ma, & Mensah, 2012). Factors including home, peer and community values, have been examined as barriers or enablers to higher learning (Card, 2001; Ellwood & Kane, 2000). Carneiro and Heckman (2002) assert that students from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to be raised in an environment where education is considered less important by family and friends. Supporting this research Finnie, Lascelles, and Sweetman (2005) determined that family attitudes to higher education, as well as secondary school grades (another important determinant in higher education enrolment) was a major factor influencing higher education enrolment.

Drawing largely from a theoretical base that centers around the learner's 'cultural' and 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1984; Willis, 1977) as a determinate of formal educational success, these studies preface the role that informal education networks play in larger issues of access, cohesion and participation.

# Appendix B



## **Appendix C**

### **Ethnographic diary**

#### ***Journal Entry 29th July 2015 Gaining Familiarity***

Today we commenced the bike build program on campus. There are 8 boys who will undertake this as a component of the 'alternative' program they have been assigned to. The boys were all very enthusiastic about the opportunity to pull apart and rebuild the bikes that they had chosen for themselves.

The boys were joking and mucking about and are there to have fun. They were

initially a bit suspicious of my presence but once I explained that we [the facilitators of the program including co-researcher and co-author of this chapter Andrew Hickey and school guidance counsellors] weren't the police or teachers they warmed to us! At the end of the session a couple of the boys came over and shook our hands and said thanks, which I didn't expect and thought it was really good of them.

I spent quite a bit of time working on Zac's bike with him and had a good chat

about how he became part of the bike build program. He told me it was because he was 'a bad kid'. When I pressed him further, he told me he swears at teachers when he gets in trouble. There was something 'authentic' in the way we spoke less formal than interviews can sometimes be; more open and relaxed. I wondered whether he would have shared this with me if this were a formal interview, audio recorder propped up on the desk between us, and me staring at him searching for the sort of response that would make it straight to a paper. Perhaps this was what Clifford Geertz (1998) meant when he talked about 'deep hanging out', but either way, sitting with C working on his bike gave us a chance to talk, properly. I think this will be a great project, not only from a research perspective but for the boys too.

#### ***Journal Entry 19th August 2015 Moving Around the Workshop***

It's now a few weeks into the bike build program and I think the boys almost fully trust me now. They are not only happy to talk to me about the program but also how they're doing in their lives, what school is to them, and how this program is allowing them to show another side of themselves.

One of the boys told me he actually would come to school early on Wednesdays

just because he likes the program so much and he joked that one of the other boys came 'to get a feed'. It wouldn't surprise me if that was partly true though as the guidance officer said previously that it was the best food some of the boys got all week!

Whilst working on the bikes I've had some very in-depth and insightful conversations with some of the boys. The affordance of movement in the workshop

space allows for natural breaks in the conversation; perhaps in a more sedentary interview the conversation wouldn't be so 'organic', but here I have the chance to talk with the boys as we go about working on the bikes. These snippets might never be finished as I move to the next bike, but we always get back to the discussion at some point.

### ***Journal Entry 2nd September 2015 Walking to The Shed***

As we finished the session today, I walked with a few of the boys up to the shed where they keep their bikes, about 60 metres from the workshop where we build the bikes. I asked the boys if they had done any classes in the workshop before and they told me that, due to their behaviour, they weren't trusted to work with the tools (especially the sharp ones!). They were quite matter of fact about it and didn't seem concerned and actually almost laughed about it. This was such an interesting moment. The walk to the shed, away from the formality of the sessions and the presence of the guidance counsellors and other school staff gave me the chance for a different type of conversation. In that walk, I gained an insight that provided me with a greater sense of how the boys saw themselves and how they connected with school. The laughs and jokes

about the sharp tools provided a denotative shield to our communication, but what we were really doing in this moment was sharing a bit of ourselves and what we each thought. I noted that I hadn't witnessed the 'bad behaviour' that they told me they were always in trouble for. We talked about this and the boys shared with me what they thought was the lot they had in school. In using the walk and the prompt for the discussion that the physical space provided what they thought of the workshop and whether they had been there for classes previously a dialogue emerged that gave me a much clearer sense of how the boys saw themselves.

### ***Journal Entry 9th September 2015 D's Story***

Today I went to get a bike from the shed with one of the boy's 'D'. D had been suspended and absent for some of the previous weeks but was now back in the program. As we walked up to the shed where the bikes were stored, I asked where he'd been. He gave me the whole story of how he was suspended due to fighting and, although he'd been back at school for three weeks, hadn't been allowed back in the program until he'd proven that he could 'behave'. We talked about what he thought of all of this, and then talked about where he wants to be after school, and generally what he thought of school. As had been the case last week, walking opened a chance to talk and to talk openly. The walk made conversation easier. It allowed for natural breaks in the conversation that were then prompted by the rhythm of our short walk to the shed. Visual cues along the way, like the sight of school buildings in the distance, prompted points for discussion, and with the crossing of this space between the workshop and shed, stood as a moment of openness and shared experience. I felt honoured to have been part of this to have had the boys share with me the things they did, and especially in D's case, to allow me this insight into what he thought.

## **Appendix D**

# **headspace Toowoomba GLBTIQ Social Group Evaluation report**



Prepared by:  
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23 November 2017

### Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to thank the collective group and individuals involved in the *headspace GLBTIQ Social Group for 12-18 Year Olds* for allowing them to observe and participate in the group.

Rebecca Schroder (Community Development Officer-Youth) from *Youth Connect*, Toowoomba Regional Council and supporter of the social group provided the initial liaison with Scott Johnston, the **headspace** Toowoomba Manager.

Scott Johnston, as the **headspace** Toowoomba Manager, not only gave permission for the research to be conducted but allowed the researcher the

freedom to participate in the group, in turn providing a much greater depth of understanding than observation alone. Scott also provided valuable insight into the social group intent and its place within the wider **headspace** context.

Finally, to the interview participants who willingly provided insight into what it is like being a young person in a regional city, specifically a young LGBTQI person and how the LGBTQI<sup>22</sup> group enacts identity, I offer my deepest appreciation. This report and the findings it presents would have been impossible without their input.

### **Scope of this report**

This report has been prepared for use by **headspace** Toowoomba as an outcome of research on how the site of **headspace** Toowoomba LGBTQI Social Group acts an opportunity for informal learning, particularly as it relates to identity formation and expression.

### **The Researcher**

Tanya Pauli-Myler, a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Arts and Communication at the University of Southern Queensland undertook preparation of this report following ethnographic research from August 2016 to July 2017.

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<sup>22</sup> The acronym for this group, as per promotional material, was LGBTQI, however the group predominantly used common parlance in citing themselves as members of the LGBTQI community. This report uses both acronyms accordingly.

## Summary

The research that informed this report aimed to explore the experience of young people in regional Queensland in relation to informal learning<sup>23</sup> around identity, sexuality and belonging. An explicit focus of this research was the exploration of the identity and experience of young people in regional Queensland, taken from the perspective of their involvement in a group that had as its central aim the support and engagement of young people who identify as ILBGTQI. Furthermore, how it is that these young people come to 'learn' their identity, and place in society, in terms of their sexuality and sense of self.

The research objectives included:

- The investigation into the ways young people come to 'learn' about their identities as LBGTQI identifying individuals.
- The understanding of how peer networks, popular culture, and community mediate the sense-of-self held by young people;
- The understanding of the role that informal learning plays in identity formation and on the lives of young people in regional Queensland communities.

An ethnographic study, within which the GLBTIQ social group provided the case site, was undertaken to respond to these objectives. Employing the use of ethnographic observation; interview and conversational analysis, this research sought an 'interpretivist' insight into the experience of identifying as a LBGTQI young person involved in the group. This report will highlight how influences impacting on the self-identification of these young people- influences including peer networks, wider social sensibilities, and popular culture- shaped the identity and lives of the participants.

The researcher commenced observations in July 2016 and ceased group participation in July 2017. Over the period the researcher attended the majority of the group's fortnightly social group gatherings.

The overarching theme drawn from the research, which will be examined in further detail in later sections, centred around the site of the GLBTIQ group as a 'safe' place in which to explore identity. As such, the significance of this group and the opportunities for supporting young people who identify as GLBTIQ presents as a prevailing theme in this report.

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<sup>23</sup> For this research, the informal learning functions as a "space where teens and other youth learn how to define themselves outside the traditional sites of instruction such as the home and school" (Giroux 2012 p xvii).

## Background

The **headspace** Toowoomba GLBTIQ Social Group was initiated in 2015 in response to a **headspace** National directive that young people at risk of homelessness, Indigenous young people and, young people who identify as LBGTQI require additional support structures. Data is collected on these at-risk groups and there are national benchmarks for engagement to be achieved. How individual **headspace** branches meet these benchmarks is individually determined by each individual **headspace** site.

In Toowoomba, the **headspace** branch elected to provide a social opportunity for members of the LBGTIQ community, aged between 12 and 18, to be able to connect with each other in a supportive environment. The group grew out of an identified need for young people who identify as LBGTQI to have an opportunity to meet other people their age set within a 'fairly conservative' (Johnston 2017) community context and to be able to do that safely, without fear of judgement. The aim was to provide an environment that is welcoming to young LBGTQI people and removes any real, or perceived, barriers that make the formation of such a network accessible. The group was initiated to be driven by the young people as 'a safe place to just be' (Johnston 2017) and evolved, and continues to evolve, on the directions and desires identified by the group itself.

Upon commencement of the group **headspace** Toowoomba asked several open-ended questions to drive the direction of the group. These questions were relayed via a small interview and focus group with three initial members, and included:

- Is there anything anyone would like to know about?
- Is there anything anyone would like more information on?
- Would you like guest speakers?

The group, which originally commenced with 3 members, decided that they would like to see the group conduct itself informally- to 'just shoot the breeze' (Johnston 2017). The group wanted to create an environment where the young people could 'just be what they want', without a label and with the capacity to drive agendas as these emerged from the group as outcomes from dialogue and shared interaction. The group under the terms of information sharing, camaraderie, and collective association. Furthermore, the founding group members emphasised that the group should be an open and participatory group where young member of the LBGTIQ community, between the ages of 12 and 18, could explore their identity with the support of their peers and other group members (Pat 2016).

In addition to the participating young people, a number of adult members of the group were also engaged in the social group gatherings<sup>24</sup>, varying from one to

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<sup>24</sup> This report uses the terminology 'social group gathering' or 'gathering' rather than the term meeting or similar to reinforce the informal nature of the group.

four at any given gathering. The adults in the group provided valuable insight into their experiences of being an LGBTQI identifying person, and the history of the LGBTQI community and acted as informal mentors to the younger members.

The group met fortnightly for the period of the research (August 2016-July 2017) in a room at **headspace** Toowoomba. The Youth Connect branch of the Toowoomba Regional Council provided catering, typically pizza and drinks, for these gatherings, with Youth Connect personnel (and in particular Rebecca Schroder), also participating in the group early on and then periodically during in the research period.

The group is promoted from one-on-one referrals from **headspace**, as well as on Facebook and group members inviting friends and acquaintances along to the group. The promotional flyer distributed for this group and on Facebook (figure 1) indicates that the GLBTIQ group is “committed to supporting GLBTIQ young people and providing safe and inclusive spaces for all young people”. This report will discuss **headspace** Toowoomba’s success in ensuring that the social group does meet the safe and inclusive space for young people as promoted.



Figure 1

## Participants

The research participants included members of the GLBTIQ group, with numbers fluctuating from two to three members to up to ten members attending each of the fortnightly social gatherings groups. The participating young people

were aged between 12 and 18 years. Individual in-depth interviews were undertaken with three core group members over the 12 month period. These interviews were audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription for later thematic analysis. The researcher retains copies of these recordings confidentially, and in line with ethical clearance requirement issued by the University of Southern Queensland.

Further interviews were held with personnel attached to the GLBTIQ group, including Mr Scott Johnson, to provide contextual detail on the formation of the group, its place within the wider social setting of Toowoomba city and the changing nature of sexuality and gender politics in Australia.

### **Methodology**

Tanya Pauli-Myler was engaged in the social group as an ethnographic researcher and was primarily interested in discovering how the young people engaged undertook processes of identity formation/affirmation within the informal environment of the LGBTIQ social group.

### **Research Question**

A central research question guided the evaluation of how the group engaged with the informal site around identity formation:

***How might the informal space of the GLBTIQ group facilitate identity formation amongst the group members?***

The research was specifically interested in understanding the characteristics of the group as a learning space, in particular as a space to explore identity. Social interaction, and how that facilitated identity exploration, became a guiding focus of this research.

### **Methods**

As an ethnographic focused research project, this research utilised participant observation, interview, and dialogic research methods to gather the data set, involving the use of the social group gatherings and individual interviews as the basis of the evaluation.

The researcher played an active role in the group and was directly engaged and participated in the group. This approach to group participation by the researcher is referred to as “deep hanging out” (Madison, 2005) within the literature and was particularly valuable in enabling the researcher to fulfil the dual role of researcher-participant within the group setting and facilitated an in-depth insight into the group dynamics.

Methods used for generating the data set that inform the evaluation included:

1. Direct participant observations: the researcher engaged as a participant and particular focus was given to participant interaction. Field notes detailing

key observations were developed. Photographs were not taken to protect the privacy of the group members.

2. Interview: ethnographic interviews with three core participants occurred throughout the researcher's involvement in the group, including an interview with the Manager of **headspace** Toowoomba, who initiated the group. These interviews took place over a period, from six months into the participation of the researcher. It was felt that, at this stage, the group and would be more willing and open with their responses due to comfort in knowing the researcher well. Discussions were audio recorded for the purposes of confirming the views articulated in the interviews. Only the researcher has access to these recordings. The interviews followed a semi-structured 'ethnographic interview' style as described by Cresswell (2013) where broad questions were asked to initiate dialogue and from which further themes were explored.

The broad focus of these interviews was:

- i) What is the experience of being a young person, and in particular an LGBTQI identifying young person, in regional Queensland?
- ii) How do young people come to 'learn' about their identities as LGBTQI identifying individuals?
- iii) What impact do group such as the GLBTIQ have on the life of the young person in regional Queensland when exploring identity?

Audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the professional transcription service, *Pacific Transcriptions*. The researcher reviewed these transcripts to ensure accuracy and extracts have been used within this report as evidentiary sources. Pseudonyms have been utilised and identifying characteristics have been removed or de-identified to ensure anonymity.

Participants and, where required, their parents/guardians gave permission to undertake the research, including observation and interviews via a signed Participant Consent Form, handed out at the first social group gathering with the researcher. Additional consent to conduct and record interviews was also obtained at the beginning of each interview. The University of Southern Queensland Human Ethics Research Committee provided clearance for this research.

All data collected for this review has been retained by the researcher, with data presented within this report done so with the approval of the participants. No further distribution of this report or its reported data is authorised without permission of the researcher.

### **Analysis of the Data**

From the time the researcher engaged with the GLBTIQ group until the researcher finished their research there was a gradual decline in the number of young LBGTQI members of the group. The researcher identified a number of factors that could account for this decline. Firstly, when the researcher engaged in the group there were at least three members who were already seventeen or older and by the end of the research period natural attrition, via no longer been in the age group or moving away for university or work, saw the numbers dwindle. At the same time some of the remaining groups members attended only periodically due to work or other commitments. There was more than one occasion where one or no young members of the group attended. This decline in numbers was not countered by a significant number of new members joining the group, with only two new consistent members joining during that same period.

The lack of attendance later in the research period caused a level of concern for some of the adult members, particularly as all the adult members were volunteering their time, and in many cases taking an absence from paid roles, to support the group. The adult members realised that this led to a disconnect, especially on the occasions where there had been more adults in the room than young people, in a group specifically aimed at young people. The levels of attendance led to discussions about how to structure and promote the group more effectively to achieve higher attendance rates.

When the researcher asked the interviewees about their own attendance the overarching reply typically stated that as there wasn't a Facebook reminder they were not sure if it was still on. This raises an interesting question as the poster indicates that the group gathers on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month, therefore, should a Facebook reminder be necessary? When the researcher questioned one participant (Mac) why they had not set up a repeating calendar reminder on their phone (as the researcher had) the response was 'dunno' and a shrug of the shoulders. This led the researcher to question does this indicate a lack of interest in attending, or is it just low on a list of priorities? In this case Ash was one of the regular attendees so was clearly getting some need met by attending the group.

The poster also indicated that one can register their interest via phone or email. This poses another question, are young people reading the poster and not feeling comfortable contacting **headspace** to register their interest, or assuming that if they don't register their interest they cannot attend? Additionally, the researcher questions the reach the poster has. Early in the research period the placement of posters was discussed and whilst some schools would allow the posters other schools refused to have the posters on the school grounds. The main reason cited, by the interviewees, was the schools were not willing to promote any external activity or group. According to the interviewees there was also some resistance from some shopping centres allowing the posters to be placed on the

community notice boards that some centres have. Therefore, is the group simply not visible enough within the community setting to attract more participants?

The specific findings on the research between the informal learning and identity formation focussed on two overarching themes:

1. The GLBTIQ support group as a supportive environment
2. Social engagement and identity formation

### **The GLBTIQ support group as a supportive environment**

The GLBTIQ group was considered a safe place by the research participants; a place without judgement, to be themselves, which they valued very deeply. The informality of the social gatherings enabled the young members to discuss and explore their sexual identity in an environment free of the judgement that many had experienced in the community.

All the interviewees had experienced some level of judgement when revealing their sexuality to their family, friends, or other community members. For example, Ash identified that they<sup>25</sup> had yet to 'come out' to one of their mother's friends; a friend Ash identified as 'homophobic'. Ash considered this to be problematic and in response to a question why they had not yet declared the nature of their sexuality, Ash noted that they 'didn't need the judgement' (Ash2017). Both Pat and Taylor had also experienced some form of negative judgement from either family or peers or both, with Pat saying it was only their 'real friends' were supportive when they first 'came out'.

The GLBTIQ social group supported the interviewees to become more comfortable with their sexuality, with Pat saying the group helped them understand that they didn't need a label and it was ok to just be themselves. Pat relayed further-saying the group helped them to come to terms with 'I am who I am and don't need to apologise for it' (Pat 2016). Mackenzie also said the group was a 'supportive place' (Mackenzie2016) where it was ok to 'be myself and not be judged'. Ash reiterated the same sentiment stating, 'I can just go to the group and not have to explain my sexuality, the group don't care if you're homosexual, bisexual or trans or anything else, it's just not an issue'.

The interviewees were satisfied with the structure of the group combining young people with selected adult members who undertook the role of mentors, saying that they valued the openness and the opportunity to hear from adults who've 'been where they are now' (Ash 2017). This mentoring role was a delicate one however, and, as will be discussed below, held implications in terms of how the process of mediating support through mentoring could proceed. In general terms

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<sup>25</sup> When referring to interview participants 'they', 'their' and 'them' pronouns are used instead of the gender specific 'he' or 'she' as it is the commonly accepted terminology amongst the LBGTQI community and doesn't confine the participants to a set gender, which is particularly important to non-binary identifying people.

however, this combination of older GLBTIQ members and the young people had the effect of relaying a wider sense of association, and that the young people were not alone in their experience as GLBTIQ identifying individuals.

### **Social engagement and identity formation**

An associated theme emerged in terms of how the GLBTIQ social group was considered as a space to engage with other LBGTQI members and explore identity. Interaction and peer-support were considered vital to the success of the social group.

An articulation of this was initially discussed by Pat who liked to listen to everyone's experiences and 'learnt a lot' from one of the younger group members as 'they were so sure of themselves and comfortable with themselves' (Pat 2016). This helped Pat feel comfortable in sharing their experiences of not only coming out, but also daily experiences of being a young LGBTIQ person.

A recurring theme of the interviews was that they would like to hear more of the adult member stories and how they navigated their sexuality when they were younger. Mackenzie was particularly interested in the life stories of the adult members and thought it would be beneficial to the younger members of the group to hear about the different experiences the people who 'came out' as LBGTQI before them had. Mackenzie believed that the history of the adult members could help the younger members understand and relate to the struggles in an era that was less accepting and how the previous generations paved the path to more freedom to express one's sexuality.

However, and although the participants generally felt that significant value was to be gained from simply listening to older members experiences and the 'open' structure of the sessions, there was some concern among some adult members about a 'lack of direction' for the group. All the interviewees were satisfied with the informal nature of the group and noted they could 'hang out' with their peers and have impromptu conversations based around their week and/or current interests. However, the interviewees were also open to having 'guest speakers' and a more defined direction for the gatherings but had no desire to drive the recruitment of the speakers themselves. This was partly because they were unsure who would be appropriate, but also felt it took them too far out of their comfort zone. When asked about the possibility of guest speakers, Pat said that whilst guest speakers 'could be a good idea, I guess' (Pat 2016) they weren't comfortable in sourcing or approaching a suitable person due to shyness. Taylor (Taylor 2016) also agreed that whilst guest speakers seemed like a good idea that they also wouldn't like to take an active role in contacting a speaker, again due to their introverted nature. The researcher deems that this was perceived by some of the adult members of the group to suggest disorganisation and lack of progression for the group.

In another instance Max was charged by an adult member of the group to find a clip to bring to the following group gathering. Max didn't attend that particular gathering and when the researcher followed up, at the gathering after that, and asked why Max hadn't attended they answered that they forgot that they had been tasked with the responsibility of the clip until the day of the meeting and then felt 'too much pressure' (Max 2017) to deliver. The researcher asked how Ash thought the group could be of benefit to the younger members and the response was to keep the group open and a 'place to hang out' without the pressure of been responsible for providing the focus of a particular gathering.

All the interviewees discussed that, although part of their identity, their LGBTIQ status was only a component of their identity and not 'who' they are. Pat said, 'I'm more than my sexuality, I am a person who has interests, hobbies and beliefs - not even related to my sexuality- just like everyone else' (Pat2016). Max and Mackenzie were also adverse to been labelled due to their sexuality and didn't like the stereotypes that could be attached to their sexuality by society. Max had a mother's friend ask how many people Max had had sex with 'now they were gay' which offended Max considerably. Max's reply was 'I am still the same person; my values haven't changed I just happen to be .....' (Max 2017). Over several interviews Max reiterated that their sexuality was not the entirety of their identity and that it was only one component of who they are. Pat indicated the same and said that the GLBTIQ group was a supportive environment as sexuality wasn't the sole focus and that they could just hang out without their sexuality been an 'issue for anyone' (Pat 2016).

At one of the gathering a guest speaker was invited to provide their story. This speaker is well respected within the LGBTIQ community as well as the wider community. The speaker provided their background, which included some details on the difficult upbringing they had and how they were kicked out of home at 14 when they came out, to then live on the streets before been taken under the wing of a mentor. During that session there were only two new young people and one parent who had just been introduced by a **headspace** psychologist. The researcher noted that the new members, and in particular the parent, were very uncomfortable when the speaker started mentioning their experience in researching and the writing about LBGTQI erotica. The researcher thought it was possibly not the best choice of topic for the group on that day as the young people were both under 14 and clearly not very comfortable been there in the first place. Had it been the regular core group that had been attending, and who were all more extroverted and older it would have been a very different vibe. The mother of the young person was also clearly getting a very one-sided impression of the group that is set up to be a safe place for young people to 'just hang out'. Neither of those young people attended another gathering.

The researcher noted that at the beginning of their research period the group was very engaged and had some, one in particular, very engaged and extroverted young members. When this member attended the gathering they always took the lead and the group was very much driven by the young people. The

attendance during this period was the highest of the research period. However, due to other commitments that member stopped attending for several months and not only did the group dynamics change but the numbers also dropped at the same time. This may be a coincidence or may have been due to the change in dynamics. In the absence of that young leader, the group, who were in general a quiet group, with only one or two members who liked to 'chat', didn't seem as cohesive and the young members didn't appear to engage to the same degree as before. This was noted by a couple of the adult members and often they would start the dialogue at the beginning of the session to try to engage some discussion, often mentioning relevant LGBTIQ specific activities or events that they had attended or would be attending. This would then set the direction for the gathering and drive the discussion for that evening gathering. The adults clearly felt that it wasn't ideal that they drove the session and felt that the group lacked direction. The adult group members decided to ask the young people at one of the sessions toward to the end of the research period what the young people wanted. The conversation led with the question *what would the young people like the group to be*, when no answer was forthcoming from the young people the suggestion was, from an adult member, to watch LBGTQI movies and listen to LBGTQI music, to which the replies were 'sure, ok, sound like a good idea'.

The researcher noticed the newest member of the group getting uncomfortable (one young person in particular told the researcher the week prior, that they didn't want everything to be about their sexuality). The researcher commented casually *it doesn't all have to be about sexuality as there's more to everyone than just their sexuality*. A couple of the young members of the group in the room nodded their heads (the ones who had previously told the researcher that they didn't want their whole identity to be tied to their sexuality). However, there were two adult members who clearly believed the researcher had overstepped the boundary and said that the whole purpose of the group was specifically about LBGTQI identifying and support and let it be known that was their opinion. There was clearly some friction and disconnect between what the interviewees had told the researcher they wanted from the group and what the adult members considered the purpose of the group.

After that particular gathering the researcher was talking to one of their key interviewees about how they felt the gathering went and the young person said they couldn't understand what happened, and how the mood in the room changed when the interviewer suggested that being LGBTIQ was only part of a person's identity for some people. The researcher asked if that suggestion had offended the interviewee who responded, "no it's exactly as I told you before, my sexuality isn't my whole identity" (Max 2017). This led the researcher to question if there was a disconnect between what the young people saw as the purpose of the group and the older members saw as the purpose of the group.

The researcher spoke to the **headspace** Manager about the gathering as clearly some tensions had been raised with two adult members approaching the manager to indicate that the researcher had become too involved and was making

the young people feel uncomfortable. The researcher mentioned that the comment about sexuality and identity was informed by interview findings from core young members. The researcher suggested that perhaps there was a disconnect between what the young people felt they needed from the group and the adult members felt the young people needed from the group. It was discussed that the researcher would compile a report (the one currently been read) to explore the research findings and give some recommendations.

### **Implications from the Findings**

The analysis outlined above confirmed that for the young people, the support group functioned as a safe site of engagement without the fear of judgement. This was highly valued by the group members as all had experienced some form of sexuality based prejudiced when they 'came out' or when people discovered their sexuality.

However, it is significant that openness and a structure that allowed the young people to direct the activity and remain engaged is crucial. Disengagement from the group- an already 'small' group- is a major risk. **headspace** can ensure that this group can effectively enable young people to engage with the exploration of their identity and experiences as young GLBTIQ identifying individuals in a way that is comfortable for the young people. To achieve this there are some recommendations for consideration.

### **Recommendations**

Although the structure of the group for the research period overall appealed to the younger members there were some area for consideration mentioned. There are **three** core recommendations the researcher and author of this report suggest moving forward. They are split into the recruitment of new participants and retention of previous and current members.

#### **Recruiting new members:**

##### **Recommendation 1:**

Undertake an audit to find out where the current group members found out about the group and any recommendations the young people have for promoting the group more widely.

#### **Retaining current group members:**

##### **Recommendation 2:**

Hold a focus group with the younger group members to gain further clarification from the younger group members as to how they see the group would most benefit them moving forward. The researcher recommends a focus group scenario to be undertaken by an employee of **headspace**, as they are the key stakeholder. The researcher recommends the manager undertake the group as the young members already have a pre-existing and

positive relationship with the manager. The researcher recommends this focus group only have the young members of the group participate, to ensure it is the young members' voice that is heard and not an iteration of what they perceive they are meant to say. It is essential to find out what the young people see as the purpose of the group and how they want it to proceed if they are to be engaged enough to attend.

The researcher recommends this course of action as the majority of the interviewees have moved on and the new members may not have the same requirements or expectations as the previous members.

### **Recommendation 3:**

As it was highlighted by the interviewees the GLBTIQ group was a safe space to dialogically engage. The researcher recommends allowing the group to engage in whatever manner the young members prefer and allow them the space to find their voice. Not engaging in constant dialogue does not necessarily coincide with not been engaged. Whilst there are adult members of the group, for the purpose of identity formation, the young people need to drive the group and feel empowered to do so.

### **Recommendation 4:**

If guest speakers are decided to be an area to pursue by the young members a clear brief of the group members and background would be helpful to know where to target the session, particularly as the group has the age range of 12-18. The presenters need to be informed that there will likely be younger members and that the session should aim for that age range.

### **Conclusions**

One of the key observations of the researcher was how engaged the group participants were throughout the research period. The group shared their experiences and stories about been a young LGBTIQ identifying person in a regional town and supported each other through their journey. The research participants found the group a safe and non-threatening site to explore their identity with the acceptance of their sexuality, without preconceived ideas been vital. The overarching theme from all interviewees was having a space to 'hang out' and 'just be' was what made the social group successful.

Although there was discussion over several sessions from some of the adult group members about the perceived lack of direction of the GLBTIQ group, the interviewees in this instance were happy with the informal nature of the group and the chance to 'hang out'. However, as mentioned previously, whilst not the top priority for the interviewees, guest speakers were also considered a 'good idea', providing the interviewees were not required to undertake the sourcing of the speakers.

For the purpose of engagement in the group the young people need to feel empowered and to feel like they are active members of the group and the group is

meeting their needs, even if those needs don't meet the perceived purpose of others.

# Appendix E



University of Southern Queensland

## Participant Information for USQ Research Project Interview

### Project Details

Title of Project: *Identity formation and community cohesion: The experience of informal learning for regional young people*

Human Research Ethics Approval Number:

### Research Team Contact Details

#### Principal Investigator Details

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### Description

This project is being undertaken as part of PhD Project.

The purpose of this project is to explore the experience of young people in regional Queensland in relation to informal learning and consider the implications this has for themselves and their community.

The research team requests your assistance because we would like to hear about your experience living in regional Queensland and how informal learning forms part of your life.

### Participation

Your participation will involve participation in 3 of interviews that will take approximately 1 hour (each) of your time.

The interview will take place at a time and venue that is convenient to you.

Questions will include:

- What is the experience of being a young person in regional Queensland?
- How do young people engage in learning in regional Queensland?
- What impact does learning have on the life of the young person in regional Queensland?

The interview will be audio recorded and may be video recorded.

# Sample Interview Questions

## Interview 1

The interview will commence with demographic data:

1. How old are you?
2. Where about in the Toowoomba region do you live?
3. Do you go to school/university?
  - a. If yes what grade/year level

And then focus on the participant's life history to that point

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself
  - a. Where did you grow up/have you always lived in ....
2. What is it like being a young person in regional Queensland?
3. How do you think your community see's young people?

## Interview 2

This interview will be used to focus on the details of the participant's experience of learning

1. Do you participate in any learning activities outside of school/university?
  - a. If so what and how and where
  - b. Why do you do that particular activity?
    - i. What led you to choose that activity over another
  - c. What do you like about the activity?
  - d. Is there anything you dislike about the activity?
2. How does informal learning impact on your life?

## Interview 3

Will be used to reflect on the meaning of their experience and clarify and explore in more detail previous interview points and look over their visual diary and seek clarification of the contents.

1. In our second interview you mentioned..... can you tell me a bit more about that

Additional questions or topics for discussion will naturally evolve throughout the process determined by the participant responses.

## Appendix F

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### FILE DETAILS

*Audio Length:* 41 minutes

*Audio Quality:*  High  Average  Low

*Number of Facilitators:* One

*Number of Interviewees:* One

*Difficult Interviewee Accents:*  Yes  No

*Other Comments:* Background noise throughout.

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### START OF TRANSCRIPT

Facilitator: I'm here with Mackenzie and we're going to do an interview. Is it all right if I tape this, Mackenzie?

Interviewee: Yes.

Facilitator: Okay, so first off, how old are you?

Interviewee: Seventeen.

Facilitator: You live in Toowoomba?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: You are about to head off first year uni, nursing.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: You said you've always lived in Toowoomba, so you grew up in Toowoomba, born and bred?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Me too. What's it like growing up in Toowoomba?

Interviewee: Boring, there's nothing to do.

Facilitator: What would you do if you were somewhere else?

Interviewee: I don't know, I feel like with Brisbane you can just walk places and there's always something to do, there's people everywhere and it's kind of cool. But then here if you go out at certain times there's no one there and you're kind of like oh well, I'm just walking in the hot sun for nothing.

Facilitator: It kind of is like that isn't it. How do you think you're viewed as a young person in Toowoomba, from other young people and then also from everyone else in the community?

Interviewee: I don't know, with young people I still get along with them, if I actually talk to them I feel like we don't really pay attention to each other if we're just not going to talk. Because it's like or we have our own friends, just ignore these other people, I might not like them. Then with the older people I'm probably viewed as a bit like weird, I don't know, I've got coloured hair, you know.

Facilitator: Is it that or is it you think in general young people are viewed differently by...

Interviewee: Yeah, that also makes sense as well, with young people, older people are usually like oh this new generation.

Facilitator: "When I was young"....

Interviewee: Yeah, they're so addicted to their phones, all that. I don't think a lot of them really realise that young people are kind of cool, I don't know.

Facilitator: Exactly and that's the thing, because that's what I'm looking at, discrimination with young people and how there seems to be the, oh you're a great kid, for example you're on a scholarship, so you're an angel. Whereas there might be someone else who's roaming the streets at 11 o'clock at night, well they shouldn't be doing that, they're the devil. So that's how I'm coming at this. What do you do when you're not at school?

Interviewee: Recently, because I graduated it's been at home just on my computer, been watching shows like teenagers do.

Facilitator: Do you have online mates? Are you doing a lot of chatting online or is it just other stuff?

Interviewee: Yeah, I do online phone as well as my computer because that's how things go nowadays, because I'm talking to my friends and stuff because we can't always meet up. Especially because one of my friends lives down the range and his parents don't always like him going places and all that. But online keeps us talking and stuff which is really good, especially because I won't see them much after I move.

Facilitator: So you're still very social, just not physically seeing each other.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Do you do any activities like sport, music, art, anything like that?

Interviewee: Well I can play instruments at home.

Facilitator: What do you play?

Interviewee: I play violin, I don't have a flute currently but I have learned it from school and I actually have a clarinet shipping, so I can learn that as well.

Facilitator: Gosh, you are musical. So when did you start with your music?

Interviewee: Violin I started in Grade 3 although I was never really into it, I never wanted to practice, I just played occasionally, so I was very, very bad and I quit for two years. I picked it up again when I moved school because I'm like I actually do want to do this now. So practicing has progressed me so far and then I picked up flute in my last year of school. I'm just really enjoying playing instruments now because I can actually understand, yeah, I need to practice for this, it's actually fun to do it.

Facilitator: Did you first learn at school? Was it a school thing, somebody taught you?

Interviewee: Yeah at the school, I haven't learnt by myself [unclear] the clarinet, I'm going to see how that goes.

Facilitator: That's awesome because that's a step before the saxophone, isn't it?

Interviewee: Yeah, my sister plays saxophone actually.

Facilitator: Yeah, I love the saxophone.

Interviewee: I don't know if I play it just because then I will have so many instruments...

Facilitator: You can never have too many...

Interviewee: I really want to learn cello as well so it's like I'll have five, that's too many.

Facilitator: No, you can never have too many. So are there any other activities you do apart from music?

Interviewee: Currently it's been pretty boring just because it's in the Christmas break and all that. I do go to the orchestra in town.

Facilitator: Okay, there's an orchestra in town?

Interviewee: Yeah, the Toowoomba Concert Hall, I didn't know about that until I searched up my violin teacher was in it, it's a bunch of music teachers from town, it's pretty cool.

Facilitator: Is it quite hipster, quite young or is it very...

Interviewee: No it's got older people doing different classical...

Facilitator: So classical music as well, cool.

Interviewee: Yeah, but recently had some newer composers like a dude who's doing composing at USQ and some guy, I think he's in Melbourne

now, I don't know but he's from here, they played some of their stuff which was pretty cool.

Facilitator: Now I'm just thinking is that formal or informal learning?

Interviewee: I don't know.

Facilitator: That borders both, so do you formally get together and learn or is it you all get together and practice?

Interviewee: We just get together and practice and then we'll play concerts and stuff.

Facilitator: That's an informal learning, how do you find that better, either different or worse to if you were doing it at school as a music class?

Interviewee: I think it's better just because it's music teachers as well as students who've been learning from school and stuff like that. They don't really choose differently just because we're kids, we're all together and we're playing together and it's pretty cool like that. Whereas with school it's kids and it's sort of like that but we're also different grades and stuff so it's like there is seniority.

Facilitator: A power balance?

Interviewee: Yeah, because I am referred to a bunch from my teacher because I am first violin and I'm one of the only Grade 12s in there apart from the other cello.

Facilitator: This is in the Toowoomba orchestra group?

Interviewee: It's at school, it's one after school. So there is a level with the grades and it's like...

Facilitator: A hierarchy?

Interviewee: Yeah, but with the Toowoomba orchestra it's not really like that, like yeah, we're just here at school.

Facilitator: What's the youngest the Toowoomba Youth Orchestra take?

Interviewee: I don't think there's an age limit but I think it's just skill level. The youngest they have I think is a Grade 10 girl from I'm not sure which school, she doesn't go to my school.

Facilitator: So if you're a little prodigy?

Interviewee: Yeah, but her mother's the lead violin.

Facilitator: Okay so she's probably got...

Interviewee: Yeah, she's probably got a lot of experience.

Facilitator: Is there anything from there in the way that works that you would apply to school if you had a choice? If you could go this works really well here, we should do that in the school orchestra. Because

obviously you've got a lot more say. What makes it better? You have more say don't you, like power?

Interviewee: I think with the Toowoomba orchestra it's just cool because I'm not relied on to be the best, because I'm not the best there.

Facilitator: Because you're not the lead?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Okay, so it takes the pressure off.

Interviewee: Yeah, a little bit. Even though the music is harder, I don't know, it's quite strange because I'm not as exposed either because there is much more players. So if I'm not doing the best it's okay because I can just...

Facilitator: Cover it up?

Interviewee: Yeah, but with school it's not like that, usually there's only two of us on the part and the other girl recently hurt her wrist on the end the year so I was by myself. So it's like if I mess up it's so bad.

Facilitator: So what happens now that you're gone then at school?

Interviewee: There were two girls so she's...

Facilitator: So they're just training?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: So there's less pressure because it's more...

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: The Toowoomba one, are you more like, is it more informal, you learn off each other? Or is it quite structured, school's quite structured?

Interviewee: I think it's more just like well we don't want to learn, it's more we just meet up and practice and stuff. We all just go and on our break we go and have coffee or whatever and [talk] and stuff. It's more just we play and then our sections we do learn sometime because we have occasionally we meet up in our section and it'll be like this bit we all have trouble with so let's do it slowly and figure it out together, which is pretty cool.

Facilitator: It sounds really interesting. Okay well see I didn't know about that so that's really interesting because that's another informal thing you do.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: From the other perspective of the group that we went on, the informal learning of that, because my whole thing is about identity, obviously that's the point of the group, isn't it?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: So before that group did you, well number one did you feel any different? Did you have a label for yourself? You know what I mean?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: What's that group given you if anything?

Interviewee: It's just more like a social network sort of respect. It's only people from school I'd really talk to. I've got a few LGBT friends from Centenary but not many from when I moved school. So I'm going to talk with my friends but I figured myself out before going there, like 2015 when they had the first version of the group it was okay but it's not as good as it is now because then it was just the people that I knew who really went. It was my friend's mum as well so it wasn't new adults as well. My friend's mum wasn't even LGBT, she just liked running it and stuff.

Facilitator: Yeah, because that was part of her, was it her job or she wanted something for her daughter?

Interviewee: I don't know.

Facilitator: I can't remember, they didn't tell me how it started.

Interviewee: I'm not sure.

Facilitator: At what age do you think you first identified?

Interviewee: Probably Grade 10-ish, I started to think I was gay, but that was very early. I hadn't really had setbacks but I hadn't really thought about it either. When I was young I remember like you know with *Glee* saw the two guys kiss and I'm like eww, because I didn't really know. But then I learnt out of that as well so...

Facilitator: Was it because that's what society expected you think, or is it because you actually just went what the?

Interviewee: I don't know, I feel like it's my dad because he said we as well, we both did at the same time, I remember that. But these days he's okay but it's probably subconscious learning from my parents, probably from my dad, my mum's chill all the time.

Facilitator: That helps.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Do you have an identity a label in that group? For example the other day when Thomas was talking about how he came out to his mum and he said well I'm bisexual, and she couldn't get her head around well how can you possibly like both and it was all like whoa. Do you have a label for yourself?

Interviewee: I'm bi as well but I'm also trans or what they call a trans guy or something, female to male.

Facilitator: You identify as that or do you just go well no I'm just a person, stuff you, you know what I mean?

Interviewee: Yeah, a lot of the time I do try and be like I'm just a person. I don't know, it's really awkward with people I don't know and just being like oh yeah, I'm a dude. Because I don't look like one, so I don't talk about it, I feel like there's an air like I'm not exactly like a female, because I am but you know, I don't really dress like that. I don't know.

Facilitator: Do you find that - do you ever get asked?

Interviewee: Not really no. A lot of people do - they use female pronouns and stuff and they assume, and I'm okay with that because I get it.

Facilitator: Does it bother you then?

Interviewee: It does, but it doesn't, it's weird. I understand where they're coming from because they just don't know, and that's fine because they just don't know and I haven't told them because it's all good. But then at the same time it does bother me because that's the whole thing is I don't want to be female so like I'm not.

Facilitator: This is the thing, I noticed when people are talking about [Ren], like for example Thomas still says she and her, whereas I try, I do, but then I go back, I try to pull myself back.

Interviewee: Yeah, I did the same thing. Even though I've known them for ages and I've been using they, because I haven't seen Ren in a while, I don't know why but I'm starting to make mistakes and I'm like I'm so sorry.

Facilitator: But I don't think Ren would...

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: So here's a tough one, if you now identify as male, which toilets would you go to?

Interviewee: Okay, so I try and go into the [gentlemen] to...

Facilitator: The unisex if you can.

Interviewee: I know it's a disabled, yeah like...

Facilitator: We all do it, I do it with my children because it's safer than sending one kid in this direction and one kid in this. They're there for other people too.

Interviewee: If there's no disabled people around I'll use it and then try and get out because I don't know if there will be one coming along and they need that one. Because I haven't gotten to the stage where I'm

comfortable going into the men's restroom because I'm really worried about like I doubt there will ever be any violence, but you know, but I just worry about going in there and they're like what are you doing and get out.

Facilitator: Fair enough.

Interviewee: I am female, people see me as that, so going into the female's bathroom is like I can but it also - there's a point where I'm not sure if everyone does see me like that so I don't want to go in there and also be told to get out. So I'm stuck in the middle there.

Facilitator: That's it, so are you going to fully transition to male with hormones and all that?

Interviewee: I'm going to try my best to get there. But it's expensive and the technology here for bottom surgery is quite.... I think it's not as progressed as some other countries. I'm hoping in a year's time something good will come along.

Facilitator: So even taking more testosterone?

Interviewee: Yeah, that's my first step is when I turn 18 is going to get...

Facilitator: Eighteen, so you have to be 18 obviously for that to happen?

Interviewee: If you want to get it under 18 you have to go through the court and have to approve you and all that.

Facilitator: So not even your parents, your parents can't say I'm their guardian?

Interviewee: No, that's informed consent, they have that in some states in America.

Facilitator: But not Australia?

Interviewee: Yeah, here it's like because they recently changed that when like a young kid before they hit puberty and they were going to go on puberty blockers before they could get hormones, they would have to go through the courts. But then one kid rallied and got it so that way it's just the doctors can put them on there or something.

Facilitator: So you can stop puberty happening but you can't...

Interviewee: Yeah, but then they still have to go through the court process to get the hormones when they're 16. By the time I'd figured out anything it was way too late to even consider that so I just have to wait.

Facilitator: That is so complicated.

Interviewee: It's very annoying.

Facilitator: So you've obviously done a lot of research.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: I'm just trying to think how to say this, because obviously you'd be more testosterone. What's the process like emotionally? Testosterone tends to make you more assertive, aggressive, is it a hard transition do you know? Do you know anyone who's been through it?

Interviewee: I don't know anyone personally but there's lots of stuff on the internet. People have different things because it's basically taking your medication and then there's the definite side effects and then there's possible ones that can happen, so it really depends on the person. Obviously you'd look male after a while. I know some people have trouble emotionally because it does change them, and then other people they're fine. So it's really like a lottery I guess.

Facilitator: You don't know how you're going to react to any medication.

Interviewee: Exactly, so I don't know how it will go. I think sometimes it would probably be worth it even though it might be annoying to be aggressive and angry and stuff, but it's like puberty as well, it's like that happens...

Facilitator: Exactly, so in 10 years' time you'll be fully transitioned?

Interviewee: I'm hoping but I don't know.

Facilitator: Physically as well, because obviously mentally you already there.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Do they do psychological testing when they do that now? Because I know years ago it used to be...

Interviewee: You have to go through that.

Facilitator: So really almost like interrogation. It used to be really, really intense, so do you know if it's still like that?

Interviewee: I'm hoping not. With the process I have already gone to a psychologist and stuff and basically it was just focusing on -is this the right choice for me, have I thought it through? Am I actually prepared? They help you do that and then you do a few questionnaires about how you feel and stuff so they could be like yeah this is definitely the thing that should happen for you. That was just a general psychologist, it wasn't even a specialist or anything. It was pretty good for that experience because there's two ways to go and get it done.

You still have to go to the gender clinic in Brisbane but there's one process where you go to the psychologist and then they write a letter saying it's all good, the GP refers you then. Or you can just go straight up there and then they take a while doing that assessment themselves.

Facilitator: So if it's already done then it's just quicker?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Has this group, the LGBTIQ group, has that influenced you or anything? It sounds like you're pretty well sorted anyway, it seems like without the group you would have been okay anyway.

Interviewee: Yeah, I would have been okay without the group. I more go as a social thing but it is good to have the support of this. Because the friends that I have now from school and Uni, a lot of them aren't LGBT at all, I think it's one or two bi people, but even then it's good to just go with them, I don't know it's like fully accepting even though my friends are, it's just a different thing.

Facilitator: So how did you come out to your friends, or did you need to? As Thomas said did you get the reaction like 'obviously, we knew, how did you not know'?

Interviewee: I think early on when I first met them I was worried to tell them because they might think I'm weird, because their opinions seem to be against that. But they actually aren't, despite some of their opinions. One of my other friends, they're not really my friend now because stuff happened, but they came out to them about that sort of fake gender thing. So I'm like oh yeah, me too.

So it was just sort of a thing. Because it was still early I'd been sitting with them but I wasn't fully friends with them because I'd just moved to the school. After a while of just being friends it was just they didn't have to care because it wasn't like we were friend and suddenly a different gender. It was just like that's been that the whole time.

Facilitator: Has anyone struggled? Obviously Thomas's mum, not that she didn't approve, she just couldn't get her head around it. Has there been anyone in your life, anyone significant in your life that doesn't get it?

Interviewee: Not particularly, the people that might not get it I don't think I've really come out to. Like my dad doesn't really know yet. He knows that I've changed my name because obviously I had to get him to sign the thing.

Facilitator: So you don't live with your dad, obviously?

Interviewee: No.

Facilitator: That makes sense.

Interviewee: But I plan to probably just tell him once I move away, he'll be fine with it because he says all the time no matter what I'll love you, all that.

Facilitator: Good parents. So, changing your name, what was your name first before Mackenzie?

Interviewee: I'd prefer to not say.

Facilitator: Okay that's fine, that's fine.

Interviewee: It's just like...

Facilitator: You've moved on, that identity is gone?

Interviewee: Yeah, that's what I'd rather - because even though I know people won't use it it's in their mind they know it.

Facilitator: Yeah, and you don't associate with that person anymore.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: So for you to change it, your mum had to sign something?

Interviewee: Yeah, my mum and my dad had to both sign it.

Facilitator: Then that goes through the court system?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Does that just change your name or does that change your actual birth certificate?

Interviewee: You can order a change of name certificate or you can order a new birth certificate, but I've had to get both because it's really annoying because with the Australian Taxation Office they don't accept your birth certificate as a change of name certificate, they need an actual certificate, so I had to go to Brisbane and get one. Just because they didn't like that the birth certificate - even though it's exactly the same it just doesn't have my parents and my place of birth on it and stuff. It just has the name, the old name on the front rather than the back. It's really stupid.

Facilitator: Okay, so you have to drive to Brisbane for that?

Interviewee: Yeah, I've had a lot of issues like trying to get into Uni because of the name change, it's been so annoying because QTAC was in my old name and they didn't change it before I accepted my offer so that uni had my name wrong. Then so I had to do the form and then go up to Brisbane. When I got the change of name certificate I think it was the same day I put in that form but they also, because its given names, I put in my first and middle name but they put it into the system as that was my whole first name. So I had to mail them and be like can you change it so I could do my HECS because it [auto active] puts the name in. So they needed to change it so it was right and I'm like oh...

Facilitator: Were they good with it when you said this is now my legal name? Have they been good with everything?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's been fine, I haven't had any issues where they're just like no I won't do that.

Facilitator: They can't, but sometimes you can go what? Why are we changing your name? Sometimes you can get that bit of resistance.

Interviewee: I think with QUT because it's known as a left uni, there's not really an issue with it. Because she didn't ask when she put in the first and middle names as one name, she didn't say is this right, she just did it. In their system because with QTAC it gives you heaps of gender options, I figured it didn't matter so I put a male in there. So it's like that in the uni as well.

Facilitator: So what are your options? Male, female?

Interviewee: They have other, and I think you could write one in, I'm not sure.

Facilitator: Then other?

Interviewee: Yeah, because they usually have the three, sometimes they don't have other.

Facilitator: So you can do - rightio.

Interviewee: When they don't have other that's usually when I hit female because I'm not sure if they needed the biological thing. I'm not sure with that sometimes.

Facilitator: It's slowly catching up isn't it.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Will your birth certificate ever change, because it currently says female?

Interviewee: You have to have a hysterectomy to change your gender legally because you can't...

Facilitator: So hang on so you can't have children?

Interviewee: Yeah, that's all you need is the hysterectomy.

Facilitator: That's a very medical thing isn't it, because that's basically saying once you've had a hysterectomy, which you might have ovarian cancer, you might need to, you are no longer a female. Well that's really shit, what if you want to be? I had no idea, I didn't realise that that was what you had to do.

Interviewee: No, I looked it up because countries have different things. I know in America sometimes you need to be on hormones or you just need to go to the doctor and write a letter. In Canada you can just do it, it doesn't matter. I think in Victoria they did, or maybe New South Wales, maybe ACT, I don't remember, it was one of those ones but they did change the way you could [just change it] and now you didn't have to have medical or anything.

Facilitator: I guess if you're transitioning into a male you want to get rid of your ovaries anyway because you're never going to be able to fully transition as long as you've got ovaries. So I guess it does make sense but it's very, it's a very medical thing for something that shouldn't be.

Interviewee: I think it's more to do with women can have children, so if you can't have children then you're a man now if you want to be.

Facilitator: So back to the group. Did you go to the Pride?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: How did you find that?

Interviewee: It was pretty good, we got to hold the flag and stuff and just walked there and there was heaps of different people so we could go and walk around however we wanted, it didn't matter.

Facilitator: Did you feel free? Because I remember Ren saying it was kind of like hey I'm like you, I'm like you. Did it feel like that? Because that's what the other guys said to me as well, it felt really like a community, like you were...

Interviewee: I think it did, it was ages ago but you did because we were all in the big group and we were all marching together and there were people on the sides yelling like yeah.

Interviewee: I can go next year definitely because I'll be in Brisbane.

Facilitator: You can also go into the 18 plus tent next year which apparently is actually not that exciting anyway. Peter's like yeah there was nothing in there.

Interviewee: I'm guessing there'd probably be some stuff in there that's like children can't see that, it's like I don't want to go in there anyway.

Facilitator: The other question is really what do people expect to be in there? Just because you're LBGTQI doesn't necessarily mean you're going to have an orgy.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: Which comes back to identity. Do you find people, once you tell them, do they ask you stupid questions?

Interviewee: I haven't had that yet but I'm waiting for it to happen because I've heard that that's very popular thing to happen.

Facilitator: The whole, as Thomas said does that mean can you be monogamous? Or in saying that there's a lot of heterosexual people that aren't monogamous, so why, you know. It's the whole label thing I think.

Interviewee: It's like people, the stereotypes who are like oh yeah, they're definitely like that.

Facilitator: So you haven't had any of that?

Interviewee: Not really, in my drama class when I first said that I changed my name, then there was two girls who I actually told why. Then they asked me some stupid questions, I think one of them just asked what

my plans were and whose bathroom I use currently, I think that was about it.

Facilitator: Yeah, stuff like that, you go how does that work? Because at school, is there a unisex one at school?

Interviewee: No. I tried to not go.

Facilitator: Did you have a choice?

Interviewee: No, no one ever asked. I think probably if I said to the school can I use the other one I think they'd probably be cool with it.

Facilitator: School are cool?

Interviewee: The staff were actually really cool with it. I think I was just worrying about the students because some of the boys that I didn't like and I feel like if I went in there they'd be like who let you in.

Facilitator: Because they're just thugs? You know what I mean, or they're just idiots.

Interviewee: Yeah, I don't know, I feel like they just wouldn't get it, they'd think I was a weirdo or something. So I didn't go in there because of the students, not because I wasn't allowed to.

Facilitator: Because I do wonder how some schools cope with that sort of stuff. Technically you can't fully transition until you're 18 anyway, so I guess schools don't really have to worry about that too much do they because there's no legal, you know, legally they don't have to. Because my friend teaches in the UK and it's a huge deal over there. She teachers at a Catholic school, I'm just trying to think if it was a female that was transitioning into a male and wanted to wear shorts and not a skirt. They wouldn't let them, and it was all over the papers, through the whole of England about the discrimination.

I said to her, because I sent back a few questions because she obviously knew that I did it as my thing, and I went oh my god seriously, wearing shorts. Then it did come down to which toilet to use as well, that was the other issue. But being a Catholic school it was really - and I went oh, but see over there Catholic schools are like state schools. So Catholic schools are like the poor schools because England's a Protestant so the Catholics are the poor people over there. So it's all really crazy but I went wow.

Interviewee: Is it state controlled?

Facilitator: Yeah. It's really weird, it's an odd system. But in the end they did actually have to legally go you know what, no you can be whatever but boy did it damage that school's reputation. But because they're Catholic they were upholding the Catholic ethos so it became really messy as. I was wondering what it was like in Australia because...

Interviewee: Well I think we're not like that. Private schools probably I don't think I would enjoy a private school experience feeling all of this as well. I was looking at changing to the other uniform, the boy's uniform, even though they're basically the same.

Facilitator: So they're similar?

Interviewee: They're basically the same, they're just a different shirt, slightly different shirt. I looked it up in the government rules for the schools and they have to let you wear whatever.

Facilitator: Yeah, as long as it's a uniform.

Interviewee: Because the uniforms have to be unisex, they can differentiate and say this is the girl's uniform, this is the boy's uniform, but they can't tell you no you can't wear the other one.

Facilitator: So at what age would you have considered? Was that after you legally changed your name?

Interviewee: That was before, probably Grade 12-ish. I didn't get to legally change my name until late Grade 12 even though I had changed it with school and people that I knew.

Facilitator: Did you have any friends who knew you by your previous name, or did that change at the same time as you changed schools?

Interviewee: I didn't really figure this out until Grade 11. So there were people who did know my old name but because, I don't know, I feel like because I was changing my name I became a bit more confident. People actually knew me after that, they didn't really before that. So they don't...

Facilitator: It was like yeah that person over there.

Interviewee: Yeah, they don't even remember my old name. People from Centenary who they only knew my name before I left, they said they forgot my old name too.

Facilitator: This is the thing, you just go I know your face but god I don't remember your name. So Mackenzie, oh awesome, that's not hard because it's like they didn't remember you anyway.

Interviewee: So it's pretty good, they'd forgotten my old name so it didn't matter.

Facilitator: The informal group, is there anything - so you say it's a social group and it's chatty and it's all that, is there anything extra good about that group or anything you'd change about that group?

Interviewee: I don't know, it's really good to go there and just be able to be myself. I can anyway but it just has that accepting, you know, and that's pretty cool. Even though we talk about political stuff it's not like these massive debates, we have all these different opinions. I'm

sure we all have different opinions about stuff but we don't have to worry about that and get into debates about stuff.

Facilitator: I think we'd all agree Donald Trump's an idiot, so that's a start.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: How do you find the fact that there's adults that sit there, is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Interviewee: I think it's pretty good because it adds a difference to the age group and stuff. They're like they've been through at a different time as well so it tells this experience of how it used to be for them.

Facilitator: How do you find that, you read some of the stories about like Lynette, she's obviously my age, she says 20 years ago she came out, and some of the stories - or even Rod's a really good example like he's 'old'. How do you find those stories?

Interviewee: It's sad because back then they had a hard time, but it's also, it actually shows how much it has changed. Because it doesn't seem like it has been because I haven't been alive very long so it's like all this is bad for me, speed it up, but it's like yeah well it has changed a lot. So it's like it will get there eventually so it's pretty good actually to hear about the bad times...

Facilitator: I know what you mean. That's good because sometimes having adults in the group can change things. But do you feel like it's just a group of people catching up or do you feel like there's a real power balance between the adults and the...

Interviewee: No, I think it's pretty good with that. We're all just hanging out, you're not above us because you're adults, we're just friends and chilling out.

Facilitator: Good, I mean that's the purpose and that's what I find with the informal learning that power balance is what changes things. If you've got adults going well I'm the adult and I'm saying this, it stuffs everything.

Interviewee: Yeah, it would change the whole group.

Facilitator: Stuffs everything up. Obviously you're going to Brisbane, is there something like this in Brisbane? Have you found something in Brisbane?

Interviewee: I haven't planned to go to anything in Brisbane but I think there is a few. That's why one started up here because there were ones in Brisbane but people can't go there all the time, Minus18 I think is up there, or is that the Sydney one? I'm not sure, there is one up in Brisbane.

Facilitator: Although Toowoomba's painful transport-wise, sometimes Brisbane, if it's on the other side of Brissie to where you live their transport

system's okay but it's not amazing. Do you have a car or are you going to be using the public transport?

Interviewee: I don't have a licence so I'll have to use the public transport.

Facilitator: That's why you're staying across from campus obviously.

Interviewee: Yeah, but it's really good because there's pretty much everything there. I'll only travel out for certain stuff.

Facilitator: I'm just trying to think is there anything else. Even though there's no power balance you are probably one of the more senior, for want of a better word, of the group. So you're already comfortable in yourself and already confident, as you said you already knew before you came to that group, so it probably didn't change a lot for you.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: But I do wonder if it's changed stuff for other people, seeing you. Like some of the younger ones, there's only a couple of young ones.

Interviewee: I don't know, I'm not sure. I think a bunch of people that have come have usually figured it out already, they're just there to hang out and stuff. But I think it would probably help some people who are still figuring it out, because they can ask questions to some people who know about it and all that.

Facilitator: I guess that was the other thing that Scott was wondering, because it quite clearly says LGBTI group, end of story. So then you've got people who are going well if I go to that group, I have to identify as one of those. Whereas, and this is what we were talking about at the end of last year, what about if you aren't confident enough to say well I am bisexual, I am transgender, I am - but you want somewhere to go. Do you think that group and the way it's advertised and set up would allow someone? Like if you were reading it, and I know it's a bit hard because I can't review everything, do you think if someone was struggling they'd go oh that might be a good group?

Interviewee: Currently I would hope so, it would be pretty good for them but I don't think that they would. I feel like if they're questioning about that sort of stuff, they're also worried about what if I'm not and I go to this group? It's like well then what was the point? They think that they go there and then not having figured it out is an issue and stuff like that.

Facilitator: Yeah, because they're going well everyone's figured it out, I'm not sure. That's where Scott, you know, we were talking at the end of last year going well can you make it more inclusive or does that then become an issue? I think I'm a perfect example, I said to Bec when she said oh you need to talk to this group. I said yeah, but I'm not LGBTQI, are they going to go there's the door, don't let it hit you on on the way out? She's like oh no they're not like that, don't worry

about that. So you wonder if that could be something that might be stopping other people, young people, because being a teenager in itself is hard enough let alone having to figure out if you're a 'minority'.

So that's the one thing that I'm thinking well, because honestly everyone I've interviewed, you've all pretty much, you already know where you're going. The group's, yeah, it's there and it's friendly and it's a chat and it's nice to have people to chat, but you're all very well, you all know who you are. I'm trying to figure out how to get people who aren't 100 per cent sure but just need that little bit of support.

Interviewee: I'm not entirely sure either, if you put something on there like if you're not sure you can still come...

Facilitator: Yeah, we figured that out anyway. Awesome, well that's probably about all I need I think. Is there anything you want to add?

Interviewee: I don't think so.

Facilitator: All right we'll end that right now then.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**