Masculinities, friendship and support in gay and straight men's close relationships with other men

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, gay and straight men's experiences in male friendships were examined in order to explore differences and similarities between the participants' construction of masculinities. A social constructionist approach to understanding human experience was utilised, through an examination of in-depth interviews with 21 men (10 straight, 11 gay). The data was interpreted following a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, utilising the lens of Gestalt therapy theory, resulting in a series of essence statements, which expressed the underlying structures of the participants' experiences of masculinity. These findings revealed constructions of masculinities which were explored in relation to the participants' close male friendships and support seeking processes. A major finding was the importance of shame as a regulating variable in the gay and straight participants' construction of their masculinity. Shame or avoidance of shame appeared to be linked to the influence of a dominant heterosexual masculine ideology. It was revealed that whilst dominant masculine ideologies were experienced as powerful 'background' beliefs, the participants were able to construct contemporaneous masculinities that were contextual and field sensitive. Thus the concept of masculinities appears inherently fluid, and changeable. Furthermore, the results indicated different definitions of friendship which appeared to be related to different constructions of masculinity. The gay participants' friendships were described in interpersonal terms compared with the straight participants' friendships which appeared more focussed on external activities. The experience of shame, or fear of the potential for shame emerged as important variables that influenced intimacy, closeness and distance in gay and straight participants' friendships and their ability to seek and receive emotional social support. The finding that men appear to seek help from male friends in ways that are consistent with their constructions of masculinity has important implications for fostering supportive interactions between men. Furthermore, an understanding of men's experiences regarding what constitutes a supportive interaction and defines intimacy appears important as these views will most likely guide their decision making processes about from whom and how they might seek support. Finally, the possibilities for constructing new masculinities are explored as men's friendships and support behaviour are both influenced by, and in turn influence, the construction of masculinities.

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Completing this study would not have been possible without the support of many people, including my close friends, colleagues and family. I would first, like to express my appreciation for the support of my partner, Ricardo, whose tireless encouragement both practically and emotionally has sustained me throughout.

The participants, who generously gave of their time and personal experiences, also deserve acknowledgment. I hope that their experiences are accurately presented here.

I was fortunate throughout this project to have the support and guidance of two supervisors, Roger Cook, and Simone Buzwell. Their patience and sustained interest in this project is especially appreciated in the numerous reading and re-reading of drafts.

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A thankyou to my Gestalt colleagues, both here in Australia and overseas, who have inspired and encouraged me. In particular I wish to thank Linsey Howie and Leanne O'Shea for their support and intellectual guidance. It has been through my initial introduction to the Gestalt approach, initially as a client and later as a practitioner and teacher that I have had the opportunity to study with and learn from other Gestalt therapists and practitioners.

Finally, no research project on men's friendships is complete without an acknowledgment of the love, support and companionship of my male friends, both gay and straight, who have both knowingly and unknowingly informed this research project. I would particularly like to thank Ross Quail, Matt Dickson, Noel Haarburger, Tim

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material, previously admitted for a degree in any University, College of Advanced Education, or any other educational institution, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

I further declare that the ethical principles and procedures specified by the Swinburne University of Technology, School of Life and Social Sciences, Human Research Ethics Committee have been adhered to in the preparation of this thesis.

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Preamble

About six years ago whilst completing my training in Gestalt Therapy, I was introduced to the concept of shame in psychotherapy research and practice. I immediately recognised in myself previous experiences of humiliation, fear of rejection from others, and the self-repulsion that characterises shame responses. These experiences have formed the background to the current phenomenological study. As Spinelli (2005) notes, phenomenological research involves a process of uncovering meaning emerging from interrelations between the researcher, the participants and key life events. Thus my experience as the researcher is acknowledged and made transparent as I am the research instrument.

In my struggles to come out as a gay[1] man in my late twenties, I experienced considerable shame and fear of being shamed. I wished to have more satisfying connections with others, particularly men, but struggled with intimacy. I was deeply concerned that I might be found to be deficient for not living up to perceived male ideals. My fear of deficiency contributed to a carefully managed outer image of masculinity (i.e. participation in aggressive sports like rugby and drinking contests). Whilst a client of individual and group therapy in the early 90's, I gained insight into my issues of identity, which were deeply connected to a desire to conform to traditional masculine stereotypes. No wonder I avoided intimacy! I later realised that many of these issues were deeply connected to my fear of shame, and my fear of homosexuality. One of my fears during this time, which continues today, although in reduced intensity, was that my friends would find me unacceptable and that I would be rejected. This fear often prevented me from seeking out emotional and social support at times when it was greatly needed.

Through my 'coming out'[2] process and subsequent therapeutic insights, I realised that my shame experiences and fear of shame had influenced my development as a man and

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[1] The term gay is used in this study to refer to men who identify as homosexual. The term homosexual is occasionally used, usually to reflect the usage in a reference work.

[2] Also referred to colloquially as 'coming out of the closet', which refers to a personal decision to adopt an identity as a gay person and disclosing this identity to others, see discussion in Section 1.3.2.4.

my beliefs about manhood. In particular, I recognised that my relationships with men were characterised by protecting my vulnerability and appearing 'appropriately masculine'. My fear of vulnerability also prevented me from experiencing greater intimacy with friends. Because of working through these issues, I have recognised the importance of support from friends and colleagues, and in particular from my male friends, both gay and straight[3]. I discovered that I was not alone; my friends held similar fears and anxieties about shame. Fear of vulnerability and shame in relationships continues to be an important theme in my life. I continue to learn that vulnerability enhances interpersonal contact, rather than preventing contact.

My interest in shame and the importance of relational support has also extended to my previous work as a prison psychologist with male sexual and violent offenders. Working with offenders gave me an opportunity to observe the consequences of a particularly negative aspect of masculinity; on the men themselves and on those affected by their actions (i.e. offender and victims' families). Furthermore, working in a prison environment provided an unusual opportunity to observe enactments of masculinity in a residential community of men, where issues of power and domination were magnified. Through intimidation and acts of violence, the construction of a type of dominant masculinity was observed in which power and the related fear of being powerless co-existed (M. Kaufman, 1987). Men in prison view each other as competitors and aggressors and display a type of masculinity that some researchers have called toxic masculinity (Kupers, 2005); others have described it as hypermasculinity (e.g. Thurston, 1996). Whilst there are numerous psychological and criminological theories of offending behaviour, some theorists have identified a link between shame based personality styles and offending behaviour (e.g. Krugman, 1995). Many offenders explain their aggressive behaviour from a traditional masculine ideology framework, albeit a distorted one from an outsider's point of view (i.e. defending one's manhood). Offenders' explanations for their offences are often assertively masculine. Furthermore, it is theorised that some male offending behaviour (e.g. rage and extreme violence) originates out of shame based syndromes that may be linked to fears of personal inadequacy as men (Krugman, 1995). Furthermore an examination of anti-gay violence

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[3] The term straight is used to refer to men who identify as heterosexual. The term heterosexual is also used on occasions throughout the thesis, usually to reflect the usage of an original reference.

has revealed the underlying assertion of heterosexuality in these acts (Herek, 1990). These expressions of hypermasculinity have been be theorised by Brooks and Silverstein (1995) as distorted expressions of traditional masculinity. I was struck by the displays of hypermasculinity that occurred in prison environments and the violence and aggression that male prisoners enacted on each other. It struck me that the men struggled to find helpful ways of emotionally supporting each other, partly because of a fear of transgressing masculinity norms. Issues of masculinity were present in both the men's offences, and their experience of living together whilst imprisoned.

Later, my work in a family therapy agency with gay and straight HIV positive men gave me an insight into the shame issues associated with the diagnosis and stigma of HIV/AIDS (Stynes, Lipp & Minichiello, 1996). I was struck by the number of gay men attending counselling with shame issues that were often connected to masculine identity concerns. I was also curious about the differences (and similarities) between gay and straight masculinities. Many gay men reported a reluctance to disclose their HIV status with their close gay friends. Presenting issues were often not primarily related to HIV per se, but were about issues of identity, stigma and lack of social and emotional support. My clinical experience has led me to question the role of social and emotional support in gay men's friendships and the role of shame as a regulating factor in preventing men from seeking support.

Counselling Vietnam veterans has also given me an insight into another aspect of masculinity and help seeking. Many Vietnam veterans suffer serious mental health issues, including post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is often co-morbid with other problems such as alcohol dependence (Department of Veterans Affairs, 1998). In providing group therapy programs for Vietnam veterans, the avoidance of vulnerability and the reluctance to seek out other veterans for emotional support was evident. Despite the reports from many veterans, that their service mates are the closest and most trusted friends they have, females are often sought out for emotional support, not other men. However, the veterans do seek each other out for support, although not in ways that might be construed by outsiders as emotionally supportive. Joining for reunions, fishing trips, often with co-existence of alcohol are perceived as supportive activities, but to what extent are these activities experienced as emotionally supportive?

These personal and clinical experiences led me to question the construction of masculinities in male-male interactions, and the influence of masculine ideologies as regulating 'appropriate' behaviour in straight and gay men. Furthermore, I was aware that many men frequently undervalue each other as sources of support. In addition, my clinical experience was that many men do not consider their close friends as sources of emotional support.

It seems that men desire closeness with other men, particularly their close friends, but appear bound by a code of traditional masculine beliefs that limits intimacy and vulnerability in and between men. I was curious about the role of shame in the construction and ongoing maintenance of contemporary masculinity, and the possible differences between gay and straight men's experiences. Furthermore, I was interested in the ways in which men did support each other and the factors, both internal and external, which helped or hindered this process. These questions are the background to the current study. This study represents an attempt to further my own understanding of men and masculinities as well contributing to the psychological literature at both a methodological and phenomenological level.

Introduction

In studies of men and masculinity, the acknowledgement of the pluralisation of masculinities is a relatively recent advance (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1987; Connell, 1995). Although the notion of a singular reified masculinity has been made redundant; many psychological studies of men reveal an underlying essentialist epistemology. To this end, the contributions of gay men and gay masculinities have been frequently omitted from studies of men and masculinities. Until relatively recently, the majority of psychological studies on men have focussed on heterosexual men as the norm and pathologised gay men as abnormal and deviant (Kitzinger & Coyle, 2002). However, the emerging field of gay and lesbian psychology has begun to challenge the heteronormativity of psychology as a practice and as a science (e.g. Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002; Riggs & Walker, 2004). These developments have highlighted the importance of understanding men (and women) and their behaviour within a contextual framework. Within sociology, there is research emerging that examines men and masculinities from a diversity of class, race and sexual identity (e.g. Connell, 1991; M. Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005; Mac an Ghaill, 1996) and some of these ideas are being incorporated into psychological research (e.g. Frosh & Phoenix, 2001). In previous studies of men and masculinities, gay men's experiences have often been absent as they have often been positioned as the 'other'- existing outside the boundaries of 'normal' masculinity (Connell, Radican & Martin, 1989; Dowsett, 1993). Furthermore, there are very few studies that compare and contrast gay and straight men's experiences of masculinity and friendship; for exceptions see Price (1999) and Fee (2000). In the current study, it is argued that men both construct their sense of masculinity and are constructed 'as men' by others, and in particular by close male friends. By bringing this construction of masculinity into sharper focus, it is hoped to gain a greater understanding of how these processes may influence men's ability to seek and receive support from other men.

There is a growing interest in the study of men and masculinities. This is evidenced by the emergence of masculinity and men's studies as legitimate areas of study in the social sciences (e.g. Connell, 1995; Dowsett, 1993; Edgar, 1997; M. Kimmel, 1987; M. Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005; Morgan, 1992; Pease, 2002; Seidler, 1994; Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). The interest has extended to academic publications on men (e.g. the

Journal of Men and Masculinities) which has included contributions from sociology, anthropology, psychology, and the psychotherapy literature (e.g. Addis & Cohane 2005; Brooks & Good, 2001; Good, Thomson & Braithwaite, 2005; Levant & Pollack 1995). The current interest in masculinity has not arisen by chance; there is a social and political background to the emergence of men's studies. The modern study of men and masculinity owes much to the academic and social advances brought about by feminism and feminist writers (Chodorow, 1978; Gardiner, 2005; Gilligan, 1982) and contributions from the gay movement (Altman, 1972; Nardi, 2000; K. Plummer, 1981).

Recent 'men's studies' developments in Australia have included the University of Western Sydney Men's Health Centre, Men's Health Annual National Conference, and the Australian Psychological Society's Interest Group in Men and Masculinities. Men's studies' programs have emerged in most Australian universities as subjects in their own right (e.g. Pease, 2002), or have been embedded within existing programs. Recent Australian publications (e.g. Tomsen & Donaldson, 2003), as well as the online Men's Bibliography (Flood, 2006), now in it's 14th edition, are indicative of the academic interest in men and masculinities in this country. Furthermore, there is an increased interest in men and masculinity in the popular press (e.g. Biddulph, 1994) and with discussion of alternative terms for men such as 'snags', 'metro-sexuals', and a greater visibility of gay men and gay lifestyles. In Australia masculinity issues have been prominent in the current 'crisis' in educating boys (e.g. Biddulph, 1997), as teachers, parents and legislators grapple with reports of boys' declining performance at school and a perceived need for male role models (see Mills & Lingard, 1997; Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004). Overall, interest in the study of men and masculinities has gained significant momentum.

The modern study of men and masculinities has arisen through a growing recognition in the social sciences of the importance of gender and gender relations (e.g. Connell, 1987, 2002). Following the advances in gender theory that have taken place over the last thirty years (e.g. Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987), there is now a greater recognition in the social sciences of the social construction of gender (Pease, 2002), and a realisation within psychology of the importance of studying within-group gender variability (Addis & Cohane, 2005). To this end, attention has focussed on the social construction of masculinities within and between class and cultural differences,

rather than the study of distinct, internalised sex-roles (Pleck, 1981). Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the need to acknowledge the 'position' of the researcher, as a gendered being, as an important influence on the subject of study (Hegarty & Pratto, 2004; Morgan, 1992). To this end, an outline of my background is included in the preamble in an attempt to make my perspective transparent and a discussion of the issues of potential bias and interpretation is included in Chapter Four (methodology).

In the current study, men's support-seeking behaviour; in particular, men's ability and inclination to seek out other men for social, emotional and psychological support is examined. It is hypothesised that the degree and manner in which men seek each other out for closeness and intimacy may be related to their personal construction of masculinity. A key goal was to examine the construction of masculinities in both gay and straight men's friendships, in order to understand male–male intimacy, and emotional support seeking. In doing so, it is important to examine the meaning given to terms support and intimacy from a male point of view. Traditional definitions of masculinity have emphasised stoicism, low levels of emotional expression, aggression, competitiveness, strength and a focus on the provider role (Edgar, 1997). Although contemporary definitions of masculinity in Australia have changed (Tomsen & Donaldson, 2003), it is theorised that central elements of traditional masculinity remain, particularly an avoidance of vulnerability. It is proposed that the experience of vulnerability for many men is one of shame, because of the perceived failure to conform to traditional male expectations. In order to avoid the uncomfortable feelings of shame, friendships with other men may be organised around avoiding shame. Yontef (1996) argues that what is considered shameful is defined culturally and the process of constructing masculinity occurs within cultural settings. Thus, examining both gay and straight men's constructions of masculinity and their close friendships, may further illuminate a link between shame, vulnerability and masculinity.

Masculinity is not a static concept but an ongoing process that is constructed in interaction and it is more accurate to speak of a plurality of masculinities (Connell, 1987, 1995; Buchbinder, 1994). The existence of masculinities is evident through examining 'power' relationships between masculinities, as Connell (1995) has argued pointing to hegemonic masculinities which subordinate and marginalise other less socially powerful masculinities (e.g. gay masculinities). Connell (1987, 1993) has

argued that the institutions of the state, the workplace and the family are of particular importance in constructing masculinities. To this list, I add men's friendships which are able to exist outside of institutional control (Little, 1989) and as such present opportunities for challenging hegemonic masculinity (Nardi, 1992a, 1992b). The concept of hegemonic masculinity has received criticism for failing to adequately account for the process by which men acquire a gendered identity (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 1999). I believe there is a danger in reifying the concept of hegemonic masculinity, without examining men's experiences of being and becoming men. It is theorised that masculinities are enacted and performed in interactions with others, and men's friendships are an important aspect of this process.

Men's close friendships may provide a valuable source of insight into the enactment of masculinity and the ways in which interpersonal vulnerability and shame are avoided (Reisman, 1990: Strikwerda & May, 1992; K. Walker, 2004). Friendships have received increased attention in sociological and psychological research in which the study of close relationships has expanded to include the process dimension of relationships as well as their enduring qualities (Clark & Reis, 1988; Duck & Pond, 1989; Sherrod, 1989). Friendships (in general), are regarded as important sources of emotional and social support, as well as places where personal identities are shaped and confirmed (Duck, 1991; Pahl, 2000). Whilst most men report several male friendships, and often their closest friendships are with men, research suggests that men are less likely to seek other males for emotional support and are more likely to seek out women (Morman & Floyd, 1998). Of interest in the present study is the way in which men negotiate and manage the personal and interpersonal dimensions of close friendships with other men.

In the present study, men's construction of masculinity and perceptions of their male friendships as sources of support are explored. A specific key objective was to understand aspects of the support process and the enabling and disabling qualities of men's relationships. Through an exploration of men's styles of relating, their awareness of needs for support and their ability to ask for and receive support was examined.

To adopt an inclusive view of masculinity, both straight and gay men were included in the present study and intimacy and emotional support in their close friendships were explored. Using a phenomenological approach, a rich description of men's friendships

was elicited, particularly their views about what defined these friendships, and how they managed interpersonal boundaries and regulated intimacy.

The research project is informed by the social constructionist approach (Gergen, 1985) in understanding the construction of masculinities in social settings (explained further in Chapter Four). The Gestalt approach provides a useful framework for studying the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of support seeking in men and between men, and the meanings attributed to these interactions. In particular, the notion of contact styles is helpful. Gestalt theory draws on three major theoretical paradigms: existential phenomenology (Spinelli, 2005), field theory (Parlett, 1991, 1993; Wheeler, 1996; Yontef, 1993) and dialogic process (Hycner & Jacobs, 1995). An existential phenomenological view of personal awareness (Spinelli, 2005) posits that the entire nature of reality is subjective and determined by the position and subjectivity of the viewer (Owen, 1994a; Spinelli, 2005). Thus it is men's experiences of their friendships and the meanings given to significant interactions with close friends that are of interest.

In field theory, as understood in the Gestalt approach, individual experience can only be understood by acknowledging the influence of context and environment (Yontef & Jacobs, 2005). It proposed that individuals create their own phenomenological fields as well as being influenced by the wider field or culture. Thus an exploration of individual experience also requires an understanding of the context in which an individual lives (Yontef & Jacobs). Following this view, the subject of inquiry is the gendered field of masculinity in which men exist. The individualistic paradigm of 'the self' and psyche is challenged and a radical 'self in relation' understanding of a sense of self is proposed (Yontef, 1997). To this end, healthy functioning is defined in Gestalt terms as organismic self regulation, which is the ability of an individual to exist in an interdependent relationship with the environment and other people in the environment (Mackewn, 1997). This approach is helpful to the current study of men and masculinity because it provides a theoretical methodology for understanding men in their relationships with other men and within the social construction of masculinity.

The empirical psychological study of men and masculinities, although influenced by feminist theory and the gay movement is largely based on an internalised, acontextual theory of gender (Smiler, 2004). Despite attempts to move away from the sex-role

model (e.g. Pleck, 1981), much of the recent empirical psychological research based on the gender role conflict (e.g. O'Neil, Good & Holmes, 1995) and the gender role stress paradigm, (e.g. Eisler & Blalock, 1991) fails to take into account a process view of masculinity (Addis & Cohane, 2005). Of particular importance is understanding the process of construction of masculinities. In the current qualitative study gay and straight men's phenomenological experiences of masculinity in close friendship interactions are explored. A key aim is to add to the existing body of knowledge on masculinities and to identify further directions and methodologies for research on the construction of masculinities.

Importance of this research

Examining perceptions of support by men is of vital importance in developing a better understanding of why men do and do not seek support as *"developing an ability to both provide self-support and to seek support from outside of self is necessary for psychological maturity"* (Yontef, 1993, p.56). Thus identifying and seeking support is considered an important aspect of psychological functioning.

In addition, developing a deeper understanding of the process by which masculinity is constructed by examining friendship interactions with other men, will add to the understanding of the contextual nature of masculinities.

It is intended that this research project will provide useful information for psychologists, counsellors, teachers, parents, and those in relationships with men and for men in general. Assisting men to identify their emotional support needs and expanding their support network to include their male friends as sources of support can only be of benefit to men. It is hoped that this study will also contribute to the field of counselling psychology and to the field of men's studies, in adding to the understanding of the complex process of masculinity formation and enactment in men. There is a lack of detailed qualitative data in the area of men's perceptions of support from male friends, particularly where gay and straight men are compared and contrasted. Therefore the present study will contribute to a theoretical understanding of the support seeking processes in men of different masculinities.

Outline of the thesis

In Chapter One, the social science literature on the study of men and masculinity is explored and places the present study within the context of the social constructionist approach. Furthermore, a brief historical overview of the study of gender, men and masculinity is provided which places current conceptions of masculinity within a socio-political context.

In Chapter Two the literature on friendships in general is reviewed and then, in some detail, gay and straight men's friendships. A historical account of men's friendships and relational capacity is provided in order to situate the current study in a wider context.

In Chapter Three, a brief review of the literature on men's physical and mental health needs and styles of help seeking is provided. The existing literature on social and emotional support is also explored and a link is made between constructions of masculinity and men's styles of help seeking. Following a relational and existential framework, men's need and desire for friendship is reported. Finally, bringing together the previously reported literature, the aims and objectives of the current study are outlined.

In Chapter Four, the method for the present study is outlined and a rationale for the use of the qualitative methodology chosen in the current study is provided.

In Chapter Five results from the straight men's experiences of masculinity (Section 5.1), friendship (Section 5.2) and emotional and social support (Section 5.3) are presented and discussed. The key findings are reviewed against previous research conducted in the area.

In Chapter Six, the findings from the gay participant's experiences of masculinity (Section 6.1), friendship (Section 6.2) and emotional and social support (Section 6.3) are discussed and reviewed in light of previous research.

In Chapter Seven, the gay and straight participants' experiences of masculinity, close friendships and support behaviour are compared and contrasted. Key similarities and differences are reported.

In Chapter Eight a summary of the main findings and their implications are discussed. The present study concludes with an acknowledgment of the limitations of the present study and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 1 Masculinity and Masculinities

In this chapter, the literature on men and masculinities is reviewed as a background to understanding support seeking in gay and straight men's male friendships. The historical antecedents of the modern study of masculinity including feminism and gay rights are covered briefly in order to locate the present study. Of interest is the construction of gay and straight masculinities; their differences and similarities. It is theorised that men's construction of their masculinity influences their ability to seek and accept support from other men. The literature on support seeking will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Three. Gay and straight men's sense of their own masculinity is considered central to their ability to consider their need for support and their ability to accept emotional support. Furthermore, men's friendships are believed to be important places where men construct their masculinity. It is a central argument of this thesis, that gay and straight men construct their masculinity in interaction with others, but that there are key differences in this process.

An overview of the sociological and psychological study of men and masculinities within a historical and social context is provided in this chapter. The empirical psychological research literature is then reviewed, and the limitations of this research are discussed. The merits of the social constructionist approach to studying gender and masculinity are then advanced and the applicability of this approach to the current research project is outlined. Next, the relevant literature on homosexuality, homophobia and sexual identity is reviewed in order to orient the concept of masculinity within a wider political and social context. I then discuss the psychological concept of shame and the link to masculinity, homosexuality and homophobia. The literature on men's friendships will be examined in Chapter Two.

1.1 Historical antecedents- the study of gender

It is only recently that men have been studied 'as men' (M. Kimmel, 2000). The great majority of all previous social research and theory has been implicitly about men, and in particular straight men, as the generic exemplar of 'mankind' (Pease, 2002). As Morgan (1992) notes, it is feminism that has placed a critical focus on the study of men, and challenged the notion that men are genderless (M. Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005).

Historically, feminists have attempted to challenge the 'naturalness' of the gender order (e.g. De Beauvoir, 1949), but these insights have not been taken up within 'men's studies' until relatively recently. It is perhaps men's reluctance to acknowledge and examine patriarchy that has prevented a critical study of men and masculinity. Alternatively, as M. Kimmel and Messner (2004) note, the mechanisms that afford privilege are often invisible to those who are privileged (e.g. men). Several strategies are offered here to make the study of men explicit and to further the study of men and gender.

By acknowledging patriarchy, it is possible to examine the social structures that contribute to the formation of gender and social inequality (M. Kaufman, 1987, 1994). M. Kimmel, Hearn and Connell (2005) offer guidelines for the critical study of men which are adopted in the present study; including acknowledging the authorship of gay, feminist and other critical writers. By including writers who have challenged the dominant gender order, an attempt is made in the present study to critically examine the concept of masculinity and to acknowledge the existence of masculinities. Whilst I acknowledge my position as a white middle class man, I assert that the critical study of men needs men, such as myself, to take responsibility for pursuing academic research. Furthermore, I believe that my position as a gay man provides an opportunity to examine the field of masculinity through the critical lens of the 'other'. As Dowsett (1993) notes, gay men occupy a unique position, not quite within the domain nor completely outside the domain of masculinity. Thus my perspective is both as a 'participant' within the field of masculinities, and as an observer and interpreter of others' masculinities.

As a result of social changes and in parallel with men's studies programs, a 'men's movement' has arisen in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia although there is some debate about its definition (e.g. Clatterbaugh, 1990; Pease, 2002; Zipper, 1993). For example, M. Kimmel and Messner (1989) report four trends in the North American men's movement: anti feminist, men's rights, mythopoetical and profeminist. Adding to this list, Clatterbaugh (1990, 1994) has identified seven forces in the American men's movement; conservative, profeminist, men's rights, spiritual, socialist, gay and anti racist. In Australia, Flood (1998) notes four strands: anti-sexist and profeminist, men's liberation, spiritual or mythopoetic and men's rights (including

fathers' rights). A concerning development in Australia, as in North America, has been the emergence of organised anti-feminist men's groups, in which men are seen as victims of feminism (see Flood, 2004). This 'backlash' movement appears to have gathered momentum around the desire to change aspects of family law, which are perceived to be discriminatory toward fathers. However, it is the essentialist underpinnings of this movement that are the most concerning, as I believe this view connotes entitlement and the pursuit of a 'natural' gender order. Following Flood (1998), it is important to acknowledge that several alternative masculinities do not directly fall within the men's movement perspective, such as gay rights and queer[4] rights politics (e.g. Reynolds, 2002). However, Flood argues that coalitions between different groups and movements may be an effective way to bring about social change (i.e. challenging patriarchy and homophobia). The current study is not located explicitly within a section of the men's movement, although I am aligned with many of the principles of the profeminist and gay movement in which a critical study of men is important. In particular, the principles of gender equality are held to be important as well as challenging any discrimination because of sexuality or sex.

Dominant forms of masculinity still exist, and their enactment results in the ongoing oppression of gays, women and of men themselves (Morgan, 1992; Pease, 1997). Whilst it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine women's experiences, it is acknowledged that the subject of masculinity is intimately linked to the subject of femininity and women. Furthermore, the modern study of men and masculinity has arisen largely because of the influence of feminism (Edley & Wetherell, 1996; M. Kaufman, 1987; Morgan, 1992). However, the focus of the present study is on gay and straight men's experiences alone as an important aspect of the study of men and masculinity.

1.2 Men and masculinities

There has been enormous political change in gender politics over the past forty years (Carrigan, et al., 1987), notably the importance of the women's movement, the gay rights movement and the men's movement since the late 1960's in Australia. These

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[4] Queer, is used in contemporary times as a political term which defies precise definition, but which often refers to non-heterosexuals (Jagose, 1996).

movements have challenged the existing social and gender order in far reaching ways (e.g. increased female participation in the workforce, new laws regarding sexual harassment and discrimination, increased visibility and acceptance of gays and lesbians). Despite these developments, a recent study indicated 35% of the Australian population believed that homosexuality was 'immoral' (Flood & Hamilton, 2005). Thus, it appears that the acceptance of alternative masculinities, such as gay masculinities, is limited and the existence of a dominant and often oppressive form of masculinity may be still widespread (Pease, 1997, 2002). To this end, D. Plummer (1999) has argued that boys learn about masculinity through a vilification of homosexuals and homosexuality. Furthermore, Connell (1995) has argued that there is a pluralisation of masculinities, in which heterosexual masculinities marginalise and sub-ordinate other masculinities, such as gay masculinities. The process of constructing masculinities is ongoing and occurs in families, schools, the workplace and on the sporting field. The increased awareness of the construction of masculinity in the Western world as well as the cultural changes noted above, appears to have challenged essentialist notions of 'maleness' and created what many commentators have called a 'crisis of masculinity' (Brod, 1987; M. Kimmel, 1987; Levant, 1996; Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). 'Traditional' masculine ideals such as stoicism, strength, independence, in-expressiveness and the provider role are being questioned in Australia (Edgar, 1997). Traditional masculinity might be outdated, but it did provide clear (although not necessarily satisfactory) roles for men. Today, great uncertainty appears to exist about contemporary gender expectations and masculinity. In the absence of 'traditional' masculinity, uncertainty and anxiety about one's masculinity may exist, including men's anxiety about being labelled homosexual or perceived as gay.

The 'crisis of masculinity' has given birth to what was described earlier as a men's movement, although this is an umbrella term used to described a wide range of men's activities, including social action, academic study, psycho-educational groups for men and programs for boys in schools (Pease, 1997). Within the modern 'men's movement', a search for a return to an inner primitive form of manhood has been extolled (Bly, 1993; Keen, 1992). However, this mythopoetic aspect of the men's movement has been widely critiqued as perpetuating hegemony through the oppression of women and gays and of failing to adequately consider the social construction of masculinity (Buchbinder, 1994). A positive outcome of the 'crisis of masculinity' has been a critical examination

of men and masculinity in the social sciences. To this end, there is a growing recognition in psychology, of the pluralisation of masculinities, which includes an examination of hegemonic masculinity and relationships between different masculinities (e.g. Frosh and Phoenix, 2001). The 'crisis of masculinity' has also co-occurred with the growing acknowledgement of gay masculinities, which may contest, reproduce or modify hegemonic masculinities (Nardi, 2000). The emergence and definition of gay masculinities are discussed below.

1.2.1 Gay masculinities

The social construction of masculinity approach and the work of Carrigan, et al. (1987) introduces the idea that multiple expressions of masculinity exist and that relationships between masculinities are based on social structures and social power. A review of the research literature on masculinity reveals the focus on heterosexual men and heterosexual masculinities in the vast majority of studies. Despite Simon and Gagnon's (1967) seminal article articulating a social constructionist account for homosexuality, and the emergence of gay writers in the 1970's and 1980's (e.g. Altman, 1972, K. Plummer, 1981) it has not been until relatively recently that gay men have been considered within the study of masculinity. The inclusion of gay masculinities (Edwards, 2005; Nardi, 2000) in social science research has contributed to the pluralisation of the term masculinity. Gay masculinities are defined as the individual and collective meanings attributed to the actions and life practices of men who identify as gay.

Because of marginalisation, gay masculinities have also developed ways of challenging traditional, straight enactments of masculinity. To this end, 'camp' behaviour, 'camping' and 'camping it up', are colloquial expressions of a gay style and sensibility, which includes an element of feminine and masculine self-mockery. Camp appears to have changed in meaning over time and in Australia, the term also describes the first gay activist organisation; Campaign Against Moral Persecution, which originated in Sydney in the 1970's (Reynolds, 2002). Camp is a term which has been commonly used to describe a positive, often playful and unique identity for gay men (see Reynolds, 2002; K. Plummer, 1981; Segal 1990). Camp has been an important term for the emergence of gay identities (see Section 1.3.1.3) and is useful in distinguishing gay masculinities from straight masculinities. Gay masculinities are now being examined

from a variety of perspectives including ethnic and cultural groupings (e.g. Drummond, 2005a; Cantu, 2000; Gutmann & Vigoya, 2005), working class masculinities (e.g. D. Barrett, 2000; Connell, Davis & Dowsett, 2000; Levine, 1989), body image (Drummond, 2005b; S. Kimmel and Mahalik, 2005) and in adolescent sexuality (e.g. Mutchler, 2000). Thus there is a growing acknowledgment that is it more accurate to speak of a plurality of masculinities in general, but also of the existence of many gay masculinities.

Whilst gay men have often been considered the 'other' within normative masculinity by virtue of appearing unmasculine (Dowsett, 1993), the emergence of gay hyper-masculinities appears to have challenged the traditional image of straight masculinity (e.g. Levine, 2000). For example, 'bears'; a sub culture of gay men characterised by facial and body hair, and a 'macho' image and clothing style (e.g. leather, boots, denim), is in direct contrast to the stereotype of the camp, feminine image of gay men. Furthermore many gay men have adopted a practice of body building and enhanced muscularity that has defied the image of the gay man as weak and effeminate (Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000). Thus it appears that the construction of masculinities is highly contextual and occurs within a prevailing ideology about normative or ideal masculinities. Some authors have suggested that the HIV/AIDS crisis which emerged in the early 1980's, and the concerns about perceptions of physical weakness has contributed to an emphasis on muscularity in gay men (e.g. Halkitis, 2000; Halkitis, Green & Wilton, 2004). The impact of the AIDS epidemic on the gay community has been covered extensively elsewhere (e.g. Altman, 1992, Buchbinder, 1994; Levine, 2000; Gagnon & Nardi, 1997; Stynes, Lipp & Minichiello, 1996) and is not the central focus of the current study. However, the current relevance of HIV/AIDS on gay men's friendships and on the gay community will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

In the present study, an understanding and examination of the construction of contemporary gay masculinities was considered important. Furthermore as gay masculinities have often been subordinated by hegemonic straight masculinities (Connell, 1995), an area of interest involved relations between these two masculinities, and how each might also be defined in relation to the other. In order to examine the subject of masculinities in more detail an overview of the study of men and masculinities is outlined below.

1.2.2 The modern study of men and masculinities

The study of men and masculinities raises definitional and methodological issues about sex and gender. On one hand the differences seem clear, sex is a biological category, whereas gender refers to the construction of cultural meanings and definitions attributed to the sexes (M. Kimmel, 2000). Thus, masculinity would seem to refer to the gendered identities, roles and practices of men that are learnt in infancy and continue to be shaped throughout life in socio-cultural settings. However, the distinctions between sex and gender are not altogether clear. Within psychology, the study of gender has often been conducted as the study of sex differences in which an underlying essentialist view of masculinity (and femininity) has prevailed (Deaux & Major, 2000). The sex differences approach has often treated gender as if it is a fixed or reified category in itself. It is now recognised that sex-differences alone do not account for variations between or within groups of men, or across different cultures and at different developmental periods (M. Kimmel, 2000). Thus there is a need to understand gender as an ongoing process that occurs in particular cultural settings, in which individual and collective meanings are attributed to maleness (and femaleness). Contributions from sociology, anthropology and gay and feminist writers are therefore included below to add to the understanding and definition of gender within a constructionist framework.

Theories of gender may be classified broadly as falling into one of two categories, essentialism and constructionism. From the essentialist position, it is argued that masculine or feminine traits are innate (essences) in the individual (Buchbinder, 1994). Essentialist theories of gender pervade popular thinking, reinforcing ideas about 'real men' and finding an 'inner manhood'. Buchbinder (1994) notes that research to determine the 'cause' (and cure) of homosexuality is underpinned by the essentialist arguments, which suggest that homosexuality is a failure to attain healthy masculinity. By contrast, in a more modern view, the social constructionist perspective is able to provide an explanation of gender as a complex set of social meanings that are attached to biological sex and are enacted in daily life- *men are not born they are made"* (M. Kimmel & Messner 1989, p.10). The social constructionist position (Gergen, 1985), allows for an examination of the processes and relations between masculinities, but it is a relatively recent approach. Previously, the study of men has been largely based on socio-biological theories of gender (Pease, 2002), which are summarised below.

Social science researchers have been studying men for a long time, and historically there have been three general models that have governed social scientific research on men and masculinity (M. Kimmel & Messner, 1989), and have informed the development of psychological models. Firstly, biological models, in which researchers have focused on the ways in which the biological differences between males and females determine different social behaviours (e.g. Wilson, 1978; Goldberg, 1993; T. Goldsmith, 1994). These models have been critiqued for being overly reductionist and for failing to adequately consider the impact of other (e.g. environmental) variables. Secondly, anthropological models, in which masculinity has been looked at cross-culturally, stressing the variations and similarities in the behaviours associated with being a man (e.g. Tiger, 1971, 1999). However, some anthropological models of masculinity and sex differences have been criticised for over generalising the naturalness of male roles and underestimating the role of culture as an important determining variable in gendered behaviour (Doyle, 1989). Thirdly, sociological sex-role models have stressed the importance of the socialisation of boys and girls into sex-roles specific to biological sex (e.g. Terman & Miles, 1936). Sex role models have been influenced by psychoanalysis (e.g. Freud, 1953) and psychological models, both of which have contributed to the discussion of gender role identities, in an attempt to map the expected sequence of development for males or females to learn appropriate sex roles (Bem, 1974, 1981; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Sex roles have been pervasive in psychology and are seen as the collection of ideas, attitudes and attributes that are seen as appropriate for males and females. For example, for males these characteristics include strength, technical knowledge, aggression and a dominant cognitive mode, whereas 'appropriate' female characteristics include the demonstration of caring, cooperation, passivity and a dominant emotional mode (M. Kimmel & Messner, 1989). Sex role identity models have been extensively critiqued by Pleck (1981, 1995) and this discussion is explored in more detail below. Overall many psychological models of gender have been criticised for being overly individualistic and based on essentialism (Deaux & Major, 2000). Furthermore, feminist critiques of psychoanalysis (e.g. Chodorow, 1978) have challenged the idea of a 'natural' gender order and other writers have argued for the acknowledgement of the social construction of masculinity in psychoanalytic theorising (e.g. Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002). In summary, despite many years of research on men, it has only been in the last 30 years that attention has

shifted to the study of masculinity and men as gendered beings (Coltrane, 1994), and thus to the study of men as 'men'.

However, views about a 'natural' masculinity are pervasive and perhaps reflect an underlying attachment to essentialist theories about gender. For example, prior to the 1970's a particular type of masculine ideology existed which has been termed 'traditional masculinity' (Levant, 1996). Brannon (1976) argued that traditional masculinity was comprised of four dimensions: 'Be a Big Wheel', 'No Sissy Stuff', 'Give 'em Hell', and the 'Sturdy Oak'. The term 'traditional masculinity' still appears to hold some currency: Levant et al (1992) defined traditional masculinity in seven dimensions; avoidance of the feminine, restriction of emotional life, emphasis on toughness and aggression, self reliance, importance of status, non relationality, objectifying attitudes toward sexuality, fear and hatred of homosexuals. However, Brittan (2001) has argued that traditional definitions of masculinity are expressions of essentialist masculine ideology which may be more accurately termed 'masculinism'. I agree with Brittan and his concern that traditional notions of masculinity become reified, suggesting that masculinity is a measurable entity. I am arguing for a plurality of masculinities, which are culturally and historically determined, and in a continual process of change. Thus, men's experiences need to be distinguished from men's masculine ideologies.

Masculine ideologies are pervasive, and traditional views would suggest that masculinity and femininity are discrete variables and indicated the presence of normality in men and women respectively. In other words, 'normal' men were masculine and 'normal' women were feminine. The presence of femininity in men and masculinity in women was regarded as abnormal (Levant, 1996). Newer models of masculinity have looked at 'gender relations' and examined how the definition of one gender depended partly on the definition of the other. Questions were raised about the duality of definitions emerging primarily from the women's movement. For example are masculinity and femininity mutually exclusive, or can they both exist simultaneously? To this end, Bem (1974, 1981) proposed a model of psychological androgyny in which an individual posses both masculine and feminine qualities. There has been some support for this model (E. Cook, 1985; O'Neil, 1981), although the concept of androgyny appears essentialist in its roots. The androgyny paradigm,

drawing on the work of Bem, and Jungian theorists (e.g. J. Singer, 1977), appears to support a pre-determined, but underdeveloped male-female potential in all human beings. By contrast, I am arguing for a social constructionist approach to gender in which one's gender is enacted and performed in specific social settings and masculinity is defined 'situationally' in a complex interaction between an individual and their environment.

Up until the 1980's the sex-role identity paradigm held considerable weight, however since that time it has been extensively critiqued by a number of researchers (e.g. M. Kimmel, 1987; O'Neil, et al., 1995; Pleck, 1981, 1995), and is no longer considered empirically valid. To this end, Pleck (1981) formulated an alternative 'gender role strain' paradigm, which was a precursor to the social construction of masculinity approach. In the Pleck's strain paradigm, the negative aspects of masculinity were explained by the 'strain' associated with attempting to adhere to normative gender roles and ideologies (e.g. Brannon, 1976). Fear of violating gender roles is theorised to cause over conforming, because violating gender roles can have severe social and psychological consequences for men (Pleck, 1995). The gender role strain paradigm has given rise to three areas of study. These include the discrepancy strain, dysfunction strain and trauma strain models (Levant, 1996; Pleck, 1995), which use different theoretical approaches in their attempt to examine the ways in which men's potential is believed to be restricted by the stress of dominant gender stereotypes which are inconsistent and contradictory (Smiler, 2004).

The 'strain' paradigm has led to the development of several psychometric measures including the Male Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS, O'Neil et al., 1986, 1995) and The Masculine Gender Roles Stress Scale (MGRSS, Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; Eisler & Blalock, 1991). An extensive number of empirical psychological studies have arisen from the strain paradigm, in which attempts have been made to determine an association between adherence to the male gender role and a range of psychological and physical health problems. In these studies, an attempt has been made to demonstrate a link between aspects of men's behaviour and masculine gender roles. For example, McCreary, Saucier and Courtenay (2005) found a link between men's (and women's) positive views regarding muscularity in men and traditional male gender-role traits. Thus, there does appear to be support for a psychosocial view of masculinity in which

gendered norms, stereotypes and ideologies influence masculine gender roles (Addis & Cohane, 2005). There is debate about the similarities and differences between the gender role strain paradigm and the social constructionist approach to studying masculinity (e.g. Connell, 1995; Pleck, 1995). Whilst the gender role strain and stress paradigms have merit, they are limited in their lack of description of men's personal experiences of the process of constructing masculinities, in different contexts and across different development periods. Thus the social constructionist approach (Gagnon & Simon, 1974) to studying masculinity is arguably better able to examine differences between masculinities, including power, and processes of masculine enactment in specific contexts.

Many researchers now view masculinity (and femininity) as socially constructed (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Herek, 1987; M. Kimmel, 1987; Levant, 1995). Other developments have come from feminist studies (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982), gay writers (Altman, 1972; Blachford, 1981; Dowsett, 1993; Kinsman, 1987; K. Plummer, 1981) and the emergence of men's studies. Furthermore, recent research (e.g. Connell, 1995) has pointed to the existence of multiple masculinities and the idea of a hierarchy of masculinities based on power differences. Of particular interest are the notions of 'hegemonic' or dominant masculinity and the privileging of some masculinities over others. These ideas have given rise to an exploration of power relationships between and within masculinities (Frosh & Phoenix, 2001; M. Kimmel & Messner, 1989; Lyman, 1987). These writers have attempted to move beyond the previous sex-differences paradigm and show the social construction of different masculinities through variations in culture, age and sexual orientation, and in specific contexts (e.g. at work). This method of researching gender has merit, as within group variations are explored, rather than male- female differences.

Unlike earlier research into sex differences, many social science researchers have now recognised the need to understand the construction of gender within particular contexts and the gender biases of the researchers themselves (e.g. Hegarty & Pratto, 2004; Morgan, 1992). Implicit in these critiques is a belief that defining male gender by its opposite, femininity, is simplistic and likely to miss within group phenomena.

In an attempt to move beyond the sex differences approach Addis and Cohane (2005) reviewed the social scientific paradigms concerned with the study of masculinity, and summarised four main approaches to studying gender; the social learning paradigm (which subsumes the sex role strain and sex role conflict literature), the social constructionist paradigm, the feminist paradigm and the psychodynamic paradigm. Whilst all of these approaches are constructionist to some degree, the feminist and social constructionist approaches allow for a greater cross fertilisation with sociology, anthropology and other studies (Addis & Cohane 2005). In the present study, the social constructionist paradigm is used because it is considered to best address the need for a rich description and evaluation of men's experiences and their construction of their personal masculinity. Furthermore the constructionist approach is compatible with a field theoretical view of a self or selfhood (Yontef, 1993). Selfhood is regarded as always in process, and existing in an intersubjective field (Jacobs, 2005), in which men both construct their sense of masculinity and are influenced by the contextual factors beyond their immediate control such as the environment in which they are born into and other individuals in it. These ideas are explored in more detail below.

1.2.3 Social Constructionism and masculinity

The social constructionist approach to masculinity grew out of the recognition that how men behave as men is culturally and historically defined, *"being a man or a woman, then, is not a fixed state. It is a becoming, a condition actively under construction"* (Connell, 2002, p.4). Men are believed to be active agents in the gender construction process (Bird, 1996; Courtenay, 2000b), not passive recipients of an all powerful gender socialisation system. Addis and Cohane (2005) describe the social construction of gender:

> *Thus, the emphasis shifts from a view of individuals as respondents to processes of reinforcement and punishment (i.e. social learning) to a view of individuals as active agents who construct particular meanings of masculinity in particular social contexts. (p. 639)*

The process of gender construction is not static; it continues and evolves. Constructions of masculinity are revealed though actions and behaviours, thus masculinity may be defined as 'what men do' rather than 'who men are' (Buchbinder, 1994). In the social construction approach, an attempt is made to understand this complex process across

different cultures and contexts and with different groups of men (e.g. gay, straight, young and old) and acknowledges differences of social power between different masculinities and between men and women (M. Kaufman, 1987).

The social constructionist perspective to studying masculinity and masculinities, places the focus on the processes of construction. Of interest are the underlying structures and forces that create and define different masculinities. Thus, masculinity may be defined as the way in which the male gender is constructed in social interaction. For example, M. Kimmel and Messner (1989) define gender as the complex set of social meanings that are attached to biological sex, and the way in which they are enacted: *"We believe that men are also 'gendered', and that this gendering process, the transformation of biological males into socially interacting men, is a central experience for men"* (p.4).

Gender is a term which has several meanings in the research literature. As noted above, M. Kimmel and Messner (1989) use gender both as a noun and a verb. Furthermore, the concepts masculinity and masculinities have received criticism for lacking clear definition and for shifting the focus of study away from men to a search for 'masculinity' as a thing in itself (Hearn, 1996). In this thesis, the term masculinity is used to describe a process of the social construction of gender through the values, beliefs, actions and experiences of men. Masculinities are constructed in the workplace (Messerschmidt, 1996; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993), in families (Morgan, 2001), in prisons (Thurston, 1996) on the sporting field (Messner, 1987; Parker, 1996; Wedgewood, 2003) and occur within cultural settings (Mac an Ghaill, 1996). Furthermore, it is theorised that masculinity is constructed in men's friendships, and in particular interactions, even though men may have little awareness of this. In addition, the way in which men's friendships are constructed may be influenced by contemporary definitions of masculinity (Nardi, 1992a). Thus in the present study, to further the study of masculine gender construction, gay and straight men's close friendships are examined. To this end, the literature on men's friendships is explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

1.2.4 Gestalt and social constructionist approaches to masculinity

The social constructionist approach is similar to both field theory from a Gestalt perspective (Parlett, 1991; Yontef, 1993) and the phenomenological approach (Spinelli,

2005) for understanding individuals and the inter-relationships with others including social structures. Field theory is based on the work of Lewin (1951) and Yontef (1993) describes Gestalt's field theory:

> *Field theory is a framework for studying any event, experience, object, organism or system. It emphasizes the totality of forces that together form an integrated whole and determine the parts of the field. People and events exist only through being of-a-field. Only the facts present in the field have influence in the field. (p. 324)*

From a field theory point of view, individuals both construct their fields and are simultaneously constructed by their fields. There is some debate about the definition of the term 'field' and whether a field can exist independent of self (O'Shea, 2005). I am approaching the concept of field from the view of an individual's phenomenologically experienced field (Jacobs, 2004), and locating the present study within a psychological framework, influenced by the wider fields of sociology and philosophy. Thus the focus of study is the men's subjective experience of their friendships within their 'experiential field' of masculinity. McConville (2001) traces the origins of field theory to Husserl's phenomenology and provides a framework that is essentially constructionist; *"fields cannot be spoken of in themselves, in nature, apart from a co-constitutive subjectivity"* (p. 201). Thus phenomenological fields are conceived to be created by individuals in their attempt to make sense of their interactions with the world. Friendships provide an opportunity to examine perceptions of inter-subjective experience. My goal was to explore men's 'map' of masculinity, through the descriptions provided by straight and gay participants. Men are born into a gendered field (i.e. masculinity and femininity) and contribute to the gendering process in social interactions throughout their lifetime. An important aspect of the wider field of masculinity concerns the existence of hegemonic or dominant forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995), which is explored below.

1.2.5 Hegemonic masculinity and subordinated masculinities

In a sociological analysis, hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan, et al., 1987) maintains the pre-eminence of patriarchy and the dominance of males over females and the dominance of certain types of masculinity. The term hegemonic refers to the dominance of a group or culture at a particular time in history (Gramsci, 1975), and is used to describe a social dynamic rather than a fixed structure. As Connell (1995) notes, *"that gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction, is*

an important theme in the modern sociology of gender" (p.35.). Connell argues that there are several masculinities and that they are constructed along class and cultural lines. Furthermore, the power relationships between masculinities are considered important and Connell's description of related terms including hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginal, are described briefly below.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a dominant expression of masculinity, within a culture, at a particular time, in which social and structural power is vested and other masculinities are subordinated. Which masculinities are dominant and hegemonic is determined culturally and is subject to change over time.

An understanding of multiple masculinities allows for an exploration of the relationships between masculinities, as indicated above. The social constructionist approach is used to understand men's experiences of masculinity and masculinities from the particular social position they occupy.

Connell (1995) notes that hegemonic masculinity in many Western societies' leads to the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men

> *Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure. Hence from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. (p.78)*

Thus, gay masculinities are often subordinated by more powerful hegemonic masculinities in Connell's sociological analysis. From a dualistic point of view, that which is not masculine is equated with femininity, and thus gay masculinities are invariably feminised. The relationship between homosexuality, gay masculinities and femininity is explored further in Section 1.3

Connell (1995) describes complicit masculinity as those expressions of masculinity that do not challenge the dominant hegemonic masculinity, but are also not oppressed by it. Masculinities that still benefit from the dominance of patriarchy are complicit by not challenging the dominant hegemonic paradigm. Some expressions of masculinity, such

as gay men who pass[5] as straight, may benefit from the relative social benefits of appearing heterosexual, whilst complying with a hegemonic ideal. However, from this paradigm it is argued that gay masculinities will always be subordinated and that these attempts to pass will always be just that, *attempts to pass* (Courtenay, 2000b).

Finally, Connell (1995) describes the concept of marginalisation which refers to the relative authorisation of one expression of masculinity relative to another, usually more powerful, masculinity. For example, gay men represent a marginalised group within masculinities. The marginalised group is positioned relative to the dominant group and this may occur structurally in institutions and laws (e.g. discriminatory superannuation laws for gay couples).

An understanding of masculinities and of the power relationships between masculinities is useful in understanding men's relationships. Numerous authors have examined the construction of hegemonic masculinity, in various social and cultural settings (e.g. Frosh & Phoenix, 2001; Frosh, et al., 2002; Lee, 2000). There does appear to be support for the concept of hegemonic masculinity within the research literature, although some authors have criticised the term hegemonic for failing to account for the processes in which it is constructed (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 1999). In support of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, two research studies are briefly mentioned here for their particular relevance to the present study.

In one UK study, D. Lee (2000) examined heterosexual men's experiences of sexual harassment at work by other men and women. She found that the harassment was perpetrated (by men and women) on men who were perceived as feminine. Thus, a form of hegemonic or 'acceptable' masculinity was regulated in the workplace, through sexual harassment.

In another study, Frosh and Phoenix (2001) explored the idea of hegemonic masculinity and its relevance to a group of 11-14 year old London school boys. They found that while the construction of hegemonic masculinity is a complex and active process; boys

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[5] The term 'pass' and 'passing' are used to refer to the strategy of successfully concealing one's homosexuality and appearing to others as publicly heterosexual.

did identify with a concept of 'popular masculinity' which was similar to a hegemonic ideal. Frosh and Phoenix noted that the influence of hegemonic masculine ideals negatively influenced boys' ability to construct relationally supportive masculinities. It appears that the construction of hegemonic masculinity occurs in ongoing social relations between school age boys. Thus, it appears that there is evidence in the research literature for the social construction of masculinities.

In summary, social constructionist approaches to studying masculinity and masculinities are useful because of the ways in which the construction of gender is studied. Addis and Cohane (2005) report that outside psychology, social constructionist approaches are currently the most commonly used methods of studying gender. In the present study, a goal is to add to the existing body of psychological research on men and masculinity by utilising a social constructionist framework (Gergen, 1985). The social constructionist approach and key principles of Gestalt therapy theory are used to understand men's interpersonal relational patterns through which masculinity is believed to be constructed.

1.3 Masculinities, homosexuality and homophobia

In this section, the plurality of masculinities is explored further by examining the interface between sexual identity and masculinity. Of interest is the ubiquity of homophobia in the construction of heterosexual masculinities, and the historical antecedents for this phenomenon. In order to explore these issues, some definitional issues are clarified first.

1.3.1. Definitional issues

The terms gay and straight raise definitional issues of homosexuality and heterosexuality. These terms are often used confusingly to refer to both sexual behaviours and identities. For example, a person can engage in homosexual behaviour (e.g. male-male sexual activity) without identifying personally or to others as homosexual (or gay). For example, a married man may choose to have anonymous sex with men, whilst identifying to others as emphatically heterosexual. Herek (1987) argues that the terms homosexual and heterosexual are social constructions, especially when used as nouns, rather than as adjectives, to describe behaviour. The consequences of Herek's argument are that anyone can engage in homosexual behaviour, even though

they may not be 'labelled' as gay. In Western culture, homosexual and heterosexual, gay and straight, are regarded as mutually exclusive terms (Herek, 1987). Thus confusion exists between the use of terms homosexual and heterosexual because it is unclear whether the use refers to behaviour or to roles and identities (Weeks, 1981). Furthermore, the terms gay and straight do not refer to homogenous categories and there is considerable variation within sexualities. The debate about sexuality identity is partly resolved for this study by choosing men who self identify as straight in one sample, and in another sample men who identify as gay (for a fuller description of the sample see Chapter Four). In the present study, the focus is on an examination of different masculinities, rather than of different sexualities. Issues of sexual identity and their relevance to masculinities are further outlined below.

1.3.1.1 Sexual orientation, historical issues

In this section the historical background to the emergence of the term homosexuality is explored. In particular, the emergence 'normative masculinity' as heterosexual and the pathologisation of non-heterosexual behaviour and desire is discussed.

The subject of sexual orientation is complex. Human sexuality research has always occurred within a prevailing social culture that was (and in many instances continues to be) homophobic (Connell, 1992; Herek, 1987; Patterson, 1995). Halperin (1990) argues that it is only possible to talk tentatively of homosexuality prior to nineteenth century because the term "homosexual" only entered the German language in 1869 and the English language in 1892. The term homosexual was first used by Hungarian writer and translator Karoly Maria Benkert in 1869 (Segal, 1990). Prior to the 19th century the concept of homosexuality did not exist and although sodomy and other forms of non-procreative sex were known about, they were not the sole domain of homosexuals. Homosexuality as a term and category has a relatively short history, but it has been a history of marginalisation and oppression (Altman, 1972). Homosexuality as a descriptor and type emerged against social and scientific developments in the late 19th century (Foucault, 1976/1998). McLaren (1997) has argued that the boundaries of 'normal' sexual behaviour were constructed in the period between 1870 and 1930 by the institutions of law, medicine, politics and popular ritual. By the early 20th century, the image of the virile, aggressive heterosexual male was exploited by sexologists, doctors, magistrates and sex reformers as the idealised masculinity (McLaren, 1997). For over

one hundred years in popular and scientific belief, homosexuality has been connected with femininity and a failure of masculinity in men (Segal, 1990). Thus, homosexuality has a history of not belonging within accepted definitions of masculinity.

Psychology and psychiatry have contributed to the pathologising of homosexuality as 'unnatural' and to the assertion of 'normal' masculinity as heterosexual. Homosexuality was regarded as a mental illness in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (used by Australian psychologists and psychiatrists) until 1973 (DSM-II, 1973), however it was replaced by the listing 'ego-dystonic homosexuality' in 1980 (DSM-III) and was not completely removed as a mental disorder from the DSM until 1987 (DSM III-R). Similarly, in the European equivalent of the DSM, the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD), homosexuality was not removed as a mental illness until 1992 (ICD-10, 1992). Thus, within the psychological and psychiatric professions, homosexuality has been regarded as a mental illness until relatively recently. Other forms of marginalisation of homosexuality have been less clinical but no less oppressive[6]. To this end, Dowsett (1993) argues that social science studies of masculinity in the 20th century have often positioned gay men and gay masculinity as the 'other'; and rarely within mainstream studies of masculinity. These contextual factors may be important in understanding how gay men perceive their masculinity and the possible implications for their friendships and support needs.

1.3.1.2 Homophobia

An understanding of masculinities, particular hegemonic heterosexual masculinities, requires an understanding of the role of homophobia. As noted previously (Section 1.1), homophobia is widespread in Australia (Flood & Hamilton, 2005). Homophobia is difficult to define because its meaning appears to have changed over time and there is debate over whether it is a true phobia (D. Plummer, 1999). Davies and Neale (1996) note that Weinberg (1972) is usually credited with the invention of the word, although it was first coined by K. Smith (1971). However, Weinberg's definition has become the most well known and widely used, whereby he defines homophobia as *"the dread of*

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[6] See Reynolds, (2002), for a history of Australian gay movement.

being in close quarters with homosexuals – and in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing" (p.4).

The definition of homophobia was extended by Hudson and Ricketts (1980) to include the feelings of anxiety, disgust, aversion, anger, discomfort and fear that some heterosexuals experience toward lesbians and gay men. Herek (1987) objects to the use of the term of homophobia because of the tendency to pathologise the individual, rather than seeing those holding anti-gay attitudes as reflecting cultural values. Herek prefers the use of the term *anti-gay prejudice.* Certainly, the use of the term prejudice places the responsibility more clearly with the offending individual or institution. In the present study, homophobia is explored as an individually held belief and attitude toward oneself and others which may influence personal behaviour.

There is discussion about the origins of negative feeling toward homosexuals, and whether this is an individual phenomena or a culturally held view. As Davies (1996) notes, some individuals do appear to have a strong individualised fear and loathing toward homosexuals. It can be argued that while this may present as homophobia, it is theorised as a social construction (Kinsman, 1996) and socially reinforced within the individual's enactment of masculinity. M. Kimmel (1994) has noted that homophobia may function to suppress homoerotic desire between (straight) men, and thus normative masculinity may be constructed around homophobia. As Lehne (1989) notes:

> *Homophobia, with its associated dynamic of fear of being labelled a homosexual,*
> *is an underlying motivation in maintaining the male sex role (p. 416).*

Thus, homophobia may exist as an ongoing dynamic or anxiety in regulating normative views about masculinity, which serves to prohibit closeness between men.

It is also useful to differentiate between internalised homophobia (which arises when gay men, lesbians and bi-sexuals themselves loathe homosexuality) and institutionalised homophobia, in which social structures cause discrimination against gay and lesbian people. In the current study, the term homophobia is used primarily to refer to those negative views held or expressed toward homosexuals and homosexuality. Institutionalised homophobia is not explored explicitly in the present study, but its

effects contribute to gay men's internalised homophobia evidenced through their collective and personal experience of shame (A. Singer, 1996).

1.3.1.3 Sexual identity

In this research project, the question of how the construction and enactment of masculinities and sexual identity intersect is of some interest. In particular, gay and straight masculinities are examined. Typically, most men are assumed to be heterosexual, and it has been argued that gay men undergo the same process of heterosexual masculine socialisation as straight men (Gagnon & Simon, 1974). To this end, Herek (1990, 2000b) has argued that heterosexism exists as a dominant cultural and psychological ideology in which any form of homosexual practice or identity is stigmatized or denigrated. There is an assumption that a child is, and will be heterosexual (Cass, 1979) unless there is emerging evidence to the contrary, which may not be apparent until adolescence. Troiden (1989) notes that sometimes a person may be 'accused' of being gay before they have identified their sexual identity for themselves. Identifying one's sexual identity is a key developmental task for all human beings (Patterson, 1995). However, for a gay person the process is often experienced as unsupportive (from family and friends) coupled with shame about one's feelings or desires for a person of the same sex (A. Singer, 1996). Thus it is acknowledged that sexual identity formation does not occur in a neutral environment despite recent advances in acceptance of non-heterosexual identities.

The proposed 'abnormality' of homosexuality may be seen in a pre-occupation with the need to find a cause for homosexuality (e.g. Le Vay, 1994). There is debate in the literature about the origins of homosexuality, and these arguments can be broadly classified as either essentialist, suggesting a biological determinant of sexual orientation (Le Vay), or constructionist, emphasising the role of culture and environment (Gagnon & Simon, 1974; K. Plummer, 1981; van Kooten Nierkerk & van der Meer, 1989). Indeed, division exists amongst gay men between the essentialist and constructions positions (De Laurentis, 1991; Jagose, 1996). Whilst it is beyond the scope of the current study to address the aetiology of sexual identity, it is important to acknowledge that these questions arise against a backdrop of heterosexism and homophobia. I take a middle ground constructionist approach in which it is argued that an individual's *"inherent sexual impulse is constructed in terms of acts, identity, community and object*

choice" (Vance, 1989, p.19). Thus, my position is that sexual orientation is not completely determined at birth, but emerges from an inherent capacity for sexual expression, and through significant life experiences and in predominantly heterosexist contexts (e.g. family, school). Sexual identity models have been proposed to explain this process and are described in more detail below (Section 1.3.2.4.). In the current study, gay and straight men's experiences of masculinity are explored in order to examine constructions of masculinity and the possible connections between heterosexuality, heterosexism and homophobia. Thus it is masculinities that are of primary interest, not sexualities. However, it is important to locate the present study within the prevailing social context, in which a non-heterosexual identity, and thus, non-heterosexual masculinities are considered to be abnormal.

1.3.1.4 'Coming out' models

In order to understand gay masculinities, the sexual identity literature which articulates the coming out process for persons experiencing non-heterosexual desire and identity are explored. In psychological research regarding gay sexual identity the coming out process features strongly (e.g. Cass, 1979, 1984). It is acknowledged that the term coming out has both a personal as well as political aspect, within the broader 'gay liberation' movement (Edwards, 2005). From a psychological perspective, the coming out process and sexual identity formation have been well documented in the research literature (e.g. Cass 1979; Coleman, 1982; D. Kimmel, 1978; McDonald, 1982; Troiden, 1989; Woodman & Lenna, 1980). Most commonly, an individual will 'come out' to themselves first by realising their difference before coming out to a close friend or confidante (Troiden, 1989). A common theme in coming out models is the emphasis on developmental stages, often involving change and growth whereby an individual acquires a homosexual identity (e.g. Cass, 1984). Thus, despite the struggle of gay people to come out in a heterosexist culture, in doing so possible gains include personal growth, coping skills and the development of empathy toward others (Barber & Mobley, 1999). However, these gains may not be immediately apparent, and lack of self support and support from significant others may impede the coming out process. It is argued that some gay men choose not to 'come out' or choose to remain at a particular stage which Cass (1984) has identified as foreclosure. Issues of sexual disclosure or non-disclosure are often closely related to shame and lack of safety about being openly homosexual (A. Singer, 1996). There are also degrees of 'being out' and some gay men

choose when and where to be 'out'. For example 'straight acting' is a strategy adopted by some gay men to 'pass' as straight, and although necessary for personal or professional reasons, may perpetuate internalised homophobia and shame over time. Passing is an indication that sexuality can be easily hidden, unlike race or gender which are more difficult to disguise. For example, a man may be 'out' with his close friends but not with family or at work, based in part on an evaluation of perceived support (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Alternatively, he may be 'out' with one trusting person at work, but not 'out' to anyone else. Thus it is important to conceptualise the coming out process an ongoing, context specific process that continues over the lifetime (A. Singer, 1996).

In a critique of coming out models, Davies (1996) notes many models assume that all people are either straight or gay. To this end, many researchers now believe that sexuality is not necessarily a binary concept, but a continuum (e.g. Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948). Critics of the gender identity models (e.g. Paul, 1985) have argued that formulations of sexual identity need to be inclusive of bi-sexuality and non-dichotomous models of sexuality. Furthermore, queer theorists (e.g. Butler, 1990) have de-constructed terms such as gay, straight, homosexual and heterosexual in an attempt to demonstrate the social and political construction of gender and sexuality. The use of the term queer to refer to non-heterosexual people emerged in Australia in the late 1990's from the gay liberation movement (Reynolds, 2002) and has given rise to the inclusion of queer studies within many gender studies programs (e.g. Jagose, 1996, Sullivan, 2003). A discussion of gay identity politics and the place of 'queer' are beyond the scope of the present study. However, it is my view that the coming out process is an important developmental task in which previously unintegrated aspects of one's identity and sexuality are integrated, and continues throughout life. Furthermore, there is congruence between social constructionist psychology and sexual orientation formation (e.g. Cass, 2004), as long as sexual identity is not reified. Theorising about how gay identities develop is an important aspect of understanding how masculinities develop, because they are both occur within social contexts. Heterosexual people do not need to come out because heterosexual identity is the assumed (majority) position in our culture, although through personal growth (e.g. therapy, life experiences) a deeper awareness of sexuality and identity is possible in all people. Through coming out, gay men are perhaps in a position to seek out others with similar experiences (other gay

men) for support. These findings may have an important bearing on understanding how gay men construct their friendships.

In summary, traditional masculinity has been viewed as the domain of heterosexuality, with gay men rejected by virtue of their aberrant sexuality and perceived femininity. The result for gay men has been a history of oppression and prejudice. Of interest in the present study is a comparison between gay and straight men's friendships, support seeking and the construction of masculinities. Pluralistic conceptions of masculinities have enabled an understanding of the relationships between masculinities and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. It is theorised that gay men's experience of marginalisation and subordination within traditional masculinity might have led a greater need for social and emotional support. Furthermore, it is proposed that gay men's constructions of masculinity may be different from straight men's constructions of masculinity and that gay masculinities may allow for greater expressions of vulnerability and other less 'controlled' emotions (e.g. sadness, fear).

1.4 Masculinity, shame and vulnerability

In this section, a link is proposed between the construction of masculinity and the avoidance of shame. It is argued that shame is not only a personal experience, but also a relational experience that occurs within a social context. The Gestalt literature on shame offers a relational model in which shame is theorised as an experience that occurs in an environment where there is insufficient support. These views are outlined for their link to the goals of the present study.

1.4.1 Definitions

Following Pleck's gender role strain paradigm (1981, 1995), the potential for men to experience shame appears to be related to concerns about violating acceptable gender norms (Efthim, Kenny & Mahalik, 2001; Krugman, 1995; Levant, 1996). Shame, which is related to personal humiliation and the sense of self, is distinguished from guilt, which is related to actions or deeds (G. Kaufman, 1996). Shame is an intensely powerful emotion in which the individual feels *"naked, defeated, alienated, and lacking in dignity or worth"* (Tomkins, 1963, p.118). In Tomkins' theory of eight primary affects, shame was considered singularly important in mediating interest, joy and excitement, and thus serves to a regulating function. Furthermore, Wurmser (1997)

suggests that the term shame covers three concepts; the fear of disgrace, the emotion of self loathing when exposed and a protective character trait (i.e. shame as potential), that can prevent the experience of shame itself. Such is the power of shame that it has been theorised that people organise their contact with others around avoidance of shame as a means of self regulation (Jacobs, 1995b). Several theorists have argued that men construct their masculinity around the avoidance of shame (Harrison, 1995; M. Kimmel, 1994; Krugman, 1995; Thompkins & Rando, 2003; Wheeler, 1996). The nature of shame processes are outlined below.

1.4.2 Gestalt and shame

A Gestalt formulation of shame is briefly provided in this section to provide a relational understanding of shame, and in particular the link to masculinity.

In the Gestalt approach selfhood or subjectivity is defined relationally as the 'self-in relation' to the environment at any given moment (Yontef, 1997). Thus, subjectivity cannot be considered apart from the person-environment field. Shame is theorised as occurring as a relational dynamic in which an individual's behaviour or actions are perceived to be unacceptable in a particular context. Shame has been described above, as consisting of intense negative affect and cognition characterised by self loathing, and withdrawal from others. Shame has been further categorised by Yontef (1996) into three types, situational (a reaction at a specific time and place), group (because of a perceived rupture from membership of a group) and existential (an attribution to an essence of a person). Furthermore, shame is regarded as occurring in a social context, even if an individual is alone. For example:

Shame is a learned sense of not identifying with the self as is. It is [sic] always occurs in the context of actual, imagined, or remembered ruptures in the organism/environment field and disruption of the person's reception (perceived or actual) in that field. (Yontef, 1997, p.29)

Thus, shame can be seen to be the experience of not being acceptable to self or to others. Shame is associated with humiliation and self loathing. From a field –theoretical framework, self is the system of 'contacts' with the person-environment field (Yontef, 1996). Punctuating this field are the child's and adolescent's interactions with significant others (e.g. family and peers), that shame messages (e.g. 'don't be weak')

become linked to an emerging sense of self and masculine identity (Speilberg, 1999). It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the origins of shame in child development; however in examining gay and straight men's same-sex friendships an exploration of the repeating and ongoing effects of shame is possible in adults.

The linking together (through child and adolescent development) of particular cognitions and affects with shame have been described as shame–binds (G. Kaufman, 1996; Tomkins, 1963). Shame binds are fixed patterns of responding to particular internal and external events and may be linked to an individual's construction of masculinity. To this end, Wheeler and Jones (1996) have argued that traditional masculinity is often constructed around independence, and that the experience of depending on another man is imbued with shame, for failing as a man. Thus it is argued that whenever men experience 'unacceptable' feelings (such as dependence, weakness or vulnerability), they will automatically feel shame (R. Lee, 1996). The development of shame binds are similar to introjected messages (such as 'boys should always be strong'), and are largely out of immediate awareness (R. Lee). These messages are not incorporated into a flexible sense of self (e.g. 'in this situation I need to be strong'), and thus become fixed gestalts. When a man is presented with a situation, such as a feeling of love for another man, he may be more aware of the shame affect, than the original desire for closeness (Yontef, 1996). In this way, shame may operate to split off a part of self that is considered unacceptable. Thus, shame responses can become part of a person's character or identity, which are experienced in particular person-environment interactions (e.g. experiencing vulnerability in the presence of male peers).

However, shame has many positive effects as well. Healthy shame assists in social control (e.g. respecting rules and laws) and in managing personal boundaries. A healthy level of shame may not be crippling, but may serve to protect an individual from potential embarrassment and humiliation (e.g. knowing personal limitations). However, it is suggested that an aspect of unhealthy shame acts to restrict men's relationships with other men, particularly in limiting emotional closeness and intimacy.

1.4.3 Shame and masculinity

Shame may be experienced by men in situations when self support (or independence) is insufficient and support from other men is needed. It may be not as shameful to offer

support to other men since this act is consistent with the masculine provider role. It is the receiving or the receptive role which may be problematic for many men (Wheeler & Jones, 1996). There is little qualitative evidence about men's experience of shame and vulnerability in close male friendships which may be because the subject itself is likely to bring forth shame from one's peers (Miller, 1983).

In men's friendships, shame or the potential for shame may have a central organising role. Some theorists have also suggested that men organise or construct their masculinity around the avoidance of femininity or feminine behaviour (M. Kimmel, 1994; Lehne, 1989). In this way, the approximation of any male behaviour with femininity might be considered shameful. Wheeler and Jones (1996), note the connection between gender and shame:

> *In our culture, shame-coded states and taboos are very nearly always associated with a gender dystonic position; that is a person-male or female- in a state of shame is very likely to be a person in a state or position that is acceptable for the other gender but not for his or her own. (p. 84)*

The potential relationship between shame and masculinity requires a further understanding of the construct of masculinity. Despite the ubiquity of men's friendships, it is proposed that the reluctance of men to seek each other out for closeness and intimacy is to be related to their construction of masculinity. It may be that appearing vulnerable or dependent in the presence of others, particularly other men, often holds the potential for shame. In order to avoid uncomfortable feelings of shame, men may construct their friendships around avoiding shame, thus, men may organise their masculinity around the *avoidance* of shame. Furthermore, an underlying fear of closeness in many men's close friendships may be the fear of homosexuality. As Wheeler (1996) notes, there are 'taboos' against intimacy in male-male relationships:

> *For men in an intimate encounter with other men, these taboos and phobias are often crystallized-or 'coded' as deconstructionism would say- into the experiential construct that carries the ultimate shame, the final break from the receptive field; the fear of homosexuality. (p.93)*

Wheeler suggests that masculinity for many men is constructed around the fear of being perceived to be homosexual. Thus, it could be argued that many men avoid behaviour (such as male-male intimacy) that could be perceived as homosexual because of the fear

of being shamed by others. In this way, it is argued that men may regulate their contact with male friends based partly through a desire to avoid the experience of shame. Thus, an examination of men's friendships may provide a valuable source of insight into the enactment of masculinity and is explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.

1.5 Relevance of masculinities' literature

In the contemporary social science literature on masculinity a plurality and hierarchy of masculinities is acknowledged (Connell, 1995). Researchers have turned their attention to studying men and masculinity rather than studying differences between the sexes (Addis & Cohane, 2005). Whilst there is an emerging body of research that is concerned with other masculinities (gay, multi-cultural), few studies consider straight and gay men together as variants of masculinities in the same study. It is my view that an exploration of gay masculinities and straight masculinities enhances an understanding of the topic of men and masculinities.

Of particular interest is how the enactment of dominant masculinities may mediate against support seeking in males. The study of masculinity has its origins in anthropology, biology and sociology, and gave rise to widely held views about male and female 'sex-roles'. The sex-role concept was discredited in the eighties (Pleck, 1981) and more weight has been given to the social construction of masculinity and femininity. Following the strain paradigm (Pleck, 1981) some researchers have espoused the importance of masculine ideologies (e.g. Brod, 1987), in shaping the emergence of different ways of being a man with different cultures and social contexts.

The social constructionist approach to masculinity which is adopted in the current study grew out of a recognition that the ways in which men behave as men is culturally and historically defined and that masculinity may be defined by what men do (Buchbinder, 1994). In the social constructionist approach, an attempt is made to understand this complex process across different cultures and contexts and with different groups of men (e.g. homosexual, heterosexual, young and old). This position has much in common with the Gestalt field theory and phenomenology. As noted previously, field theory is closely aligned with social constructionism and from this perspective, human subjective experience is viewed as a process always under construction.

In this study, I take the view that men's masculinity is actively constructed in relationships with others. Whilst acknowledging the existence of social structures, men are believed to be active (though often unaware) agents in the construction process. Men's friendships are held to be an important aspect of the social construction process. In men's relationships with other men, their identities are shaped. Shame is considered an important interpersonal dynamic that regulates contact between men, often in unhealthy ways. In the next chapter, the literature about men's friendships is examined to explore these relationships further

Chapter 2 Men's Friendships

To perceive a friend, therefore, is necessarily in a manner to perceive oneself, and to know a friend is in a manner to know oneself. The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself. (Aristotle, cited in Pahl, 2000, p.21-22)

For the man who keeps his eye on a true friend, keeps it, so to speak, on a model of himself. For this reason, friends are together when they are separated, they are rich when they are poor, strong when they are weak, and- a thing even harder to explain - live on after they have died. (Cicero, cited in Pahl, 2000, p.79)

In this chapter, a brief history of research on men's friendships is presented in order to provide a historical context for the present study. Friendships can be sources of important interpersonal relations. Furthermore, through relating with others a sense of self emerges that is relationally dependent and in process (Spinelli, 2005). Thus, men's friendships provide an opportunity to examine an aspect of self, namely the construction of individual masculinities. Of interest is the subject of intimacy and interpersonal support in close male relationships. In this chapter, the literature on straight and gay men's friendships and the linkages to masculinity is reviewed before introducing the concept of men's relational processes. As noted in the previous chapter, masculinities are constructed in many settings including at work, in families, and on the sporting field. In this section the construction of masculinities in men's friendships are explored.

Men's friendships have been described as instrumental, activity based, and task oriented, and lacking in the intimate connection formed through emotional disclosure that characterises many female friendships (Reid & Fine, 1992). However these reported male-female differences may obscure the potential intimacy of men's friendships by adopting feminised standards of intimacy (Cancian, 1986), and failing to examine within group differences. Men may define and experience intimacy in different ways to women, such as through shared activities, or through expressing disagreement (e.g. Bank, 1995; Swain, 2000). Furthermore, it appears that with important social and economic changes in history over the last one hundred years, the characteristics of men's friendships and friendships in general have changed (Sherrod, 1987). These ideas are explored further in this chapter.

2.1 Historical background

The meaning and construction of male friendship has undergone significant change throughout history and it appears that the prohibitions on intimacy between men are a relatively recent phenomena. In ancient times, writings about male friendship reveals two important periods; the Classical Age of Greek society and during the European Renaissance (Sherrod, 1987). In classical writings on friendships by Cicero and Aristotle, 'serious' and virtuous friendships were considered only possible between men (Pahl, 2000). Women were regarded as lacking in the personal characteristics, or necessary education, to achieve serious friendship. Friendships between men were often considered deeply intimate. In classical Greek writings friendships between men included homosexual relationships as well as platonic love (Sherrod, 1987). In Renaissance Europe, Montaigne, (1575/1988) described male friendships as *"souls (that) are merged one in the other and so wholly mingled that they efface the seam that joined them" (p.19).* These descriptions of male friendship indicate a degree of intimacy and closeness that are unusual by today's standards. Furthermore, Rotundo (1989) reports many instances of romantic, non-sexual love, between men in friendships in The United States during the period 1800-1900. It appears that up until the later 19th century close and intimate relationships between men were not necessarily viewed as problematic.

As indicated in the previous chapter, several important historical events at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century appear to have contributed to changing definitions of masculinity (McLaren, 1997; Weeks, 1981). Events that led to the advent of the term homosexual in 1869, and the pathologising of homosexuality appear to have resulted in the emergence of a type of 'hegemonic' or dominant masculinity (Connell, 1995). To this end, it has been argued that hegemonic masculinity is in part constructed around the prohibition of male-male intimacy and is emphatically heterosexual (Connell, 1992). As noted previously (section 1.4), intimacy in men's close friendships in the modern world is an area fraught with fear of homosexuality (Herek, 1987; Lehne, 1989; Lewis, 1978) and fear of femininity (Sapadin, 1988), because of the perceived threat to the dominant masculinity. Consequently, in the twentieth century, men's friendships appear to have become less intimate, for fear of being labelled 'un-masculine' and possibly homosexual (Sedgwick, 1994; Segal, 1990).

Thus, men's friendships and perceptions of their friendships are believed to be intimately related to contemporary constructions of masculinity.

Sherrod (1987) argues that two economic-historical factors have influenced changes in men's friendships toward less intimacy over the last one to one hundred and fifty years. First, increased intimacy between married men and women, in which the emotional supportive aspect of marriage is seen to have increased in importance. The second factor relates to economic and social changes in the nature of organised work and capitalism that have placed structural barriers (e.g. nature of organised work) and increased competitiveness between men. Therefore, men are seen as competitors in the labour market, with less time available for building and maintaining friendship bonds (Cohen, 1992). Thus, the historical research into men's friendships and male-male intimacy, and the emergence of a hegemonic masculinity provides historical and sociological explanations for men's aversion to same-sex intimacy. Whilst these ideas form the background to understanding the construction of masculinities, the focus of the present study is on men's current constructions of masculinity and male friendship. In other words, from a contemporaneous position (Parlett, 1991), it is of interest to examine how past influences may have impacted on the current constructions and meanings of masculinity in gay and straight men's friendships

The meaning of friendship appears to have changed over time (Nardi, 1992a). In particular, Pahl (2000) has described contemporary friendship (in general) as important 'social glue' and argues that expectations of friendship are changing:

> *Our ideas of what it means to be a good friend, a close friend, a really close friend or a best friend are changing. Our expectations and aspirations are growing and we are even prepared to judge the quality of our relationships with kin on the basis of some higher ideal of whether we can be closer to them as friends. (p.8)*

Similarly, Sapadin (1988) has argued that men's friendships are increasingly evaluated in 'feminine' terms (e.g. qualities of relatedness, and emotional intimacy) rather than for 'traditional' male friendship qualities (e.g. instrumentality, loyalty). Thus, it appears that whilst the definition and perhaps the importance of friendship have changed over

the time, a more recent emphasis on closeness and intimacy in friendships may represent a challenge to dominant constructions of masculinity.

2.1.1 The Australian context

In Australia, looking at men's friendships invariably invokes images of 'best mates'. However, the ubiquitous term 'mates' and the related term 'mateship' are difficult to define, because their meaning depends partly on the way in which in which they are used (Altman, 1987). Mateship suggests a male-male bond formed through adversity, with an underlying anti-authoritarian 'larrikin' quality (Edgar, 1997). For example, some authors have suggested that the term mateship is the outcome of 'male bonding rituals' that take place in military or navy training and that these bonds become solidified in extreme situations such as during war (e.g. Agostino, 2003). However, several authors have suggested that 'mateship' has taken on mythological proportions, forged in historic conditions of Australia's settlement history (Ward, 1958), and has little basis in contemporary, everyday friendships of Australian men (Altman, 1987; Edgar, 1997). Furthermore, some commentators have argued that the term 'mateship' has become politicised, and has lost any valid meaning (e.g. Watson, 2005). However Bank (1995) argues that the cultural image of mateship has provided a cultural legitimation for male friendship in Australia. Thus there are mixed views about Australian mateship, and its meaning and relevance may depend on the context (e.g. personal or collective) in which the term is used, and for this reason the term friendship is used. A clearer understanding of Australian men's subjective experiences of friendship is required.

It is theorised that some of the ways that Australian men construct their masculinity does not allow for expression of intimacy and closeness between straight men outside adverse or extreme situations (e.g. war or disaster) or on the sporting field. Several theorists have discussed the idea of Australian masculinity (Altman, 1987; Edgar, 1997; Pease, 1997) proposing that in contemporary Australian culture there seems to be shame associated with male-male intimacy because it challenges the hegemonic masculine idea that men 'should be' self sufficient, independent and strong. In support of this view, a search of the Australian literature reveals very little written about male friendship together with intimacy. However in recent years, as the exploration of men and masculinities has gained momentum, studies of Australian men and close friendships

have emerged (e.g. Gruenert, 2003; Leyden, 2005). Central to most recent research on Australian masculinities is the concept of hegemonic masculinity, articulated by the Australian academic Connell (1987, 1995, 2000), and reported in Chapter One. Thus, understanding Australian masculinities through the existence of hegemonic and other marginalised masculinities is important when examining barriers to closeness and intimacy in Australian men's friendships. There appears to be a dilemma for Australian men in becoming closer with other men, between desiring intimacy whilst at the same time avoiding shame associated with violating the traditional masculine ideals (e.g. independence, avoidance of vulnerability). These themes are explored below.

2.1.2 Friendship, closeness and masculinity

Close friendship suggests a degree of physical or emotional intimacy. However, there is debate about the meaning and measurement of close relationships (Berscheid, Snyder & Omoto, 1989). Kelley et al (1983) offer a definition of a close relationship in which two individuals' thoughts, feelings and emotions are frequently, mutually and causally interconnected in an ongoing and interdependent way. This definition of closeness is useful because it places the emphasis on relationship interactions, rather than static qualities of relationships themselves. Clark and Reis (1988) have suggested that three important processes are important in all relationships; interdependence, emotion and intimacy. To this end, Berscheid and Ammazzalorso (2003), argue that partners in close relationships are dependent on each other. Whilst these definitions have merit, in straight male-male relationships all of these processes are challenges to 'traditional' expressions of masculinity, particularly experiences of dependence. Thus, it is no surprise that Rubin (1985) has described male friendship as the 'neglected relationship' as closeness and dependency are avoided. However, it is also possible that men may have another definition of 'closeness', or alternatively find the path to closeness in a way that is related to maintaining a 'respectable' masculine image, in order to avoid shame. These points are explored in more detail below.

The experience of closeness, or the anticipation of closeness in male friendships is perceived to be layered with difficulty. This is because the subject of close relationships between straight men often raises anxiety about homosexuality (Lehne, 1989; Strikwerda & May, 1992) and what Herek (1987) has called a challenge to 'heterosexual masculinity'. The anxiety about homosexuality in men has been described

as homophobia (Lehne) and has been covered previously (see Section 1.3.2.2.). Furthermore, a positive association has been found between adherence to traditional male roles and homophobia in men. Thus, an examination of men's beliefs about hegemonic masculinity may be especially important in understanding the meanings and understandings of close friendships.

There are several studies which support a causal link between the influence of hegemonic masculinity on the formation of men's friendships (e.g. Harvey, 1999; Levy, 2005). However, I argue that 'masculinity' in itself does not necessarily contribute to the styles and patterns of men's friendships, rather masculinity is constructed and enacted in men's friendships. As noted in the previous chapter, I believe there is a danger in reifying the concept of masculinity as if it exists in its own right. As K. Walker (2004) notes, it is important to distinguish masculine ideology from masculine behaviour, as her research suggests that men do experience intimacy and share emotional support in specific close male friendships. Thus, it is important to examine men's behaviour and actual experiences, not just masculine ideologies.

2.1.2.1 Friendship and family

The closest relationships in many people's lives often include either family or friends. However, friendships are chosen relationships, whereas family relationships are usually not chosen. Rubin (1985) describes the difference between family and friends:

> *With family, 'it doesn't end'- a sharp reminder that without the commitments and obligations of blood, friendships require a level of care and attention for their maintenance in ways that kin do not. There's no obligation to take a friend or to keep one; we're free to choose without support or coercion from any quarter outside ourselves. (p. 22-23)*

Thus, exploring friendships allows for an examination of the choices that men make in their lives and the issues of ongoing maintenance that close friendships may require. Furthermore, the aspect of choice highlights the political aspect of friendship, in which personal authority and power are exercised. As Little (1989) notes, friendships allow for connections based on personal identity rather than on prescribed 'roles and statuses', which are fundamental to institutions of work, civil society and the nuclear family. In particular, traditional family ties represent the dominant legal and social order (e.g. inheritance of family names and property), and thus the creation of friendships between

individuals of different backgrounds may represent a challenge to dominant social structures. This may be particularly so in gay friendships (and families) in which the dominant social order is challenged (Nardi, 2004; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). The concept of gay friendships creating new definitions of 'family' is explored further in Section 2.2.2.

2.1.3 Gay-Straight friendships

The political potential of friendship is also found in friendships between gay and straight men (Price, 1999). Whilst not a key focus of the present study, these 'crossover' friendships provide an opportunity to break down traditional constructions of masculinity (Fee, 2000). As noted previously, heterosexual masculinity is the dominant masculinity in western culture (Connell, 1995), and gay men experience heterosexism and homophobia as 'hegemonic' masculinities are enacted and maintained. Thus, it is not surprising that close gay-straight male friendships are relatively uncommon (Grigoriou, 2004). This finding is also supported by research that all close friendships are frequently characterised by a high degree of mutuality, through similarity of age, gender and social status (Duck, 1991). Mutuality may also be determined through sharing a similar sexual identity. However, the existence of close friendships between some gay and straight men represents a potential change to the social order. Fee's (2000) study of straight-gay friendships provided support for the impact of masculinity constructions on male friendship. In deconstructing sexual identity and gender, Fee found that many straight men are attracted to the potential intimacy in their gay friendships, as compared with their straight friends. By contrast, some of the gay men were attracted to the lack of intimacy with their straight friends. In these friendships, the gay men reported enjoying 'drinking beer' and 'catching up' in which their 'gayness', whilst respected, was a side issue. These findings support the general proposition that in any friendship, there needs to be mutual gain for both parties for a relationship to endure (Duck, 1991) and challenges the assumption that gay-straight friendships replicate the 'instrumentality-expressiveness' dimension of many male-female relationships (Wright, 1982). In other words, Fee argues that it is important not to conflate sexual orientation with gender, in which being gay is feminised. Furthermore, Fee's research provides some support for the proposition that different friendship constructions support non-traditional expressions of masculinity. Thus, it appears that male friendships are useful for studying and examining different masculinities.

The definition and description of close male friendships and experiences of intimacy and support are research goals in this thesis, therefore these terms will not be definitively clarified here. My belief is that these definitions will be provided by the participants. However, a review of the literature concerning men's intimacy and friendships is intended to provide a background for examining these issues.

2.2 Friendship and intimacy

The importance of friendships on wellbeing has received considerable attention from psychologists (e.g. Cohen, 2004; Duck, 1997; Duck & Silver, 1990; Reis, Collins & Berscheid, 2000). It has been reported that close friendship can provide a sense of community and belonging, emotional stability, opportunities for communication about a person's inner world, provision of help, maintenance of self esteem and to support the integration of an individuals' personality (Duck, 1991). Thus friendships are important for psychological development and well being. Furthermore, they can be important sources of intimacy, closeness and support (Fehr, 2004; Floyd, 1997). However, several authors suggest that (straight) men's same-sex friendships are not characterised by these qualities (e.g. Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Pease, 2002; Sherrod, 1989). It may be men's fear of intimacy that prevents them from experiencing the benefits of closeness.

The vast majority of research on men's friendships is based on heterosexual men or assumes a heterosexual orientation of its participants (Nardi, 1992a, 1992b). In the current study, gay and straight men's friendships are examined separately (as well as being compared and contrasted) in order to explore the role of different masculinities on friendship. To this end, the literature on straight men's friendships is examined below and gay men's friendships in section 2.3.

2.2.1 Straight men

There is some evidence to suggest that the most intimate same-sex friendships that straight men experience are from fraternal bonds (e.g. Floyd, 1997). Notwithstanding the potential for sibling jealousy and rivalry (e.g. Dunn & Kendrick, 1982) siblings can be a significant source of mutual support. It may also be that expressing love in fraternal bonds (Floyd, 1997) does not challenge traditional masculine ideology in the same way that intimacy in same-sex friendships might (e.g. for friends to hug). Thus straight men

may be missing out on potential support from their close male friends because of a fear of intimacy. This theme is explored further in the literature on social support and male friendship in Chapter Three.

Explorations of straight men's friendships and intimacy are frequently found in sex-differences research (e.g. Reis & Solomon, 1985; Weitz, 1976) and self report measures of intimacy have often been influenced by sex-role stereotyping (Deaux, 1984). As Sherrod (1989) notes, comparing men and women on friendship and intimacy is fraught with methodological difficulties, as there is likely to be a lack of equivalence in the definition and meaning of key terms. Thus, it is important to define terms being used and to carefully examine men's personal experiences of friendship and intimacy. Definitions of intimacy are offered below.

One measure of intimacy is the degree of verbal and non-verbal self disclosure in personal relationships (Lewis, 1978). Studies of (heterosexual) men's and women's friendships have found that men appear to limit the degree of emotional self disclosure (e.g. Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Rubin, 1985; Sherrod, 1987) and gender theorists have reported that women are more likely to engage in personal disclosure than men (Morman & Floyd, 1998). Men's friendships often emphasise the importance of activities and doing things together, whilst women show a greater interest in emotional sharing and talking (e.g. Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). As Sherrod (1987) notes, men place less importance on self disclosure than women in close friendships:

> *We generally think of close friendships as involving a good deal of disclosure about the intimate details of our lives. After all, a best friend is someone who accepts us as we are. Yet in the same way that men and women disagree about the meaning of close friendships, they also differ in the amount of personal information they disclose to close friends… A considerable body of evidence confirms the limits on self-disclosure in most close male friendships. (p. 218)*

Men's friendships have been characterised as 'instrumental' and 'side by side' friendships, compared with women's 'expressive, 'face to face' friendships (Nardi, 1992a, Wright, 1982). However, these views may be overly stereotyped and are likely to miss the variations within different male friendships. By examining male friendships from a developmental perspective, it appears that some boys experience closeness in childhood same-sex friendships that diminishes later with age. For example, several

studies of boys' friendships (e.g. Redman, Epstein, Kehily & Mac an Ghaill, 2002; Way, 1997) have suggested that as adolescent boys grow older they grow increasing distrustful of their male peers, although they continue to yearn for the close bonds of boyhood. A similar view is expressed by Wall, Pickett, and Paradise (1984), who found that (straight) men do value interpersonal qualities and social support in male friendship, (i.e. confidentiality, trust and intimacy) but that the possibilities for close friendship diminishes with age, and as men partner with women. It appears that many straight men desire more closeness and intimacy with male friends than they currently experience (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Levy, 2005; Miller, 1983), although it depends on how terms are defined.

Several researchers have examined the area of intimacy in close heterosexual men's friendships (e.g. Bergman, 1995; Cohen, 1992; Levant & Pollack, 1995; Lewis, 1978; Miller, 1983; Nardi, 1992a; Reid & Fine, 1992; Rubin, 1985; Seidler, 1992; Sherrod, 1987; Veniegas & Peplau, 1997). However, there is debate about what constitutes intimacy and the related concept, emotional support. It appears that men do experience support through male-male intimacy, depending on how intimacy is defined. Intimacy may refer to an individual's capacity, the quality of an interaction or a relationship itself. Thus Prager (1995) notes that whilst a clear definition of intimacy is important the *"ultimate definition is also unobtainable" (*p.13). Furthermore, some researchers have critiqued current definitions of intimacy as overly feminised and not representative of masculine expressions of intimacy (Cancian, 1986). For example, Bank (1995) has suggested that men's conflict styles (e.g. through disputes and arguments) in their close male relationships may indicate men's capacity to experience intimacy. Perhaps through an outburst of angry feelings men's friendships are just as open and expressive as women's friendships, depending on the particular definition of what constitutes an intimate interaction. This view is consistent with other researchers who have argued that conflict between close friends (if resolved) can lead to increased trust and intimacy (e.g. Cahn, 1990; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2005; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). Thus it is important to define intimacy from individuals' subjective experiences of significant interactions, rather than applying imposed definitions on observed or reported events.

There is other evidence that suggests that men experience intimacy in close friendships. Swain (2000) has argued that men seek support and intimacy covertly through activities

(e.g. playing sport, joking together). It may be that men experience a different kind of intimacy to women through sharing activities and interests (Fehr, 2004). Furthermore, the construction of the friendship may be important in understanding intimacy. Levy (2005) has argued that American middle life men ('middlers') construct their male relationships as either 'comrades' based on non-intimate exchanges or 'friendships', which are marked by mutual significance and emotional expression. Furthermore, in a sex-differences study, Wagner-Raphael, Seal, and Erhardt (2001) found that men were able obtain emotional closeness with other men through "*the ability to relax and to be oneself*" (p.244), as compared with enjoying personal disclosure with women. Thus, men do appear to be experiencing intimacy in male-male friendships, depending on the writer's definition of intimacy.

The research on intimacy and friendship is characterised by differing definitions of terms, differing research frameworks, and is frequently concerned with sex-differences (Reisman, 1990). Examining intimacy in and between men reveals a considerable body of psychological research in which gender roles are examined (e.g. Gender Role Conflict approach, O'Neil, et al., 1995) and socialised gender roles are described as if they exist as enduring social structures. Levy (2005) argues that an essentialist epistemology underlies much of this research. As noted in Chapter One, I believe that the gender role approach fails to examine the construction of gender and men's phenomenological experiences of this process Reis and Shaver (1988). The social construction of gender roles and identities (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Gergen, 1985; Harré, 1979), and the construction of men's friendships, is examined in the present study. Adding to the constructionist approach, Weingarten (1991, 1992) argues that it is not relationships that are intimate, but the quality of particular interactions. Thus, it is important to think of intimacy as residing in the quality of an interaction, as well as within an individual or a relationship per se (e.g. Prager, 1995). In Gestalt terms, intimacy may be defined as voluntary interactions between two people, that are both verbal and non-verbal, that lead to increased personal knowing of each person and mutual connection (Melnick & Blackman, 2000). Similarly,) define intimacy as a process in which a person feels understood, validated and cared for. Thus, intimacy appears to overlap with other concepts such as love, attachment, support and closeness (Prager, 1995). In friendships terms, intimacy implies a mutual relation through a reciprocation of intimacy (Strikwerda & May, 1992), which may be verbal or non-

verbal, brief or enduring. To this end, there is evidence to suggest that friendships that are perceived as unequal are likely to be less close than those which are perceived to be more equal (e.g. Veniegas & Peplau, 1997). Thus, a methodology of exploring intimacy that is process oriented (e.g. phenomenological examination of lived experience, See Chapter Four) is used in the current study because of its utility in studying men's friendship constructions and qualitative experiences of intimacy and support seeking.

As noted previously, an understanding of men and intimacy has been limited by excluding the experience of homosexual men and their friendships. In the next section, I will examine the relevant literature on gay men's friendships, intimacy and support.

2.2.2 Gay men's friendships

The literature on gay men's friendships is drawn from a number of areas of social science because the psychological research literature on gay men's friendships is limited. As reported in Chapter One, gay men's experiences need to be understood against a history of social oppression in which homosexuality was psychopathologised (Altman, 1972; Weeks, 1981). Therefore the literature on gay men's friendships is drawn from sociology (Nardi, 1992b, 1999; K. Plummer, 1981; Segal, 1990; Weeks, 1981; 1995), psychotherapy writings (Davies, 1996; A. Singer, 1996) and sexual identity models (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). Sociological models are helpful as they place homosexuality and friendship within a historical and social perspective. The most comprehensive survey found was Nardi's (1992b, 1999) sociological study of 161 gay men and their friendships, conducted in the Los Angeles area using both questionnaire and interview data. Nardi's findings are reported in the paragraphs below. Second, psychotherapy practice and theorising adds to the knowledge of gay men's friendships through an understanding of inter- and intra-personal dynamics. Third, sexual identity models provide a theory of the process by which individuals acquire a gay sexual identity against a background of stigma and homophobia, which highlights the need for close friends. A common feature of the literature on gay men's friendships is the acknowledgement of friendships and the development of gay communities as forms of social support for gay men (e.g. Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001).

When exploring gay men's friendships, it is important to acknowledge the profound impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the gay community (Altman, 1992). Several writers have examined the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (e.g. Gagnon & Nardi, 1997; Nardi, 1997; G. Walker, 1991) on the gay community and gay men's friendships. These writers argue that gay men's friendships have in some instances replaced or parallelled family or kinship like ties, as forms of social and emotional support. Many gay men have lost friends to AIDS, and have required the support of other friends to mourn their loss (Nardi, 1999). Furthermore, an understanding of gay men's friendships and social networks may have implications for understanding gay men's sexual behaviour and preventing HIV infection (Smith, Grierson, Wain, Pitts & Pattison, 2004). Whilst an examination of HIV/AIDS is not a central focus of the present study, it is acknowledged that awareness and concern regarding the epidemic has strengthened the growth of gay identity and community in Australia (Altman, 1989).

As noted previously (Chapter One), the experience of being gay is to belong to a minority group and to belong to a marginalised and subordinated masculinity (Connell, 1995). The experience of marginalisation places particular emphasis on the need for social support, and this is especially evident during the 'coming out' process. The importance of gay friends has been highlighted in several models and stages of the 'coming out' process (e.g. Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). Drawing on identity concept theory, Troiden describes the end stage of the homosexual identity formation process as 'commitment', which is in part characterised by the attainment of gay friends. However, difficulties in adopting a gay identity (including shame and homophobia) can also prevent the formation of friendships. As Martin (1982) notes, concealing homosexual activity and erotic interests may make the attainment of gay friendships difficult, resulting in isolation and a lack of a peer support network. Thus forming close friendships, whilst challenging in the early stages of the coming out process, may be especially important for peer support in the lives of gay men.

Several writers have expressed the view that gay men have the potential to construct friendships in unique ways that are not constrained by the boundaries of heterosexual masculinities (Nardi, 2004; Ratigan, 1996; Segal, 1990). For example, traditional heterosexual 'rules' regarding intimacy and sexual boundaries between friends may not apply to the same extent in gay men's friendships. The fear of same-sex intimacy,

which makes closeness problematic in straight men's friendships, may not be present in the same way in gay men's friendships (Nardi, 1999). Furthermore, gay men appear to value and utilise emotional and social support in their close male friendships as compared with findings that in straight men's friendships support is often defined in material or instrumental terms (Nardi, 1999). Thus, gay men's friendships may be organised in ways that are reflective of a different construction of masculinity than straight men and in this sense represent an alternative to hegemonic masculinities (Nardi, 2004).

Whilst there is the possibility that gay men construct their masculinity differently than straight men, there are also shared experiences which should not be overlooked (e.g. Connell, 1995; Nardi, 1992b). As Nardi notes, it is important not to confuse gender roles with sexual identity; although the two are often conflated (e.g. gay equals non-masculine). However, both gay and straight men share the experience of being born into the biological gender of male and perhaps have similar socialisation experiences as children. Similarly, it is argued that both gay and straight men are constrained by traditional hegemonic constructions of masculinity, although in different ways, due to their relative differences in social 'power'. This represents a relatively new area of research in psychology. Recent research examining male gender role conflict (GRC, O'Neil, 1981) in gay men provides tentative evidence for a reduced impact of gender role conflict in some gay men (e.g. Simonsen, Blazina & Watkins, 2000; Wester, Pionke & Vogel, 2005). This may be result of constructing non-heterosexual masculinities through the coming out process. I agree with K. Walker (2004) in arguing that an examination of men's friendship behaviour and specific experiences are required to clarify the distinction between masculine ideology and behaviour.

The issue of sexual attraction and sexual tension are key features in gay men's friendships (Altman, 1972; Nardi, 1999). Furthermore, Rubin (1985) has argued that some level of sexual attraction is present in all friendships (gay or straight), but is usually unspoken. Nardi (1992b) has argued that exploration of gay men's friendships requires an examination of the interface between sex and friendship. Gay men appear to construct friendships in ways that may include or preclude sexual contact or be based entirely on sexual contact (e.g. 'fuck buddies'). In the formation stages of gay men's friendships, sexual attraction and sexual activity are frequently present and in many

instances sexual contact occurs prior to a friendship commencing (Nardi, 1999). Viewing sex as a way to emotional intimacy (e.g. Levant, 1995) suggests a similarity between gay and straight men (Nardi, 1992b), although I would argue that many gay men are also able to distinguish between different types of sexual activity and are able to negotiate sexual needs quite directly. It appears that gay men make a choice between maintaining sexual partners and developing a close friendship, with the two rarely occurring simultaneously (Nardi, 1992b). It has been theorised that an 'incest' boundary exists to regulate sexual contact between close friends (Weston, 1991). Thus as a friendship between gay men becomes closer, the sexual involvement may decrease (Nardi, 1992b). Thus sex and friendship are closely entwined in gay men's friendships, in a way that appears quite different from straight men's friendships, but also reflects some similarities with straight men (e.g. sex and intimacy). These issues will be explored further in the current study.

2.3 Relevance of friendship literature to the current study

The literature on men's friendships has been explored from a variety of theoretical perspectives including psychology, sociology, feminism, gay theorists, psychotherapy and philosophy in order to provide an overview of close interpersonal relationships. Friendships are important aspects of social life to explore as they are generally voluntary unlike biological family ties. Furthermore, it is through important relationships such as friendships that a sense of self is known and developed. Thus ways that men initiate, maintain and experience their male friendships is of interest in the present study on men and masculinities.

The literature on the construction, maintenance and interpersonal processes of gay men's friendships is limited. The main areas covered include the importance of friendships and support for gay men due to their marginalised status and the issues of sexual attraction in gay men's friendships. The present study on gay and straight men's friendships will add on to this neglected area in the research literature.

Whilst there is considerable evidence for the importance of close friends, research suggests that straight men report a lack of male friends as they approach mid-life and that they struggle with closeness in male friendships. Historical developments over the

last century may have contributed to the construction of a dominant (straight) masculinity in which intimacy is often avoided in straight men's close friendships and a prohibition on male-male intimacy in general. It is theorised that while gay men may share some similar masculinity constructions with straight men, by contrast gay men may have constructed their masculinity in friendships that challenge the dominant hegemonic ideal (e.g. emotional intimacy). For this reason, gay men's friendships and support seeking processes are compared and contrasted with straight men in this study. Furthermore, it is proposed that both gay and straight men actively construct their masculinity in relating to others, rather than being passive recipients of a masculine ideology. Therefore, the ways that men construct their friendships is of key interest in this study. To this end, gay and straight men's experiences of intimacy in close relationships will be examined. A key issue concerns the degree to which men consider each other as sources of support and the ways in which intimacy is defined and experienced. Men's support seeking behaviour in friendships, and in general, is explored in an examination of the relevant literature in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Men's Health, Support Seeking and Relational Models

In this chapter, the literature on men's health and support seeking is reviewed. I commence the chapter with a review of the evidence that points to a pattern of men's reluctance to seek professional and personal help, despite a vast amount of data that indicates men's physical and mental health needs are considerable. An exploration of the complex link between masculinity, men's current health problems and their reluctance to seek professional help is provided. I then locate men's support seeking within male friendships and, using relational models of masculinity, I explore the literature for views advanced on men's relational styles, existential concerns, interpersonal contact patterns and support seeking.

3.1 Men's health and help seeking

Popular views suggest that most men avoid help seeking and are often unwilling to acknowledge the need for help from friends, family and helping professionals (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Numerous American studies note that men are less likely than women to seek out professional support for a range of mental health related concerns, including psychiatric illness (Courtenay, 2000b; Kessler, Brown & Bowman, 1981). Other research suggests that men visit medical practitioners less frequently than women do and when they do consult a doctor they ask fewer questions than women (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Empirical studies from the United Kingdom suggest a similar trend, with men less likely to use health services and seek help from health practitioners than women (see Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2004, for a literature review and meta analyses). In some studies the role of gender is challenged as a determining variable in help seeking, instead highlighting the importance of lifestyle choices and occupations (e.g. C. Lee & Owens, 2002). Furthermore, there are methodological problems when comparing men and women on help seeking behaviours because these sex-differences studies do not adequately account for different men's social psychological processes and the social construction of masculinities (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Despite these issues, there does appear to be a clear trend in the UK as well as in the US of men seeking help less frequently than women for a range of health related issues.

3.1.1 The Australian context

In Australia, the trend is similar to North America and the UK: men are less likely to visit a GP than women (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004). This is despite the lower life expectancy (a measure of health) for men, of 77.4 years compared to women, at 82.6 years (AIHW, 2004). In epidemiological studies men's risk of developing serious illnesses is higher for several categories than women (e.g. coronary heart disease, AIHW, 2004). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (Mortality Atlas, 2002), reports men's rate of mortality compared to women's mortality is higher for most major categories. Thus, a picture emerges of Australian men's reluctance to seek help for health issues, and suggests a lack of awareness of health needs, despite a high prevalence of serious health concerns. However, a different view of men's health is expressed by Fletcher, Higginbotham and Dobson (2002) in a study of Australian men's perceived health needs. They found that in asking men about their perceived health needs men were forthcoming about specific areas of personal concern. Fletcher et al. found that men reported awareness and concern about some of their health needs (e.g. personal stress levels, back pain), although these were different from men's health needs identified by 'health professionals and planners' in medically-based epidemiological studies (e.g. heart disease, mortality rates). Thus, it appears men in Australia do have awareness of some of their health needs however, medically based research fails to adequately capture this information as men are rarely asked about their specific health concerns (Fletcher et al). The fact remains that men's mortality rates are high compared to women's. Thus, an examination of men's health and help seeking needs to incorporate men's personal perspectives of their health and masculinity, rather than relying only on large scale epidemiological data.

In Australia, men are more highly represented than women on a range of health statistics including higher rates of injury from motor vehicles and industrial accidents, and suicide rates for men and boys (Schofield, Connell, Walker, Wood & Butland, 2000). These findings suggest a link between health risk behaviours and masculinity enactments rather than an inherent biological determinant of health. For example, a common focus on motor cars has been theorised as an important collective process for Australian young working class males in the formation of masculinities (e.g. L. Walker, 2003). From this perspective, risk taking behaviour and the experience of power whilst

driving dangerously may be understood as specific enactments of masculinity (Connell, 2000).

In other health findings, men are also more highly represented than women in problematic drug and alcohol use in Australia (Higgins, Cooper-Stanbury & Williams, 2000). Furthermore research has identified a link between dimensions of the male gender role (e.g. restricted emotionality, anti-femininity) and problematic drug and alcohol use, particularly in young men (Monk & Ricciardelli, 2003). Thus, there appears to be a relationship between particular enactments of masculinity and men's health issues.

In recent research on men, links between masculinities, gender relations and men's health, are being explored (e.g. Courtenay 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Courtenay & Keeling, 2000; Sabo, 2005; Schofield et al, 2000). For example, the Australian Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner recently highlighted the relationship between masculinity and men's health problems (Goward, 2005). It has been proposed that aspects of traditional masculinity (achievement focus, excessive risk taking, stoicism) are major causes of many health problems that men face (e.g. work stress, alcohol and drug abuse, physical health problems), rather than any inherent biological difference between the sexes (Eisler & Blalock, 1991; O'Neil, 1981; O'Neil, et al., 1995).

Addis and Mahalik (2003) have suggested that more research is needed to understand the relationship between men's gender role socialisation, physical and mental health and help seeking. Thus, one issue concerns the possible relationships between masculinity and health problems, whilst the second, related issue, concerns the relationships between masculinity and help seeking. Furthermore, Courtenay (2000b) argues that men's health related beliefs and behaviours need to be understood from the perspective of men's constructions and enactments of masculinity in particular settings (e.g. at work, playing sport). For example, a man may have awareness of a health problem but may fear that attending the doctor or taking sick leave may be perceived as an admission of weakness, especially by peers or work colleagues. Courtenay (2000a) argues that medically based research often fails to consider the impact of gender on health. These issues are important, because the consequences of not seeking help for health problems are potentially serious. It remains a question of interest; the degree to

which men's constructions of masculinity influences their help seeking behaviour from close friends. In order to explore these issues, the help seeking literature is explored in Section 3.1.1 below.

3.2 Mental health issues, help seeking and men

There is evidence which suggests that most help-seeking occurs within close relationships (Clark, 1983; Leatham & Duck, 1990). However, in much of the psychological literature on men's help seeking (e.g. Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Mansfield, Addis & Courtenay, 2005) research has focussed on men's help seeking from health professionals. Examining men's help seeking from professionals is important to improve men's help seeking and their health outcomes. It is also important to distinguish between help seeking and receiving. It appears that men's experience of receiving help and support, such as in everyday interactions may be overlooked (e.g. Leatham & Duck, 1990). However men's experiences of seeking and receiving support from men's close friendships are under researched. Nevertheless, there are some important contributions from the professional help seeking literature which are briefly reported below.

3.2.1 Help seeking models

In research findings, it is acknowledged that help seeking involves a complex process that involving an interaction between the person seeking help and the helper (e.g. Gross & Mc Mullen, 1983). Also important is the type of help requested and the situation in which help is sought (Wills & DePaulo, 1991). Individual perceptions of the help seeker greatly influence the decision making process to seek or not seek help. Perceived inadequacy (Rosen, 1983), embarrassment and shame (Shapiro, 1983) about an issue or regarding selfhood have been found to limit help seeking behaviour. Adding to these views, Addis and Mahalik (2003) have proposed a model in which men's constructions of masculinity are moderated by basic psychological processes, in specific help seeking contexts. These include:

a) the perceptions of the normativeness of problems, b) the perceived ego-centrality of problems, c) characteristics of potential helpers, d) characteristics of the social groups to which the individual men belong, and e), perceived loss of control. (p.10)

This model is helpful as it integrates individual help seeking processes within a wider context of masculinity. Thus, men's help seeking behaviour can be understood to involve a complex interaction between individual and environmental factors. It has been theorised that men are greatly influenced by traditional masculine ideologies (e.g. demonstration of independence) in help seeking behaviour, and that transgressing these ideologies may be shame inducing (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Questionnaires and large scale surveys may not provide the complex detail of individual men's decision making processes in deciding whether to ask for help. Thus an understanding of men's reluctance to ask for help (e.g. Mansfield, et al., 2005) can be expanded by examining different men's perceptions of help seeking behaviour in specific contexts. To this end, the literature on gay and straight men's help seeking for personal and emotional issues is explored below.

3.2.2 Men in general

In North American studies on men's seeking of mental health services and counselling, men are underrepresented as counselling and psychotherapy clients (Cochran, 2005; Good, Dell & Mintz, 1989; Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens & Bartels, 1996). Men also hold more negative attitudes toward counselling than women (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Good, et al., 2005). However, men's underutilisation of counselling and psychotherapy does not appear to be due to a lesser need for mental heath services (Cochran, 2005). Levant (1998) has suggested that men's male socialisation leads to difficulties in identifying and communicating emotions, which are necessary for engagement in counselling and psychotherapy. Good and Wood (1996) report that aspects of traditional masculinity (such as independence, low levels of emotional disclosure) impact on men's psychological health as well their ability to seek out help for those stressors. Mahalik, Good and Englar-Carlson (2003) report a positive relationship between men's endorsement of 'traditional' masculine ideologies and a range of presenting problems. In Australia, Pease (1997) has argued that adherence to dominant forms of masculinity prohibits emotional expression in men, and in turn reduces help seeking. Therefore, aspects of masculine socialisation may contribute to mental health problems and are barriers to seeking help. In order to further examine potential links between health, support seeking and masculinity, the literature on the health needs of gay men is explored below.

3.2.3 Gay men

There is less known about the health needs and help seeking behaviour of gay men as a discrete group than about straight men. The degree to which men's general health issues are reflective of gay men's health in particular is largely unknown, although it is assumed that gay men's general health issues are largely similar to straight men's. However key differences are indicated in studies on the physical and mental health needs of gay men. Health concerns identified as particular to gay men have included issues related to HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour, alcohol and drug use, body image concerns and the social stigma associated with a gay identity (e.g. Herzog, Newman & Warshaw, 1991; Meyer, 1995; Robertson, 1998; Sabo, 2005). These issues are explored below.

Whilst there is no link in the research literature between gay sexual identity and psychopathology (Gonsiorek, 1991), in other research (e.g. DiPlacido, 1988; Meyer, 1995) it has been argued that gay men (and lesbians and bisexuals) suffer from chronic and acute stress by virtue of their minority status. There is a considerable body of evidence which documents the social stigma and prejudice faced by gay and lesbian adolescents and the potential negative impact on social and personal identities of adult gays and lesbians (e.g. D'Augelli, 2006; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1994). Many psychological problems experienced by gay people can be explained in socio-political terms and within a cultural context, rather than in acontextual psychiatric terms (Warwick & Aggleton, 2002; Vincke & Heeringen, 2002). To this end, in a recent study (Pitts, Smith, Mitchell & Patel, 2006) it was found that approximately half of the gay men sampled had sought a counsellor or psychiatrist in the past five years for issues including depression, anxiety, relationship problems and family issues. While it seems that gay men are highly likely to suffer from minority stress, these health findings are complicated by the possibility that gay men might also be more likely to ask for professional help, and help in general, than straight men. There is insufficient data available to adequately answer these questions, thus gay men's help seeking (from close friends) is explored in the current study.

Gay men are known to experience the negative effects of homophobia and are at risk of negative evaluation and stigma (Flood & Hamilton 2005). A severe form of anti-gay

prejudice is verbal and physical abuse. A recent report (NSW Attorney Generals Department 2003) showed that in the previous 12 months, 61 per cent of gay men surveyed in NSW experienced homophobic abuse. These statistics may not necessarily represent the full extent of homophobia experienced by gay men due to several underreporting issues. First, surveys of this kind often rely on recording experiences of individuals' who identify as gay, which may exclude some men, and second, relies on self reporting of incidents, which may be denied or minimised. In summary, the NSW Attorney General's report indicates that gay men are *"significantly more likely to encounter abuse and violence compared to heterosexual men"* (2003, p. ii).

Another health issue of particular concern to gay men is the stress of conforming to an idealised body image (e.g. Drummond, 2005b; Herzog, et al., 1991). In several studies, gay men have been found to report higher levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders than straight men (e.g. Lakkis, Ricciardelli, & Williams, 1999; Siever, 1994), suggesting a strong association between sexual identity and body image concerns. Several arguments have been proposed for these findings, including the impact of the 'buff agenda' (Halkitis, 2000), that may operate within the gay community, in which physical appearance and attractiveness is highly valued (Dillon, Copeland, & Peters, 1999; Herzog, et al., 1991; Siever, 1994). It would also appear that gay men's experience of minority stress (Meyer, 1995) is also an important contributory factor in determining body image dissatisfaction, measured as the difference between desired and perceived body image (S. Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). A muscular body may be desired by gay men in order to defend against the perception of being less masculine than straight men (Pope et al., 2000). Furthermore, in some HIV positive men, an overemphasis on body appearance has been found, particularly in promoting an idealised and 'healthy' masculinity (Halkitis, Green, & Wilton, 2004). Thus, it would appear that gay men's body image concerns are closely related to concerns about acceptance within gay masculinities and/or concerns about appearing unmasculine within straight masculinities.

The HIV/AIDS crisis in Australia, as in other western countries has severely affected 'homosexually active'[7] men and prompted a National HIV/AIDS Strategy (Department

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[7] Refers to homosexual behaviour rather than homosexual identity.

of Health and Ageing, 2005). To this end, Lumb (2003) has argued that the HIV/AIDS crisis has generated the only significant men's health policy in Australia, which has been hailed as a success internationally. However, in recent years, the number of new HIV diagnoses has risen, including new diagnoses in gay men. For example, in 2003, 74 percent of new HIV diagnoses and 85 per cent of newly acquired infection occurred in men who are sexually active with other men (Department of Health and Ageing, 2005). It is gay men and the gay community that have been the most affected by these increased rates of diagnoses. Notwithstanding the optimism generated by new treatments (antiretrovirals), increased risk taking (unprotected anal sex) and drug use among gay and other homosexually active men has been theorised as a major cause for the increased transmissions (Department of Health and Ageing, 2005; Kippax et al, 2003). To this end, some authors have argued that gay men's engagement in high risk sexual practices should be understood as an expression of 'protest masculinity' against hegemonic, heterosexual masculinities (Connell, 1995; Courtenay, 2000b). In this way gay men's risk behaviour can interpreted as a particular enactment of masculinity, informed by the marginalised position of gay masculinities to other masculinities. Thus an examination of health issues and behaviours amongst gay men needs to be viewed through the lens of masculinity enactments, which in turn will inform a greater understanding of support seeking behaviour.

There is a lack of detailed research comparing the help seeking behaviours of gay men with straight men, and it is important not to conflate sexual identity and masculinity. Whilst it is acknowledged that gay men belong to a marginalised and subordinated masculinity (Connell, 1995), the way that gay men enact their masculinity in everyday settings is important. As Courtenay (2000b) notes, some gay men adopt 'traditional' masculine behaviours in order to compensate for their minority status, and do not seek help from others in order to appear as 'real men'. By contrast, gay men with low gender role conflict and who do not endorse traditional male gender roles, may find it easier to seek professional help (e.g. Simonsen, et al., 2000). These findings are drawn mainly from professional help seeking studies and do not reveal the gender of the potential help provider. In heterosexual studies, men's resistance to asking for help from other men has been identified as an important aspect of the help seeking process (e.g. Mormon & Floyd, 1998). Thus, there is merit in examining help seeking in gay men's friendships, to explore the potential impact of gay 'male-male' dynamics.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that many gay men selectively disclose their sexuality to health professionals, depending on the perceived receptivity of the audience (e.g. Robertson, 1998; Taylor & Robertson, 1994). For example, Pitts, et al. (2006) found that 20 percent of gay men had not disclosed their sexuality to their regular GP. Thus an examination of help seeking in gay men requires an understanding of the ways in which gay men construct and enact their masculinity in different settings.

It is theorised that gay men's friendships may provide opportunities for safe disclosure and the provision of social and emotional support as noted in Chapter Two. However, examining support seeking in gay men's friendships also requires an understanding of the terms social and emotional support. These issues are explored below.

3.3 Social and emotional support

Exploring masculinity, close friendship and support touches on wider human themes of existence. Ideas expressed by existentialist theorists and existential phenomenologists, point to universal human issues. Yalom (1998) has listed four main existential concerns that confront all people: death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. These themes are present in all human beings and are helpful in considering masculinity, men's friendships and support seeking

As reported in the previous chapter (Chapter Two: men's friendships), friendships can be important sources of social and emotional support. However, in terms of social support, men report they are lonelier than women in Australia. From adulthood through to old age, men report less close friends for companionship or support (Flood, 2005). Loneliness may be defined as a response to an absence of a particular desired relationship, which includes an intimate attachment and close friends (Weiss, 1973). Whilst friendship can ameliorate relational loneliness, by contrast, existential loneliness (Moustakas, 1961), whilst not always foreground, is an existential reality of human existence. I believe that close friendship presents unique opportunities for the existential encounter described by Buber's (1970) I-Thou meeting and consequent support in life's existential aloneness.

It appears that men in Australia are in need of, and desire, social support but many have few close friends from whom to seek support. A second, related issue, concerns the extent to which men seek out social and emotional support from their existing friends.

Social support and to a lesser extent, emotional support, has been extensively researched in the social sciences, and the focus of the present study is on supporting seeking in men's close friendships. The literature on social support will be covered briefly first, and the literature on emotional support appears subsequently below (Section 3.2.3).

3.3.1 Social support

Social support has been theorised as having an important relationship with promoting health (e.g. Cohen, 2004; Sarason, Sarason & Gurung, 2001; Schwarzer & Leppin, 1991). The perception that practical and emotional support is available in times of need has been associated with positive mental and physical health outcomes (Cutrona, Suhr & MacFarlane, 1990). Furthermore, the research on utilising social support from close friends has been shown to be a preventer of health problems (e.g. stress) and as having a buffering effect in the advent of particular problems and crises (e.g. Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona & Russell, 1987).

Social support has received considerable attention in the academic literature and because of different methodological and theoretical positions, and is defined in several different ways (e.g. Duck & Silver, 1990; House, Umberson & Landis, 1988). For example, social support has been used interchangeably with terms such as social networks and social integration (House et al, 1988) and researchers are now increasingly linking social support and relationships (Badr, Acitelli, Duck & Carl, 2001; Duck & Silver, 1990). To this end, I am considering social support within the context of close friendships as an interpersonal process. The social support research is extensive and has examined interpersonal transactions and perceived support (e.g. Cutrona, et al., 1990), communication patterns (e.g. Burleson, 1990), the mobilisation process (e.g. Eckenrode & Wethington, 1990) and health outcomes (e.g. Cohen, 2004; Sarason, et al., 2001). Therefore it is important to define the terms being used, as elucidated in the paragraphs below.

Cohen (2004) provides a useful definition of social support as *"a social network's provision of psychological and material resources **intended to benefit an individual's ability to cope with stress**. It is often differentiated in terms of three types of resources: instrumental, informational and emotional"* (author's emphasis, p.676). Instrumental assistance refers to the provision of material aid (e.g. food, money) or a specific act or behaviour (e.g. offering a lift, or assistance with a task). Informational assistance, above, refers to the provision of knowledge or advice. Emotional support refers to expressions of empathy, care and reassurance, and in which opportunities for sharing feelings are provided (Cohen). Of particular interest in the present study are the supportive 'resources' that men perceive their friends to posses, and the processes by which gay and straight men seek out those supports.

There is also evidence that suggests that social supports can produce negative outcomes including experiences of feeling smothered and controlled, inadequate, and in the longer term, depression and lowered self esteem (La Gaipa, 1990). Thus, it is important to examine support processes in men's friendships in a way that allows for the emergence of both positive and negative experiences.

Leatham and Duck (1990) argue that routine everyday interactions between friends are examples of social support. I agree with this view, as it is congruent with the Gestalt model (see Section 3.3.1) of self, in which individuals exist in an indivisible relationship with the environment. Social support in this way refers to the perception of the availability of support of others (built up over time), and the everyday experiences of receiving support both verbally, and non-verbally (through actions and behaviours). Furthermore, the social support process has been theorised as consisting of at least three components: support seeking, support provision and support receiving (Badr, Acitelli, Duck & Carl, 2001). I add to this list, the awareness of a need for support as an important aspect of the support seeking process. From a Gestalt therapy perspective, awareness of personal and social needs is a necessary pre-cursor to consideration of mobilising support to meet those needs (Polster & Polster, 1973). To this end, it is acknowledged that seeking support for personal problems may invoke conflicting thoughts to reveal and withhold personal information (D. Goldsmith & Parks, 1990). It is theorised that shame (or the fear of shame) and embarrassment about personal needs,

may be an important variable in understanding men's reluctance (and ability) to seek and receive support.

3.3.2 Emotional support

Emotional support is a related concept to social support and has been identified as an important component of close relationships (Clark & Reis, 1988; Weiss, 1973; Xu & Burleson, 2001). Emotional support has been conceptualised as verbal and non-verbal expressions of love, concern and care especially in times of personal distress (Burleson, 2003). Emotional support from friends may be thought of as a special form of social support, and is of interest in the present study for its role in men's close friendships, because it may challenge traditional notions of masculinity (e.g. independence, stoicism). Emotional support from friends may be especially in important in times of a personal or health crisis, as these situations often involve invalidation of sense of self from personal rejection (e.g. relationship break-up) or from perceived failure. In both cases, reassurance and encouragement from friends may be especially important (Burleson, 2003). For example a health crisis such as HIV, which is highly stigmatising, may present an important need for close friends and their emotional support (Paul, Hays & Coates, 1995). In support of this view, in the Fourth HIV Futures Survey (Grierson, Thorpe, Saunders & Pitts, 2004) it was reported that approximately half the gay men living with HIV regarded their close friends as a significant source of social and emotional support. Thus emotional support provided in close friendships may offer a validation of a sense of self, further highlighting the relational nature of support.

3.4 Men seeking close male friends for social and emotional support

The relevant literature on men's friendships and men's relational processes is examined to further explore the phenomena of men seeking out male friends for support. In the present study, enactments of masculinity in close friendships are of interest. Whilst the literature in psychology on relationships and gender is extensive, emotional support seeking in close male friendships is rarely covered. Secondly, there is even less written about gay men's friendships and the comparisons between gay and straight friendships. Contributions from social psychology, psychotherapy, sociology, existential phenomenology and Gestalt therapy are examined in this section to explore men's

friendships and men's relational processes. In particular, men's friendships as sources of emotional support and intimacy are explored.

The research on support and intimacy between men was reported in the previous section and one aspect of male help seeking which appears greatly underutilised is support from other men. Several authors (e.g. Barbee et al, 1993; Miller, 1983; Seidler, 1992) have suggested that men's focus on competition in friendship often leads to wariness and mistrust and is a barrier to seeking each other out for support. Thus, it seems that the construction of men's friendships in competitive terms may not be conducive to seeking emotional support.

Burda and Vaux (1987) found that men reported a clear preference for females as primary sources of emotional support. In an examination of communication patterns between and within men and women, it was concluded in a general sense that women were more supportive than men (Burleson, 2002). Thus, it appears that men may not consider other men as sources of emotional support. Several authors have suggested that men's friendships may be organised around rationality and the avoidance of expressing and discussing emotions because of issues associated with vulnerability (R. Cook, 2002; Seidler, 1992). Paradoxically, avoidance of emotions may be perceived to be supportive for some men who wish to avoid vulnerability. Sometimes 'hanging out' with friends and not focussing on emotions may be experienced as supportive (Fee, 2000). However, as noted in the previous chapter, some authors have suggested the definition of emotional support and intimacy has become overly feminised (Bank, 1995; Cancian, 1986). Thus, questions regarding men's support may often be framed in such a way as to bias the response toward female styles of support seeking, and thus may miss men's unique accounts.

It may more useful to examine ways in which men do seek support and to examine how and what factors assist the support seeking process. It appears that men seek out help under particular circumstances, such as in times of crisis (Seidler, 1992). In addition, it may be that men receive emotional support from other men through seeking out activities that covertly enhance intimacy (Swain, 2000). These include seeking out a friend to join in a common interest, playing sport, providing assistance with practical problems, physical gestures and joking behaviour. Other studies have revealed men's

ability to seek support if their behaviour was perceived to be preserving or restoring an aspect of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. professional fire fighting; see O'Brien, Hunt & Hart, 2005). Furthermore, other researchers have found that men are more likely to seek support from other males when traditional male roles, are not threatened, such as in social drinking (Burda & Vaux, 1987). As Fehr (2004) notes, men may achieve intimacy and support through engaging in shared activities and adventures. Thus, an examination of men's experiences of emotional and social support seeking requires an examination of different men's experiences and interpretations of perceived intimate and supportive interactions is needed. To this end, the literature on gay men's support seeking in close friendships is reported below.

3.4.1 Gay men

By contrast to the findings on straight men, the limited research available on gay men's friendships as sources of support suggests a different picture. Nardi (1999) has argued that gay men's friendships, unlike straight men's friendships, are central to gay men's lives as sources of social support and in the creation of a sense of community. This may be because many gay people have experienced stigma and prejudice from the community and their families (Davies, 1996). The association between gay men's friendships and the creation of alternative families has been made by a number of commentators (Altman, 1972; D'Augelli & Garnets, 1995; Segal, 1990; Weston, 1991). Furthermore, the importance of supportive friendships for gay people during the coming out process, and in providing support against discrimination and prejudice, has also been reported (e.g. Cass, 1979; K. Plummer, 1981).

Gay men's friendships may have the potential for challenging the structures of dominant masculinity through the existence of alternative masculinities (Nardi, 1999). It is possible that gay men's constructs of masculinity are less focussed on traditional masculine values such as independence and stoicism than straight men's masculinity. This may occur through an increased ability to experience male-male intimacy and to express vulnerability. Thus, both straight and gay male friendships need to be explored to gain a greater understanding of the possible relationship between support seeking and the construction of masculinities.

3.4.2 Support and the Gestalt approach

The Gestalt approach provides a useful framework for studying support seeking processes in men as it operationalises the social constructionist approach (Gergen, 1985). The Gestalt approach challenges the existence of an objective reality and argues that all existence is subjective and constructionist (Yontef, 1993). Therefore, the ways in which men enact gender roles occurs within socially constructed contexts and fields. Gestalt field theory, based on the Lewin's (1951) notion of person-environment fields, provides a framework to understand men's 'maps' of masculinity. Thus, a key question is how do men actively construct their masculinity in their interactions with other men?

The Gestalt approach provides an understanding of an individual's relationship with the environment through 'contact'. According to the Gestalt approach, all experience is contact with the environment and contact with other individuals in the environment is the process by which the personality and a sense of self is formed (Yontef & Jacobs, 2005). This relational view is an important aspect in studying men and masculinity, because it provides a method of understanding men in relation to others, particularly other men. From a Gestalt perspective, men influence other men and are shaped by their interactions with other men. The 'field' of men is differentiated by boundaries and it is through men's contact with other men (self-other boundary) that the existence of interpersonal boundaries are made aware. Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951) offer a particular definition of a personal boundary suggesting that boundaries perform a regulating function:

> *When we say 'boundary' we think of a 'boundary between'; but the contact-boundary, where experience occurs, does not **separate** the organism and its environment; rather it limits the organism, contains and protects it, and **at the same** time it touches the environment [Author's emphasis]. (p.229)*

The self-other boundary is a permeable boundary that is not fixed (Polster & Polster, 1973). Thus, health is defined as the ability of the individual to respond adaptively via the self-other boundary to their environment as Mackewn (1997) describes:

> *From a Gestalt viewpoint, psychologically healthy people are self-regulating individuals, able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances and to support themselves in many respects while accepting mutual interdependence with other people and the environment. They can strike a balance between looking after their*

own individual needs and caring for the needs of other people and their community, recognising their interdependence with the environment and caring for it as well. (Pp.21-22)

Support is an important term psychologically, and in Gestalt theory, and may be defined broadly in external and internal terms. Mackewn (1997) defines external support in broad terms as support that may be obtained from the physical, social and structural aspects of the environment. This broad definition of support covers all environmental phenomena external to the individual. Punctuating the entire 'field' are other people (e.g. friends) as potential sources of social, emotional and practical support. Of particular interest in this study is men's consideration of other males as sources of social and emotional support. Environmental support may be contrasted with self support which includes the support that individuals can provide for themselves. Self support is defined as the conscious and unconscious supportive functions that an individual can provide for themselves including constitutional factors such as health, breathing, values, self-beliefs and self care (Mackewn, 1997).

Most aspects of daily living involve a complex interrelationship between self support and environmental support. For example, spiritual beliefs could be considered as either self support, or environmental support, or both, depending on a person's particular view of spirituality. Both self support and external support are necessary for psychological health, although what is of interest in the present study is men's style or pattern of identifying support needs and of seeking and receiving support from others. Thus, I concur with Clark and Reis (1988) who argue that interdependence is an important feature of close relationships. In a similar vein, the Gestalt approach challenges the traditional notion of psychological maturity as the attainment of independence from others (Wheeler, 2000). An excessive focus on independence is characteristic of some men who report a preference for self support, as opposed to support from male friends (Wheeler & Jones, 1996). Thus, it is argued in the present study, that some men discount the possibility of support from others, while perhaps relying perhaps too heavily on self support. By contrast, from a Gestalt perspective, it is suggested that an individual exists in an indivisible, interdependent relationship with their environment which includes other individuals (Perls, et al., 1951). Of interest in this study is the degree to which men consider other men as aspects of the person-environment field as sources of support.

The Gestalt approach provides a theory for understanding individuals and their relationship with others through contact, as driven by an awareness of individual needs. This view is similar to help seeking models (e.g. DePaulo, 1983; Gross & McMullen, 1983) in which individuals have first to identify a personal problem, and a need, in order to consider where and how to get their needs met. However, from a Gestalt perspective, this idea is taken further, in which an individual is considered to exist in an indivisible relationship with the environment through contact processes which are occurring all the time. Thus, an awareness of needs is the basis for most human activity, not just in specific help seeking situations. Mackewn (1997) describes the Gestalt notion of contact:

> *Gestalt counselling and therapy study the individual at the contact boundary between the self and the environment, the relationship between the person and the situation, for it is here that client and counsellor can notice the patterns of how people connect (or fail to connect) to their surroundings and circumstances and thus learn about how they meet (or fail to meet) their needs. (p.27)*

The 'need' referred to above, may be a physical need such as food or drink, or it may an interpersonal need such as love or care. It is theorised that in some men particular needs are experienced as shameful, especially if they are gender-dystonic (Wheeler, 1996). Of significance is how men 'make contact with their environment' and of particular interest is how men make (or inhibit) contact with other male friends. This study is not an exploration of therapeutic relationships; however, as a Gestalt therapist, my training and clinical work is in the area of noticing and observing relationship patterns and assisting clients to identify their contact patterns. This perspective has been brought to this study in order to examine men's relationship styles and patterns with their close male friends. Therefore, support and masculinity are examined as relational constructs, rather than as solely intrapersonal concepts.

3.5 Relational models and support

In the current project, men's support seeking processes are explored from a relational framework. As Reis, et al. (2000) note, "interpersonal *relationships are the foundation and theme of human life (*because*) most human behaviour takes place in the context of the individuals relationship with others"* (p.844). It is in relationships that our sense of

self initially develops (e.g. K. Barrett, 1997) and continues to develop in an interdependent relationship (Duck, 1991). For example, Little (1989) notes the *"paradoxical sense that you can be more fully yourself with a friend"* (p.145). Furthermore, from a phenomenological perspective, it makes no sense to think of 'the self' as a permanent construction, as it is through relating to the world and others that a 'self' comes to be known (Spinelli, 2005). In other words, a sense of self is the result of reflective experience. Thus a relational view of self and an examination of self-other processes are important, including men's awareness of relationship, need for relationships and ability to be in relationship. The particular relationships of concern in this study are male-male friendships. The literature on men's relational processes is helpful in adding to the understanding of men's friendships. Furthermore, relational models are helpful because they place selfhood and subjectivity within a relational framework. Therefore, models of men's relational processes tell us something about men's need for friends in the development of a sense of self.

Bergman (1995), drawing on a psychotherapeutic framework, has criticised psychological theories of male development as being overly self centric, without a consideration of self in relation. Wheeler (2000) critiques Freud (1953), Jung (1946/2001) and Erikson (1951) amongst others, for idealising masculine maturity as the attainment of individuation and independence. Many Western psychological models of 'the self' provide conceptualisations of self identity occurring prior to relationship, and thus fail to consider the interdependency of a self in relation to another (K. Barrett, 1997; Reis, et al., 2000). Furthermore, it has been proposed that males are essentially agentive and individually focussed, and thus less relationally focused than women (e.g. Bakan, 1966, Spence & Helmreich, 1978). However, individualistic models have been challenged by a number of theorists for their lack of relationality in general (e.g. Salgado & Hermans, 2005) and in particular in theorising about men and development of self. For example, important infant studies by Stern (1985) have challenged the 'individual in isolation' models of a self. Stern showed that male and female infants demonstrate emotional connectedness and mutual responsiveness for relatedness that is evident in the first years of life. The implications of Stern's (1985) research are that men do have an inbuilt capacity for relationship. Furthermore, these findings suggest that men also desire and need close relationships for growth and health.

Other researchers (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Bergman, 1995; Pollack, 1995) have highlighted the contributions of the feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to understand men's relational processes. Chodorow's (1978) understanding of boys' gender development and gender identity has provided new ways of understanding men's relational styles. In a re-working of the oedipal conflict, Chodorow argues that boys' attachments to their mothers are disrupted early in life, and in that process of separation, boys develop more rigid ego boundaries than girls. Boys are theorised to develop a masculine sense of self that is separate to others. Following Chodorow (1978), Pollack (1995) argues that boys' separation from their mothers' results in developmental trauma that inhibits men's capacity for relationship in later life. Pollack explores the possibilities for men through therapy and personal growth to embrace a balance between an individualistic 'I' position and a 'we'- relatedness position. Whilst these theories are useful in adding to our knowledge, they are limited in that they are overly reliant on early childhood development as explanatory models. By contrast, the constructionist theorists seek to understand how individuals (in this case, men) actively construct their sense of self and masculinity in ongoing relational processes. For example, Redman, Epstein, Kehily and Mac an Ghaill (2002) in a study of boys' bonding, reported that close friends were able to construct their friendships in ways that challenged hegemonic constructions of masculinity (i.e. through male-male intimacy). Thus, it is important to understand how individuals' construct their relationships and their masculinity. In the Gestalt perspective, the focus on process and present moment experience provide useful tools for examining relational processes and is explained further below.

3.5.1. Gestalt and relational approaches

Gestalt theory and therapy has been a leader in the development of a relational sense of self (Yontef, 1997). As mentioned previously, Gestalt theory posits that a sense of self develops and exists in relation to the person-environment field, and is not a fixed entity (Yontef & Jacobs, 2005). Gestalt theory draws on the work of Buber (1965, 1970), who provided a relational model for humans; the I-Thou and I-It modes. The I-Thou mode conveys the importance of a subject–subject encounter as a deep existential, person to person meeting (Yontef, 1993). This is compared with the I-It mode of relating, which is a subject–object, or object-object mode of relating. I believe that Buber's (1965) I-Thou mode, although rarer than the I-It mode which describes most interpersonal relations, represents many of the supportive features of a close relationship such as

intimacy, interdependence, emotional connection and love (Clark & Reis, 1988). Hycner and Jacobs (1995) refer to this relationship in Gestalt therapy as the dialogic relationship. Hycner (1995) defines the possibilities in a dialogic relationship:

> *"In discussing the dialogic, I am not referring to speech, but rather an attitude and awareness and openness about caring about the unique other person and our inter human connectedness with that person. I am referring to an attitude of genuinely feeling/sensing/experiencing the other person **as a person** (not an object, or part object), and a willingness to deeply "hear" the other person's experience without prejudgment. Furthermore, it is the willingness to "hear" what is not being spoken, and to "see" what is not visible. It is presence to the mystery of our interexistence". (p. xi, author's emphasis)*

To see the other person as a subject, not an object is at the centre of a dialogic relationship in Gestalt therapy. For a (gay or straight) man to have the experience of being seen and accepted by another man is perhaps the foundation of a supportive experience from a close male friend. The goals of a dialogic relationship provide a useful definition of emotional support, although it is important to distinguish Gestalt therapy from processes in men's friendships. Therefore, the terms intimacy, closeness and interpersonal contact will be used, instead of dialogic relations. It is acknowledged that the goals of therapy are different from friendship goals in several important ways. Whilst they are both human relationships, they have different boundaries and different power structures. Friendships are not usually constructed around a specific task while therapy is focussed on specific goals of personal change or growth. Secondly, therapeutic relationships are not usually chosen for their friendship value (although in some rare situations a friendship may emerge later). Thus, central aspects of the 'dialogic relationship' may be explored in men's friendship interactions through examining experiences of interpersonal contact and intimacy.

The relational elements of Buber's (1965) I-Thou relationship provide a useful framework for describing the experience of intimacy experienced in emotional support. They include presence, genuine and unreserved communication and inclusion (Jacobs, 1995a). Emotional support is defined in this way as a genuine reaching out to the other (not always with words) and an acceptance of the personhood of the other. Buber (1970) stated, *"All real living is meeting"* (p.11). Thus, relationship is central to human existence. A further implication of this definition of interpersonal contact is the

mutuality and reciprocal possibilities in close friendships. The potential for male friendships to be emotionally supportive is consistent with the intention of an I-Thou meeting. It is 'meeting' itself that is supportive. Thus, close relationships are not merely desirable, but an integral part of life in general. However, being 'in relationship' requires an individual to manage the opposing forces of the desire for connection and the need for separateness, as Polster and Polster (1973) note below:

> *Since our umbilicalectomy, each of us has become separate beings, seeking union with that which is other than ourselves. Never again can we return to the original symbiotic paradise; our sense of union depends paradoxically on a heightened sense of separateness and it is this paradox which we constantly seek to resolve. The function which synthesizes the need for union and for separation is contact. (pp 98-99)*

Thus, exploring men's constructions of friendship and their relational patterns, necessarily involves an appreciation of men's ability to manage these twin goals of contact and separation

In summary, the literature on men's health and support seeking has been reviewed in this chapter. In particular, support seeking has been reviewed from a relational perspective. It is theorised that men demonstrate capacity to be in relationship, and desire relationship, but it also follows that adherence to traditional aspects of masculinity may inhibit men from seeking support from each other. Despite the ubiquity of men's friendships, it is not generally known how gay and straight men's friendship processes differ in the way that they may offer mutual support and ameliorate against everyday stressors and existential concerns. In the present study, these questions are explored.

3.6 Aims in the present study

In the present study, the key aims were to examine and compare the lived experiences and perceptions of gay and straight men in three related domains.

1. Their experiences and definitions of masculinity and masculinities.
2. The qualities of their close, non-sexual, male friendships.
3. Their experiences of engaging in emotionally and socially supportive behaviour with close male friends.

Furthermore, a key goal in the present study was to explore relationships between the participants' descriptions of masculinity, and the way in which they constructed their friendships. To this end, the gay and straight participants' experiences and perceptions of seeking and receiving support were explored in close male friendships, as a further attempt to understand the possible impact of their constructions of masculinity. Of current concern was an exploration for evidence of multiple constructions of masculinities and of relationships between masculinities.

A key aim was to add to the existing knowledge about men and masculinities by furthering the theoretical understanding of men's relational processes. By comparing and contrasting gay and straight men's experiences of support seeking, a goal was to deepen the understanding of the complex relationship between help seeking and the construction of masculinities. To this end, a key goal was to provide insight into the factors that support or hinder men's help seeking behaviour.

In order to examine the participants' relational experiences, a qualitative research methodology was employed. In the next chapter, I will outline in detail the research methodology used to conduct the research.

Chapter 4 Method and Methodology

In this chapter, the choice of a qualitative methodology and its applicability to the current study is discussed. An explanation of the study within the social constructionist paradigm is provided, followed by a discussion of the selection and recruitment of the sample. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology to analyse the in-depth interviews is presented and important issues of rigour and ethics are addressed throughout.

4.1 Why a qualitative research methodology

The study of men and masculinity covers a wide range of research paradigms, as has been presented in Chapters One, Two and Three. Whilst debate exists about the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln 1994), the key issue concerns the most relevant approach for the research goals (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). In the current study, a qualitative methodology was chosen because it was considered more appropriate than quantitative methodologies, to address the questions raised in this research which deal with complex life experiences, and the interpretation of meaning. I wanted to understand men's experiences of constructing their masculinity in their relationships with close male friends. I was interested in men's relational experiences and the meanings that they attached to their experiences. A key goal was to allow new knowledge to emerge from analysing and interpreting in-depth interviews. Therefore, a qualitative research methodology was deemed the most appropriate for the research goals of the current project.

In addition, my training and practice as a Gestalt therapist influenced the choice of qualitative research methodology. Brown (1997) notes the strong links between Gestalt and qualitative methodology, particularly the use of self as a research tool, self and other awareness, the ability to deal with complexity and working with relational processes. Furthermore, the Gestalt approach is based on the principles of holism and field theory, in which individuals' unique experience may be understood through a consideration of the interrelationship between an individual and their environment or context. It is through reflection on the interrelationship between individual experience and context that meaning emerges (Yontef & Jacobs, 2005). Similarly, qualitative

designs are holistic, in that they examine the larger picture and understand relationships within a system or culture. Implicit in this approach is the "researcher as instrument", wherein the researcher uses his or her own subjectivity to collect, analyse and interpret research data (Janesick, 1998). These strong parallels between qualitative research approaches and the Gestalt approach as well as the current research questions, provide a strong argument for a qualitative research methodology.

4.1.1 Social constructionism

The epistemological base of this study is the constructionist approach to knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Berger and Luckman (1967) have argued for the social construction of reality through interpretative methods and thus *"social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live"* (Gergen, 1985, p.266). Therefore, the goal in this study was to explore the participants' experiences of masculinity and to uncover new meanings as a process of creating knowledge. Employing this approach involves an acknowledgement of my own views and background, as well as the particular meanings that are uncovered (hermeneutic research) for the participants. Through the interpretation of in-depth interview data, a goal of the present study is to explore gay and straight men's friendships and masculinity. The present research is qualitative at both the conceptual and methodological level. Viewing masculinity, and support in men's friendships, through the constructionist paradigm was essential because gender was theorised as a social construction. As Stimpson (1987) notes, *"Most scholars in men's studies have concluded that gender, our sense of being masculine or feminine, is as much a human construct as the pyramids or pewter. Like all human constructs, gender systems can change"* (p. xiii). In other words, the questioning regarding masculinity is situated in the belief that masculinity is constructed, as compared with anatomical gender which is determined biologically. In exploring and understanding these constructions, it was hoped to shed light on men's friendships and support seeking in those friendships. A key research goal was to uncover men's experiences and definitions of masculinity, and the ways that masculinity is constructed in men's friendships.

4.1.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

The qualitative conceptual basis for this study is hermeneutic phenomenology, as this was considered the most appropriate approach to studying the lived experience of the participants (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutics and phenomenology will briefly be considered separately to illustrate their conceptual basis and historical origins, in order to illustrate their relevance to the current study.

4.1.2.1 Phenomenology

The antecedents of phenomenology are found in the work of mid-eighteenth century philosophers: Kant, Hegel and Marx (Spinelli, 2005). The development of phenomenology as a science occurred later in the beginning of the twentieth century with the writing of Husserl who is credited with refining the phenomenological method. Phenomenology is concerned with exploring the process of meaning making, and 'bracketing' judgments and assumptions about the nature of reality in order to arrive at a clearer knowledge of reality (Spinelli, 2005). Furthermore, in Gestalt therapy, phenomenology of awareness and contact are drawn in part from Husserl's phenomenology (Yontef & Jacobs, 2005). Therefore the choice of employing a phenomenological methodology is appropriate because I am trained and experienced in the Gestalt phenomenological method and secondly because it is well suited to studying lived experience (Barnacle, 2004, van Manen, 1990). Polkinghorne (1989) describes the goals of phenomenological research:

> *The findings of phenomenological research is a description of the essential structure of the experience being investigated. The essential structure is made up of the elements or constituents that are necessary for an experience to present itself as what it is. (p.51)*

In the current study, Colaizzi's method (1978) is employed in order to analyse the interview transcripts and to arrive at an underlying structure of experience (the data analysis is reported in detail in Section 4.3.4). Phenomenology can be further divided into transcendental phenomenology, which is attributed to Husserl and existential phenomenology, largely connected to the work of Husserl's assistant, Heidegger (Spinelli, 2005). The phenomenological basis of the current study draws more closely on Heideggerian phenomenology because it is not only descriptive, but also seeks to uncover underlying structures or essences through the hermeneutic method (Sharkey,

2001). However it is also important to clarify an important difference in the use of the term 'essence' in phenomenological inquiry, from the term essentialism, used in Chapters One and Two regarding gender and sexual orientation. In phenomenological research, the goal is to uncover and describe the essences of lived experience which refers to internal and existential meaning structures (van Manen, 1990), not biological determined essences.

Spinelli (2005) notes that while there is no single phenomenological research approach, all phenomenological research does rely on three principles of the phenomenological method. The first principle is the rule of epoché, which involves making aware and explicit my assumptions and biases. I have attempted to bracket my assumptions, as much as possible, although it is acknowledged that this is a difficult and ongoing process. As van Manen (1990) notes, *"The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not that we know too little about the phenomenon, we wish to investigate, but that we know too much"* (p.46). Therefore, it is important to state what presuppositions, ideas and assumptions I have brought to the research project, which have been outlined in the previous chapters. Second, the rule of description urges a focus on a description of the investigated phenomena, not an explanation, in order to assist in revealing the essence of the phenomena. Finally, the rule of horizontalisation in which I attempted to consider all events and data equally, and to avoid a hierachicalisation of experience, thus allowing for new knowledge and understandings to emerge. To this end, in phenomenological research, the aim to avoid the notion of linear causality (Spinelli, 2005) but to answer the question 'what' rather than 'how'.

The aim of phenomenological research is to uncover original meanings, that is, to arrive at the essence of an experience in order to explicate the structural essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). However, in the current study, the phenomenon of masculinity is not examined as it presents itself immediately to me, but as it presents itself to the research participants. It is acknowledged that gaining access to the immediate experiences of the participants presents a phenomenological difficulty. I can only know of the participants' experiences through their own accounts, he cannot experience *exactly the same* experience as the participants. Thus, my role as an interpreter of the participants' experiences is illuminated (Willig, 2001). Interpretative phenomenological methodologies have been found to useful and appropriate in similar

studies such as the lived experiences of gay men with long term HIV (e.g. Marcus, 2002), and gay men's close friendships with straight women (e.g. Grigoriou, 2004). The method of interpreting the interview data in the present study is drawn from hermeneutics which is described below.

4.1.2.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

The method of interpreting the interview transcripts and arriving at meaning in this study is hermeneutic phenomenology (Sharkey, 2001). Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting texts (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995) and is based on the work of Gadamer (1993), Heidegger (1996), and Ricoeur (1981). The hermeneutic approach is holistic as distinct from causal. The method involves understanding the parts in relation to the whole and understanding the whole as informed by the parts. The whole is regarded as more than a collection of the parts and the process of alternating between parts and the whole is referred to as the hermeneutic circle.

The essential feature of hermeneutics that we are concerned with is this: the only way we have to interpret a text is to give it an overall, global, holistic meaning. This implies that the individual parts of a text cannot be given definitive meaning by themselves, although we can allow them provisional meaning while we go ahead with the interpretation of the whole from which they come. This alternation between parts and the whole of a text is known as the hermeneutic circle. To understand the parts we must understand the whole; to understand the whole we must understand the parts. (Minichiello et al, 1995, p.24)

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach is further described by van Manen (1990) who describes a dynamic interplay between six research activities:

1. *Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.*
2. *Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it.*
3. *Reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomena.*
4. *Describing the phenomena through the art of writing and re-writing.*
5. *Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomena.*
6. *Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.*
   (Pp, 30-31)

Heidegger's hermeneutic circle involves the alternating process of considering the parts and the whole and relation between the two in order to uncover the structures and meaning of human experience (Crotty, 1998). Kvale (1996) describes the process of the hermeneutic circle:

The interpretation of meaning is characterized by a hermeneutical circle. The understanding of a text takes place through a process in which the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text, as it is anticipated. The closer determination of the meaning of the separate parts may eventually change the originally anticipated meaning of the totality, which again influences the meaning of the separate parts and so on. In principle, such a hermeneutical explication of a text is an infinite process, while it ends in practice when one has reached a sensible meaning, a valid unitary meaning, free of inner contradictions. (p.47)

Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology is the chosen research methodology for analysing and interpreting material from the in-depth interviews because a key research goal is to uncover underlying meanings of masculinity in men's friendships. Furthermore by adopting a phenomenological approach, and examining gay and straight men's lived experiences, it was hoped to uncover new meanings of their friendships. In the next section, an outline of in-depth interviews is provided.

4.2 Issues to address in interpretative studies

Guba and Lincoln (1994) report two criteria for assessing constructionist approaches to research; the trustworthiness criterion of credibility and the authenticity criterion. These criteria are complimented by Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) who present seven guidelines for the publication of qualitative research. These guidelines address potential difficulties and areas of methodological concern. They include owning one's perspective, situating the sample, grounding in examples, providing credibility checks, coherence, accomplishing general versus specific research tasks and resonating with readers. In the current study, all of these guidelines are considered important and are addressed. Furthermore, Rice and Ezzy (1999) note the importance of three aspects of rigour in qualitative research which includes theoretical rigour, methodological rigour and interpretative rigour. These issues are important to an overall goal of conducting rigorous research and are addressed below.

4.2.1 Theoretical rigour

Rice and Ezzy (1999) state, *"a study has theoretical and conceptual rigour if the theory and concepts are appropriately chosen so that the research strategy is consistent with the research goals"* (p.35). As mentioned previously, the constructionist paradigm and the hermeneutic phenomenological method were chosen for their close alignment with

the Gestalt approach and their relevance to the research questions. Furthermore, the literature on hermeneutic phenomenology was closely studied in order to affirm that it was able to provide the focus on rich and detailed description and analysis which this study demanded. Thus, issues of theoretical rigour are addressed by an alignment between the research goals (studying men's lived experience) and the research methodology named above.

4.2.2 Methodological rigour

The issues of methodological rigour are addressed through an explication of the research approach, my background and orientation and the steps undertaken in the research process.

Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1996) define qualitative research as *"the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense of what is made"* (p.2). Because qualitative research methodologies employ the use of self as a research tool, revealing my personal values will hopefully assist the reader to assess the research findings and interpretations. In accordance with best practice principles of qualitative research (Elliot, et al., 1999; Janesick, 1998; Stiles, 1993), my orientation and preconceptions have been described in the introduction of this study. As much as possible, I have attempted to bracket my personal and professional assumptions about the research topic. Thus, issues of methodological rigour are addressed through outlining my background and orientation.

The steps involved in the research process are carefully outlined in Method Section (section 4.3) below.

4.2.3 Interpretative rigour

Issues of interpretative rigour concern the reliability and transparency of the interpretations made by me. As Rice and Ezzy (1999) note, *"One way that interpretive rigour can be ensured is to demonstrate clearly how the interpretation was achieved"* (p.36). In the current study the process of interpreting the views and experiences of the participants are explained in the method and by way of examples (verbatim quotes) throughout the results section. The quotes from the participants are listed with transcript line numbers in order to detail an audit trail. The meanings derived from the transcripts

are discussed and argued throughout the results and discussion section. Thus, issues of interpretative rigour are addressed via a transparent and straightforward process.

Issues of interviewer bias were addressed through utilising the assistance of my two university supervisors. My supervisors, experienced researchers themselves, listened to a random audit of interview tapes and were closely involved in the drafting and re-drafting of the results chapters. The assistance of two supervisors, representing both genders, was thought to assist in increasing interpretative rigour.

Furthermore, I sought out male and female professional colleagues from my own networks of psychologists and therapists who were experienced in working therapeutically with (gay and straight) men and their issues of masculinity. The meetings were informal, but occurred on a regular basis and through sharing chapters of results, new insights and views were made available. This process also furthered the goal of refining my interpretations.

4.3 Method

In this section an outline of the method is provided in order to make transparent the process that that I followed, and the reasons for my decisions. I explain the reasoning behind the choice of sample, recruitment strategies, and the process for conducting the interviews and analysing the data.

4.3.1 Sample

In this section, the rationale for the sample is explained, and the procedures for recruiting the sample are outlined. The importance of situating the sample has been described by several writers (Coyne, 1997; Elliot, et al., 1999; Mykut & Morehouse, 1994) in order to aid the reader in understanding the relevance and applicability of the research findings.

In this study, the sample of straight and gay men was chosen to further the understanding of masculinity in men's friendships and to provide rich descriptions of the men's relational processes. As Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) note, in qualitative research methodologies, the researcher aims for richness of information rather than

representativeness and limitations regarding generalisability of the sample are noted and discussed in the research findings.

The current participants were recruited utilising a snowball sampling approach (Patton, 2002). Gay and straight male participants within a particular age range were targeted as considered appropriate to meet the research goals. As Rice and Ezzy (1999) state, sampling in qualitative research is purposive, in that the aim is to select information rich cases that will fulfil the research aims. The recruitment strategy is explained in Section 4.3.2.2.

4.3.1.1 Heterosexual and homosexual men

The experiences of both gay and straight men were sought in order to provide a rich description of masculinity that was inclusive of both heterosexual and non-heterosexual masculinities. In this section a brief discussion of the issues associated with sampling gay and straight men are provided.

Issues with researching non-heterosexual populations have been raised regarding definitions of sexual identity and sampling difficulties (e.g. Harry, 1986). Recruiting heterosexual and homosexual men presents definitional issues because the terms are non-specific and may refer to sexual behaviour, identity, subjects of fantasy or lifestyle. Recently social science researchers have stressed the importance of self definition in sampling non-heterosexuals (e.g. Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001); largely because it is acknowledged that gay (and straight) identities are always in process and never in a complete and fixed state of being (Vance, 1989; Weeks, 1995). Furthermore, the key findings are discussed and situated in a way that acknowledges that the nature of human experience is ongoing and never complete. The snowball sampling approach used in the present study was aimed at recruiting men who self identified as either gay or straight men, and is outlined further below.

Straight participants were recruited initially with a flyer (See Appendix A), requesting, "Men wanted for research project". Second, the gay participants were recruited for the interviews by making the request "Gay men wanted for research project" (see Appendix B). Thus, the men who responded were recruited by self-disclosing their sexual identity. By using a snowball sampling method, the participants then recruited other participants.

As noted above, each of the straight men identified as straight and the gay men interviewed self identified as gay. The purpose of the current research project was to investigate different masculinities, rather than different sexualities.

4.3.1.2 Age of participants

A sample was obtained of 21 males comprising 11 gay, and 10 straight men (see Table 1 and Table 2). The sample was recruited from men who were between 35 and 45 years of age at the time of the interview. This age range has been described as including the mid-life transition (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee, 1978; O'Connor, 1981) and was chosen because of a belief that men may be closely examining and potentially modifying their models of masculinity at this time (Cochran, 2001; Jung, 1946/2001; Moreland, 1989; O'Connor, 1981, 1993). Thus, I believed that a rich description of masculinity and men's friendships would be elicited from men in this age range.

The crisis-transformational theories of male development (Hart, 1992) suggest a series of tasks that challenge men from infancy to adulthood. For example, Erikson (1982) outlined a series of eight stages from infancy to adulthood in which key developmental tasks were achieved. Erikson's penultimate stage (generativity versus stagnation) is of relevance for adults post 30 years of age. Furthermore, Levinson et al (1978) argued that within the second stage of middle adulthood (between 17-45 years of age), there was an alternating sequence of transitional and stable periods through which men progress. Men aged at least 35 will most likely have completed the difficult age 30 transition, and should be approaching the 'mid-life transition" (Levinson et al, 1978). While, it was not a research goal to prove or disprove the existence of a mid-life transition, I was of the opinion that interviewing men in this age range rather than a younger age range, would provide a sample of men who were beginning to reflect on their lives, including issues of masculinity and friendship.

4.3.1.3 Demographic Tables of the current sample.

A summary of the demographic information for the straight sample is presented in Table 1. below.

Table 1. Demographic information- Straight participants

Name (pseudonyms)	Age	Education level	Marital Status
Neville	41	Uni	Single
Eric	41	VCE	Relationship
Noel	42	Uni	Married
Ross	35	Uni	Single
Nic	35	Uni	Married
Richard	36	Uni	Married
James	39	Uni	Single
Bob	38	Uni	Married
Jack	35	Uni	Relationship
Larry	43	VCE	Married

N=10

M = 38.5

SD = 3.13

Key: Uni denotes University Degree

VCE denotes completed Year 12 at secondary school

Ten straight men were interviewed between May 2003 and February 2004. A majority of the interviews were conducted during the afternoon or evening to fit in with the participants' work schedules. Of the ten interviews, four were conducted at the investigator's office, which was conveniently close to the city. One interview was conducted in the participant's home, and one interview was conducted at the participant's place of work. The remaining four interviews were conducted at the university.

The straight participants ranged in age from 35 years to 43 years with a mean age 38.5 (SD = 3.13) years. All the participants were born in Australia, except one who was born

in New Zealand (who migrated to Australia in his late teenage years). It was decided that the inclusion of a New Zealand born participant would not significantly alter the core qualities of the sample, and that his experience may add to the depth of the research material.

All of the straight participants spoke English as their first language, and were educated in Australia. Eight of the straight participants had university degrees and the others had completed secondary school. Nine of the straight participants described their occupation as professional, and one worked in the health and fitness industry.

All ten straight participants described their sexual orientation as heterosexual. Five stated they were married, two reported that they had a female partner, and three stated they were single.

Overall, the sample was characterised as predominantly middle class, educated, and of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic background, with an average age in the late thirties. Most of the participants were articulate, and agreed to participate in the research because the topic interested them as described to them by a friend and further explained in the Flyer and Plain Language Statement (see Appendix C).

A summary of the demographic information for the gay participants is presented in Table 2. below.

Table 2. Demographic information- Gay participants

Name (pseudonyms)	Age	Education level	Relationship Status
Kevin	42	Uni	Single
Harry	44	Uni	Relationship
Roger	39	Uni	Single
Neil	39	Uni	Single
Will	41	Uni	Relationship
Dennis	35	Uni	Single
Sam	41	Uni	Relationship
George	35	Uni	Single
Barry	34	Uni	Relationship
Lucas	38	Uni	Relationship
Matt	38	Uni	Relationship

N=11

M = 38.72

SD = 3.16

Key: Uni denotes University Degree

Eleven gay men were interviewed between October 2003 and February 2004. The majority of the interviews were conducted at two locations, the university, or my office in the inner city, based on the participant's preferred choice. One participant was interviewed at his work at his request.

The gay participants ranged in age from 34 to 44 years of age (M = 38.72, SD= 3.16). Ten of the eleven participants were born in Australia. One gay participant was born in Italy, but was brought up in the UK where he lived until the age of 34. His inclusion in the sample was based on the belief that his inclusion would add to the richness of the sample. Four of gay participants were first generation Australians of European background (Italian and Greek).

All eleven of the participants self-identified as gay. Six were in same-sex relationships, and five reported they were single at the time of interview.

All of the gay participants spoke English as their first language and held university degrees. All of the gay participants identified their occupation as professional. Four of the gay participants interviewed belonged to the same gay sports club.

Overall, the gay sample was characterised as middle class, with a mixture of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic background, or Mediterranean background.

4.3.2 Procedure

The procedure for the current study commenced with a small pilot study, which was used to refine the interview questions. This was followed by the recruitment of gay and straight participants, the conduction of interviews, the transcription of interviews and their analysis, all of which is outlined in detail below.

4.3.2.1 Pilot Study

The interviews were piloted on two heterosexual males (aged 23 and 24 years) who were associates of mine. The aim of the pilot was to test the suitability of the research questions and to gain feedback from the participants about the style and format of the interview. It was discovered that eliciting information from the participants regarding masculinity and friendships was not easy. The participants were guarded in their responses. Because of the pilot study, several modifications were made to the interviews. In particular, the importance of building rapport and grading the questions from less confronting to more confronting was identified. In addition, the author presented an outline of the research project at an International Gestalt Therapy conference in September 2002. The author received valuable peer review and these critiques were incorporated in to the project design. This included the focus on shame as an interpersonal and intra personal construct as described in Section 1.3.1.

4.3.2.2 Recruitment

The recruitment process involved utilising my networks, my supervisors' networks to distribute flyers (see Appendices A & B), and to place them at several highly visible locations around the university where straight and gay men in the target group could view them. In addition, the flyers were posted at another university, a Community Health Centre, and a psychotherapy training institute. None of the 21 participants recruited were known personally to me, as there was at least one 'degree of separation' between the participants and me. Once contact was made with the potential participants, the project was explained in brief and the demographic criteria were explained and checked. A date was then made to conduct the interview.

4.3.2.3 Conduction of interviews

The data in this study was gathered from a series of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are used to understand the significance of an aspect of human experience as

described from the participants' perspective and interpreted by the researcher (Minichiello et al, 1995).

In-depth interviewing (Minichiello et al, 1995) has its origins in the 'interpretative tradition'. The qualitative research interview is an attempt to gather information directly from the participant's experience and to arrive at a description of the essence of the experience. In–depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method of obtaining data for the purposes of exploring the research questions.

The interviews were semi-structured, and allowed for participants' unique themes to be pursued although each interview followed a similar format (See Appendix F for the interview schedule):

1. Introduction, demographics and rapport building
2. General questions about masculinity and role models
3. Men's friendships
4. Support in men's friendships
5. Summary and closure

The interview questions were developed with the purpose of revealing the underlying essences of masculinity for the gay and straight participants and their perceptions and experiences of support seeking from close male friends. The questions were designed to produce a semi-structured interview format, following up on ideas I had identified in the literature and in my own clinical practice. It was theorised that men would find the topic of emotional support in close male friendships quite personal and possibly confronting. This hypothesis was confirmed in the pilot study where participants found these questions more challenging than general masculinity questions. For this reason, I spent some time at the introductory stage of the interviews in building rapport by engaging in small talk, thanking them for their time and interest, offering refreshments and explaining the purpose of the study.

I established trust and safety with the participants by explaining the limits of the study, setting time boundaries and by obtaining their informed consent. The participants were given a copy of the Plain Language Statement (see Appendix C) and given the

opportunity to clarify the research aims and methods. The participants were then asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix D) indicating their informed consent to participate in the study. The participants were then asked to fill out a form detailing their personal demographics (see Appendix E).

The initial interview questions were deliberately general and were intended to 'warm-up' the participants to the topic of masculinity and to begin to understand the pre-conceptions the participants brought to the research area. In particular, I was interested to know the participants' views about masculinity in others, such as role models or important public figures as a first step to understanding their own conception of masculinity. I chose to limit my level of personal disclosure to the participants and did not share personal details, such as my sexual identity to any of the participants during the interviews (although some gay participants may have known I was gay through the recruitment networks I used). I wanted the focus of the interview to be on the participants' experiences and felt that bracketing my personal information and beliefs would assist the participants in speaking freely. It is also possible that some of the straight participants may have made assumptions regarding my sexual identity, although these assumptions were not verbally expressed during the interviews.

The next series of questions focussed on men's friendships, definitions, qualities and descriptions. This section was relatively straight forward, and the participants were generally forthcoming in their responses.

The fourth stage of the interview involved an exploration of social and emotional support needs and support seeking. This section was perhaps the most confronting part of the interview for the participants as it involved the highest level of personal disclosure and vulnerability. Questions were also asked about offering support to male friends and were intended to explore the experience of providing support to close male friends.

Finally, the interview closed by asking the participant if they had any questions, and asking them about their experience of the interview. A space was provided for the participants to reflect on their experiences of the interview and the research topic, which was in part an attempt to acknowledge the interplay between the researcher and the

researched (Morgan, 1992). In many cases, valuable and insightful responses were recorded from this section, and are included in the results and discussion chapters.

4.3.2.4 Interview locations and procedures

The interviews were conducted at three main locations; at the university, at my office, or at the participant's office or home. The location and time was chosen by the participants. Interviews were conducted at a variety of times including, during the day, evening and weekends. All participants were offered a light refreshment.

The interviews were taped using a standard tape-recorder, placed on small table between the interviewer and participant. Interviews lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes.

4.3.2.5 Initial recording of the interviewer's responses and field notes.

During the interview, some initial notes were made to prompt me to ask further about particular issues or to note 'significant events' based on my judgments about significant events that occurred during the interview, as suggested by Brown (1996). Following the methodology of 'researcher as instrument' (Patton, 2002), I practised self-awareness as much as possible, whilst also attending to the participant's responses. Immediately following the interview, I made brief notes about anything that stood out as significant, including personal responses to the participant, subjective feelings, and areas of curiosity.

4.3.2.6 Transcription.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim using a transcribing machine to create a Microsoft Word document. The interviews were carefully checked for accuracy, and a random audit was conducted by my two supervisors. These transcripts were also checked for accuracy and a number of changes made during a second and third listening. Included in each transcript were line numbers in order to provide a clear and transparent audit trail. Initially the transcript included all verbalisations, but was later modified slightly to a more readable version, removing "ums and "ahs", but noting pauses or strong responses.

The following notations and abbreviations were used:

a. "I" for interviewer and "P" for participant.

b. "Unintelligible" for statements or words that could not be understood because of sound quality.

c. "Thinking", where the participant paused to reflect on the question for more than a few seconds.

d. "Laughs", where the participant or I laughed.

All names and identifying details were changed in order to protect confidentiality. I made brief notes about key themes and impressions during this checking process. These notes were later used to inform the hermeneutic process of data analysis.

4.3.2.7 Copy of the transcript

A copy of the verbatim transcript was posted to the participants with a covering letter (see Appendix G). The aim was to provide the participants with an opportunity to correct the interview transcript, and secondly to give 'something back' to the participants for their time and contribution in the research project. Only one participant replied on receiving the transcript; he noted a place name that required de-identification.

4.3.3 Ethical Issues

No form of deception was used in the research project. As stated above, the participants were given a plain language statement to explain the research project and voluntarily signed an informed consent form.

Approval for this project was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, of Swinburne University of Technology, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences on 26th February 2003, Project ID Number, 32/03.

The data collected in the form of interview tapes and transcripts was stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office at the university. All identifying names on the transcripts were changed to pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

4.3.4 Analysis of the interview and interview transcript.

The data analysis method utilised is a minor variation of Colaizzi's (1978) method and incorporates the hermeneutic analysis by alternating between a consideration of parts and the whole and through the writing and re-writing process whereby meaning is articulated. The work of Marcus (2002) in assisting with the methodology is acknowledged.

The text below in *italics* refers to Colaizzi's (1978) work, and the 'normal text' underneath refers to my adaptations. This process was completed for all of the heterosexual interviews first, and then separately completed for all of the homosexual interviews.

1. *Read all protocols in order to acquire a feeling for them.*

The transcripts were read through and my initial reflections and ideas were recorded on a separate document to the original transcript.

2. *Return to each protocol and extract from them phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomena [i.e. significant statements]. Several protocols may contain the same or nearly the same statements, thus repetitions can be eliminated. Statements may be transformed from the specific to the general.*

Using 'cut and paste' functions, the significant statements pertaining to the research questions were placed in a separate document.

3. *Try to spell out the meaning of each significant statement; known as formulated meanings….he must leap from subjects say to what they mean.*

Using the 'review' function of Microsoft Word, the formulated meanings of each significant statement was recorded alongside the significant statements. These meanings were read over several times and then collated on a separate document.

4. *Repeat the above procedure for each protocol, and organize the aggregate formulated meanings into clusters of themes. Need to allow for an emergence of themes which are common to all the subject's protocols. Again, the ineffable consists in leaping from what is given in the meanings to themes given with them.*

Once several formulated meanings had been explicated, themes began to emerge. The formulated meanings were placed under the subheadings of the emerging themes. Throughout this process, the names of themes changed as they were considered in

relation to other themes. A process of redefining themes and the categorisation of formulated meanings continued over several weeks.

5. *Refer these clusters of themes back to the original protocols in order to validate them. This can be achieved by asking whether there is anything contained in the original protocols that isn't accounted for in the clusters of themes, and whether the clusters of themes propose anything which isn't in the original protocols. If the clusters of themes are not thereby validated, for example, if they contain themes which are alien to the original protocols, then the preceding procedures must be re-examined or conducted anew.*

The overall themes were listed on a separate document and checked against significant statements, and the interview transcripts. Further re-organisation and refinement of themes occurred.

6. *At this point discrepancies may be noted among and/or between the various clusters; some themes may flatly contradict other ones, or may appear to be totally unrelated to other ones. Here again the notion of approach comes to the fore because the researcher must rely on his tolerance for ambiguity: he must proceed with the solid conviction that that what is logically inexplicable may be existentially real and valid. He must refuse the temptations of ignoring data or themes which don't fit, or of prematurely generating a theory which would merely conceptually-abstractly eliminate the discordance of his findings thus far.*

Some themes emerged that were in opposition to others. These themes were included despite their apparent contradiction of other data.

7. *The results of everything so far are integrated into an exhaustive description of the investigated topic.*

By this stage, an overall description of the investigated area was possible and was written up in rough draft form, which was discussed with my supervisors.

8. *An effort is made to formulate the exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon in as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible.*

An essence statement was provided for each of the investigated phenomena; masculinity, friendships and support seeking. This produced an exhaustive description of the investigated phenomena for the straight and gay participants separately.

9. *A final validating step can be achieved by returning to each subject and asking the subjects about the findings thus far.*

It was decided **not** to take this step as the present study adopted a strongly interpretative approach, in which the essence statements reflect my interpretations of the participant's comments in the interviews. As noted earlier, the transcribed protocols were posted to the participants for review and accuracy only. One gay participant returned his transcript with a request to alter a name in order to ensure his anonymity.

The research analysis of data involved interplay between Colaizzi's (1978) method above and the hermeneutic circle. The most difficult stage of the data analysis involved step 3, arriving at the formulated meanings, which involved a process of transforming and synthesizing the data. As Polkinghorne (1989) notes:

> *On of the most difficult aspects of the data analysis process to explain is the transformation of a meaning unit, which is given in a subject's everyday language, into a statement using psychological terms to describe the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 55)*

I was able to draw upon my clinical skills as a psychologist and Gestalt therapist to arrive at the formulated meanings. Furthermore, this was achieved through an exhaustive process of reading, writing, checking, moving between the quotes and the interviews themselves. The formulated meanings are based on my interpretations of the interview material, and are explained and discussed in the results section for the straight participants, Chapter 5, and for the gay participants, Chapter 6. A comparison and contrast of the underlying structures of the gay and straight participants' experiences was then conducted and is reported in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5 Straight Men: Results and Discussion

In the following three sections, the results of the interviews with the straight men are presented. The findings are presented in three sections, reflecting the three parts of the interviews.

In section 5.1, the straight participants' experiences and definitions of masculinity are reported. These findings are discussed with reference to the existing literature on masculinities, and as important background material in understanding the straight participants' male friendships.

In section 5.2, the straight participants' close male friendships are discussed. In this section, the participants' constructions of male friendship are evaluated, and insights into the interrelationship with the construction of masculinity and masculinities are explored. Of interest is the ways that straight men describe their friendships and what they consider to be of value in their friendships with other men.

In the third section, 5.3, the straight participants' experiences of emotional and social support in close male friendships are reported. In this section, the participants report specific experiences of needing support. The extent to which the straight participants sought out support from male friends is examined, and what the experience of receiving support was like. Finally, the experience of receiving support is contrasted with giving support to close male friends.

Section 5.1 Masculinities: Results and discussion of the straight participants

The results are presented firstly in an essence statement, which was achieved by use of hermeneutic phenomenological interpretation (van Manen, 1990). In an attempt to describe the participants' essential features of masculinity, it has been important to allow for the emergence of ambiguity, contradiction and complexity (Colaizzi, 1978). Following the essence statement is an explanation and discussion of the straight participants' descriptions of masculinity and masculinities in an attempt to capture this complexity.

5.1.1 Straight Masculinities Essence Statement

The essence statement is presented in five sections, which represents the five main themes derived from the straight participants' descriptions and experiences of masculinity. The five themes are traditional masculinity, the importance of strength, independence, the anxiety of masculinity, and new masculinities.

Traditional masculinity

The straight participants struggled to define contemporary masculinity but identified a type of masculinity which they called traditional masculinity. It appeared that one of the difficulties in describing masculinity might have been related to the straight men's difficulty describing their inner world, but also suggested the instability of the construct of masculinity. Traditional masculinity was described in terms of stereotyped 'outer' behaviours that characterised men of previous generations, but was still evident in many men in contemporary society. These descriptions suggested the existence of a traditional masculine ideology. The qualities of traditional masculinity were: stoicism, low levels of emotional expression, a tendency toward using and valuing physical strength, a focus on action and problem solving and a focus on the traditional male gender roles of provider and protector. Traditional masculinity was closely linked to essentialist views about gender.

The importance of strength

The straight participants described the importance of physical, mental and moral strength in defining masculinity, and it was particularly the display of physical strength that was important. The display of weakness such as personal vulnerability, or 'not knowing' was considered the antithesis of strength and this type of behaviour was not considered masculine. The straight participants seemed unaware of the 'power' of straight masculinity, relative to other masculinities, except that they expressed reluctance to relinquish power and strength.

The value of independence

Personal independence featured heavily in the straight participants' descriptions of masculinity. Independence was characterised by self support and the denial of dependence on others for one's personal needs or for psychological or emotional support. Independence was also described as an essential feature of a successful man, thus it was considered important to be perceived as independent. A discrepancy emerged between independence as an ideology and actual behaviour.

The anxiety associated with masculinity

Descriptions of masculinity were characterised by an anxiety about one's own masculinity against an unclear measure of 'appropriate' standards of masculinity. Anxiety associated with masculinity was described in terms of fear and shame about being un-masculine which was often equated with femininity. Anxiety about personal masculinity appeared strongest when in the company of other men, perhaps because of perceived negative evaluation by other males against a masculine ideal. Thus, anxiety and shame were experienced by participants in relation to lack of support in the male 'field'. It also appeared that the concept of masculinity was inherently unstable, and thus unobtainable in a pure sense, which contributed to the participants' anxiety.

New masculinities

Finally, the straight participants' described a complex plurality of masculinities in which there existed a hierarchy of masculinities. Whilst traditional hegemonic masculinity was pre-eminent, there was support expressed for new and inclusive masculinities that allowed for more personal choice in expressing individual masculinity. However, the participants also described the difficulties of challenging

traditional masculine behaviours and dominant masculine ideals. The straight participants described a desire for masculinities that were relational, but appeared limited in their capacity for relationship because of their fear of dependency.

These five themes are a reduction and synthesis of the participants' descriptions of masculinity, and are discussed further below.

5.1.2 Traditional masculinity

Overall the straight participants struggled to define the concept of masculinity, but a description of masculinity emerged that the participants termed 'traditional masculinity'. The term 'traditional masculinity' was suggestive of traditional masculine roles (Pleck, 1981) that are passed down through the generations, via various family and cultural practices (Levant, 1995), and implies a 'natural' basis. These views suggested the presence of a masculine ideology (Levant & Pollack, 1995) in which an individual's "*beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards of male behaviour*" (Pleck, 1995, p. 19) are paramount in defining an individual's masculinity. Eric comments on traditional masculinity in terms of qualities:

> *I mean I know what it's like in myself -work, the family, breadwinning; you know those traditional sort of qualities that-that are still around a lot. [Trans, 90-92]*

Eric describes masculinity in terms of traditional qualities, and acknowledges the ongoing existence of traditional roles. Traditional roles appear to have their origins in previous generations of men. Jack comments on his paternal and maternal grandfathers:

> *They are probably more traditional men of their generation, they were depression children and they're very stoic and they are not emoters… on any level. At the same time they have strong views and values and they would talk about those if you pressed for them, they are not going to necessarily be open. [Trans, 70-74]*

Jack suggests both his grandfathers' qualities were traditional male qualities. The qualities he describes are stoicism, low levels of emotional expression, strong values, and a closed communication style. These qualities are similar to Pleck's (1981) notion of the traditional male role which emphasised individual physical strength, low levels of emotional expression, particularly regarding vulnerability or weakness. However, unlike some early formulations of masculinity in the research literature (e.g. Brannon, 1976)

which were largely acontextual, Jack also hints at a definition of masculinity that is influenced by the prevailing field conditions or context. Jack highlights the Depression of the 1930's, and the experience of being a child during the Depression, as important contextual factors. He acknowledges that both of his grandfathers' masculinities were in part influenced by the environment in which they were raised. Thus, the possibility that masculinity is in part socially constructed is suggested above, and is explored in more detail in Sections 5.1.2.1 and 5.1.6 below.

5.1.2.1 Problems of definition

As mentioned above, the concept of masculinity was difficult to define for these participants, and this point is explored below in more detail. Jack noted:

I don't have an easy definition of masculinity for myself. [Trans, 181]

Jack's view was reflective of many of the straight participants. It appeared that masculinity might have been easier to define in men's behaviour and roles during previous generations, suggesting that there might be a difference between traditional masculinity, as imagined, and contemporary masculinity, as experienced. Furthermore, the participants' difficulty in defining masculinity may also reflect the challenge between distinguishing masculine ideology from actual behaviour. This may also be an indication of the difficulty in making sense of personal behaviour; the process of constructing meaning requires time and reflection. It may only be in retrospect, or by comparison with traditional views, that an individual's sense of masculinity becomes clearer.

The straight participants also suggested that traditional masculinity was under challenge for being outdated and lacking relevancy. However, in the absence of traditional masculinity, perhaps some uncertainty exists about current definitions. The difficulty in defining masculinity is a contemporary phenomenon as Nic comments:

Oh I think it's so without meaning nowadays. [Trans, 260]

There was a sense from the participants that masculinity might have been easier to define in the past. Significant changes have taken place over the past 30 years in gender politics in Australia, as noted by Carrigan, et al. (1987). A possible reason that the men

in this study struggled to define masculinity is that it has changed and is still changing, suggesting an ongoing constructionist view of masculinity and masculinities (see Section 5.1.6). Traditional masculinity might be outdated, but it did provide clear (although not necessarily satisfactory) roles for men. In an acknowledgement of changing times, some Australian writers have described a masculinity crisis, as Dowsett (2003) notes:

> *This [masculinity] crisis can be noted in advertisements in the mass daily newspapers offering sexual health services to men in the form of impotence clinics, penis extension operations, Viagra ordering sites on the internet, counselling services, warrior workshops, group encounters for 'getting in touch with yourself', increased interest in body building and fitness activities, and the burgeoning men's cosmetics industry. (p. 24)*

Dowsett's views suggest a preoccupation with proving or maintaining some kind of essentialist masculinity which, ultimately may not exist. Similarly, for the straight participants in the present study there appeared to be great uncertainty about the concept of masculinity beyond traditional roles. In the absence of traditional masculinity as an exemplar of the way to 'be a man', anxiety may exist. I believe that the concept of masculinity is inherently a process, not a fixed structure. To this end, Connell (1995) has argued the gender order is inherently unstable and always in crisis to some degree, thus the concept of masculinity is also in crisis. Thus masculinities are never complete or fully actualised, but always under construction. The implications of this argument indicate an experience of anxiety for men regarding their masculinity, which was found in the present study and is reported in detail in section 5.1.5. In the participants' responses, there was not a clear sense of what might have replaced traditional masculinity, although there was support for new masculinities which are reported in Section 5.1.6. As the desire for new masculinities has emerged, it appears that traditional masculinity has moved from foreground to background in the minds of the men in this research cohort, as noted by Jack and Neil above. Thus, the values of traditional masculinity remain in the minds of the straight participants, but do not appear to be guiding their everyday lives. Traditional masculinity appears not to have been clearly replaced, however, the description of traditional masculinity is an important part of their 'map' of masculinity, against which other forms of masculinity are compared.

5.1.2.2 The 'inner world'

There is another possibility for the difficulties men in this study encountered in defining masculinity. This may be due in part to their lack of comfort exploring and describing their inner world. Indeed most of the descriptors of masculinity were characterised by a focus on the external world of what men do, and how they act, rather than how they perceive and experience themselves as men. This point is also made by O'Connor (1993) when he described men's fear of feelings:

> *Since to welcome the feelings into consciousness is to challenge the supremacy of the acceptable male view that logic and reason are the only legitimate ways to be in the world and that feelings and imagination are merely inferior forms of this traditional masculine way of being. (p.3)*

Perhaps it is men's fear and unfamiliarity of their inner world that contributes to their difficulty defining masculinity. However, the men's capacity and interest to reflect on their 'inner world' and their relations with others may also increase at key developmental periods, such as in the mid-life period.

All the men interviewed in this study were between 35-45 years of age, men in the developmental stage of mid-life. As O'Connor (1993) has indicated, the age between 35-45 years is often a time of crisis for many men, when the inner world of feelings conflicts with the outer world of rationality and logic. Questions about identity, work, family and other important relationships are often figural at this time (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Vaillant, 1977) Furthermore, anxiety about death, and a sharpened awareness of loss may become present in the mid-life period (Yalom, 1998). This period also presents a rich opportunity for growth and integration, if some of these issues are made aware and worked with (e.g. Cochran, 2001). Levant (1995) discusses some of the important mid-life issues for men and offers a definition of traditional masculinity:

> *To many men, particularly midlife men, the question of what it means to be a man today is one of the most persistent unresolved issues in their lives. Raised to be like their fathers, they were mandated to become the good provider for their families and to be strong and silent. They were discouraged from expressing vulnerable and tender emotions and required to put a sharp edge on their masculinity by avoiding anything that hinted of the feminine. Unlike their sisters, they received little if any training in nurturing others and in being sensitive to their needs and empathic with their voice. On the other hand they received lots of*

training in problem solving, logical thinking, risk-taking, staying calm in the face
of danger, and assertion and aggression. (p. 229)

The themes of silent strength and being in the provider role are evident in this definition of traditional masculinity. These themes are similar to those raised by Eric's description of traditional masculinity (the breadwinning role), and Jack's description of his grandfather's qualities (stoicism, strong values, low levels of emotional expression). However, these descriptions of traditional masculinity are being questioned by the straight participants, which may reflect a period of mid-life inquiry. In the discussion of masculinity stereotypes below, there does appear to be some support for 'inner' questioning by the straight participants.

5.1.2.3 Stereotypes

A belief in traditional male roles revealed the existence of masculine stereotypes for many of the straight participants, but also some confusion about their existence. As Richard notes,

I mean not that I'm a traditionalist and the man goes out to work and the woman
stays at home, but to me it's sort of like that's the man's role.
[Trans, 94-96]

Richard's view of the man's role sounds like an ideology that he has introjected. It appears that a man 'should' go out to work and provide for his family, because that is what has 'traditionally' occurred in the past. These traditional ideas are quite powerful, even if not in the forefront of men's minds today, they do appear to be present as Richard notes above, "*it's sort of like that's the man's role*". These introjected ideas may be out of conscious awareness much of the time and perhaps it is not until they are questioned that awareness of traditional masculine stereotypes arises.

As noted above, it appears that notions of traditional masculinity are more certain and easy to define than contemporary masculinity. Traditional masculinity may have become a set of stereotypes. Neville comments on stereotypes:

I think we still have our evolved characteristics, to some degree and for men that,
I think there's some truth behind the stereotypes, although I think, they're
generally widely exaggerated, in the general public. [Trans, 55-59]

The stereotypic descriptions of masculinity are similar to traditional masculinity; descriptions of low levels of emotional expression, a tendency toward using and valuing physical strength, a focus on action and problem solving, and the traditional male gender roles of provider and protector. However these descriptions, as with all stereotypes, are simplistic and generalist. Furthermore masculine stereotypes are suggestive of an underlying masculine ideology (Brittan, 2001), which need to be distinguished from actual behaviour. Stereotypic definitions are insufficient to adequately describe the full range and complexity of masculinity, because they are too broad, and are suggestive of static sex-roles. As Brittan argues, attempts to stereotype masculinity originate from a misguided search for the 'essence' of masculinity, when it may be possible only to speak of socially constructed masculinities in particular social contexts and times in history.

These stereotyped views of masculinity are similar to 'fixed gestalts', that is, a way of being that is not responsive to the environment or to the changing needs of the individual. These traditional definitions of masculinity are more about how a man 'should' be than how he 'would like' to be, or how he might actually be. These results are important because they report the existence of some straight participants' fixed beliefs about masculinity. In later sections (5.2 and 5.3), the results of the straight participants' actual and perceived behaviour are reported and interpreted in light of these views above.

5.1.3 The importance of strength and power.

A second theme that emerged in the straight participants' descriptions of contemporary masculinity was a preoccupation with the adjective 'strength' and it's opposite, 'weakness'. An emphasis on having strength and the demonstration of strength were identified by the straight participants as key aspects of masculinity. This finding supports the view that physical assertiveness and strength are 'naturally' characteristic of men (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). Strength was defined in physical, emotional, mental and moral terms. As Neville notes:

Masculinity...I'd define it as showing physical, emotional and moral strength, I guess, (thinking), the key word I guess would be strength. [Trans, 111-113]

Neville makes the point that it is the demonstration of strength that is important, suggesting a performative aspect of masculinity (e.g. Connell, 2000).
This point is also made by Larry,

Yes, possibly the determination and maybe the willingness to appear outwardly with that strength, to display that strength, whether they have got it or not is another thing. [Trans, 53-55]

In defining masculinity, Larry raises another important issue; the "willingness" of a man to "appear outwardly" as strong and powerful. However, it the focus on the appearance of strength that is most interesting as it is suggestive that masculinity is in part determined by being perceived *by others* as being strong or having strength. These views reveal the importance of the meanings attributed to the appearance and utility of men's bodies in defining masculinity (e.g. Connell, 1983). The attainment of muscularity as a means of appearing 'masculine' and strong has been found to be increasingly important to many men in recent times (Glassner, 1989; McCreary, et al., 2005; Pope et al., 2000). Thus, the appearance of strength and power appear to be important aspects of masculinity, even if they are not demonstrated, they still exist as a potential.

5.1.3.1 The demonstration of strength, power and aggression

The straight participants also expressed a belief that a tendency towards aggression was an innate quality that men are born with. As Bob notes:

I see lots of kids, that's right, and until I had kids myself I would have thought that if we brought him, a boy up neutrally, gender neutrally, that there wouldn't be much of a difference between a girl, if you could possibly ever do it, and I don't know if you really can. But it's clear to me that there are innate boy characteristics and there are innate girl characteristics. [And they are?] ...gregariousness and a roughness, roughness when I say - boys just love rough play. [Trans, 133-144]

Bob believes that boys' tendency toward "roughness" is innate and there is empirical support for greater displays of overt aggression in boys than girls (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Hayward & Fletcher, 2003; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). However, further examination of aggression in children reveals that whilst boys are often perceived to show greater instrumental aggression than girls, pre-school girls have been found to be significantly more relationally aggressive than boys (Crick, Casas & Mosher, 1997). Thus, boys may

be viewed as more aggressive partly because their aggression is often viewed in instrumental terms. To this end, the straight participants highlighted the demonstration of physical strength as an important determinant of heterosexual masculinity. The willingness of a man "*to appear outwardly with that strength*" as Larry notes above, is a defining aspect of masculinity. The demonstration of strength and aggression in boys appears to have become associated with support for a 'natural' masculinity.

The theme of strength and power was also demonstrated in adult life through an attraction to action as Noel notes:

> *I feel it in myself, I know it's there in myself, things like if there's a problem, wanting to just go ahead and fix it and just getting on and being quite practical about things and just saying 'Right. The problem's there, right lets fix it…' I think that's a very male tendency to do that. [Trans, 172 -176]*

Noel is describing an internal feeling, when confronted with a problem, to act or to use his power or personal strength to solve the problem, or effect change. This approach can result in other difficulties, such as acting without thinking of the consequences. This approach also suggests discomfort with not knowing what to do and with 'not knowing' in general. These instrumental descriptions were consistent with men feeling strong and powerful, and acting with strength. By contrast, it was as if the ability to be receptive or dependent was not on the 'map' of masculinity for many men. An underlying theme that emerged from others as well as Noel was the emphasis on doing, providing and acting; generally being in the active role. These views about men and masculinity are similar to previously reported views about men's 'natural' tendency toward instrumentality (Bakan, 1966). Noel (above) and many of the other straight participants seemed unaware of the possibility that an emphasis on instrumentality might represent a traditional masculine ideology, rather than an innate tendency.

Sometimes it is the demonstration of strength and power through action that defines masculinity. This point is similar to that made by M. Kimmel (1987) about hegemonic masculinity and men's use of power.

> *The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man **in** power, a man **with** power, and a man **of** power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. (p. 125, author's emphasis)*

It appears that the quality of being masculine is not something that you 'are', but something that you 'do', which is acted out or demonstrated. This definition suggests an essentialist view of strength and power. There was little acknowledgment from the straight participants about the social power of straight masculinity and male strength (e.g. football players). However, the pre-occupation with strength reveals an attraction to power and aversion to its opposite, weakness. In an analysis of power and masculinity, and the relationship between masculinities was first described by Carrigan, et al. (1987), in their description of hegemonic masculinity in which some masculinities (e.g. gay masculinities) are subordinated. Thus, the participants' references to strength and power are important. It is noteworthy that the word 'strength' came up frequently in participants' descriptions of masculinity. Thus there appears to be some support in the present study for the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a desired ideal, with its connotation of physical strength and power. For the straight participants the importance of strength also extended to mental strength and is explored below.

5.1.3.2 Mental strength

The importance of strength as a masculine characteristic also applied to the mental and emotional realm. Emotions were often described by the straight participants as powerful internal forces that required control. Being able to control one's emotions through mental strength was seen as desirable. Bob comments on mental strength and hardness, and acknowledges it is not always positive,

> *To me it (masculinity) would mean a ...mental strength, mental hardness I suppose. To me it's not necessarily a positive term. [Trans, 206-207]*

Mental strength may mean having strong views and values, and the ability to put forward those views. It may also mean keeping control of emotions, remaining focussed on the tasks and goals, and not being distracted by sentiment. Mental strength was also described by some straight participants as the ability to pursue goals, especially in the face of opposition. Jack describes his admiration for Robert Kennedy, the American Senator, and brother of ex-President John F. Kennedy:

> *(I've always had) ...a lifelong admiration for Robert Kennedy who died a few months before I was even born but a lot of the values of, or a combination of*

values, of sort of public service but also a fair degree of just ruthless political operation, something I have always quite admired about him. [Trans, 19-22]

The demonstration of strength and power through "*ruthless political operation*" is greatly admired and legitimised when directed at the 'right' cause. Jack appears to be identifying with a quality of masculinity that has nothing to do with co-operation, gentleness or any softer feelings. In this way, the use of strength suggests a non-relational definition of masculinity. Independence and individualism are highlighted as desirable masculine ideals. Strength may also be the ability to control inner feelings especially in difficult situations; James describes his admiration for his brother-in-law's qualities:

To absorb (family tension and conflict)… to a point where people are won over by him, because he hasn't sort of flared up in spite of all that's happened. [Trans, 168-169]

This quality of 'absorbing' is the closest that the straight participants came to describing a positive receptive quality of masculinity. James describes the quality in terms of being able to control his emotions. This quality was similar to Brannon's (1976) description of masculinity,

'Be a Sturdy Oak'. Masculinity depends on remaining calm and reliable in a crisis, holding emotions in check". (p. 125)

Brannon (1976) described four key elements of contemporary American masculinity which were reported in the Chapter One (No Sissy Stuff, Be a Big Wheel, Be a Sturdy Oak, and Give 'em Hell). These descriptions of masculinity are common to each other in their focus on the use of strength and power, which supports other findings into the relationship between masculinity and power (Edley & Wetherell 1996). However, the straight participants' views about strength are complex, especially in the area of the use of strength and power over others. Brannon's four descriptors of North American masculinity (above) may not be as applicable in Australia, and were not evident in the participants' descriptions of masculinity. Overall, the straight participants placed great emphasis on being in control of one's emotions, which suggests an image of a grim determination. This theme will be explored in greater detail for the possible implications on men's help seeking behaviour in Section 5.3.

5.1.3.3 Negative aspects

Negative aspects of power and strength were frequently reported by the straight participants in describing masculinity as Noel, comments:

Oh I think, being overly aggressive and leading to even violent, physically violent sort of behaviour. [Trans, 211-220]

A consistent theme in the participants' responses about violence and aggression was the belief that men's tendency toward aggression is innate, as noted in Section 5.1.3.1 Neville comments on men's aggressiveness as a perceived natural tendency:

Well I guess men tend to be more assertive and aggressive generally. [Trans, 40]

These comments (and earlier comments about boys' aggression) are similar to popularist views about testosterone and men's aggression (e.g. Biddulph, 1997) which are often underpinned by socio-biological arguments (Pease, 2002). However not all men are aggressive and those who act aggressively often do so in particular circumstances and contexts (Pollack, 1995). Thus, men acting aggressively or any other male action may also be interpreted as a masculine enactment (e.g. Deaux & Major, 2000). In the present study, the origins of aggression were not explored, but the straight participants consistently reported a belief in the 'naturalness' of aggression in males, supported by the assumption of aggression as a stereotypical male characteristic.

The descriptions of strength and the use of power as masculine characteristics may be positive or negative. Ross comments on men's capacity to be rough, and when asked to define masculinity he says:

Probably in fairly simplistic kind of...you know, physical related terms, I guess. You know a combination of the physical size, strength kind of thing and the....well I suppose I assume insensitive, kind of rough. [Trans, 169-171]

When a man's strength is used insensitively without regard for others, it was seen as negative. However, men's capacity for aggression was also admired. Nic comments on his admiration for previous Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating:

There's a certain killer instinct in Keating which I think is attractive. That he is,
was a very powerful figure and would chew up opponents, but also would do it for
the right end, and would make a stand. It was courageous. [Trans, 211-213]

In situations when men's aggression is rationalised or believed to be furthering the interests of a particular cause or goal, it appears the end justifies the means. The relative position of victim or perpetrator of men's aggression may determine whether the behaviour is perceived as negative or positive, respectively. Nic (above) identifies a key paradox in the straight participants' views about masculinity and strength. Whilst aggression and violence are sometimes seen as destructive and harmful, in other contexts, these qualities are also admired. It is perhaps the power that goes with the strength that is admired, even if others suffer at the hands of men's power. Thus, there appears to be support for the exalted the position of hegemonic masculinity, and the power that goes with it. The impact of aggression on men's' friendships and support seeking will be explored in greater detail in Section 5.2 and 5.3.

5.1.4 The value of independence

A third theme that emerged in the participants' descriptions of masculinity was the high value given to independence. Similar to being strong, independence suggests self reliance and held a high value in the minds of the straight participants. Nic uses the term 'lone wolf' to describe independence:

I think one quality about men which is a fairly generalised one, which when I
counted them, in my dealings with guys over the years is this independence thing.
A sort of a lone wolf type characteristic. I mean nearly all my friends and male
role models are very private to some extent, have certain points where they
withdraw to themselves, or want to be elsewhere and not connected with others.
That's sort of the underside to the independence. I think that's a very essential
male quality that I see with people. [Trans, 55-61]

The tendency towards independence is similar to the idea of 'self support' in the Gestalt therapy literature. As defined by Mackewn (1997), *"Self support is the support people can give themselves"* (p.183). Self support is contrasted with environmental support which is the support individuals may obtain externally to themselves (e.g. from friends). Of course, these terms are not mutually exclusive and an individual may seek out support from the environment whilst also supporting themselves. However, what is of interest here is Nic's description of internal support, and his lack of focus on

environmental support. The emphasis is on withdrawal from others, and reliance on self. The tendency toward independence may also be underpinned by an introject system or related to a masculine ideology, such as an internal system of 'shoulds', that are learnt over time, and culturally defined (Yontef, 1993). For example, a man 'should' be independent; the failure to achieve such is one definition of immaturity and potentially shame. As Wheeler (1996) notes:

> *In the autonomy/individualistic paradigm, support is necessarily a crutch, a badge of inferiority and shame. 'Self determination' and 'self support' are ideals; anything 'less' implies developmental delay, at least, if not constitutional inferiority, and is best kept hidden. (Pp. 53-54)*

This preference toward self support over support from others is explored further in the Section 5.2 on men's friendships and Section 5.3 on support seeking.

There was an acknowledgement by the participants that personal independence is not always positive and can result in withdrawal and disconnection from others. Noel shares his view on the key qualities of masculinity,

> *Probably a tendency to withdraw in certain situations. It all gets too hard, just to sort of go into your shell a bit or just, you know, not want to confront it. [Noel 183-184]*

As Noel notes, withdrawal can sometimes be about avoidance of something that is difficult. He describes going "into your shell" as a coping strategy to deal with certain situations. It may be that self support is preferable to the potential shame of appearing vulnerable. Furthermore, Noel's withdrawal may also indicate withdrawal from himself, as a coping strategy when faced with an inability to live up to a masculine ideal (Krugman, 1995). Furthermore, the idea of the withdrawal may describe a strategy that men adopt when unable to comply with hegemonic masculine ideals, such as appearing strong and in control. These ideas are explored in more detail in Section 5.3 on help seeking in times of crisis.

5.1.4.1 Independent achievement

The tendency toward independence also emerged in descriptions of individual achievement. The participants' definitions of successful men were men who had been strong leaders and whose achievements were measured in terms of their individual

accomplishments. The focus on achievement was not on working together as a team, toward a common goal, but rather the focus was on individual achievement. There was little emphasis on co-operative or democratic decision making processes. James comments on qualities of famous men:

I suppose leadership, and to…choose a direction and force it sort of thing, or make it happen, that's a good one. [Trans 60-61]

James notes the use of strength and power in achieving an outcome. A masculine ideal was described as an ability to know what to do independently and for a man to 'use his power' through leadership to make it happen. There is little room for indecision or for the need to consult with others. A picture emerges of a presentation of masculinity that is about being both quietly confident in yourself and self supportive. To this end, Neville comments on his admiration for his father:

He tends to be fairly quiet and reserved, and that comes across as strength of character, and as a sort of fairly firm sense of self- really a sense that, of being comfortable with who you are, and um, kind of self assured I guess, but not in an sort of extroverted, overt way. [Trans, 89-101]

It is noteworthy that in this description, which was similar to others, masculinity is not defined in terms relationship with others, in either partnership, sharing, or in receiving support. The only relational descriptions of masculinity were in doing for, providing for, or use of power over others. There may also be a level of shame about being dependent and needing support from others. This theme will be explored in more detail when examining men's needs in their close friendships in Section 5.3.

The straight participants were predominantly from white middle class backgrounds and employed in professional roles. The tendency toward independence and independent achievement needs to be considered within this context. The men interviewed were in the age group 34-45 years of age, a time when professional men are expected to be proficient in their chosen career and area of expertise (Moreland, 1989). These expectations may also shape a tendency toward individualism, at the expense of needing or relying on others. However, of interest in the present study was the additional possibility that men may be beginning to place a greater value on relationships with

others in mid-life (Cochran, 2001), and these ideas are reported in more detail in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.

5.1.5 The anxiety associated with masculinity

The straight participants revealed an underlying anxiety about their own masculinity which appeared to be related to a fear of being judged or found out by others for not living up to some unspecified masculine ideal. The straight participants expressed a pervasive anxiety about masculinity, not only about being masculine 'enough', but also about knowing what masculinity was. As mentioned earlier, many straight participants struggled to define masculinity and reported this was unsettling for them. Furthermore, there was an anxiety about one's own masculinity, especially when peer evaluation was expected. It seemed that anxiety about an individual's masculinity was particularly strong if perceived to be violating a perceived gender norm. Bob describes this anxiety well in his interest in cooking.

> *I feel exposed as a male in the fact that I enjoy cooking. So I feel that in a gut level, I don't feel it in an intellectual level, like I know that it is ridiculous. But if I was in a group of blokes at the pub and we're talking about what we like doing, I probably wouldn't raise it as, I might, but I probably would feel exposed I guess from a masculinity perspective to say... that's a major interest of mine. [Trans, 235-246]*

Bob's identifies fear of exposure in performing an activity that may not perceived as traditionally masculine. This view gives support to the notion that the meanings and interpretations of social behaviours in specific contexts define cultural norms of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus it might be more acceptable for Bob to perform the role of a professional chef, compared with home based cooking, which may be perceived as un-masculine, probably because it is seen as a feminine enactment. Bob makes the distinction clear; he enjoys cooking at home, but he feels ashamed and exposed to share this in front of his male friends. Bob is describing anxiety about his masculinity, and a key feature of his anxiety is a fear of appearing too feminine in performing a non-stereotypically masculine behaviour. As O'Neil, et al. (1995) note, gender role conflict may result when individuals deviate from gender role norms. Masculinity may be defined, to some extent, by exclusion; that is by excluding any behaviour or activity that is associated with the feminine, or may be perceived to be associated with the feminine, such as cooking at home. As M. Kimmel (1994)

comments, *"Historically and developmentally, masculinity has been defined as the flight from women, the repudiation of femininity"* (p.126). However, in an American study of male 'homemakers' (Robertson & Verschelden, 1993), (straight) men's social reactions from peers were not as negative as perceived reactions. However, a major source of anxiety for many men is their fear of negative evaluation by peers and the potential for shame in appearing un-masculine (e.g. Krugman, 1995) even if these fears may sometimes be exaggerated. Thus there is support for a relationally based shame response (Wheeler, 1998). It may be the individual's fear of peer rejection, or lack of support from peers, that may be important in determining appropriate masculine roles.

5.1.5.1 Display of emotions

It also appeared that some of the participants were anxious about showing 'softer' emotions and the feeling of vulnerability associated with these emotions. Personal anxiety might be stronger when in the company of other men, as Bob notes above in describing his fear of exposure. In a similar vein, Richard admires his father's ability to care for others and to express his feelings:

> *I mean people like my father who was, who is quite…I don't know there's positive and negative traits, but then on the whole you look to people like that, you know they look after the people around them and he's not afraid to show his emotions and he's not well-guarded from that side. [Trans, 243-246]*

There is a key distinction between having emotions and showing emotions. Richard notes that his father is "*not afraid to show his emotions*". He suggests that other men might be afraid to show their emotions and are more guarded. A key fear is showing certain un-masculine emotions to others. The qualities that Richard is describing are equated with feminine qualities such as caring and supporting, and the emotions he is suggesting are 'softer emotions' such as love. Neville shares his beliefs about men's tendency not to share emotions.

> *[men]… tend to be more constrained, [than women] emotionally. [Trans, 41]*

The idea that men are less emotionally expressive than women is supportive of the concept of traditional masculinity. This is similar to the point made by O'Connor (1993) in his description of men's anxiety about 'not knowing' as an explanation for avoiding their emotional world. The world of logic and reason, 'logos', is likely to be far less

anxiety provoking, than the world of feelings, which may be unpredictable and are often uncomfortable (O'Connor). It is hypothesised that to feel and express vulnerable emotions might require considerable internal and external support and personal safety.

5.1.5.2 Anxiety and shame

Some straight participants identified the need to protect themselves from shame and humiliation for not fitting into accepted masculine role norms. Bob describes his need to protect himself from shame and embarrassment:

> *And it wouldn't stop me from telling people I do it (cooking) , but I certainly, I am very conscious when I do that, that I need to protect myself. [Trans, 281-282]*

A possibility that masculinity was constructed around avoiding shame emerged from the straight participants as they described masculinities that were 'acceptable' and those which were not, according to 'unwritten rules' of the dominant masculinity. These results support other findings in the research literature regarding the construction of masculinities around the avoidance of shame (e.g. Krugman, 1995; Levant, 1995). However, Bob's example above also suggests he has found ways to continue cooking, and may engage in selective disclosure, thus lending weight to the notion that masculinities are defined in relation to the person-environment field. It is not cooking per se that is shameful, but the perception of the meaning that others may attach that is shameful. The possible links between the straight participants' experiences of shame and anxiety and the construction of their masculinities is explored further in Section 5.2 on men's friendships.

5.1.5.3 Not knowing

A further aspect of the straight participants' descriptions of masculinity was the anxiety of 'not knowing'. The qualities of strength, power and independence reported above reflect a degree of certainty of 'knowing' where you are going and how to get there. Larry comments on the importance of certainty in describing masculinity:

> *Sticking to your path, obviously having flexibility but, yes, say sincerity and integrity I think very positive in my regard. Negative, I suppose the opposing ones, you're not being…a bit wishy-washy (Trans, 82-84).*

In Larry's definition of masculinity, he describes the importance of "sticking to your path", and knowing who you are and where you are going. I think Larry is placing a

negative value on 'not knowing', and describes this as "wishy washy". This is similar to O'Connor's (1993) ideas about men's capacity (or incapacity) to tolerate ambiguity:

> *Most men equate uncertainty with weakness and thus rush headlong into clarity long before it is appropriate. But this impatient seeking of intellectual clarity merely reflects anxiety, not any genuine desire to understand. Hence an emerging feeling conversation can be traumatically severed by such comments as 'where is your evidence for that', 'that is illogical' or' 'that is just your imagination'. (Pp. 4-5)*

The straight participants expressed a strong preference toward 'knowing' ones masculinity at both a personal level and more generally. Because of the inherent instability of a concept like masculinity (Connell, 1995), it appeared to be a great source of anxiety to the participants.

5.1.6 New masculinities

The final theme emerging from the straight participants was a desire for a plurality of masculinities, which included opportunities for new expressions of masculinity. The straight participants also acknowledged the presence of gay masculinities. However, there was confusion and internal conflict between traditional masculine ideals and a desire for new masculinities. The straight participants' descriptions of new masculinities emerged from a rejection of many of the values of traditional masculinity, which provided some support for the view of a crisis of masculinity as noted by Levant and Pollack (1995).

5.1.6.1 Crisis of masculinity

As noted previously (Section 5.1.2) some participants noted their confusion about the concept of masculinity, which also suggested that the possibility of a personal crisis of masculinity. Some straight participants acknowledged that men's focus on achievement and independence came at a personal cost to self and to personal relationships as Noel comments on his view of success in men:

> *Because that's one of the things that I feel kind of strongly about, passionately about, is that I think that a lot of people are…you know, well at a certain stage in their life maybe they will have, you know, fantastic educational qualifications, be a fellow of this society, be a this and that, who have achieved all kinds of fame and fortune, whatever, notoriety, but in their personal life maybe their wife hates them, they've had three divorces, their kids don't want to know them. You know*

and you say to yourself, 'well how successful are they, really?' How happy are they? They might have been going to kill themselves, or you know. [Trans, 78-86]

Noel is talking about congruence between a man's inner world and his outer world. He is quite critical of men who are successful in their outer world at the expense of their inner world and their relational world. The conflict between the outer and inner worlds and between traditional and contemporary masculinity may have contributed to what some commentators have described as a crisis of masculinity as Levant and Pollack (1995), note:

The pressures on men to behave in ways that conflict with various aspects of traditional masculinity ideology have never been greater. These new pressures to commit to relationships, to communicate one's innermost feelings, to nurture children, to share in housework, to integrate sexuality with love, and to curb aggression and violence- have shaken traditional masculinity ideology to such an extent that the resulting masculinity crisis has left many men feeling bewildered and confused. And the pride associated with being a man is lower than at any time in the recent past. (p.2)

The level of crisis noted above was not evident in this sample, although there was evidence for confusion in the straight participants about their own masculinity. A complex picture of masculinity and masculinities emerges. It appears that uni-dimensional descriptions of masculinity do not adequately capture the range of possibilities which multiple masculinities may offer for these men. Masculinities that are constructed with sensitivity to the environment and other individuals in it are desired by the straight participants. The challenge for these new masculinities is to allow for complexity, but also pride and self esteem. The straight participants acknowledged that masculinity and masculinities are complex as Nic comments:

I think men are much more complex than that and I don't see myself as ticking a box with those qualities (i.e. independence, provider, good judgement, strength). [Trans, 52-53]

I think Nic is drawing a distinction between masculine ideologies and behaviours. Ideologies are like stereotypes, in that they describe an ideal or a generalised idea, without allowing for individual behaviour in specific contexts. What is of importance are the ways in which men's actual behaviours are constrained by introjected beliefs and ideologies. In the sex role strain paradigm (Pleck, 1981) which gave rise to the gender

role conflict (O'Neil, et al., 1995) and gender role strain (Eisler & Blalock, 1991), this view is also expressed. Tensions between dominant masculine ideologies, which are often inconsistent, and behaviour which violates this ideology, may result in fear of sanction and stress for many men (Pleck, 1995). However, masculinities are complex, and it is important to examine relationships between different masculinities (e.g. young and old, working and middle class) and in different contexts to further understand the social construction of masculinities (Connell, 1995). To this end, gay and straight masculinities are compared in detail in Chapter Seven. However, a brief discussion of the complexity and plurality of masculinities appears below.

5.1.6.2 Complexity of masculinities

The straight participants appeared to be negotiating a balance between retaining some positive qualities of 'traditional masculinity' and incorporating new behaviours and ways of being as man into the definition of masculinity. There was a strong theme of pride and self confidence in these descriptions of masculinity. Larry comments on his view of masculinity:

> *Not so much being proud, but being confident but not sort of arrogant. So masculinity, yes I feel comfortable with myself, I am confident, but I am not overly proud, I'm not in your face. [Trans. 116-118]*

Larry's view of masculinity combines confidence with an awareness of the impact of his behaviour on others. The emergence of relational masculinities is discussed further in Section 5.1.6.5 below.

Traditional masculinity is more known and although criticised, it is predictable. Nic comments on the difficulties associated with defining masculinity and a new masculinity:

> *Oh I think it's so without meaning nowadays. I just don't get it. I mean there'll be that term, that word, is associated in the gay press, about gay men as being masculine. It's associated with you know, new forms of masculinity, so called, you know…sensitive, communicative, non-macho, traditional macho images that are still associated now with rev-head and macho cars. I mean it's just devoid of much specific meaning to me. [Trans, 260-264]*

Nic raises some important issues. Whilst there is a sense of a traditional masculinity, he identifies a plurality of masculinities which includes gay men who have traditionally

been feminised and excluded from traditional constructions of masculinity (Connell, 1995; M. Kimmel, 1994). Thus confusion may exist about the meaning of masculinity. Indeed some writers have suggested that the concept of masculinity is confusing because it covers too broad a range of concepts (Hearn, 1996), and is thus not a meaningful term. However, if we accept that individual and collective masculinities are evolving, and always situated in specific contexts, then it is possible to speak of masculinities as processes always under construction for all men. New masculinities were described by the straight participants as ways of being and doing that were flexible, responsive to the environment, and allowed for the possibility of uniqueness and individuality. New forms of masculinity were harder to define, perhaps because they are continually being re-defined and constructed. These new masculinities also retain some of the qualities of traditional masculinity, such as strength, independence, and achievement. However, these traditional qualities were perhaps important 'background' characteristics, which supported the emergence of new, flexible 'figures' or masculinities, as determined by current circumstances.

5.1.6.3 Gay masculinities

Some straight participants reported that gay men have also challenged traditional ideas about masculinity. Whilst traditionally viewed as effeminate or feminine, other images of gay men were noted. Ross describes his gay friend's masculinity in physiological terms:

> *I've never thought of trying to define masculinity and short of a physiological sort of description, I still struggle. Because Michael [a gay friend] would be one of the most masculine friends I know, if I had to say who's a bloke…oh not who's a bloke, but who's masculine. So that's interesting. [Trans, 1197-1200]*

The public emergence of gay men who appear stereotypically masculine in Australia has contributed to the current debate on masculinities. Ian Roberts, the openly gay Rugby League player, has been a prominent example of a high profile athlete outing himself and has been widely referred to in the Australian masculinity literature (e.g. Tomsen & Donaldson, 2003). Thus, the greater visibility of gay men, some of whom appear very 'masculine' appears to have the challenged traditional heterosexual image of masculinity.

5.1.6.4 Courage to break away from norms

The straight participants reported that courage was required to break away from accepted norms. Bob comments on his admiration for the Radio personality Brian Nankervis:

> *I don't think generally males would tend to… bare their soul in such a public way and that's what I find most interesting. [Trans, 94-98]*

It appeared that embracing a non-traditional concept of masculinity required personal strength and courage to challenge dominant constructions of masculinity. Bob talks about his admiration for men who are prepared to break away from accepted norms of masculinity.

> *Something that I admire is the boldness to be unique I suppose, to break away from the accepted norms [of masculinity]. [Trans, 198-199]*

Included in possibility of new masculinities are some of the qualities of traditional masculinity, with an allowance for a flexible plurality of masculinities. However, these descriptions were notable in their absence of the need for support for others in breaking away from accepted norms. Thus it seems that a desire to enact new masculinities co-exists with an attraction to independence, a traditional masculine ideal. The challenge to incorporate a greater capacity for relationship and interdependence is reported below in relational masculinities.

5.1.6.5 Relational masculinities

There was support for a type of masculinity that was relational and less individualistic. Larry describes the positive masculine qualities of caring for others and the importance of the provider role:

> *Being loving and supportive, so we are talking about a relationship, you're there for the other person, you are there to look after them, care for them in a loving and supportive way. [Trans, 114-118]*

Larry's descriptions reveal that contemporary constructions of masculinity may also include a capacity for relationship, albeit as the dominant partner. Men's capacity and desire for relationship is also reported by Bergman (1995), who critiques psychological theories of male development for being overly self centric. It may be through a re-

evaluation of their masculinity at mid-life (Cochran, 2001) that some of the participants are questioning the ideal of independence and considering the importance of relationship. However, whilst Larry's description of masculinity is relational it does not recognise the need to receive support or help from others. There is an avoidance of being in a passive or receptive role. Thus, the straight participants' descriptions of new masculinities suggest possibilities for change, against a background of traditional masculine ideology.

5.1.7 Discussion of key findings: straight men and masculinities

The straight participants' descriptions of masculinity revealed a complex and sometimes contradictory picture of changing definitions of masculinity, occurring against a background of traditional masculine ideology. Following a constructionist epistemology, the essential features of masculinity described by the straight participants are revealed in masculinity enactments in which the anxiety of not being masculine 'enough' is ever present.

Whilst on one hand the participants expressed support for essentialist, 'natural' explanations of masculinity, there was also support for the social construction of masculinities in the participants' descriptions of masculinity. Thus, the concept of masculinity and masculinities is complex, and perhaps not particularly stable. It is in the enactment of masculinity in particular situations and contexts that aspects of masculinity may be revealed. Thus, individual masculinities may be thought of as the outcome of complex self-other processes. This appears particularly so in relation to issues of shame, that may arise when traditional or hegemonic masculine ideals are perceived to be transgressed, and this fear appeared ever present. For many straight participants, the potential for shame was evident in failing to appear strong or independent, especially in front of peers. To this end, a key finding was the ubiquity of anxiety about one's masculinity, which appeared to be closely related to a fear of shame. Shame was experienced as a lack of support from the gendered field, especially one's peers. Thus, social support may play an important role in ameliorating the experience of shame.

Many participants expressed a desire for new masculinities and new ways of being masculine that challenged hegemonic masculine ideals. However, there was also

concern about transgressing dominant norms of masculinity, and the potential for shame and vulnerability. Thus changes in the way in which masculinities are constructed and experienced may also require changes and support in the receptive field (Wheeler, 1998). Thus, the emergence of new masculinities requires a greater examination of support at both an individual level and in the wider field.

These descriptions of masculinity are important because they provide a background for understanding how men construct their masculinity in their close male friendships. These results are reported in the next section in which I will examine men's friendships with other men, and their relational needs and the meanings given to particular interactions.

Section 5.2 Straight men's close friendships: Results and discussion

In this section of the results, the emergent themes in relation to straight men's friendships are presented and discussed. An essence statement is first provided to describe the essential features of the straight participants' experiences of close male friendship. Then the findings are discussed providing quotes as examples for my interpretations.

5.2.1 Essence statement

The essence statement is presented in three main parts; shared lives and activities, the boundaries of intimacy and managing difference.

Shared activities and shared lives

The straight participants described their close friendships with other men as founded on, and maintained, in the practice of shared activities, which may have been a way of maintaining a degree of personal independence and autonomy. Furthermore, in ways that signified the influence of traditional masculine values, the participants described a dilemma between managing closeness and distance. Friendships were described as close even if a participant was not in regular or recent contact with a friend. Friendship was described as a mutual experience of enjoyment, fun, common humour and companionship whilst engaged in an activity or common interests. Friendships were chosen because of a common of interest and time spent with a friend invariably involved a direct or indirect connection with the common interest, and the consumption of alcohol was often involved. Shared experiences (and 'adventures'), particularly in adolescence or early adulthood were described as formative for developing trust, loyalty and openness. Emotional disclosure or a focus on the inner world of feelings, were not excluded from close friendships but were not described an essential feature of close friendships by the straight participants.

The boundaries of intimacy

Intimacy was defined by the straight participants as interpersonal closeness that needed to be carefully regulated. The need to regulate intimacy appeared to be associated with a

fear of shame for appearing un-masculine. The straight participants reported the importance of regulating contact with male friends by maintaining interpersonal boundaries. These boundary regulating experiences were not discussed with friends, but were assumed to be known as 'unwritten rules'. There were mixed views about the desire for intimacy in close male friendships. Where intimacy was experienced in close friendships it was in situations that were emotionally safe, which was often whilst engaging in an activity. The focus on an activity appeared to preserve an aspect of masculinity reported in Section 5.1. Many straight participants did not consider their close friendships as sources of intimacy, although they did report interactions whilst engaged in activities that were similar to intimacy.

Managing difference

The theme of difference emerged as an important aspect of the straight participants' friendships. Friendship differences were often experienced as differences about the outer world of activities and interests. Differences could both enhance the relationship or cause conflict and disconnection. Invariably, conflict between friends was experienced interpersonally because it often resulted in disconnection, although the straight participants did not describe their friendship differences in interpersonal terms. A theme of avoiding conflict was evident, and appeared directly related to avoidance of closeness. In friendships where conflict was normalised and worked through, the potential for greater closeness was reported.

In the present study, straight men's relational contact styles are examined by exploring their relationships with close male friends. The overall aim was to better understand how men's construction of their friendships might influence their ability to seek support. In this chapter, I discuss each of the three themes named above and provide quotations to support my interpretations.

5.2.2 Shared lives and shared activities-"points of connection".

A strong theme that emerged from the participants' descriptions of their close male friendships was the theme of shared lives and shared activities. The straight participants reported that their friendships often formed through common interests, or shared experiences, or both. Sometimes through a shared experience, a common interest

emerged. The common interest then served to consolidate the friendship. James comments on how he became friends with Ian through sharing a house.

We were sharing a house together. He knew someone else in the place, we had a spare room and he moved in and so we sort of got to know each other. We lived together probably for about five or six years…And we have like common interests I think too, that's probably the big thing…I suppose the way he sees the world is a bit similar to me. [Trans, 373-382]

James notes that he came to know Ian over a period of years whilst living together and most likely through shared experiences during this time. He also notes that there were differences between them, while underneath there was a shared view of the world. It appears that a defining characteristic of an ongoing friendship is the existence of common interests, which provide a foundation for the friendship. This view is also reported in the research literature (e.g. Caldwell & Peplau, 1982), in which men report the importance of sharing interests as a basis for a close friendship. The participants did not necessarily describe their friendships in terms of interpersonal attractiveness or dependency, but in terms of mutual enjoyment of activities.

Neville comments on his awareness of 'common interests' as a starting point in his friendship.

I'm not sure why we became friends, it's such a long time ago. I guess we had common interests. [Trans 154-156]

The idea of common interests arose frequently in participants' reports of close male friendships. These common interests varied considerably, but were usually activities, thoughts or ideas about the 'outer' world. Bob describes the importance of a shared activity.

The friendship I guess would be mainly built on activities. We share an enjoyment of fishing, not so much since we've both had kids. But, we'd rent a cottage on the river and go fishing. [Trans, 437-439]

Bob notes that the friendship is "*built on activities*". For many of the straight participants, the chosen 'activity' was central to the friendship. To this end, other researchers have described men's friendships as 'side-by-side' (Wright, 1982) or

instrumental (Sapadin, 1988). The focus of the friendship is not overtly interpersonal. It appears that the presence of an activity serves as a focus point, which may also support the friendship. In a similar vein, James comments on men's patterns of relating:

> *I think it's probably got something to do with relationships and how men relate. [thinking] From my end I think men don't think so much about how they feel about things, more about actual things that happen. Like what they've done or achievements or things that are going on in the world as opposed to how you feel about the things that are going on in the world. That's just from my experience… I'm not saying it's the same for everyone, but in engineering it's fairly common. [Trans, 76-81]*

James describes a way of relating to other men that is not focused on emotional disclosure, or interpersonal connectedness. This finding supports other research that indicates men limit the degree of self disclosure in male-male friendships (Morman & Floyd, 1998; Sherrod, 1987; Strikwerda & May, 1992). However it is also important to consider James' views from a constructionist position whereby he notes the link between a focus on the outer world and the profession of engineering. It may be that men who are attracted to engineering exemplify a type of masculinity that is indeed rational and externally focused (Messerschmidt, 1996). However, the male dominated engineering profession also appears to be an important site for the construction of traditional masculinity identities (e.g. Frehill, 2004; M. Walker, 2001; Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993). As Connell (1995) notes, the workplace is an important site for the enactment of hegemonic masculinities, and in male dominated workplaces, traditional masculine beliefs and practices may be reinforced. However, it is my contention, that masculinities are also constructed in men's close friendships, in social-psychological processes. A key aspect of the straight participants' friendships appeared to be in the way in which closeness was regulated through activities and a subsequent focus on the 'outer world'

The straight participants appeared to limit the degree of emotional self disclosure in close male friendships. James (above) describes his views on how men relate as factually based and not emotionally based. In James' view, a friendship between two men requires an activity or external topic of interest on which to focus rather than focusing directly on the interaction between them. This result was consistent with the existing literature on (heterosexual) men's friendships and is compared and contrasted

with women's friendships (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Rubin, 1985; Sherrod, 1987), with higher levels of emotional disclosure, as a route to intimacy. Thus, it appears that the straight participants did not construct their friendships around emotional disclosure. As Sherrod (1987) notes,

> *Anecdotal observations and research findings demonstrate that men and women, on the whole define friendships in different ways. Women seem to look for intimate confidantes, while men seek partners for adventure (p. 217).*

However, there are several routes to intimacy (Fehr, 2004) and there may be different types of intimacy. It may be for some men that through sharing activities and interests a certain type of intimacy develops that is different to female constructions of intimacy (Cancian 1986). This idea is explored in the following section.

5.2.2.1 Comfort and being together

For some straight participants the focus on an external activity or interest may only be a temporary phenomenon, in the 'getting to know each other' phase of a friendship. Later, through sharing experiences, especially with a man that he feels close to, and has known for a long time, there is an opportunity for a shared intimacy as Neville comments.

> *To some extent it's just hanging out, like Colin...I'll go visit him in Ballarat and we'll go fishing, and we'll talk about stuff. But a lot of the time it's just having the company of someone you've known for a long time-and you feel very comfortable with.*
>
> *[What do you enjoy?] ..... Its really quite complicated isn't it, there's always things mixed together. The fact that you can discuss similar things, you can wonder about what people are, why they do things, have fairly philosophical discussions, and discuss where you're going in life, what you're doing and why you're doing it. Um what you want to get out of life, out of work. [Trans, 167-175]*

Whilst there might be a number of things that draw Neville to Colin, something is shared between them that is more than the activity by itself. It appears it is the experience of sharing time with a close male friend that is most enjoyable. Neville notes that being with Colin is 'comfortable'. Through sharing existential questions about life (e.g. "*where you're going in life"*) there appears to be an opportunity for closeness and intimacy. Thus, perhaps men's close friendships do present opportunities for intimacy, through sharing time together (Fehr, 2004; K. Walker, 2004) which may not necessarily require emotional disclosure.

For many straight participants, the emphasis on a shared activity or on shared interests was central to the friendship. Perhaps the activity supports the contact between the two men. Noel describes his enjoyment of camping, but underneath this he acknowledges the importance of an activity:

Well I suppose it's being able to relax and socialise and just talk about…sometimes it's just being able to talk about trivial stuff and so you don't have to get really heavily into anything or whatever. Just to be able to relax and talk and have a few jokes and that sort of thing. And probably another big one for me is being able to do some activity together. And in my case, for instance, it's water skiing and camping. I really enjoy those. So to me that's just perfect. To be able to get up to the river and set up a camp, have the ski boat there and have a campfire. [Trans, 274-281]

Noel is describing the experience of feeling relaxed and comfortable in his friend's company. He is describing a style of contact that is not too 'heavy', which could be interpreted as not too emotionally intense. There is no pressure to deepen the contact, and he then goes on to talk about the enjoyment of an activity. It appears that the pursuit of an activity, like camping, is an important part of the friendship, and may also be viewed as a particular enactment of masculinity. For some participants, the focus on the activity is integral to male friendship, as the focus is maintained on the 'outer' world'. Furthermore, it may be through an activity that a type of intimacy is 'inferred' (Sherrod, 1987) as friends relax and enjoy each other's company.

5.2.2.1.1 Familial friendships

For one of the straight participants, his brother was regarded as a close friend. Eric describes his friendship with his brother and notes the importance of shared views,

We have a very honest relationship, we can talk about, pretty much anything we like really….and I guess we have the same views, we share a lot of the same views. [Trans, 231-234]

Eric emphasises the importance of honesty and openness in his relationship with his brother, and he appreciates his brother's relaxed manner. Eric's views are consistent with other research which suggests that many siblings experience their relationship bond as a form of mutual support throughout life (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982). Floyd (1997) has noted that fraternal dyads provide a form of safe intimacy and that many

men perceive these relationships as their closest relationships to another man. Furthermore, Floyd has noted the possibilities for closeness, liking and love, in fraternal dyads, and found that intimate verbal disclosure was not necessary for closeness.

For Eric, it appears that sharing time together in itself is an important and enjoyable aspect of the friendship. He goes on to talk about how comfortable he feels with his brother:

> *I feel comfortable with him. That's pretty much all there is too it, really. I mean we can just sit down and you know, you don't feel compelled to say anything, if you don't want to. You can just sit there and just shoot the breeze with him. [Trans 270-272]*

The friendship seems characterised by a relaxed time together that is enjoyable and comfortable. The notion of not feeling 'compelled' to speak is very different from descriptions of women's 'expressive' friendships (e.g. Fehr, 2004) and supports Floyd's (1997) view that intimacy can occur in fraternal dyads without verbal disclosure. It appears that Eric and his brother have a relationship that is supported by a shared history in which they have developed common interests, 'same views' of the world' and the relationship is comfortable due to this.

5.2.2.1.2 Sport

Some of the straight participants described playing sport as an important shared activity and through playing sport together, there is often an opportunity to form close bonds (Messner, 1987). Richard describes the importance of sport:

> *We started playing sport together and [thinking]… and got to know each other there and you know and that's how basically (sic) the friendship developed. [Trans, 266-268]*

The mutual interest in sport appears to have provided an opportunity for Richard to meet his friend, and through playing sport, they were able to form a friendship. The emphasis on sport as a formative male friendship activity, in the straight participants' early adulthood in discussed in more detail in section 5.2.2.4. Several researchers have noted the importance of competitive sport as a foundation of hegemonic masculinity

(Rowe & McKay, 2003; Wedgewood, 2003). The focus on competitive or social sport as a current friendship activity was not especially prominent in the straight participants. This may have been due to presence of university qualifications, and the professional backgrounds of the participants, or the due to stage of life issues. The opportunities to form friendships through sport probably recede as men enter their thirties and begin to focus on career and family. The changes in friendships over time are reported in more detail in Section 5.2.2.5 below.

5.2.2.1.3 Friendships of choice

In a friendship there is something gained for both parties, which underpins the notion that friendships are a choice. Unlike families, which we do not usually choose, we can choose our friends (Rubin, 1985). With the element of choice it follows that there must be an expectation of a basic need (e.g. companionship, or support) being met in a friendship even in everyday interactions (Leatham & Duck, 1990). For a man to seek out another man he is likely to have a strong belief he will be received and that he wants to receive the other, as opposed to being rejected. There appears to be a greater likelihood of being received if there is a perception of common ground; this may be a shared interest or a shared view of the world. As noted previously, Eric is close friends with his brother. Whilst Eric did not choose his brother as his sibling, he did choose him as a friend. The decision appeared to be based on shared views and comfort in the company of his brother. The theme of shared views arose frequently from the participants. Ross defines the essential features of his friendship with Roger:

> *Yes, I think there's probably a shared general approach to the world. I don't mean politically necessarily. [Trans 267-268]*

Ross goes on to explain what he means by a shared approach and highlights the importance of shared interests and names some points of connection. He also described the positive emotion of fun and humour as important.

> *Yes, an enthusiasm for the world, and being involved in it. I'd struggle to maintain much of a friendship with someone who simply wouldn't read the newspapers, and didn't engage in public affairs or any of that sort of thing. So that sort of stuff, basic stuff, has to line up to some degree. You don't have to agree, but we have to be engaged. And someone with whom I can share a laugh. Have to have a common sense of humour, at least to a degree. [Trans, 275-281]*

Ross emphasises the quality of shared interests in his close friendships, which may be a shared understanding of the world, or it may be a sharing a joke. Implicit in this shared understanding is the choice of a friend who meets these criteria. These views reinforce views of masculinity reported in the previous section (5.1); the straight participants appear to construct their friendships in ways that maintains a focus on the outer world (i.e. through activities), maximises independence (note limited descriptions of dependency or neediness toward friends) and reduces anxiety of not living up to masculine ideals (i.e. finding a friend and activity that feels comfortable and safe). However there are also experiences of closeness and intimacy reported in shared activities. These findings are reported in more detail below in section 5.2.3

5.2.2.2 Old friendships

Several straight participants reported they met their closest friends at a very young age. Neville describes meeting Colin;

Well my oldest friend is Colin, he lives in Ballarat, I met him at school when I was in grade three I think. [Trans, 147-148]

Neville's response is quite typical of men's responses when asked about their close friends. He describes a friendship that goes back many years, that was built up over time with a shared history, and shared experiences. Sometimes there are special circumstances that are remembered as Bob describes forming his friendship with Geoff, when asked how long he has been friends:

No twenty-five years, yes, twenty-four years. So that friendship is one that's, it's very important to me. It's a long standing one, it was a friendship that - I came to a new school as a fourteen year old, a very awkward sort of time, I guess Geoff was one of the cool guys at the new school. I guess it's a friendship that was born of, I feel like it was probably more important for me than him in a way. [Trans 350-356]

It appears that friendships have many levels, particularly when the friendship has a long history. It seems that Bob's friendship with Geoff was experienced as supportive, at a time when he was new to the school and felt 'awkward'. This view supports other research (e.g. Wall, et al., 1984) concerning the importance of friendships in childhood and adolescence. Childhood friendships do not always prevail (e.g. Way, 1997), but in

Bob's case, although the original reason for the friendship may have changed over time, a solid bond had been built up. Bob describes the foundation:

> *I: It sounds like you have got a good solid foundation in the friendship?*
> *P: Yes that's right. It's a bond that goes beyond the need to, it's a bond that goes beyond maintenance I suppose as a way of putting it. But for either of us it doesn't take any maintenance. We don't need to see each other to keep that friendship cemented. [Trans 367-374]*

In addition, when a solid bond is formed then a friendship may last for life. Bob stated that he felt comforted by the knowledge of the existence of the friendship as he notes:

> *I guess it's the… comfort, there's a certain amount of comfort in knowing that there is someone there, even if it is not an active, not always an active friendship. Probably more than anything, I guess is that, that the fact it's a comfort. [Trans, 380-382]*

Bob describes a feeling of comfort even though he is not in close contact with his friend Dave. This view is interesting because it challenges several psychological definitions of close relationships, particularly mutual interconnectedness and interdependence (Clark & Reis, 1988; Kelley et al, 1983). Several straight participants reported close friendships with male friends with whom they had very little contact (e.g. once a year), and thus did not appear to be interconnected or interdependent with a close friend. It may be as Polster and Polster (1973) note in their definition of contact, "*contact can also be made with memories and images, experiencing them sharply and fully*" (p.102). To this end, Bob appears to be recalling the memory or feeling of his friendship with his friend as a source of support and comfort. This definition of a close friendship is interesting because it appears that for some of these straight participants closeness does not require regular contact or ongoing maintenance and in some cases, it does not require even occasional contact. This finding has great importance for the question of whether men might seek out close male friends for emotional support and will be taken up in Section 5.3 on support seeking.

5.2.2.3 Loyalty and certainty

In addition to sharing an activity or interest in a close friendship, several straight participants reported the importance of trust and loyalty as a defining variable of a close

friendship. Nic's comments expand on the elements of fun but also the importance of loyalty and certainty.

They're both loyal to me. They're both funny, humour. They both have pretty serious expectations of life, in a sense, that they're dedicated to their respective pursuits, personally and professionally and sort of reflect upon what they're doing fairly seriously. They know how to have a good time, you know drinking and mucking around, watching the footy and such things. [Trans, 372-376]

Nic notes that a balance of fun and seriousness is important in his friendships, but underneath there is a sense of loyalty. Descriptions of trust and loyalty in men's friendships are common in historical descriptions of men's heroic friendships (e.g. Hammond & Jablow, 1987) and appear to still hold currency today. It appears that trust and loyalty may provide some predictability and certainty in a friendship. Nic comments on the importance of certainty with a close friend:

Yes, it's a certainty. I know what he's about and I know he gets a head full steam about certain things, he's a bit erratic and he makes me laugh and he'll perhaps cajole me to do things maybe my better judgement might suggest I shouldn't. Yes within certain parameters that we've developed over the years, which has been played out between us, and that continues to be played out between us, I enjoy that sort of engagement. Yes, it's certain, or it's known and yes, that's fun and makes me laugh and I enjoy his company. [Trans, 460-465]

Nic notes that it is not only fun that is important in his close male friendships, but also knowing where you stand with your friend, a certainty or predicability, and perhaps a level of safety that comes with this.

5.2.2.4 Formative Experiences

Other participants reported meeting their closest friends whilst at university or at work. Most straight participants reported that their closest male friendships were formed before their thirties. The participants reported that they had more time for making friends in their twenties and that there were more opportunities for making friends. These views are supported by other research which reports greater opportunities and ease in forming male friends in youth (e.g. Wall, et al., 1984; Way, 1997) Richard comments on how it was easier to form friendships when he was younger than it is now.

I'm feeling like a broken record because they…I suppose one of the problems I've got with male friends, is that I had quite a few like through school and high school and university, and after we finished all of that the only contact I really had with them was through sport. If we played basketball or volleyball or whatever. And as soon as they finished we all sort of drifted apart. So I don't have a lot of male friends. [Trans, 301-305]

Richard acknowledges a loss of friendships that were built on shared activities and sports, because in the absence of continuing the sport, friendships have ended. He describes this as a problem with his male friendships. It may also be possible that as men partner or marry, their friendships patterns may change, and this view is explored in Section 5.2.2.4.

On the other hand, Nic describes his time at university as building a foundation that has supported the ongoing existence of his close male friendships:

I think at university, for five, six, seven years, there was a lot of time spent together, much more time than what is available nowadays in our respective lives. And that gives you a certain…well built up this huge foundation of activities and adventures and mis-adventures and goings-on and such a sort of intimacy in a sense with each other. So that sort of anchors the friendship. [Trans, 404-408]

Nic describes these adventures and misadventures as providing a sense of intimacy and a foundation for the friendship. A possible interpretation of intimacy is closeness and a personal 'knowing' of each other. Whilst these friendships may have started out with a shared activity or interest, the progression to close friend may have come later.

Jack describes the importance of closeness formed through shared experiences:

There is something about just sheer time and shared experience and…I have known them since we were kids and so we have gone through a range of traditionally stupid teenage behaviours together. We have also seen each other in some fair extremities emotionally, for one reason or another, and you build up a level of trust that person will be, that person won't abandon you when you're vulnerable… or will pick you up off the floor when you have been violently ill, or whatever they'll do, they will do anything that they need to do to look after you… But I think it is harder as older people set in your ways a bit more and set in your own relationships, maybe not being as generous with your time with newer people and not maybe having a shared experience and developing the trust that I think you have with older friends. …but I think a lot of your shared past experiences do

come from dealing with your friends at moments of extremities, in one way or the other. [Trans, 456-473]

Jack notes the difference between friends with whom he has a long relationship history and the process of building up trust with friends through revealing emotional and physical vulnerability. He notes that through extreme situations a level of trust has been forged. He describes the importance of formative experiences in times of crisis with his long term male friends, and a possible interpretation is that crises provide safe opportunities for intimacy.

If your friend was sixteen maybe with a bottle of Vodka at a party and then you spend the rest of the next twelve hours basically dealing with them as though they were a six month child with a bad nappy problem, that builds a relationship in some way that isn't particularly pleasant at the time, and but you get something out of it. [Trans 479-482]

Jack is describing an experience with a friend that may signify an experience of intimacy, through increased personal knowing of another (Melnick & Backman, 2000), and through care giving and receiving. It seems that for some men, these formative experiences are remembered and assist in building trust in the relationship. It is also notable that these formative experiences may sometimes involve a degree of risk taking or danger, often combined with alcohol. These activities appear to be rites of passage for some straight participants, and are fondly remembered.

5.2.2.5 Changes over time.

A key theme in the straight participants' descriptions of their close friendships was the inevitability of change. It appeared that as individuals changed, so did their friendships. Some of the straight participants had experienced a mid-life crisis, which is described in Section 5.3. All the straight participants were in the mid-life stage of life, which Levinson et al (1978) describe as the mid-life transition which may be time of inner questioning for some men:

Every man at mid-life must ...integrate his powerful need for attachment to others with his antithetical but equally important need for separateness. (p.197)

There was an acknowledgement that the opportunities to spend time with close male friends diminishes with time, especially after the age of 30, when men begin partnering,

pursuing careers, or raising families. Richard comments on how his priorities have changed:

> *And because I've been, semi-recently married, well quite a few years ago now, but through that time like family life becomes more important than my friendships. [Trans, 313-314]*

Relationships with immediate family members may take greater priority, at this stage of life, as more time and energy are devoted to family life. Neville laments the lack of time available to spend with his friend Colin:

> *I don't really see him that often so that when, so I do go and spend time down there, you know its like there's things to catch up on, there's really, like there's not enough time. [Trans, 182-184]*

As noted previously, there are often fewer opportunities for shared activities with friends as men age and many straight participants lamented the loss of time and closeness in earlier friendships. Whilst there are still opportunities for shared experiences together, their lives are not as closely shared.

Larry misses the close friends from his Navy days. Larry is describing a time in his life when there were many shared times with male friends whilst he was at sea. He describes the feeling of missing his friends from the Navy.

> *What I miss more than anything is the esprit de corps… and that unity, pride in your unit with your fellow mates. [Trans, 327-328]*

Larry is describing a special type of friendship and mateship from his time in the navy. The element of choice is reduced in this situation as he, and the other sailors, were relatively isolated whilst at sea and presented with a reduced set of choices about whom they could form a friendship with. Nevertheless, Larry described very close bonds that were formed. He describes these friendships further in the section on support seeking.

5.2.2.5.1 Friendships at mid-life

It appears that friendships made later in life do not always have the closeness of earlier friendships. This may also be so because of the connection between intimacy and time spent together in men's close friendships. Thus with less time available to be together

there is less opportunity to experience closeness and to build up trust. Furthermore, with less time available, there is greater pressure on men to engage in verbal intimacy and communicate their experiences, which may be challenging if unfamiliar or uncomfortable (Strikwerda & May, 1992). Most of the participants hinted at the challenges in initiating male-male closeness in their thirties and forties. Ross comments:

It's interesting at thirty-five to watch friendships settle down. It's not the Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night thing any more, by a long shot. You have to go out of your way a lot more to organise social occasions and actually sitting down and working out who are the friends that you go to now…[Trans, 1208-1211]

Ross is acknowledging the work required to maintain friendships, and the process of sorting out who his friends are, and what they mean to him. When asked to list their closest male friends, all the participants described friends that they had known for at least ten years. This does not mean that straight men do not form close friends later in life, but it does suggest that there is an association between very close friends and length of friendships.

Larry comments on the process of maturing and becoming more responsible. As straight men mature, their friendship needs may change. Perhaps as men mature then they may be able to seek out new friendships based more on their current needs. As Larry notes;

I think they (my friendships) changed when I become more responsible in being a husband and father. It wasn't so much leaving the navy it was possibly growing up a bit. The navy can keep you very young and you do a lot of fun things, silly things and carry on, and you're one of the boys. And then meeting my darling wife. [Trans, 376-383]

Larry notes that with maturity he has become more responsible and an important part of this process has been getting married and becoming a father. Larry notes that his friendships have changed as he has changed. He laments the loss of closeness with his friend Dan who he has very strong feelings of love for:

Something's different. I don't smoke, but I always smoked [marijuana] with Dan. Up till five years ago I smoked with Dan, but I just wasn't enjoying it anymore and it wasn't, yes, I discovered it was doing more harm than good, mentally and that I thought look, "I just don't want to do it anymore". But then I have lost this really [accentuates "really"], I mean Dan and I are just such great strong mates,

he is tall and strong and we don't mind showing a bit of, we tell each other "I love you Dan, I love you mate, I love you too Larry" [laughs], we don't mind giving each other a hug and doing that. We haven't done that for a while and we haven't smoked together for a while and it's just that little bit of distance now. But I can live with that, I don't … and I will have to talk to Dan about this, because we haven't spoken about it yet. [Trans, 709-718]

Larry clearly loves his friend Dan, and he appears saddened to have lost some closeness with Dan, but he is also clear about his decision to cease marijuana. It appears that one of the challenges to a longstanding friendship arises when a common interest or activity changes. Larry notes that he can "live with" the difference in the friendship, but he does express a desire to talk about it further with Dan. Eric also comments on his relationship with his brother and maturity.

We were always friends, we've been separated a couple of times, by the fact that I've worked overseas and he's lived overseas et cetera et cetera, but we're actually -probably have become closer over time I would say I think as we've sort of matured. I think we're able to talk about different things more so than we were when we were 18 or 20 and a different set of relevancies (laughs) I think. [Trans, 244-248]

Eric describes a deepening of his friendship with his brother over time, although the points of connection might have changed. The changes appear to have brought their relationship closer. Noel comments on a new friendship:

Well Michael's sort of come into my life in recent years, say in the last five years or so and he's one of that group that I was talking about that I'd sometimes go out and have a beer with on a Saturday night. Yes he's just a fun person to be with. I've never…I have had some serious conversations with him and some confidential conversations even lets say, you know I've told him stuff that I wouldn't perhaps, want to tell my wife about. And vice versa too probably, but yes, Michael is right up there in friendships at the moment. [Trans, 255-258]

Noel touches on some important points. Firstly, the shared activity with Michael is centred on visits to the pub and the use of alcohol. There is a basis of fun and some shared activity, but also moments of a deeper sharing, hinting at a bond that is qualitatively different from the one with his wife. He also comments on the contemporaneous nature of the friendship, and this comment suggests that the degree of closeness can change depending on a range of factors, including maturity and compatibility. These descriptions of closeness suggest possibilities for challenging

dominant norms of masculinity (e.g. independence, avoidance of vulnerability). Noel (above) describes disclosing personal information, which is suggestive of verbal intimacy in a supportive environment, such as the pub. His friendship with Michael is explained in interpersonal and interdependent terms. Thus it may be in specific friendships (e.g. Levy, 2005) and in supportive environments, that non-hegemonic masculinities may be enacted.

5.2.3 The boundaries of intimacy: close or too close

As noted above, the straight participants described the importance of shared activities and interests in their close male friendships. These friendships varied along a continuum of contact from sharing a discussion or activity through to experiences of love, intimacy and closeness. Some of these results challenged traditional notions of masculinity and the idea that (heterosexual) men are not emotionally expressive. The results indicated that the straight participants have strong feelings toward their friends and that some men are emotionally expressive and experience intimacy in their close male friendships. As indicated in Chapter Two, intimacy has been described as an important part of close relationships (Clark & Reis, 1988), and may be measured by verbal and non-verbal disclosure (Lewis, 1978).

The quality of intimacy in men's close friendships is a key subject of study in this research project. It appears that the participants did not always feel comfortable with close male intimacy. A key theme in exploring men's friendships was the way in which intimacy was regulated. Experiences of intimacy, both positive and negative are explored in the following section.

5.2.3.1 Positive experiences of intimacy

A close friendship can provide an opportunity for intimacy through personal sharing. James comments on his best friend, Ian:

> *And he's also good at listening, I could talk to him about problems and stuff.*
> *[Trans, 311-312]*

James describes Ian's ability to listen which appears to be and as a source of support for James' problems. He then goes on to describe how much his friend knows about him.

I suppose because he knows so much about me. Like he probably knows more about me than anyone else I think. And so it's just a familiarity with each other. [Trans, 360-361]

James' description of his friendship with Ian suggests closeness and intimacy through sharing a very personal part of himself, "*more than with anyone else*". This description supports a definition of intimacy as an "*increased level of increased personal knowing of each person and mutual connection*" (Melnick & Backman, 2000). Thus, intimacy may be experienced through personal sharing and mutual familiarity.

Intimacy may also be experienced through the sharing a personal problem, in which an individual's experience is validated through empathy. Ross describes his friendship with Roger.

And he's also good at drawing out of me what it is that I'm actually trying to tell him, where it is ...a situation, oh you know where I suppose I'm crying out for some sort of advice or whatever. He's particularly good to talk to because he's very quick to ford (sic) a path for me and say 'Well, what are you actually worried about?', and assist me in doing that. Qualities? So I suppose it's a combination in that case of empathy and I feel quite unthreatened I guess, in the situation and in my dealings with him. [Trans, 203-209]

Therefore it appears important to examine perceptions of particular interactions between men in order to examine intimacy (e.g. Reis, Senchak & Solomon, 1985) not just general beliefs about male-male intimacy (e.g. K. Walker, 2004). Ross' experience of his friendship with Roger is of feeling 'unthreatened', and one interpretation is that he means safe. He reports that he feels able to share personal concerns, and through this process is able to receive support. Ross describes empathy, which could also be described as a feeling that his friend can understand his experience and feel concern for him in some way. This varies from the theme of independence that was reported in the Section 5.1 on masculinity. Whilst independence has been reported as a highly regarded masculine characteristic, it appears that in some situations it is acceptable to experience some dependence. Ross (above) acknowledges relational needs and the benefits he receives from reaching out to Roger. Jack describes the support he receives from his close friend Frank.

I just find Frank probably one of the most supportive and giving and generous people I have ever come across I think. He's an extraordinarily positive and supportive person for me personally and has been to my partner as well. He and I lived together for a couple for years, probably at a time when I was going through a few ...career change, personal life changes and I have found him to be just someone who I can automatically talk to about a range of issues no matter how complicated and I hope... I sometimes think it's a bit, it's not an equal relationship, because I sometimes think Frank is probably a bit more generous with his time for me than I am in reverse. So I sort of try and work it making sure that I ring him more frequently, so it's not just a one way thing. [Trans, 159-167]

Jack describes his friendship with Frank as generous, supportive and positive. He notes the friendship also involved a shared experience of living together, and a closeness that enabled him to talk about a wide range or personal issues, whilst in need of support. He also expresses a concern about equality in the friendship, which supports other research findings about the importance of equity in close relationships (Clark & Reis, 1988). Jack may also feel some guilt about being too needy, or a hope that he can return the favour in some way. He may feel a loss of power through relying on his friend more he perceives his friend relies on him. Power and strength emerged as important themes for the straight participants in their descriptions of masculinity. It is possible that an unequal relationship carries the risk of a feeling of powerlessness.

5.2.3.1.1 The importance of context

The importance of a supportive environment for intimate interactions to occur was highlighted by several participants. Possibilities for intimacy and closeness between straight men emerged in specific contexts. Larry describes the possibilities for intimacy whilst at sea:

P: I was engineering, so you would be down the engine room with your watch and you do have nice conversations down there, you talk about home and when you're on the upper decks you can't help it when you're under the stars, it's a clear night, beautiful ship and the water is like glass.

I: It must be amazing.

P: Yes it is, it's gorgeous. The sun, I mean the stars and that, it's amazing. Sometimes that sets an environment where you're sort of 'oh gee I wouldn't mind going home' or you might see the lights along the shore of a house and you are like 'oh look at that they're home, we are stuck out here'. Yes that sort of prompts a conversation [Trans, 552-564]

Larry describes an experience of shared intimacy with a close friend that appears very comfortable. He describes missing home, and sharing the experience with his friend. Thus, there appears to be a positive emotional connection around a mutually shared experience that is deeply intimate which supports Swain's (2000) view that (straight) men in same-sex friendships experience intimacy in covert ways (such as through activities), and in specific environments. This view is also found in other research highlighting the importance of particular situations and individual wishes in determining whether intimacy is sought out and experienced between men (Reis, et al., 1985). Furthermore, it may be important to acknowledge the field conditions in which intimate interactions are reported. In this way, experiences of intimacy may be related to aspects of the field, which are perceived as supportive such as privacy, quietness, time and ambience. These ideas are explored further in Section 5.3 in relation to support seeking in men's close friendships.

5.2.3.1.2 Straight -gay friendship

Ross describes below his friendship with a gay man, Michael. He was the only straight participant to describe a close friendship with a gay man, which was not unusual, given the finding that close gay-straight male friendships are relatively uncommon (Grigoriou, 2004). I have included a brief description of intimacy in their friendship, as I believe it adds to an understanding of how individual friendships can challenge traditional masculinity ideology. This friendship will be discussed in more detail in the support seeking section. In the quote below, Ross describes a deep level of contact and a feeling of love in the friendship with Michael.

And then I suppose in a friendship there's just something…I can't quite put my finger on of whether it's an intangible connection thing. I don't know if it's a love or just the fact that we're bloody used to each other, or whatever it is. [Trans, 286-288]

Ross notes how activities or interests provide opportunities for connection, but the points of connection sometimes go deeper than just shared activities.

Yes, interest points of connection. And I think there it's an enthusiasm for things. The things that we're into together. That's the quality that I really enjoy in him. And it's knowledge of the world and how things work and all that sort of thing that draws me to him. [Trans, 226-229]

Ross is describing a 'drawing' toward his friend, Michael and an enjoyment in spending time with him, and their shared interests. The focus is on the interpersonal dimension of the friendship, which is different to the idea of being drawn to an activity, as the primary focus. Ross is acknowledging a desire to make contact with his friend through these common interests.

Ross' friendships with Michael started out at dance parties, of which they shared a common interest. Later on, they became close friends.

> *But it actually became a really close friendship. We talk every day, every second day. [Trans, 246]*

Ross describes a very close relationship that is characterised by almost daily contact. There were no other straight male friendships in which this frequency of closeness was reported. It appears that the friendship is characterised by a closeness that is not directly based on shared activities, nor reliant solely on shared interests. Furthermore, it appears that this friendship does represent an alternative to notions of independence and instrumentality described by adherence to traditional masculinity (e.g. Fee, 2000). Thus it appears that relational patterns in a gay-straight friendship may present opportunities for non-traditional patterns of masculinity to arise. Whilst there appears to be a comfortable intimacy in this relationship, Ross does describe a need to need to regulate his level of contact with Michael in a later section of the interview which I will discuss the issue of intimacy regulation below.

5.2.3.2 Too much intimacy

The straight participants described experiences of intimacy in their close friendships as noted above. However, sometimes there was perceived to be too much intimacy in the friendship, and this experience was not comfortable. The participants appeared to have a strong relational sense of when a friendship felt comfortable and when it was uncomfortable. Often this level of comfort appeared to be linked to the level of intimacy or closeness to their close male friend. As described previously, the gestalt notion of contact describes an individual's ability (or inability) to manage his contact with the environment. Interpersonal contact requires the management of boundaries, since contact occurs at the boundary between self and other (Perls, et al., 1951). An underlying theme in men's descriptions of their close relationships revealed a need to

manage their interpersonal boundaries with a male friend. Managing an interpersonal boundary is similar to managing intimacy with a close male friend.

I propose that the straight participants' need to manage interpersonal boundaries arose when their perceptions of independence were challenged, or if their strength or power was under threat. I also hypothesise that the participants' anxiety, and in particular the anxiety of feeling certain emotions, such as vulnerability, sadness, pain or grief might influence their level of intimacy with male friends. In an example of boundary awareness, Bob describes his discomfort in being with male friends:

It's not always inherently comfortable, if you know what I mean. [Trans, 509-514]

Bob reports discomfort in his relationships with men. Furthermore, he reported (below) that the interview with me was very intense for him, and probably uncomfortable. I believe that he is referring to intimacy, which is probably higher when there is not an activity to focus on.

Yes and (the activity) it's a safe reason to hang out together. I don't want and I've never really sought intensity in relationships. I don't want to… I wouldn't choose to sit like this and to sit and talk for an hour. [Trans, 551-553]

Bob describes his feeling of safety when there is an activity and a lack of comfort when there is too much intensity. Bob notes that he does not seek out too much intensity in his friendships. A possible interpretation of intensity is a close interpersonal connection with emotional disclosure, and the intimacy that this may bring with it.

I guess also when I think about safety I think of safety from exposure to judgement. And I guess that's part of the, I guess maybe in my mind that's inherent in emotional safety. When I think of emotional safety I think of safety from judgement or ridicule or appearing deficient in some way. [Trans, 615-618]

Bob defines safety as the safety from personal exposure and judgement. He notes his fear of feeling exposed and then judged for being deficient in some way. This is very similar to the experience of shame, which for many men is related to a fear of not appearing appropriately strong or masculine (Wheeler & Jones, 1996). Bob goes on to explain that intimate friendships with women are different and somehow easier for him.

So it's easier to have a more intimate friendship I guess with a woman in some ways, even a non- sexual relationship with a woman because in my mind the societal rules from an external point of view looking at that relationship are different. [Trans, 646-648]

Intimacy with men can be difficult as Bob notes. Perhaps this is because intimacy between straight men violates some of the norms of traditional masculinity of strength, independence and low levels of emotional expression (see Section 5.1). These ideas are explored in more detail in the next chapter on support seeking in men's close friendships.

5.2.3.2.1 A legitimate reason to make contact

It has been reported that everyday interactions (e.g. conversations, social meetings) between friends may be perceived as supportive transactions (Leatham & Duck, 1990). However, some participants noted that initiating an interaction with a male friend required a 'legitimate' reason, suggesting a need to regulate intimacy of the perception of intimacy. For example, Richard notes that he needs 'a reason' to contact a close friend.

P: And it's more about I always need a reason to contact. You know I'm not very good at you know just drop into someone's house and just…it's like I need a reason.

I: So the reason…and I'm just going to challenge you for a minute, the reason 'I'd like to see you', isn't a good enough reason?

P: Yes exactly. It should be a good enough reason, but it's like…I don't know, it's almost like because everyone's lives are so busy, there's an element of I feel like I'd be intruding unless there's a reason to go there, just for the sake of catching up. [Trans, 484-500]

Richard reports a fear of intruding on a friend if he expresses a need to see them which I interpret as an expression of intruding on a masculine ideal of independence. As Kelley et al. (1983) note, high levels of mutual interdependence are a defining characteristic of close relationships. Thus, it is hypothesised that Richard struggles with closeness in male relationships through his attempts to avoid the perception that he is depending on a friend. He goes on to talk about his struggles with friends:

I suppose it's because I'm not very good at maintaining friends that I, you know the few ones that I do have, if they do drop in I don't want to step on their toes, from that point of view. That I'll put them first before me, I suppose. That if I did have things planned to do, that I'd then rather see them if they did make the effort. [Trans, 562-565]

It would appear from his comments that Richard desires closeness and connection with his male friends, but that a belief structure (fear of intrusion) is preventing him from experiencing closeness, and interdependency. Thus, whilst an everyday interaction, like dropping in to visit a friend might be desired, it is also fraught with difficulty, as it potentially violates a boundary of independence. Put simply, Richard seems to be saying 'I should be independent, even if I don't really want to be'. This view supports other findings in the research literature on men's help seeking and the perceived normativeness of problems (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). If a male regards his problem (or need) as not normative, or not legitimate within a masculinity framework, they may be less likely to initiate contact to seek help to meet that need (e.g. social contact).

5.2.3.2.2 Sexual boundaries

Some participants reported that personal boundaries were not noticed until they felt threatened or invaded. Whilst none of the straight participants reported a sexual boundary issue with a friend, Ross notes a personal boundary threat in his relationship with gay friend Michael,

There was a period there where he was basically trying to crack on to me way too often, which at a certain point was kind of part of the game. You know if you're off taking drugs at dance parties there's a certain amount of physical contact and the rest of it, and it took us a while to work out those boundaries. [Trans, 325-329]

Ross notes that his friend Michael was making sexual overtures toward him which he initially experienced as a part of a game. This view highlights the possibility for some sexual attraction to exist in gay–straight friendship as gay men desire other men (Fee, 2000). Ross also notes that he and Michael were under the influence of drugs and this may have enabled some level of disinhibition and intimacy. However, he notes that "*it took a while to work out those boundaries*"; which suggests that he is talking about the boundaries of intimacy. He goes on to acknowledge that he was also 'curious' about his sexuality and through this curiosity he may have been exploring his own boundaries.

And at a certain point I was curious about my sexuality at a point there and we did have a bit of play and that was enough to sort of say well 'yes, well actually this doesn't really do anything for me.' It was nice to try and that was fine, that was agreed. And for a period after that, and we're talking three or four years ago, there was a few moments at the end of a dance party night when I...oh yes...no I don't...It was interesting. It was not unlike having a close friendship with a girl and then something, there's a sexual tension too, and it's like 'aaah, that's way too confusing'. [Trans, 346-353]

Ross is to be admired for his frankness in describing his friend Michael's attraction to him, but also his curiosity and desire to experiment with his own sexuality. It appears that partly through this process he was able to work out his boundaries in his friendship, in addition to his boundaries with his sexuality. Polster and Polster (1973) define expansion of the individual's boundary of self with environment or I-boundary as personal growth.

Although the I-boundary is not rigidly fixed, even in the most inflexible of people, individuals do show great variability in the expansivity or contractibility of their I-boundary. Some people seem to make great changes in their I-boundaries during their lives, and we are likely to think of those with the greatest changes as those who have **grown** *the most (p.110, Authors' emphasis).*

It seems that in exploring an interpersonal boundary, too much intimacy is experienced when one's boundary feels violated or invaded, or one's sense of self or "I" is compromised. This is an individual experience that occurs in an interpersonal situation. The other person may or may not be aware of their impact on the other person's boundary. Individual boundaries are not necessarily pre-determined, except in extreme cases (such as sexual boundaries). Interpersonal boundaries are more likely to become known (or conscious) in interaction, and may change with time and place. It is possible that some boundaries only become known to self when they are threatened. Whilst all human beings have a desire to be seen and acknowledged by another (e.g. Buber, 1965), sometimes this experience may not comfortable if seen too much. This experience of discomfort represents an acknowledgment of a boundary. One way that the participants reported that they set boundaries with their male friends, was by participating in 'safe' activities. Alternatively, in some cases, perhaps these boundaries were established at an earlier stage in the friendship.

5.2.3.2.3 Fear of homosexuality

Despite Ross' close friendship and successful negotiation of sexual boundaries with Michael above, the masculinity literature suggests that the fear of homosexuality is present for many (straight) men, particularly in male-male relationships (Davies, 1996; Herek, 1987; M. Kimmel, 1994; Lehne, 1989; A. Singer, 1996). The fear of homosexuality carries great shame for many straight men (Wheeler, 1996), and although this fear was not articulated directly in these interviews there were fears of appearing too intimate with close male friends. As noted above intimacy can mean sexual intimacy, and it appears this fear may have been present for some of the heterosexual men interviewed in this study. Ross noted confusion in his friendship with his gay friend, when Michael tried to "crack on" to him. It appears that Ross was able to set a personal boundary with Michael and appeared quite comfortable with the resolution of this issue and his sexuality.

The fear of homosexuality has been described by M. Kimmel (1994) as an important regulating feature in (straight men's) friendship. Furthermore, Lehne (1989) defines the fear of homosexuality as homophobia. It was not surprising that there was no direct evidence of homophobia in the interviews. Given the strength of shame and fear, named above, it is likely the straight participants guarded and protected themselves against revealing this feeling (if it was present) in the interview with me. This may have been because I am also a man and a relative stranger, which may have added to their anxiety. In the previous section, 5.1, it was reported that anxiety was a key theme in the straight participants' definitions of masculinity. In this way, the straight participants may have been anxious about not being masculine enough, or of being perceived by peers to be feminine. Thus, a fear of homosexuality may have been present in the straight participants, but the associated fear of shame may have prevented this type of disclosure.

5.2.4 Managing difference (when views are not shared)

As noted previously, the participants' close male friendships have been reported to involve a degree of shared activities and interests, and this may also involve some degree of intimacy or closeness. The third theme to emerge from the interview transcripts explores the opposite dimension in men's friendships- the experience of difference and disconnection. Sometimes difference was experienced as conflict. Some

of these experiences of difference in close male friendships were expressed spontaneously. Some were replies to the question: 'What don't you like about the friendship" and "Have you experienced conflict and what was it like?"

Sometimes the point of disconnection involved a loss of closeness and care in the friendship, but did not necessarily threaten the friendships itself. Ross describes how this happened in his friendship with Roger:

> *Yes it sort of gets a bit…the humour goes from wit to sarcasm and there's some sort of bitterness that comes in there with Roger for some reason when he's pissed. And normally I wouldn't…you know normally that would really affect me. With Roger I don't think it's meant, I don't think he knows he does it. [Trans, 325-328]*

Ross notes that Roger's bitterness has the potential to affect him personally, but he excuses Roger in the way he understands or rationalises Roger's behaviour. He does not believe that Roger would deliberately hurt him, and suggests that the influence of alcohol may be a determining factor for the change in his friend's behaviour. There appears to be a solid foundation to the friendship, as he does not attribute malice to Roger's actions. Therefore, the friendship does not appear to be threatened.

5.2.4.1 Competitiveness

Another area of difference and potential conflict reported by the participants was competitiveness. Nic is a successful barrister and works in the highly competitive legal industry. He describes the problem of rivalry and competition in one of his close male friendships. In doing so, he notes that this is a difficult area for him:

> *One of these two guys works in my area, so we are in the same world professionally. And that means that there's a range of sort of professional issues that come to play, including…well there's a certain rivalry. We're not rivalrous (sic)…but there is a dimension of that. He's a bit more work focussed and obsessed than I am, and for me work is a much more discrete part of my life and I don't really care for it to overtake the rest of my life. Whereas he's invited it, and that gives me the shits a bit and you know, and then to the extent that work does come up it's in this sort of slightly tense…tense way, because we're in the same little pond. So I don't really…that doesn't give me great satisfaction, but it's, you know, doesn't give me great grief either. [Trans, 482-491]*

Nic notes that competitiveness and rivalry do not add to the friendship. Whilst he reports that the level of competition is not all consuming, he does acknowledge that there is a "dimension" of rivalry and it is not liked. This dimension of competition does appear to characterise some men's friendships and has been reported as a barrier to intimacy and trust (e.g. Miller, 1983; Seidler, 1992). The level of competitiveness may be especially strong when friends work in the same field as a positive association has been reported between men's work, masculine ideology and competitiveness (e.g. Messerschmidt, 1996; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993). I did not find the degree of competition that Miller (1983) and Seidler (1992) have described. The participants' descriptions of their close male friendships did not provide strong evidence of overt aggression and competition. It may be that in a close friendship some of these issues have been resolved.

5.2.4.2 Points of difference

Interpersonal conflict is often about points of individual difference, and is inevitable in interpersonal relations (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2005). Eric comments on his relationship with his brother and their points of difference.

> *We argue every now and again about attitudes to work. I guess he has a sort of slightly different slant on how to approach some problems that he would have at work than I would perhaps- we sort of discuss that quite heatedly some times. Otherwise we get through that. [Trans, 285-288]*

He notes that these differences with his brother can become quite 'heated' at times, but it appears the relationship is robust enough to withstand this level of difference. It appears that underneath their disagreement there is a foundation of respect that enables the friendship to "get through" it.

Another theme around individual difference that emerged from the straight participants involved episodes of risk taking, often combined with alcohol. Whilst these experiences of male risk taking were often characterised as exciting adventures, sometimes a boundary was crossed and the activity or experience ceased to be enjoyable. In many of these situations, a difference of opinion, value or personal position with this friend was reported, often accompanied with discomfort. Noel comments on what he does not like about situations when things were 'out of control'.

I think there's been situations where the boys' stuff can be out of control. You know people can be taking things too far and getting dangerous [Trans, 314-316]

Noel's point of difference in this situation appears to be the dimension of control. He appears to be uncomfortable in a situation with close male friends, when a situation is out of control. In response to prompting Noel described what "taking things too far" meant in more detail:

Like risk taking…like jumping in the boat in the middle of the night, drunk and hooning off down the river. [Trans, 322-323]

Noel goes on to describe the importance of a line, which could also be interpreted as a boundary.

I think there's a line…to me there's a line. And I suppose everyone's got a different line and to me if it reaches the stage where you're annoying other people and definitely when you're at risk of serious injury or injuring yourself or others, or whatever, you've definitely crossed that line [Trans, 338-341]

Managing difference in a relationship is similar to managing boundaries. As noted above sometimes interpersonal boundaries of closeness and intimacy are crossed, and the feeling is uncomfortable. In this situation, Noel is describing a boundary at the other extreme of too much difference. Noel is aware of his personal boundary and describes it clearly as the place where fun and enjoyment end and the risk level is too high. Noel appears to be challenging the normativeness of a particular masculine behaviour; high risk and adventure combined with alcohol.

In Noel's attempt to manage a high risk situation seems he invokes another important aspect of desirable masculinity, the desire to be in control of oneself and a situation. He described an attempt to re-establish a boundary, or limit with his friend and if this was unsuccessful, he would then set a personal boundary by "stepping back":

Oh, yes, well I would do something. You know I would try and talk to him and try and bring him into line, basically and try. But I don't know… I'd have to judge each situation on its merits and sometimes there's not much you can do, but except get out of it and just take a step back. [Trans, 349-352]

His response is interesting because while he describes a process of trying to talk to his friend, which could be interpreted as an attempt at remaining in contact. He then notes that in some situations one has to "take a step back" and this taking a step back sounds like breaking contact, although perhaps not permanently.

Sometimes interpersonal differences in a friendship can be too great and may result in the end of the friendship. Eric describes his feelings of disappointment around a point of difference with a friend about acceptance of homosexuality:

> *Yeah, I was really disappointed … I wouldn't say our relationship's been quite as close since that time really. And there are probably issues that I wouldn't bother discussing with him now or subjects. And he was quite sort of homophobic. And I couldn't really see why. And I was quite surprised because I didn't actually, obviously know him well enough at the time. And I was quite taken aback. So it sort, sort of, it drove a little bit of a wedge through our relationship, yeah. [Trans, 645-669]*

Eric's experience reveals some important themes. He notes his surprise and disappointment about his friend's homophobia. Whilst Eric does not identify as a homosexual man, his disappointment suggests a surprisingly strong support for homosexuality, to the extent that he was not prepared to continue his friendship with a friend who was homophobic. He notes that this point of irreconcilable difference drove a "wedge" through the friendship, and lessened their closeness. Eric's behaviour is unusual given the reported high prevalence of negative attitudes towards gay men by straight men (Herek, 1998). In Australia, it has been found that expressions of homophobia are important hegemonic masculine enactments in many Australian men's friendships (D. Plummer, 1999). Straight men's support and acceptance of gay men has not been widespread. Thus, Eric's example of support for gay men and homosexuality in general highlights the possibility for new masculinities, that are less homophobic to be created, in men's close friendships.

5.2.4.3 Differences adding to the friendship

There was also awareness from the participants that differences can add to a close friendship. These differences might be in beliefs or opinions or could be differences in cultural, religious or political beliefs. Jack describes his close friendship with Peter and their relationship history together.

Yes again we have twenty-five years of very close history, which has had it's ups and downs I mean probably all your good relationships do, don't they? Peter and I spent some years in our twenties, not actively estranged but our lives had just gone in different directions due to his extreme commitment to very, very far left with politics, I just found it a bit confronting perhaps, but yes we have come through those things and we are probably better friends for it ... there are others they are the one's that leap out... a lot of respect for those ... handful of good friends, very, very close friends. [Trans, 215-222]

Jack acknowledges an interpersonal and perhaps an intellectual difference with Peter. An interpretation of extreme is *too* different. It appears that their differences resulted in a period of separation and disengagement from the friendship. Jack notes that the friendship has survived these extreme differences and may even be stronger as a result. He also states a belief that friendships, like all relationships, have their "*ups and downs*", which may also indicate his investment in the friendship. Despite positive and negative aspects of the friendship, an important friendship is worth persevering with. In a relationship where either party does not have a loyalty toward the other, there may be no investment to resolve conflict (Healey & Bell, 1990) or to see it through the vicissitudes. This view of friendships allows for difference because of an underlying loyalty, but it is the ability perhaps of both parties in a friendship to hold this view which may be a determining factor in the friendship's survival.

This description of friendship is similar to the Gestalt idea of a dialogic relationship. As Mackewn (1997) notes, commitment to a dialogic relationship does not always mean agreeing with another person, rather, it means a meeting, where each party takes responsibility for themselves and for the relationship. Differences in a relationship can be about managing boundaries of closeness and separation. As Polster and Polster (1973) note, it is a fundamental challenge for all human beings to manage the twin goals of connection and separateness. This struggle to resolve the tension between these polar opposites is ongoing and ultimately irreconcilable. In this study, the straight participants revealed relationship patterns that were characterised by connection through mutual interests and activity, and the awareness of personal boundaries as a regulating function to establish separateness. The straight participants in this study appeared to struggle most with issues around connection, rather than separation. In other words, the general theme was managing intimacy rather than managing difference. Most of the straight

participants wanted close friends, and wanted to feel comfortable with their close male friends, but were anxious about too much intimacy.

5.2.4.3.1 Difference and intimacy

It also appears that there might be a connection between difference and intimacy. An interesting idea emerged from one of the participants when asked about conflict. He stated that he avoided conflict, and that he also avoided closeness. Perhaps these two concepts are related in the sense that conflict over differences may sometimes be an indication of closeness, or a rupture of pre-existing closeness. Richard makes a connection between closeness and conflict:

And I suppose that that's the sort of level that I've had with all my friendships that…I don't know if it is because we don't talk about our deepest, darkest secrets, or we don't talk a lot about our feelings other than if we're happy about something, that there isn't a lot of conflict at all really. I don't have enemies and I don't have…it's like I manage to navigate myself around all of those things. So it is very rare that there is any conflict, that I see with my friends. [Trans, 1189-1195]

One possible interpretation of Richard's comment is that by avoiding conflict, he is also avoiding closeness. Experiencing and resolving interpersonal conflict may be an important aspect of managing a close friendship, which is learned earlier in life. Child development research indicates that conflict between friends promotes social development (Nelson & Aboud, 1985). This idea is similar to the gestalt idea of contact and dialogic relations, which suggests that good contact is about appreciating difference as well as similarity- and that both are necessary for dialogue. Without difference, there is a tendency toward confluence, which is a merging of the two individuals and the loss of the I-boundary. Good contact requires an interpersonal meeting, without this there is no possibility of good contact. As Bob notes below, when a close friend does not acknowledge a conflict, then the possibility of contact is diminished.

I was willing to talk to him about it, but without him even without acknowledging it that there was a problem there, there's nowhere to go. [Trans, 758-756]

In this situation, Bob described a disagreement with a friend and work colleague. He stated his desire and willingness to discuss the issue with his friend, but realised that without his friend's acknowledgment of the problem, "there's nowhere to go". Perhaps

the feelings were too strong for his friend, or perhaps his friend's way of dealing with the situation was to deny the feelings and withdraw- it is not clear in this situation. One hypothesis to be drawn from this example is that without investment in resolving this point of difference, the survival of friendship may be at risk.

5.2.5 Summary of main findings: straight men's friendships

In summary, the straight participants characterised their male friendships as founded on and experienced through shared lives and activities. All the straight participants interviewed were able to identify close male friends, and it appeared that close friendships were often formed in childhood, adolescence or early adulthood and friendships were formed through common interests and activities. A key feature of a close friendship was enjoyment and fun in being together, coupled with a sense of trust, safety and comfort, often built up over time.

It was also evident that some common experiences were considered foundational and deeply intimate, as it was the trust and sharing of the experience together that was remembered, not just the experience itself. It appears that a focus on activities and experiences of intimacy were not mutually exclusive. It appears that some straight men do experience closeness and intimacy with their friends; however in doing so, there is a heightened awareness of personal boundaries. Following other findings (e.g. Fehr, 2004; Swain, 2000) the presence of an activity was an important route to intimacy without which the interpersonal intimacy was too uncomfortable. It appeared that the possibility for vulnerability and shame were ever present. Whilst the participants expressed a desire for closeness in their friendships, there appeared to be a fear of transgressing a masculine ideal of independence, which was reported in Section 5.1. To this end, several participants described their friendships as close even in they had not been in contact with friends recently, or even occasionally. Thus a view of a close friendship emerged in which the memories of past shared experiences were held in mind in the present. This finding has important implications for men's ability to seek support from close male friends, and will be examined in the next section (5.3).

In addition, some participants, particularly those in similar occupations, reported that competitiveness in their friendships may have contributed to a lowering of safety and trust, as reported elsewhere (e.g. Seidler, 1992). However there was not strong evidence

that competitive interactions were commonplace in the participants' friendships. More common was the theme of managing differences in these friendships. It appeared that a close friendship presented many opportunities for differences to emerge, although the capacity to manage differences varied greatly among the participants. Viewing friendship as a process of contact episodes (e.g. Polster & Polster, 1973), allowed an examination of differences which enhanced interpersonal contact, and those which detracted from the friendship. For the most part, differences were described in terms external to the friendship. Whilst differences were also interpersonal, they were often not described in this way, perhaps reflecting the participants' focus on activities and the outer world, reported previously. Differences were often 'resolved' by reducing contact; it sometimes appeared quite challenging and possibly too intimate to resolve a difference through interpersonal dialogue. Thus, understanding differences in men's friendships appears to be an important aspect of how intimacy is managed.

Friendships did change over time based on different needs and other contextual factors such as mid-life changes as reported elsewhere (e.g. Cochran, 2001; Reisman, 1990). The straight participants expressed a desire for closer friendships. However, a key theme was the loss of time available to join with friends for activities (e.g. sport) as family and work commitments took precede. These findings also suggest the straight participants' increased capacity for relationship with significant others at mid-life. Nevertheless, a key consequence of these changes may be a reduced opportunity to seek out male friends for support. For example, it is hypothesised that if men predominantly seek out friends for support through activities, then the reduced time available to seek support in this way may mean that support seeking from friends is reduced at mid-life, which supports other research findings (e.g. Strikwerda & May, 1992). Thus it may be important for men at mid-life to find ways of making contact that are less activity based. This finding has important implications for the provision of intimacy and emotional support.

In the next section, the results from the straight participants' experiences of seeking and receiving emotional and social support is reported and discussed.

Section 5.3 Straight men's experience of support: Results and discussion

In this chapter, the straight participants' experiences of social and emotional support in their close male friendships are reported and discussed incorporating the findings from the previous chapter. The focus in this chapter is on particular experiences of support, during times of personal crisis or difficulty. The chapter is divided into three main sections; 1) receiving support: the experience of acceptance and understanding, 2) seeking support: the challenges of asking for help and 3) giving support: The experience of reciprocity.

5.3.1 Essence statement

<u>Receiving support: The experience of acceptance and understanding</u>

Emotional support received during a personal crisis was not necessarily solicited, but was usually accepted when offered. Emotional support was defined by the straight participants as the experience of being accepted and understood by close friends. Acceptance and understanding were conveyed through both supportive words and actions. The straight participants reported that emotional support was closely linked to practical support and often co-existed with the presence of alcohol. Emotional support was often experienced through participation in shared activities or interests, and in this way may have minimised the perceived neediness of the person receiving support. Social support was defined as the personal experience of belonging to something external to oneself, and a reduction in personal or existential isolation. The straight participants reported a definition of support that included a dimension of social and emotional support, but the participants described these contacts more in terms of their social support value.

<u>Seeking support: The challenges of asking for help</u>

Despite the supportive experiences of acceptance and understanding, many straight participants were reluctant to seek out emotional support from close male friends. There appeared to be a number of complex factors which influenced the straight participants' decision to seek out their close friends for support. Some of these reasons were related to internal factors such as fear of vulnerability or shame, and some were external factors

such as the availability of friends, timing and other situational factors. Some decisions were based on relational factors, such as the perceived level of support available from their close friends. Sometimes this involved a process of testing out the relationship with their close male friends before they sought support. Some straight participants were highly aware of this, for others it became clearer during the interview.

The process of deciding whether to seek out support was quite conscious for some men but appeared unconscious for others. It also appeared that the decision making process was also informed in part by the acknowledgement, or lack of acknowledgment, of their feelings. In instances where the participants did not acknowledge their own feelings they were less likely to seek out support from a close male friend, and less likely to be clear about what support they wanted. However, even in the event that the straight participants did acknowledge their feelings, they were not always straightforward about seeking out support. The straight participants revealed that any consideration of seeking emotional or social support was predicated on firstly an identification of support needs and secondly the consideration of close friends as sources of support and trust. Thus, caution and careful consideration in the support seeking process was evident.

It appeared that where the straight participants constructed their masculinity around independence, physical and emotional strength, this may have contributed to their reluctance to seek support. Appearing weak or vulnerable appeared to challenge masculine ideals. Furthermore, many straight participants reported that their friendships were not necessarily constructed around emotional intimacy of support seeking, but were based on mutual activities and shared interests. Whilst there was a possibility for receiving support and intimacy in these shared activities, intimacy was not described as the central focus of the relationship. Thus seeking social support may be another way of seeking emotional support.

Giving support: The experience of reciprocity
The straight participants reported that providing emotional and social support to friends was generally easier than seeking support from friends. It appeared that providing support was associated with less vulnerability than asking for support. The participants reported a high degree of awareness and empathy with their friends' emotional world, suggesting a high degree of intimacy, although they were often unclear how to offer

support. Providing support often occurred in conjunction with an activity, which both allowed the friend to ask for support and may have provided emotional safety. Some participants expressed a desire to solve their friends' problems and felt overwhelmed when presented with 'unsolvable' problems. There appeared to be evidence of an injunctive process in which some participants' felt they 'had to' provide instrumental support (i.e. solve a problem), which may have been related to a prevailing masculinity construction. However most participants noted the importance of demonstrating empathy and care toward their friends through using listening skills. Furthermore, many participants noted the relational nature of giving support, and that the quality of emotional support provision increased if they themselves were emotionally open and vulnerable to their friends. Paradoxically, despite an awareness of their friend's emotional and relational needs, the participants' appeared to lack confidence in providing emotional support.

The results are now presented and discussed in three broad theme areas. These are; 1) Receiving support 2) Seeking support and 3) Giving support to close friends.

5.3.2 Receiving support: The experience of acceptance and understanding.

Emotional support was defined by the participants as the experience of acceptance and understanding and demonstrated with words and actions. However, whilst emotional support was desired it was hard to ask for. Despite the positive descriptions of receiving emotional support, it was an area fraught with difficulty for the straight participants, because of the potential for vulnerability and shame. These findings are reported in detail in Section 5.3.3. In the instances where emotional support was experienced it often took place with the co-existence of alcohol, and was mostly experienced indirectly in the context of social support and everyday interactions. Social support was defined by the participants as the sharing the company of a friend, often in an activity of mutual interest. Social support and emotional support were related concepts, differing along a continuum of emotional intensity. For some of the straight participants the experience of receiving support was very positive, firstly through having their needs acknowledged, and secondly receiving support through being affirmed and loved. Love, acceptance and affirmation were highly desired experiences for the straight participants, but receiving

these supports from male friends appeared problematic and potentially shameful, perhaps because of perceived gender norm violations.

5.3.2.1 Evaluation of needs.

As a pre-cursor to seeking support from friends, the straight participants identified the importance of carefully evaluating their support needs and the best place to get those needs met. In many cases, the straight participants reported a reluctance to seek support from other men and these findings and the decision making process are reported in Section 5.3.3. However, in situations where emotional support from male friends was experienced, it was often described by the straight participants as the need to connect with a friend through talking, as Eric describes:

> *I think it's sort of, probably just trying to evaluate and know the situation and what your immediate needs are I think. Sort of you know you just - my immediate needs was basically just to talk, talk to somebody about the situation I was in and how I was feeling at the time- and that was pretty much it. [Trans, 519-522]*

The process of identifying personal needs was more conscious for some participants than for others and involved a complex cognitive and emotional process, within the context of perceived masculinity norms and relationship factors. An awareness of personal needs can also be understood as an aspect of affective processes in which an individual's affect (e.g. fear, hope) orients them in relation to the social environment (Cole, 1998). For example, an awareness of loneliness may orient an individual toward seeking a friend and social support. Thus, it was not surprising that in instances in which a participant was unaware of his support needs, he was unlikely to ask for support directly, as he did not appear to recognise the need for it.

5.3.2.2 Acknowledgement

Some of the straight participants reported that their experience of receiving support was in the form of advice and being offered solutions. Whilst this was not exactly what was required, the experience of being heard and acknowledged was regarded as important. Thus, the social support process involved a complex interrelationship between the participant, his needs, his friend's perceived qualities and relationship factors. Noel described what happened when he sought support for a relationship issue:

And I would say that particularly looking back on it now, I got some classic male responses. You know, ranging from some who kind of said 'Oh Stuff her, just leave her and yes piss her off and get her out of there and go and play around and have a great old time'. Which wasn't that helpful really. So then it wasn't really…mind you I didn't necessarily expect any more than that, or didn't know really what to expect I guess. The value really to me anyway, was always me being able to talk and even if the person I was talking to kind of saw it in those simplistic terms, still I found it a healing and helpful process to do the talking. [Trans 397-405]

Noel highlights the positive value of talking. Whilst he states that some of the responses from his male friend were not supportive, he makes an important point about defining support in terms of the interpersonal contact with a friend. The experience of feeling supported needs to be understood in terms of Noel's perception of support and the quality and expectations of his friends. It appeared that the process of talking and connecting to friends who supported his position was unambiguously supportive. This view supports other findings in the research literature regarding the importance of self perception in defining support (e.g. House, et al., 1998). Thus if there is a congruency between perceived support available and received support, then an interaction appears more likely to be experienced as supportive. A key feature of the supportive interactions appeared to be the experience of being acknowledged by a friend.

5.3.2.3 Shame

The straight participants reported that personal crises raised conflicting feelings about the need for support, because of the potential for shame. Many personal crises can be defined as feelings of hurt arising from interpersonal rejection or from failing to live up personal expectations (Burleson, 2003), or failure to live up to perceived masculinity norms (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Thus, from a consideration of a sense of self as existing in an interdependent relationship with the environment (Wheeler, 1998), any personal crisis may be considered in relational terms. The relational aspects of a personal crisis are evident in Ross' descriptions of 'embarrassment' and why he did not seek support:

I tended to close up. I probably have a pretty fine history of doing that generally. I think I felt sufficiently embarrassed about what I was actually closing up over, which was a: the relationship and b: the study. The study wasn't going well because I simply wasn't disciplining myself to do it, so then I'd punish myself, in the head for… 'you're hopeless, you're hopeless, look, look, look, you've left it go so late and now it's too late'. [Trans, 406-411]

Ross notes the subject of his concerns (embarrassment about his relationship break up and fear of failure in his studies) as reasons for not seeking support from friends. The description of embarrassment about these two issues and the statement "*you're hopeless*" could be interpreted as shame responses. The fear of experiencing further shame by reaching out to his male friends appears to have contributed to his reluctance to seek support from his friends. Thus from a relational perspective, shame and embarrassment may be experienced as the result of a perceived lack of receptivity or acknowledgement from male friends, resulting in a decision not to seek out support. This view is important as it suggests what needs to be resolved for participants who wish to seek out support. These experiences are reported below.

5.3.2.4 Love and acceptance

Emotional support was also experienced through communicating personal feelings to a friend and in this process acceptance was conveyed. Jack describes emotional support as acceptance and caring:

> *I think it is a practical thing, it is that sense that you can just rave and someone will listen to you and someone will actually still say "yes well we love you, we care about you", I think it is that…as simple as that sometimes. I think it is also that sense that that person is not just a wall themselves, that they are also open, that they're not just saying "there, there dear" and patting them on the head, but not really listening to you and not really being open to your pain, I guess at that point, or your joy I guess and good times. But they are also prepared to be open back with you. [Trans, 499-505]*

Jack describes emotional support as the experience of being loved which he states is a "*practical thing*". It appeared that caring and love were conveyed through acts, such as being listened to and accepted. Importantly, it was the experience of a friend's openness to Jack's 'pain' that conveyed acceptance and love. Furthermore, Jack notes the importance of his friend reciprocating as a demonstration of openness, and thus support. This definition of support does suggest an intimate interaction characterised by a process of greater mutual knowing, and highlights the reciprocal nature of intimacy (Strikwerda & May, 1992). In the dominant paradigm of traditional masculinity, the straight participants have described the importance of independence and strength, therefore the potential for male–male intimacy to be shaming is great. Thus a critical

aspect of emotional support may be a requirement of mutual openness and vulnerability, in order to avoid one party feeling over-exposed and dependent on the other.

5.3.2.5 Understanding and empathy

The experience of being accepted required some degree of empathy, which was conveyed through mutual openness with a friend. Thus emotional support may be enhanced through a friend's willingness to open themselves, and perhaps demonstrate vulnerability in doing so. Empathy was also experienced when a friend had been through a similar experience. James comments:

> *So he'd experienced something similar to what I'm probably experiencing so it was easy to talk to him because I knew he knew what I was talking about I suppose. [Trans, 601-603]*

However, it was not just the experience of empathy and understanding that was considered emotionally supportive. A further dimension of support noted by the straight participants was acceptance as James comments:

> *Yes. I suppose the first thing is to be understood. If they can understand it and still say, well you're still my friend, like if I've told them everything that's happened, and they're still happy to be my friend, well that's a good first step. [Trans, 781-783]*

Acceptance was conveyed through the absence of rejection as indicated in James's comments above. The antithesis of acceptance is rejection. Several participants identified the fear of rejection in their close friendships and these findings are reported in the next section 5.3.3.

A further aspect of acceptance was the supportive experience that a friend wanted to share time with you. When the feelings were shared, there was the opportunity for strong interpersonal connection and belonging. Neville describes the feeling:

> *I guess company and understanding and a feeling of shared empathy and, and the feeling of being loved, I guess. Just because they enjoyed your company and they wanted to be with you. It's the idea that someone wanted to be with you [Trans 649-654]*

Neville comments not only on the company of his close friend, and empathy, but the feeling of being loved. This statement partly challenges some of the straight participants' previous comments about the high value given to independence and self support. He acknowledges receiving his friend's support but he does not describe his love toward or dependence on his friend, although it is hinted at in his description of "shared empathy". It appears that some of the straight participants yearned for a strong emotional connection with their male friends, but also feared the opposite, the experience of rejection. Whilst it is a universal human need to be loved (Yalom, 1998) not many straight participants in this study acknowledged the desire to be loved by another man. It was perhaps a fear of being un-masculine, and the fear of being labelled homosexual, that restricted men's ability to express their love for their close male friends. The shame associated with expressing love for other men is explored further in section 5.3.3 below.

5.3.3 Seeking support: The challenges of seeking help

As indicated above, emotional support was defined as receiving acceptance and acknowledgement from a close friend. However, emotional support was rarely requested directly by the straight participants, partly because of the potential for vulnerability and a subsequent uncomfortable level of intimacy. The issue of seeking support raised a dilemma for many of the straight participants. The participants identified issues and situations that gave rise to the need for support; however, they also identified that a negative value was given to the seeking support. Due to this negative value, the majority of the participants reported a preference for self support. In addition, close male friends were not considered by many participants as sources of emotional support. The participants reported that emotional disclosure was associated with an avoided 'zone' in their close male friendships. This feared 'zone' appeared to describe interpersonal intimacy. The participants reported that there was an understanding amongst friends about the 'zone', although it was never discussed. By maintaining vigilant interpersonal boundaries, it appeared that intimacy was regulated. There appeared to be a level of shame attached to seeking support from male friends. It appeared to be shameful to appear needy or vulnerable in front of friends.

When support was sought from close friends, it was often in the form of a test. The purpose of the test was to evaluate emotional safety in the relationship, before exposing

personal vulnerabilities. Ways of testing included hinting at a personal issue, revealing a small amount of personal information, or attempting to gauge a friend's mood or receptivity, in the hope of a positive and supportive response. However, some participants reported that the test approach was not always successful especially if the participant's close friend was unaware of the test.

In summary the straight participants' challenges to seeking emotional and social support are grouped into four main themes 1) self support and independence, 2) friends not considered sources of emotional support, 3) vulnerability and shame and 4) testing for safety.

5.3.3.1 Self support and independence.

Some straight participants reported that they do not seek out support from close male friends because they place a high value on independence. As reported previously, the experience of receiving support was often very positive and accepting, if it occurred in an everyday interaction. However, it was very challenging to ask for support. Requests for support were expressed indirectly to avoid conveying an image of dependence. Neville describes seeking support and the strategy of choosing an activity that his friend likes:

Well usually I'll make sure. I'll pick something that the person likes. But I'll either well I'll pretty much never.., I can't think of instance where I'll say "Well actually I just need some company" I'll be.. "Oh well yeah ok why don't we go for a beer then. [Trans, 593-595]

Most of the straight participants reported that they did not directly seek out their male friends for emotional or social support. It appeared to be acceptable to seek out friends for social support as noted above, and this frequently occurred with the co-existence of alcohol. On many occasions, these interactions were described as emotionally supportive. However, most straight participants reported a strong belief in the value of self support which may have been linked to an underlying masculine theme of independence reported in Section 5.1. When asked about emotional support, Noel describes his shed as his best friend and comments on independence:

I feel it's important for people to be happy with themselves. It's no good looking to friendships or marriages or anyone else. Fundamentally you've got to look after you and if you're happy with yourself, then you're a better partner, you're a better friend, you know all those things work better anyway. I guess this is where the balance thing comes in of being able to make sure that you are ...allocate enough time and space for your own very personal needs. I mean the way I do that is with my shed at home. My shed is, that's probably my best friend really [laughs] not a human being, but a place where I perhaps build things, work on the boat, work on the model planes. Yes that's true relaxation and getting away from stuff. [Trans, 645-756]

Noel is also describing a form of external support; his shed. However, it is notable that his form of external support is not an interpersonal relationship. The focus on an activity and the outer world was a key masculine ideal identified earlier in this study. Indeed Noel reported his enjoyment of camping and waterskiing in Section 5.1. However, when asked about emotional support, Noel is also articulating a view in favour of independence and self support and attributing a negative value to dependence on others. It seems acceptable to have needs, but there appears to be an overriding need to be able to meet personal and emotional needs by oneself. Many of the straight participants reported the importance of shared activities in maintaining a friendship (Section 5.2). However, there may be an underlying avoidance of acknowledging support needs in a male friendship. Many of the straight participants expressed an underlying belief in self-support as preferable to seeking support from others.

5.3.3.2 Friends not as a source of emotional support.

Many of the straight participants did not consider their close friends as sources of emotional support, as defined by intimate interactions and verbal disclosure conveying acceptance and love. Whilst social support was considered within the acceptable realm of male friendship, emotional support was not. It appeared that many men did not seek out emotional closeness or intimacy in their friendships. As Nic comments:

Sometimes if I catch up with a friend, a mate, it's not...that's not the focus of the discussion or the discussion doesn't really come to that point. Does not come to that sort of inward issues. Or perhaps the other one, or me perhaps, were unwilling sort of to go into that zone on any particular occasion. So it doesn't happen then and even though the other might want it to, or I might want it to. [Trans, 971-975]

Nic notes that the focus of his contact with his male friends is not about emotional support or other "inward issues". He acknowledges an unwillingness to go into the

"zone" of emotional issues, even though he hints at a desire for more closeness. Thus, the qualities of emotional support (e.g. acceptance and love) described in Section 5.3.2 might be desired, but when male friends are considered as the provider of support, a level of anxiety appears to arise. This was a common theme for many of the straight participants, and suggested a fear of emotional intimacy in close friendships. However, it did appear that aspects of emotional support may have been received under the 'label' of social support and in environments in which it was safe to be intimate. This finding appears to echo previous findings that have highlighted men's capacity to be intimate with other men, not necessarily involving verbal disclosure (Fehr, 2004). As noted previously, many straight participants considered their friendships as sources of shared activity, and it may be that supportive interactions are more likely to occur in these contexts. The importance of environmental factors contributing to emotional safety is discussed further in section 5.3.3.3.

5.3.3.2.1 Practical support

For many of the straight participants support was defined in practical terms rather than emotional terms and often occurred whilst engaged in shared activities. Practical support included financial support and material supports such as providing accommodation or a meal. Sometimes it was assistance with a practical task (e.g. fixing a car or computer). However, in receiving practical support the straight participants also described a level of social and emotional support and potentially an experience of intimacy. Larry describes (below) the experience of receiving practical (and emotional) support from his friend Dan, during a time of personal crisis:

It was like that with Dan and I, I think yes, he just sort of took care of me in a sense, yes. Took me under his wing and looked after me for a couple of months and then I moved out [pause]. So yes, it wasn't discussed, but just "come here mate, just sit down, live with us for a little while. [Trans, 684-687]

This description reveals the emotional support that Larry received as well as the practical support. He acknowledges that he was taken care of and looked after through the actions of his friend. This finding is consistent with other research which suggests that ways in which men seek support need to be understood in light of managing obstacles caused by adherence to traditional masculine values (e.g. Burda & Vaux, 1987). Although Larry notes that personal issues were not discussed, he does appear to

acknowledge the emotional aspect of support received through being able to receive his friend's care. Thus, practical support may provide a safe conduit through which the participants were able to experience and manage same-sex intimacy.

Some other participants reported a sharper distinction between emotional support and practical support. Bob notes that his friendships with men are not based on emotional support:

> *I think probably the level of the friendship. My friendships with my male friends are more at a level of activity and not at the emotional level. When I think of the friendships with my male friends, it's all geared around activity, as we said before. It's not geared around emotion. I'd seek them out if I had difficulty putting new floorboards in the house or I would seek them out if I had difficulty buying a new car. [Trans, 818-822]*

For some participants, their close male friendships were considered as sources of practical support rather than emotional support. This view appears linked to the idea presented earlier (Section 5.2) about straight men's friendships being built around common activities and interests, rather than around emotions and feelings.

5.3.3.2.2 Preference for female support

Many straight participants reported that they would choose a female as a preferred option for emotional support, which supported previous research in this area (e.g. Burleson, 2003). Neville notes that in times of crisis he needs female company:

> *Sometimes really needing some company, but at that time it was often my female friends really that I sought company with, probably more than male friends. [Neville 218-228]*

Neville notes that he has been more likely to seek out females, especially a partner, for emotional support. However many of the straight participants stated that a common source of emotional distress was conflict with female partner. Richard described this scenario:

> *And when I think of my friends outside my marriage, all the friendships I have aren't really based on…it's not a feeling sort of thing…well normally it's not a feeling thing, it's…So if I'm upset about something with the wife and then I don't see my friendships I suppose close enough to you know, discuss that and how I*

feel, and so I don't have a lot of outlet in that respect. Like the only person I seem to talk feelings and that side, is with the wife. So if that involves her, well then I'm sort of stuck. [Trans, 615-620]

The participants who relied primarily on their female partners as a source of emotional support were without support in the event of a serious relationship rupture. The participants did not consider their male friends as alternative sources of support. Some straight participants stated that they would seek out other females instead of seeking support from male friends. Richard states (above) that male friends were not considered 'close enough'. However, it also appears that the participants' friendships were constructed (e.g. with an activity focus) in such a way as to regulate same-sex intimacy.

5.3.3.2.3 Intimacy and boundaries

For some of the straight participants, their friendships provided moments of considerable intimacy, but were not considered sources of emotional support. For example, Larry describes his time in the Navy. He notes that while there were many shared experiences and a high degree of intimacy, male friends were not perceived as a source of emotional support, and were not sought out. He describes (below) why he did not seek out his male friends during a crisis:

Well it wasn't, we didn't seem to do that, we would just ...having beers and having laughs, that was it, having a beer and having a laugh and then go to work. And that was generally, that was it, there was no interaction on that level, it just didn't happen. I never did it before, when we were drunk we would put our arm around each other and (we were) singing and quite comfortable with each other. And life aboard a ship, struth, everyone's walking around, you are living with each other and you have the showers, very comfortable being with blokes, but as far as an intimate conversation up to that level it just didn't happen. [Trans 488-493]

Larry's comments suggest that aspects of physical intimacy were comfortable, but emotional intimacy was regulated. There appeared to be a rule or an understanding of a rule governing emotional intimacy. Different levels of interpersonal contact are ascribed different levels of personal meaning, with a consideration of the context. Thus 'sharing showers' and shared living are perhaps a necessary part of life on board ship and given a neutral meaning. However, emotional intimacy is perhaps constructed as openly sharing feminised feelings (e.g. fear, sadness, vulnerability) and as a rule, avoided. Furthermore, Neville describes this rule as an awareness of a zone:

It's funny it's like you know its there and you see it like its sort of a zone, not a zone that's ignored, its like its understood or, its not one you go into verbally, generally. [Trans, 430-431]

Most of the straight participants described a boundary around emotional intimacy in their friendships with men, which was not openly discussed, but was understood by other men. Richard describes this as an invisible barrier:

I wouldn't want to, and it's that thing I talked about before about this invisible barrier, where I shall not speak about certain things. So what I wouldn't want from them is to, I suppose get to…like I don't want to know too much, well it's not that I don't want to know, I'm not comfortable talking to other people about intimate relationship details. [Trans 1152-1156]

Richard's comments indicate an awareness of a personal boundary that served to regulate emotional disclosure and possibly to protect himself from vulnerability. Many of the straight participants described the fear of exposing their vulnerability, especially in the presence of male friends. Some ideas about the possible psychological beliefs underlying these fears are discussed below.

5.3.3.3 Vulnerability, shame and fear of exposure

The purpose of rules or 'no-go zones' may have been to regulate intimacy and the participants' vulnerability in their male friendships. The feelings of vulnerability may also bring up feelings of shame due to being needy. It appeared that feelings of neediness challenged the masculine ideal of independence discussed in section 4.1. Nic describes this feeling:

It's funny…all my friendships with men, I think how they're played out or what's presupposed in them is that you bring to them your own independence and not a dependency on the other. So you want to be with them or spend time with them doing whatever, or just being together talking from your own self, rather than a neediness. And I'm just thinking about why it is that I wasn't direct or express about saying what my predicament was, or what my wishes were and I think it's because of that. It is a reluctance to actually be…to state that need. Because we don't want to appear to be…too needy. [Trans, 921-944]

Nic clearly articulates his view of male friendship as the mutual enjoyment of an activity where some personal sharing takes place. However, his comments impress the

importance of independence, defined partly through an avoidance of neediness. For many of the straight participants, expressing emotional needs implied dependence- and this appeared to be a vulnerable position for many men. Larry describes his avoidance of vulnerability:

I guess I don't want to look vulnerable, you don't want to appear vulnerable or weak or whatever the term is. And I think that might be the challenging thing to express, to really express yourself. [Trans 1377-1379]

Larry has made a connection between being vulnerable and weak, both of which are to be avoided. In section 5.1 on masculinity, strength was idealised by the straight participants as a desirable masculine quality. The experience of vulnerability for many straight participants was synonymous with weakness. It appeared that the desire to avoid vulnerable feelings prevented some of the straight participants from seeking support from other men.

By contrast, seeking emotional support from a female partner was described as acceptable. James notes his preference for seeking support from his girlfriend:

Well I guess I'd like to…probably prefer to be with… I'd prefer to be with my girlfriend. That would be the main thing and probably to be talking with her about these things. [Trans, 931-932]

James' preference in seeking out his girlfriend for emotional support confirms the findings of other researchers that men seek out women for emotional support more often than seeking out men (Burleson, 2002; R. Cook, 2002). It appeared that seeking support from a close male friend was very challenging for many men, particularly if the issue that is causing them distress was a feeling of failure.

Fear of failure was a strong factor in the straight participants' reluctance to seek out support from their close friends. Neville describes in a situation in which he would not seek out support from a close male friend:

I'm really not sure why, I think it was partly, as I said I think it was partly, not wanting to admit that my relationship had failed… I mean, I use that word fairly deliberately. [Trans, 337-339]

He stressed the word "failed", and a possible corollary is that he felt like a failure. Relationship difficulties with female partners were reported as significant sources of distress for many of the straight participants. It appears that being a 'successful' man may be linked to having a successful relationship. It not surprising that Neville did not seek out support from a close friend, given these beliefs. The feelings of shame may arise in relation to a fear of being un-masculine. Wheeler and Jones (1996) note the connection between gender and shame:

> *In our culture, shame-coded states and taboos are very nearly always associated with a gender dystonic position; that is a person-male or female- in a state of shame is very likely to be a person in a state or position that is acceptable for the other gender but not for his or her own (p. 84).*

The experience of shame or the fear of shame may be closely related to the perception of not living up to a masculine ideal. Furthermore, some participants reported that feelings of failure may be intensified when evaluating the normativity of a problem with a friend. Concerns regarding friends' reactions and the fear of appearing un-masculine through loss of self-reliance are powerful factors in preventing men from seeking help (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

Sometimes the decision not to seek out a male friend for support was due to competition and rivalry as Ross describes:

> *I think there might have been some residual competitiveness with Roger. Roger's an incredible ladies' man in the verbal sense and all of that, which I'd never seen myself as. And I do think there was probably a little bit of that there, a little bit of me backing down and just feeling stupid about it all and then probably hesitant to reach out. [Trans, 452-456]*

This finding supports Barbee et al. (1993) and Miller's (1983) views that competition and rivalry in men's relationships prevents closeness and supportive interactions. Viewing a close friend as a source of competition rather than support, may serve to prevent any display of vulnerability or weakness, for fear of being further shamed. Thus, men's friendships which are constructed around competition may present limited potential for emotional support, particularly if reaching out for support is perceived to increase personal inadequacy.

In an example of a different construction of friendship, Ross stated he was more comfortable discussing relationship issues with his gay friend Michael than with his straight friend Roger:

> *I'd definitely have a slightly different conversation with Michael about the relationships not working out than I would with… Michael the gay guy, than I would with Roger. Whereas there's probably a little residual envy on my behalf of Roger's easy ways with women, whatever you want to call that, there's never been that question with Michael. [Trans 1034-1038]*

Ross noted that he would feel more comfortable with Michael, because there is no competitiveness or rivalry in relating to women. It also appears that Ross' friendship with Michael is constructed in a way that challenges traditional masculine ideals of stoicism and independence. Whilst Ross has noted previous sexual boundary issues with Michael (see Section 5.2.3.1.2), it seems he feels comfortable seeking out support regarding female relationship issues with Michael.

It seemed that the straight participants did appear to evaluate their emotional needs, and the best place to get emotional support, based on a number of factors. One of the factors in making that judgment seems to be the perceived level of safety and comfort, and the avoidance of shame and mockery. Thus, men may be reluctant to seek emotional support if they perceive their behaviour to be 'un-masculine' (e.g. D. Lee, 2000). Thus, friendships which are able to challenge traditional masculine norms may be especially important in facilitating supportive interactions. In addition, an understanding of how alternative masculinities may be constructed in friendships may assist in our understanding of the support process.

5.3.3.4 The test

The straight participants revealed that they were often indirect in seeking emotional support. Sometimes this took the form of a test. It appeared that the test fulfilled the function of testing for receptivity in their friend and testing for emotional safety. In a situation of crisis or distress, it was understandable that the participant would want to protect himself and not want to put himself in a situation where his distress is exacerbated. Ross acknowledges this testing process with his close male friends, when deciding whether to seek emotional support:

Yes, there's almost a testing out… (Which requires a friend) revealing something of themselves and almost as soon as that happens, I'm quite happy to say 'oh god, yes, well you think that's bad,'…although not in that sense, of trying to one-up them. [Trans, 644-665]

Ross described how the testing process occurred by waiting to see if the friend revealed something of themselves first, which is perceived as a signal. It is possible that the process of a friend revealing something personal provided emotional safety for the participants to reveal their own vulnerability. However, a difficulty arises if both men are waiting for the other to reveal themselves first. The participants revealed creative ways in which they tested the receptivity of the field, including using 'safe' sporting terms, as explained below.

Some straight participants described the 'test' in sporting language, which suggested the process of seeking support was like a game. Nic described the test as "*putting the ball up in the air*":

I would get on the phone, ring them up and just sort of put the ball in the air and see what was going on. I did reach out to sort of make…I didn't just sort of pull the shutters down. No that's right, I did make an effort to reach out and see if I could catch up with someone, see what they were up to. [Trans, 801-805]

Testing a friend's reaction appeared to provide a safe way of asking for support, because the need for support was disguised, and could easily be withdrawn if the response was not positive. Nic reveals his tentativeness in his initial testing out until he gets a positive response:

Yes, what's going on and what are you up to? And you know if it elicited a positive response, to say well lets catch up, or let's do something, come round, or I'll come round there. So it's a more tentative. [Trans 824-826]

The initial inquiry was based on social needs, and the participant's emotional needs were kept private. It was only after safety had been established that emotional support issues were raised. Once a positive response has been established, then a plan to catch up may be implemented. Larry notes that if a response is positive then he might expose another "layer":

And that's part of setting the environment, the emotional environment as well. I guess you are unpeeling a layer, aren't you, at a time and then you are exposing your true feelings, almost as if to say, "is this a test", it can be a test. Unpeeling a layer might be a test and what sort of reaction am I going to get from this test. [Trans, 989-992]

However part of the difficulty of the test, may be that the close friend may not know he is being tested, as Nic comments:

I can recall feeling a situation where 'oh shit they didn't pick up on where I'm at. Well that's a bit disappointing, I've missed the mark there' or feeling a bit flattened, a bit deflated. [Trans, 848-850]

The straight participants' attempts to seek support were usually tentative and unclear. Whilst the purpose of the test was to see if the environment was emotionally safe, if the test was misunderstood by the friend (as in the above example), the participant's request for emotional support was probably not received. Therefore, the chances of receiving support were greatly reduced. However, this situation highlights the dilemma for the straight participants. In order to seek support the participants needed to find a way to manage risk of rejection or of vulnerability or attempts at support seeking from male friends may have been withheld.

The fear of vulnerability could be overridden by the need for support in a crisis (e.g. the experience of not coping in response to an internal or external stressor often accompanied by anxiety). Furthermore, it appeared that in a crisis, especially if it is known by others, there may be more likelihood of being perceived as needing support by friends. This may be in part due to the greater difficulty of disguising one's distress in a crisis, and a greater urgency to reach out for emotional support in these situations. However, some straight participants reported withdrawal and avoidance as coping strategies in times of crisis, which are forms of self support. Some participants described the importance of external (environmental) supports which greatly assisted the support seeking process. These are described below.

5.3.3.4.1 Alcohol and other environmental supports

Two factors that assisted the seeking of emotional support for many straight participants were the physical environment and the presence of alcohol. It appeared that the physical environment in which support seeking took place was important, especially if the

location was a traditional masculine environment such as the following example in a pub as Larry comments:

I was at a bit of a low point and we left work and went down to the pub and had a few beers and it really helped me that particular day, talking with him. Although I don't think he was particularly empathetic or insightful or whatever but it was still good to hear his view, even though I didn't take it up or agree with it or whatever. [Trans, 438-443]

The expression "*having a few beers*" underscores an acceptable way that some of the straight participants sought support from their male friends. Joining with a friend at the pub appeared to be a safe way to ask for support because the focus was not directly on emotional support. The importance of social drinking has been reported elsewhere as facilitating supportive interactions between men (Burda & Vaux, 1987). The focus is on the activity of drinking and being at the pub, and is not perceived to violate traditional masculinity norms. The choice of a mutually enjoyable activity, in a safe place, with the presence of alcohol, was interpreted as environmental supports. It is perhaps through this process of talking that Larry knew that his friend had heard him and was concerned about him, even if his friend's suggestions were not taken up.

Sometimes the timing of seeking support was important. Ross described the response from his close male friends when he has sought them out for support:

Generally excellent if I've got them at the right time. Sometimes you might be in that mode, geez I could do with a half-hour conversation and they're rushing out, or they just can't talk or they're not in the right mood or whatever. So, yes if they're up for a chat, fantastic. And it could be a half-hour, an hour, a two-hour chat. I lived in Sydney for four years so there's a few mates in Sydney who I don't catch that often. Or if I was up in Sydney...that's probably the better example, is a time in Sydney where my predominant mates, friends group was in Melbourne. Just hit the phone for three hours in the evening. [Trans 573-579]

Timing did appear to be an important factor, as well as the method of seeking support. Ross describes using the telephone for support when his friends were predominantly interstate. However, for some men, the meeting requires personal presence and preferably in a supportive environment, often with alcohol. Larry comments:

Yes, when you mention that, environment yes, definitely. The environment that we are in when we are together is not that type of environment. It's like "g'day mate, kids are great". Whereas if we went to a coffee shop, maybe, and sat down and had a coffee or even went out to dinner, if we went out to dinner and had a glass of red. [Trans, 903-906]

These environmental factors appeared important factors in men's ability to seek out and receive support. It appeared that some men were better at creating these environmental factors, whilst other men waited for the right opportunity to arise. However, there was another consideration identified by the participants, both parties needed to be in the right frame of mind, or zone, as Nic describes:

I think there needs to be time, that's another environmental thing. And I think beyond that it's really about whether or not me and my friend are sort of in the zone up here to talk about those inward matters. [Trans 1001-1007]

There was an acknowledgement that seeking emotional support between men involves "*inward matters*". It appears that inward refers to the inner world of feelings and personal thoughts. These comments stress the importance of environmental factors that assist, or detract from, seeking emotional support from close friends.

5.3.4 Giving support: The experience of reciprocity

The straight participants reported that providing emotional and social support to close male friends was easier than seeking support and often occurred in conjunction with a shared activity. Instances of giving support arose through personal request or were self-initiated. However, many straight participants reported a level of discomfort with requests for emotional support because requests for emotional support challenged some participants' perception of their ability to support close friends. Most participants were more comfortable with requests for practical support. When faced with emotional problems, some straight participants described a pressure to solve their friend's problems. The need to solve a friend's problem appeared to originate within the participants themselves and may have been related to a misguided perception of what was helpful. Some participants reported that they felt helpless when they could not solve their friends' problems, and this may have induced feelings of shame. However, other participants reported the experience of listening and acknowledging their friends' feelings as the key aspect of proving emotional and social support. Furthermore, some

participants stated that reciprocation of feelings was an important part of a close friendship.

5.3.4.1 Awareness of friends' feelings

Many straight participants reported they knew when their friend was experiencing personal difficulties through their shared history, personal knowledge of a friend, and through empathy. However, many participants stated that their friends did not regularly seek them out for emotional support. As Nic comments, he sensed his friend's distress:

> *Again, I'm thinking about one particular friend here, another one, no it wasn't made express. But I sort of sensed it. [Trans, 1172-1173]*

The participants demonstrated a capacity to 'sense' that a close friend was experiencing a personal difficulty. This finding challenges some of the ideas underpinning the 'male deficit model' (e.g. Balswick, 1976), which suggests that men are not capable of affectively attuning or responding to others. The straight male participants did report awareness of their friends' emotional states further reinforcing men's capacity for relationship as reported elsewhere (e.g. Bergman, 1995; Wheeler, 1996). The participants' appeared able to pick up on prominent and sometimes subtle verbal and non-verbal cues from close friends. However, sometimes they were unsure what to do with this information. The participants may not have the verbal or emotional skills or confidence to know how to respond. Thus, a lack of response is not necessarily indicative of an absence of awareness of an others' subjectivity. Furthermore, the confidence to respond to emotional distress can also be understood within a framework of masculinity enactments. As Richard comments on a situation at work, sometimes the urge is to run away:

> *That has happened at work, when there's been, you know, while I'm in the kitchen making coffee or something, somebody may say something about 'oh my god, this, that and the other happened'. And that has been the classic from my personality is 'Oh, I wish you wouldn't talk about that', run away, run away. [Trans, 1227-1230]*

Richard is describing a situation at work and not with a close male friend. Nevertheless, his response suggests an avoidance of interpersonal connection with his workmate, therefore not necessarily a friend, and perhaps a fear of closeness. In addition, it appears

that Richard is conscious of his avoidance behaviour and of the workmate's 'distress'. His personal response appears to be the greater issue for him, rather than his colleague's issue per se. One interpretation is that Richard did not know what to do or how to support his colleague because his focus was on 'self support'. It is possible that 'running away' was a form of self support and emotional safety. Thus, Richard may have been attending to his own needs as an immediate priority. Furthermore, Richard may not perceive the task of emotionally supporting a work colleague as consistent with his view of an acceptable masculine enactment. Supporting a friend involves a complex inter-relationship between an awareness of personal needs and an empathic awareness of another individual's needs within a social context. This view is similar to the Gestalt view that health is a function of both self and other (environment) support (Yontef & Jacobs, 2005). Furthermore, asking for support or offering support requires some level of interpersonal communication and negotiation. In this example, self support could also include personal confidence, communication skills and self awareness. Thus, some participants' reluctance to offer support may be understood not through lack of awareness of a friend's distress, but through a lack of confidence or skill in self and the relational process of supporting a friend. This may be especially so if the act of emotional support appears to violate a traditional male gender norm.

It may be that in being asked for support, a question arises in the support provider about their own competence to provide what is needed, balanced against what they feel competent to provide. Some straight participants reported a strong desire to solve their friend's problems, which may have been motivated by a desire to be helpful. As Jack notes:

> *[On a preference for problem solving] I think that's very much the case. I have always, probably in my work; those sorts of things are more appropriate. I have always been someone who I think is quite a good problem solver. [Trans, 748-750]*

As Jack notes, problem solving is a useful skill especially at work, and a skill he has confidence in. However, this may not be what the seeker of emotional support requires. In the previous section (5.3.2), the straight participants reported the importance of being acknowledged, accepted and understood, rather than having their problems solved. Nevertheless, being confronted with a friend's problems may trigger feelings of shame

and inadequacy as noted in Richard's 'tea room' example above. Being able to listen to a friend's problems without the need to solve them may invoke feelings of uselessness, which may be uncomfortable. In support of this idea, a desire to be useful was noted by most participants. As James notes:

It's good to be useful, and… can actually help him because I think my debt to him is a lot greater than his to me. [Trans, 1089-1090]

The need to be helpful may also be underpinned by an equity rule (Clark & Reis, 1988). Relationship benefits may be carefully monitored in a desire to achieve equality between friends. These views require some awareness of self and other, in order to evaluate equity. Thus, the straight participants did report awareness of an intersubjective process, although they were not always sure how to respond. The tendency toward problem solving and being useful in some participants may have been a reason for instrumental approaches to help seeking. This idea is explored below in examples where the provision of support involved an activity.

5.3.4.2 Activity

Providing emotional and social support to a friend was often combined with an activity or a shared experience. This was similar to the experience of receiving support noted previously. A shared activity provided the opportunity to be together which was described as supportive in itself. Larry comments on supporting his friend through a relationship break-up:

But there were a few times, he has let a few good ones go, well I think have let a couple of good ones go and yes "okay mate, I am here mate" we are in the kitchen cooking up a storm or sitting around watching a video, just being together.[Trans 1184-1186]

Social support is evident in this description particularly through sharing a simple activity with a friend who had experienced a loss. Larry provides a level of emotional support through letting his friend know that he is personally present with him and thus conveys acceptance and belonging. Sometimes the friend's request for support arose whilst engaged in an activity such as fishing. Eric comments:

Ah yes, a friend of mine here in Melbourne, was having some trouble with his marriage about 6 months ago. And we were going fishing actually, I used to go fishing quite a bit with him, and were just discussing you know what he could do or what he should do or what did I think he should do. And discussing what was, sort of wrong with his relationship, or what he was finding stressful about his relationship. [Trans, 704-708]

Eric emotionally supported his friend by listening, and acknowledging his friend's feelings. Through exploring options with his friends, Eric was also demonstrating that his friend's issues were important. As noted previously, relationship issues with women were frequent causes of emotional distress for the straight participants. The straight participants displayed a great capacity for empathy in their understanding and caring for friends' 'women problems'. This was an area where the straight participants were well qualified to offer empathic support. By simply listening and being there for their friends, the straight participants were able to provide emotional support.

5.3.4.3 Reciprocal nature of support

Several participants reported the reciprocal nature of support: through giving support to a friend, they were impacted often positively. Eric comments positively (below) on the experience of being sought out, and acknowledges that this process strengthened the relationship:

Oh it was good it was good actually, it was sort of… certainly I think it sort of strengthened our friendship to quite a degree actually. I think it added a different dimension an extra dimension to our friendship which was good… which was good. [Trans, 847-849]

The idea of adding a different dimension to the friendship suggests that the dimension of discussing personal issues was not there previously. Nic describes the satisfaction he receives from being sought out:

I get satisfaction from that because I feel that a friend of mine, taking me into their confidence, because generally I act on the assumption that this friend, or most of my friends, don't speak generally about these sorts of issues, which trouble them to just anyone. And I feel good, flattered in a sense that they seek me out for my counsel, for my view and I take that very seriously and want to be able to be there for them. To help them in whatever way I can. [Trans, 1200-1205]

This type of response was quite common from the straight participants, yet when asked about seeking support, many men were reluctant to do so. The participants expressed quite positive comments about their friends seeking them out, and appeared unaware of the apparent contradiction in their responses. It appeared that some of the participants experienced a 'blind spot' in the area of seeking support. It is suggested that this avoidance of seeking support is linked to fear of shame and ridicule, and competitiveness as mentioned previously. To this end, it may be through sharing activities that intimacy are trust are built up facilitating mutually supportive interactions. However, as men age and the time available for shared activity diminishes, a greater reliance may be placed on verbal disclosure (Strikwerda & May, 1992). Thus, for participants who experienced mutual disclosure, their friendships appeared to be enhanced and deepened. By contrast, for participants whose intimate interactions were based solely on activities, the opportunities for intimacy based on self –disclosure may appear threatening.

5.3.4.4 What constitutes good support

Further questioning about what constitutes good support to a friend revealed a number of qualities, one of which was not appearing to be the expert. Another way of being supportive involved the straight participant revealing his own vulnerability. Jack comments on how to do this:

> *I think you have to throw away your own guards a little bit to be a good friend. As well even if you're not the one currently having difficulties, I think if you put up such a veneer of "well I'm okay, I'll listen to you, but I am so scarily competent that I will just be closed", well I think that you need to also open up a little bit. [Trans 511-515]*

These acts of 'opening up' and 'lowering your guard' appear to facilitate close interpersonal contact. It appeared that the level of personal safety in support seeking was increased by mutual disclosure. The act of mutual sharing appeared to reduce the vulnerability and potential for shame in support seeking. The participants were articulate about the support needs of their close male friends and the importance of emotional support as Neville comments:

> *I think he wants similar things to me he doesn't want to feel alone, and wants to feel valued. [Trans, 726-727]*

Neville's comments indicate a high degree of empathy and understanding of his friend's emotional world. These views further support the importance of close friendship as an opportunity to know self through knowing another (Vernon, 2005). As a friend exists in one's social world, testing and discovering knowledge of a friend's emotional world may provide useful opportunities to also know oneself. Thus seeing a friend's need to feel valued, may serve to normalise this need within oneself. Furthermore, the desire to feel valued and to belong is a universal human need (Yalom, 1998) and in a close friendship may be a mutual need. To this end, the straight participants expressed some awareness of their ability to provide this level of support. However many of the participants reported that their friends were reluctant to seek out emotional support from them. This finding was interesting given that many participants also expressed reluctance to seek support from male friends (See Section 5.3.2). This finding further supports the idea that seeking support is challenging for some men, possibly because of normative masculinity constructions. Furthermore, it may be easier for a friend to see and acknowledge a friend's needs at times than it can be for the friend himself. If an individual has developed habitual ways of denying his emotional needs or channelling emotional distress into compulsive behaviour (e.g. work, addictions, and exercise), his underlying emotional needs may be out of his immediate awareness. These compulsive behaviours may be very obvious to others, especially friends. However seeking support from friends may require a greater awareness of emotional needs (Cole, 1998) which in itself may be 'un masculine' and thus shameful. By contrast, it may not invoke strong feelings of shame and vulnerability for a friend to offer support, compared to receiving support, as giving and providing may be more consistent with acceptable masculine enactments.

Several participants described the experience of a friend opening up emotionally and subsequently withdrawing from contact. Noel describes this experience:

And you know, like I've got another example of a friend Ray who was the one I went to the pub with that time and yes, similar story. Recently he started opening up to me about marriage problems and whatever and I started to be really receptive of that. And I guess I'm interested in that stuff and I feel like....it's not like I want to meddle or get involved when I'm not needed, but you know, I certainly willing...would like to help my friends like that. But he then sort of backtracked. He sort of opened up and then he kind of wanted to... I think he

spilled his guts a little bit but then kind of, I think, almost felt like he'd gone too far, and then it all suddenly went away. You know the problem sort of went away, which I'm sure it hasn't, but from the point of view of he and I, he hasn't said too much about it. So I'm interested but at least he knows that I'm there and he can talk to me if he wants to. [Trans, 548-560]

Some participants were aware of an interpersonal process of managing emotional exposure with their friends. Noel (above) notes his friend's need to protect himself from vulnerability presumably because he can empathise with this process himself. He notes the importance of being available for his friend. An awareness of a friend's vulnerability 'zone' described previously may highlight the need for caution to avoid exposing their friend. As Noel describes above, it was important to wait until his friend was ready.

5.3.5 Summary of key findings: Support and close friendship

In this section, the straight participants' experiences of seeking, receiving and giving support were reported and discussed. There was strong support for a link between men's constructions of masculinity and their support seeking behaviour, although a complex picture emerged. Emotional support was defined as the experience of love, acceptance, understanding, acknowledgment and empathy. However asking for and receiving emotional support from male friends presented a series of personal and interpersonal challenges for participants that seemed to be centred on a fear of appearing un-masculine, and thus shameful. The support seeking process was viewed through a self-environment lens, in which some needs (e.g. love or caring from another man) were potentially shameful and often withheld. Thus an injunction appears to exist between some relational desires (e.g. closeness) and fear of closeness. It is theorised that these injunctions are held in place by fear of transgressing hegemonic masculine ideology.

Following previous findings (e.g. Reisman, 1990; Bergman, 1995) the straight male participants in the present study expressed a desire for closer supportive relationships with their male friends. However, these participants also reported a fear of shame and vulnerability as key barriers to seeking support from close male friends, even in times of crisis. The linking of shame to 'non- traditional masculine' behaviour such a appearing vulnerable, dependent or weak was evident.

Following Fehr (2004), the straight participants reported several routes to intimacy and emotional support with other men. It appeared that the straight participants' friendships were not necessarily organised around emotional closeness or feminised descriptions of intimacy (e.g. Cancian, 1986). However, some straight participants had sought out and received support from their friends in ways that were characteristic of a type of masculine intimacy such as through activities, or in social settings as reported elsewhere (e.g. Swain, 2000). Thus it is important to understand the meaning given to men's experiences of male-male interactions in order to examine male intimacy. Furthermore, the existence of extra-relationship factors may be important in supporting intimate and supportive interactions. These, 'environmental' supports (e.g. alcohol, a safe physical environment), may have provided the necessary conditions to enable a supportive interactive to occur. The importance of 'the test' was revealed as key way in which the straight participants tested the receptivity of the field. However, the potential for this form of communication to be misinterpreted or misunderstood was high. Thus it was not surprising that emotional support was often experienced in the context of social support. This finding further highlights the importance of everyday interactions as a source of important support (e.g. Leatham & Duck, 1990). Although for men who have little contact with their friends, this avenue of support is limited. Therefore, creating opportunities for contact with friends may increase the potential for supportive interactions.

The relational aspects of friendship were further highlighted by the straight participants in their recognition that offering support to a friend also involved revealing something of their selves. However, somebody has to take the first step and initiate an interpersonal contact. It appeared that many of the participants would have liked closer relationships with male friends if the issues of vulnerability and shame were not as strong. Despite the participants' previously reported description (Section 5.1) of masculinity in instrumental terms, only some participants reported a desire to solve their friends' problems. Most straight participants were clear in their belief that providing support to a friend involved listening and attending to their relational needs, not necessarily solving his problem. In examining the process of giving support, the straight participants revealed the existential possibilities of friendship as reported elsewhere (e.g. Vernon, 2005). By knowing, trusting and seeing another, an existential meeting

was possible, which served to reduce isolation and contributed to a deep sense of belonging.

The possibility for close and intimate interactions between friends was apparent, and desired, but is balanced against the potential for shame in violating traditional masculinity norms. Managing the potential for shame may require both internal support as well as the maintenance of safety in intimate friendships. The construction of alternative, non-hegemonic masculinities appears possible, but requires interpersonal support from male friends. Viewing (the enactment of) masculinities through a field theoretical lens would suggest that any potential change in straight men's masculinities can only be understood in the context of change within all aspects of the field of masculinities, which includes gay masculinities. This idea is explored in the next chapter on gay masculinities.

Chapter 6 Gay Men: Results and Discussion.

In this chapter, the results of the interviews with gay male participants are presented. The findings are presented in three sections, reflecting the three parts of the interviews.

In section 6.1, the gay participants' experiences of masculinity, are reported. It was considered important to describe the gay participants' construction of masculinity in order to understand their experience of masculinity within the broader concept of masculinities. Furthermore, understanding the gay participants' experience of masculinity and masculinities was considered a first step toward understanding how their male friendships were constructed.

In section 6.2, the gay participants' perceptions of their close male friendships are reported and links are drawn to the construction of gay masculinities. Friendships are explored for an understanding of the way in which gay participants may or may not consider their male friends as sources of emotional and social support.

In the final section 6.3, the gay participants' experiences of emotional and social support seeking in close male friendships are reported. The participants' experiences of needing and seeking support are discussed in light of their earlier reports of masculinity and friendship. Linkages are made between constructions of masculinity, friendships and support seeking. Finally, the experiences of giving support to close friends are discussed as an important part of the matrix of support.

Section 6.1 Masculinity and masculinities: the experience from a gay perspective: Results and discussion

In this chapter, the results from the gay participants regarding masculinity are presented and discussed. The findings are firstly presented in an essence statement, following the method of phenomenological interpretation (van Manen, 1990) used for the straight participants in Chapter Five. Following the essence statement is an explanation and discussion of the gay participants' descriptions of masculinity.

6.1.1 Essence statement

The essence statement is divided into four sections reflecting the four themes elicited from the data reduction and analysis (Colaizzi, 1978). These themes are the experience of otherness; masculinity and the male body; essentialist masculinity and reclaiming masculinity and masculinities.

The experience of 'otherness'

The overarching descriptor of masculinity for the gay participants was the experience of otherness and marginalisation within heterosexual masculinity. The experience of otherness was determined by the gay participants' perceived difference from mainstream expressions of masculinity. Furthermore, the inclusion of gay masculinities seemed difficult to imagine for many participants, as masculinity invoked images of heterosexuality. The gay participants' experience of difference raised personal ambivalence about declaring one's sexuality to others, particularly non-gay men. By openly declaring a gay identity, the participants reported a heightened experience of difference and sometimes shame. The practice of camping seemed to magnify (and sometimes celebrate) the experience of difference, whilst the experience of passing seemed to minimise experiences of difference. Masculinity was described by the gay participants as a judgement made by others regarding a man's outer appearance and manner. 'Inner' qualities, such as a man's thoughts and feelings were not generally considered as important as outer qualities as descriptors of masculinity. However, the concept of 'inner' strength was regarded as an important descriptor of gay masculinity, as was a capacity of gentleness. Overall, a complex association of strength and

masculinity were evident. The gay participants acknowledged that strength was required to challenge dominant views about masculinity and to assert a gay masculinity.

Masculinity and the male body

Masculinity was believed to be embodied by a man's mannerisms, outer appearance and deportment. The gay participants described the 'appropriate' deportment associated with straight masculinity; appearing strong, muscular and physically capable. Many gay participants felt they were excluded from this type of masculinity. However, the focus on the male body revealed the existence of several gay masculinities. Camp was identified as one style of gay masculinity, which was equated with feminine behaviour and was described as weak, floppy, soft and 'queeny' movement of the male body. By contrast, hypermasculinity of the gay 'bear' culture was described as an exaggerated straight masculinity. The male body was also highly idealised by the gay participants as an object of visual desire. Many of the gay participants eroticised an idealised image of strong muscular men, in self and in others. The idealisation of fit muscular bodies suggested several implications. First, there appeared to a hierarchy of gay masculinities, with the idealised, toned body as the most desirable and feminised, 'weak' bodies as least desirable. Second, the possibilities for body dissatisfaction and shame were evident.

Essentialist masculinity

The gay participants expressed a belief in an essentialist masculinity that was based in traditional masculine ideology. Essentialist masculinity was characterised by physical strength and a stereotypical 'masculine' appearance (such as muscles, facial hair) and was underpinned by biological determinism. These essentialist definitions provided a singular and reified model of masculinity. However, the degree to which the participants felt they belonged to this masculinity was unclear and thus raised anxiety about their own masculinity. It appeared that the gay participants lived in two worlds, partly between an essentialist heterosexual masculinity and a constructed gay masculinity. The desirable qualities of the essentialist masculinity gave some clues to the behaviours necessary for gay men to pass as straight. However, a key tension emerged between a desire to belong to mainstream masculinity and summoning the inner strength to assert one's difference and to construct alternative gay masculinities. A key issue for the gay participants involved deciding how much, when, and with whom to be out (i.e. openly

gay). It also appeared that the gay participants had utilised the support of peers to construct gay masculinities, and thus challenge the hegemony of essentialist masculinity.

Reclaiming masculinity and masculinities

The gay participants expressed some confidence to challenge essentialist notions of a singular masculinity and to embrace a constructionist perspective of multiple masculinities including several gay masculinities. The participants reported experiences of reclaiming their masculinity, especially through experiencing both personal power and strength (e.g. the experience of competition in a gay sports club) and social power (e.g. acceptance of gay masculinities). For some of the gay participants the experience of reclaiming a feeling of power and control through being openly gay was a liberating experience. The gay participants expressed a wish for new masculinities in which there was a greater equality of power. Definitions of masculinity were believed to be undergoing change toward a greater inclusion of multiple masculinities including gay masculinities. An underlying theme was the belief in personal change through harnessing one's personal power. Furthermore, through the support of other gay men it was possible to challenge mainstream heterosexual masculinities and feel pride rather than shame about one's gay masculinity.

In summary, the results of the interviews with the homosexual participants revealed four broad themes in relation to masculinity. These were:

1. The experience of 'otherness'.
2. Masculinities and the male body.
3. Essentialist masculinity.
4. Reclaiming masculinity and masculinities.

These themes represent an attempt to describe the experience of masculinity from a gay perspective, and the subordinated place of gay masculinities within a plurality of masculinities. These experiences are important because they provide a context for understanding gay men's friendships and support seeking in those friendships. These four themes described above will be discussed in detail in the section below.

6.1.2 The experience of 'otherness'.

The experience of being gay was described as the experience of being the 'other' for many of the gay participants. This is largely because heterosexual masculinity is the dominant masculinity within the social order while homosexuality is subordinated as Connell, Davis and Dowsett (2000) note:

> *In contemporary Western Society, the most symbolically important distinction between masculinities is in terms of sexuality. Hegemonic masculinity is emphatically heterosexual, homosexual masculinities are subordinated. (p. 102)*

The gay participants reported their experiences of difference and marginalisation from mainstream masculinity. These differences appeared to be determined according to how a man acted and behaved. Many of the gay participants reported the challenges of negotiating a life between two different worlds; the gay world and the straight world. The participants described ways in which they negotiated an existence in the straight world which included the strategy of 'passing' as straight. By contrast, the practice of camp behaviour was identified as one way of being in the gay world. These experiences are explored in the paragraphs below.

6.1.2.1 Subordinated masculinity

The experience of otherness and belonging to a marginalised group emerged when the gay participants were asked to define and describe masculinity. Being gay was experienced as being different and being placed in a position as the 'other', which echoes the views of other writers (e.g. Dowsett, 1993). It appeared that many gay participants have difficulty locating themselves in relation to the concept of masculinity. When questioned about what masculinity meant to them and how they would define masculinity it was apparent that the gay participants have questioned their masculinity and have had their masculinity questioned by others. It also appeared that the gay participants may have had more awareness of masculinity issues than the heterosexual participants because of working through their sexual identity issues (e.g. Cass, 1979). When asked to define masculinity, the gay participants reported that this was a term that did not necessarily apply to them. It appeared that the term raised feelings of exclusion and of not belonging to mainstream masculinity. Neil describes the negative associations of the word masculinity:

So look, as a gay man hearing that word (i.e. masculinity) and thinking sometimes it's not always applicable to yourself for instance, because you might have traits that aren't perceived to be masculine or whatever, you know. So yes it can have negative associations, you know as a gay man, in terms of can you apply it to yourself? [Trans 179-183]

Neil refers to non-masculine "traits" which might suggest to others that he is gay. Neil's circular definition of masculinity is about possessing traits that are perceived as masculine. He suggests that gay men may have traits that are not perceived as masculine. The term trait is interpreted here to include mannerisms, tone of voice, dress sense, grooming and how a man expresses his masculinity physically. These views highlight the increased scrutiny given to men's bodies as determinants of masculinity and sexual orientation (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Drummond, 2005a, 2005b). Failure to appear appropriately masculine is discussed in detail in Section 6.1.3 on gay men's bodies. In Neil's example (above) the term masculinity may have negative associations because it describes a group to which he does belong. In this sense, the term masculinity is being interpreted as the hegemonic or dominant form of masculinity, which is emphatically heterosexual. Thus to think of gay masculinities may seem like a contradiction in terms (Edwards, 2005). However, despite grappling with this issue, the gay participants also identified emerging definitions of gay masculinities, although subordinated and marginalised, which are reported in detail in Section 6.1.3.

6.1.2.2 What you do and how you do it

The gay participants noted the importance of meaning given to action and behaviour as a key determinant of masculinity. The participants believed that a gay man's masculinity was determined by how he lived out or enacted his 'maleness' according to socially prescribed standards. In this sense, masculinity was closely related to how a man 'should' act and behave. It is therefore determined by how a man lives out his life (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It is not who you are, but how you are.

The gay participants described the importance of an embodied masculinity. Meaning was given to specific actions, as Matt notes below:

I think it's manly attributes. So masculinity, they're like… someone's physical appearance and they behave in a masculine way and they do masculine things I guess. So if a man is doing flower arranging, then I don't regard that particularly as a masculine thing. Men might do it and there is nothing wrong with them doing

it, but I don't regard it as a particularly masculine thing. If a man comes and does plumbing and fixes water pipes, I would say that is a masculine thing, even though a woman can probably do the same thing. [Trans, 158-164]

Matt describes the link between masculinity and physicality and gives some clues to masculine traits. He uses the term 'manly' to define masculinity and explains that the link between how a man acts and behaves is central in defining his masculinity. For Matt, masculinity is defined by what men do with their bodies and how men do it and his comments indicate the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes. Matt does not provide any clues for the non-masculine meaning given to flower arranging or the normativity of plumbing and masculinity. However, these views do give support to the social construction of gender roles. What men can and can not do, or which behaviours are labelled as masculine or feminine, are powerful constructs because they influence personal choices and behaviour (Deaux, 1987). These constructs are explored in Section 5.2 and 5.3 for their potential impact on gay men's friendships and support seeking.

6.1.2.3 Passing and shame.

Several of the gay participants reported that they did not feel accepted by the mainstream because of their gay identity. Furthermore, many of the gay participants reported that masculinity was a term that they believed did not apply to them. In this usage of masculinity, they were reinforcing the view that a hierarchy of masculinities existed, in which they were positioned as subordinate. Many of the gay participants reported the experience of being 'the other' and this experience often felt shameful. Indeed, the identification to others as gay and the experience of personal difference from mainstream masculinity is often experienced as personally shameful (e.g. Davies, 1996; D. Plummer, 1999; Wheeler & Jones, 1996). A. Singer, (1996) describes the relationship between homosexuality and shame:

Homosexuality and shame have been intertwined in an arranged if unholy marriage throughout much of human history. The social expectation or even social requirement of heterosexuality in many cultures produces an inevitable core of experience of shame for anyone who comes into awareness of same-sex attraction. The world, as we know, is filled with judgement. Messages and expressions of approval and disapproval, elaborated into belief systems of "right" and "wrong", enable social systems to construct and maintain themselves by defining the parameters of acceptable social behaviour. In the form of religious doctrine and secular law, and then expressed through social institutions and social power, these beliefs then determine the boundaries of what is

supported and unsupported, encouraged and discouraged, and in the extreme permitted and forbidden in individual and group behaviour. (Pp.124-125)

The shame that gay men experience may have its origins in externalised homophobia or prejudice (Herek, 2000), that becomes internalised through exposure to frequent and enduring negative messages (e.g. Davies, 1996; D. Plummer, 1999) The experience of internalising negative messages from others about an aspect of self, such as an affect, thought or behaviour, may lead to a disowning of that aspect (R. Lee, 1996). When a person's disowned aspect is re-experienced in an unsupportive environment then the person may feel shame. As noted above, there are often negative associations with gayness. The gay participants' perception was that being gay was un-masculine and for many gay participants the experience of being un-masculine was shameful. This binary view of masculinity is ultimately unhelpful for all men because it suggests that there is only one way to express masculinity (i.e. traditional or hegemonic masculinity) and that any less is a failure, and thus equated with femininity.

In an attempt to belong to mainstream masculinity or to minimise one's difference, several gay participant's identified the strategy of passing or 'straight acting' by adopting stereotypical masculine behaviours such 'macho' mannerisms or through particular clothing or grooming. Neil describes some of the difficulties of the term masculinity from a gay perspective:

Yes, okay. Well it's fraught in the gay community isn't it? You know, straight acting, masculine, all that sort of stuff you know. [Trans 172-173]

Neil suggests that masculinity and homosexuality have an uneasy relationship. The implication, in this formulation of masculinity, is that masculinity is equated with heterosexuality. For some gay participants the way to appear masculine was to appear straight. 'Straight acting' serves the purpose of 'passing' as heterosexual, and has been reported in other studies as a strategy to minimise risk (e.g. Linneman, 2000). Sometimes the act of passing may serve the purpose of attaining social acceptance, particularly from other non-gay men, in public, the workplace or family of origin. The idea of passing challenges the idea of being 'out' about one's sexuality. George gives an example of passing from his Greek background:

Yes. It was a bit different in Greece because Greece is a more Eastern country so things are never overt in Greece. So the fact that I am gay will never come out. If I go on to church and if I sit in the company of females once or twice a year, if I don't parade my boyfriend on the balcony everyday, people won't ask questions. They may gossip but it doesn't get in the way. As long as things are implied and not stated it is fine. Australia is going along that trend of America where things have to be out in the open. That makes it very difficult, it is very frustrating here. [Trans, 674-681]

George describes a strategy based on minimising his difference from the mainstream by giving the impression of belonging to the mainstream masculinity. His comments suggest that as long as he maintains the outward appearance of heterosexuality, then his gay 'world' will remain private. He challenges the idea of 'being out', and argues that in Greek culture, there is less support for overt displays of same sex attraction. Indeed, George did not express any conflict about this idea and seemed quite happy with the idea of passing.

By contrast, some gay participants reported condemnation and derision for men who 'passed' as straight. Dennis describes his problem with passing:

Yes, and I can't stand that whole idea. I just…and I just have no respect for that whole stream of passing and.. just be quiet and don't make a noise and don't draw any attention to yourself. [Trans, 295-297]

Dennis suggests that 'passing' is about hiding a part of yourself and minimising overt gay traits.

And it's trying to conform to somebody else's idea. It's someone else's oppressive idea of what you should be and it's disempowering. And it's disempowering yourself and handing all your power over to other people. [Trans, 309-312]

Dennis explains the idea of 'passing' for him is about conforming and thereby minimising difference. Furthermore, he believes passing is not being true to oneself or to others. However, individual choices about passing may also be made based on self – confidence, perceived supports and the acceptance of one's sexuality (Cass, 1979). Dennis perceives 'passing as straight' to be disempowering, which provides further clues about some of the power issues inherent in the concept of masculinity. This idea is explored further in Section 6.1.5 on new masculinities.

By not adopting traditional masculine mannerisms, (i.e. not passing), a gay man's difference from the mainstream masculinity may be made more apparent. Moreover, as Carroll and Gilroy (2002) report, gay men are particular adept at noticing and demonstrating non-verbal cues such as mannerisms and gestures as signifiers of homosexuality. Thus, gay men are also adept at the required behaviours for 'passing', which is one of trying to fit in with the existing majority, by minimising one's difference or appearance of difference. If sexual identity is thought to be determined by outward appearance; gestures, tone of voice, then gay men are able to change their behaviour to assimilate or to pass as straight (K. Plummer, 1981). The gay participants identified the 'appropriate' physical behaviours in order to be perceived as straight, which is especially important as passing is one way of avoiding avoid the stigmatisation and shame associated with the minority stress of homosexuality (Meyer, 1995).

6.1.2.4 Camping

Camp behaviour was reported as a way that some gay men express (and celebrate) their difference from heterosexual masculinities. Camp behaviour, or camping, was identified by the participants as an expression of gay masculinity. Camp behaviour is often seen as quite humorous and is often a parody of dominant heterosexual masculinity (e.g. K. Plummer 1981; Segal, 1990). Several participants also acknowledged that being camp or acting a camp way in mainstream society required courage and strength. Roger describes his drama teacher whom he admired at high school, who was very camp:

> *The drama teacher was very gay, very camp and I suppose that that's actually a male characteristic in itself. [Trans, 68-69]*

Roger also makes the point that camp behaviour is a male characteristic, although many would argue for its difference from traditional masculine behaviour. Camp behaviour may let other people know something about a man's sexuality. Roger describes his drama teacher's 'camp' behaviour:

> *P: I found [him] quite confronting for me, because I was a you know, a sort of eighteen year old boy coming to terms with my own sexuality, and he was an openly homosexual guy, not that he went around telling people he was gay or anything, but it was just like, 'hello'.*

I: He was flamboyant?

P: Yes. But not overly so but it was there, just in his mannerism and speech, sort of like pick up that classic 'how dare I say that nineteen seventies gay tone of voice'. [Trans 106-117]

Roger notes that his drama teacher's camp behaviour suggested that the teacher was gay and that this was confronting perhaps because of Roger's emerging sexuality, and presumably because his teacher (and his teacher's behaviour) stood out for its difference from other male teachers. Roger describes his teacher's tone of voice, his mannerisms, and his speech, as camp. It was through these behaviours that Roger, and presumably others, suspected that the drama teacher was gay. The emphasis is on his outward behaviour and the movement of his body as determining features of his sexual preference and in turn, judgements about masculinity. It appears that 'acceptable' masculinity is defined partly by how closely a man follows prescribed 'masculine' behaviours and mannerisms. The centrality of the deportment of the male body in defining masculinity is taken up in more detail in section 6.1.3.

Camping was seen as a strong expression of difference from mainstream masculinity by some participants. Dennis describes his admiration for camp men:

And the people that I admire most out of the gay men I know are often the campest ones, and often the ones who are most out there and queeny. And the ones I have the least respect for are the ones who are always, like paranoid that they're going to look too girly and sort of standing around saying they can't stand all that. And you know, no I don't want to be, I don't want to talk this way, or dress that way, or that's shocking or that's too girly. And it's just really cowardly, to my mind. Whereas people who are just completely themselves and they're quite camp, and they're quite out there, they're often by far the bravest people. [Trans, 248-257]

Dennis refers to camp behaviour as 'queeny' and 'girly'. He makes a connection between gay behaviour and feminine behaviour. Camp behaviour could be interpreted as a challenge to the dominant heterosexual paradigm because it is not stereotypically masculine, and often associated with homosexuality. Camp behaviour, especially in public, may also be uncomfortable or even shameful for gay men who wish to identify with traditional masculinity norms. Furthermore, camp behaviour is often labelled as feminine (Segal, 1990), which may be considered shameful if an individual has a strong investment in appearing stereotypically masculine. Thus, camp behaviour actively

challenges hegemonic masculinity and hence the derision by both straight and gay men for camp behaviour and those associated with it (e.g. effeminate men). Challenging the dominant social order also takes strength and courage, as Dennis notes above. The gay participants noted that camp behaviour was experienced as the re-claiming of masculinity and a celebration of a gay masculinity for themselves.

6.1.3 Masculinities and the male body.

The term masculinity also raised issues for the gay participants about the physical appearance and physical movement of the male body. A sense of masculinity was closely connected to physicality and bodily expression, and seemed easier to determine in others than in oneself. In this sense, a distinction was made between the outer observable world and the inner feeling, sensing and thinking world of men. Less emphasis was placed on the inner world of men in defining masculinity for the gay participants than the outer manifestation of masculinity. The inner world of men's feelings and thoughts was not considered by the participants as a strong determining feature of masculinity. The emphasis was on physical manifestations and the outer observable, demonstrable world. How a man acted, how he dressed, what he looked like how he moved, what his body was like, and how he used it were key determinants of his masculinity. It is through the meanings that are attributed to others and one's own bodies that constructions of masculinity are made (Connell, 2000). The gay participants highlighted the judgements made about the outer appearance of theirs and others' bodies, which has also been reported elsewhere as an important aspect of sense of self in gay male culture (e.g. Herzog, et al., 1991; S. Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). Gay men's preoccupation with the appearance of their bodies may also relate to their desire to improve their attractiveness to other men (Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko & Rodin 1989). In this section, the links between constructions of masculinity and the male body are explored. Four main themes emerged; the movement of camp bodies, the idealised body, the sexualised body and the variability of gay masculinities.

6.1.3.1 The movement of camp bodies

As noted previously in Section 6.1.2.4 on camp behaviour, the gay participants noted there were expected ways of behaving for men and the ways men use their bodies may be an important determinant of masculinity and camp behaviour. Harry describes the link between masculinity and expectations of behaviours:

There are ways in which it is expected to behave. And ways that it's expected to move physically. Camp behaviour is really unacceptable behaviour and people need to be enormously strong to be able to maintain the camp. [Trans, 249-251]

These views illuminate the field-theoretical construction of masculinities; it is the meanings given to specific behaviour in societal contexts that defines 'acceptable' masculinity. Harry notes that camp behaviour really challenges notions of acceptable masculinity because of the links with femininity (see below):

I: So where does camp behaviour fit within masculinity?

P: I suppose camp behaviour tends to take on female qualities and that sort of thing, just in terms of physical looseness, relaxed, slightly exaggerated physicality. That's not…men don't move like that, they're much more controlled.

I: So it's almost a challenge to masculinity in a sense or…?

P: I think it does, yes. I think that's why a lot of people are really uncomfortable around camp people is because it really does challenge stuff...If you're not matching that model, that's wrong and bad but it's also very uncomfortable because it challenges them. Because you are a man and you're not behaving the way that's expected and therefore that challenges my theory, structured view of how it is or how it should be. So yes I think it's uncomfortable and it's often expressed in terms of it's wrong and it's unnatural. [Trans 254-274]

Harry's description of physical looseness and relaxedness is very different from the descriptions of manliness reported in Chapter Five earlier, which emphasised control and strength. Camp behaviour does appear to challenge these conceptions of straight masculinity because it involves behaving and moving in a way that is not expected of men. Harry notes that acting in a 'camp' way requires a different kind of strength because it challenges what is expected. It is an interesting re-working of the word strength to associate camp behaviour with strength. Physical strength was not a term attributed to gay men, but being 'camp' requires mental strength and the emotional strength of courage and self confidence. This is one of only a few examples where masculinity was defined by inner qualities, rather than outer qualities, by the gay participants.

6.1.3.2 Ideal bodies

Masculinity was described by some gay participants in terms of the 'ideal' male body. One of the participants, Kevin, worked in design and gave a perspective of masculinity from the perspective of the "well built bloke":

Masculinity in terms of an arts sense or a design sense or an image sense is the well-built bloke. That's coming from an art and design perspective, that he is more masculine than the skinny, nerdy guy. That's the perception students give to me anyway. [Trans, 252-255]

The "*well built bloke*" suggests a man with good muscle definition who is physically strong. Kevin's comments sharpen the distinction between the outer images of masculinity which are seen, compared with the inner or subjective world, which is harder to know. Knowledge of the subjectivity of the other requires some level of intimacy or dialogue (Wheeler, 1998). Despite his intention not to judge men from their outer appearance, Kevin's comments underline the capacity we all have to make a judgment based on outer appearance.

Yes. I probably deal more with ideal masculinities in terms of like fashion and the history of art. I probably haven't really sat down and thought about it in terms of people that I know. I suppose too it goes back to.. I try not...I never try to be too judgemental whether a guy is too feminine or too masculine, you know. Yes, I suppose it's just an innate quality that we have, that we just happen to be masculine. [Trans, 278-283]

Kevin's 'ideal' masculinities are contrasted with the masculinities of "*people that I know*". These 'ideal' masculinities are exclusively visual and highly objectified. To this end, the commodification of the male body in general as an object of visual pleasure has accelerated in Australia and Western Society in recent times which may be due in part to the influence of gay men and gay culture (Buchbinder, 2004; Dowsett, 1993; Drummond, 2005b). There is no mention of the subjectivity of the individual male; it is his image that is evaluated. Kevin's answers give an insight into the complex picture of masculinity as partially socially constructed, partially biologically determined, and frequently judged from a man's outer appearance. It is as if a man's outer appearance and the presence of an ideal body confirm and elevate his masculinity. The meaning that is applied to the movement or appearance of the male body appears to be based on the degree of conformity (or lack of conformity) to an ideal male body.

The focus on the 'ideal' body was also revealed in descriptions of gay men's pre-occupation about their outer appearance. There was a perception that gay men were more attentive to their appearance than straight men, as Roger notes:

P: Men in general. [thinking] I was going to say lack of appearance, lack of awareness of their appearance. That's more I think men in general, certainly not in the gay world I don't think that's true.

I: You mean attention to grooming and clothes and that type of thing?

P: Yes, yes. But I think…that's just changing a little bit, you know sixteen-year-olds nowadays; they spend ten hours in front of the mirror, until their hair is right. [Trans, 273-284]

There was an underlying belief that straight men are less aware and concerned about their outer appearance than gay men which has been reported in previous research (e.g. Herzog, et al. 1991; Siever, 1994). Roger believes that straight adolescent boys' attention to their appearance is increasing in the current generation, and there is research evidence confirming the increased concern with outer appearances in men (e.g. Duggan & McCreary, 2004). What is of interest is the overt construction of gay masculinity around outer appearance, suggesting a concern for personal grooming, clothes and fashion, which highlight the male body as an object of beauty, particularly to other men. This view is contrasted with traditional heterosexual male body images, such as the 'workers body' (Connell, 1983), in which functionality, strength and prowess are considered important. To this end, the straight participants in this study also expressed concern about their appearance but in ways that were often more concerned with appearing strong, than beautiful. These themes are discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven in which gay and straight masculinities are compared and contrasted.

6.1.3.3 Male bodies: Beauty, desire and strength

In defining masculinity, the gay participants reported that male bodies (gay or straight) were frequently objects of beauty and sexual desire. Lucas notes that the outer image of a man is something that he finds very attractive in describing Spanish actor Antonio Banderas:

It's very superficial; he's just very stunning physically. [Trans, 40]

There appeared to be a pre-occupation with outer appearance and the outer image of men for the gay participants, which was sometimes sexualised. This view has also been expressed by other theorists who have noted the high level of sexual objectification in gay men, in which judgements are made about other men based on their outer appearance (Altman, 1972; Blachford, 1981; Halkitis, 2000, Halkitis, et al. 2004). The emphasis on the body and the outer appearance of a man was an important defining aspect of masculinity for many of the gay participants.

Some writers have suggested that images of gay men have become more 'masculinised' in the last thirty years through a movement toward a focus on an athletic, muscular gay male body (Blachford, 1981; Buchbinder, 1994, 2004; Gough, 1989). Historically, gay men have often been stereotyped as weak and associated with femininity (Connell, 1995). The image of a gay man as a camp, limp wristed male appears to have lost some currency, although, as the gay participants point out (see 6.1.3.1) it still exists as a stereotype. There may be another aspect in the desirability of muscularity for gay men in that it is the embodiment of healthiness and robustness. Some authors have suggested that the HIV/AIDS crisis which emerged in the early 1980's has contributed to emphasis on muscularity in gay men in an attempt to assert an image of health, not disease (e.g. Halkitis, 2000). Consistent with a desire for idealised, muscular male bodies, images of high profile muscular gay men are now appearing in Australia. Matt comments on his admiration for Ian Roberts, the openly gay Rugby League Player:

> *Well as I said I admire Ian Roberts because he's… he's is quite intelligent but he's a good sportsman, he's physically attractive and he's showing that he's quite a brave individual as well. So yes, the characteristics of his body, he's a very attractive man, he's quite masculine, but he's also showing, despite all those sports stereotypes and you know showing that he's a caring person, that he can be very brave as well in relation to his sexuality and mixing with some of those sportspeople who are very homophobic, quite intimidating and quite aggressive I would imagine, so yes something like that I guess I admire. [Trans, 120-127]*

Matt rates Ian Robert's physical attractiveness and his muscular body as key defining features of masculinity. It also appears that Ian Roberts is admired for how he acts, and his bravery for being openly gay in an aggressive heteronormative sporting environment. In Matt's description there is an interesting mixture of strength tempered with gentleness and caring, suggesting the complexity of gay masculinities which defy simple stereotyped categorisations. Some authors have suggested that hypermasculinity

is a strategy adopted by some gay men in order to demonstrate that they are 'real' men (Courtenay, 2000b). Ian Roberts' gay masculinity is expressed through his body, in a way that challenges straight masculinity, because he is not feminine and embodies the traditionally heterosexual arena of Rugby League (Rowe & McKay, 2003). However, Matt's comments also reveal that Ian Robert's gay masculinity will always be marginalised, even though he appears strong and hypermasculine. As Rowe and Mackay note, Ian Robert's obsessive hypermasculinity may have been a form of over-compensation, as his need to prove his masculinity was probably greater than his straight team mates. Thus, gay masculinities that are pre-occupied with muscularity and outer appearance may be further evidence of a hierarchy of masculinities, in which hegemonic straight masculinities are pre-eminent.

The gay participants' interest in the male body was closely tied to sexual attraction and desire. Neil describes masculinity in physical terms:

Gee it's like word association, but strength came to mind. Masculinity? Yes, strong...maleness, so a robustness a healthiness. Masculinity? Masculinity? [thinking] it's a word I associate on a sexual level with good looking, you know. Sort of attraction. Yes, supportive as well. [Trans, 161-165]

Neil notes the importance of sexual attractiveness, strength, and physical healthiness. He notes these qualities are attractive to him both sexually and as a person to turn to for support, which also suggests a capacity of relationality. Neil describes supportiveness in a man, almost as something that can be determined outwardly. Neil's definition of masculinity appears to be a combination of physical strength and attractive outward appearance. He appears to be attracted to an image of strong and supportive masculinity. Since gay men are same-sex attracted, it follows that if the gay participants define masculine characteristics in terms of outer qualities, then they are likely to also experience attractiveness to men in terms of outer characteristics (e.g. Herzog et al. 1991; Silberstein et al. 1989). It has also been reported that gay men's preoccupation with 'ideal' muscular, non-fat bodies may place them at risk of developing body dissatisfaction problems (e.g. Siever, 1994). Thus there are potential problems associated with the desire for 'ideal' bodies. It may be that a hierarchy of gay masculinities exists in which the idealised lean, muscular body is considered the ultimate form. At both a personal and societal level, the pre-occupation with the outer

image of masculinity for gay men, may serve to invalidate other important factors, such as the internal world of gay men, which can only be known through greater intimacy and dialogue.

6.1.3.4 Different gay masculinities

Despite the pre-occupation with idealised bodies noted above, the gay participants also noted that different gay masculinities existed. There seemed to be an awareness of irony in the way some gay masculinities were enacted. Roger notes the "affected masculinity" of men who go to the Laird, a well known gay bar in Melbourne:

> *[there are men] that go to The Laird' for instance you look at it in a gay culture, but it's a very affected masculinity. [Trans, 476-478]*

The Laird is well known in the Melbourne gay community as a 'leather' bar and similarly to other leather bars attracts a clientele of gay men who identify as 'masculine' such as 'bears' and distinguishes itself from other gay venues (with "flashing disco lights"), which may be perceived as attracting a different type of gay man. Leather bars attract a style and for some, a subculture, of gay masculinity in which gay men dress in denim and leather, which some writers have suggested is a reaction against an effeminate expression of gay masculinity (See Schippers, 2000). An interpretation of Roger's "affected masculinity" (above) is a form of hyper-masculinity (D. Plummer, 1999). Hyper-masculinity is a form of exaggerated masculinity, characterised by an excessive concern about appearing outwardly stereotypically masculine in clothing and appearance. Levine, (1998, 2000) has written about this phenomena in the North American macho 'gay clone', in which the hypermasculine gay 'Marlboro man' came to represent the ultimate desired image for gay men. Whilst the 'gay clone' may not apply to the same extent in Australia, the preoccupation with hypermasculinity is present in the gay community. This extract is from The Laird Website:

> *The 80's established The Laird as Australia's most famous "Mans hotel" and the 90's further cemented it in Australian gay culture. With close links to other Leather/Denim bars world wide, the hotel soon became the first stop for many international tourists. A friendly meeting place for gay men without the encumbrance of loud music or flashing disco lights. The hotel attracts a masculine yet varied crowd ranging from Leather Men through Bears to the average 'man off the street'. The theme of 'Where Men Meet Men' has been*

developed to create an environment where men can meet and talk. (Laird Hotel Website, 2005)

The language in this promotional material from the website reveals something about the type of gay men the hotel attracts; "*a masculine, yet varied crowd*". The Laird appears to be pitching towards the segment of the gay community that identify as outwardly masculine through grooming, clothing and manner, but also satirises straight masculine images. This is one example of variability of the expressions of masculinity within gay culture. Unfortunately, the small sample size of the current study did not provide an opportunity to further explore expressions of gay masculinity, but does raise the idea of the plurality of gay masculinities (Edwards, 2005) and the emergence of hypermasculinity as a desired and idealised gay masculinity.

6.1.4 Essentialist masculine ideology

It appeared that many gay participants have had to reconcile the worlds of essentialist masculine ideology and a socially constructed masculinity. As noted previously, the gay participants reported their experience of difference or otherness from mainstream masculinities. Gay masculinities are situated in the gender order as subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1995). However, the gay participants also reported identification with an essentialist masculinity that was biologically determined, probably as a reflection of the culture in which they were raised and forms the background to the current context in which they exist. In this way underlying essentialist beliefs about sexuality and masculinity appear pervasive (Vance, 1989), although not necessarily in conscious awareness. When asked about masculinity, many gay participants provided essentialist biological descriptions including the secondary sexual characteristics of men such as facial hair, depth of voice and musculature. Will comments below:

Yes…well I suppose I'd combine…the need for some biological aspects of it. So they're male, however that's represented, and then I'd probably go towards the stereotypical thing like will have the deep voice…well that's biological as well I suppose. You know dark hair, beard, hairy, muscular, things like that. And then if I thought about the behaviours it would be strong, resolute, caring, yes that's about it really. [Trans, 126-131]

Will also notes the importance of strength and a capacity to care for others as important masculine characteristics. The word strength was a common descriptor for essentialist

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masculinity. However, it was not only physical characteristics that defined masculinity, but the meaning that was applied by the gay participants. It is through his actions that a man's use of strength is evaluated, as in Will's description above; through being resolute in his decisions and in his caring actions toward others. However, Will's comments also suggest the necessary characteristics for gay men to pass as straight. If a gay man is muscular and has facial hair, then perhaps through his outer appearance he may pass more easily as straight. However, this strategy is also fraught with difficulty, as by passing as straight, he is potentially denying the possibility of constructing an alternative gay masculinity.

As another example of adherence to traditional essentialist notions of masculinity, some gay participants noted it appeared important not to appear weak. Barry describes the importance of maintaining perceptions as he defines masculinity:

Well I'm going to fall into a cliché but the first thing that popped into the half of my mind is that thing of probably not being perceived to be weak. [Trans, 118-120]

Barry's comments give some clues to the way that masculinities can differ, according to perceptions of weakness. The importance of appearing strong is further explained by Neil below in describing masculinity and avoiding the opposite of strength which is weakness:

So an essential male characteristic might be that strength that you seem to be almost indomitable and you're not allowed to cave [in] as such. [Trans 126-128]

The idea of appearing indomitable may have been a desire to avoid being positioned toward the bottom of the hierarchy of masculinities. Neil makes a second point about perceptions. As noted earlier, the importance of strength is related to the ability to demonstrate strength to others. He notes that a man is "*not allowed to cave as such*"; possibly because to "*cave*" might mean that a man may be perceived to be less masculine than ideal. He is describing a traditional masculine ideology, similar to that reported in Section 5.1 by the straight participants and will be explored further in the comparison chapter (Chapter Seven). These descriptions provide clues about essentialist masculinity ideology, although the extent to which the gay participants belonged to this masculinity was unclear. There was a sense of belonging to essentialist masculinity

through belonging to the male sex, but this view was contrasted with non acceptance of gayness within hegemonic masculinity. This view is further understood in the light of a pre-occupation with outer appearance in determining masculinity (as noted in the previous section). Thus, gay men can appear heterosexual and masculine, by adopting stereotypically male mannerisms and behaviours, but underneath, their position in the gender hierarchy is that of outsiders. Thus gay men need to develop and negotiate an alternative identity in which an awareness of personal difference is often the starting point (e.g. Cass, 1979, Troiden, 1989). In a relatively new area of research, attempts have been made to measure the negative impact of adherence to traditional gender roles experienced by gay men as a measure of psychological well being (Simonsen et al. 2000; Wester et al., 2005). Thus gay men may be complicit with an essentialist belief system in which outer 'masculine' behaviours are believed to be indications of a simplified underlying male essentialism (e.g. Vance, 1989). However there is no evidence that gay men experience greater gender role conflict than straight men (Wester, et al., 2005), which may be explained by gay men's ability to successfully construct alternative masculinities. Thus the gay participants' struggles with recognising their sameness to straight men, but also managing their differences, may be part of an ongoing tension.

It appeared that the gay participants were responding to two different but related constructions of masculinity. By living in two worlds, the gay participants appeared to be describing a process of negotiating their place in two realms of masculinity. Dennis describes his admiration for the well known Australian actor Andrew MacFarlane:

> *He always had this slightly otherworldly aura about him and he's since come out publicly as gay and he's sort of quite open about it. And it was really funny, you know I think it was something…there's something about the way that you learn to relate to the world as a gay man that came through in his acting. [Trans, 60-64]*

Dennis notes the importance of gay role models in learning to relate to the straight world as a gay man. The emergence of multiple masculinities, including gay masculinities allows for the possibility of inhabiting 'other worlds' and celebrating 'otherness'. By contrast, essentialist masculinities may appear fundamentally shameful, because they offer limited flexibility, and are based on an ideology which prescribes narrow roles and expressions of masculinity. The possibility of constructing gay

masculinities also requires strong internal and external support and is discussed further in Section 6.4.

6.1.4.1 A 'Mediterranean' perspective

Three of the participants were Australian men of Mediterranean background (two were of Greek parentage and one of Italian parentage). These participants' experiences provided a unique insight into masculinity from a different cultural perspective. Whilst all of these participants had lived in Australia for several years, their constructions of masculinity suggested a link with their parent's culture based on traditional beliefs and values. Themes from two of these participants, illuminating a Mediterranean perspective are reported in this section, as examples of essentialist masculine ideology. It might be expected that the masculinity of men from Mediterranean backgrounds would be less emotionally constrained than Australian masculinities. Notwithstanding this possibility, the current participants reported that displays of gay masculinities potentially transgressed (Mediterranean) masculinity norms. These gay participants reported the importance of adhering to traditional masculinity norms.

Matt, who was born in Italy, comments on the importance of being manly:

Well it's my own opinion, and I don't necessarily think its right or anything, but I personally find it admirable and attractive if a man is particularly masculine and assertive and strong and just manly...I don't particularly like feminine men either, it's just, I don't make any judgements by that, it's just who I am, about manliness really I guess. [Trans, 91-98]

Matt notes the importance and attractiveness of 'masculine' traits, such as assertiveness and 'manliness', in others. He also reports the importance of appearing 'manly' himself, and his desire to find other 'manly' gay friends (see Section 6.3.2.3). Despite Matt's view that he does not make a 'judgement' about masculinity and femininity, there is a suggestion that manliness is associated with a normative masculinity; assertiveness and strength. His views give support to the maintenance of hegemonic masculine ideology from a gay perspective, as both desirable in others as well as oneself.

A stronger view is provided by George who is a Greek Australian, who has lived part of his adult life in Greece as well as Australia. George's description of 'Mediterranean' masculinity suggests principles based on long standing traditions and a related theme of

acting in a way that was consistent with ideals. These ways of acting included behaving and conducting oneself as a man that was honourable. In a sense the ideals are introjected messages about how a man 'should be', in order to defend his honour. George describes what it means to be a man in Greek culture.

A man has to know how to defend the honour of a family, even to the point of risking your life. So this idea of whether I have got a car or whether I have got money means nothing if you have no honour, if you have no dignity as a male in society. [Trans, 41-45]

George's description of masculinity strongly asserts the idea of defending honour and dignity. However, this idea does not appear to extend to one's sexuality. When asked about gay relationships, George notes the importance of privacy:

I: You hold a very high value around privacy?

P: Yes because that is what gives something meaning, it's special. I don't like people who flaunt their boyfriend or girlfriend around to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the Street, there's no need for that. [Trans, 806-811]

An interpretation from George's comments is that being openly gay or openly affectionate with your partner, would be dishonourable or un-dignified. Thus, it appears that the principle of defending one's honour as a man may conflict with being openly gay. These two ideas further support the idea of gay men living in two worlds. In George's view, the 'homosexual' world is private and kept separate. However, there is a contradiction in George's position as he also values the ability of men to stand up for their beliefs, which appears to support an underlying essentialist masculine ideology.

I think it is the testosterone, which makes them (men) very aggressive in their actions so that they're very territorial, they will risk things for what they believe in. So I don't want to generalise and say men and women, the men that I have known tend to be people who will stand up even if they are going to be blasted, even if they are going to be crapped on, they will stand up to defend their friend or to defend somebody who can't be defended or to defend the defenceless, they will stand up and that is something that I admire. I think that we are born with that. [Trans, 65-77]

It appears that George is prepared to stand up for some beliefs and values, but the area of sexuality and sexual orientation is to be kept private. George's view of masculinity is

contradictory, as it appears undignified and even shameful to declare a same sex attraction. He describes a type of masculinity that emphasises the qualities of honour and dignity, which suggests that existence of an underlying masculine ideology, of how a man 'should be'. Thus it appears that George's capacity to construct an alternative masculinities (i.e. gay), may be compromised by his adherence to traditional masculine ideology.

These views supports Nardi's (2000) opinion that gay men may reproduce (as well as contest or modify) hegemonic masculinity. It may be that traditional forms of masculinity are more strongly endorsed through a Mediterranean influence, although more research is needed to examine this hypothesis. Other gay participants expressed a strong desire to modify and challenge traditional masculinity. These views are reported below. The emerging themes relating to men's friendships and supports and will be reported in sections 6.2, and 6.3.

6.1.5 New Masculinities, reclaiming masculinity

In this final section participants' ideas and hopes for new masculinities are explored, in which some of the tensions inherent in living between two worlds may be reconciled. Furthermore, it was acknowledged by the gay participants that living up to any form of 'pure' masculine ideology was impossible. Many of the gay participants in this research project were hopeful of new expressions of masculinity that allowed them more power and reduced the dominance of the heterosexual majority. As mentioned earlier, the gay participants reported a struggle with their subordinated place as the 'other'. There was also a hope and a desire from the participants that masculinities were changing from restrictive, homophobic traditional definitions to greater inclusiveness of gay men and gay masculinities. Kevin commented on the existence of the traditional 'macho' image of the Australian male but also believed that that this model of masculinity is changing.

When I think of qualities of maleness, particularly in Australia, I think of you know that sort of macho image. But I firmly believe that's really breaking down now. [Trans, 71-74]

Kevin describes his belief that masculinity is changing, particularly through changing images of the male body, which has been reported elsewhere (e.g. Buchbinder, 2004). In

the following example, he highlights strength and the role of provider as important masculine characteristics that appear to be changing.

> *I think particularly the Australian male has softened a lot. So there's nothing that… you know the whole idea of being strong is no longer at the forefront. The whole notion of like being the breadwinner. [Trans 81-83]*

Kevin works in a university in an Art and Design course. He has the benefit of working in a relatively non-traditional environment, with many young people where there is the possibility of changing values and ideas. As Kevin notes, the existing hegemony of masculinity still exists:

> *Because I am working with students these days who range from you know like eighteen up, they appear… the blokes appear to be more open in terms of conversation about fashion and you know a discussion about sexual relations and its maybe a little easier these days in a university area to come out, you know. But on the other hand I reckon that the next generation, and I suppose they may be…yes the next generation to me, are becoming again quite conservative. So that could possibly lead to going back to the male and the female thing. [Trans, 184-193]*

Kevin is in a position to comment on changing patterns he has noticed within some of the university student population, although this may also be an example of students' exploring roles and identities. Kevin acknowledges that ideas about masculinity and sexuality change and that the recent movement toward openness may be replaced by a conservative trend. His comments highlight the possibility for views about masculinity to change over time and perhaps in response to broader social trends.

The consideration of gay masculinity as a part of a spectrum of possible masculinities was expressed as a desirable idea by several of the participants. Harry describes the idea of a spectrum of masculinities.

> *I suppose I see it much more in terms of a spectrum of masculine and feminine behaviours and I think most people are a mix of them and I don't even know that any of them are real…really essentially male. I think it's about mixtures and where you are on the spectrum. It's like jobs. I've never understood how some jobs are masculine jobs, particularly say round being at home. Washing the dishes is a female job and taking out the rubbish is a male job. [Trans, 67-75]*

Harry puzzles over the assignment of gender to certain roles or tasks, which supports other research suggesting gay men adhere less to traditional male norms (e.g. S. Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). These traditional male roles may appear more rigid to gay men than straight men because gay men have contributed to challenging gender roles and norms (Altman, 1972; Blachford, 1981). Many of the current gay male participants believed in a flexible construction of masculinity. Sam describes the process of personal growth and increased awareness in the area of masculinity.

I try to cultivate some of those qualities within myself, some of them have become more active as a result of bringing more awareness to the sort of person I want to be and that then influences the sort of choices that I make about the kind of male or man I want to be. [Trans, 86-89]

Sam believes in individual change through awareness and personal growth. He describes a process of deciding what sort of man he wants to be, and making informed choices. However whilst individual change is important, the concept of masculinity is also constructed at a broader societal level, and personal change may also require support at a societal level. Sam talks a bit more about what masculinity means to him and acknowledges the complexity of the issues:

Yes, for me it is more context specific. I struggle to try to define what this notion of masculinity means to me. Is it about having a great masculine male body? Is it about being able to be quite strong and aggressive when I need to be? Is it about allowing myself to share my vulnerability? Is it about not showing feelings? I'm not sure; I am still quite unclear on what it actually is. And whether the notion of masculinity is really clear and universal, I think it is a lot more complex than that. [Trans, 136-142]

Sam describes masculinity as a '*context specific*' phenomenon, and in doing so appears to support the social construction of masculinities. He does not appear to believe that masculinity is an essentialist quality that cannot be changed. His views suggest that masculinity is a dynamic concept that is strongly influenced by environmental factors as well as individual factors. Sam, like many of the gay participants, had questioned his masculinity through the process of developing a gay identity. It is possible that gay men have more awareness of masculinity constructions than straight men because they have considered the issue when working out their sexual identity with others and in relationships (Wester et al., 2005).

6.1.5.1 Reclaiming masculine power

Some of the gay participants described experiences of reclaiming their personal power and feeling 'strong' as men. This was particularly evident in gay participants' descriptions of playing sport. Several of the participants belonged to the same gay sports club. Dennis describes his experience in the sports club.

P: And every time I can go there and just be myself and to do things like actually participating in the sport, actually playing the sport and physically doing it and realising...starting to feel what some of that traditional hegemonic masculinities stuff is like.

I: Strength and power?

P: Yes, and control...you know control under pressure as well as the power and competency and it's a combination of all of those things. And having all that and having that on my terms and not having to pretend to be something...normally you'd have to pretend, you'd have to, you know, try and pass for straight at least, you know, make yourself a minimal target in pretty much any other sports club. But to be able to do that and to come up with girly names for everyone in my team [laughs] and to, you know, not really give a shit whether I'm flapping or not. And it's a really...it's a really nice feeling. It's like it is a way of claiming it and claiming it entirely on my terms. Like this is me being myself and being true to myself and that that's something that's really important. [Trans, 327-347]

Dennis is an articulate university student and has an interest in masculinity research. He is attracted to the strength, power and the feeling of control. Dennis noted how important it is to 'be myself', and not having to pretend to be someone else. He describes the unsatisfactory experience in heterosexual sports clubs of 'passing' as a coping strategy to avoid attack (making himself a 'minimal target'). He describes an experience of being openly gay and playing sport as powerful, strong and very new. This may be particularly so in Australia where hegemonic heterosexual masculinities are often enacted through aggressive male sports such as Aussie Rules (Wedgewood, 2003). The emergence of gay sportsman such as Ian Roberts, challenges one of the foundations of hegemonic masculinity because competitive male sport is considered the domain of heterosexual men (Rowe & McKay, 2003). Thus Dennis experiences an unfamiliar power as a gay man in competing against straight men at sport. Dennis highlights the idea that being gay and experiencing power is usually mutually exclusive for him, and perhaps for many other openly gay men.

As he states below, the experience of attending sports events is a positive form of 'being outed' for the whole team.

> *Every event we go to, everybody knows who we are. Not that we've ever had any antagonism or anything... every time you walk in anywhere you just get this trail of heads going {makes sound of whispering}...behind you. So it was never that but it was sort of confronting this whole idea that to play sport, to play a team sport and to compete, and to compete successfully, that that was a whole idea that was something that was essentially masculine, or manly. And that being gay is not that. And that being gay by definition you can't do that. And to actually go out and do that there was something really powerful...powerfully liberating about going and doing that for me personally. [Trans, 125-136]*

The gay sports club, noted above, competes directly and openly with the straight sports clubs. As Dennis notes, everybody knows about the gay sports club, and at every sporting event they attend, the issue of their sexuality is present. Even though the club has some non-gay members, the club is publicly identified as a gay and lesbian sports club. By identifying as a gay sports club, the majority of members have chosen to 'out' themselves. Whilst Dennis notes the whispering, it appears the experience is positive overall. The experience of being 'out' in the sports club also appears to be different because it is not a solitary experience; there is the support of peers. Dennis appears to enjoy this aspect, just as much as the sporting aspect, which reinforces the importance of social support. The experience of peer solidarity may provide the necessary support to promote new masculinities, as attempting change single headedly is more likely to fail.

6.1.6 Summary of key findings: Gay masculinities

In summary, the gay participants described a hierarchy of masculinities in which they existed as the 'other'. These findings support Connell's (1995, 1987) analysis of masculinities, in which gay masculinities were positioned as subordinate and marginalised. The gay participants' experiences of belonging to a subordinated masculinity revealed a complex relationship between hegemonic masculine ideology and homosexuality. For many gay participants, the experience of being gay left them with an experience of living between two worlds, and an underlying anxiety about not belonging and shame. To the extent that the gay participants reified notions of essentialist masculinity, they appeared more likely to experience shame and rejection

through not belonging. By contrast, in constructing gay masculinities, the participants were demonstrating the ability to contest hegemonic masculinities.

The gay participants were acutely aware of their difference as men from straight men and the difference between gay masculinities and mainstream masculinities, consistent with other research findings (Connell, 1995; Dowsett, 1993). For some gay participants, being in the straight world involved passing as straight, which was a strategy for minimising the potential for shame. There were mixed views about passing and whilst it was a coping strategy for some participants, it was viewed negatively by others. The practice of camp behaviour and camping emerged as one way that gay participants express their masculinity, although to do so may require considerable inner strength and the support of others.

Description of gay masculinities also included an emphasis on the idealised body determined through outer appearance and movement of the male body. Male bodies were also the object of sexual desire. Male bodies were objectified and for many participants masculinity was closely related to the 'ideal' male body, lean, muscular, beautiful. Thus, there appeared to be a hierarchy of gay masculinities, in which the 'ideal' was most sought after. Alternatively it could be argued that idealised gay masculinity has moved closer toward perpetuating hegemonic masculinity, rather than challenging hegemonic norms. There was an underlying anxiety about masculinity, as it is always in process and never complete. Masculinity was defined largely by what a man did with his body, how he acted and expressed himself. Descriptions of male bodies were highly polarised as either camp and effeminate, or strong and muscular. These descriptions were evident in stereotyped enactments of gay masculinities such as the hyper-masculinity of some gay men. There appeared to be some support for the movement of gay masculinities toward mainstream masculinities, evident through an increased desirability for outward displays of strength and muscularity reported elsewhere (Dillon, et al., 1999; Glassner, 1989). However, included in these descriptions of the ideal male body were descriptions of gentleness and sensitivity, which was suggestive of relational gay masculinities. The gay participants provided an image of gay masculinities that were less polarised between weak and strong, and incorporated flexibility into expressions of masculinity.

There was strong evidence that gay masculinities have challenged the hegemonic paradigm, in positive ways. For some of the gay participants involved in sports, the experience of reclaiming a feeling of power and control whilst being openly gay was a liberating experience. These experiences were closely connected to group activities in which solidarity and peer support were evident. Thus it appears that sport may be one way in which hegemonic masculinities may be contested, particularly because sport represents such an important bastion of heterosexual masculinity in Australia. These findings highlight the need for support from others if new masculinities are to be successful in challenging existing hegemonic masculinities. To this end, in the next section, 6.2, the gay participants' experiences of close male friendships are examined, as potential sources of personal support and collective action.

Section 6.2 Gay men's friendships: Results and discussion

In this section, the results from the gay participants regarding their close friendships with men are reported and discussed. The findings are presented as themes that describe the structures of the gay participants' friendships. In the next section (6.3), specific instances of seeking or receiving support in close friendships will be examined.

6.2.1 Essence statement

The findings in the current section are first presented in an essence statement which is divided into four main sections that reflect the four separate theme areas of the gay participants' friendships; 1)being seen and accepted, 2)personal differences: positive and negative, 4) negotiating boundaries and 4) gay-straight friendships. Following the essence statement, the themes will be discussed in detail.

Being seen and accepted

The experience of being 'seen', accepted and supported was a central feature of the gay participants' close friendships. Gay men's close friendships were described as central to the participants' sense of gay identity and masculinity, especially given the gay participants' previously reported experiences of otherness and shame within mainstream masculinity. Whilst friendships were formed through common experiences and activities, and strengthened over time, the presence of an activity was not central to the friendship. The gay participants reported that the provision of emotional and social support was a primary characteristic of a close male friendship. The participants reported that close friendships provided an opportunity for validation of their sexual orientation and gay masculinity. The friendships described by the gay participants provided safety in which gay men could make contact without fear of ridicule and rejection; the experience many gay participants feared within dominant straight masculinities. In addition, gay friendships provided an opportunity for the gay participants to understand their 'non-heterosexual' masculinity and to feel supported in their difference.

The experience of feeling accepted in a close male friendship was often connected to recognition of similarity between gay friends. For many of the gay participants a key connection point was sexual identity, and with this came a familiarity of language, a

'gay sensibility' and connection to a gay network. Beyond the similarity of sexual identity, the participants reported a connection based on other points of similarity and similar interests, including politics, socialising, cultural background, having fun and a similar sense of humour.

Personal differences: positive and negative

Personal differences from friends were viewed in both negative and positive terms. Some gay participants reported a connection with their close friends based on personal differences. These differences (such as personality, or interests) were seen as adding to the friendship and heightened the sense of being seen in a positive way. Some gay participants reported the experience of difference as an integral part of the friendship that was of benefit to both parties. An attraction and acceptance of a friend's differences from self was explicitly regarded as a key feature of some gay friendships. The recognition of personal differences was important because they provided participants with a reference point from which to compare and contrast their own perspective.

Personal differences between friends could also be negative, especially if they threatened the foundation of a friendship and resulted in serious conflict. Areas of personal differences arising included envy, sexual tension, trust and competitiveness. Given the importance of interpersonal closeness in the gay participants' friendships, areas of serious conflict were invariably experienced as highly personal. Furthermore, conflicts arose in the context of unmet expectation of friends, such as confidentiality. However, in the event that conflicts were resolved, the gay participants reported that their friendships were invariably enhanced through increased trust and intimacy.

Negotiating boundaries

The negotiation of personal and interpersonal boundaries emerged as a major theme in the gay participants' friendships. The gay participants appeared quite sophisticated in their ability to negotiate different levels of intimacy with close friends. It appeared that the management of interpersonal boundaries functioned to regulate intimacy and trust. Tension around sexual attraction emerged as an issue in many of the gay participants' friendships and it appeared that boundaries around sexual intimacy needed to be negotiated at some point in order to develop and maintain a friendship. For most gay participants this issue was managed successfully and they reported close and enjoyable

friendships. For some other gay participants, sexual boundaries issues were not resolved and they reported they did not and could not have close trusting friendships with gay men. For some other gay participants the trust issues were related to a lack of confidentiality from gay friends.

Gay-straight friendships

Some gay participants reported their closest male friendships were with straight men, partly because the sexual boundaries appeared clearer. Whilst there was still potential for sexual tension with a straight friend, the gay participants noted that these issues were usually resolved. Friendships with straight men were not based on issues of sexual identity, but on other points of connection (such as sport, work, or shared history). The friendships that the gay participants described with straight men also supported the idea of friendships as a balance between personal differences and similarities. Overall, the gay-straight friendships revealed a relatively high level of interpersonal closeness and intimacy.

In summary, the results of interviews with the gay participants revealed four main themes about gay men's close friendships:

1. Being seen and accepted.
2. Personal differences; positive and negative
3. Negotiating boundaries.
4. Gay-straight friendships.

These themes are explored and discussed in detail below.

6.2.2 Being seen and accepted

Many of the gay participants described support of their homosexuality as an important point of connection in their friendships with other gay men. Being seen and accepted by a friend was described as a very important feature of a close friendship. Being seen appeared to involve two related types of contact. The first involved recognition of sameness in friends, and the second involved an appreciation of personal differences. Ultimately the successful management of these two dimensions, sameness and difference, often defined the friendship. The importance of similarities and support is reported below.

6.2.2.1 Similarities and support

The recognition of 'sameness' in the other, served to reflect back and confirm a part of themselves. The connections between gay men around the recognition and validation of their sexuality provided an opportunity for acceptance. In the previous section (6.1), the gay participants reported their experience of 'otherness' from mainstream masculinity. One might suspect that the gay participants would seek out friendships with other gay men to reduce the sense of otherness. Also given the shame and lack of support that some gay men can feel, it could be assumed that gay participants might seek out friendships that are supportive and not shameful. Peer support for gay men has been found to be especially important in the early part of 'coming out', and throughout life in order to strengthen identity and increase a sense of belonging to the world (Cass, 2003).

The feeling of acceptance was rated highly by the participants as a desirable feature of close male friendships. The identification of sameness appeared to provide a source of support. As Jacobs (2005) notes, the development of self occurs through the connection and identification with others. Gay men's friendships may be especially important in the development of a gay identity as Nardi notes:

> *Friendship may be the central organizing element of gay men's lives-the mechanism through which gay masculinities, gay identities, gay cultures and gay neighbourhoods get created, transformed, maintained, and reproduced (1999, p.13).*

The gay participants in this study identified their friendships with other gay men as significant sources of emotional and social support and these findings are reported below.

6.2.2.2 Acceptance, honesty and loyalty.

Being seen and accepted by a close gay friend was a central feature of the gay participants' friendships. Sam describes the important features of his close gay friendships:

> *I like how I can just be who I am with them. I can discuss whatever I want with them, whether it is a particular issue, whether it is a particular feeling about something, whether it is an opinion about something. I like the way we can laugh about stuff together, how we can take life really seriously and then go to the other*

extreme and have a lot of fun, write ourselves off. So kind of everything between two. It's an easy interaction, it's easy to be around them, there's a sense of being accepted by them and understood by them when I need to be, and being supported by them too, during the tougher times. And it goes both ways. [Trans, 245-253]

The feeling of being accepted was described as the freedom to be oneself and a sense of being understood. The experience of being accepted for "*who I am*" is an experience that may have particular meaning for gay men. As noted in the previous chapter on gay masculinity, many of the gay participants had a strong experience of being 'the other', and feeling different from mainstream masculinity. It follows that the experience of 'being accepted' by a friend might be highly valued as a significant source of support (e.g. Vincke & van Heeringen, 2002). Furthermore, the friendship Sam describes provided the opportunity for a full range of interactions from fun through to a deeper sense of mutual support during tougher times. The range of friendship interactions Sam describes appears to deepen his sense of being known and accepted.

Sam also acknowledged the full dimension of his friendship from thoughts to feelings and activities together. It is notable that he describes the connection of feelings as an important part of the friendship, which supports other research in gay men's friendships (e.g. Nardi, 1999). Unlike straight men's friendships; where the emphasis was often on activities, the place of a shared activity appeared less central in gay participants' close friendships. This may indicate a greater focus on emotional intimacy and support in gay participants' friendships. This point will be explored in more detail in a comparison of heterosexual and gay participants in Chapter 7. However, Sam notes the importance of support in the friendship, and appears to be describing emotional support. The gay participants' experience of seeking and receiving emotional support is discussed in more detail in the next section, 6.3.

The theme of acceptance appeared to be related to honesty. In the following description, Barry describes his experience of being open and honest with his friend Patrick. It appears that he feels accepted by Patrick and this feeling may contribute to an absence of barriers.

It's honest; it's a very honest friendship. There is no problem with me to discuss ups or downs, there's no problem going to see Patrick, if I'm in a good or a bad

mood, for example, and there would be no problem discussing anything with him, there's sort of no barriers about what we can talk about as well. [Trans, 254-258]

The friendship seems to offer emotional safety and that enables Barry to be honest. The experience of being accepted and the support that was afforded by acceptance was identified as an important aspect of gay male friendships. Thus, the relational or interpersonal aspect of the friendship is highlighted, rather than activities or interests.

Honesty was also described as not needing to hide an important part of self, such as sexuality, as Matt notes below:

P: I've got female friends as well, and with them you just talk about different things and you behave differently. When I am with men or gay friends I just talk about different things, I can be more open and honest I think with gay friends in particular.

I: Right. More honest about your feelings or…?

P: Yes, feelings and your sexuality and that sort of thing. Whereas with female friends I can't be too graphic or I just talk about different things. [Trans 308-318]

Matt has female friends and straight male friends, but he described a different quality of friendship with his gay friends. He notes the importance of being able to be honest to his gay friends about his sexuality and feelings. As noted in the previous chapter, 6.1, the experience of many of gay participants was of belonging to a marginalised masculinity and sometimes the identification of being gay felt shameful, especially if unsupported. Because Matt belongs to 'the same world' as his gay friend, they share a common language and understanding. It appears that the acceptance and honesty comes partly out of a similar identification. It is perhaps through this recognition and validation of sameness that safety exists, and the emergence of shame is reduced.

Support was described as an important feature of the gay participants' friendships and supportive interactions in personal crises are reported in detail in Section 6.3. However, the importance of support in general is reported here because it was unsolicited and emerged as a defining aspect of many gay participants' close friendships. Being able to be open, to feel safe, and to feel comfortable all appeared to be forms of support, and had a reciprocal dimension as Kevin notes below:

We have a lot of fun, you know and we talk at least once a week. And it's not about stuff, it's like you know, 'how are you, are you okay, I'm a bit concerned about this'. And the other mate does that as well. Yes so it's that... I suppose it's a sort of honesty between us. And also, there hasn't been any shit between us in the last six years. You know there's been no arguments or not speaking to each other. [Trans, 361-366]

Kevin describes the process of contact with his gay friend; the balance between fun and self disclosure. Kevin appears to be describing a process of interpersonal intimacy in which friends know something of the other's inner world and their emotional well being. This type of intimacy requires clear communication and personal honesty in which the relationship is enhanced. It is suggested that this intimacy has contributed to a lack of conflict in the relationship, or at least the conflict may have been resolved. The potential for conflict to arise in close friendships is reported in more detail in Section 6.2.3.2.

The feeling of being accepted by a gay friend appeared to allow the gay participants to express their gay masculinity freely. As noted previously, many gay participants expressed a tension in the two 'worlds' that they inhabit. The experience of being with a close gay friend, may allow them to feel safe to express their homosexuality. Neil comments on what he likes about his gay friendships.

Well that's that other level of you know, being able to just comment on, not that I wouldn't not comment about a guy's looks or whatever to the straight mates but you just don't even blink when you're doing it in front of your gay friends. But, you know, there's that gay sensibility that you bring to your friendships as well with the gay guys. So you can have the camp humour, you know... [Trans, 284-289]

There appeared to be a connection for gay friends around a 'gay sensibility', as Neil calls it. This may include a camp sense of humour, which underlies the participants' connection around a similar type of gay masculinity. This type of gay masculinity is understood and has a language and sense of humour; a sensibility. As Neil notes, he could comment on a guy's looks to a straight friend, but there is a shared sensibility that draws him to his gay friends. It is something about the interaction and the connection between the friends. This feeling seems to go deeper than just acceptance, it is about connection. Neil reports familiar and comfortable connection to a gay friend. They both

inhabit the same world. As Nardi (1999) notes, gay men look to their gay friends to confirm a part of themselves:

> *For most gay men, friends are other selves with whom they can truly be themselves. It is through friends, that gay men verify and expand their sense of self as gay: family members rarely provide this information or identity in the way family provides racial minorities, for example, with their identities as they grow up. (p. 5)*

Gay men's friendships are more than places where gay men meet in safety with like minded friends. These friendships provide an opportunity to support the development of a gay identity, which is an ongoing process (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1989). For some gay participants, the friendship served the purpose of providing an entry into a social network, as Barry comments:

> *This person also seems to know the people I want to know, get to the events that I would like to get to as well. [Trans, 224-225]*

Entry to these social networks can provide a source of social support through connection to the gay community (Nardi, 1999). Dennis describes (below) his connection to his closest friends, a gay couple and the social network that the friendship offers:

> *Oh, probably the closest friends and the ones I spend the most time with are Tino and Kiefer, they're a couple....they're kind of the centre of the social network and they seem to ring people up and organise things and let's go out together and what are you doing tonight and we're going here, and we'll pick you up. [Trans, 455-465]*

As Dennis notes, he has a close friendship with Tino and Kiefer. The friendship also provides a doorway in to connections with other gay social networks. This view reinforces the supportive aspects of close relationships and social networks (Morgan, 1990), rather than just friendship interactions alone. Access to a social network may enhance the experience of belonging and reduce social isolation.

6.2.2.2 Becoming friends.

The gay participants noted several points of connection in their friendships with other gay men. It was often through shared activities or interests that gay participants initially

made friends, although it was through the development of an interpersonal connection that solidified the friendship. The participants reported their friendships were based on the recognition of sameness as a deep point of connection. Sometimes the points of connection were an interest or sometimes it was through shared history, such as school or university. Sometimes the point of connection was their common sexuality. However, the common sexuality meant that sometimes the initial attraction was sexual. Harry describes two of his closest friends and initial stages of the friendship:

> *In both situations it was through sexual contact initially and then that sort of aspect dropped away and we remained friends. [Trans, 309-310]*

Harry's comments highlight a theme that is apparent in many gay participants' friendships; the theme of sexual attraction to friends. In this instance, it appears that the sexual contact was casual and short-lived, and a friendship developed subsequently, as has been reported in other studies (e.g. Nardi, 1992b). For some gay participants, sexual tensions inhibited the possibilities of close friendship. This subject is discussed further in the next section 6.2.3; managing boundaries.

For some gay participants their friendships were forged through a gay group or a meeting of gay men around a common interest: Kevin describes how he met two of his best friends:

> *I actually met them both through… I would say gay men's groups, but they weren't gay men's groups…yes, one was sort of a gay men's group, the other one was through a friend of a friend who ran a gay film night. [Trans, 334-336]*

It appears that the groups Kevin attended provided an opportunity for him to meet men and then over time he was able to develop friendships. Matt noted that he attended a cultural group, and met his close friend there.

> *I go to a cultural group, a gay cultural group and I met him through that. [Trans, 278]*

It appears that for some of the gay participants, attending a group or an organised gathering where other gay men meet, provided the opportunity for developing friendships. The provision of a group around a particular focus (e.g. film, or a cultural

interest) facilitated the friendship process. The group provides an opportunity for connection around a similar interest as well as a scheduled time and place for meeting. Alternatively, some gay participants met their gay friends at school or university which dated back over a period of twenty years as Neil comments:

Two are school friends; [correcting himself] three are school friends and one's a Uni friend. [Trans, 229]

Whilst at university and school many opportunities are provided for socialising and making friends, and these opportunities diminish in later years, as noted by some participants below.

6.2.2.3 Changes over time

It seems that friendships might be harder to develop for men as they grow older. George comments on the difficulty of forming new friendships with age:

Well the trouble is this because I have gone to Greece and I have come back, the reality is, well what I have found, is that the older we get the more and more difficult it gets to make friends, so the last friends that I made were at university because you are exposed to a large number of people, your living life with them. It's very difficult to make a friendship under artificial conditions, like let's be friends, well we have done nothing to be friends. [Trans, 340-345]

Most friendships change to some degree over time (Rubin, 1985) and gay friendships are no exception. A connection based only on gay sexuality may not be enough to sustain a friendship. Whilst an important basis of the friendship might be a shared gay identity, there does need to be a deeper interpersonal connection. In the deepening phase of a friendship, exploring similar interests may lead to an increased interpersonal closeness. Sam comments on deepening a friendship:

I don't remember anything sort of changing; we started to do quite a few things in common, we started to have more fun with each other and then we would spend more time ringing each other and speaking to each other on the phone which would lead to doing more stuff together and it kind of evolved from there. [Trans, 197-201]

He is describing a process of deepening, or becoming more intimate, that occurs over time. In Sam's description, there is an increased frequency of contact, and the

enjoyment of each other's company through shared activities, but also an increased knowing of each other. Sam's comments underlie the notion that friendship is a process that develops over time and continues to evolve. Indeed a healthy model of interpersonal relating might be one that continues to evolve with time and as individual circumstances and needs change, and in which friends mutually influence each other.

Maintaining friendships, like any interpersonal relationship requires a balance between recognising sameness and appreciating difference as part of the ongoing cycle of interpersonal contact (Zinker & Nevis, 1994). Some participants challenged the idea of similarities as the only foundation of a friendship which was also expressed as too much sameness, as Harry comments on one of his friends:

> *I tend to be a listener rather than a talker… He's probably a bit like me in that regard, he tends to be a listener, not a talker. Get two listeners in a room and not a lot happens. Yes so that can be a bit difficult. [Trans 363-370]*

Thus an important aspect of the friendship process appears to be the management of the twin poles of sameness and difference. The management of difference is reported in greater detail in Section 6.2.3 below. There was also the view expressed that gay friendships do not stand the test of time. As George notes:

> *It's very difficult for two gay men I think to have a friendship over time. [Trans, 569-571]*

George's views were different from many of the other gay participants. He did not describe any close gay friends apart from one overseas friend with whom he corresponded by letter. He perceived a lack of trust with gay men, which may have contributed to an absence of close gay friends and consequently his opportunities for support seeking from men were reduced. This issue is discussed in detail in Section 6.3.

6.2.3 Personal differences: positive and negative

The experience of personal and interpersonal differences in gay friendships is reported in this section. The gay participants reported that differences could add to a friendship, although if differences were not experienced as complementary, interpersonal differences could result in disconnection. Overall, the gay participants recognised the

importance of a balance between personal and interpersonal similarities and differences in friendships.

6.2.3.1 Differences adding to the friendship

For some of the gay participants, their personal differences from their friends added to their friendship. Some participants reported an attraction to their friend's difference from themselves, as a key foundation of the friendship. The acceptance and validation of interpersonal differences was seen to add to the friendship as Kevin comments on his friend Alex:

> *I have to sit back and go 'my god, he actually just said that', you know. And I sort of like going shopping with him because I'll see something in the window and think that's the worst thing I'd ever seen, knowing full well that in thirty seconds he'll stand there going 'oh my god, this is the most fantastic thing'...I was brought up to really worry about what other people think, you know. Like my mother and father are always like, don't do that because people might think you're this or, in terms of manners and the way we present ourselves. And this particular person is extremely camp, you know...I've supported him as much as he's supported me. [Trans 390-405]*

There appears to be both an attraction and support for Alex's differences. Whilst there is a mutual interest in 'shopping', the differences that Kevin describes appear to both challenge and excite him. It appears the experience of difference offers a point of challenge to Kevin's way of 'being in the world'. He likes the points of difference and he supports Alex in his difference; particularly his camp and 'feminine' behaviour. Nardi (1999) describes this as structural asymmetry, a key feature of some gay men's friendships, through which friends can engage with the world in different ways. The friendship, whilst reciprocal is partly built around appreciating a different view of the world. Alex's behaviour is not only challenging to Kevin but perhaps Alex's behaviour is appreciated because it challenges dominant masculinity norms. Whilst Kevin may not act in a camp or feminine manner himself, it is proposed that he may experience a vicarious enjoyment from being associated with Alex. It allows him to enjoy camp behaviour without having to take on this behaviour himself.

In some instances, perhaps too much similarity in a friendship serves to reflect back to self an aspect of self that one is not fully comfortable with. As Harry comments, some friends are just too similar:

I: And, well you've sort of answered this partly, but what do you enjoy about your contact with each of them.

P: Partly it's the difference in some ways. I have other friends that I'm very similar to [laughs] ...I find that really annoying. These people...I enjoy the difference, the way they highlight, I suppose the differences between us as people. [Trans, 320-327]

Harry notes the pleasurable aspect of inter-personal differences in some of his close gay friendships. These differences seem to add something to the friendship by creating novelty in their contact. In contrast, some other gay participants reported the theme of difference as a problem in their gay friendships. These ideas are explored below.

6.2.3.2 Conflict and competition

Some participants reported when there was too much interpersonal difference in a friendship, it which resulted in conflict. It appeared that there were several sources of conflict, including sexual tension, trust issues, competitiveness, envy and feelings of hurt. The conflicts reported often arose because of an expectation (such as confidentiality) not being met, and the feelings of disappointment and frustration that resulted. It appears that too much difference occurs when the individual is unable to accept the friend's behaviour, or when it was perceived as influencing the friendship. Roger describes his annoyance with a close friend:

Okay the one who I was at school with, he's incredibly arrogant and annoys the fuck out of everybody who love him to death, but he's just one of those people who will just annoy you to...I don't know why. But it's such joie de vivre, but sometimes that much joie de vivre, is just a little bit too much. [Trans 719-722]

The theme of too much difference is evident in Roger's description. Roger appears jealous of his friend's '*joie de vivre'*, which he himself might like to have, and thus may be uncomfortable seeing it in his friend. This theme is developed further in Roger's description of his new friend:

For instance when this last guy came on board I didn't like him at all when I first met him. I was just sort of like oh you're a pretentious, Sydney queen, has it all easy, you know, good looking, tall, you know fabulous body, the whole package, fuck off. [Trans 815-818]

As Roger notes, his friend had many 'outer' qualities that he himself would like; good looks, tall, and an attractive body. Roger's comments also highlight the importance some gay participants give to outer appearance, particularly on first impression. There is also the suggestion of jealousy evident in Roger's dismissal of his friend. Furthermore, Roger's aggressive reaction ('fuck off') may also be interpreted as a shame based response (R. Lee, 1996). In interpersonal interactions in which an individual perceives that an aspect of self is undesirable, in this case triggered by comparison, he may respond with a self righteous attack (Erskine, 1995). Thus shame issues, or the protection of a sense of self against shame may be underlying the dynamics of conflict and competition.

In several gay friendships, competitiveness emerged as a source of for between participants. Barry comments on competitiveness:

Describing Tom, the shared house situation, I think it was fairly competitive, I think academically and all sorts of things it was fairly competitive. [Trans 792-794]

Barry describes living with Tom as a competitive experience on a number of levels. Being competitive also highlights another feature of gay friendships and perhaps all close relationships; the tendency to compare oneself with a peer (Mackewn, 1997). Perhaps by living together the opportunity to compare and evaluate increases, which may increase the possibility for competition. By contrast, personal differences might be more manageable if friends do not see each other every day as Neil comments:

I think I manage my friendships very well in that although I think at times I probably keep at somewhat of a distance. I think I keep a distance, that you know, any foibles sort of don't become overwhelming. You know because, okay I know that's there but it's not as if I see them day in, day out and that sort of thing. So…yes…no look nothing of …one mate smokes and he's a, well you know, he's a little bit of a whinger in a lot of ways and he's a bit negative. So they're his negative qualities, but you know he's got some fantastic qualities as well. So you take the good with the bad, to use a cliché. [Trans 344-352]

Neil's comments suggest that differences are accepted by managing both one's own "foibles" and those of one's friends. In this way, the friendship is a process of managing attraction and repulsion, and finding a balance between these two opposite forces. The

different qualities of Neil's friends do not appear to present major challenges to his friendship, nor are they sources of conflict.

However, many participants did report the existence of conflict in their close friendships. Most participants reported the experience of interpersonal conflict as unpleasant, particularly because it involved a disturbance to the friendship, and in some cases a cessation of the friendship. The initial reaction in response to conflict for many gay participants was to withdraw. In response to interpersonal disruption, a strong internal discomfort was reported. As Harry notes:

> *I found it really difficult. I don't like conflict at all [emphatically, laughs]. I found it really challenging just to be able to not run away, because that's what I want to do, run away and hope that it will all go away. [Trans, 742-744]*

Conflict in the gay participants' friendships seemed to provoke very strong feelings, often intolerable feelings, especially if the conflict is primarily interpersonal. If the source of difference is primarily external to the relationship, such as different tastes or personal preferences, then the difference may not result in conflict. As Nardi (1999) notes, conflict between gay friends may not be as problematic if the issue is of *"minimal importance to the relationship itself"* (p.177). As noted above (Section 6.2.3.1.), sometimes 'personal differences' were valued and seen as adding to the friendship. However, if the conflict is primarily interpersonal, and of importance to the relationship itself, then the potential for shame, hurt or anger may be high. Thus the urge to avoid these uncomfortable feelings by 'running away' is understandable.

The gay participants' conflicts were often described in interpersonal terms and a key source of conflict reported originated from different relationship needs. Matt comments on conflict with a close friend:

> *P: There was this guy that was a friend and he wanted more than friendship and I didn't want that.*
>
> *I: He wanted sex?*
>
> *P: Yes, he wanted a relationship. One day he sat me down and told me how he felt and everything and I was really scared because I didn't feel the same way. So I*

basically avoided that person. And then he started ringing me and hassling me and shouting at me over the phone. [Trans 968-971]

In this case, Matt's friend wanted something different from what he wanted. Matt's response was to avoid contact. The issue of negotiating sexual needs and levels of intimacy in the gay participants' friendships is reported in more detail in Section 6.2.4. However in some conflict situations the participants reported that it was easier to withdraw than to negotiate with a friend. As Barry comments below, he withdraws in response to conflict:

I would stop making an effort. I wouldn't go out of my way to contact or be available, I very much would (makes sound with hands) yes, I would withdraw, as simple as that. [Trans, 715-717]

There is a sense of a physical and emotional withdrawal in Barry's description. Whilst withdrawal from contact might be a response to conflict or perceived conflict, it also appears difficult to maintain contact whilst in conflict, and may require a sufficient level of internal support and a stable foundation in the relationship itself. Conflicts over personal differences presented a threat to close friendships. Alternatively, as Sam comments, the resolution of the conflict may involve a re-evaluation of the friendship.

It was resolved, not in the way that I would have preferred that it was resolved. It was resolved, I resolved it for myself by disconnecting from him in and over time, but not abruptly or suddenly, but I realised well this is someone who really emotionally can't give me what I want in a friendship, but I don't want to not have some sort of relationship with this person because there are other things that I get from the friendship. So I accepted that and pulled back from the emotional aspects and kept the connection and the friendship going on other levels. And we're still friends but he wouldn't be someone I would turn to in a crisis. [Trans 1052-1060]

Sam's comments suggest there were several desirable qualities in the friendship despite the absence of emotional support. Sam resolved the issue by re-defining the friendship. The capacity of two close friends to discuss their differences appeared to be a key determinant in gay participants' ability to satisfactorily resolve conflicts. This is not an easy task, as the first impulse when faced with a conflict may be to withdraw. It may be difficult to remain in contact with a friend whilst experiencing strong emotions. The

initial withdrawal may facilitate a 'cooling off' period for both parties, which, in time may support a greater capacity to resolve the conflict later as Harry comments:

> *Not a lot was said about it, at least initially, but it was certainly, yes a cooling, a withdrawal I suppose from both of us in some ways, from the relationship. Until we, you know sat down and talked about it. [Trans, 768-770]*

It appears that Harry and his friend were able to talk about their differences later on, and that this may have brought them back together. This view is consistent with other findings in which the successful resolution of conflict can lead to increased trust and intimacy (e.g. Cahn, 1990; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2005; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). By contrast, a result of not discussing a conflict may be a distancing in the friendship as Sam comments,

> *Oh, it was uncomfortable because we were so close and then I was starting to realise that that closeness was disappearing, at least within me anyway. That became uncomfortable because there was period there where we were unable to really talk about how the stuff that was going on at the time was impacting him, me and our friendship too. [Trans, 1093-1097]*

There is a realisation that a possible result of not discussing a conflict is an interpersonal rupture, in which the friendship itself is jeopardised. Thus, the interpersonal dimension of gay friendships is evident in these descriptions.

6.2.4 Negotiating boundaries-managing contact

The experience of managing friendships was also one of managing boundaries. For some of the gay participants, issues of trust, sexual tension and fidelity were primary issues in their close friendships with gay men. Some of the gay participants reported that these issues were manageable while others reported a lack of trust and disappointment in their friendships with gay men. These findings are reported and discussed in this below.

6.2.4.1 Sexual attraction

As noted previously the theme of sexual attraction was present in many of the gay participants' close friendships. Sometimes the sexual attraction was described as a sexual tension as Roger notes:

I think it's natural for there to be sexual tensions between gay men, I mean that's par for the course, really. [Trans 788-789]

For some of the participants, these tensions were explicit and were either a source of ongoing tension or had been resolved. In either case, there was a sense that sexual attraction between gay men was natural, as Roger notes above. For some participants sexual attraction or sexual intimacy was accepted as a part of the process of forming and maintaining friendships with gay men. This finding supports other findings in same-sex friendships (e.g. Nardi, 1999; Weston, 1991). Overall, the gay participants appeared quite sophisticated in managing sexual boundaries in their relationships. I asked Dennis if he had sex with his best friend:

Yes, when we first met and it was just a one-off. [Trans 495]

It appears the friendship developed successfully after an initial sexual encounter with his friend. In this instance the sex did not appear to impede the formation of a close friendship. For a few gay participants, sexual tensions were a significant barrier to forming a trusting and close friendship as George describes:

Oh, it's impossible to have a friendship with gay males almost…sooner or later sex gets involved. [Trans 541-543]

There was a sense from some of the participants that sexual needs and friendship needs were co-existing and competing needs. It appeared that an individual's sexual needs could disrupt a friendship if not satisfactorily resolved. Matt describes his difficulty with drawing a boundary between competing needs:

Yes, I think I don't know where to draw the line sometimes between friendships and…, because if I am attracted to somebody, it has happened in the past where I have had sex with them and then regretted it. [Trans 804-806]

In this case, acting on the sexual feelings is regretted, but Matt's difficulty in "drawing the line" may point to another issue in gay men's friendships; the desire to be liked and the fear of rejection. Matt described his dilemma below:

Maybe if I had set the agendas at the beginning and said that "I just want you as a friend, I don't want something to happen", maybe that may have made things

differently. But then they might have been a lot colder towards me anyway, because well "we're not going to get anything from him" and I don't know, I'm not sure really. Maybe I should have been more upfront I suppose, I don't know. [Trans, 881-886]

Notwithstanding Matt's own sexual needs, his comments above suggest an awareness of his sexual attractiveness to his friend. I wonder about Matt's awareness of his other attractive qualities. There may be a belief system operating; 'they only love me for my body', which is not unreasonable given the findings in the previous chapter about gay men's objectification of the male body. Matt's comments may be interpreted as a fear of rejection, which may explain why he has not been more direct in raising the issue with his friends.

By contrast, when issues of sexual attraction are discussed, there is potential to resolve the issue. However, the participants reported that discussing sexual attraction with close friends was often challenging, but not impossible. Furthermore, issues of sexual tension may not be immediately obvious to both parties as Sam comments:

For me it has come up with quite a few friends and it is still unresolved with quite a few friends, the sexual tension between myself and them is a conscious thing, at least on my behalf. With Peter and Paul, with Peter, for me, there has never been any sexual tension between us; I am not sure what goes on for him. I know there was sexual tension between Paul and I, and I think that has now been resolved, it has been resolved for me. But there was a time last year when there was sexual tension and I told him, I actually told him and he was taken by surprise not realising that was part of what was going on for me. But at the time that I told him the sexual tension for me wasn't there anymore. Yes, so I felt comfortable at that time to share that with him and there is no sexual tension there now. [Trans 1134-1144]

Sam chose to tell Paul about his sexual attraction at a time when the tension had diminished, and is an example of managing interpersonal boundaries. A definition of a boundary is that of a dynamic process which separates and joins the individual with the environment and other individuals in that environment (Yontef, 1993). Thus, discussing issues of sexual attraction and sexual tension may be dependent on an individuals' ability to manage interpersonal boundaries. The issue of discussing sexual tension in close friendships appears quite challenging, and may be related to the amount of perceived support available internally and in the friendship. There is great opportunity for misunderstanding, if friends are unable to dialogue about boundaries. Overall, the

gay participants expressed a familiarity with thinking and talking about sexual boundary issues in close friendships, even though it was not always comfortable.

6.2.4.2 Trust issues

Many of the issues of trust in gay participants' friendships seemed to be related to issues of interpersonal boundaries and potential boundary violations. There were several types of boundary violations described; the most serious involved a perceived betrayal of trust. As Lucas notes below the issue of trust or lack of trust is a key factor in his lack of gay male friends:

> *Actually, I feel a bit unusual as a gay man because I don't have many gay male friends, so that's what you tapped into when you asked that question, I don't trust gay men very well, easily [laughs]. [Trans, 690-692]*

Sometimes the trust issue was related to confidentiality. Dennis describes the loss of trust in his friendship, because of his friend's lack of confidentiality:

> *And mainly because I know he would gossip… And so there are things that I just won't tell him or won't talk to him about. [Trans 569-580]*

The lack of trust in Dennis' friendship may be a serious impediment to closeness. Whilst a trusted friendship was highly valued and desired, building up trust in a friend can take time. The importance of building up trust in gay friendships and the impact of other variables such as proximity have been highlighted in other studies (e.g. Schneider & Witherspoon, 2000).

George comments (below) on the process of building up trust through shared experiences and knowing each other. George describes how he misses his best friend, a gay man who, lives in Greece. They communicate by letter, but have not seen each other for several years.

> *It is hard. Yes it is actually because you spend so much time doing things and then you know that you can trust somebody, you know that that person can trust you. And then to have to start again meeting people is very difficult. Because if you're not going to meet them at work, you go out, say you met somebody at a bar or club or something or sport, unless you have a common interest which would be reinforcing the friendship or you are doing the same things. I have got great*

friends now through the sports club but that's starting… I really don't consider a friend a friend until four, five, six years. [Trans, 429-437]

George is describing the process of making new friends here in Australia and the importance of building up trust, which may take several years. As noted previously George does not trust many gay men, and the process of making a new friendship takes time for him. His responses further highlight the importance of trust in close friendships and the hard work required to achieve a high level of trust.

6.2.5 Gay-straight friendships.

Several of the gay participants reported their closest friendships were with heterosexual men, with whom they had been friends for many years. These friendships were described as well bounded, without the same sexual tensions experienced in same-sex friendships. That is not to say that there were not sexual tensions in gay-straight friendships, but overall these tensions were reported less often and appeared easier to resolve. The points of connection with the straight men were not focussed on gay masculinity or identity. These connections were built on other long-term factors; generally divided into two categories; a common interest (e.g. politics, work or football) or a deep emotional connection that felt safe, and sometimes a combination of these two factors.

6.2.5.1 Sexual boundaries

The issue of sexual attraction appeared less problematic in the gay-straight friendships described by the participants. As Lucas comments, he feels the (sexual) boundaries are clear with straight men:

There are no risks, it's not going to get complicated by a sexual theme. They're heterosexual men, they don't want me, I don't want them; they're married and it can never be crossed over and I like that. I like the boundaries and I like the clarity of the boundary, it helps with my trust for them. Whereas with the gay men [exhales] perhaps it's more fun if you're single, but it's been a long time now since I've been single. [Trans, 732-737]

Clear boundaries appear to contribute to a trusting relationship. Lucas is in a long term same sex relationship, thus he may be referring to trust for all four parties concerned. He feels safer, his partner may feel safer, and his straight friend may feel safe, as may his friend's wife. However, this does not discount the possibility for sexual tension to

exist, as some level of sexual attraction has been theorised to exist in all close relationships (e.g. Rubin, 1985).

In the gay-straight friendships reported by the participants, sexuality was not seen as the primary point of connection, but it was an issue that raised tension for some of the gay participants. Matt describes the tension with a straight friend:

> *We used to do a lot of physical exercise and he was good at motivating me to do that. But it was hard for me to tell him that I was gay, because we used to shower together and I just was worried about how he would react. And in the end he was fine about it, I was paranoid. [Trans, 231-245]*

Part of Matt's concern may have been managing his own feelings as well as a concern about his friend's reaction. It appears that Matt's primary issue was a desire to keep the friendship as he describes fear of losing the friendship:

> *I: So what was the hardest thing about telling him that you were gay do you think?*
>
> *P: I was just worried more about his reaction. I thought I'm going to lose someone that I quite like and that it would basically be the end of the friendship. We might still be friends but it would be different and not as close. That was my paranoia; he was all right in the end. [Trans, 361-374]*

The sexuality issue emerged as a major concern for Matt, but it was not the central point of connection point in the friendship. By not discussing the sexuality issue, it may have remained figural, possibly creating a rupture in the friendship. Once the issue was satisfactorily resolved, it receded to the background, enabling their shared interests to become foreground.

6.2.5.2 Other points of connection

As the gay participants' close friendships with straight men were not based on a common sexual identity, they were characterised by other points of connection. These often included a shared history combining both a liking of personal attributes and of shared interests. Whilst the gay identity issues were not necessarily hidden, they were also not the focus of the relationship as noted by other research (e.g. Price, 1999). Neil describes his points of connection with his straight friend.

P: Yes the connection, yes that's right. Yes I would be someone that, you know, is a lifelong friend to him and he doesn't want that to dissipate and nor obviously do

I. And there are areas that we connect in terms of politics…sorry areas that we connect and others that we don't, like politics is probably one where we wouldn't necessarily connect. But we just, I think, we both know the value of that long term friendship.

I: What do you particularly enjoy about that?

P: Oh, he's funny. We have a good sense of humour and I love his kids, so that's added a new dimension to the friendship. Oh and he's sharp, he's intellectually sharp. So we can have a good discussion as well on different things. And he is fairly open, you know with his life, as with me. So I just get a sense of what's going on in his life and yes, he's very open with me actually, so that's valuable, yes. [Trans, 261-277]

Neil notes that they both valued the long term nature of the friendship and they connect through humour and shared lives. Furthermore, their friendship has withstood changes that have occurred over time such as the arrival of his friend's children.

Neil notes that there are clear differences between the two men's lives, he comments below on the importance of similar values with his other straight friends:

…that similar value set. That we've all been, you know…if I think about them…all Micks, you know all Catholics, because the three of them being from school and the guy from uni, well he's a Mick as well. So I think we have similar sensibilities around that as well and when I…three of them know each other very well…one of them is not…oh well it's all rather overlapping here. But yes, it's just…there's a sameness. I don't know that I hugely distinguish between how I engage with them and they with me, because of the sexuality thing. [Trans, 320-327]

Neil describes his sexual identity as a secondary issue in his close friendships with straight men. The points of connection are not directly gay related. It appears that that there are strong points of 'sameness' and a similar 'sensibility' that anchors the friendship (e.g. Catholicism). The connections with his straight friends extend over twenty years and provide a shared history. Having a history with a friend appeared to provide a level of comfort and safety as Will comments:

Well I really like them as people, so…I like being with them. I like doing things with them and talking with them. I like having a history. And feeling that yes I can

sort of say most things or do most things or whatever, just be yourself. [Trans, 244-246]

It appears that the shared history contributes toward a sense of safety and predictability. The safety in the friendship enables Will to be himself, despite the difference between his and his friend's sexual identity. These friendships may provide an additional level of acceptance for some gay participants. As stated previously, gay masculinity is a minority and subordinated masculinity. To feel accepted by a member of the dominant heterosexual masculinity, may serve as a source of acceptance and belonging to the 'other world'. Whilst interesting, this point was not explored further because gay-straight friendships were not the central focus of the current study.

For some gay participants their connection to their straight friends was through a similar cultural connection. Lucas describes his close friend Said:

He's a wog[8] boy, he is. So there's that cultural understanding, you could scream, like I can remember, I won't get into the specific details or wait until you ask about it, there were several episodes where you just do the Greek thing and you don't get a PD[9] label [laughs], because it's part of your culture, it's how you communicate, and I love that about him [laughs] [Trans, 492-496]

Lucas is open in describing his love for his friend Said and their common understanding and communication as Greek 'wog boys'. Lucas clearly enjoys the connection he has with Said and the ability to express himself and to be understood. As noted above the connection point is this friendship is not about primarily about sexual identity, but about a similar culture.

6.2.6 Summary of key findings: Gay men's' friendships

The gay participants' close friendships were constructed in ways that were similar to their masculinity constructions; i.e. social and emotional closeness characterised by intimacy and interpersonal sharing. Thus there appears to be support for the notion that friendships are important and useful relationships through which masculinities are

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[8] Wog, Australian colloquial expression for a Greek or Mediterranean person. May be a used as a derogatory expression or a familiar expression.

[9] Lucas is referring to the psychological term, personality disorder (P.D.), in a humorous way to describe dramatic and expressive behaviour.

constructed. The gay participants described experiences of emotional and social support as central to their friendships with other gay men, similar to other research findings (e.g. Nardi, 1999).

The feelings of belonging and the safety in close friendships were important to the gay participants as this was not their experience in the world of straight masculinities. This belonging was conveyed through being seen and accepted, and served to reduce the potential for shame. Thus there was support for the notion that shame may be theorised as a field variable, in which the presence of shame may indicate lack of support from an individual's phenomenological field. The connection to a close gay friend was experienced as both affirming and confirming, and highlighted the ongoing need for close friends.

Because gay men need to construct a gay identity, there may be more need for gay friends through which to develop a sense of self. The connection to a close gay friend was experienced as both affirming and confirming, and highlighted the ongoing need for close friends. Whilst it is theorised that these close gay friendships might be especially important during formative stages in the development of a gay identity (e.g. Cass, 1979, D'Augelli, 2002), they also appear important at other life stages, such as the current mid-life stage. Close friends are an important aspect of the person-environment field, and serve to increase awareness of self through intersubjective processes.

The gay participants' friendships were constructed around interpersonal attraction and sharing. Therefore, it was not surprising that conflict that was mostly described in interpersonal terms and if not resolved could lead to interpersonal rupture. Implicit in the conflict in gay men's friendships was the potential for shame based patterns, such as jealousy and competitiveness. Gay friendships were not without their challenges, particularly the management of interpersonal boundaries involving sexual attraction. However, it appeared that most gay participants were able to negotiate their way around these boundaries. Overall, issues of intimacy and closeness in the gay participants' friendships, whilst challenging at times, were manageable. This may be because gay masculinities do not appear to be constructed around avoidance of vulnerability and male-male intimacy.

In an interesting finding, a few gay participants reported their closest friends were straight men. These gay-straight friendships appeared to be organised around other, non-gay points of connection, and the lack of overt sexual tension was a key attraction. These participants expressed disappointment that they did not trust gay men. These gay-straight friendships were based on similar interests and activities and a shared history, but also allowed for safe emotional closeness and intimacy.

These findings suggest that the gay participants have formed friendships characterised by alternative, non-traditional masculinities. In the next section (6.3), the implications of these findings are explored in the gay participants' experience of seeking and receiving emotional and social support in close male friendships.

Section 6.3 Support in gay men's friendships: results and discussion

In this chapter, the gay participants' experiences of emotional and social support are reported. Building on the previous chapter which examined the gay participants' friendships in a general sense, the focus in this chapter is on particular support experiences, during times of personal crisis or difficulty. An essence statement is provided to explicate the essentials features of the gay participants' experiences of needing, seeking, receiving and giving support in their friendships with other gay men.

6.3.1 Essence Statement

The essence statement is divided into three sections; receiving support, seeking support and giving support.

Receiving support: being fully met and understood

The gay participants' friendships were constructed around giving and receiving social and emotional support. The gay participants described affirming experiences of receiving social and emotional support in their close friendships during times of personal crises. These interactions, in which gay masculinities were constructed, were characterised by vulnerability, support and intimacy. The participants described crises in relational terms; feeling alone and unacceptable to oneself and to others. Thus, key features of emotional and social support were experiences of acceptance and intimacy with close friends. Acceptance was conveyed by friends both verbally and non-verbally and involved four related concepts.

The first concept was the feeling of being met, acknowledged, and validated. Implicit in this feeling was a strong sense of connection to a close friend. The experience of 'good' contact with close friends was associated with an existential dimension of support, especially in validating the participants' sense of self. These moments were described by the participants as experiences of being deeply seen and accepted by a close friend. Receiving emotional and social support through the presence of a close friend appeared to mediate against the potential for shame. Shame was described by the participants as the fear of rejection or the experience of rejection, accompanied by feelings of personal

inadequacy. Shame was sometimes described as the experience that one's self or masculinity was not acceptable, to others and to self. Receiving social and emotional support, by contrast, was described as the experience of being accepted as one is.

The second aspect of acceptance was the experience of being understood by a close friend, which required an empathic response. Empathy was defined by the gay participants as a friend's willingness and desire to 'try to know' the participants' experience. Furthermore, empathy involved a friend acknowledging and sharing his personal response to the participant's particular struggle or issue.

The third concept which demonstrated acceptance was the benefit of a friend's unique personal perspective, which was often conveyed through advice. Receiving advice was an important aspect of emotional support, which demonstrated acceptance and care. Several participants emphasised that their friend's perspective was especially supportive in a crisis. Sometimes advice or the friend's perspective provided a helpful counterpoint or reference point to their own experience, because it reduced the participants' sense of aloneness.

The fourth aspect of acceptance was an existential experience of belonging, conveyed through social support, especially to alleviate loneliness. Loneliness was described as the unpleasant experience of isolation and anxiety about one's personal difference from others. The experience of 'belonging' which occurred through a close friendship connection was deeply supportive through words, actions and simply being with a friend.

<u>Seeking support: the challenge of managing vulnerability</u>
The gay participants made a distinction between seeking and receiving support. The gay participants identified a fear of personal vulnerability and shame in seeking support, which appeared related to anxiety about their masculinity, although it did not prevent them from seeking support entirely. It appeared that this anxiety influenced their personal decision making process about seeking support. If support was offered, it was easier to accept, although the participants noted that vulnerability was still present. The issue of asking for or requesting support appeared to raise anxiety about rejection. Furthermore, asking for help appeared to challenge an individual's sense of

independence and masculinity. This may have been because asking for help when already in a vulnerable state may sensitise the help seeker to avoid the potential for further vulnerability. Choosing which friends to seek support from entailed an evaluation of intrapersonal needs and interpersonal factors. This process involved an evaluation of the best person to meet those needs. The participants were candid about the personal qualities and limitations of their close friends. The gay participants appeared to draw on past personal experiences of seeking support and an evaluation of their friend's quality of offering support in making choices. In some instances, the individual acted on this awareness and sought out a close friend (in a variety of ways). In some instances, the participant did nothing and in some cases actively avoided contact with friends. The avoidance of contact was described as a self supportive strategy, designed to protect the participants from vulnerability. However, some gay participants were able to ask for support without too much difficulty which may have been because the experience of seeking support was part of the friend's regular interaction.

The issue of friends being 'too close' emerged as a barrier to seeking support from close some gay friends. Several of the gay participants reported they would not share personal information with their gay friends because of fear of being judged which appeared stronger where there was a fear that friends would talk amongst each other. If a close friend was less connected to the participant's social network then the fear of judgement was less and thus some gay participants reported a practice of seeking out emotional support from those close friends who were less connected to the participant's social networks. The gay participants appeared quite sophisticated in their process of seeking different supports from different friends.

Giving Support: a question of balancing

Giving support to close friends revealed the relational nature of the emotional and social support process. Many of the gay participants had built up trusted gay friendship networks over time that were sources of mutual support. The gay participants reported that they also gained personally from supporting others, suggesting a relational construction of masculinity in these interactions. Furthermore, a necessary condition of providing good emotional support entailed an emotional presence and openness to the friend in need through empathising with their friend's experience. A high value was

placed on reciprocation of support, which involved a process of finding a balance between giving to a friend whilst also receiving support in return.

These findings are reported in three sections. In section 6.3.2, the experience of receiving emotional support is reported. Second, in section 6.3.3, the decision making process in seeking support and the role of shame is reported and finally in section 6.3.4, the experience of giving support in friendships and the importance of balance is discussed.

6.3.2 Receiving support: being fully met and understood

The gay participants defined receiving emotional and social support as the experience of being accepted by their close friends. The feeling of being accepted by a close friend was a personal experience that was conveyed both verbally and non-verbally (through physical touch or presence). Thus, constructions of gay masculinity incorporating physical and emotional intimacy were evident. In this section of the thesis, four overlapping concepts which define social and emotional support are discussed; 1) acknowledgement and validation, 2) empathy and understanding, 3) advice and caring, and 4) social support and belonging.

6.3.2.1 Acknowledgment and validation

The gay participants reported that acknowledgement and validation of their personal experience and feelings by a close friend were fundamental aspects of emotional support. In some instances, simply having one's experience acknowledged without judgment was supportive in itself. Dennis defines emotional support:

> *Its…partly it's about what you can talk about, being able to talk about your feelings and having that being listened to and having that acknowledged and not having it challenged or questioned. Because if that's what you're feeling it's what you're feeling and it's real for you. And not having to justify why you feel that way…it's kind of like the overt stuff…there's sort of another level too, of being accepted. [Trans, 872-879]*

The experience of having one's feelings acknowledged, regardless of their content contributed greatly to a feeling of acceptance. Acknowledgment of feelings conveys a deeper acknowledgement of a person's existence (Hycner, 1995). The gay participants' desire for acknowledgement underscores the universal desire of all persons to be

acknowledged and accepted by others; and the anxiety that we will not be accepted (Yalom, 1998). It was perhaps through their interactions with significant others that the participants realised their anxieties were similar to others. These moments of recognition appeared to assist the participants to feel supported, accepted, and less alone. The opposite of acceptance for the gay participants was rejection or fear of rejection and these feelings are described in section 6.3.3.

6.3.2.2 Support through empathy and understanding

In addition to the experience of being acknowledged, receiving emotional support was also defined as being understood. The experience of being understood required a degree of empathy on behalf of the close friend. Empathy was defined by the participants as an attempt to imagine what the world must be like 'in their shoes', and was experienced as intimate. It was the friend's active attempt to understand and desire to know the others' experience that was defined as supportive. Sam describes empathy and emotional support:

> *I know when I am being emotionally supported when I can put out to a friend what is going for me and know that that person is trying to understand my experience. They're trying to respond back to my experience in a way that is helpful to me, they're reflecting something back about particular feelings, they're kind of giving me suggestions about being too directive or prescriptive, they're usually validating or acknowledging my experience, they're usually not judging me and there is a sense of being kind of connected with them and held by them too, psychologically speaking. [Trans, 785-792]*

Sam's comments highlight the active and intimate nature of acceptance and emotional support. The experience of being understood was not a passive experience. Sam's comments suggest that empathy is as much an attempt to understand as understanding itself, conveyed through feedback. A close friend may or may not have had the same personal experience as their friends, nevertheless, it was the attempt to understand from their perspective and life experience that appeared important. Emotional support may be experienced through a close and intimate connection, and being 'held' by a friend. Thus the gay participants provided examples of supportive friendship interactions in which intimacy and masculinity were not mutually exclusive.

Emotional support was described as the experience of being received and fully accepted (not rejected or judged) as one is and who one is. Some participants noted the difference

between a close connection that involved empathy and understanding and a shallower level of contact, in which they did not feel seen or acknowledged, or in some cases felt judged or criticised. Barry notes the importance of understanding as part of emotional support:

> *Emotional support is very much an understanding of where you're coming from and not making a judgement about it, ...some guys will give you "she'll be right" attitude, which is very much "okay" but they're really insensitive, they haven't heard a word about what you're saying, they're not interested, they don't want to get involved. [Trans, 443-450]*

Emotional support requires a degree of intimacy that is lacking in this description. Barry notes that the '*She'll be right*' attitude is distancing and lacks intimacy. Being supported involved being seen and being 'met' by the other. This experience could also be described as the experience of being acknowledged. Some participants noted that the experience of being accepted without being seen was not as satisfactory, and even dismissive. To be emotionally supported required the pre-condition of being seen and met, which suggests the importance of intimacy in this process (Fehr, 2004). As noted by Barry above, the gay participants expressed a desire for intimacy in close friendship interactions, and were sensitive to distancing from their friends. These views suggest the possibility for male-male intimacy in gay men's constructions of friendships and masculinity.

The experience of being seen was deeply intimate especially if occurring during a time of personal crisis. During these times of crisis, the participants reported that their vulnerability was exposed, and sometimes this was embarrassing, as Neil comments:

> *... it was a particular low, you know that he caught me at. My feeling was a little bit of embarrassment but also it was a nice thing to be able to sort of say oh you know I don't know whether I'm doing the right thing in terms of what I'm doing and just that I wasn't feeling good about where I was in that space. You know it was okay to say that and you know I think that can be an enriching experience in a way to a friendship....you don't want people to worry about you, or you don't want people to feel you're struggling either. Which I know, intellectually, that's all stupid, but it is sort of how I feel. [Trans, 531-541]*

Neil was aware of his embarrassment at being 'caught' in a low mood; however, he also notes the connection that he had with his friend brought them closer. There appears to

be a struggle between the feeling of embarrassment about being vulnerable and a relief in being able to reach out and get support. The experiences of shame and embarrassment are discussed further in Section 6.3.3.2.

The knowledge that another person had understood the participant's experience, contributed greatly to the experience of emotional support. Conveying understanding did not necessarily mean the other person had exactly the same experience, but perhaps did require that the other person was able to 'meet' the participant in that place. Place refers to a temporal emotional moment, not a physical place per se. These experiences of empathy are similar to the existential I-Thou moments described by Buber (1965, 1970) in which inclusion is experienced in a 'deep' meeting between two people. Demonstrating understanding required the friend to know something of the participants' feelings in themselves, even if the experience was different. Thus, the gay participants' experience of empathic contact with a friend was supportive itself.

Emotional support was also conveyed through a practical action, in which empathy and understanding were conveyed. Sometimes understanding and concern was demonstrated by an assertive action as Neil mentions below:

> *And just even you know the things like they might ring and check in with you and that sort of presence aspect. That they're there for you as well… I just put that under emotional support. [Trans, 647-651]*

Neil highlights the importance of being thought about by a close friend, as demonstrated by his friend's motivation to telephone him. In describing the presence of his friend, Neil appears to be alluding to his emotional presence, and this was experienced as supportive.

Emotional support was conveyed both verbally and non-verbally. Physical touch was an important non-verbal part of emotional support for several gay participants and conveyed acceptance. Neil describes emotional support:

> *Well I think we do it with kisses in some quarters, and handshakes in others, and that sort of thing. And I think it's sort of a similar thing, but there's nothing as powerful as a hug is there? [Trans, 1036-1038]*

This definition includes non-sexual intimate physical contact that was experienced as supportive. These moments of contact conveyed caring, love and acceptance without words. Several of the gay participants described physical intimacy as a form of support, and it appeared that this type of intimacy was not threatening to their sense of masculinity.

6.3.2.3 Advice and caring

Emotional support was also described by the participants as the experience of receiving advice and care from their close friends. The subject of giving and receiving advice raised many issues for the gay participants. It appeared that receiving advice could be experienced as emotionally supportive, but only if the advice was given in a way that was consistent with understanding, empathy and acknowledgement. Advice could also be given in a way that was experienced as dismissive and directive and this type of advice was not conducive of acceptance, as the participants' views and agency were not taken into consideration. Furthermore, the giving of advice could potentially convey the message that one was not accepted for who he is. This type of advice, especially when not requested, appeared to invoke shame in the participants. However, advice that was requested and received from a respected and trusted friend that was also affirming, was regarded as an important part of emotional support. Advice or feedback that could also offer a different perspective was considered an important part of emotional support. Sam comments on asking on advice:

> *By the end of it all, after I have done the purging stuff then I would ask him 'any thoughts about the matter? Any suggestions about what I might think about doing about this matter? Am I being reasonable under the circumstances?' ...I suppose an expectation that I have is my friends, both Peter and Paul, giving me some sort of reality check too. Because when I get caught up in all that stuff I kind of lose my own perspective. So it's about getting me to maybe see it more clearly or differently or putting a different frame around it sometimes just getting me to snap out of it because I need that from time to time. [Trans, 419-428]*

It appeared that Sam accepted his friends' advice only after the experience of being heard, and if the advice was personally requested. This type of advice was described as seeking a view from a friend's perspective, which could include a validation of his view or a challenge to his view. Gaining an external perspective from a trusted friend appeared to be supportive.

It was acknowledged that in times of crisis or personal difficulty, one's sense of perspective may be diminished, as Neil comments below

Well okay, if you are a bit blue you can lose that perspective, you know perspective is probably the other word to it as well. [Trans, 586-587]

In seeking the perspective of a close and trusted friend, there was an acknowledgement of one's personal limitations and the recognition of the need for a friend. There was an implicit acknowledgment of the limitations of self support, especially during difficult circumstances.

The process of being acknowledged by a close friend also involved a degree of separateness from the friend as Neil notes in defining emotional support:

That clarity, almost detachedness in a sense. Acknowledgment of what you're feeling. [Trans, 600-601]

Neil described his friend's clarity whilst also caring for him suggesting that it may come from an interpersonal detachedness, or difference. It appears that emotional support requires a balance between joining (and empathising) with a friend as well as maintaining separateness. This description is similar to the Gestalt notion of interpersonal contact, which requires an awareness of individual difference (Mackewn, 1997). Contact occurs at the interpersonal boundary where two people meet, and is this sense refers to a dynamic boundary rather than a fixed entity (Perls et al, 1951). Thus, an important aspect of support involves an intersubjective experience in which a friend can provide a reflection from their perspective which is supportive in itself.

Sometimes a friend's perspective was offered spontaneously, and demonstrated caring through taking up a supportive stance. This type of emotional support was often quite idiosyncratic. In the example below, Kevin reports feeling bereft following a relationship break-up. Kevin notes his friend's response was quite humorous but supportive:

P: Yes but I also think it's, or reckon it's like, you know if someone wants to give you advice that's coming from their background. It's like everyone can offer something different and one of my best mates said something like 'hey don't worry he wasn't very fashionable anyway' and I mean…it's pretty funny but…

I: Was it supportive to hear that?

P: Well I figure that that's his way of supporting me. Yes, it's not like, you know sit down and let's discuss this and I will offer you help. He's quite flippant but hey that's the way he is. [Trans, 645-656]

Kevin recognised that his friend cared for him. This example highlights the idiosyncratic nature of emotional support. The way in which a message is both conveyed and received determined whether it was experienced as supportive. It was the subjective evaluation of a friend's actions and words that was important. Thus, it is important to examine individuals' perceptions of friendship interactions to determine if they are supportive.

The desire to be accepted and acknowledged has particular meaning for the gay participants as noted in the previous sections 6.1 and 6.2, due to their marginalised masculinity. The experience of belonging to a marginalised group highlights the need of the gay participants find acceptance for their gay masculinity. This feeling may be especially strong during early stages of the coming out process, in which a gay person's difference from the mainstream is felt most acutely (Cass, 1979). The need for support during the coming out process may centre on finding a respected and trusted friend to assist in the development of a gay identity as Matt comments:

Yes, I think yes right because at that time I was very new to being gay and I was quite late in coming to terms with being gay and I didn't really know that many gay people. The people who stand out aren't necessarily the people you particularly admire or respect and I thought, 'well this guy is masculine and he's gay so there must be other men out there aren't like very effeminate basically'. Because I was having trouble coming to term with my sexuality. [Trans, 569-574]

Matt notes the lack of close gay friends and thus a limited gay support network. His experience of being aware for his sexuality, but withholding disclosure, until some safety is established is reflected in other research (e.g. D'Augelli, 2006). In coming to terms with his emerging sense of gay identity, Matt expresses a need to find other gay men with whom he could identify, men who were masculine and gay, as potential role

models. His comments suggest his masculinity crisis was brought about largely through realizing his difference from heterosexual masculinity, and the potential shame and stigma that may have been invoked. The experience of difference further highlights the high probability of experiencing minority stress (e.g. Meyer, 1995). As an antidote to stress and shame, Matt highlights the importance of receiving support from a gay friend whom he accepted and trusted:

> *He was supportive in that he understood my situation and he was reassuring. He sort of looked at my situation and he said that, 'well this has happened, you will get over it, you can do this, this is your situation, you have got this to offer someone', he just gave very good advice and I could identify with what he was saying. He seemed to understand me and my situation. [Trans, 521-525]*

Matt highlights the importance of understanding and reassurance in describing emotional support. He appears to be reassured by receiving explicit encouragement and advice. In addition to reassurance, it appears that a high degree of empathy is conveyed in which Matt believes that his friend could identify and understand his situation as another gay man. Thus, a key aspect of friendship support involves the experience of having one's masculinity understood and accepted.

6.3.2.4 Social support and belonging

Social support and a feeling of belonging were especially important to the gay participants when experiencing loneliness and isolation. For some participants the experience of isolation was especially strong during early stages of the coming out process, as Matt notes below:

> *Oh just isolation, lack of support, being let down, quite lonely and a bit scared of what the future held because I had quite a safe life, I'd been married. [Trans, 444-445]*

Loneliness is a subjective experience that has been explored from a number of theoretical perspectives, in which existential, intrapersonal or interpersonal dimensions are highlighted (e.g. Perlman & Peplau, 1982; Moustakas, 1961). In Matt's description of loneliness above, he highlights interpersonal or social isolation from similar others (i.e. gay men), as a key determinant of his loneliness. Thus, the provision of a supportive social network may be especially important in providing emotional and social support, and reducing loneliness (e.g. Weiss, 1973). As noted above, emotional

support was defined by the gay participants as the experience of feeling accepted, through acknowledgment, validation, empathy and understanding. To add to this definition, social support was defined by the gay participants as the experience of belonging, which was conveyed in a close friendship. Thus belonging was defined as a phenomenological experience of inclusion, which was related to interpersonal acceptance as Dennis comments:

...and having somewhere where I felt I belonged, and there was somebody looking out for me. [Trans, 841 843]

The experience of belonging appears to reduce the sense of isolation, especially during times of loneliness. Belonging and the related concept of acceptance was experienced even if the participant was not in direct contact with a friend. Kevin describes the importance of belonging to a network of friends:

...and I realised that I very rarely felt lonely and very rarely felt alone because I know I have people around me. Even if we're not talking that I have a network of people there who are always there. [Trans, 721-723]

The idea that friends are '*always there*' appeared to provide a form of social support for Kevin. There appeared to be a reassuring dimension in the knowledge that friends are available to be called upon for support. Thus the experience of belonging may be a reminder that friends exist and care for him, and that they will be available for support if called upon in the future. The importance of confidant support from gay friends has been highlighted in other studies (e.g. Vincke & van Heeringen, 2002), and reinforces the importance of peers in the support process in promoting well being.

When calling upon friends for support there was an acknowledgment of the overlap between social support and emotional support. Some gay participants described social support as engaging in an activity or connection that took their mind off an emotionally difficult experience. Social support was sometimes defined as a respite from difficult feelings, as Will comments:

Yes social support. You know the social support has an element of emotional support in that you know, say my mind was taken off my grief or something for a period of time. That would be giving me a respite from it. [Trans, 572-574]

It may be supportive not to discuss painful feelings at times, particularly if the feelings are intense and involve an unacceptable level of exposure. An individual may need to develop some self support first before sharing intense feelings with a friend, and thus regulate their level of vulnerability. As noted by other theorists, men may avoid help seeking if it is perceived to involve a loss of control (e.g. Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Thus, seeking support in ways in which an individual maintains some control over self-disclosure may be important. By spending time with a friend who was going through a difficult time, there was an acknowledgment of the feelings, but the focus was not on personal disclosure. The process of identifying feelings and the decision process about disclosing those feelings is discussed in the next section 6.3.3. However, it was evident from the gay participants' descriptions that failure to discuss feelings did not preclude other forms of support. George describes the support he received:

> .. it's good to be able to come home, maybe not even talk about it but just have someone sitting next to you, even fishing, knowing that person is next to you. [Trans, 1357-1361]

It appeared supportive for George to be with a friend, especially if there was a strong dimension of acceptance and belonging. The overlap between social support and emotional support is evident in the concept of belonging, as Dennis comments:

> It's things like, you know…going around to a friends place for dinner and sitting there and watching TV together and having a couple of drinks. And like that can be really emotionally supportive. [Trans, 895-897]

There is a reduction in social isolation in being with a friend, sharing a meal or an evening together. As Dennis describes above it can be emotionally supportive to know that someone wants to and enjoys spending time with you.

6.3.3 Seeking support: managing vulnerability

In the preceding section 6.3.2, the gay participants described acceptance as the central feature of receiving social and emotional support. The gay participants noted that receiving support was much easier if it was initiated by a close friend. However, acceptance was often the end result of a decision making process about when, how and with whom to seek support. The antithesis of acceptance was non-acceptance, and in

each support seeking activity the potential for rejection or perceived rejection was present. Rejection related to related to a sense that an aspect of self was not accepted, and an important aspect of self was one's masculinity. Thus, the support seeking process was influenced by the participants' need to protect themselves from potential rejection based on their perceived deficiencies in their masculinity.

Three themes were identified in the decision making process about whether to seek support. These themes were first, shame and vulnerability; second, internal factors of self support and independence and third, relational factors, including different friends for different needs. These three themes are discussed below.

6.3.3.1 Shame and vulnerability

The experience of shame, or the avoidance of shame, emerged as a significant contributory factor influencing gay participants' decisions to seek support (or not) from close friends. Commonly reported times in which emotional support was needed were intimate relationships break-ups or ruptures. As noted previously (R. Lee, 1996), shame responses are often connected to introjected perceptions or beliefs about selfhood, of which masculinity is a key aspect (e.g. 'I should be able to cope on my own', or 'I must be strong'). It is the original feelings (i.e. neediness) that are often shameful. These feelings were strong whilst experiencing a relationship break-up, and included embarrassment, shame, sadness and anger. However connected to this feeling may be shame about admitting a relationship has ended, and the shame of seeking support, if one believes that one 'should' be able to cope on one's own. In this way, shame is multi layered and may co-exist with embarrassment and sometimes humiliation. In this way, a shame experience, or the potential for a shame experience, is linked to embarrassment about being seen in a vulnerable or dependent state. Some of the gay participants had some awareness of their feelings of vulnerability. There appeared to be a level of shame about being vulnerable. One way of dealing with this was to deny the feelings, as Neil comments:

> *Even if it is a good friend, you know you still want them…and it's partly so that you, yourself, you know if you go and tell the world you're weak at a certain thing, or whatever, it's like admitting it to yourself when it's happening at the same time, and that crystallises it and makes it real. And who wants to go there in a sense? That's the daunting aspect. [Trans, 932-937]*

Neil is acknowledging that his feelings are noticed at two levels, to self and to a friend. By admitting his feelings to a friend, perhaps there is the risk that his feelings are felt more deeply and made more real. The main issue appeared to be reluctance to admit or acknowledge 'weakness' which for many men, regardless of their sexual orientation, is shameful (Wheeler, 1996). Furthermore, the act of asking for help seemed to expose the participants' dependency which was a vulnerable experience. It appeared easier to accept support when it was offered as Kevin comments:

> *I would ask them, but quite often I probably didn't need to ask them, that they would offer, come over for dinner, let's go out for dinner, let's go out for a drink. You know you need to get out, yes. So… [thinking] gee I don't know, did I actually ask them for help? I think it was just offered to me and by more than those two mates too. [Trans, 516-520]*

As Kevin notes, when support was offered it was gratefully received. Whilst many gay participants reported a preference for their friends to initiate support, supportive interactions often took place within everyday interactions. Underlying the notion of being offered support is the suggestion that gay men's friendships were 'places' where gay men could receive and offer each other support. The gay participants' friendships appeared to be constructed around giving and receiving support. Nevertheless, the act of asking for support remained the most challenging aspect of the support process as Will comments:

> *I mean it's not hard for me to accept support when it's offered. Probably a little harder for me to seek support. I like people coming to me once they know I need support, I like them, I suppose to come to me. [Trans, 692-695]*

Will's comments illustrate a dilemma. How are his friends to know he needs support if he does not request help or disclose his feelings? Therein lies the personal risk. For some participants asking for support from a close friend involved a fear of exposure or rejection that was managed by selective disclosure as Barry comments:

> *I don't want everybody to see the whole me, I am happy for someone to know about my foibles in relation to that, but I don't want them to know about my foibles in relation to that. [Trans, 1204-1212]*

By compartmentalising his issues or by limiting disclosure to those trusted friends Barry appears to be managing his level of vulnerability. Barry appears to be protecting himself against the potential for shame by organising his friendships around selective disclosure. This strategy reveals a decision making process about who to disclose to, what, and how much. This is an example of how masculinities are constructed in social environments in response to perceived support or receptivity of significant others. Thus, if the perceived support for vulnerability is low with male friends, then constructions of masculinity which are defensive are more likely.

Several gay participants reported a fear of being judged especially for personal weaknesses. Neil describes support seeking:

> *What would make it easier (to seek support)? I think the history that you have with an individual comes into mind at that point in time. And that's probably the common…the main thing and probably a sense of knowing that you're not going to be judged. ……what makes it easier to talk about these things, almost and what makes it possible…yes that feeling of, well that person knows me for who I am. They know my strengths and weaknesses. [Trans, 550-559]*

Implicit in Neil's description is a desire for acceptance and by implication, the avoidance of rejection. With the revelation of one's weaknesses to a friend is the potential for judgement and rejection. In Neil's description above, the history of the friendship appears to engender trust and lessen the fear of rejection. Thus, Neil may feel confident to reveal his weaknesses and thus construct a less defensive sense of masculinity because of a level of safety in the friendship

For some participants the ability to ask for support was related to the degree to which they could handle a potential rejection. Roger comments on managing his fear of rejection when asking for support:

> *But that strength of knowledge that you know, even if the person said no, that you know, that that's not going to be the end of the world. [Trans, 1620-1622]*

The ability to handle rejection may be mediated by the strength of an individual's internal supports (such as belief in self, self esteem, confidence). Thus, internal support may provide a buffer against potential rejection and enable the seeking of external

support. However, the seeking of support also requires a degree of perceived receptivity from a friend, as well as internal supports.

6.3.3.1.1 Comparison with friends

Some gay participants reported that it was difficult to seek support because of negative comparisons with close male friends. To this end, comparisons about the perceived success or failure of personal relationships aroused significant vulnerability. In the event that a personal comparison led to vulnerability, support seeking was hindered as Kevin comments:

> *Maybe at the time I was a bit upset or pissed off really about those friends of mine who were in good solid relationships. I think that's a bit of an envy thing really. When you're feeling abandoned and single, but that wasn't a long-term issue. [Trans, 565-568]*

In the case above, Kevin had experienced a relationship break-up and his feelings of vulnerability were related to his lack of confidence about being able to have a 'successful' relationship. Thus, seeking support from friends may be more difficult in this type of situation where comparisons result in negative self evaluations. As noted in Section 6.2, shame and envy may arise from competitiveness in close gay friendships and the result may be a diminished capacity to seek support.

6.3.3.2 Self -support and independence

In some instances, a decision was made that self support and independence were preferable to support from a friend. For some participants the issue of reaching out felt too difficult at a particular time as Roger comments:

> *I fear rejection by them, at a time when I could not handle it. [Trans, 1455]*

For Roger, the fear of rejection was very strong and greater perhaps than the potential benefit of receiving support. The decision to ask for support pre-supposes that something positive would be gained from the experience. In his decision making process, Roger appears to be making an evaluation between self support and environmental support. Self-support was chosen as the best choice, based on his perception of his support options and personal vulnerability at that particular time.

Some of the gay participants identified a habit of initially turning to self support in difficult situations as Harry describes:

So if I'm trying to manage a difficult situation like that I need to gather my strength or something or other. So it's an internalising, rather than putting out… *[Trans, 449-451]*

Harry notes the importance of gathering his strength as a first option before considering support from friends. The notion of seeking external support is not rejected, but appears to be a secondary consideration (perhaps when feeling stronger). Furthermore, the need to gather strength, suggests an avoidance of displaying weakness; an underlying belief of traditional masculine ideology. In Section 6.1, the gay participants also noted how pervasive these traditional beliefs were in shaping their sense of masculinity. In Harry's example, it appears that adherence these ideals may have contributed to his preference for 'internalising' rather than seeking support from friends.

6.3.3.2.1 Changes at Mid-life

There was not strong support for changes in the support seeking process at mid-life from the gay participants, although some participants noted a gradual increase in the ability to seek support commencing in their early thirties. This may have been because the mid-life transition (e.g. Levinson et al, 1978) was not experienced as a major crisis by the gay participants. It may have been that the gay participants learned to seek support for life challenges experienced prior to the mid-life period. Commencing in their early thirties the process of asking for support from friends appeared to have become easier for some of the gay participants. Sam notes that asking for help is something he has learned. He comments on how he used to be:

[I was] More reluctant and I kept a lot more stuff to myself and I believed in resolving stuff myself, not necessarily getting opinions, not necessarily getting someone else's input, it was up to me, to like OK, this is your lot you have got to deal with it. [Trans, 717-720]

The preference toward self support suggests a previously held underlying masculinity belief in which independence was highly valued. Sam notes that his beliefs have changed, and that seeking support has become easier.

[Over time there have been]…changes in some of my beliefs, the belief that it is okay for me to ask for support. [Trans, 727-728]

Overall, the gay participants' desire for independence was not universal. The reliance on self support was perceived to have diminished with age. There seemed to be an awareness of the need for support, and recognition that friends were a valid source of emotional and social support. However, there was a question of timing and a selectivity of which issues to seek support for. Whilst there were some issues that were initially kept private, it appeared that these issues would be discussed later. Thus, self support was clearly an important aspect of support utilised by the gay participants but usually not at the exclusion of support from friends. As noted earlier (Section 6.2), the gay participants' friendships were constructed around interpersonal closeness and support.

The impact of mid-life on support seeking may not have been as a great as predicted, because gay men may have developed adaptive responses to masculinity and sexuality crises earlier in life (D. Kimmel & Sang, 1995). A significant crisis for most of the gay participants involved the initial stages of the coming out process, as Matt comments:

I was married and I met this guy and really fell for him and so basically decided that I was gay and that was a horrible time in my life. I was very upset and anyway it was just a mess and it was an awful time. [Trans, 433-435]

The impact of the coming out process and the identification with a marginalised masculinity may have prompted the gay participants', such as Matt, to question issues of personal identity and evaluate relationships with others prior to the mid-life transition. In addition, the crisis of coming out appears to have provided an opportunity for many of the gay participants to seek out support from gay friends, as Matt comments:

Well I'd known him for quite a while and I knew he was gay and whilst talking to him he seemed to understand my situation and he was offering really excellent advice and he was very supportive. So I thought I knew I could trust him and that he knew where I was coming from. And I am really glad that I did talk to him [Trans. 494-498].

In the present study, all of the gay participants had come out before the age of thirty, and through this process appeared to have developed a network of close friends. Thus, a

recognition of the need for support and utilisation of support from close friends appears to have preceded the mid life transition.

There may be another explanation for the absence of an apparent mid life crisis in the gay participants. The previously reported preoccupation in gay male culture with idealised bodies (Section 6.1), may precipitate an earlier 'crisis' of ageing for gay men in their early thirties than their straight counterparts. The negative impact of a pre-occupation with 'youth' in gay male culture has been reported elsewhere (e.g. Boxer, 1997; Shankle, Maxwell, Katzman & Landers, 2003), and is not the focus of the current study. The importance of peer support and an increased capacity for inter-dependence may be an outcome of both the coming out process, and later, the impact of the ageing process in their early thirties. Thus, as the gay participants' enter their forties, the impact of the mid-life transition may be lessened. To explore this idea further, a comparison is made between the gay and straight participants at mid-life in Chapter Seven.

6.3.3.3 Evaluation of friendships and trust

The decision to seek support from a close friend was also associated with an evaluation of a friendship itself. Some gay participants reported a lack of trust in their friends. Other participants reported that they were quite specific about what was disclosed, and to whom, based on the perceived qualities of their friends. Some participants reported a fear that their confidentiality would not be respected. Whilst they reported close relationships with friends, it appeared that this closeness did not always include confidentiality. Neil comments:

> *And also he's not the model of discretion so I would feel that I would tell him that and he would tell other people that, and you know, you don't necessarily want the world to know that you're struggling in your job and that sort of thing. So that would be a factor in my decision not to share something with him and whether that was of work or any sort of personal failing. You know that's…I do perceive that to be a bit of a deficiency in our friendship, that I…gay Miles we'll call him, in that I don't think I could completely…it's not…he's just indiscrete. You know the old joke, telephone…there are three forms of communication: tele-phone, tele-vision and tell Miles. [Trans, 439-437]*

The fear of indiscretion was reported as a major barrier to seeking support from a close gay friend. Several gay participants reported that perceptions of confidentiality

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influenced their decisions about seeking support. Sometimes a particular friend was chosen for support because of their perceived distance from other close friends, which provided a safe boundary. This view supports the finding in Section 6.2 on the need to manage boundaries in close gay friendships. Dennis notes the importance of choosing a friend who was not enmeshed in his social network:

> *So it's quality rather than quantity, but also the whole boundary thing is sort of like…he's not enmeshed…he's close enough in my life that he's part of it and that we do social things together. And we do social things involving lots of people that we both know and there's a good overlap with our social networks, which is really good. But so he knows all the people and knows everyone who's involved, but he's distant enough from it. [Trans, 988-993]*

A pre-requisite for a confidante, may paradoxically be someone who is not that close, or at least not that close to the person's friendship networks. Perhaps the potential for shame and vulnerability are reduced when personal information is isolated from other close friends. As Barrell and Jourard (1976) note, in close dependent relationships there is a greater risk of rejection than less dependent relationships, which presents a challenge to self-disclosure. To this end, the gay participants noted that negotiating closeness and personal safety were key issues in seeking emotional support. The perception of trust was a key mediating variable in this process.

6.3.3.3.1 HIV

Two of the gay participants disclosed their HIV positive status in the interview, which was striking because both of them reported that that had not told their close gay friends. Their selective disclosure appears to confirm the finding above that very personal information may sometimes be easier to disclose to someone out side of one's support network. This may be because of the fear of judgement and rejection in close dependent relationships (Barrell & Jourard, 1976) or because of the belief that nothing would be gained. Dennis was clear about not disclosing his HIV status:

> *I don't think there's anything to be gained from telling them. [Trans, 601]*

Dennis made a decision not to seek support from two of his close friends. He may have been concerned about a negative outcome, which suggests the potential for shame,

rejection and embarrassment. In this way, the decision not to seek support appears directed at protection from potential harm or hurt.

As Dennis notes, he has not told his closest friends about his HIV status because he fears their negative judgment, which suggests the fear of shame:

> *Probably the biggest one is because I'm HIV positive and I haven't told Tino and Kiefer that. And I thought about and thought….kind of…at one stage I was sort of like a bit annoyed and I know Kiefer would make all sorts of judgements about it because he does that. [Trans, 586-589]*

Dennis's decision not to disclose his HIV status to two of his closest gay friends challenges assumptions about closeness and support in gay friendships. My assumption was that gay participants would seek out other gay men with an issue such as HIV because of their perceived capacity to empathise. Other research has suggested that gay men have formed supportive networks and communities in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic with other gay men (Nardi, 1997; Stynes, Lipp & Minichiello, 1996). These communities of support and understanding may include others with HIV as well as those who are not HIV positive, and are characterised by social, emotional and material support. However, Dennis' comments indicate that a fear of judgement from his close male friends has contributed to his reluctance to disclose. An underlying issue may be a fear of shame, which functions as a protective mechanism to cause him to 'pull back' from his support network in order to protect himself. Shame may serve a protective function by testing the perceived receptivity of an individual's phenomenological field (R. Lee, 1996). Thus shame may be an important variable in an individual's decision making process about seeking support and is discussed below.

6.3.3.3.2 Decision making process

The gay participants revealed quite a high degree of awareness about their decision making process. When needing support, friends were chosen who could meet particular needs, as Will notes:

> *Yes. And I would probably view it all in a probability factor, like if I felt like I needed emotional support I'd sort of think about, you know who's in town, who's around, what my expectations of what I could get…to put it in a sort of acquisitional way. What you get from X, Y and Z, and I'd go for the ones that I think I can get the best support out of. [Trans, 586-590]*

As Will notes, he made an evaluation based on his needs and who was available. Some friends were valued for their ability to make an emotional connection, others for their clear thinking or rational skills. Sam notes the distinction between two of friends:

> *He's more rational about stuff, more directive about stuff. Whereas, Paul tends to be a great validator of feelings, he picks up on feelings he's able to reflect back the feelings and so on. [Trans, 503-505]*

The decision making process about seeking support may be based on perceived support offered from friends, and appears to entail an evaluation of potential helpers (e.g. Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Furthermore, the particular issue of concern may greatly inform the decision making process as Dennis notes:

> *It kind of depends what the thing is. So if it's dealing with doctors and HIV, Sammy's sort of someone who I would go to because I know he knows about that and he's been through a lot of that stuff too. So he understands that. Whereas Tino and Kiefer wouldn't understand that and I wouldn't go to them for something like that. [Trans, 1483-1487]*

The underlying theme in the decision making process appeared to be seeking out someone who would understand and accept the support seeker. In not seeking out close friends for support, a fear of the reverse is also true. Many of the participants reported situations in which they would not seek out support because of a fear of not being accepted, which probably included a fear of being shamed. Choosing friends for support based on perceived acceptance and understanding may be an effective strategy for minimising shame. Thus awareness of one's shame and embarrassment in social interactions may be an effective regulator of disclosure and support seeking.

6.3.4 Giving support: a question of balance

In this final section of results from the gay participants, the perspectives on giving support are reported. The findings are divided into two areas 1) the question of balance; giving too much or not enough and 2) the relational nature of giving support.

6.3.4.1 The question of balance: Giving too much/not enough

In giving support to friends, the gay participants described sensitivity to their friends' emotional and social needs, as well as the relational dynamics of the support process.

Many of the gay participants reported a high degree of awareness of their friends' emotional state, and the possibility of shaming their friends through exposing their vulnerability. As mentioned in Section 6.2, the gay participants' friendships appeared to be built on a high degree of interpersonal closeness and emotional sharing. The participants were able to identify situations in which their friends were experiencing a personal difficulty. In the event that their friend reached out for support, they were then able to respond having some knowledge that their friend needed some level of support. Difficult situations arose when a friend did not ask for support, yet the participant was concerned about their well being. As Sam comments below, he proceeded cautiously when he perceived his friend needed support:

> *I had a sense on Thursday when I briefly spoke with him on the phone that the situation is worse than he is letting me know. So I had the urge on Friday morning to call him and I said "look I know that you said that you would rather catch up on the weekend but I was concerned and I wanted to call you. You can tell me to hang up or not today, but my gut feeling was to give you a call and just to let you know that I am around, we don't have to wait until the weekend. Did you want to talk about some of that stuff now because it kind of sounded big"? And he was okay about that and he stayed on the phone for forty minutes [Trans, 961-970]*

The question of when and how to inquire about personal issues was a clear theme in giving support for the gay participants. Sam knew his friend was experiencing relationship difficulties, but was unsure how best to respond. Sam appeared to be sensitive to his friend's personal boundaries and the potential to embarrass or shame his friend. There was the potential for shame on a number of levels in this situation. Sam may have been fearful that he would shame his friend by exposing him through a poorly timed intervention. Sam might have felt embarrassed or ashamed that he raised the issue. However if Sam did not raise the issue and he later discovered that his friend was really in need of support, he might have felt guilty for not doing enough. There is the potential risk of a shame based response for both parties in this type of situation, especially in the absence of clear communication.

Some of the gay participants acknowledged the potential risk of shame in offering support, but also noted risk was a necessary part of a close friendship. Lucas (below) notes the risk involved, but also defines a close friendship as putting yourself at risk:

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But I think part of being a good friend for me is putting yourself at risk sometimes. And now and then you say things that you know will possibly not be received well by the person. [Trans, 1178-1180]

Lucas has a high degree of awareness of the potential upset that he may cause, but an overriding principle is his overriding care for his friend. Neil comments below on the importance of sending a message that he is available for support:

But I think it's important that you give them that first message that I'm here and I know there's some things you may not want to talk about so, and I'll respect that, but if there is something you want to talk about please, you know, say. [Trans, 968-971]

Neil's comments indicate a sophisticated level of communication skills in which he acknowledges his friends' feelings, and potential embarrassment in disclosing feelings, but a clear offer of support should his friend wish it. The offer of support is made, but the receiver can make his own decision about how and when to respond. In this way, the friend is able to regulate his own level of vulnerability, by deciding how much or little to expose. This is a good example of a relational process, which cannot be determined in advance, but relies on communication and trust to mange self-disclosure (Barrell & Jourard, 1976). Furthermore, if a friendship has a foundation of trust and personal sharing then the support process will most likely be easier.

6.3.4.1.1 Giving too much

Whilst the gay participants reported satisfaction by helping a friend, the participants also reported the need for balance between giving and receiving support in a close friendship. This involved an evaluation of their own needs as well as the perceived needs of a friend. For some gay participants there was a feeling of giving too much support to a friend without regard to their own needs as Lucas comments.

Now and then I will get resentful about it and realise that I have given too much or that I am doing this for the wrong reason. [Trans, 1411-1412]

Lucas works as a counsellor and notes his attraction to the role of helper in which he may hide a part of himself (below) when giving support. He comments on the difference between giving and receiving support.

It's safe, it's rewarding and it's something that I do. Safe and rewarding, you can actually hide a little bit when you're caring for someone else. That's where the safety comes from. So the risk-taking for me is Uh Oh, its time for me to get support. [Trans, 1428-1421]

Lucas' description of hiding suggests he is hiding a part of himself in giving support which may be a protection against shame. As noted in Section 6.3.4.2. giving support sometimes involves revealing oneself. Being personally present to both one's personal struggles and the struggles of a friend was not always a comfortable experience and requires both internal and external support.

The theme of 'giving too much' also arose in the context of regulating personal boundaries. Some participants reported that they had clear personal boundaries and did not want to be involved in their friend's personal struggles. Perhaps by maintaining a personal boundary they were also protecting themselves from uncomfortable feelings. Barry comments on the uncomfortable experience of hearing his friend's problems:

I don't mind it as long as it's, (thinking) well actually I do mind it [laughs]. Because it's more like, I don't like people dragging me into their problems or expending all my energy or when I see that that's all they want to talk about. [Trans, 1279-1281]

There appeared to be several issues involved for Barry; a fear of losing his personal boundary, and becoming lost in his friend's problems, or a fear of not receiving something in return. A few gay participants did not appear to have the personal awareness and communication skills to negotiate their level of involvement with a friend. In this case, a rigid boundary of 'no involvement' was set rather than negotiating the level of personal involvement.

6.3.4.1.2 Not giving enough

Some gay participants believed they were not sought out for emotional support because they were perceived to lack empathy. These participants expressed guilt for not giving enough support to their friends. These views echo earlier comments about gay men's decision making processes to seek out the best person for perceived level of support required at the time as Will comments:

My closest friends would come to me in an emotional situation or trauma situation. But there's not a lot of that, because like I said before I'm not recognised as an empathetic sort of person. [Trans, 917 -920]

The perceived lack of empathy or availability to be present to a friend's needs also provides a theory why some gay participants did not seek emotional support from their male friends. If particular friends are perceived to be lacking in empathy then the help seeker may be less likely to seek support from those friends. This may be true for particular issues, or in a consideration of the domain of help required (e.g. instrumental or emotional). Empathic understanding of another person's experience requires a degree of knowing, or attempting to enter the emotional world of the other person (Spinelli, 2005). Some of the gay participants expressed a belief that men in general were not as skilled at empathising as women. As Will comments:

I think that males are just as capable of knowing that there's a high level of emotion and grief and all the rest of it, but women seem to be better for me at creating a space where I'm able to express that grief and, so it's more comfortable for me. [Trans, 438-431]

Some participants expressed the view that close male friends, regardless of sexual orientation were often aware of a friend's distress, but were unable or unwilling to offer empathic emotional support. This may be because to do so may require the supportive friend to feel some of those feelings themselves, which may be uncomfortable. Furthermore, empathic emotional support may sometimes require the individual to surrender to an existential 'un-knowing' (Spinelli, 1997) which involves the capacity to tolerate the anxiety of not knowing.

Giving up 'knowing what to do' appeared to be uncomfortable for some participants and the feelings that were aroused in them when sought out for support appeared to be intolerable. A common response was a desire to take action and to solve their friend's problem. George, one of the Greek Australians, describes a different type of support:

I listen, I listen to it and then ask him what he would think, what he wants to do, and then I tell him that he has got to weigh up everything and make his decision now on the spot……Clear it up right now. And I find that people like that. Sometimes we do want somebody else to take control of our lives I think. [Trans, 1624-1629]

In George's description of offering support, whilst there is an initial listening, this is followed by an overt focus on problem solving, and taking responsibility for his friend's problem. In this way, some gay participants felt it was their responsibility to make their friends feel better, rather than empathise with their friend's situation. Support was described in instrumental and practical terms. By contrast, it appeared challenging for some gay participants to emotionally support a friend through a personally difficult experience. The difficulty seemed to lie with the providers of support as Roger comments on his desire to control his friend's moods:

> *It's about being in control I think. And it's like I can't control this person, when they're in that state. Not that I can control them when they're not in that state, but it's like what you're wanting to do is control them out of that mood, just so that they feel better. [Trans, 1933-1936]*

Paradoxically, the gay participants almost unanimously expressed the desire not to be controlled when *seeking* support. As reported previously, most gay participants expressed a desire to be acknowledged and accepted 'as they were' in their distress. It appears in some instances of (gay) male-male support there is sometimes a mismatch between what is needed and what is provided. Being faced with a friend's distress may confront the supporter's own helplessness, which may at times be anxiety provoking (van Deurzen, 1999). The possibility for these relational dynamics emphasises the need for men to discuss their support needs in close friendships. This discussion about relational needs could reduce the possibility for misunderstanding and improve the quality of emotional and social support.

6.3.4.2 Receiving support through giving: the relational nature of giving support

Many of the gay participants recognised the relational nature of support, in a close friendship both as an idea and in practice. The willingness to share and to be open with a close friend, is similar to the I-thou experience described by Buber (1970). The I-thou meeting requires a mutual openness to the other and the willingness to be impacted upon by a friend indicates that you are not neutral, that you care. Will describes this process below:

> *Because I think to offer support you have to be open yourself, because it's a reciprocal thing, it's a trust thing and all that as well. [Trans, 450-453]*

Offering support to a close friend includes the dimension of offering something of oneself. Being open suggests being open to oneself as well as being open to a close friend. Thus, in the process of giving support, something is received as well as given. And many participants reported they benefited out of supporting a close friend. Dennis notes that support is reciprocal in close friendships:

> *And reciprocating as well. Inviting them around and you know, and cooking a meal and sitting down and planning out a menu and doing the shopping especially and thinking what can I do to make it nice for all of us and having a good time. And having fun doing that and having fun doing that for other people, that I really value. And sharing that with people, and having people to share that with and like that's a whole level of support that I find, personally find, really important. [Trans, 919-925]*

By providing support for close friends, support may also be received. Perhaps it is in being with others, sharing a meal and a social time together that both social and emotional support are present. These comments highlight the relational needs of all people, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Sharing everyday aspects of life can be supportive. It is through our interaction with others (and the world in general) that a sense of the world and personal meaning is constructed; human experience is intersubjective (Jacobs, 2005; Spinelli, 2005; Owen, 1994a, 1994b). Thus, interacting with friends and being together can be supportive in itself as it confirms our existence and sense of self.

6.3.5 Summary of key findings: Gay men's' support seeking and receiving.

The emotional and social support process in the gay participants close friendships revealed some important findings about the construction of gay masculinities. The gay participants' experiences of seeking support from close male friends, both challenged and perpetuated aspects of traditional masculinity.

Overall, gay masculinities were constructed around supportive friendship interactions, in which emotional intimacy was valued and acceptance of vulnerability was present. Furthermore, through non-sexual intimacy, such as physical touch, or emotional sharing, the gay participants demonstrated the construction of less restrictive masculinities, in which closeness was valued. These supportive friendship interactions

were also characterised by a high level of empathy and acceptance, often organised around recognition of a similar sexual identity.

The underlying pervasiveness of traditional masculine ideology was also present in descriptions of seeking support and the potential for shame, based on exposing personal vulnerability, and appearing dependent. However, the awareness of shame appeared to sharpen the participants' decision making process about who and when to seek help rather than a total avoidance of help seeking at all. Thus, the gay participants demonstrated the capacity to construct non-traditional masculinities, although the influence of traditional hegemonic masculinity was apparent as a background factor.

Changes in the utilisation of support seeking from gay male friends at mid-life were not as great as expected. It may be that the mid-life transition is not as life changing for gay men as for non-gays, as gay men may have confronted and examined significant masculinity issues at an earlier age. A comparison between gay and straight participants will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Whilst gay friendships were described as close and intimate, sometimes personal boundary difficulties arose when friends were perceived to be too close. The most significant boundary issues included sexual tension in a friendship or lack of confidentiality. For this reason, some gay participants reported their preference to seek out confidants who were outside their friendship network. Thus paradoxically, sometimes friends can be too close, which may create a barrier to support seeking.

There was an acknowledgement from the gay participants that providing support was often easier than seeking support. However, there was also a level of discomfort associated with being empathic, because of the possibility for experiencing uncomfortable emotions. Overall the experience of giving support was experienced as part of a mutual experience of giving and receiving that underscored the relational nature of support, and lent weight to the construction of relational masculinities in gay men's friendships. It was often through the exchange of feelings, and of being with a close friend, rather than engaging in activities that defined closeness. Furthermore, it was in these personal exchanges, that the participant's sense of self was confirmed.

Chapter 7 Comparisons and contrasts of gay and straight participants

In this section, the gay participants' views and experiences on masculinities, close friendships and support are compared and contrasted with the results from the straight participants. Whilst the two groups are roughly matched for age and background, it is not an exact comparison. The intention is to compare the views and experiences from the position of gay and straight masculinities. Comparing the results of the two groups of participants did elicit some key similarities and differences in views about masculinity, friendships and support seeking. An overall theme for both the gay and straight participants was a degree of anxiety about their masculinity, and a strong desire to be accepted by their close friends. However, a key difference between the gay and straight participants was the degree to which they adhered to dominant constructions of masculinity in close friendships. The gay participants appeared to have constructed less traditional masculinities than the straight participants. Thus, the gay participants' masculinities appeared more able to encompass interpersonal closeness and support seeking with close friends, than the straight participants. These ideas are explored in depth in this chapter.

A comparison and contrast of the gay and straight participants is provided in three sections. In the first section, different and similar views about masculinity are considered, in the second section, views about close male friendships, and in the third section, views about seeking and receiving support in particular instances of personal difficulty and crisis are compared and contrasted.

7.1 Comparisons and contrasts of gay and straight participants' experiences of masculinity

In this section, the straight and gay participants' experiences and descriptions of masculinity are compared and contrasted in four main themes:

1. The construction of masculinities.
2. Anxiety and shame.
3. Strength and the male body.
4. New masculinities.

Overall, in defining masculinity, both the gay and straight participants acknowledged the existence of a number of masculinities and provided support for Connell's (1995) identification of hegemonic masculinity as clearly heterosexual. Hegemonic masculinity was similar to aspects of 'traditional' masculinity described by the participants whilst gay masculinities were perceived by the gay participants to be subordinated and marginalised. These views were reported at both a societal level and in individual experience. Thus, there was an acknowledgement of the power relationships between masculinities.

7.1.1 Defining masculinity: Masculinities and power

In this section, the participants' definitions of masculinity are compared and contrasted. Defining masculinity was challenging for both the gay and straight participants. Whilst there was a belief in the social construction of masculinities, there was also an underlying belief in a biological essentialism that existed as a type of masculine ideology against which all masculinities were judged.

7.1.1.1 Similarities

Defining masculinity
Both the straight and gay participants experienced difficulty describing and defining their own masculinity. It appeared easier to describe aspects of masculinity in others, particularly in famous, or well known, men. To this end, both the gay and straight participants gave examples of sportsmen, politicians and world leaders as exemplars of

particular stereotypes of masculinity, which included traditional masculinity and 'macho' masculinity. However, there was an acknowledgement that stereotypes of traditional masculinity, including traditional gender roles, were rigid, simplistic and outdated. Both the gay and straight participants noted that most of the aspects of traditional masculinity did not apply to them personally. However, the concept of traditional masculinity appears to hold some credence as a yardstick, or ideology, against which other forms of masculinity were judged. Both the straight and gay participants believed that masculinity was in part based in biological sex, as well as being socially constructed. Thus, it appeared difficult for the participants to separate the consequences of their biological sex from the process of constructing gender roles and enacting gendered behaviours. However, as reported in Section 7.1.1.2 below, the gay participants appeared to have questioned and examined their masculinity and identity more closely and at an earlier age, than the straight participants.

Masculinities and power

In the gay and straight participants' descriptions of masculinity was a description of underlying power dynamics within and between masculinities. This was expressed in terms of 'acceptable' expressions of masculinity, which were usually associated with traditional masculinity (e.g. appearing strong, resolute, and independent). Both the gay and straight participants acknowledged that men who represented 'unacceptable' forms of masculinity (e.g. appearing weak, dependent), were marginalised. Thus, there was evidence from both the gay and straight participants of the existence of hegemonic masculinities, which were heterosexual, as well as the existence of subordinate and marginalised masculinities. However, both the gay and straight participants appeared anxious about their position within a hierarchy of masculinities. It appeared that the pressure to conform to a hegemonic ideal was both impossible and anxiety provoking. Idealised masculinity appeared to exist as a background or contextual masculinity, against which the gay and straight participants' constructed their own subjective sense of masculinity. Both groups described the potential for shame in not living up to hegemonic masculine ideals, which is discussed further in Section 7.1.2.

7.1.1.2 Defining masculinity and masculinities: Differences

Hierarchy of masculinities and power

Whilst many of the qualities of traditional masculinity were disparaged as 'passé', the straight participants expressed a greater attraction to the power that came with it, than the gay participants. Although the straight participants expressed a belief that several aspects of masculinity were socially constructed, they expressed stronger support for an essentialist, biologically determined position than the gay participants. This view was expressed as a belief in the 'natural order', a variation of the 'boys will be boys' argument. The straight participants' expressed a belief in natural strength and aggression that was attributed to traditional straight masculinity. In doing so, it seemed that the straight participants were implicitly expressing their reluctance to give up power.

By contrast, the gay participants described a subordinated 'position' in the hierarchy of masculinities accompanied by a feeling of powerlessness. Whilst the straight participants described the importance of personal power and strength when defining masculinity, they were relatively unaware of their potentially powerful position in relation to gay masculinities. As Hearn and Collinson (1994) note in the social sciences and in everyday life, (heterosexual) men occupy a powerful position as the dominant gender. Thus, a common experience of being a straight man is not to know the experience of being 'the other'. The gay participants revealed an insight into the construction of masculinity that was qualitatively different to the essentialist descriptions given by the straight participants. It appeared that the experience of being the 'other' had provoked the gay participants, unlike many of the straight participants, into thinking through masculinity issues. There was a lack of acknowledgement from the straight participants about the privileged power position of heterosexual masculinities over gay masculinities, and a tendency to describe power in essentialist terms as a 'natural' phenomenon, rather than a relational construct. To this end, several straight participants attributed the achievement of personal goals to the concept of a powerful masculinity (e.g. in Section 5.1.3.2 Jack expressed his admiration for John F Kennedy's pursuit of goals). The belief in the power of masculinity was closely aligned with an individualistic notion of masculinity, and failed to acknowledge the lack of support that a man might experience if a personal goal was outside 'acceptable'

definitions of masculinity (e.g. to be a house husband). Thus, heterosexual masculinity was thought of as conferring on (straight) men the power to achieve personal goals.

Personal meaning of masculinity

Almost all the gay participants had considered the meaning of masculinity through the process of adopting a gay identity, and learning to live between 'two worlds'. Their experience of being the 'other' within the dominant masculinity (Dowsett, 1993) appeared to provide them with a different viewpoint to the straight participants. The gay participants appeared to have a greater interest in, and knowledge of, their 'inner' world, than the straight participants. For example, the gay participants appeared to have questioned the meaning and construction of masculinity both intellectually and practically, by making choices about how 'to be' in the gay and straight worlds. To this end, it is possible that the mid-life period was less confronting to the gay participants as they may have already reflected on some of the issues of identity and loss described by life stage theorists (Levinson, et al, 1978; Vaillant, 1977). By contrast, the straight participants expressed genuine curiosity in the topic of masculinity, perhaps in relation to their mid-life status, which has been suggested by other writers as a time of inner reflection (Moreland, 1989). It appeared that reflecting on masculinity was a relatively recent experience for the straight participants and they may have been influenced by an increased attention to masculinity issues in recent times (e.g. in the media). Thus, the gay participants appeared to have examined issues surrounding their own masculinity and the construction of masculinity at an earlier age, to a greater degree, than the straight participants.

Independence, dependence

Although the straight participants expressed confusion about their place within changing definitions and ideas about masculinity, there was an underlying identification with many of the qualities of traditional masculinity, particularly independence and individualism. By contrast, the gay participants expressed and acknowledged a greater degree of dependence on other men both as sources of support and for close relationships than the straight participants and this subject is discussed further in the next sections 7.2 and 7.3. The gay participants' definition of masculinity included a love of other men, and an openly expressed desire for closeness with other men, beyond a sexual or romantic interest. Thus, the gay participants' definition of masculinity

included interpersonal closeness between men. These views suggest that the gay participants have been able to construct masculinities that differ from hegemonic norms and thus may not experience the same levels of gender role stress (Pleck, 1995), or gender role conflict (O'Neil, 1981) as some straight men (Simonsen et al., 2000). This view was contrasted with the straight participants for whom their masculinity was more often defined in terms of their independence or competition toward other men in general. It is noted that these findings need to be interpreted cautiously, whilst also acknowledging the important distinction between expressed ideologies and actual behaviours. For example, the straight participants did report an enjoyment of shared activities with male friends, although they did not define masculinity as a shared enterprise. Thus a difference emerged between stated ideology and actual behaviour. However, the discussion of masculine ideologies (Brittan, 2001) is important as it may reveal important 'background' beliefs out of which individual masculinities emerge.

7.1.2 Masculinities: Anxiety and shame

In this section, the gay and straight participants' anxiety about their masculinity and the potential for shame in not living up to masculine 'ideals' are reported. Both groups of participants reported that masculinity was closely associated with anxiety, although in different ways. It appeared that the gay participants had experienced greater shame about their masculinity because of their sexual identity than the straight participants.

7.1.2.1 Similarities

The gay and straight participants were aware of the potential for shame in challenging perceived gender norms. Both the straight and gay participants reported anxiety about their place within the construct of masculinity. As noted previously (see Chapters 5.1 and 6.1), both the gay and straight participants reported difficulties in defining and describing their own masculinity. Whilst there was support for a plurality of masculinities, there was an underlying notion that there were 'acceptable' masculinities and 'unacceptable' masculinities, lending weight to a hierarchy of masculinities (Connell, 1995). Many of the descriptions of acceptable masculinity were defined by exclusion. Thus, a man 'should not' be weak or vulnerable, but how this was evaluated in everyday life was unclear. Both the gay and straight participants reported that the 'rules' of acceptable masculinity were generally unclear and this lack of clarity appeared to create anxiety for all the participants. Thus, both the gay and straight

participants reported the potential for shame arising through violating 'unwritten' rules governing standards of behaviour for men. These findings suggest that the concept of masculinities is inherently unstable, but may be organised around the avoidance of what is perceived to be unmasculine, or feminine, especially in the public domain as suggested by others (Segal, 1990).

Conformity

In constructing individual masculinities, the gay and straight participants described a dilemma between attempting to conform to hegemonic ideals, which involved less anxiety (but was unsatisfying in many ways), and openly challenging traditional masculinity which risked the feelings of shame. In this sense, the theme of 'passing' in gay men, was similar to 'appearing strong' in straight men. Both are attempts to gain acceptance from others in the public domain and to reduce the possibility for shame. Men (i.e. public figures or role models) who had challenged traditional masculine ideals were admired and respected for their capacity to challenge normative male roles. It appeared that challenging norms in the public domain (e.g. crying in public), presented a greater challenge, than in a private or personal setting (e.g. cooking at home). Thus the pressure to conform to hegemonic ideals for both the gay and straight participants appeared strongest in public situations.

Challenging stereotypes

Both the gay and straight participants acknowledged the difficulty in challenging gender stereotypes. The gay participants identified the importance of camp behaviour as a way of challenging the 'strong' masculine stereotype, especially in the movement of 'loose and floppy bodies'. Acting in camp way was perceived to require inner strength to challenge dominant heterosexual masculine ways of behaving. For the straight participants, challenging stereotypical male roles, such as the breadwinner, and choosing to be a house husband, also risked the experience of shame and humiliation in front of peers. To this end, it appeared that the greatest difficulty in challenging stereotypes involved the negative perceptions of others. Masculine stereotypes were challenged more easily in a private settings (e.g. at home) than in public settings, where the fear of negative evaluation was stronger. This finding provides a strong argument for the construction of masculinities in social settings and interactions. Furthermore, to challenge stereotypes may also require support to construct new masculinities in social

settings. Therein lies the potential importance of friends for both the gay and straight participants. The possibilities for friends to either maintain or challenge gender stereotypes in reported in the next section, 7.2.

7.1.2.2 Anxiety and shame: Differences

Anxiety

The gay participants reported a greater level of anxiety about their masculinity than the straight participants. By identifying as homosexual, the gay participants appeared to live with a heightened level of anxiety about being shamed or stigmatised, particularly by straight men in the general population. The gay participants also experienced homophobia and prejudice, which was another way of being experienced as the 'other'. The gay participants experienced anxiety about their (non-traditional) masculinity in more profound ways that the straight participants. The gay participants reported a relatively constant anxiety about being the 'other'. The strategies of passing and camping served to minimise or highlight their otherness respectively. Passing as straight appeared to reduce the gay participants' anxiety and potential for shame, especially in heterosexual environments. The straight participants also expressed some anxiety and insecurity about their masculinity, but their anxiety was not at the heightened levels reported by the gay participants. Unlike the straight participants, many of the gay participants lived with the fear of being 'outed', or the fear of being shamed as gay men.

Conformity

Some gay participants, unlike the straight participants, reported a relief in not having to live up to 'traditional' masculine ideals. The experience of being the 'other' allowed some gay participants to celebrate their difference, although this required a high degree of self esteem and a supportive network of friends. Whilst many straight participants admired other men who had challenged gender norms, it was acknowledged that this took courage and often unacceptable risk, especially to achieve by oneself. Unlike the gay participants, many of the straight participants expressed support for 'natural' gender roles such as the provider role. The straight participants expressed fear of negative evaluation from peers in challenging 'traditional male' roles. In instances where the straight participants had considered more flexible gender roles, it was usually because of a personal crisis, such as marriage dissolution or following an experience of personal therapy. This finding supports other research into gender roles in gay and straight

households (Kurdek, 1993) and it appears that the gay participants may have more experience in challenging traditional gender roles than the majority of the straight participants.

7.1.3 Masculinities: Strength and the male body

In this section, the emphasis on the male body and strength in defining masculinities is reported. For both the gay and straight participants, masculinities were defined by meanings and perceptions attributed to the male body. To this end, expressions of strength were important determinants of masculinity. Appearing strong, acting with strength and possessing 'strength of mind' were positively associated with hegemonic masculinity. However, the gay participants reported a greater focus on the appearance of the ideal male body, contrasted with the straight participants' focus on the body's utility and instrumental capacity. However, an interesting finding was the increased association between muscularity and gay masculinities, which was theorised to be related to a reaction against gay men's marginalisation, and stigmatisation of HIV as found in other research (S. Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). These themes are discussed below.

7.1.3.1 Similarities

Outer appearance and strength

Both the gay and straight participants reported the importance of physical and mental strength as important aspects of masculinity. Furthermore, it appeared that masculinity was largely defined by demonstrating strength visually through 'outer' characteristics and behaviour, such as the presence of muscles and deportment (i.e. 'appearing strong'). Both the gay and straight participants reported anxiety about being perceived as weak by deviating from the strong masculine 'ideal'. These findings may also be due to an increased focus and commodification of the male body in fashion, popular images and the media in recent times (Buchbinder, 2004). Both groups defined masculinity in terms of male physicality with an emphasis on physical and mental strength. Strength was determined by how a man looked and how he acted. These findings support other research that indicates an association between muscularity and desirable presentations of masculinity in men (McCreary, et al., 2005).

Mental strength

The concept of mental strength was difficult to define, but appeared related to ego strength, and strength of convictions. Clearly, possessing mental strength (e.g. commitment, endurance, courage), and using strength to achieve goals were desirable and important masculine qualities. Positive forms of mental strength were described as adhering to values, beliefs, goals and morals, although these 'inner' qualities were less articulated than the 'outer' qualities of strength. Both the gay and straight participants described strength as a desirable masculine quality which was determined largely by how a man acted, not so much who or what he was. Thus, it was apparent from the gay and straight participants' descriptions that masculinity was determined by the visual appearance of strength, even if the demonstration of strength was sometimes only an outer veneer.

Weakness

Both the gay and straight participants described negative associations with physical weakness (and to a lesser degree, mental weakness) and the absence of strength. Appearing weak was to be avoided because it was experienced as shameful. Weakness was often described in 'feminine' terms, such as appearing soft, gentle and emotional. Thus being perceived as weak was equated with lack of masculinity, and in many instances was shameful. Several straight participants described shame associated with roles (e.g. carer) that were perceived as feminine or weak. The gay participants were also keenly aware of the negative perception of 'weak and floppy' bodies, which were associated with feminine bodies. Thus a prevailing view underlying a dominant construction of masculinity is that any behaviour which is not stereotypically masculine, is labelled feminine.

Excessive strength

Both the gay and straight participants reported that 'too much strength' was also problematic, and was described as an overly aggressive aspect of masculinity. Both the gay and straight participants derided 'macho' masculinity as a form of overly aggressive masculinity, and noted the co-existence of alcohol with male aggression. Alcohol was regarded as a dis-inhibitor, which released aggressive impulses in men, suggesting an underlying biological essentialism that explained men's aggression. Aggressive male behaviour was described as a type of masculinity that was unpleasant for others

particularly those who were the direct recipients of aggression. This description of masculinity was particularly insensitive of others and non-relational, as the impact of aggressive behaviour of others was not a major consideration.

Several gay and straight participants believed that that 'outer' strength in men can mask 'inner' weakness. Men who were aggressive and violent were not seen as possessing inner strength, by both the gay and straight participants. 'Inner' strength was a more complex term that eluded a clear definition, but was related to controlling negative 'inner' impulses (e.g. sexual aggression), acting with more relational awareness and harnessing other 'inner' qualities (e.g. courage). 'Inner' strength was also described as the ability to challenge the dominant social order. It was acknowledged by both the gay and straight participants that 'inner' strength, by way of self confidence, was required to challenge masculine stereotypes.

7.1.3.2 Strength and the male body: Differences

Muscularity and masculinity

Some straight participants noted that some expressions of gay masculinity appeared more masculine than straight masculinity, usually due to the appearance of physical strength and muscles. The gay participants' descriptions of masculinity in terms of body image; muscularity and physical appearance, were far more pronounced than the straight participants. This view supported the findings of other researchers regarding the muscularisation of gay men which has occurred over the last thirty years (Blachford, 1981; Gough, 1989; Levine, 2000). A consequence of this development may be the greater levels of body dissatisfaction in gay men than straight men and the potential flow-on effect to the development of eating disorders (e.g. Lakkis, et al., 1999; Siever, 1994). Whilst the gay participants did report greater concerns about outer appearance than the straight participants, eating disorders were not reported by any participants in the current study.

Strength and appearance

Strength and outer appearance were important descriptors of masculinity for the gay participants although not in the same way as the straight participants. The straight participants described the importance of strength to achieve goals and to be personally and professionally successful. It was also important to appear strong and successful to

others, indicating the importance of competitiveness, and potential for instrumentality. For the gay participants the focus was on the appearance of a strong male body as an object of desire and beauty. Thus, an idealised physical appearance may be more important to the gay participants' sense of self (Silberstein, et al., 1989), than for the straight participants, for whom it may be important to appear strong and capable.

Strength and support

The straight participants reported that underlying the idea of mental and physical strength was the need to appear independent. This individualistic focus of masculinity for many straight participants was described as the strength to achieve personal goals (as mentioned above) and without the need for support from others. Unlike the gay participants, there was virtually no mention of reliance on another man for support for achieving goals or in general. The gay participants recognised the relational nature of men's strength, by describing a desire to be looked after and cared for by another man. Thus for the straight participants, strength was indicative of independence, whilst for the gay participants strength was described as a masculine quality that did not preclude dependence on others, particularly other men. The gay participants also noted their attraction to a definition of masculinity that included strength with sensitivity and caring for others.

Mid life changes

Mid-life difficulties and changes appeared more pronounced for the straight participants (e.g. descriptions of failed marriages, or lack of close friends). By contrast, the gay participants appeared to have examined issues concerning their masculinity and identity at an earlier period, thus reducing the impact of the mid-life period. Some straight participants had questioned their views about close relationships, work, identity and masculinity through the mid life transition, consistent with the views of other writers (e.g. Jung, 1964; Levinson et al, 1978, Moreland, 1989) who have noted that many men pass through a period of personal re-evaluation at mid-life. The literature suggests that in this period some men experience a shift between a focus on the 'outer' rational world toward a greater attention toward the 'inner world' of thoughts and feelings. Although several gay participants also reported changes in masculinity at mid-life, they were not as pronounced as with the straight participants. It appeared that the gay participants had thought about masculinity issues at an earlier time, perhaps through the coming out

process. The possibilities for challenging previously held views are further explored in section 7.3 on support seeking.

7.1.4 New masculinities

In this section, the gay and straight participants' desire for new masculinities are reported. Both groups of participants expressed hope for a plurality of masculinities that involved the freedom and support of others to express masculinity in a variety of ways. It was acknowledged that the construction of new masculinities and new ways of being a man required both internal support (e.g. confidence) and external support (e.g. acceptance from others). However, the gay participants' approached this possibility from the experience of belonging to a marginalised and subordinated masculinity, compared with the straight participants who were in a relatively more powerful position. These findings and the implications of these differences are reported below.

7.1.4.1 Similarities

Plurality of masculinities

Both the gay and straight participants expressed support for a plurality of masculinities and a desire to challenge hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic representations of masculinity presented problems of rigid stereotypes and the potential for shame in both the gay and straight participants. There was general support for a loosening of the boundaries of masculinity, toward an acceptance of multiple expressions of masculinity, which supported the concept of masculinities as socially constructed. Both groups of participants reported that the subject of masculinities had received increased attention in the media and popular culture. It was acknowledged that different portrayals of masculinity in the media assisted in breaking down stereotypes. However, both the gay and straight participants acknowledged that challenging hegemonic masculinities required personal strength and courage and involved the risk of being shamed for violating masculinity norms. While there was support from both the gay and straight participants for a plurality of masculinities, it was also acknowledged that this would take time to occur at a wider societal level. Thus there appeared to be a movement toward a greater recognition of the social construction of masculinities, which implied change was possible, rather than essentialist masculinities, which were based on a pre-determined and unchangeable structure.

Choices

The gay and straight participants expressed a desire for individual masculinities which encompassed a greater freedom and flexibility in choices, than traditional and stereotypical masculinities. It was acknowledged that many different constructions of gay and straight masculinity existed, but to enact new gender roles required the support of others. In other words, both the gay and straight participants reported they were confined by gender stereotypes, but perhaps to different extents, depending on their relative adherence to traditional ideals (Wester et al., 2005). This view supports Pleck's (1981, 1995) gender role strain paradigm in which the pressures in living up to stereotypical gender roles can result in deleterious effects on physical and mental health. Thus, gender roles are powerful constructs and challenging gender roles is associated with fear and anxiety. Both the gay and straight participants acknowledged the importance of internal support and social support, in order to enact new masculinities (e.g. gay men joining a gay sports club, or a straight male finding a non-shaming environment in which to ask a male friend for support). It was acknowledged that personal choices regarding expressions of masculinity occurred within a social context. The social context could be a source of support for change or hindrance; therefore, both the gay and straight participants recognised that for masculinities to change required change at a level greater than the individual alone.

7.1.4.2 New masculinities: Differences

Power

The gay participants approached the issue of new masculinities from the view of wanting to be included and accepted for their difference and to have more power. The straight participants approached this question from a position of wanting to move beyond the boundaries of rigid heterosexual masculine 'rules'. For the straight participants one issue involved their preparedness to consider issues of personal power and control and to be vulnerable (e.g. public display of emotion). For the gay participants the challenge was to be proud of their difference and to take up strength and power. Thus, the sharing of power was central to the participants' desire for new masculinities.

Relationship

For the straight participants, a key issue in challenging hegemonic masculinity involved an increased attention toward mutually supportive relationships with significant others including family and friends. For the gay participants, close relations and interdependency with significant friends were already considered important, and not considered a challenge to their sense of masculinity. The straight participants recognised that traditional expressions of masculinity which included a focus on success and power were at the expense of personal relationships. Several straight participants had questioned the definition of success in themselves and in other men in this light, perhaps in relation to the mid life transition. Whereas, the gay participants' appeared to have previously acknowledged the need and desire for close relationships, especially with male friends.

Acceptance

For the gay participants, the attraction to new forms of masculinity was connected to the hope of being accepted. The gay participants indicated a desire for gay masculinities to be accepted equally alongside straight masculinities. By contrast, the straight participants did not necessarily know the experience of being the 'other' (in an enduring way) within the plurality of masculinities, and the issue of acceptance of their masculinity was not the same. The straight participants did express a fear of not being accepted if they chose to express their masculinity in a non-traditional form (e.g. cooking). However the gay participants' desire for acceptance was expressed in terms of attaining something which they did not already have.

7.2 Comparison and contrast of gay and straight friendships

In this section, the views of the straight and gay participants on close male friendships are compared and contrasted. The results suggest that there are key similarities in the ways that the gay and straight participants commenced their friendships, particularly through shared interests, shared lives and shared activities. However, there are also key differences between the two groups in that the gay participants emphasised the interpersonal dimension of their friendships more strongly than the straight participants. Overall, the importance of friends as sources of support and acceptance were reported for both groups, although the way in which the straight participants engaged with close

friends was not focussed overtly on interpersonal closeness as with the gay participants. The section is presented in three main parts:

1. The construction of close friendships.
2. Managing boundaries in close friendships.
3. Managing differences in close friendships.

7.2.1 Construction of friendship

In this section, the gay and straight participants' constructions of their friendships are compared and contrasted. Both groups reported the importance of shared activities and interests in forming and maintaining close male friendships, although in the gay participants' friendships interpersonal intimacy was highlighted, whereas for the straight participants intimacy was often avoided.

7.2.1.1 Similarities

Importance of friendships

Both the straight and gay participants acknowledged the importance of male friendships in their lives as potential sources of acceptance, belonging, fun and social support. Qualities that were important in a close friendship included loyalty, trust and honesty. For both the gay and straight participants, friendships were formed through similar interests and an enjoyment of being together. There was agreement that friendships were based on a level of interpersonal attraction, and were freely chosen. Unlike other relationships, like work or family, friends were chosen because of mutual attraction. In addition, both the gay and straight participants acknowledged that close friendships evolved over time, through a process of sharing time and activities together. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that friendships also changed over time as individual circumstances changed, and decisions were made regarding work, family, partnering, and place of residence. Important friendship qualities were also built up over time, and often formed the foundation of a close friendship. Many participants reported that formative experiences early in the life of the friendship provided a solid foundation of interpersonal trust, which contributed to a long lasting friendship. Several of the gay and straight participants reported that close male friendships had outlived their romantic relationships. Thus, close friendships were important for their continuity and longevity.

Reference point

An important point of attraction to a close friend was a balance between sameness and difference. Interpersonal differences served to challenge the participant's world view, as well as to provide an external reference point. Friendships were 'places' where self identity developed, and masculinities were constructed and enacted. In the process of relating to male friends and through recognising their mutual similarities and differences, the participants appeared to be experiencing a sense of their own and their friends' masculinity. This finding supports Pahl's (2000) view that friendships provide the opportunities to confirm individual and group identities. This was especially so in friendships that had spanned many years. Many formative experiences (e.g. leaving home, attending university, and starting work) were experiences that were shared with close friends. It was through friends that many gay and straight participants reported the development of social networks in early adulthood. Later in life, after the age of thirty, many gay and straight participants reported that the number of friends generally diminished due to time constraints and a narrowing of interests. However, long term friends were important in providing a continuous reference point throughout the participants' various changes. It was through friends that the participants made sense of their personal and interpersonal worlds. To this end, several gay and straight participants noted the attraction to close friend's personal differences from themselves. It appeared that interpersonal differences in a friendship provided a helpful reference point to a participant's experience. This finding is explored in greater detail in the support seeking section, 7.3 below.

Acceptance

In addition to similar interests, both the gay and straight participants described the importance of acceptance in their close friendships. Identification of a common gay identity or straight identity was an important point of connection in their friendships with other men. The recognition of 'sameness' in the other, served to reflect and confirm a part of themselves. Being seen and accepted was often conveyed in non verbal terms, through the perception that a friend enjoyed the participant's company, and wanted to be with him. The feeling of being accepted was described as the freedom to be oneself and a sense of being understood. In this way, both the gay and straight participants described support for life's existential issues (e.g. aloneness, the search for

meaning) in their close friendships. It appeared that close friends contributed to a reduction in aloneness and were important reference points in the journey of life.

7.2.1.2 Construction of friendships: Differences

Shared interests or shared emotions

The straight participants reported that their friendships were often organised toward activities rather than interpersonal issues, unlike many of the gay participants' friendships. Many of the gay participants described their friendships with other gay men in terms of interpersonal attraction, intimacy, support and closeness. Several gay participants reported a high frequency of contact with their male friends (e.g. daily or every other day). By contrast, some straight participants reported infrequent contact (e.g. less than once a year) with friends that they described as very close, and their style of contact was often described in terms of low levels of inter-dependency and not necessarily based on emotional closeness. Thus, the gay and straight participants seemed to have different definitions of closeness, which may have related to their different constructions of masculinity. The participants' constructions of masculinity were revealed in the way in which their friendships were enacted. For example, the gay participants seemed more comfortable with interdependence in their friendships, whilst the straight participants placed a high value on personal independence and personal achievement. These differences appear reflective of the straight and gay participants' different constructions of masculinity. The straight participants valued traditional masculine ideals of independence and autonomy, whilst the gay participants endorsed the importance of support, co-operation and caring in their description of masculinities. Although several straight participants reported emotional closeness in a male friendships, it was often incidental rather than the focus of the friendship. Several straight participants reported that they had not considered their male friendships as places to share emotions or to seek closeness, and thus their friendships replicated traditional masculine ideals of stoicism, independence and low levels of emotional vulnerability. The gay participants' friendships were constructed more interpersonally than the straight participants, which appeared to be related to their different construction of masculinity, in which emotional intimacy and closeness were valued.

Gay identity and family

The experience of being accepted by a friend was an experience that appeared to have a particular meaning for the gay participants, which was different from the straight participants. Many of the gay participants reported the experience of being 'the other' and feeling different from mainstream masculinity. The feeling of being accepted by a gay friend appeared to allow gay men to express their masculinity more safely than with heterosexual friends. In this way, gay friends were a source of emotional and social support. There also appeared to be a connection for gay friends around a gay sensibility, or gay masculinity. This included a 'camp' sense of humour, and a common language which highlighted the gay men's connection to their friends around a shared gay masculinity, which had often been marginalised. This type of connection was not described in the same way by the straight participants. The straight participants reported the importance of formative experiences such as sharing adventures, including fun and joking, often combined with alcohol. However these experiences were generally not described as bonds forged out of marginalisation, or through fear of discrimination. The gay participants reported the importance of being able to have other gay friends with whom they could 'be themselves', which confirm the views of other writers about the importance of friendship and gay men's 'chosen families' (Altman, 1972; Segal, 1990; Weston, 1991). The straight participants did not describe their friendship connections with other men as similar to family ties.

7.2.2 Managing boundaries

In this section, the gay and straight participants' experiences of personal and interpersonal boundaries in close friendships are reported. The management of boundaries emerged as an important theme, and appeared related to different constructions of masculinity. The straight participants reported a fear of emotional intimacy with male friends and a need to carefully manage interpersonal boundaries. By contrast, the gay participants appeared more comfortable with male-male intimacy than the straight participants. The gay participants described experiences of regulating intimacy by successfully negotiating interpersonal boundaries, as an ongoing part of a close friendship.

7.2.2.1 Similarities

Boundaries

Both the gay and straight participants acknowledged that close friendships involved some interpersonal closeness and noted the importance of managing interpersonal boundaries with friends. The participants noted that a balance was required between time spent together with a friend and time apart. Similar to the Gestalt concept of contact (Polster & Polster, 1973), both the gay and straight participants noted that a tension existed between a desire for connection with a friend and a need for separateness. Thus, managing boundaries was important, and involved an awareness of an individual's needs and appreciation of a friend's availability and interests.

Trust and shame

For both the gay and straight participants, issues of trust, honesty, and loyalty were key factors in regulating interpersonal boundaries. A violation of trust or confidentiality constituted a boundary violation, and carried with it the potential for shame. Both the gay and straight participants reported that in the formation process of a friendship, interpersonal boundaries were usually safely established through patterns of relating and realisation of mutually enjoyable activities, or personal interests. However, it was also acknowledged that the issue of managing boundaries was ongoing and required maintenance in order to for one's needs to be met and to protect oneself from embarrassment or vulnerability. Thus shame, or the potential for shame served as an important regulator of personal boundaries in both the gay and straight participants' friendships.

7.2.2.2 Managing boundaries: Differences

Desire for intimacy

The gay participants appeared more adept than the straight participants at negotiating interpersonal boundaries, partly because of a greater desire for intimacy with male friends, and perhaps through more practice. Unlike the gay participants, many of the straight men reported that 'unwritten rules' governed the boundaries of their friendships. These rules appeared to be linked to straight participants' construction of masculinity, in which self sufficiency and independence were highly valued. Whilst some straight participants reported a desire for closeness in their friendships, there was a generally a fear of too much intimacy in male friendships. It appeared that the straight

participants constructed their masculinity in their male friendships around the avoidance of emotional intimacy, similar to the notion of 'side-by-side' relating (Wright, 1982). The straight participants were more uncomfortable than the gay participants with emotional closeness to close friends, often setting rigid boundaries, sometimes resulting in social isolation. For the straight participants, intimacy usually occurred in the context of an activity, which enabled an incidental level of closeness, as emotional disclosure was not a central part of the interaction. It appeared that the presence of a shared activity may have enabled a 'safe' intimacy. Thus, intimacy appeared to be defined in slightly different ways. For the gay participants an intimate interaction was described in 'feminised' terms as emotional closeness and sharing. The straight participants did not describe their interactions as intimate, but through shared activities, it appeared that intimacy was experienced. Thus, there may be different routes to intimacy (Fehr, 2004), with gay men following a more interpersonal path than straight men.

Negotiating verus managing

As noted previously, the straight participants did describe experiences of intimacy in their close friendships however a fear of closeness was reported and a need to carefully manage and regulate personal boundaries. Several straight participants described the safety of an activity when with a friend and a lack of comfort when there was too much interpersonal intimacy. By contrast, the gay participants described the ability to negotiate personal and interpersonal boundaries in close friendships. The gay participants appeared to be more practised and more relaxed than the straight participants in negotiating the boundaries of intimacy. The gay participants' masculinity was not constructed around the avoidance of male-male intimacy, and this factor may have contributed to a greater ease in negotiating and allowing intimacy. By contrast, the straight participants appeared anxious about raising intimacy issues in close friendships, perhaps through fear of being shamed. The fear of homosexuality may have been a factor in the straight participants' need to carefully manage male-male intimacy, as noted in other research findings (M. Kimmel, 1994; Lehne, 1989).

Sexual intimacy and friendship

The theme of sexual attraction was present in many of the gay participants' close friendships and was raised by several gay participants. By contrast, the issue of sexual boundaries or sexual attraction did not emerge in the straight participants' descriptions

of their friendships. Unlike the straight participants, there was a sense from some of the gay participants that sexual needs and friendship needs were co-existing and competing needs, thus, there was a need to negotiate sexual boundaries. Many gay participants reported that sexual attraction between gay friends was natural. For some gay participants sexual attraction was accepted as a part of the process of forming and maintaining friendships with gay men. The intimacy issues did not appear to violate the gay men's sense of masculinity in the same way that intimacy threatened straight men's masculinity. Whilst Rubin (1985) has hypothesised that a level of sexual attraction is present in all close friendships, it was not revealed by the straight participants in the present study. It is theorised that the construction of straight participants' friendships around shared activities may serve to deflect any potential attraction, and keep this issue out of awareness.

Gossip and trust

Both the gay and straight participants noted the importance of honesty and trust in close friendships. However, the gay participants expressed a greater degree of reluctance in entrusting close friends with personal information, if betrayed. Several gay participants reported that their gay friends were prone to gossip and as a result could not be trusted with confidential information. By contrast, the straight participants reported that an important quality of close friends was their ability to keep personal confidences. Thus, it appeared that a greater degree of interpersonal closeness, noted above (7.2.2.2) for the gay participants came at the cost of the potential betrayal of trust. This theme is discussed further in Section 7.3.2.2 below.

7.2.3 Managing differences

In this section, the gay and straight participants' experiences of managing differences and conflict in close friendships are discussed. Differences between friends emerged as both positive and negative experiences. In the event of conflict between friends, it appeared to be based in interpersonal differences with the gay participants as compared with the straight participants where reported differences were often external to the friendships itself.

7.2.3.1 Similarities

Differences adding to the friendship

Both the straight and gay participants reported that some level of personal difference added to the friendship. As noted previously (See Section 7.2.1.1) friendships can offer an important reference point, and this ability may be enhanced through recognition of personal difference. Thus, many of the gay and straight participants valued their personal difference from their friends, as it enhanced the friendship. By valuing personal differences, it appeared that the participants were acknowledging the need for others and the importance of a friend's unique perspective.

Competition

Both the gay and straight participants reported that a friend's perceived difference from themselves could also result in envy and competitiveness. In situations where a participant's friend possessed a desired attribute or quality, the potential for envy was high. It appeared that both the gay and straight participants engaged in comparisons with friends. Comparisons were especially evident when participants were competitive in a similar area, such as work. Competitiveness was experienced as potentially destructive to both the gay and straight participants' friendships.

Conflict

For both the gay and straight participants, in instances where differences were unmanageable, a conflict was experienced. Conflict was universally described as unpleasant and in many cases was avoided. Conflict usually arose through the perception that an important friendship value (e.g. trust) had been violated or through significant conflicting values. Most of the gay and straight participants reported that conflict was a part of a close friendship, although there was wide range of views expressed, of the positive and negative value of conflict.

Conflict resolution

Both the gay and straight participants reported that successful resolution of conflict often resulted in greater trust, closeness and growth in the friendship. However, there were both gay and straight participants who avoided conflict in close friendships because it was personally uncomfortable. Overall, where there was both a strong investment in the friendship and foundation of trust, there appeared to be a greater

likelihood of a successful resolution of conflict. The corollary to this view, is that where one or both parties did not regard the friendships as close, or valued, there was little investment in resolving a conflict. In some instances it was on these occasions, that a participant discovered that a friendship was not as close as he had perceived it to be.

7.2.3.2 Managing differences: Contrasts

Conflict: Interpersonal vs. external dimension

There were several important differences between the gay and straight participants' descriptions of conflict which appeared to mirror their different constructions of friendship and masculinity. The gay men reported that their sense of masculinity was in part constructed through close interpersonal interactions with male friends and thus it was not surprising that conflict was generally experienced and described in interpersonal terms. The gay participants described their friendships in interpersonal terms, even if engaged in an activity. By contrast, the straight participants' described a sense of masculinity in which an independent engagement with the 'outer world' was primary, and thus, differences that arose in their friendships were initially described as external to the friendship. Arguments were often about points of difference in the 'outer world' (i.e. politics, football) and not often about interpersonal issues. Whilst all conflict between friends is arguably interpersonal, the straight participants did not initially describe their friendship conflicts in interpersonal terms. Sometimes differences became interpersonal and the result was a negative impact on the friendship.

Competitiveness and envy

Both the gay and straight participants reported conflict that arose over competitiveness although for different reasons. The 'world of work' provided many opportunities for competitiveness for the straight participants. The level of competitiveness and rivalry was especially strong when friends worked in the same field, and was based on issues of power and success. By contrast, competitiveness in the gay participants' friendships appeared to be frequently linked to personal qualities such as a friend's perceived physical or sexual attractiveness, and included a tone of envy. Envy is defined as the emotion that occurs "*when a person lacks what another has and either desires it or wishes the other person did not have it*" (Parrot, 1991, p.4). It was noted that some straight participants were envious of their friends' perceived 'success' with women, but the straight participants did not describe envy of their friends' physical characteristics.

Thus, a key difference in competitiveness between the gay and straight participants involved the focus of their attention on the perceived area of difference. The gay participants were concerned with their outer appearance and attractiveness, whilst for the straight participants, competitiveness was often related to perceived abilities, as a function of instrumentality. These differences appeared related to the different ways in which the gay and straight participants constructed their masculinity. The gay participants placed great value on a type of masculinity in which outer appearance and attractiveness were central to their sense of self. By contrast, the straight participants noted the importance of strength and instrumentality in defining their masculinity. Thus both the gay and straight participants reported envy toward their friends, but for gay men they were envious about personal qualities and appearances, whereas the straight participants appeared envious about their friends' instrumental capacities.

Impact of conflict

The impact of a conflict was described slightly differently between the gay and straight participants. For the gay participants, the result of a serious conflict was the loss of interpersonal closeness. By contrast, the straight participants reported the loss of an activity as central. It was assumed that the straight men also experienced a feeling of loss in the event of a serious conflict; however, what was notable was that straight men described the loss of the activity, rather than the underlying feelings. This may have been because the straight participants had constructed their sense of masculinity by engaging with the outer world, and in shared activities with close friends. By contrast, the gay participants' friendships were constructed around interpersonal closeness compared with the straight participants' focus on activities in friendships. Thus the gay participants' sense of masculinity, which included a valuing of emotional intimacy with other men, was central in understanding the impact of conflict between close male friends. Conflict in gay men's friendships seemed to provoke very strong feelings, often intolerable feelings, especially if the conflict was primarily interpersonal. Conflict in the straight participants' friendships probably also aroused strong feelings, but these were not reported.

Conflict resolution

The gay participants appeared to be more committed to discussing conflicts with friends than the straight participants, although conflict resolution was a process that appeared to

continue over time. This may have been because the gay participants' friendships were usually constructed in terms of valuing interpersonal closeness, and they reported more time spent with friends than the straight participants. The net result of resolving a conflict for the gay participants was a restoration of closeness. However, a common strategy for many of the straight participants when faced with a conflict common response was to avoid contact, and the conflict was left unresolved. The straight participants may have wished to avoid the level of intimacy and interdependency implied between friends (e.g. 'you are important to me'). This level of intimacy may have been experienced as uncomfortable or potentially shameful, especially if it contravened traditional masculinity norms, such as self sufficiency. Several straight participants reported that on some occasions all contact was ceased with a friend following a conflict, which may have continued for a period of months or years. Restorations, when they occurred, followed the passing of time and included an engagement in new activities and interests, and often an avoidance of the previous 'conflicted' area of difficulty.

7.3 Comparison and contrast of support seeking, receiving and giving

In this section, the gay and straight participants' experiences of support in close friendships are compared and contrasted. An overall definition of emotional support from friends was described as interpersonal acceptance, experienced through acknowledgement and empathy. Social support was defined as the experience of 'belonging' through which isolation was mediated. Both the gay and straight participants noted that asking for support was challenging and potentially shameful, especially where it involved exposing personal vulnerability. A key difference between the gay and straight participants involved a greater degree of interpersonal intimacy in the gay participants' transactions of support giving and receiving. The section is presented in three main parts:

1. Receiving support from close friends.
2. Seeking support from close friends.
3. Giving support to close friends.

7.3.1 Receiving emotional support

In this section, the gay and straight participants' experiences of receiving emotional support during personal crises are compared and contrasted. Whilst emotional support was described as the experience of interpersonal acceptance by both groups, the gay participants emphasised the personal dimension of support more directly than the straight participants.

7.3.1.1 Similarities

Personal crises and emotional support

Both the gay and straight participants acknowledged the importance of acceptance, acknowledgement and reassurance as important relational aspects of emotional support, especially when experiencing a personal crisis. Personal crises were often experienced as invalidation of selfhood through interpersonal rejection (e.g. relationship break-up) or through failure to live up to personal expectations (e.g. work or study performance). By contrast, supportive interactions involving the validation of self illuminated the relational value of emotional support from close friends. This was especially so if close friends were able to empathise and offer an alternative perspective. Both the gay and straight participants described the need for emotional support in times when they felt personally shamed and that 'something was wrong with them'. Emotional support from close friends involved a validation of the participants' self and a level of care and concern expressed through empathic words and actions. These findings support the view that self-processes are greatly influenced by field conditions, particularly the subjectivity of important others such as close friends.

Social support

Social support was described by both the gay and straight participants as a related concept to emotional support. Social support was described as the existential experience of 'belonging' through a connection to a friend, or friends, and served to reduce isolation and loneliness. Social support was important to both the gay and straight participants because it conveyed the message that a friend wanted to be with them. It seemed that being with a close friend was a supportive experience in itself, regardless of the content of the interaction. For both the gay and straight participants, emotional support was often combined with social support and practical support (e.g. caring for a friend whilst having a meal together or giving a friend a lift). Thus social support was

often conveyed through the meanings attached to simple everyday interactions (e.g. Leatham & Duck, 1990). It was also acknowledged by both the gay and straight participants that with highly emotional personal issues (e.g. death or other major loss) that it was sometimes supportive *not* to disclose their feelings with a friend. Simply being with a friend, who knew about the situation, but with whom the participant could engage in a normalising experience (e.g. having a coffee), was often very supportive.

Receiving compared with seeking

Both the gay and straight participants reported that receiving emotional support was easier to accept, especially when offered, than actively seeking emotional support. It was generally easier to receive support, than to seek support because seeking support involved more exposure and potential for vulnerability. Experiences of seeking support are covered in more detail in section 7.3.2 below.

7.3.1.2 Receiving emotional support: Differences

Receiving emotional support and dependency

Receiving emotional support was associated with more difficulty for the straight participants than the gay participants. The gay participants may have been more comfortable with receiving emotional support than the straight participants because of a greater acceptance of dependency on men, and being in a receptive role. Being dependent did not appear as threatening to the gay participants' masculinity as for the straight participants. By contrast, the straight participants often described situations of receiving emotional support whilst engaged with their friends in an activity and often with the presence of alcohol, both of which may have served to decrease or excuse the perception of dependency. Furthermore, the straight participants noted that personal issues were not necessarily discussed with friends. Thus while emotional support may have been obtained implicitly in straight participants' friendship interactions, it was not often made explicit. By contrast, the gay participants reported that emotional support usually involved personal disclosure and sharing of feelings, during which the friends may or may not have been engaged in an activity. The key difference between the participants was the explicit focus on interpersonal sharing with the gay participants and the incidental sharing with the straight participants. For the straight participants it was emotionally supportive to be with a friend who cared about and accepted them, even if the particular details of a crisis were not discussed or even alluded to.

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Intimacy

Receiving emotional support also involved a level of intimacy that appeared less comfortable for the straight participants than for the gay participants. Whilst the straight participants reported the importance of being accepted and acknowledged, their sensitivity to personal boundaries was evident. Unlike the gay participants, the straight participants did not report a desire for physical touching (e.g. non-sexual touching, hugs) as part of emotional support. The straight participants described the importance of a friend 'being there' for them, but the maintenance of a personal boundary was evident. By contrast, the gay participants did note the importance of non-sexual, physical intimacy (e.g. a hug or kiss) as an important part of emotional support. Furthermore, the gay participants did not emphasise practical support as a primary part of emotional support. It appeared that the gay participants defined emotional support in more interpersonally intimate terms than the straight participants. This appeared reflective of the gay participants' constructions of friendship and masculinity. The gay participants appeared much more comfortable with male–male intimacy than the straight participants which appeared to be linked to prohibitions on dependency and intimacy in traditional masculine ideology. Thus, the fear of transgressing masculine norms seemed particularly important in influencing the straight participants' level of intimacy in supportive interactions with close male friends. By contrast, the gay participants' experience of constructing alternative (non-traditional) masculinities, in which physical and emotional intimacy with males is 'allowable', appears to have contributed to a different definition of emotional support.

7.3.2 Seeking support

In this section, the gay and straight participants' experiences of seeking support are compared and contrasted. Both groups reported that seeking support was much more challenging than receiving support that was voluntarily offered by friends. A key difference emerged as the straight participants revealed the use of the 'test' as a tentative way of asking for support. By contrast, the gay participants were more likely to ask for support directly, which appeared to be related to the way in which their friendships were constructed.

7.3.2.1 Similarities

Vulnerability issues

Both the gay and straight participants revealed that seeking emotional support from close male friends was difficult because of the fear of being perceived as emotionally needy, which in turn, raised issues of vulnerability and the potential for shame. Seeking social support and practical support involved less emotional vulnerability than seeking emotional support and thus the fear of personal rejection was manageable. Asking for emotional support was the most difficult aspect in the matrix of support activities (i.e. compared with receiving and giving support). For both the gay and straight participants, asking for help was challenging, even though help and support were often desired. Some of the participants reported that their friends had noticed a change in mood or behaviour in the participant, and subsequently had offered support, which was usually gratefully received. However, in the absence of an offer, both the gay and straight participants reported that initiating support seeking was challenging. These findings confirm other research that suggests that men generally struggle to ask for help from other men (Morman & Floyd, 1998). Both the gay and straight participants reported the fear of being perceived as a 'failure' as a man and interpersonal rejection as barriers to seeking support from close friends.

Decision process

Both the straight and gay participants reported a decision making process informed their support seeking behaviour, in a process that was similar to the Gestalt cycle of experience (Zinker, 1978), in which an individual makes choices based on an evaluation of their own needs and the availability of resources in the environment to meet those needs. The gay and straight participants reported an evaluation of their own needs and emotional states and the potential receptivity and availability of their friends before seeking support. An evaluation of personal needs assumes a level of self-awareness of needs. It was acknowledged by both the gay and straight participants that a thorough evaluation of needs sometimes took time. However, initial decisions about support seeking were often made quite quickly and followed habitual patterns. These decisions were based on previous experiences of support seeking and the nature of the personal problem. The participants articulated key differences in their friends' abilities to provide emotional support, compared with practical support. Thus, in instances where the gay and straight participants sought support from friends, they chose friends whom they

perceived would be supportive for that particular issue. These findings support other research that indicates an interactive process between self needs and the perceived support available of friends (Barbee et al, 1993; Burleson, 2003).

Self support

Both the gay and straight participants noted a degree of reliance on self support in times of personal difficulty. Whilst both groups reported a greater ability to ask for support at the current stage of their lives, compared with ten or fifteen years ago, self support and independence were often the first aspect of support chosen in times of personal difficulty. This may have been due to moderating effects of dominant masculinity ideals, such as a desire for independence and self control (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Depending on the intensity of the personal difficulty, and perhaps the perceived normativeness of the problem (Addis & Mahalik) as well as the availability and closeness of friends, the participants reported that they continued to support themselves or reviewed their decision, and sought support from friends.

7.3.2.2 Seeking support: Differences

Shame, vulnerability and masculinities

The straight participants found seeking support more difficult than the gay participants because of shame and vulnerability issues (e.g. appearing weak) which appeared to challenge their preferred constructions of masculinity. The straight participants often sought support indirectly (i.e. through hints) and were very reluctant to reveal vulnerability in front of their male friends, despite valuing honesty and openness in their close male friendships. As reported previously (Section 7.1), the straight participants' friendships were constructed their around 'unwritten rules' such as independence and low levels of emotional disclosure. Thus, seeking out emotional support from male friends appeared to directly challenge the straight participants' self-reliance, and was not described as a 'normal' friendship interaction. As noted previously (Section 5.2.2.2) some straight participants were not in regular contact with 'close' friends, and thus, the opportunity to seek out support as part of an everyday friendships interaction was greatly reduced. By contrast, the gay participants appeared more comfortable with seeking out support than the straight participants, and reported this was a regular and frequent experience in their close male friendships. Whilst the gay participants did report some inclination toward self support, their construction of masculinity was not as

focused on independence as the straight participants. The gay participants recognised their need for support from other men and constructed their friendships around seeking emotional and social support.

Environmental supports

The straight participants were more likely than the gay participants to report that support seeking took place indirectly, and with the co-existence of alcohol and whilst engaged in a 'safe' activity (e.g. bush camping) with a friend. These 'environmental supports' served to increase the opportunity for 'safe' intimacy and emotional support to occur, and confirmed other findings in the research literature (e.g. Fehr, 2004). Certain physical environments such as the pub, or outdoors, were also important in maintaining normative masculinity enactments (i.e. drinking), that were beyond scrutiny for appearing 'too intimate'. However, as the straight participants have aged, and created families, the opportunities for male friends to get together on their own appears to have reduced, as have the opportunities to seek and receive friends' support. By contrast, the gay participants did not appear to require these environmental supports to pre-exist before seeking support. The gay participants appeared more comfortable with initiating support seeking directly (i.e. picking up the telephone and calling a friend), or were able to create the necessary environment (e.g. explicitly invite a friend over to discus an issue). The straight participants reported that even in the event of a safe environment, support seeking was not sought directly. This idea is explored further in the paragraph immediately below.

Decision process and the 'test'

Support was sought out very indirectly by the straight participants. Unlike the gay participants, the straight participants reported the use of an interpersonal test (e.g. 'testing the water' for perceived receptivity) that was conducted to determine the level of interpersonal safety before seeking emotional support. However, if the 'test' was unclear, or not 'passed' by their friend, the straight participants were not likely to share any further personal information and thus not receive emotional support. By contrast, the gay participants appeared more confident in negotiating interpersonal boundaries and did not report engaging in a test. This may have been because their sense of masculinity was not compromised by seeking support from male friends. They were more forthright in seeking out support from close male friends, and were less concerned

about a negative perception of male-male intimacy. If a friend was unable to offer support, then the gay participants were more likely to confront their friend or choose someone else to seek support from, who matched their needs. An outcome of these two different styles of support seeking is that the straight participants appeared to seek and receive support less from male friends than the gay participants.

Gossip and trust

Another area of difference between the gay and straight participants in seeking support concerned the issue of gossip and trust. Unlike the straight participants, the gay participants reported that a significant barrier to seeking emotional support from some close male friends was the lack of confidentiality through a tendency toward gossip, especially within an individual's friendship network. By contrast, the straight participants did not report violations of personal confidence as a major issue, perhaps because of a lessor tendency to gossip or at least that was the perception of their friends. This may have also been related to infrequency of contact in some straight participants' friendships. In examining differences, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that gay men gossip more than straight men. However sex differences in gossip have been found with women more likely to engage in gossip in same sex friendships than men (Leaper & Holliday, 1995) perhaps as a form of fostering intimacy and solidarity in close relationships (Tannen, 1990). Thus gossiping may serve to heighten intimacy in some close relationships, or to reduce trust, depending on whether an individual is the instigator or the subject of gossip. In the current study, the gay participants had constructed masculinities in which relational intimacy was central to their friendships, compared to the straight participants, for whom, relational intimacy appeared less important. A result of the gay participants' interpersonal focus in close relationships, compared with the straight participants' focus on activities, may be a greater potential for the use of gossip to foster closeness with friends. By contrast, it could be argued that the straight participants reported less gossip because in straight male friendships, loyalty was reported as an important masculine quality, demonstrated through actions and not necessarily through emotional sharing or closeness. A key consequence for the gay participants of their confidentiality concerns, was a tendency toward going outside their friendship network for some personal concerns. To this end, several gay participants reported the importance of *straight friends* as important confidants, whom they trusted with some issues more than their gay friends.

7.3.3 Giving Support

In this final section, the gay and straight participants' experiences of offering and giving support to close friends are compared and contrasted. Both groups of participants reported that giving support was an important part of a matrix of seeking and receiving support in close friendships. Giving and receiving support were conceptualised together as reciprocal processes with mutual empathy described a key component. However, a key difference between the gay and straight participants involved a greater focus on problem solving in the straight participants.

7.3.3.1 Giving support: Similarities

Caring for friends

Both the gay and straight participants defined giving emotional support to friends as the provision of care through listening, empathising and sometimes by giving advice. Both the gay and straight participants realised that they were describing the type of support that they themselves would like to receive. However, it was easier to give a friend emotional support than to ask for support, probably because providing support placed the provider in a less vulnerable position than the receiver. Both the gay and straight participants reported the importance of balance in giving and receiving support to friends. This finding supports previous research regarding the importance of equity and mutuality in close friendships (Clark & Reis, 1988; Strikwerda & May, 1992).

Empathy

Both the gay and straight participants reported an awareness of their friends' emotions, and were able to empathise at some level with their friends' experience. They both acknowledged a need to be sensitive toward a friend's emotional issues. A challenge for all the participants in providing emotional support to a friend was the realisation that one of the best ways of providing support was to be emotionally open to their friend. Thus, an important aspect of emotional support appears to be intersubjective process in which individuals mutually influence each other. However, being emotionally open involved vulnerability and was not always comfortable. However, through being open to their friend's experience and in giving support, the participants' acknowledged a deepening and strengthening of the friendship. These experiences of mutual openness were similar to I-Thou moments (Buber, 1970), and occurred through acknowledging and confirming each other's experience. Thus, it appeared that both the gay and straight

participants were often aware of a friends' distress, however a key issue involved the willingness and confidence to 'meet' their friend empathically in that 'place', which is discussed in the paragraph below.

Problem Solving

Whilst it was acknowledged that providing emotional support involved listening and caring for a friend, in many instances both the gay and straight participants reported a desire to solve a friend's problems through giving advice. Whilst both the gay and straight participants were adamant that advice that was not requested was unwelcome, a strong desire to give advice to their friends was nevertheless reported. It was theorised that the desire to solve their friend's problems may have arisen partly from a desire to be helpful, although if advice was not requested the provider was not perceived as helpful. The desire to problem solve may have also arisen as a personal reaction to their friend's personal issues. The participants' personal reactions may have included a level of discomfort with the emotions that were aroused (e.g. anger, sadness, anxiety). The desire to problem solve for both the gay and straight participants may reflect the presence of an underlying dominant masculine ideology (see Section 5.1.2.3) that it is a 'man's role' to take action and solve problems (Levant, 1995).

7.3.3.2 Giving support: Differences

Emotional intimacy

The straight participants appeared more uncomfortable with their friends' emotional issues than the gay participants. Raising emotional issues in close friendships appeared to raise fears for the straight participants about emotional intimacy. Whilst the straight participants were aware of their friend's feelings, especially in times of crisis, they seemed less skilled, or less confident, in knowing how to support their friends. By contrast, the gay participants appeared more adept at negotiating advice and emotional support with friends, and seemed more able to negotiate interpersonal boundaries than the straight participants. Furthermore, the straight participants often provided support for their close friends whilst engaged in an activity, with the presence of alcohol, which may have reduced the level of interpersonal intimacy to a manageable level. The gay participants did not necessarily require the presence of an activity or alcohol in order to provide support to their friends.

Waiting versus initiating

The straight participants reported that it was their friend's responsibility to seek support. It was regarded as the friend's responsibility to raise support needs, and the straight participant's role to let the friend know he was available, and to wait for a request. This may have also been a way of minimising the help provider's potential for rejection. This view was contrasted with the gay participants who emphasised the need to be emotionally attuned to their friends and to initiate an offer of support, if a friend appeared upset. The gay participants appeared more skilled in knowing how to discuss and offer support to their close friends and in some instances assertively offer support even if it was not asked for. Unlike the straight participants, the gay participants did not believe in waiting for a friend to request support. The straight participants appeared to be operating from an 'unwritten' rule valuing masculine independence and autonomy, in which offering support appeared linked to shame. By offering unsolicited emotional support, there was a fear that a friend might be perceived to have failed, (through appearing dependent) which could be shameful. The straight participants' masculinity appeared to be constructed more around independence and self reliance than the gay participants, and thus initiating support was more problematic for the straight participants.

Problem Solving

The straight participants reported a stronger urge to problem solve their friend's emotional issues than the gay participants. In listening and caring for close friends, the gay participants seemed more able to tolerate ambiguity and vulnerable emotions (e.g. fear, anxiety, and 'not knowing'). The straight participants' desire to solve their friend's problems also served to devalue the importance of empathy and risked shaming their friend by being perceived as the 'expert'. By contrast, the gay participants seemed more able to resist the urge to solve their friend's problem and in doing so, express empathy.

In summary, the results from the gay and straight participants regarding masculinities, friendship and support have been compared and contrasted. In identifying key themes, there appears to be strong link between the ways in which the gay and straight participants have constructed their sense of masculinity and experienced their close male friendships. These findings have important implications for understanding and facilitating emotional and social support seeking behaviours in gay and straight men.

The key findings and the implications of these findings are presented in the concluding chapter (8) which follows.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

In this study, gay and straight male participants' phenomenological experiences of their masculinity have been examined in order to add to the understanding of men and masculinities and of relations between masculinities. An important contribution has been made toward an understanding of the ways in which gay and straight masculinities are socially constructed, particularly in close male friendship interactions. By comparing and contrasting gay and straight masculinities, a strong argument has been made for the importance of understanding the importance of masculinities as influencing and regulating the relational process of support seeking in close friendships.

In this chapter, the key findings are first presented. Next, the methodological, practical and clinical implications of these findings are explored. The limitations of the present study are then outlined, and suggestions are made for future areas of research.

8.1 Key findings

The key findings are presented in three sections:

1. Masculinities.
2. Close male friendships.
3. Support seeking, receiving and giving.

8.1.1 Masculinities

In this study, the existence of a plurality of masculinities was confirmed, by both the gay and straight participants, as was an underlying hierarchy of masculinities, in which straight or heterosexual masculinity was pre-eminent as suggested by Connell (1983, 1995). It appeared that the existence of hegemonic or traditional masculinity was experienced by all the participants *as an ideology*, or an important background variable. The influence of traditional masculinity was frequently experienced as an introjected belief about how a man 'should be'. The straight participants appeared to be challenging these ideologies at the time of interview, as they entered the mid-life period. By contrast, many of the gay participants had already challenged notions of traditional masculinity, perhaps because of working through sexuality issues at an earlier age they

had constructed alternative 'gay masculinities'. The straight participants' anxieties and fears about not living up to 'expected' standards of acceptable male behaviour (e.g. appearing strong, independent, successful and avoiding vulnerability) were potentially shameful. In addition, the fear of not being 'manly enough' existed in some degree for all of the participants and the potential for shame appeared present in everyday enactments of masculinity. Thus a fear of other's perceptions and of negative self perception was associated with the concept of masculinity. For many gay and straight participants, their 'public' masculinity was constructed around the avoidance of shame, and involved an ongoing level of vigilance regarding the potential for shame. In addition, anxiety about personal masculinity was compounded by the impossibility of ever attaining an 'ideal' masculinity. Furthermore, the concept of masculinities appeared to be a complex social construction characterised by fluidity and relative instability. The implications of this finding is both that attempts to definitively articulate a person's masculinity is almost impossible, as it is always context specific, but also that masculinities can be and are in a constant process of change.

While the gay and straight participants reported major similarities in their experiences of masculinity, there were also significant differences. The gay participants described the experience of being marginalised as the 'other' within the construct of masculinities by virtue of their sexual identity. There also appeared to be a hierarchy of gay masculinities, in which physical appearance and attractiveness were highly idealised expression of gay masculinity. Thus it appeared that the gay participants also experienced some anxiety about their masculinity within the gay community as well as within the wider field of masculinities.

The greater visibility and existence of gay masculinities does suggest that alternative, non-traditional masculinities are increasingly possible. Both the gay and straight participants expressed a hope for new masculinities that were inclusive of difference and allowed more flexible gender roles. In order to construct non-traditional masculinities, both internal support (e.g. self-esteem) and external support (e.g. supportive friends) were required. The importance of support is summarised below in Section 8.2 and 8.3 below.

8.1.2 Friendship

A contribution to knowledge was made in finding that that gay and straight masculinities were constructed in both significant and common everyday friendship interactions. The participants' lived experience in close friendships interactions was considered an important enactment of masculinity. It was apparent that friendships were an important aspect of the participants' relational field in which a 'masculine' sense of self was explored and enacted in interpersonal interactions. There were important connections for both the gay and straight participants between the underlying descriptions of masculinity and the ways in which their friendships were constructed and experienced. For example, the straight participants described masculinity in largely instrumental terms with a focus on the outer world of independent achievement, low levels of emotional vulnerability and a focus on having and acting with strength. To this end, their friendships were also constructed in 'outer world' activities and shared interests, in which emotional sharing, although possible, was not central to the friendship. By contrast, the gay participants described their masculinity in terms of being 'the other', and the experience of being socially marginalised, and in need of solidarity and confirmation. To this end, the gay participants described their friendships as important sources of emotional and social support as marginalised 'others', and provided opportunities for developing and expressing gay masculinities (e.g. camping, gay sensibility). Thus masculinities and friendships may also be mutually influencing concepts in which the construction of one impacts on the other.

The results from gay and straight participants suggests that while their constructions of masculinity and their friendships were different in many respects, there were underlying similarities in their need and desire for close friends. Beyond differences in sexual orientation and in masculinity, the desire to be accepted, loved, to have fun and to experience a sense of belonging were fundamental needs. However the gay participants' friendships were more overtly constructed around meeting these emotional and social needs, whilst for the straight participants, the focus was on a shared activity or interest. Whilst friendships were formed for both groups of men through shared experiences and activities, the straight participants appeared to rely on the presence of an activity to regulate intimacy, and to preserve masculine norms of independence and self sufficiency. Overall, friendships between men were highly regarded and considered

important, as means to know oneself more fully and for human connection. A great gift of a close friendship was the opportunity for another man's perspective through which a unique reference point was offered throughout important periods in life and in everyday interactions.

8.1.3 Support

Social and emotional support were overlapping concepts, and were described as the experience of acceptance, inclusion, belonging and love and were demonstrated through empathic, verbal and non-verbal interactions. Overall, support appeared to be experienced in existential terms, as a reduction in loneliness and a sense of 'belonging' through making interpersonal contact with someone else. This aspect of support highlighted the participants' need for friends, not just in times of crisis or emotional difficulty, but to confirm one's existence and as a reference point. The implications of a lack of close friends are noted in Section 8.2 below.

There was a strong link between the participants' construction of masculinity and their experience of seeking, receiving and giving support. The straight participants' friendships were constructed around shared activities which appeared to maintain their preference for a style of masculinity based on low levels of vulnerability and neediness. It was through these shared activities that moments of support and intimacy were experienced and the presence of activities appeared to provide the safety of a regulated interpersonal boundary. By contrast, the gay participants' friendships were constructed more directly around interpersonal needs and support in which intimacy and closeness were negotiated. To this end, the gay participants' masculinities were constructed around needing other gay men for solidarity and support, with an explicit acknowledgment of the need and desire for closeness with other men in general. Most of the gay participants appeared comfortable and familiar with non-sexual intimate male–male interactions. This may have been because they were practised in setting inter-personal boundaries through negotiating personal and sexual boundaries with friends. The straight men's needs for intimacy and closeness were no less important than the gay participants, but their friendships did not appear to be overtly constructed around emotional support and intimate interactions. However, it was also evident that the straight participants experienced intimacy in shared moments and activities, that were safe and non-threatening (e.g. whilst drinking or fishing). It is theorised that the

participants sought and experienced intimate and supportive interactions that were consistent with their different constructions of masculinity.

In an important finding, it was revealed that good emotional support was often experienced through mutual experiences of vulnerability, thus the importance of reciprocation in supportive close friendship interactions was acknowledged. However, the experience of vulnerability, especially if it was perceived to transgress a masculine norm, was potentially shame inducing for many participants thus representing a barrier to seeking and providing support. The importance of shame as a masculinity field regulating variable was evident in the participants' decision making process about support seeking. In instances where participants were fearful that their vulnerability was likely to be experienced as shameful, they were less likely to seek out friends for emotional support. Thus, constructing friendship interactions in which the potential for shame was muted was essential for the provision of emotional support. This may involve acknowledging the unique ways in which men seek out and receive emotional and social support. For some men, the experience of 'being with' a friend connotes intimacy whilst for others verbal and emotional sharing is important. The overall finding was that the gay and straight men in this study sought out emotional and social support in ways that are generally consistent with ways in which they have constructed their masculinities. Thus assisting men to seek support may be facilitated by encouraging a critical examination of their dominant masculinity constructions.

8.2 Implications

The implications of these key findings are discussed briefly below in two sections 1) methodological implications, and 2) practical and clinical implications.

8.2.1 Methodological implications

The application of the social constructionist approach to gay and straight men's masculinities in the present study reveals the importance of a qualitative approach to the study of masculinities. Masculinities appear to be contextual, fluid and changing, rather than fixed constructs which can be measured objectively. Through application of the phenomenological method and subsequent hermeneutical analysis of interview transcripts, an interpretation of participants' experience has been provided. The modern study of men and masculinities is moving beyond the study of sex-differences, in which

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the term male has often been regarded in essentialist terms as an irreducible social category in itself. Of more interest are variations within and between men, which may be achieved through men's experiences of enacting masculinities in particular contexts (e.g. in friendships). In the present study the participants' unique and shared experiences of masculinity, add to knowledge about masculinities through an interpretation of their lived experiences. Thus future psychological studies of men and masculinities would benefit from the adoption of social constructionist methodologies in which masculinities are viewed as contextual, fluid and perspectival.

The outcome of this research project is not a definitive statement about causation of masculinities in general or about gay or straight masculinities. What is emergent however, in keeping with the goals of phenomenological research (Spinelli, 2005), is that there do appear to be underlying structures or themes which describe the participants' experiences of lived masculinities in supportive interactions with close male friendships. Furthermore, a comparison between the gay and straight participants has sharpened these underlying themes. A methodological contribution has been made in the use of comparing the underlying structures of different masculinities; gay and straight. It has been helpful and important to examine relations between masculinities (gay and straight), as this approach is consistent with the view that multiple masculinities exist and that masculinities are changeable, and mutually influencing. It has been shown that men construct their masculinities in everyday interactions, especially with male friends. Thus, methodologies which are descriptive and context specific are especially important in capturing the voices of the participants, and adding to new knowledge.

8.2.2 Practical and clinical implications

There are several practical and clinical implications of the research findings. Gay men appear to have challenged many of the traditional constructions of masculinity and whilst these experiences have not been without struggle, gay men have contributed to the breakdown of the idea of a single masculinity, and the emergence of multiple expressions of masculinity. Thus an understanding an appreciation on non-heterosexual masculinities, such as gay masculinities, is important to the study and practice of masculinities.

It has been important to clarify a distinction between masculine ideology and masculinity enactments, such as actual friendship experiences. To this end, it has emerged that the participants were able to construct masculinities that challenged traditional hegemonic masculinity. Thus while masculine ideologies exist as powerful 'background' constructs, it is important to examine men's 'foreground' experiences of masculinity in real life interactions, such as in friendships and in support seeking interactions. Asking men about their masculinity in general may miss descriptions of actual behaviour, and thus omit important information.

That men appear to seek help from male friends in ways that are consistent with their constructions of masculinity has important implications for fostering supportive interactions in between men. Encouraging support seeking in men is unlikely to be effective if consideration is not made for the potential for shame through violating masculinity norms. Thus it may be important to gain an understanding of individual constructions of masculinity in order to assist individuals to seek support in ways consistent with these views. Furthermore, an understanding of men's experiences of what constitutes a supportive interaction and how intimacy is defined appears important as these views will most likely guide their decision making processes, about from whom and how they might seek support.

If men do not have close friends, or seldom make contact with friends, even with those considered as close, then the potential for supportive male friendship interactions is almost non-existent. Given the fear of embarrassment and shame associated with revealing vulnerability, interactions and environments that are supportive of intimacy may be especially important in the matrix of support activities. To this end, assisting men to develop friendships in which vulnerability may be safely expressed is likely to very helpful. This may include 'safe' environments where men can engage in activities or interests that are supportive and non-threatening.

8.3 Limitations

In this research project, the views and experiences of a qualitative sample of twenty-one men are reported. The sample was predominantly a white, middle class, highly educated cohort. Whilst it is believed that the experiences of this sample were not unusual, in

order to confidently generalise about the concepts of masculinity, friendships and support in gay and straight men, further research is required. Studies that examine men from different cultural groups, backgrounds and ages are also needed to accurately reflect the wide range of masculinities that may exist.

The research is also constrained by the limitations of expressive and written language. The views of the men expressed here were their attempts to describe their experience to me, a relative stranger. The task of knowing, and then describing personal experience has challenged philosophers, psychologists and social science researchers for years. In this study, a transparent attempt has been made to share my interpretations and reflections of the participants' experiences. The use of my supervisors and professional colleagues has informed the interpretative process, and the use of the participants' words via quotations is extensive. However, apart from reference to texts as indicated, the ideas presented in this study are my own. Inevitably, what is written here will also be shaped by the personal views, phenomenology and meanings made by the reader.

8.4 Future research

There are several areas worthy of consideration for future research. The study of men's friendships represents a unique opportunity to study male-male relationships. Many men report a desire for more satisfying friendships and for closer friends, but are often unsure how to proceed. Areas for further study in this area include longitudinal analyses of men's friendships and particularly the factors which support friendship formation and maintenance.

The study of masculinities is gaining momentum, and could be furthered by a closer examination of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. In particular, as less is know about gay masculinities, the notion of a hierarchy of gay masculinities is worthy of further study. Furthermore, examining the lives of men whose experiences represent unusual, alternative or marginalised masculinities can assist in an understanding the relationships and hierarchy's between and within masculinities. For example, by understanding what is considered deviant within masculinity (e.g. homosexuality), the construction of 'acceptable' masculinities may be illuminated. There are several groups of men who experience extreme marginalisation within masculinity and the wider

culture including transsexuals and bi-sexuals, for whom the issues of 'belonging' are especially pertinent. The masculinity enactments of men who have been described as hyper-masculine such as offenders (also labelled toxic masculinity), war veterans and body builders, are also worthy of study. An emerging area of interest concerns issues of body image and body dysmorphia in men. It is through understanding these men's experiences of masculinity that further clarification of the construct of masculinities could be understood within a wider social context.

8.5 Final comments

Beyond the western individualist notion of 'the self', which emphasises individual achievement and success through autonomy, lies a strong need to belong and to be confirmed by another. To this end, men can benefit from other men and through interactions with others may develop and enhance a sense of self. Through different stages in life, or through different personal challenges, men are a potential source of support to each other. It is a basic human desire to be confirmed and acknowledged, and men desire this from their friends.

In this research project, some of the ways in which gay and straight men both receive emotional support, and do not, have been explored. The focus on relational patterns has indicated that it is more useful to speak of close or intimate interactions, than intimate friendships, and the importance of shame as an intimacy regulating variable in the support process. This view underlines the capacity men have for constructing their masculinity and their friendships, such that men are not passive recipients of an all powerful gendered social order.

This study raises some important issues about men, their friendships and masculinity. If men shared their experiences, particularly their challenging and difficult experiences, they could be an enormous source of support to each other, as some of the participants have noted. By keeping these feelings and experiences to themselves, they both fail to avail themselves of potential sources of support and perhaps fail to see their struggles as normative and as a source of support to others. Another key issue for men seeking support is their preparedness to risk being open to their feelings and to the feelings of

others. This represents both a challenge to traditional masculine values and to the definition of men's close friendships.

That gay and straight men have much in common underlines the basic proposition that all are men and are human beings. In the politics of gender, gay men have been situated at the bottom of a gender hierarchy that has ultimately been damaging to both gay and straight men. The construction of a plurality of masculinities may allow for greater flexibility for all men to express their perspective of what it means to be a man.

Furthermore, whilst this research project was only concerned with men's experiences, it is my hope that an understanding of men's friendships, their support seeking behaviour and their construction of masculinities might result in more satisfying relationships for all men and those with whom they interact: their families, their friends and the significant others in their lives.

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Appendix A: Recruitment flyer for straight participants.

School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Telephone: +61 3 9214 5209
Fax: +61 3 9819 0574
Email: sbsadmin@swin.edu.au
Website: www.swin.edu.au/sbs

Men Wanted for Research Project on Men's Friendships

ARE you a male:

- Between 35 and 45 years of age?
- Born in Australia?
- Available for a 60-90 minute confidential interview?

This research is being conducted as part of a Doctoral Thesis at Swinburne University, Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences.

If interested, please contact Richie Robertson on 0417 604 799 or **rrobertson@swin.edu.au** to arrange a time for an interview.

Appendix B: Recruitment flyer for gay participants

SWiN BUR *NE*

SWINBURNE
UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY

School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Telephone: +61 3 9214 5209
Fax: +61 3 9819 0574
Email: rrobertson@swin.edu.au
Website: www.swin.edu.au/sbs

Gay Men Wanted for Research Project on Men's Friendships.

ARE you a gay male:

- Between 35 and 45 years of age?
- Born in Australia?
- Available for a 60-minute confidential interview?

This research is being conducted as part of a Doctoral Thesis in Counselling Psychology at Swinburne University.

Please contact Richie Robertson on 0417 604 799 or rrobertson@swin.edu.au to arrange a time for an interview.

Appendix C: Plain language statement

School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Telephone: +61 3 9214 5209
Fax: +61 3 9819 0574
Email: sbsadmin@swin.edu.au
Website: www.swin.edu.au/sbs

Men's Friendships and Supports

Investigators: Mr. Richie Robertson & Dr. Roger Cook
(Supervisor).

The aim of the project is to investigate support-seeking behaviour in men's friendships. In particular, the project examines men's perceptions about seeking support from other men. There is some evidence to suggest that men are less likely to seek out support than females. Also there is some evidence to suggest that men are less likely to seek out emotional and social support from other men. However there are situations when men do seek out support from their male friends. This area of psychological inquiry is not well researched. This study aims to more fully understand the support seeking process in men's friendships.

Procedure: An appointment will be made for you to attend an interview at Swinburne University, at the Centre for Psychological Services, or I can come to your workplace or home. The interview will last for approximately 60 minutes. You will be asked to answer some general questions and some more personal questions about your life, your friendships, masculinity and support seeking. The interview will be tape-recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Your name will not be recorded in the interview schedule. A pseudonym or "replacement name" like J1 will be used to protect confidentiality. A copy of the transcribed interview will be posted to you at a later date for your own personal use.

Benefits for you and Society: You will be given an opportunity to reflect on definitions of masculinity and male friendship. You will be able to identify your patterns of social and emotional support seeking from your male friends. You may be able to identify elements of your friendships that you were previously unaware of. The research will be used to gain more detailed information about patterns and perceptions of support seeking in men. Of particular interest are the barriers to support seeking in men. This information is of importance to counsellors, psychologists, and other health professionals and policy makers.

Privacy of Information: The interview will be tape-recorded, and then transcribed into a written form by the researcher. Only the researcher (Richie Robertson) and the supervisors will have access to the tapes and transcripts for auditing and checking purposes. The tapes, transcripts and consent forms will be stored separately. The tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Once the project is completed

the tapes will be erased. The data gained from the interviews will be analysed and written up in a thesis, but may also be used for:

- Preparation of a journal article, book or other publication.
- Presentation of research at a conference or other professional gathering
- Preparation of a training or teaching package.

Consent and Withdrawal: Once you have read and understood the information above, and if you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to sign a consent form (attached). You are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If completion of the interview has caused you any emotional distress please seek support from your counsellor or call CARE RING a free 24-hour telephone counselling service on 136 169. Alternatively there is a low cost counselling clinic at The Swinburne University, Centre for Psychological Services, 0n (03) 9214 8653.

Enquiries:
If you have any questions regarding this research you are encouraged to contact the researcher (Richie Robertson, on 0417 604 799 or rrobertson@swin.edu.au). Alternatively you may contact the project supervisor Dr Roger Cook, on (03) 9214 8358.

If you have any queries or concerns which Roger Cook, or Simone Buzwell was unable to satisfy, please write to:	Or, if you have a complaint about the way you were treated during this study, please write to:
The Chair, SBS Research Ethics Committee School of Behavioural Sciences, Mail H24 Swinburne University of Technology	The Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee Swinburne University of Technology Hawthorn, Vic, 3122 Hawthorn Vic 3122 Tel: (03) 9214 5223

Appendix D: Consent form

School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Telephone: +61 3 9214 5209
Fax: +61 3 9819 0574
Website: www.
Email: sbsadmin@swin.edu.au swin.edu.au/sbs

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ON MEN'S FRIENDSHIPS

I _____ have read (or, as appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information above regarding the research project on Men's Friendships. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this interview, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the interview will be recorded on audio tape as data on the condition that no part of it is included in any presentation or public display.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published, used in conference or training seminars or provided to other researchers on the condition that anonymity is preserved and that I cannot be identified.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE
DATE

NAME/S OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/S
Simone Buzwell
SIGNATURE
DATE
Richie Robertson.
SIGNATURE
DATE

Appendix E: Demographics

Research Project
Men's Friendships and Supports

ID: Code:____

Demographic Information

1.   DOB _____Age_____
2.   Where were you born_____ (City and Country?)
3.   Is English your first language? _____
4.   How brother and sisters do you have? _____ (sisters) _____ (brothers)
5.   What was your birth order? _____
6.   Where did you go to school? _____
7.   What is your highest level of education? _____
8.   Religion? _____
9.   Marital status? _____
10.   Occupation: _____
11.   Sexual orientation:
a.   Heterosexual ☐
b.   Homosexual. ☐

Appendix F: Interview questions

Research Project
Men's Friendships and Supports

ID: Code: ____

Interview Questions:
- Plain language statement
- Sign consent form and get address
- General rapport building
- Background of the research, my background

Part 1 (introduction and general issues masculinity)

Today I'm going to ask you some questions about being a man. There are no right or wrong answers and you may find some of the questions easy and some will be more difficult. Please do your best to answer as honestly as you can and answer for yourself. I am interested in your answers and your particular views and opinions.

1. Can you think about any famous or well- known men in Australia or in the world?

2. What qualities do they have?

3. Can you describe some essential male qualities?

4. What are some positive male qualities?

5. What are negative male qualities?

6. In what ways do you think that men differ from women?

7. Can you think of men that you have looked up and admired or currently look up to and admire?

8. Describe the type of qualities that you look up and admire?

9. How would you define the term masculinity?

Part 1 (Friendships)

1. Describe 1-2 of your closest male friends.

2. What qualities do they have?

3. What defines the friendship?

4. How did you become friends?

5. What do you enjoy about your contact with your close male friends?

6. What did you not enjoy?

Part 2 (emotional needs and support)

1. Can you describe a time when you have felt upset or distressed about something?

2. Can you describe your feelings and the thoughts at the time?

3. Did you talk to anyone about your feelings?

4. What was that like?

5. Did you talk to talk to one of your close male friends?

6. What was that like?

7. If not why not?

8. What would have made it easier? How would you feel comfortable to ask for support?

Part 3 (social needs and support)

1. Describe a time when you have lonely or in need of some social company?

2. What were your feelings and thoughts at this time?

3. Did you contact a close male friend?

4. What was that like?

5. If not why not?

6. What factors would influence you to contact a (close) male friend?

7. What would you like from them?

8. Can you tell me about a time when you have been in conflict with a close male friend?
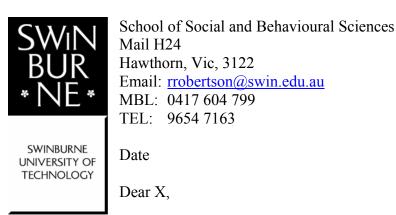
Part 4 giving support

1. Can you describe a time when a male friend has sought you out for support?

2. What did you do?

3. What was that experience like for you, how did you feel?

4. What do you think makes it easier for a friend to seek out support form you?

Part 5 (closure)

1. Are there any questions you would like to ask?

2. What has it been like to answer these questions today?

Appendix G: Letter to participants

School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Mail H24
Hawthorn, Vic, 3122
Email: rrobertson@swin.edu.au
MBL: 0417 604 799
TEL: 9654 7163

Date

Dear X,

Please find enclosed a transcript of your interview with me about men's friendships and support seeking. As discussed during the interview I am making a copy of the interview transcript available to all the men who took part. Even though some time has passed since the interview, I am doing this for several reasons.

Firstly, I want to thank you for your time and input into this important area of research. Your experiences, thoughts and feelings are the basis of this research project into gaining a better understanding of men's support seeking behaviour in their close male friendships.

Secondly, I invite you to take the time to read through the transcript and to make any alterations or corrections that you feel appropriate. There is a self-addressed envelope enclosed so that you can send me any changes you would like to make. When reading the transcript you may find that it does not make sense, or that the language or expression is not exactly as you would have liked. Do not worry too much about that, as the transcript of an interview always looks very different from formal written expression.

You will notice that your real name does not appear anywhere on the transcript and that some identifying details have been changed, such as place names, and names of friends. If this has not been done completely, you may wish to make the alteration.

Please feel free to contact me (details above) if you have any questions or queries regarding the transcript or the project. I am currently in the (long) process of analysing the interview transcripts and writing up the results. At this stage, I hope to submit the thesis for marking at the end of 2005.

Thank you once again for your assistance with this project.

Regards,

_____

Richie Robertson.

List of Publications

The following is a list of peer reviewed publications produced as a result of the project

Robertson, R., Buzwell, S. & Cook, R. (2005). Men and masculinities: Shame and support in heterosexual and homosexual men's close friendships. In T. Bowles (Ed.), *The Good the Bad and The Ugly. Proceedings of the APS Psychology of Relationships Interest Group 5th Annual Conference* (pp 125-134). Melbourne: The Australian Psychological Society.

Robertson, R. (2006). Shame and boundary regulation in straight and gay men's close friendships. *Gestalt Journal of Australia and New Zealand, 2(2),* pp 42-64.