"You can play with the ball, but don't get dirty":

A hierarchy of heterosexual women’s gender expressions

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Abstract

This PhD thesis contributes to sociological understandings of how femininities are understood and experienced by Australian heterosexual women, and develops language for conceptualising the hierarchies within femininities, and femininities and masculinities. Furthermore, through analysis of gender maneuvering this research provides insight into the intricacies of the relationship between structure and agency in expressing one’s gender. Motivated by a lack of theoretical works on multiple femininities, this thesis uses focus groups with different communities of practice to understand how women’s gender expressions are constructed hierarchically, and to examine the complexities around embodying various forms of femininities.

Understanding how men express ‘being a man’ and their masculinity has been of considerable interest in sociology in recent years. However, women's gender expressions have received less attention, and much of the work that has occurred within this field has examined the experiences of queer women, leaving heterosexual gender expressions a relatively under explored area. I argue that dominant women's gender expressions can be understood as being constructed through three key dimensions of femininity: the physical (body), the malleable (appearance) and the restrictive (demeanour). Non-dominant and pariah femininities manifest when these dimensions are violated in some way, attracting stigma and significant social penalties. By focussing on how my participants collectively group together and rank particular forms of women’s gender expression, a hierarchy through which to analyse femininities is proposed. Within this, the intragender relations between women’s gender expressions highlights not only the relationality between the feminine and masculine, but also between the feminine and unfeminine. Through examination of the multiplicities of femininities and their relationships, I demonstrate how the lack of linguistic alternatives for heterosexual women’s gender expressions results in a reinforcement of binary constructions of gender that maintains not only a position of subordination to men, but also privileges femininities that maintain this relationality.
I explore the ways that women find spaces where they are able to challenge dominant ideals of women's gender expressions and reconstruct femininity on their own terms. Relations within particular communities of practice demonstrate that violations of the dimensions of femininity do not always attract the same stigma but instead can enable alternative gender relations to develop through gender manoeuvring. However, once out of these spaces, pressures to embody feminine characteristics are felt throughout women's lives, exacerbated by dating, relationships, co-habitation and child rearing.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree in any university or another 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.

Kythera Watson-Bonnice

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Chapter 1

Playing with Gender

Growing up, I often took great pleasure in playing with gender. Many a weekend found me competing against the guys in high school in keg stands, swearing in ways that made even them blush, and outsmarting them in political debates – all the while dressed in a short denim skirt, full make-up, and big hoop earrings. My ‘costume’ created a powerful disguise through which I was seen as a meek, soft ‘girl’, and then Bam! I would pin them down in a wrestling match. I took great pleasure in the looks of surprise when I changed a tire or jump started a car. I loved being girly and strong. But not everyone else did. Boyfriends found that I didn’t ‘need’ them so much and promptly stopped needing me at all. Other girls couldn’t quite work me out. Didn’t I want guys to like me? I got better at behaving in more socially acceptable feminine ways, but as I got older and was able to go further out into the world, I discovered I wasn’t the only one. There were straight women all over who liked to swear and argue. And so I wondered, what happens when heterosexual cis women (those whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth) don’t fit into the traditional notions of women’s gender expression and femininity? What word(s) do we use to describe this? How do I describe myself?
Not surprisingly, the work of Judith Butler was one of the first places I sought answers. As one of the most influential gender theorists, her work provides some insight into my experiences. She writes:

‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish casual or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the ‘expression’ or ‘effect’ of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (Butler 1990, p. 17)

While Butler's analysis helped me to understand aspects of my interactions with others, it did not provide me with the words I needed to fully explore the experiences. Intelligible genders are those that align with the socially assigned sex of an individual and heterosexuality, and those who embody intelligible gender have more power than those whose gender is less readable (Schippers 2007). Femininity can be understood as the social norms around what is acceptable behaviour and ways of being womanly, including being compliant, passive, other-oriented, dependent and sexually conservative (Charlebois 2011; Connell 1987; Messerschmidt 2010; Schippers 2007). This thesis is essentially a study about unintelligible women. For women to be intelligible, they need to be feminine, and femininity is what masculinity is not (Connell 1987). The relational nature of women's gender expressions is highlighted throughout this thesis, both between masculinity and femininity, and between the feminine and unfeminine.
When I began my research, I was primarily interested in understanding what it meant for heterosexual women to embody traditionally masculine traits. At present, there is a lack of cohesive theoretical frameworks for fully exploring the complexities of femininities. However, as much of the research on these issues was from a queer context and as such did not speak directly to my own experiences. While this project began through personal discovery, its focus is on addressing broader intellectual issues around heterosexual gender expression. This study therefore begins by looking at how it is we come to be understood as intelligibly female. It is only through understanding these ideal feminine tropes that one can then explore the relational other – that of the unintelligible woman.

**Contextual Information and Background**

Over the past several decades, there have been apparent changes in the types of women’s representations throughout the media, however the discourses surrounding them often still reaffirm the current gender order (Gallagher 2014). This can be seen for example with representations of Julia Gillard as a childfree Australian Prime Minister, singer Pink who embodies unconventional femininity or Amélie Mauresmo’s masculine physique; differing images of women’s gender expression are becoming more visible. However, this visibility is accompanied by criticism and stigma. Gillard, along with other women politicians such as British Prime Minister Theresa May, have had their ability to be empathetic and lead a nation called into question because of their childlessness (Dunlevy 2016; Kelly
Pink, born Alecia Moore, has recounted the difficulties she faced early in her career, being told she was “not pretty enough” to become successful due to her “butch” appearance (Fox 2013). Ideal femininity centres on notions of empathy, nurturing, and appealing to male desires (Ambjörnsson 2004; Messerschmidt 2010). The social penalties for not adhering to these expected gender norms, in behaviour and appearance as well as other facets, can be harsh and often centre around the notion that these women are not ‘proper women’ (Allan 2009). Women with public profiles are not the only ones to feel the impact of not embodying ideal femininity. One of the things that strikes me about my research topic is how relatable these issues are for everyday women. Whenever I explain what my project is about – non-dominant forms of gender expression – women either respond with, “Oh, that is totally me!” or “I know someone just like that.” But like me, the exact words to describe these experiences was lacking.

The importance of gender expressions extends well beyond finding words to describe one’s self. Femininity serves as a form of compliance with the global dominance of men over women by submitting to the position of subordination and creating an asymmetry in the gender order (Charlebois 2011; Connell 1987; Schippers 2007). In Western society, and indeed most societies throughout the world, unequal power relations still exist between men and women. Despite an increase of women in Australia engaging in paid work, they still do the majority of domestic unpaid labour (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2015; Craig 2007), are paid roughly 17.3% less than males (ABS 2016) and one in four women experience partner violence (ABS 2012). The importance of this research is to gain insight into how we can move beyond the binaries of gender expressions to
provide a piece of the puzzle to challenge the gender order. Male domination is maintained within the gender order by masculinity holding a position of superiority over femininity (Schippers 2007). As Nancy Finley (2010, p. 363) argues:

...the internal dynamics of femininity have importance in the gender order. Interactions that construct these intragender dynamics can be used to not only sustain gender relations but also to challenge the relationships between masculinities and femininities.

Such a feat requires a reconfiguration of the ways in which we view gender expressions through not only shifting the values placed upon the traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity, but also by creating a space in-between that frees gender expressions from the sexed body. Ideologies become normalised and reconstructed through language (Charlebois 2011). I argue that at present, we do not have the linguistic options for conceptualising women’s gender expressions in order to do this. The current models for women’s gender expressions are inadequate and fail to make sense of the breadth of women’s gender expressions for heterosexual women. As such, women’s gender expressions are understood only through the lens of femininity and are relegated to a position of subordination. An important step then in mounting a challenge to the gender order is to first establish a conceptual framework from with which to interrogate the construction and maintenance of femininities and masculinities.

While women who challenge notions of traditional femininity may be becoming more commonplace in Western society, many have noted the limited academic literature on women’s gender expressions (see for example Budgeon 2014; Finley
2010; Gill & Scharff 2011; Schippers 2007). Following a challenge to the idea that
gender is only a concern for women, there has been extensive research on men
and masculinities, and a smaller but significant body of work on femininities.
Mimi Schippers (2007, p. 85, emphasis in original) has stated that, “a compelling
and empirically useful conceptualization of hegemonic femininity and multiple,
hierarchical femininities as central to male dominant gender relations has not yet
been developed”. Finley (2010, p. 361) echoes this, stating that “scholars have
not adequately developed the relations among multiple femininities”. Gender
expressions such as femininity and masculinity are the ways in which one
expresses their gender identity through dress, mannerism, and behaviour
(Connell 1987). Research on heterosexual women’s gender expressions is
noticeably absent in the contemporary field, and in particular, there is little
research from an Australian context. Understanding how heterosexual women’s
gender expressions manifest and function enables a more thorough scrutiny of
the power relations both between men and women, and between women and
women.

Research on the ways in which women express their gender, particularly the little
that has focussed on heterosexual women, has almost exclusively done so
through the lens of femininity. However, I use the term women’s gender
expressions throughout this thesis to highlight the possibility of separating out
women’s bodies from femininity and to open this space up to other linguistic
options. While I will argue that we do not have language outside of femininity for
women’s bodies yet, I do not want to limit the possibility that we may soon find
these words. It is also important to note that I often use the plural term
femininities to indicate that there is not solely one way of being feminine. 

Femininity, like masculinity, comes in many forms (Connell 1987). These various forms rest within a hierarchy where the most dominant and culturally acceptable forms are situated at the top, garnering the most power (Schippers 2007). There have been several attempts to frame multiple femininities within a hierarchy, however to date, there does not exist a cohesive framework and this is an area in need of further investigation.

**Aims of the Project**

There are multiple aims for this project. Firstly, this study aims to investigate women’s gender expressions and how they are experienced by heterosexual women in order to expand our understandings of what contemporary dominant and non-dominant femininities look like. In doing so, this thesis also aims to explore the in-between spaces between femininity and masculinity to provide an account of unintelligible genders and to establish a manner through which to conceptualise a hierarchy of multiple femininities. Furthermore, a focus on heterosexual femininity will enable analysis of the ways in which gender expressions are compounded by heterosexual experiences.

I argue that dominant femininity can be understood through three key aspects, the physical (body), malleable (appearance) and the restrictive (demeanour). These three dimensions shape the way in which non-dominant women’s gender expressions are constructed and positioned within the femininities hierarchy.
While we do not yet have the everyday language to adequately capture the multitude of women's gender expressions, women who embody these forms of femininity have a sophisticated understanding of their experiences and create ways to find agency within this space. As such, the goal of the present research is to explore ideas around, and experiences of, both dominant and non-dominant forms of gender expression, including femininity and masculinity, for female-bodied heterosexual Australian women in order to uncover the meanings attached to those experiences. A further intention of my research is to contribute to the establishment of a cohesive theoretical femininities framework. I propose a hierarchy of femininities that draws upon the three dimensions of femininity to establish the ways in which hegemonic femininities are maintained while also enabling a broader conceptualisation that includes women's gender expressions that do not rest on solely femininity.

My research project rests in the in-between spaces of, and the complex relationality between the feminine and unfeminine, and the feminine and masculine. Accordingly, the primary research questions are:

- How is femininity understood by heterosexual cis women?
- What do dominant and non-dominant forms of gender expressions for heterosexual cis women look like and what differentiates the various forms from one another?
- What are the experiences of heterosexual cis women who embody non-dominant gender expressions and femininities?

These questions guide the chapters through this thesis.
The Chapters

This thesis consists of eight chapters. This first chapter has provided a brief overview of the aims and purpose of my study, outlining the importance of developing a framework for conceptualising women’s gender expressions. Such a task represents a small step towards providing a challenge to the gender order. This thesis therefore aims to add to the body of literature on women’s gender expressions and, in particular, to provide much needed research that focusses on heterosexual women.

Chapter 2: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality defines and examines understandings of the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality. Key debates regarding the ways in which these categories are constructed and their relationships to one another are explored to situate the work within the broader context. In line with Butler’s (1990) work, I argue that gender is not a direct result of a person’s assigned sex category but rather it is through the repetition of everyday gendered acts that we come to understand a person as masculine or feminine. Sexuality is also discussed to illustrate the ways in which heterosexuality is linked to the ways in which we conceptualise sex and gender. Sex, gender, and sexuality are unable to be separated out from one another and therefore must all be considered when discussing women’s gender expressions.

In Chapter 3: Women’s Gender Expressions, I extend the theorising from the previous chapter to assess research on gender expressions more specifically. I begin with a brief overview of masculinities before discussing in more detail
literature on femininities. The main frameworks utilised by femininities researchers, emphasised and hegemonic femininity, are evaluated and the debates surrounding them are discussed. I argue that hegemonic femininity provides a more useful way of understanding and analysing women’s gender expressions. Qualitative research on dominant and non-dominant femininities is also presented to illustrate the breadth of different types of women’s gender expressions. However, the lack of cohesive frameworks present in this body of existing research is highlighted demonstrating a need for further scholarship in this area.

Chapter 4: Research Methods outlines my feminist methodological approach embedded in this research. Symbolic interactionism and phenomenology support the epistemological approach and use of focus groups for data collection. The focus of symbolic interactionism on shared meanings and symbols in meaning making lends itself well to my research and is idea for group discussions. Furthermore, phenomenology suggests a communality in the shared experiences of a particular phenomenon enabling rich discussions regarding the women’s experiences of gender expression in their communities of practice.

My findings are discussed over three chapters. In Chapter 5: Hegemonic Femininities, I explore the ways in which the women I spoke with understand dominant femininities and conceptualise these on three dimensions. Physical (body), malleable (appearance), and restrictive (demeanour) aspects of femininities are outlined and analysed drawing on the theoretical works presented in the previous chapters. The dominant forms of femininity that they
express can be understood as that of the Mother and the Barbie. These are discussed as central to understandings of Schippers (2007) concept of hegemonic femininity.

Chapter 6: Non-Dominant Gender Expressions and Pariah Femininities opens up the discussion to examine non-dominant forms of women's gender expression. I describe the way the women in this research made sense of gender expressions that deviate from ideal femininity. Analysis of my participants’ discussions highlight the difficulty in finding words that speak to their experiences. Words such as ‘androgyny’, ‘masculinity’, ‘tomboy’, and ‘butch’ are all explored but found to be inadequate and instead, all forms of women’s gender expression were read as forms of femininity. However, when embodying non-dominant femininities, they were understood as expressions of unfemininity. I argue that the binaries of femininity and masculinity are inescapable when trying to make sense of gender expressions as we do not yet have the language to describe such manifestations.

In Chapter 7: Contingent and Relational Gender Expressions, I discuss the ways in which women emphasised particular characteristics as their own individual forms of femininity that often differed from hegemonic femininity. This is followed by an examination of the ways in which the different communities of practice ‘did’ femininity. In both of these cases, there was a sense of subjective agency present whereby the women felt that they could opt in and out of these various feminine subject positions depending on the situation. I analyse this by drawing on Schippers (2007) concept of gender manoeuvring, illustrating that for some groups of women, alternative femininities enable a reconfiguration of
gender relations in a local context. However, the limits of gender manoeuvring are also evident for many of the participants. Despite the agency expressed by many of the women, overarching structural limitations were felt by all of the participants. A further focus of this chapter is on the relationality between hegemonic femininity and non-dominant gender expressions, and between femininity and masculinity. Motherhood, dating and relationships highlight this relationality and the ways in which they sustain structural gender influences on their lives.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8: Resistance, I summarise the key arguments throughout the thesis and outline how the research questions have been addressed. Support for Butler (1990) and Schippers (2007) work is discussed and recommendations for future research are provided.

**Conclusion**

As noted earlier, there has been little research specifically examining heterosexual women’s gender expressions. Furthermore, there have been multiple calls for the development of theoretical frameworks through which to explore the hierarchy of multiple femininities. This thesis aims to address these issues. I will argue that femininity is constructed through three key dimensions, that of the physical, the malleable and the restrictive. Gender expressions are read as unfeminine when they do not adhere to these dimensions. Through this process, multiple femininities can manifest and are then situated within a
hierarchy, where the most legible are located in a hegemonic position. While women may not always have everyday language to describe their experiences, they most certainly understand the consequences for embodying non-dominant forms of women’s gender expressions.
An examination of the literature has revealed that gender expressions cannot be separated out from their connections to sex, gender categories and sexuality. Thus, in order to explore gender expressions, we must first discuss sex, gender, and sexuality. This chapter will outline these key terms and some of the debates surrounding them, as well as provide some background for the theoretical concepts utilised throughout this thesis. Definitions of sex and gender will be outlined, followed by theories of gender and its construction. Socialisation, performativity and ‘doing gender’ are also explored. The relationship between sexuality/desire and gender is then examined, followed by a discussion of relationality and heteronormativity. As will be illustrated, sex, gender, and sexuality are inextricably linked in the social imagination through the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) and confined to essentialist thinking (Richardson 2007). However, by viewing these as social constructs that are malleable, the fluidity of the categories is opened up and challenges to the binary categories are made possible.
**Sex and Gender**

The term sex has a complicated relationship with gender. Often used interchangeably, the two terms have altered meaning over the past century. It is important to first establish an understanding of what the common usage of the term sex currently means before discussing the differences between this and the concept of gender.

**Sex as the Default**

Early sociological work used the term ‘sex’ to refer to not only one’s biological make up, but also their roles, identity and sexuality (Muehlenhard & Peterson 2011). In their collaborative works, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1998 [1848]) made note of ‘sex’ inequalities through critiques of the bourgeois family, noting the exploitation of women, but offered little analysis beyond that. Emile Durkheim’s (1964) functionalist writings viewed women as naturally subordinate and suggested that there was a natural evolution towards sexual differences between men and women as civilization advanced. In a similar vein to Durkheim, Talcott Parsons (1954) saw the division between men and women as ‘functional’. He used the term ‘sex roles’ to refer to the complementary activities and norms associated with men and women. These works drew on understandings of men and women based on a dichotomy of biological differences where men and women each have different physical characteristics associated with particular behaviours.
The term sex today still centres on biology and takes into account several aspects, including a person's chromosome make up, external and internal genitals, reproductive organs, hormones and secondary sex characteristics such as physical body shape and hair growth (Lindsey 2011; Muehlenhard & Paterson 2011). Sex can be seen as a status as one is born into it (Hird 2000). However, the above definition falls victim to biological essentialism where sex is seen as a primarily dichotomous arena; you are either male or female, and these characteristics can be neatly typologised into two exclusive categories. Fausto-Sterling’s (1993; 2000) research suggested that there are, in fact, several possible combinations of male and female sex characteristics. This has fuelled a somewhat tongue-in-cheek call for there to be a new way of viewing sex, where rather than humans being a “perfect dimorphic species” we instead could view five separate possible sexes (Fausto-Sterling 2000, p. 20). Fausto-Sterling’s (1993; 2000) work demonstrates the need for a broader conceptualisation of how we define and use the term sex.

The term ‘intersex’ has become familiar vernacular to describe people who do not fall neatly into the male or female categories based on physical and biological markers (Hird 2004; Fausto-Stirling 2000). While the idea of a third category allows us to break away from the binary view of sex as male or female, it should be noted that for many people (including those with intersex traits), there is a preference to view intersex as a disorder of sex development (Davis 2016). Nonetheless, as the development of sex characteristics are seen to not adhere to the biological dimorphic understandings of male and female, they are often seen as ‘wrong’ and in need of correction (Hird 2004; Holmes 2007; Fausto-Sterling
This has previously taken place when a child is very young through such means as ‘corrective’ or ‘assignment’ surgery where genitals are made to look more clearly one gender (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Justifications for such surgeries stemmed from the belief that happiness requires adhering to one of the two socially accepted sexes (Fausto-Sterling 1993, p. 24). Such drastic measures demonstrate societies’ need to categorise people as either men or women in order to reduce the ‘threat’ to the dimorphic social order. Intersex bodies challenge the notion of males and females as two ‘naturally’ distinct and complementary categories, a concept that underpins heteronormativity throughout many societies. Heteronormativity refers to the ways in which social institutions and structures promote heterosexuality as a given and, in doing so, privilege it above all other forms of relations (Berlant & Warner 1998).

The ways we describe the sex categories as male, female, and intersex, are not biologically intrinsic but rather they are relative to time and place. The very fact that different cultures have defined and made sense of sex variation in such diverse ways, and that these understandings have changed over time, highlights that this supposedly fixed, biological notion is most certainly socially constituted. Researchers have amassed a significant body of anthropological work supporting a rejection of a two-sex model (see for example Hird 2004, Fausto-Sterling 2000; Kessler & McKenna 1978; Nanda 2000; Peletz 2009; Roscoe 1998; Whitehead 1994). However, as Hird (2004, p. 2) argues, Western understandings of ‘sex’ are constructed not so much through “actual knowledge of sex differences rooted in morphology” but rather through discourses that highlight and reinforce sex dichotomy, not diversity.
While the term sex is often seen to correlate with biological markers for males and females, sex can be understood as a social construction and subject to change over time and place (Butler 1990). With this in mind, throughout this thesis the usage of sex will refer to those who have been socially categorised as male, female or intersex. As inferred in this section, gender is understood to refer to the expression of socially accepted masculine or feminine characteristics, regardless of sex assigned at birth. However, it is of course, not nearly this simple.

Relationship Between Sex and Gender

Prior to 1960, the term ‘gender’ appeared only in a handful of academic papers (Jackson & Scott 2010) and has only come into common usage over the past 40 or so years (Muehlenhard & Peterson 2011). In this short time however, the term has stirred up a whirlwind of debate and controversy (Bradley 2007), from what it means to its complicated relationships to sex and sexuality. While sex can be seen as a status one is born into, gender is understood as a status in that it is learned through social interactions within a society (Hird 2000). Put simply, “Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine” (Lindsey 2011, p. 4).

In the early decades of usage of the term gender (from the early 1960-70’s), sex and gender were often used interchangeably and inconsistently (Oakley 1972). Initially a term utilised by American psychiatrists, ‘gender’ enabled a way in which to explore the experiences of people whose biological and social sex
differed (Oakley 1972). The construction of the concept of gender enabled several new possibilities, including enabling the various social differences between sexes to be encompassed in one concept (Delphy 1993). In one of the first works directly addressing gender, Ann Oakley’s (1972, p. 16) ‘Sex, Gender and Society’, the differences between the two terms were defined as follows:

‘Sex’ is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. ‘Gender’ however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.

Separating out gender from sex allowed for an emphasis on the social factors rather than biological in determining a variety of behaviours which had been used as a justification for women’s subordination (Hood-Williams 1996). The common assumption, that gender differences are ‘natural’, was able to be challenged through this new concept. The distinction between sex as the biological and physiological body and gender as the social construction of it, became commonplace amongst social scientists (Gould & Kern-Daniels 1977). There is still, however, vigorous debate regarding exactly how to distinguish the two terms and precisely what they each constitute, or if the two can be separated (Carlson 2010; Hood-Williams 1996; Kessler & McKenna 1978; Muehlenhard & Peterson 2011).

It is important to note that this connection between the physical body and understandings of sex not only affects the manner in which we categorise people, but also in the way we maintain our bodies. For many years, the body was problematic for researchers due to the dualistic tendencies inherent in the two-
sex models of difference and the recurrent view of women’s bodies as deviant (Holmes 2007). However, researchers such as Germaine Greer, Ann Oakley, and Judith Butler wrote extensively on these issues. Greer (1970) argued that while there may be some small bodily sex differences evident in males and females, they are mostly emphasized through social practices, manners of dress and other aspects of social life to create the illusion of difference. Butler’s (1990) extension of Foucault’s (1979) ideas in *The History of Sexuality*, posited that our bodies are sites onto which femininity and masculinity are imposed through the daily actions one undergoes in regulating their gender. Sex, she claims, is “an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time” (Butler 1993, p. xi). It is not a “fact” but rather it is a “process” through which social norms make it become real (Butler 1993, p. xi). In other words, social influences impact the understandings of sex and thus cannot be understood as simply ‘what is between our legs’ (Butler 1990; Butler 1993; Hird 2000).

Further challenges to deterministic biological arguments can be seen in the work around ‘embodiment’ (Budgeon 2003; Coffey 2013; Coleman 2009). Dualistic understandings of the mind and body as separate constructs have been critiqued for their tendency to associate men and masculinity with the mind, and women and femininity with the body, a position which maintains gender divisions and the global gender order (Grosz 1994). Messerschmidt (2004, p. 31) explains that the embodiment perspective enables analysis of “the social processes and practices through which the body becomes meaningful to the social agent”. Such a view challenges mind/body dualisms through conceptualising the mind and body as working together rather than as separate and binary constructs (Butler 1990;
Coleman 2009; Grosz 1994). This is of importance to the present research as the connection between women’s experiences of their bodies and societal influences is crucial in any discussion of gender expression.

So far, a general background to the usage of the terms sex and gender has been outlined, however as has been indicated, there is greater complexity to these words that extends beyond basic definitions. The next section will explore some of the theoretical underpinnings involved in the construction of gender as a concept and the associated understandings of the term.

**Theorising Gender**

This section will consider how the term ‘gender’ has historically developed and explore some of the key debates surrounding theories of how gender is constructed. As explained, the term gender carries with it a complex myriad of debates and theoretical understandings around not just what it is, but also how it comes to be. Gender can be defined broadly as the various social and cultural characteristics of femininity and masculinity assigned to a person, often attributed to a person’s biological make up (Oakley 1972). Thus, gender is the expected behaviours for one’s sex. While this definition may seem rather straightforward, there has been significant disagreement regarding how it is that gender is constructed (Risman 2004). There are many theories of gender formation and gender differences that have taken different approaches to answering how it is people come to be seen as either male or female. Many have
fallen out of favour, becoming out-dated as the times have changed, and others have remained part of the theoretical discourses, maintaining strong support, often being taken up and reworked by others along the way. This section will discuss the broad historical and theoretical trajectories of early functionalist theories, socialisation, and gender as something we ‘do’.

*Functionalist Approaches*

A somewhat traditional view of gender is that of the structural-functionalist approach which focused on the differences between men and women (Bradley 2007). Key theorists of structural-functionalism, Parsons and Bales (1955), saw sex role specialisation as crucial to the smooth functioning of society. Drawing on biological arguments regarding women and childbirth, they suggested it was therefore ‘natural’ that women care for and nurture children (Lindsey 2011). Similarly, men were viewed as ‘naturally’ aggressive and competitive due to their physique and hormones (Lindsey 2011). In this way, masculinity and femininity are attributed to dichotomous biological differences in men and women which are then shaped and reinforced through ascribed complimentary sex roles (Bradley 2007; Holmes 2007). The structuralist-functionalist approach to gender has lost credibility over the past 50 years as it disregards the differences that exist among men and women (Connell 2002) as well as variation across social contexts (Holmes 2007). In the 1970’s many scholars began to critique this approach, arguing that it was used as a means for supporting male domination and gender stratification (see for example Firestone 1971; Greer 1970; Oakley
1972; Ortner 1972; Russo 1976). From these works, a new conceptualisation began to emerge that proposed social reproduction as responsible for the differences between men and women. This enabled challenges to the essential inevitability of these roles.

*Gender Socialisation*

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1953, p. 34) paved the way for feminist analysis of sex and gender arguing that physical sex differences may exist, but that they had "no significance". That the social environment and context shape how we come to both understand and be women was the cornerstone for feminists who sought to deconstruct the sex/gender distinction (Jackson & Scott 2010). As noted earlier in this chapter, Oakley (1972) proposed that sex and gender should be completely separated out from one another. Oakley (1972) used the term socialisation to explore how institutions teach children what is appropriate gendered behaviour for men or women, focusing on the social aspects over the biological. At its core, framing our understanding of gender through the lens of socialisation suggests that the way in which one learns to be a man or woman originates through an interaction with societal norms of masculinity and femininity (Garfinkel 1967; Kessler & McKenna 1978; Oakley 1972; Rubin 1984). Through this process one actively forms notions of what it is to be a man or a woman, as was illustrated in de Beauvoir’s (1953, p. 301) famous quote, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. Scholarship clearly indicates that appropriate behaviours, values and beliefs associated with each
gender are internalised and reproduced within society, and while they may differ over time and from place to place, the process is much the same (Bradley 2007; Wearing 1996).

The socialisation approach utilised by the early gender theorists provided a much-needed shift from viewing sex as the determinant of an individual’s social role. Oakley (1972) viewed social gender as imposed upon ‘blank slate’ sexed bodies, where sex was viewed as a natural and gender was wholly placed upon such bodies. But such a view still assumes a dimorphic position and inherent in the sex/gender distinction is the assumption that the ‘natural biology’ of bodies results in two distinct categories, male and female (Hood-Williams 1996). The body was seen as biological evidence for Oakley (1972) of male and femaleness and the basis for social gender divisions. For her, sex is natural, gender is the social and she argued that these social and cultural aspects were malleable, while the biological was constant (Oakley 1972). This sex/gender divide challenged the ‘naturalist’ perspective that femininity and masculinity were specifically results of biological characteristics of women and men. On one hand, such a view provides for a separation between the two concepts to explore them in ways that had not previously been possible, but at the same time, despite attempting to break the link between the two, gender becomes dependent on the notion of sex, creating a problematic binary relationship between the two.

While the sex/gender distinction became central to the work of many feminist scholars, there were many who contested it. Delphy (1993, p. 4) argued that we think of gender in terms of sex, suggesting that gender is the “content with sex as
the container”. In this sense, sex can be spoken about without referring to gender, but gender cannot be discussed without reference to sex. Such discussions lead to the questions of whether gender can be truly disentangled from sex, and inevitably which comes first. As sex is assigned at birth through physiological markers, it tends to be assumed to be ‘first’. Such a view suggests then that sex not only causes but also explains gender; gender is then dependant within the relationship, collapsing back into the primary concept, sex. However, not everyone agrees with this.

Liz Stanley (1984) argued that while many feminist academics contested ideas of biological essentialism, they often did so while also accepting the possibility of ‘pre-given’ sex differences. Stanley (1984) challenged the sex-gender distinction and coined the term ‘correspondence theory’ to describe the ‘correspondence’ between sex, gender, sexual orientation and reproductive sexual behaviour that form a natural order. Stanley (1984, p. 40) posited that this is an “impermeable theory” as when evidence is provided that contradicts this natural order, it in fact proves the theory through its perceived “unnaturalness”. The collapse of sex and gender can also be seen in ideas of Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (1978) and their work with transsexuals. Kessler and McKenna (1978) developed the idea of ‘cultural genitals’, or genitals that a person is assumed to have under their clothing, regardless of whether or not they did in fact possess them. As Kessler (1998, p. 86) explains: “The cultural genitals (not some configuration of biological material) are the foundation for any gender attribution made”. This suggests that there is little separation between sex and gender; they are inevitably intertwined.
Gender attribution is almost always actually genital attribution, and thus gender informs sex. To ‘pass’ as a man or a woman requires expression of particular mannerisms and behaviours that are specifically tied to a particular sex. Garfinkel’s (1967) case study of Agnes, a male-to-female transsexual, illustrates this. While Agnes did not have the biological characteristic socially ascribed to females, she was able to pass as a woman (Garfinkel 1967). Agnes’ mannerisms and behaviours were seen as signs of ‘gender’ attributed to her ‘sex’, and not as effeminate. Stanley (1984, p. 39) interprets the account of Agnes as an example of the “symbiotic relationship of sex and gender”, where gender works because of links between natural order, sex and gender. This was achieved through studying and then enacting how to be a woman, consciously doing what many women do without thinking (West & Zimmerman 1987). This notion of ‘doing gender’ will be discussed in the following section.

*Gender as a Performance*

The notion that gender is something we ‘do’ has garnered much support, even from those who disagree on the extent and manner in which sex and gender are related (Butler 1990; Connell 1987; Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1976; Kessler & McKenna 1978; West & Zimmerman 1987). Gender can be seen as either a performance, something we have to work at or a repetition of gender norms (Butler 1990). When viewed as a performance, people are seen as actors, drawing on gendered scripts to present a good show of femininity or masculinity (Goffman 1976). This view draws on the dramaturgical approach stemming from
symbolic interactionism and the work of Erving Goffman (1976). Goffman (1976) did not see presentations of gender as natural, but rather as a product of inequality that seems natural through our continual displays in our everyday interactions. The gender displays reproduce a gender hierarchy and inequality that is essentially an illusion created through our daily interactions with others.

In one of the most influential pieces of literature on gender, Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) coined the term ‘doing gender’ to describe a similar understanding to Goffman (1976) regarding the ways in which people continually work at doing gender through their interactions. West and Zimmerman (1987) understood gender as not something we are, but something we do through performed daily interactions and the relational experience one encounters in their engagement within society. West and Zimmerman (1987) stressed the importance of the distinctions between sex, sex category and gender in order to elaborate how the process of doing gender unfolds. In this context, the term sex refers to socially established biological criteria of a person and the sex category is the application of these sex criteria (West & Zimmerman 1987). In everyday life, one’s sex is not always discernible so it is through social cues one is placed within a sex category. Gender, however, is the enactment of normative behaviour appropriate for ones’ sex category (West & Zimmerman 1987). By behaving in a masculine or feminine manner one ‘becomes’ gendered through their interactions with others within a society (West & Zimmerman 1987).

Judith Butler (1990) also reimagined the relationship between sex and gender. One of the most influential post structuralist gender theorists, Butler (1990;
1993a) rejected the idea that gender is an expression of sex and argued that gender is used to construct sex through repetitive acts. Extending Foucault’s genealogical approach, Butler’s work explored the power sustaining popular understanding of gender as natural by breaking down the binary constructions of gender identity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990, p. 33) argued, “There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its result”. Rather than seeing gender and sex simply as performed, Butler (1990) argued it is performative. She suggested that we ‘do’ gender not for ourselves, but for others, whether real or imaginary. In order to know how to relate and interact with a person, we first must ascertain their gender; without discourses of gender, one is unintelligible. Bodies are not able to be ‘intelligible’ unless classified or marked by sex/gender (discussed in more detail later in the chapter with relation to the heterosexual matrix). In this way, Butler saw gender as something that is done to us.

Butler (1990) also discussed what she calls ‘pastiche’, a replication comprising of an assortment of identity forms, which in turn then mocks any notion of an inner true self. Pastiche enables the examination of the fluidity of identity, as is the case with resistance to fixed drag identities. When men portray themselves as women, it suggests that all forms of gender are simply impersonations:

...gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. (Butler 1993b, p. 313)

This is her notion of ‘performativity’.
For Butler, gender identity is a performance. It has no ‘real’ essence. The so called male or female ‘identity’ is merely the result of public and social discourses entailing unrelenting echoes of innumerable gender acts, making gender seem ‘real’ through this act of repetition. If gender only becomes real through discourse, then so too does sexuality. These ideas are central to the present research and will be discussed in the following section.

**Sexuality**

Sex, gender, and sexuality are inextricably and inescapably linked. At times the terms, meanings and relationships collide, causing political and theoretical problems (Richardson 2007). As with sex and gender, there are those who have argued that we cannot understand sexuality without drawing on the other concepts and therefore they must be analysed in conjunction with each other, while others suggest we must separate out each term and unpack them individually. Even within these fields of thought, there are differences in how this should be done and the degree to which they must be understood as interconnected or as separate. These issues will be explored by outlining some of the main debates surrounding the gender/sexuality relationship and the theoretical borders between the two. Understandings of how we ‘do’ sexuality will also be discussed in order to illustrate the power of the perceived binaries of sexuality and its impact upon how we make sense of gender. The relationality of the gendering of sexuality is then considered, followed by a discussion of Queer Theory and heteronormativity.
Sexuality can be understood as “all erotically significant aspects of social life and social being, such as desires, practices, relationships and identities” (Jackson 2006b, p. 106). What is deemed as sexual varies from person to person and is influenced by historical and geographical contexts. In understanding this complicated relationship between gender and sexuality, we must also consider the varied usage of the term ‘gender’ as discussed in the previous section. Gender has been used synonymously with sexuality, causing debate as to where one ends and the other begins. Many theorists still use the terms in diverse ways to signify very different things (Richardson 2007). One of the main conceptualisations of the gender and sexuality relationship is the notion that there is a strong overlap. The degree and direction of this relationship differs with theorists prioritising one over the other. Broadly, this distinction can be seen as the divide between feminist and queer theorists (Richardson 2007). This section will begin by briefly outlining the essentialist approach, followed by a discussion of sexuality and gender relationship as viewed by those who prioritise gender over sexuality, and then those who see sexuality as primary to gender. Next, the view of sexuality and gender as separate theoretical domains will be explored.

The essentialist approach to sexuality stems from universalised understandings of sexual identities and sex acts, often based on biological assumptions. It aims to explain sexuality as coming from an innate inner truth, reducing complex human behaviours into simplified pre-social biological origins based on psychological, physiological, hormonal or genetic grounds (Rahman & Jackson 2010; Weeks
Within this framework, sexuality can be seen a posteriori of gender in that it comes about as a result of the naturally occurring binary relationship between men and women (Richardson 2007). One of the many problems with such an approach, as discussed earlier in relation to gender, is its claim to be able to place various aspects of life into neat measureable units. Feminist theory has rigorously critiqued notions of sex and sexuality as a natural consequence of physiology to justify women’s social roles and purpose within society (Greer 1970; Firestone 1971).

For feminist theorist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow (1978; 1994), there was a strong overlap between sexuality and gender that at times parallels the essentialist viewpoint. Chodorow (1978) argued that a person’s sexuality forms as a part of their individual development with influences from their family life and learned gender identity, although this differs for boys and girls. She argued that women may be more open to bisexuality and homosexuality due to attempts to recreate the mother-daughter relationship but that “most women are heterosexual” (Chodorow 1978, p. 200). This position has drawn much critique from other feminists and sexuality researchers such as Adrienne Rich (1980). In a shift away from Chodorow (1978), Rich (1980) maintained people are pressured into taking on ‘conventional gender identities’ through the larger social context as opposed to the immediate family setting. This social process takes place through the both positive reinforcements, such as economic rewards, as well as punishments like harassment and violence towards those who do not conform to heterosexuality. Rich (1980) referred to this as compulsory heterosexuality. However, she suggests that there have been many women through history who
stray from this compulsory heterosexuality by arranging their lives in relation to other women, rather than men. Rich (1980) claimed that any woman who chooses to create a life around another woman is then a lesbian, as lesbianism is a political act, not a sexual desire. She argued that sexuality was a product of men’s power and social control, and a direct expression of gender.

Both Chodorow’s and Rich’s work have drawn criticisms from each other and others (Gatens 1994; Young 1997). These criticisms tend to focus on the reinforcement of universally inscribed gender categories. Furthermore, intersections with class and race are overlooked, which mask issues of power and domination (Sprague & Kobrynowicz 2006). However, both Chodorow and Rich’s theories of gender and sexuality demonstrate a strong link between the formation of sexuality through the prism of gender. In contrast, Gayle Rubin (1984) objected to the notion that sexuality was a direct manifestation of gender arguing that such views not only ignore the differences within women’s and men’s sexualities, but also lack the ability to adequately theorise sexuality through gender. Instead her approach insisted on a radical separation of gender and sexuality on grounds they are two separate domains: “...although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice” (Rubin 1984, p. 170). This idea of a sex/gender system influenced post structuralist approaches to gender and sexuality, allowing the analysis of gender and sexuality to be explored in new ways and enabling more complex understandings. These ideas eventually added fuel leading up to the challenge of the category ‘women’ as a fixed category and towards the ‘cultural turn’ towards postmodern thinking (Rahman & Jackson 2010).
Christine Delphy (1984) and Monique Wittig (1981), like Rich (1980), viewed gender and sexuality as a result of the larger social context. The materialist approach is often equated with the social constructionist approach (Beasley 2005). Delphy and Wittig’s approaches differ significantly from Rich’s in that they refute the gender difference oriented explanations and instead focus on dominance suggesting that the categories of man and woman are relative and dependent upon particular social and economic positions within any given society. Delphy (1984) and Wittig (1981) argued that it is from gender that the binary divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality stems. Wittig (1981) uses the term ‘heterosexual contract’ to refer to the way in which binary sexual differences and heterosexuality are the result of political influences, creating a social contract which reinforces relations between men and women. The heterosexual contract places boundaries on gender identity that must sit within the norm of heterosexual desires. While both Delphy and Wittig’s views still maintain a strong link between gender and sexuality, they do so through the use of meta-narratives. More recent work by Stevi Jackson (2005) builds upon the ideas of Delphy and Wittig, acknowledging that sexuality is inherently gendered, but places the emphasis on the interconnections between gender and sexuality allowing for analytical distinctions.

Building upon these earlier works, Judith Butler (1988; 1990; 1993; 2004) wrote extensively on sexuality and gender. Her work has focussed on challenging the ontological basis of these categories. Butler (1990) does this by drawing on Rich’s (1980) ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ and Wittig’s (1981) ‘heterosexual contract’ to create what she terms the ‘heterosexual matrix’. Within this matrix, sex, gender
and desire (sexuality) are positioned such that the framework enables meaning to be extracted. Ideal relations are produced in which gender naturally follows on from sex, and sexuality naturally follows on from gender. Gender and heterosexuality are therefore interdependent and interwoven in such a way that deviations from normative expressions of masculinity and femininity can cause a person’s heterosexuality to be in question. Butler (1990, p. 151) calls this intelligible genders:

I use the term heterosexual matrix...to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized...a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.

In order to create a theory of gender that enabled escape from this matrix, Butler turned to identity and performativity (discussed earlier). By integrating and combining categories of sex, gender, and sexuality, Butler’s work has been seen to have enabled the creation of a Queer politics that refused any sense of a set identity (Jagose 1996). Butler’s (1990; 1993) ‘mixing up’ of identities and traditional presentations of gender is of importance to the present research.
Michel Foucault is one of the most influential theorists regarding the social and political power of sexuality (Seidman 2010). Similar to several of the theorists discussed previously, Foucault (1979) disputed the view that sex was inherently biological or natural. In the ‘History of Sexuality Vol. 1’, Foucault (1979) examined historical as well as contemporary discourses that led to our understanding of sex and sexuality. He explained:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (Foucault 1979, p. 106)

Foucault’s (1979) claim was that sexuality is a powerful discursive construct. He argued that power was at the core of this construction and that by containing a person’s sexual behaviours and identities, internalising this control, society is able to better monitor and manage behaviour of individuals and whole populations (Foucault 1979). One of the results of this is that we become more and more a ‘disciplinary society’. The types of discourses that arise from this involve judgements of what is normal and abnormal, creating further means to control people’s bodies (Foucault 1979). By controlling bodies and sexuality, or
rather people’s sexual desires and feelings, a society controls ideas of what is normal, shaping people into disciplined and productive members of society (Foucault 1979).

According to Foucault (1979), sexuality is a modern creation that is produced by us, enabling exploration of how it is that we ‘create’, or rather, ‘do’ sexuality. Echoing the concept of ‘doing gender’ (West & Zimmerman 1987), ‘doing sexuality’ rests on the notion that sexuality is not something that someone ‘is’ but rather something one actively does. Schippers (2002, p. 200) explains that sexuality is not restricted to genital contact or even sexual desire, but that: “...actions that reproduce the sexual order, whether they consist of genital contact, sexual desire, or assumptions about sexuality constitute doing sexuality”.

Within this thesis, much of the analysis will draw on ideas that stem from social constructionism, however as with many who research issues relating to sexuality and gender, there is significant overlap with other streams of theory that will be utilised. This includes work that has come out of post structuralism, postmodernism, Butler’s (1990) heterosexual matrix, Foucault’s (1979) discursive practices as well as ideas from Queer theory. The social constructionist approach is particularly opposed to essentialisms, both in relation to biological and social arenas. Earlier, varied social constructionist ideas from Jackson, MacKinnon, Delph and Wittig were discussed in relation to the rise of the sexuality and gender relationship debate. In the following section, the social constructionist approaches will be revisited in relation to later theorists who have embraced the term, including Jeffery Weeks and Ken Plummer.
Postmodernism and Queer theory will also be discussed to explore beyond the
gender and sexuality causality debate, and look into the impact of the
male/female and heterosexual/homosexual binaries.

*Relationality and the Gendering of Sexuality*

Even if one wants to move beyond the theoretical binaries of male/female,
masculine/feminine or heterosexual/homosexual, there is no clear in-between
space. Our understandings of what it is to be ‘female’ are all too often intertwined
with, and oppositional to, what it is to be ‘male’. This is central to this thesis
which interrogates the spaces within and around women’s gender expressions.
Sherry Ortner (1972) explored the relationship between men and women
drawing on the relationality of nature and culture. Ortner (1972) posited that
women’s subordination can be understood as a result of the association of
women with nature and men with culture. The male/culture approach is awarded
more prestige and status, thus resulting in unequal power in the male/female
dichotomy. This helps us to understand how it is that the gender order is
structured and highlights the relationality between the categories of male and
female, an idea in the work of Shulamith Firestone (1971).

Although Firestone’s (1971) ‘*Dialectic of Sex*’ has been on the receiving end of
much criticism (see for example Merck & Sandford 2010), her work was a
foundational text for critiquing binary gender. Her text provided a framework for
understanding the male/female binary by building upon and rethinking de
Beauvoir’s (1953) work discussed earlier. Where de Beauvoir (1953) came from a social constructionist view, Firestone (1971) at times took a more biological reductionist approach, suggesting that gender follows on from biological sex, and more specifically from childbearing. However, she argued that not only is biological sex not ‘fixed’, it in fact produces the possibility to overthrow itself. Her proposition for achieving this was to do away with the nuclear family and take reproduction out of the equation all together, with conception made possible through use of artificial insemination and wombs (Firestone 1971). Firestone’s (1971) approach has been heavily criticised as being too technologically determinist, and for ignoring the power of the gender order (Merck & Sandford 2010).

Coming from a rather different angle, the work of John Gagnon and William Simon (1973) provided some insight into the relationality of the male/female roles in intimate sexual encounters. They proposed a ‘script’ theory of sexuality that suggested people are not born sexual but rather learn to become sexual. They rejected the notion of sex or sexuality as a natural force or that anything is intrinsically sexual instead suggesting that anything can become sexualised as we are taught by society what feelings and desires are considered to be sexual (Gagnon & Simon 1973). Sexuality is thus “interwoven with the everyday social fabric” (Jackson & Scott 2010, p. 816) drawing on both past and present experiences allowing for reflexivity. This can be seen in Gagnon and Simon’s (1973) script theory, which proposed that sexual scripts or blueprints enable us to make sense of our sexual experiences. They help us to understand, “the who’s, the what’s, the when’s, where’s and why’s for given types of activities” (Gagnon
Within the sexual scripts metaphor, Gagnon and Simon (1973) explained that cultural scenarios help to organise sexual meanings on a broad level while interpersonal scripts take place in individual social interactions. This help us to know how to play the part of the man or woman within the sexual encounter (Gagnon & Simon 1973) and ties in with ‘doing gender’ and performance discussed earlier (Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1976; Kessler & McKenna 1978; West & Zimmerman 1987). Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler, and Tolman (2007), utilised Gagnon and Simon’s (1973) sexual scripts and Rich’s (1980) compulsory heterosexuality to create a heteronormative and dominant sexual script. While others have made use of heterosexual scripts (see Frith & Kitzinger 2001; Ward 1995), they have tended to separate out the men’s and women’s ‘roles’, whereas Kim et al. (2007) drew on Butler’s work to argue for one integrated script with two parts; one for the men, and one for the women. As they explained, “Like two voices engaging in dialogue, these complementary ‘parts’ comprise a single, integrated script, working in tandem to produce ‘culturally intelligible’ heterosexual interactions and relationships” (Kim et al. 2007, p. 146). The heterosexual script reinforces and supports power inequalities between men and women (Kim et al. 2007). This work helps to provide a means by which to understand heterosexual sexual interactions (Jackson & Scott 2010; Richardson 2007).

While sexual scripts help to understand intimate heterosexual encounters, heterosexuality is more than physical acts. VanEvery (1996) argued that heterosexuality should be viewed as a social institution rather than a sexual preference or sexual acts. Such a view allows for examination of the ways in
which masculinity and femininity are produced through heterosexual relations (VanEvery 1996). Heterosexuality presupposes difference as it rests on the notion of opposition between masculinity and femininity (Richardson 1996). The relationality between male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual are epitomised in heteronormativity and will now be discussed in more detail.

*Queer Theory and Heteronormativity*

In the following section, the influence of Queer theory on our understandings of the gender/sexuality relationship will be discussed. The concept of heteronormativity will be explored to highlight how gender and sexuality are inextricably linked. The ways in which sexuality has been viewed over the past century have clearly altered significantly (Plummer 2003). As suggested earlier, society has a persistent notion of humans as a naturally dimorphic species. Alongside this bias, heterosexuality has also come to be seen as the natural state of sexuality. Heterosexuality constructs sex as binary by producing men and women as discrete oppositional categories. However, interrogations of such discrete categories have enabled a challenge to the notion of heterosexuality as the norm.

During the 1980's the impact of the ‘cultural turn’ was felt within social theory, eventually leading to the development of Queer theory (Jagose 1996). This body of scholarship drew heavily on the post structuralist and postmodern work of
Michel Foucault and Judith Butler by taking up the notion of meaning as constructed through language, identities as products of discourse, and knowledge as being produced through localised discursive interactions (Rahman & Jackson 2010). Queer theory views identity as constructed through the social arena, as well as not only unstable but also disjointed (Jagose 1996). For the most part, Queer theory focuses on the areas that are excluded or made invisible by heterosexual theories, instead concentrating on other sexualities (Jagose 1996). Queer theory challenges the concept of a unified identity, such as gay or straight, as these terms are seen as practices of power that silence (Jagose 1996), instead positing that identities are fluid and multiple.

In a germinal work within Queer theory, Michael Warner (1991) coined the term heteronormativity. Heteronormativity was touched upon previously in the discussion of Rubin’s (1984) sex hierarchy, Rich’s (1980) compulsory heterosexuality, Wittig’s (1981) heterosexual contract, and Butler’s (1988) heterosexual matrix. These works share the notion that heterosexuality is at the centre, and that all else is defined in relation to it. Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 548) used the term heteronormativity to mean, “the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged”. Within essentialist frameworks, those who do not fit within this framework of binary heterosexuality or heteronormativity, ‘deviate’ from the norm. Thus, for much of the past century homosexuality has been viewed as ‘deviant’ and such constructions of homosexuality have influenced the gender performance (Hird 2000). An example of the dimorphic gender/sexuality relationship can be seen in
biological males presenting a performance of gender where they appear more ‘feminine’ (Pascoe 2012). If a man is to be in a sexual relationship with another man, there is often an expectation that one of them must at least ‘act’ like a woman in order to maintain balance expected within heterosexual relationships.

Tracey Steele (2005) illustrated the power of heterosexual assumptions well in her article ‘Doing It’. She asked the reader to make a gesture using only their hands for ‘sex’, noting the ways in which they shape and move their hands. Steele (2005) explains how these simple hand movements speak to the core cultural assumptions about sex: “The most common gesture for the sex act involves one hand or finger actively breaching the passive boundaries of the other in a mock penetrative motion” (Steele 2005, p. 17). This act demonstrates the pervasive nature of seeing sex as an act between a male and female body. Variations on this ‘natural order’ become deviant. British sociologist, Ken Plummer (1975) wrote about the impact of homosexuality as a deviant sexuality. He argued that people are not born homosexual but rather learn to become homosexual. By this he meant that although a person may have sexual desires for someone of the same sex, it is only through social interaction that they learn that these feelings are indicative of a homosexual identity. Others also have suggested that by focusing on the lived body rather than a specific gender, we can view differences in sexual desires as just desires, rather than an ‘inner core’ identity or sexual orientation (Moi 2001; Young 2002). However, as gender and sex are still the cornerstones of how we make sense of others, it appears we are not yet ready to be able to focus on desires without attaching sexual meaning to them.
In a study on ‘doing bisexuality’, the author questions how it is that one can ‘see’ a person's bisexuality (Miller 2006). The article draws on the work of Garfinkel (1967) and Kessler and McKenna (1978) which suggest that we see all people as either ‘male’ or ‘female’, ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ and as either ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’. Miller’s (2006) findings reinforce the notion of homosexuality as dependent on heterosexuality in the same way that woman is to man, and femininity to masculinity. Gender and sexuality are inevitably intertwined. Eve Sedgwick (1990, p. 31) has argued that, “Without a concept of gender there could be, quite simply, no concept of homo or heterosexuality”. Consequently, if gender constructs do not allow for anything other than homo or hetero, bisexuality becomes invisible (Miller 2006). The relationality between these categories blinds us to other possibilities. It is important to note that sexual identities also extend beyond the categories of straight, gay and bi. Other sexual identities used contemporarily include queer, pansexual, polysexual, asexual, heteroflexible, bisensual, to name just a few (Smith, Jones, Ward, Dixon & Hiller 2014).

When ideas such as compulsory heterosexuality, correspondence theory, the heterosexual matrix and heteronormativity are interrogated, what is central to all of these conceptualisations of relationships and society is the relationality between men and women, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual. These ideas will be applied to and explored in the responses of my research participants in the findings chapters. First, the thesis will turn to other empirical literature that has attempted to make sense of femininity and women’s gender identity.
Conclusions: Sex/Gender/Sexuality

This chapter began with a brief history of the usage of the terms sex and gender. Both terms have origins in biological essentialism but have since been reconceived as social constructions amongst scholars. Variation in historical and cultural sex categories demonstrates the role of time and place in creating labels to describe physical bodies in particular ways. While the binary view of sex as just male or female is still prominent throughout general society, researchers have come to understand sex as a status assigned at birth based on physical characteristics. The ways in which gender has been theorised were discussed, both with regards to what the term means, and with respect to how it constructed. Gender can be understood as the socially ascribed category for particular behaviours, and much like sex, gender tends to be viewed as dimorphic by many. However, the construction of these gender identities (man or woman), are not necessarily a result of a person’s assigned sex category but rather, gender comes into being through performativity, or our repetition of everyday gender acts. Sexuality was also discussed with a focus on its connection to gender and sex. The ways in which we ‘do’ sexuality are rooted in heterosexuality. Despite evidence supporting the notion that sex, gender, and sexuality are social constructions reinforced through discursive processes, the power of the heterosexual matrix and heternormativity results in an ongoing perception of a natural binarism for all of these categories.

In spite of traditions that suggest otherwise, it is my view that the
interconnection between sex, gender, and sexuality prevents us from fully separating them out from one another. In order to research gender expressions, these connections need to be acknowledged and incorporated into the analysis. By viewing gender as a social construct that is informed by sex and sexuality, we can then gain further insight into how it is that binary gender expressions are so pervasive. The next chapter will expand upon this by examining the theoretical work and empirical research pertaining to gender expressions, and more specifically, women's gender expressions. Dominant and non-dominant femininities will be discussed to provide a detailed description of the theoretical frameworks the present research is situated within.
Chapter 3

Women's Gender Expressions

The previous chapter presented some of the important debates relating to the definitions and intersections between sex, gender, and sexuality to provide the foundations for making sense of gender expressions. This chapter will focus on the theoretical and empirical research on women’s gender expression more specifically to establish the framework the present research is located within. It will begin by examining masculinity and the significance of masculinities in understanding femininity. As femininity is constructed relationally to masculinity, an understanding of how masculinities are constructed and theorised is essential. The key theoretical frameworks utilised in exploring women's gender expression and the debate regarding these will be explored, followed by a discussion of the terminology used for describing the most culturally dominant forms of women's gender expression. Connell’s (1987) concept of emphasised femininity will be then discussed, as will Schippers’ (2002) alternative of hegemonic femininity. This chapter will draw on a range of qualitative research in this area in order to interrogate how femininities have been theorised. There are myriad of terms that have been used to describe femininity; some overlap in the ideas they are conveying, while others make different claims about the connection between femininity and the gender order. Finally, non-dominant forms of women’s gender expression as well as a number of subtypes will be outlined.
Masculinities and Femininities

As was detailed in the previous chapter, one of the major problems with scholarship about gender has been the default to two distinct and dichotomous sex categories (Butler 2004; Charlebois 2011; Connell 2002). While biological sex is socially constructed (Butler 1990), this notion still forms the default basis for how masculinity and femininity are understood: where men are masculine and women are feminine (Charlebois 2011). Viewing masculinity and femininity as fundamentally different encourages us to think of men and women as also different (Johnson 2005). In their most basic form, masculinity and femininity can be seen as sets of social norms about men and women’s behaviour, and more significantly the gender specific expectations of what those behaviours should include (Johnson 2005). As the following will establish, within Western societies, masculine characteristics and behaviours are often considered to include being aggressive, competitive, independent, strong, confident and permissive heterosexuality (Charlebois 2011; Francis 2010; Messerschmidt 2010). For femininity, the key aspects are seen to be compliance, dependence, cooperation, passivity and conservative sexuality (Charlebois 2011; Connell 1987; Messerschmidt 2010; Schippers 2007). In essence, femininity is what masculinity is not (Connell 1987).

The term masculinity has been in usage since the 1800’s and has surprisingly altered little in its meaning (Whitehead 2002). While what constituted masculinity in the early days of the terms usage bears little resemblance to its more contemporary understanding, the essence of the term remains the same in
that masculinity represents an idealised version of what it means to be a man within a given society (Whitehead 2002). A prominent theorist in the study of gender and masculinities, Raewyn Connell (1987, p. 71) describes masculinity as “...simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture”. According to Connell (1987), masculinity involves a set of practices and characteristics that by engaging in, people are able to position themselves within the space of masculinity. In other words, by acting in particular ways, one becomes masculine. When people, but men in particular, engage in these practices there are very real and significant effects on the social and cultural landscape. From this work, the term masculinity has extended from just pertaining to the various ideas about what constitutes male behaviours and characteristics to now being an entire area of research examining power relations, stratification and identity (Haywood & Macan Ghaill 2003; Whitehead 2002).

Work by sociologists such as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) has challenged the essentialist view by examining the differences that are present within the same sex categories and the many forms of masculinities and femininities. Within any category of classification exists a hierarchal order and thus some masculinities and/or femininities embody a more dominant position over others. Messerschmidt (2010) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest that in order to understand how the hierarchies within femininities function, we need to first understand their relation to the hierarchy of masculinities with which they are inextricably linked.
One of the problems with trying to define masculinity is that it obscures the processes involved in being gendered, and in doing so neglects the relationships between and among genders (Connell 1987). For this reason, Connell (1987) uses the term masculinities to make it clear that is not just one form of being masculine, but many. Rather than conceiving of masculine behaviours and attributes under the single heading of masculinity, conceptualising multiple masculinities allows exploration of the various forms masculinity can take on. In this vein, the concept of hegemonic masculinity was developed by Connell (1987) to describe the dominant form of masculinity within a given society and since has become an essential component in gender and masculinities studies. When particular ideas and meanings around what is masculine dominate a given society, the forms of masculinity that are less powerful then defer to the hegemonic form. Connell (1987) also argues that the way in which we understand hegemonic masculinity is often through comparing it to what it is not, such as femininity and less dominant forms of masculinity. In this way, Connell (1987) views masculinity and femininity as part of gendered power relations where different masculinities are thought of in relation to one another within a hierarchy.

Due to the influence of the prominent view that there is a dichotomy of men and women, and masculine and feminine, much of the research into masculinity has pertained only to those who exhibit clear male sex characteristics. Pascoe (2006, p. 1) challenges the dominant approaches to sociological masculinity research which views masculinity as “whatever it is that male bodies do”. Research by Pascoe (2012) and others (see for example Halberstam 1998; Sasson-Levy 2003)
has begun to build a body of work breaking down this dichotomy and examining masculinity in more fluid terms where sex and the body are less central to the analysis, including masculinity and women’s bodies. This will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Understanding masculinity is essential to understanding femininity, as both are constructed in relation to each other. As discussed in the previous chapter, within the heterosexual matrix masculinity and femininity are central to making gendered bodies intelligible (Butler 1990). Of interest to this thesis is the ways in which women's bodies are seen as unintelligible, or rather bodies that do not present the expected gendered behaviours and presentation. In order to discuss this, a clear understanding of the expected behaviours is needed. The following section will explore these ideas further by unpacking what it means to be feminine.

**Femininity and Femininities**

In a similar fashion to masculinity, femininity can be seen as what groups of people think it means to be women in a particular society (Paechter 2007). As discussed in Chapter 2, both sex and gender are socially constructed categories and these categories inform understandings of gender expressions (Butler 1990; Connell 1987). A review of the literature reveals that femininity is an expression of women's bodies that encompasses particular behaviours and attributes that has shifted over time (Butler 1990; Skeggs 1997). In the 1700’s, the hegemonic
ideals of the bourgeois woman were pushed upon the working class, creating femininity as a category women strove for (Skeggs 1997). According to Skeggs (1997), at this time, femininity was focused predominantly on simplicity, composure, moderation and opulence in one's appearance (Skeggs 1997). However, by the 1800's, femininity began to include behavioural aspects (Skeggs 1997). Central to these understandings was the notion of 'respectability' (Skeggs 1997). While respectability is still an important characteristic of modern femininity, there are many other aspects that are seen as more significant. As outlined earlier, these include qualities such as being passive, compassionate, submissive, nurturing, and weak (Ambjörnsson 2004; Messerschmidt 2010). Empathy, control, sexual desirability, and softness are similarly considered to be part of femininity (Ambjörnsson 2004). The role of motherhood as a cornerstone in the constructions of femininity has also been noted by scholars (Charlebois 2012; Nakano Glenn 1994; Nash 2014; Russo 1976; Skeggs 1997).

Femininity is constructed in relation to hegemonic masculinity, where women are subordinate to men (Charlebois 2011; Connell 1987; Schippers 2007). These notions of femininity rest upon difference; femininity is what masculinity is not (Connell 1987). This can be seen in the types of characteristics that have come to be understood as feminine: passive versus aggressive, submissive versus dominating. Underpinning the notion of difference is the heterosexual matrix. Heterosexuality provides a rationale for difference, as women and men are seen as complementary opposites, justifying power inequality (Charlebois 2011; Connell 1987; Schippers 2007). As highlighted in the previous chapter, sex, gender, and sexuality are intertwined and contingent upon one another. It is for
these reasons that femininity cannot be understood or analysed without acknowledging its connection to masculinity and heterosexuality.

While masculinity has been an area of great interest for researchers, femininity has received significantly less attention (Finley 2010). In the past two decades, there has been an increase in qualitative research on various aspects of femininity exploring a number of areas ranging from the internet (Elm 2009), geek (Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz 2006), Goth culture (Wilkins 2004), and music (Mullaney 2007; Schippers 2002). Education (Allan 2009; Cockburn & Clarke 2002; Esposito 2011; Fahey 2014; Hill 2015; Renold & Allan 2006), work (Demaiter & Adams 2009), drug use (Haines, Johnson, Carter & Arora 2009), drinking (Rolfe, Orford & Dalton 2009), graffiti (Halsey & Young 2006), and homelessness (Huey & Berndt 2008) have also been areas of interest. Likewise, substantial research has looked at femininities in particular cultures (Beutel, Borden & Burge 2015; Charlebois 2014; Cole & Zucker 2007; Pyke & Johnson 2003), and its intersectionality with class (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong & Lotus Seeley 2014; Fahey 2014). Femininity and sport is a further area that has received significant attention from researchers (Adams & Bettis 2003; Cohen 2008; Grindstaff & West 2010; Ezzell 2009; Grogan, Evans, Write & Hunter 2004; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar & Kauer 2004; Packard 2009). This list is by no means exhaustive, but despite the amount of research presented here, there is little consensus as to a framework within which to analyse femininity. In fact, the majority of these qualitative studies do not utilise any framework for understanding femininity in a broader context. As such, while the findings of much of this work are of interest to the field of gender expressions, they do not
serve to further an understanding of the relationships between femininities or their relationship to masculinities.

For many of the studies on femininity that do engage with theoretical frameworks for understanding femininity, there is tremendous variation in the terminology and concepts utilised including traditional (Grogan et al. 2004; Sasson-Levy 2003), dominant (Charlebois 2011; Rosdahl 2014), emphasised (Connell 1987), hegemonic (Schippers 2007), conventional (Gonick 2004), successful (Ringrose 2007) or normative (Ambjörnsson 2004; Adams & Bettis 2003; Fahey 2014; Jaji 2015; Pascoe 2006; Renold & Allan 2006) and new femininities (Budgeon 2013). While the amount of research that has touched on femininity may appear to constitute a substantial body of work, within these works there remains a lack of consensus on how to best to theorise these femininities or the relationships with non-dominant forms of femininity. Schippers (2007) has called for a more useful framework for through which to analyse the ways in which hierarchies of multiple femininities help to reinforce the gender and Finley (2010) has also highlighted the lack of adequate scholarship regarding multiple femininities. Furthermore, Hockey, Meah and Robinson (2007) argue that heterosexuality has not been central to empirical sociological research and suggest further research into experiences of heterosexuality, including the role of femininity. It is clear that there is a distinct lack of investigation into the practices that constitute femininity (Gill & Scharff 2011), and in particular heterosexual femininity (Hockey et al. 2007). There are however two dominant frameworks that provide some insight into the complexities of the relationships between femininities, that of emphasised and
hegemonic femininities. The following section will discuss and critique these typologies to consider how they may be useful for analysing the data collected in this project.

**Current Typologies: Emphasised and Hegemonic Femininities**

As noted above, a cohesive framework for understanding women’s gender expressions has not yet been adequately developed, however, there are several important concepts that have paved the way for greater understanding of multiple femininities. The academic dominant typologies of femininities will be discussed, that of emphasised femininity (Connell 1987) and hegemonic femininity (Schippers 2007), in order to provide a view of the current work on women’s gender expressions. These two perspectives are the main frameworks through which hierarchical femininities have been explored and have also been the basis for much of research in this area.

*Emphasised Femininity*

Much of the research on femininities has stemmed from Connell’s (1987) work on masculinities noted earlier. While femininities were not an area of significant focus for her, Connell’s (1987) work is still one of the most dominant theoretical frameworks within femininity research. Drawing on West and Zimmerman’s (1987) concept of doing gender, Connell (1987; 2002) argues that relations
between and among masculinity and femininity are seen within all types of power relations, including labour, emotional and symbolic relations. Connell (1987) conceptualises a model of gender relations that acknowledges the constraints of social structures while also allowing for multiple masculinities and femininities. In exploring these multiple femininities, Connell (1987) coined the term ‘emphasised femininity’ to describe the most culturally dominant form of femininity.

Connell (1987) initially developed a concept of hegemonic femininity alongside hegemonic masculinity, but soon after reconceptualised the concept as emphasised femininity. She argues women have little institutionalised power over other women and therefore the term hegemonic was misleading. However, she suggests that the term emphasised femininity captures the pattern of femininity that has most cultural support within a given society. It can be seen as traditional femininity that is “defined around compliance” to the subordination of men and “oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (Connell 1987, p. 183). This compulsory heterosexuality is central to conventional gender identities (Rich 1980). While it is often the most valued form of femininity within a culture, it is not necessarily the most common. Furthermore, like hegemonic femininity, emphasised femininity is not a form of gender expression that can ever be ‘achieved’, rather it is a cultural ideal women aim to embody, shaping their bodily practices and altering their behaviour to align with the notions of what femininity is (Charlebois 2011).
Emphasised femininity can be seen as both “historically and geographically mobile” (Charlebois 2011, p. 26). In other words, the dominant forms of femininity have changed over time and differ from place to place. For example, what was considered to emphasize one’s femininity in 1500’s (pale skin) differs from contemporary understandings (tanned skin) in a Western context (Charlebois 2011). Moreover, these aspects differ across cultures. While in Western culture tanned skin is desired, in other parts of the world, emphasised femininity may require lightening of one’s skin colour. Cultural understandings of emphasised femininity are often promoted and commercialised, reinforcing legitimation (Charlebois 2011; Finley 2010). This can be seen in the growing number of ‘diet’ businesses, and the exercise and make up industries which all stem from the notion that women’s bodies are deficient and need to be fixed (Bartky 1990; Charlebois 2011). Attempts to control and modify the body, and thus present more feminised bodies, are seen to be done to appease male desires (Bartky 1990; Greer 1970), reinforcing femininity as subordinate to masculinity.

The ways in which women over emphasise or exaggerate their femininity in certain contexts, such as when engaging in more masculine sports or activities, reinforces such ideas and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

While emphasised femininity was constructed in relation to the concept of hegemonic masculinities, it differs from the masculine form in the way that it reflects the acceptance of global dominance of men over women, thus creating an asymmetry in the gender order (Finley 2010). Messerschmidt (2004) has also extended Connell’s (1987) concept by suggesting that emphasised femininities are practiced in a manner which accommodates the inferior relationship with
hegemonic masculinities, both legitimizing their existence and making visible their “meaning and essence” (Messerschmidt cited in Charlebois 2011, p. 26). It is through the relationship between hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininities that we can see how the positions within the hierarchy are perpetuated through interactions, in turn revealing what constitutes hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininities. It is only within this context of the hierarchal relationship that these concepts can exist; they must be understood in relation to one another in order to have meaning (Charlebois 2011; Messerschmidt 2004).

Esposito (2011) explored notions of emphasised femininity in her research on the experiences of young women from universities in the United States. In her study, Esposito (2011) spoke with young women identifying two types of femininity, the ‘Hill girl’ and ‘City style’. The ‘Hill girl’ was influenced by traditional notions of femininity and consumption practices, and represented a particular form of dominant femininity on the university campus where they attended. Despite this, Esposito (2011) asserts that even with this status, it did not offer the women “a reprieve from heteropatriarchy”. Such findings support Connell’s (1987, p. 187) rejection of hegemonic femininity suggesting that such a category cannot exist as “all forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men”. Esposito (2011) contends that for this reason, the term emphasised femininity is more appropriate. Furthermore, she, like Connell (1987) and Paechter (2006), argues that femininities differ from masculinities as they enable patriarchy.
Charlebois (2012) also utilises the term emphasised femininity in his work exploring the Japanese subject positions of ‘salary men’ and ‘professional housewives’. In their accounts of their lives, Charlebois (2012) suggests that the women discursively construct emphasised femininity by internalising notions of heterosexuality, marriage and motherhood. Charlebois (2012) understands this through the framework of bounded masculinity and unbounded femininity, where the men are bound to their work and the women are freed from that pressure. The women viewed their position as a professional housewife in a positive way, where the domestic role was preferable to being bound to employment outside of the home. In creating such a dynamic, men maintain a position of dominance and women, of subordination. The women’s “complicit subject positions” as housewives are understood by Charlebois (2012, p. 28) as “legitimating an unequal relationship between masculinity and femininity”. This unequal relationship is at the core of emphasised femininity and can also be seen in sporting contexts as discussed at later in this chapter.

In exploring relationships between men and girls, Terry Leahy also (1994) draws on Connell’s (1987) concept of emphasised femininity and Dorothy Smith’s (1988) ‘codes’ of femininity as a starting point for analysis for discourses of femininity. Smith’s (1988, p. 53) notion of ‘codes of femininity’ asserts that women, “use, play with, break with, and oppose” these textually organised practices of cultural understandings of femininity. Using this as a starting point, Leahy (1994) argues that rather than being situated within either dominant culture or resistant subcultures, as is suggested in Connell’s work, femininities are in fact not nearly this ‘neat’. Instead Leahy (1994, p. 49) suggests that,
Emphasized femininity is not a coherent unified ‘culture’ but arises from practices occasioned within a variety of discourses – for example, motherhood, beauty, or romance. These do not come together as a watertight package, but individually they provide a range of subject positions which may well contradict each other in a particular situation. This also affects other areas that may seem unrelated such as adolescence, health or sports by creating tension between the different subject positions as well as enabling a fluidity in expressions of gender. Gender construction within and across the facets may at times both adhere to and contradict discourse of dominant femininity (Leahy 1994). This notion of multiple, incongruous subject positions will be explored through my findings. However, the complexity of these various manifestations of femininity are not adequately captured through the emphasised femininity framework as all femininities are understood subordinate, limiting any possibility of power over one another.

While many theorists have built upon the concept of Connell’s emphasised femininity incorporating various other elements to counter perceived limitations within the theory (Charlebois 2011; Messerschmidt 2000; 2010), there are also those who have critiqued it (Finley 2010; Schippers 2007). With the shift to emphasised femininity, Connell (1987) argued that all femininity is subordinate to masculinity, and that no form of femininity could ever have enough power to be seen as hegemonic. This replacement of hegemonic femininity with the concept of emphasised femininity therefore restricts analysis of the hierarchies of femininities and the power relations within (Finley 2010). Furthermore, while Connell (1987) suggested that women have little institutionalised control over
other women, Pyke and Johnson (2003) argue that this disregards the ways in which age, class, sexuality and race are subjugated in order to establish a hegemonic form of femininity. The privileging of particular forms of femininity over others creates subordinate forms that are constructed as oppositional to dominant femininity (Charlebois 2011; Pyke & Johnson 2003). By drawing on such a framework, researchers are better able to explore the “multiplicity of women’s experiences” with relation to race and class (Pyke & Johnson 2003, p. 35). For these reasons, many have returned to the term hegemonic femininity.

_Hegemonic Femininities_

Drawing on her work with women in the alternative hard rock music scene, Schippers (2002; 2007) addressed the concerns noted by Pyke and Johnson (2003) regarding a lack of analysis of the hierarchy within the emphasised femininity framework. She proposed an alternative theoretical framework that reconceived of hegemonic femininity that enabled further investigation of the gender order and its maintenance in the hierarchies of femininity. Schippers (2007) theory of hegemonic femininity stems from Butler's (1999) heterosexual matrix by suggesting that heterosexuality structures the relationships between masculinity and femininity. Complementary but asymmetrical relational variations between men and women allow for this hegemony to be maintained. Schippers’ (2007, p. 92) understands people to occupy the social location of man or woman:
It is through social practice that the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity organizes material relations of social life. Practice, then, is not masculinity and femininity as Connell suggests; social practice, in all its forms, from embodied interaction to child raising... is the mechanism by which masculinities and femininities, as part of a vast network of gender meanings, come to organize social life. Masculinities and femininities provide a legitimating rationale not just for embodiment and behavior by individuals but also for how to coordinate, evaluate, and regulate social practices, and therein lies their hegemonic significance.

Rather than view people occupying Connell’s (1987) notion of ‘place’, Schippers (2007) argues that people occupy the ‘social location’ of woman or man. From this location, they can then participate in practices and embody characteristics symbolically understood as masculine or feminine. Such a view enables analysis of the hierarchal relationships that exist not only in relation to masculinities, but with other femininities as well. Furthermore, it distinguishes femininity from subordinate masculinity, enabling a view of multiple femininities that does not reduce it to the practices of women, and masculinity to the practices of men (Bäckström 2013; Halberstam 1998; Schippers 2007).

Connell (1987, p. 188) suggested that “femininity organized as an adaption to men's power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance, and empathy as womanly virtues, is not in much of a state to establish hegemony over other forms of femininity”. The emphasised femininity framework discounts the relationships between multiple femininities. In contrast, Schippers (2007, p. 11) argues that “when a woman is assertive, she moves away from ideal femininity. While others might evaluate her negatively, it does not make sense to say she is in a
subordinate position in relation to other women”. This is an important conceptual departure from emphasised femininity. In this rethinking of Connell’s work, Schippers (2002; 2007) explains that when a woman embodies masculine traits they are not understood in same way as a man exhibiting identical behaviours. The ‘content’ of gender still rests within the ‘container’ of sex (Delphy 1993). Expressions of masculinity collapses back onto the sex assigned at birth, preventing us from separating out gender from sex. Unlike Connell, Schippers (2007, p. 89) also argues the forms of femininities or gender expression that are seen as deviating from the “normal, ideal or desirable” should not necessarily be considered to locate a ‘subordinate’ position to the dominant forms as they often have masculine qualities and thus cannot necessarily be considered inferior. Furthermore, the complementary nature of masculinity and femininity are what maintain the current gender order, and thus through continued use of the term ‘hegemonic femininity’ rather than ‘emphasised femininity,’ this relationship is highlighted.

Schippers (2007) contends that by reworking Connell’s (1987) theory of gender hegemony in these ways, the concept of hegemonic femininity can be used to examine how masculinities and femininities work to maintain dominance over women as a group on various scales, local to global. On a more global scale, it allows for exploration of the ways in which gender hegemony justifies and continues inequality based on race, ethnicity, class or sexuality as well as enabling an understanding of femininity that allows for multiple configurations. On a local scale, Schippers (2007) speaks of the resistant forms of femininity as ‘alternative’ and ‘pariah’ femininities. This typology of femininities allows for an
exploration of women's gender expression not available through the emphasised femininity framework as it allows for analysis of multiple, hierarchical femininities.

The conceptualisation of multiple hierarchical femininities is an important distinction between hegemonic femininity and emphasised femininity. Connell (1987, p. 188) argues that femininity is “organized as an adaptation to men’s power” and centred around compliance, empathy and nurturing, and therefore is “not in much of a state to establish hegemony over other forms of femininity”. However, Schippers (2007) suggests that this would only be the case if masculinity and femininity were understood separately. By “placing the relationship between masculinity and femininity at the centre of gender hegemony” we are able to examine the “multiple and hierarchical configurations of masculinities and femininities” as it is through the idealised relationship between the two that contents of gender are constructed (Schippers 2007, p. 94). This can be seen in Messerschidt’s (2004) research on femininity amongst high school students where various forms of women’s gender expression were evident. There were two main groups of girls who competed for dominance against each other, as well as a small separate group of girls who behaved in typically masculine ways. These masculine girls were awarded a higher status that others, but they were still subordinate to males. Multiple, differing forms of femininity held hegemonic social positions within the same schooling environment and competed for dominance. Schippers’ (2007) gender framework enables analysis of these types of intricate intragender relations between femininities in a way that emphasised femininity does not provide for.
Connell’s (1987) work on femininities was foundational in our understandings of gender expression, however there are many limitations to the theory. Building on the work from Connell (1987), Schippers’ (2007) hegemonic femininity framework provides a useful way in which to explore the most culturally dominant forms of femininity and subordinate femininities and will be utilised in the data analysis of this project. Hegemonic femininity also enables analysis of the intersectionality of race and class with femininities. A further useful aspect of Schipper’s (2007) work is that it draws on Butler’s (1990) heterosexual matrix, suggesting that heterosexuality underpins the relational variations between men and women. The next section will explore this in more detail.

**Dominant Femininities and Heterosexuality**

Some researchers use hegemonic and emphasised interchangeably (Fairchild & Gregg 2014, Hill 2015; Jaji 2015), while others do not utilise any of these main theoretical frameworks at all. However, these findings still provide valuable insight into femininities and gender expression that can be considered in analysis of the data. Some of these will be briefly discussed.

Budgeon’s (2014) work on ‘new femininities’ has added to Schippers’ (2007) hegemonic gender theory. Due to various societal changes, including an alleged shift towards a feminization of the public sphere, Budgeon (2014) has argued that idealised femininity has begun to incorporate elements of empowerment. The girl power movement of the 1990’s brought a form of femininity to the
foreground that incorporated traditional aspects alongside a sense of agency and liberation (Budgeon 2014). Characteristics such as being assertive and active are part of what has been deemed the ‘new girl’ (Gonick 2004). This can also be seen in the notion of the ‘future girl’ (Harris 2004). Young women are now expected to enact aspects of both traditional femininity and masculinity, creating contradictory subject positions (Harris 2004; McRobbie 2007; Ringrose 2007). However, Budgeon (2014) argues that rather than reject the gender order, these new femininities often play into it as plural femininities are produced alongside hegemonic relations. McRobbie (2007) echoed this, suggesting that neoliberal discourses “re-regulate young women by means of the language of personal choice” (p. 38) and the illusion of ‘choice’ that is actually “a modality for constraint” (p. 36). This is of interest to the present research as the new forms of femininity present in the media (noted in the introduction), often draw on notions of contradictory expressions of gender that centre on the notion of ‘choice’. As such, these ideas will be drawn on in the findings to see the ways in which women may experience tension between hegemonic femininity and aspects of masculinity.

While hegemonic femininity can be broadly described as what is deemed socially acceptable for women to both ‘be’ and ‘do’, within this category there are various forms of femininity, one of which is hyperfemininity. ‘Hypfer femininity’ can be understood as a socially acceptable form of femininity, however it is seen as an extreme form of femininity (Allan 2009; Connell 1995; Holland & Harpin 2013; Paechter 2010; Renold & Allan 2006). Hyperfemininity is located at the far end of the women’s gender expression spectrum, an exaggerated and ideal performance
of femininity that is inextricably linked to (hetero)sexuality (Allan 2009; Paechter 2010). Within hyperfemininity, the 'girly-girl' occupies a particular type of embodiment that focuses on both looks and behaviour (Allan 2009), where attention to one's appearance becomes a leisure activity (Holland & Harpin 2013). Pink, fluffy, well made up, nice and compliant are all aspects of the girly-girl. This notion aligns with what Halberstam (1998) describes as a ‘compliant form of femininity’ that allows for the subordination of men over women. The underpinning of heterosexuality discussed in the previous chapter is crucial in the manifestation of such forms of femininity.

In a study of hyperfemininity, Alexandra Allan (2009) undertook research with young girls in a private primary school to explore the relevance of Butler’s (1990) heterosexual matrix and the intersections between class, gender and sexuality. Allan (2009) found that heteronormativity and the male gaze played a large role in how these young women constructed their identities. The girly-girls were described by the participants as the most popular girls in school, seen as beautiful, attractive and nice. They were the ideal feminine type many of the girls strived to be like, despite often not feeling positively towards those they saw as embodying it. Paechter (2010, p. 221) uses a framework that sees masculinities and femininities as “ways of ‘doing man/woman’ or ‘boy/girl’ that are constructed within local communities of masculinity and femininity practice”. She contends that the girly-girl is always constructed as heterosexual, and that the girly-girl identity was constructed in opposition to the ‘tomboy’ identity (discussed later). Unlike Allan’s (2009) research however, Paechter (2010) found that looks and behaviour were separated out from each other when constructing
the girly-girl identity. The ‘nice’ aspect of being girly became less relevant as girls
grew older and began to embody more of a ‘flirty-fashion’ discourse (Renold
2005). This discourse described by Renold (2005) involves the girls applying
makeup, altering clothing, and beginning to ‘flirt’ with the sexual boundaries of
child/adult. These works on the ‘girly-girl’ provide insight into how girls feminine
identities, even from a young age, are closely intertwined with heterosexuality.

Educational settings provide a rich site for viewing complex gender identity
negotiations that support heteronormativity. In this vein, Myers and Raymond
(2010) undertook research with girls under the age of nine to explore how
heteronormativity is constructed. They found that, rather than being a part of
growing up and ‘coming of age’, it was a part of everyday life. Myers and
Raymond (2010) contend that the girls in their research ‘performed’
heteronormativity for other boys and girls by focussing their interests on ‘boys’.
Much like the work done on ‘girly girls’ (Allan 2009; Paechter 2010; Reay 2001;
Renold 2005) heterosexuality begins to shape children’s understandings of
themselves and others at a young age through their construction of gender
identities. As Schippers (2007, p. 100) suggests, men and women who embody
“intelligible gender” have more power within society than “those who do not”.

The influence of heterosexuality can also be seen in sites such as sports and
athletics where gender can be bolstered and/or challenged (Bäckström 2013;
Davis-Delano, Pollock & Vose 2009). Research has examined how femininity can
be seen to be performed through participating in sports such as cheerleading
(Adams & Bettis 2003; Grindstaff & West 2006; 2010). This can be seen in the
case of cheerleaders in secondary schools who are often attractive, sporty and well-liked (Charlebois 2011). Prior to the 1940’s, cheerleading was seen as a masculine sport that encompassed athleticism and technical skill out of reach for women (Hanson 1995). However, in the 1950’s, this began to change and the sport became more focused on the typically feminine characteristics we associate with it today, such as manners and cheerfulness (Kutz cited in Adams & Bettis 2003). Around this time, women cheerleaders began to engage in a ‘performance’ where they provided a subordinate but supportive role to male athletes (Adams & Bettis 2003; Eckert 1989, 2003; Grindstaff & West 2006; 2010). Cheerleading has typically reinforced notions of heteronormativity, where men are the primary focus of attention as with work and politics in broader society, while women are relegated to the ‘sidelines’, or the domestic sphere (Grindstaff & West 2010). Furthermore, the performance in itself is a display and enforcement of heterosexuality (Grindstaff & West 2010).

However, while sideline cheerleading can be seen as a form of femininity that embodies normative and/or hyperfemininity, competitive cheerleading contains transgressive aspects of the feminine ideals. In recent decades, the role of the cheerleader has moved beyond sideline supporter into an extremely physically demanding sport of its own. Adams and Bettis (2003, p. 88) point out that despite all of their “athleticism, toughness, and risk taking”, women cheerleaders still do not challenge hegemonic masculinity or transgress gender boundaries. Cheerleaders are not seen as a threat to dominant expectations about how women should behave, as it “is a performative act” that has been traditionally done as a means for providing pleasure and support for others, and most
commonly for the benefit of men (Adams & Bettis 2003, p. 87). This is not the case for many other sports where gender expression, and in particular ‘violations’ of femininity, are seen as a threat to male dominance.

Ezzell’s (2009) work with women rugby players found that their identity work resulted in a reinforcement of gender inequality. The women in her research had recently joined a women’s rugby team only to find that they were branded “butch lesbians”, as often occurs when women engage in physically aggressive sports (Blinde & Taub 1992; Cahn 1993; Ezzell 2009; Griffin 1998). The women created a space for themselves where they could reject this stereotype, however, in attempting to resist the butch lesbian stereotype, the women inadvertently reinforced notions of heteronormativity and the stigma of women as weak (Ezzell 2009, p. 118). By distancing themselves from the “mannish lesbians”, the women in Ezzell’s (2009, p. 118) research not only emphasised their femininity, but they created narratives where they were the “exception”. This was accomplished by engaging in body work and emphasizing conventional notions of femininity and beauty to ensure their sexual appeal to males. Ezzell (2009) refers to this as ‘heterosexy-fit’. The heterosexy-fit subject position is similar to the concepts of emphasised femininity and hegemonic femininity, but includes aspects of toughness, assertiveness and athleticism (Ezzell 2009). Rather than subvert or resist the gender order, this form of femininity supports both heteronormativity and the gender order. Heterosexy-fit can be understood as a form of femininity within the hierarchy of women’s gender expressions that holds a position of status as it is reflective of ideal femininity and serves to support male dominance and the gender order.
The body is central not just to the heterosexy-fit femininity, but to all dominant forms of women’s gender expression and hegemonic femininity. Femininity is reproduced through the body (Bordo 2003). Coffey’s (2012; 2013) Australian research on body work and gender found that women feel pressure to ‘work on’ their bodies to adhere to the ideal femininity. She argues that power of binary gender and heterosexuality makes it difficult to accept anything other than slender femininity as ideal (Coffey 2012; 2013). The importance of heterosexuality in understanding gender relationships is evident through these examples. Women come to be understood as feminine as they are constructed relationally to what men are not. Women who fail to adhere to the expected gender norms risk upsetting the delicate balance between femininity and masculinity. Hegemonic femininity is the form of women’s gender expression that women are compared to, either by themselves or others within society. The various manifestations of actual lived experiences of gender expression vary greatly, but can be understood as situated within a hierarchy under idealised expressions of hegemonic femininity. Those forms of gender expression that are seen as subordinate or oppositional to dominant forms of femininity are central to the present study and will be discussed through the rest of the chapter.

**Non-Dominant Forms of Women’s Gender Expressions**

When talking about the most culturally dominant forms of femininity, emphasised femininity and hegemonic femininity are the two main frameworks researchers tend to work within. However, this area is still under researched
resulting in a lack of cohesive conceptualisation regarding the relations amongst femininities. There are various frameworks and terms utilised to describe and analyse non-dominant forms of gender expression, however much like with dominant femininities, non-dominant femininities are under theorized. There is a significant amount of work that has examined deviant or non-dominant forms of femininity without engaging with any theoretical frameworks or concepts relating to gender expression specifically. These works still provide insight into the ways in which women’s gender expressions can manifest and help to expand the understandings of the range of multiple femininities. Given that this thesis is about non-dominant forms of gender expression, many of the terms utilised in gender research (even without the presence of a theoretical framework) are relevant to the data collected from my participants. My work is an interrogation of this space of non-dominant women’s gender expressions and aims to add to this field of scholarship by looking at how women themselves understand their experiences of non-dominant femininities. I will now outline some of the main terms used to describe women who embody these types of gender expressions.

Terms such as subordinate (Connell 1987), gender deviant girls (Charlebois 2011; Brown 2003; Messerschmidt 2004), pariah (Schippers 2007) alternative (Bäckström 2013; Schippers 2007), and oppositional femininities (Charlebois 2011; Messerschmidt 2000) have all been used to explore the ways in which women challenge dominant, hegemonic or emphasised femininity. This can also be understood through the process of ‘gender manoeuvring’ (Bäckström 2013; Finley 2010; Pomerantz, Currie & Kelly 2004; Schippers 2007). Each of these concepts will be discussed in relation to how they are theorised to operate as
forms of defiant femininities, where they overlap and which provide the most useful framework for analysing the non-dominant forms of femininities that will be explored in the present research.

In order for gender hegemony to function, there must exist an alternate form over which the hegemonic forms dominate. As Butler (1993) has stated, each norm has a relational ‘constitutive outside’ that makes the norm possible. As previously mentioned, Connell (1987) initially used the same terminology for femininity as she did for masculinity. Soon, hegemonic femininity was replaced with the term emphasised femininity to enable further exploration of the unique gender difference in the roles of the various forms of femininity. Connell (1987) proposed that there were subordinate femininities that enabled resistance to hegemony. These subordinate femininities are claimed by Connell (1987) to be most visible in resistant subcultural alternatives. However, as Leahy (1994) importantly points out, resistance often takes place in areas that one would not necessarily label as a subculture. Despite this, much of the research into non-dominant femininities has been undertaken with women who occupy particular subcultures that are perceived to outwardly resist notions of emphasised femininity.

James Messerschmidt (2000; 2004; 2010) has built upon Connell’s work on femininity, labelling subordinate femininities as ‘deviant’ to both emphasised and dominant femininities. When one fails to meet the expectations for either emphasised, hegemonic or dominant femininity (such as attractiveness and heterosexuality), it results in bullying and peer abuse (Messerschmidt 2004).
Charlebois (2011) posits that subordinate femininities are deviant in relation to dominant femininities in particular contexts and can manifest based on race, class, age, sexuality, bodily display, or behaviour. The girl is then viewed as ‘unfeminine’ (Charlebois 2011). Many other academics have utilised the term ‘gender deviant’ in their research to explore the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable feminine behaviour (Adams 1999; Adams & Bettis 2003; Carr 2005; Inness 1999).

Schippers (2007) uses the term ‘pariah femininities’ to describe aspects of what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) refer to as subordinate femininities. In both cases the terms refer to a similar pattern of femininity, but it is the manner in which Schippers (2007) interprets their place within the gender hegemony that differs. Both Connell (1987) and Schippers (2007) contend that women and girls who express and embody the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity defy the workings of the hegemonic relationship that exists between masculinity and femininity are stigmatised for upsetting the balance. According to Schippers (2007), Connell suggests that these types of femininities are ‘inferior’ to not only hegemonic masculinity, but also to emphasised femininity. However, Schippers (2007, p. 95) views this form of femininity as not inferior but as “contaminating the relationship between masculinity and femininity”.

There are three main components to pariah femininities: deviation from feminine practices; a threat to “men’s exclusive possession of masculine characteristics”; and “refusal to embody the relationship between masculinity and femininity demanded by gender hegemony” (Schippers 2007, p. 95). When women embody
these types of behaviours that challenge male dominance, their behaviour becomes both stigmatised and feminised as their gender expressions make their gender less intelligible. Women who exhibit this behaviour they are then labelled in specifically feminised ways, such as a lesbian or slut (sexually non-compliant), bitch (authority) or ‘bad ass’ (physically violent), and thus become socially undesirable as a means to ‘contain’ them (Schippers 2007). In these cases, their gender is read differently according to their sex assigned at birth, however being overly feminine can also attract stigma. These then are the ‘pariah femininities’. Interestingly, studies have shown that women are often the ‘labellers’ of the pariahs to maintain hierarchal positions, much in the same way males do to women (Lundstrom 2006; Tanenbaum 2000). The ‘slut’ is situated as subordinate and oppositional to the ‘nice’ girl (Schippers 2007). This and other pariah femininities establish a set of relational hierarchal femininities. These types of intragender relations of femininities play an important role in the gender order and impact upon women’s life chances (Finley 2010).

Budgeon (2014) has provided critique of Schippers (2007) theory, suggesting that there is a lack of distinction between the many different forms of pariah femininity that may manifest. Darwin (2017) has echoed this in her research on pariah femininities, body hair and fat. In arguing that body hair on women is more severely stigmatised, Darwin (2017) is able to demonstrate the way in which different forms of pariah femininity may be positioned above one another within the hegemonic femininity hierarchy. Darwin’s (2017) findings illustrate the need for greater understandings of how different forms of pariah femininities are positioned within the gender hierarchy. While it appears that there is a clear
hierarchy within pariah femininities as well as femininities as a whole (Budgeon 2014; Darwin 2017), there is a lack of theorising as to what these types of femininities look like, how they are understood, and how they are experienced. As Darwin (2017, p. 2) argues, “Schippers’ original formulation does not account for the subordination of certain pariah femininities beneath others”. These ideas are particularly important for the present research, as mapping femininities is a primary goal.

Alternative femininities is another term that Schippers (2002; 2007) has utilised to explore the hierarchy of femininities. Both alternative and pariah femininities are forms of gender expression that are resistive of hegemonic relations (Bäckström 2013; Finley 2010; Schippers 2002, 2007), however, they differ in how they are received. Alternative femininities can be understood as localised discursive traits and practices that “do not articulate a complementary relation of dominance and subordination between women and men” (Schippers 2007, p. 98, emphasis in original) but that are not stigmatised in the same way that pariah femininities are (Schippers 2002; 2007). Because stigma is associated with pariah femininities they are actually not much of a threat to hegemonic relations (Finley 2010), however they have the potential to turn into alternative femininities (Bäckström 2013). Alternative femininities take place in a more ‘local’ context, such as within the rock subcultures, where face-to-face interactions between masculinity and femininity are able to be replaced by negotiations outside of those in the broader culture (Schippers 2002; 2007). In other words, femininity can be reconstituted to allow for normally stigmatised behaviours to be acceptable in certain spaces.
Bäckström’s (2013) work with women skateboarders illustrates the ways in which young women are able to renegotiate the inter and intra gender relations in such a way that enabled an alternative type of femininity to develop that supported and valued their outspoken manner and non-traditional expressions of femininity. Women in roller derby have also been found to challenge dominant gender norms and create a space for an alternative femininity (Finley 2010) and is discussed in more detail in the next section. It is important to note that alternative femininities vary from one context to another, whereas pariah femininities are culturally defined as contaminating to the gender order as they are relationally understood against hegemonic femininity.

The re-negotiating of gender relations present in alternative femininities are part of what Schippers (2002; 2007) calls ‘gender manoeuvring’. Gender manoeuvring is a type of interaction where a person’s (or groups) performance of gender is manipulated by them in order to shift the gendered meanings within the local context (Schippers 2002). This allows for alternative gender relations to develop. This can take place not only in relation to men, but also in relation to the negotiations between the multiple femininities (Finley 2010). Finley (2010) undertook research on the recent resurgence and popular interest of women’s roller derby utilising the concepts of hegemonic and alternative femininities to explore intragender relations between femininities. In the ethnographic study, Finley (2010) observed and interviewed members of two women’s flat track roller derby leagues from the southern United States to gain insight into the gender manoeuvring within a feminized but very aggressive sport. Women athletes who play aggressive sports are easily stigmatised as pariah femininities
(Gill 2007). Drawing on Schippers (2007) work, Finley (2010) demonstrates how roller derby is able to ‘transport’ the pariah femininity discourse to a local setting, and through gender manoeuvring, recreate it into an alternative femininity that, while resistive to hegemonic masculinity, does not attract the same stigma and scrutiny a pariah would. During derby ‘bouts’ (games), the women skaters would “flaunt the hegemonic masculinity of sports unapologetically with a pride in toughness and aggression” while simultaneously exaggerating markers of femininity (Finley 2010, p. 371). Rather than a form of apologetics, the women’s amplified femininity serves as a form of mockery. In doing these things, the women are able to reclaim the label of pariah. Often men, in the form of partners, friends or just fans of the game, will come to the bouts and play a supportive role (Finley 2010). This shifting of the roles upsets the boundaries between femininities and masculinities. Gender manoeuvring enabled the women to transform the pariah femininity into an alternative femininity (Finley 2010). However, roller derby is still problematic in that it maintains hyper sexualisation through the presentation of hetero femme signifiers in the women’s appearances. As such, often the creation of the alternative femininity is limited to the local context and cannot be extended to broader gender relations.

Skateboarding also provides a site through which to examine non-dominant femininities. Pomerantz and colleagues (2004) work with young women skateboarders found that the skater identity created by their participants enabled them to construct an alternative form of femininity. As skateboarding tends to be a mostly male activity, the girls felt the need to prove themselves to the boys in the hopes of acceptance and to legitimate their use of the skate park. They faced
struggles in challenging the boys control and domination of the skate 'space' and vigorously resisted traditional femininity by wearing comfortable clothes, a lack of make-up and most importantly by taking on a role 'doing' rather than 'watching'. 'Doing' skateboarding allowed these young women to exceed the boundaries of the socially constructed bodily restrictions often placed upon girls. Kelly, Pomerantz, and Currie (2005) found similar results in their research into 'alternative girlhood' and skateboarding. They argue that the women in their study used their skater girl identity as a means to distance themselves from emphasised femininity. By exploring the lives of everyday girls doing everyday things, resistance against emphasised femininity, and male control and domination, are uncovered. This resistance can also be seen in Bäckström's (2013) research into women skateboarding in Sweden. Utilising Schippers (2002; 2007) theoretical framework, Bäckström (2013) explores inter and intra gender relations and gender manoeuvring in a local and regional context. Her findings identified three main forms of femininities, the 'bitch', the 'lesbian', and the 'tomboy', who engaged in gender manoeuvring processes. The 'bitch' exhibited authority and in doing so challenged hegemonic male dominance. The 'lesbian' contaminated femininity through the promiscuity and sexual desire for other women. These femininities provide a 'liberating influence' for the young women involved in the skater community, helping to transform traditional 'gender scripts'. However, while the 'tomboy' also contaminates femininity, Bäckström (2013, p. 41) argues that it does so by reinforcing the gender order, “The category of woman is positioned as complementary and also is inferior to the category man in that its quality content is less valued”. This will be explored further in the next section.
When women participate in more traditional and ‘masculine’ sporting activities their femininity and heterosexuality come into question. Attempts to overcome this tend often lead to constructions of femininities that reinforce, not contest the gender order (Lowe 1998). However, in less traditional sports, like roller derby and skateboarding, there is more room for gender manoeuvring allowing for the creation of alternative femininities that challenge hegemonic gender relations.

There have been numerous studies on femininity and femininities from within various other sporting environments, including bodybuilding (Obel 1996; Shea 2001; Wesely 2001), soccer (Caudwell 2003), rugby (Ezzell 2009; Gill 2007), football (Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel 1999) and horseracing (Butler & Charles 2012), that explore the impact traditionally masculine sporting environments have on women and gender expressions. The research on body building shows a constant balancing act between being muscular athlete and feminine woman (Grogan et al. 2004; Shea 2001). When women actively alter their bodies to become more muscular, they move away from the ‘natural’ state they are seen to be so close to (Shea 2001; Ortner 1972). The women bodybuilder’s body represents a challenge to constructions of not just femininity, but also of masculinity and the idea of sex differences as a whole (Schulze 1990). However, women who engage in such ‘masculine’ practices often enhance their ‘feminine’ traits. This can be seen in the research with women rugby players discussed earlier (Ezzell 2009). When women engage in a sport that requires toughness, they encounter sexist and homophobic stigma. In order to combat this, women engage in being ‘heterosex-y-fit’.
Charlebois (2011) critiques Schippers (2007) pariah femininities for failing to capture the many other femininities that resist emphasised or hegemonic femininity. Charlebois (2011) suggests the usage of Messerschmidt’s (2000) term ‘oppositional femininities’ to describe noncompliant femininities that do not generate the same negative connotations as pariah femininities. Charlebois (2011) argues that the use of oppositional femininities enables viewing forms of resistance that are subtler than those that Schippers describes in her work (Charlebois 2011). While Charlebois (2011) makes some interesting points in his critique of pariah femininities, one of the main components he takes issue with is Schippers’ focus on women who embody hegemonic masculinity. As the focus of this thesis is interested in exactly that, women who embody typically masculine traits, these critiques are less relevant, but are certainly worth acknowledging.

Subtypes of Women’s Gender Expression

While much of the research discussed has focused on the dominant forms of femininities and the ways in which women manoeuvre within the broader context of ‘femininity’, there is also substantial work that has explored categories of gender expression that are not necessarily classed as a form of, or are on the border of, ‘femininity’. This includes research on ‘tomboys’, ‘butch’, ‘female masculinity’, ‘androgyne’ and ‘polygender’. These conceptualisations will also be explained alongside the findings.
Tomboys

When children are young, notions of sex and sexuality are almost ‘unthinkable’ (Renold 2006) and yet, research suggests that peers, parents, media and schooling “channel girls in a heterosexual direction” (Hyde & Jaffee 2000, p. 287) informing their understandings of their own identity and their peer interactions (Renold 2000). Renold (2000; 2005; 2006) has written extensively on the experiences of young girls and their gender identities with particular focus on those she classes ‘tomboys’. Renold (2006) draws on multiple understandings of tomboys to define how she uses the term, suggesting that the subject position of ‘tomboy’ for children is a form of gender transgression that rejects normative femininity and rallies against the restrictions that come with being a woman. She argues that “being a tomboy is perhaps one of the few remaining legitimate subjects of girlhood that can directly deflect the male heterosexual gaze and subvert or queer (heterosexualised) girlie culture” (Renold 2006, p. 503-4).

For Paechter (2010), the tomboy is constructed in opposition to the girly-girl. When she asked the children in her study what it meant to be a tomboy, the response was often either “a girl who likes to do boy things” or by referring to its opposite, the girly-girl (discussed earlier) (Paechter 2010, p. 226-227). However, in contrast to the parents and teacher’s understandings of tomboys, the children who identified as tomboys expressed that it was something they ‘did’ sometimes and not others. In this sense, they were ‘a bit tomboy’. As Paechter (2010, p. 226) explains, the description of ‘a bit tomboy’ does “not so much describe a mixed or androgynous identity as one that varied according to circumstances”.

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The tomboy is often afforded more acceptance in their gender transgression than their male counterparts, sissies, who are viewed as “failed male[s]” (Thorne 1993). This may be in part due to displays of masculine behaviours which receive more approval (Thorne 1993) as well as the view that tomboyism is a ‘stage’ that young girls go through, but will grow out of. However, Halberstam (1998, p. 6) argues that tomboy identity is only “tolerated as long as the child remains prepubescent”. So, what happens when the tomboy grows up and reaches puberty? Carr (1998; 2004; 2005; 2007) sought to shed light on this question. A common reason provided by the women for why they moved away from tomboyism, was ‘boys’. Many of the participants in Carr’s (2004) research expressed these social pressures to ‘conform’ in order to attract male attention. “A woman must surrender her ‘masculine’ manner to attract a man” (Carr 2004, p. 9). This is not surprising as adolescence is a time in girls’ lives where the pressures to adhere to dominant ideals of femininity increase significantly (Currie 1997). A further factor in the ‘disappearance’ of tomboys is tied in with notions of maturity (Carr 2004). As girls become women, maturity becomes associated with femininity. To be masculine, or tomboyish, is to then be immature. In a related work a few years later, Carr (2007) identified a similar pattern. The women in her study who identified as tomboys when younger:

...lost interest in childhood games; they embraced ‘grown up’, ‘femininity’, ‘androgyny’, ‘butch’, or ‘jock’ status; they viewed tomboyism as incompatible with increased heterosexual urges; and/or they acceded to harassment and warnings from parents and peers. (Carr 2007, p. 446)

Negotiating adulthood and heterosexuality means a loss of the tomboy identity. But does it become something else? In exploring the conflation between
lesbianism and tomboyism, Carr (2005) identified two different categories, those who in their adolescence ‘chose masculinity’ without ‘rejecting femininity’ and those who ‘chose masculinity’ but ‘rejected femininity’. Her findings suggest that the women who didn’t reject femininity tended to identify as heterosexual. These women were described as ‘straight butch’. The term butch will be discussed in the next section.

**Butch**

The term ‘butch’ has been used by many theorists to describe a more ‘masculine’ type of woman (Carr 1998; 2004; 2005; 2007; Feinberg 1993; Halberstam 1998; Hart 1998; Levitte & Hiestand 2004; Pascoe 2012). However, it is a term that is almost exclusively used to refer to women who identify as queer or are labelled/misidentified as queer (an exception to this is the work by Carr (2005) mentioned above). The term first began to be used in the 1940’s in relation to lesbian women whose survival required them to imitate heterosexual gender roles (Feinberg 1993). Women would take on either a butch or femme appearance, where the butch woman incorporated masculine style and the femme, an exaggerated form of femininity. In the 1970’s, this mimicking of heterosexual relationships came to be seen negatively within the lesbian community, as it was the type of patriarchal institution they were trying to reject (Feinberg 1993). The butch masculine markers were critiqued and instead a more androgynous aesthetic was adopted. However, since the 1990’s, the butch/femme dynamic has since re-emerged (Levitte & Hiestand 2004).
Much of the work examining the butch identity does so with respect to the butch/femme dynamic. It has been suggested that much of the literature examining lesbian culture does so by looking at the butch and femme as part of one and the same, but it is the butch’s visible nature that enables femme to be seen (Hart 1998). Without the presence of the butch, the femme could easily be assumed to be a heterosexual woman. For these reasons, we often find that research on butch women are discussed in conjunction with the femme. This only further reinforces butch as a lesbian identity.

Butch is more than a masculine woman; it is “an alternative gendering of the female body through an appropriation of masculinity” (Nguyen 2008, p. 674) that extends beyond masculinity being performed by women’s bodies and the wearing of male clothing by women (Feinberg 1993; Halberstam 1998; Levitte & Hiestand 2004). Through simultaneously invoking and rejecting heterosexuality, butch is a distinctive form of gender construction that can be understood as a form of lesbian gender (Nguyen 2008; Rubin 1992, p. 466). For lesbian women, butch is an identity; it has symbolic power and meaning. As such, there has been almost no research on butch gender expressions and heterosexuality. My project aims to address this gap by exploring how heterosexual women understand what butch means to them.
Female Masculinities

There is a small body of research that has explicitly explored women and masculinity, although the area has been relatively ignored in academia (Halberstam 1998). One of the most well-known works within this area of study is that of Jack Halberstam’s (1998) book, *Female Masculinities*, which argues that masculinity should not be thought of only in relation to male bodies. His work examines historical accounts and contemporary pop culture to explore instances of masculinity in both female-bodied and trans women to create a taxonomy of female masculinities. In these instances, female masculinity is seen as not an imitation of masculinity, but rather as a ‘fabrication’ no different to that which men embody. However, when masculinity exists within queer or female bodies, it loses its power and dominance, becoming a form of subordinate masculinity. As noted earlier, intelligible genders have more power than those that are not as legible (Schippers 2007). The interconnections between sex, gender, and sexuality are apparent through such instances. While Halberstam’s (1998) work has been incredibly significant in gender research, the focus of is almost exclusively on same-sex desire; the heterosexual woman is not of interest to him.

Pascoe (2012) explored ideas around female masculinity in her book, *Dude, You’re a Fag*. The opening quote from her chapter on female masculinity states: “Girls can be masculine too, you know” (Genevieve cited in Pascoe 2012, p. 115). Pascoe’s (2012) research with high school students found that boys and girls described many of their female peers as ‘masculine’. These were not women who were trying to pass as males, nor were they necessarily tomboys, nor were they
Pascoe (2012) explores what it means to define masculinity by looking at it as a set of practices that both men and women can engage in. She utilises Schippers’ (2002; 2007) concept of gender manoeuvring to make sense of the movement between masculine and feminine identities.

Sasson-Levy’s (2003) study on Israeli women in the military utilised Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity and Connell’s (1987) concept of ‘gender regime’ to gain insight into the experiences of women who occupied ‘masculine’ roles during their service. She found that there was a rejection of ‘traditional femininity’ while at the same time a compliance with the masculine gender order. As Sasson-Levy (2003, p. 441) explains, the women refused “to accept definitions of femininity and masculinity as essentially dichotomous identities”. Instead they created a new form of gender identity that breaks down the boundaries between masculinity and femininity by combining aspects of both; they “do not turn into men, but are always only ‘like men’, similar but different” (Sasson-Levy 2003, p. 451). They are located somewhere in between traditional woman and masculine soldier, actively distanced themselves from ‘traditional femininity’ through repetitious acts including changing the tone of their voice, wearing oversized clothing and swearing more while also only mimicking masculine identities.

Sasson-Levy (2003) understands this distancing from the feminine as a way in which the women can create a positive perception of themselves. By constructing their identities in opposition to traditional women, they are able to become ‘masculine’. These findings support the notion of relationality, where feminine exists as oppositional to masculine. Research on women in the military in
America has found similar experiences in that the participants sought out a balance between masculine and feminine identities, however there was a stronger need for the American women to reinforce their heterosexuality, and thus femininity (Herbert 1998). This was attributed to the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy in the American military (Herbert 1998) which banned lesbians and homosexuals from openly serving until 2010 (Don’t Act, Don’t Tell Repel Act of 2010). In order for women to not be perceived as too masculine and therefore lesbian, they emphasised feminine practices including wearing perfume, painting their nails and dating men (Herbert 1998).

**Androgyny**

Another area of interest in gender expression research is the concept of ‘androgyny’. Historically, the term has been used in a medical sense to describe a person who is part male (andro) and part female (gyne) (Ferguson 1974). In this sense, an androgynous person was someone who was intersex. However, understandings have shifted from this view to focus less on physical sex attributes and more on masculine and feminine traits that are assigned to gender (Bem 1974; Singer 1976; Woodhill & Samuels 2004; Young 2002). In the early 1970’s, androgyny became an area of interest for researchers, predominantly in the field of psychology. June Singer (1976) wrote extensively on the concept of androgyny, defining the term as the ability to choose between masculinity and femininity depending on the circumstances. She argued that androgyny was the ambition of individuation as it allows people to react to situations by drawing on
either masculine or feminine responses, regardless of the social prescriptions as to what a man or woman should do. Around the same time, Sandra Bem (1974) developed the Bem Sex Role Inventory to measure levels of maleness, femaleness and androgyny. Bem (1974) suggested that masculinity and femininity should not be seen as only binary opposites as there was room for tremendous overlap. In her view, sex-typing stifled gender identity formation and that to be psychologically healthy, “behavior should have no gender” in order to allow people to choose their own unique identity (Bem 1974, p. 361). Similar to Singer (1976), Bem (1974) defined androgyny as a person who has both masculine and feminine traits providing for flexibility and adaptability in the way that they conduct themselves.

While these psychological understandings of androgyny provide an interesting attempt at possible avenues for theorising gender, they are still inherently riddled with the need to draw on feminine and masculine, and gender and sex as binary opposites, to do so. They also rend to naturalise binary sex as essential. Building upon both Singer (1976) and Bem’s (1974) work, Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi (1996) attempted to do this by proposing a model of androgyny that differentiated between three separate forms, ‘co-presence’, ‘fusion’ and ‘transcendence’. The ‘co-presence’ form of androgyny is most similar to Singer and Bem’s definitions and refers to when a person has feminine and masculine traits and draw on either depending on the circumstances. ‘Fusion’, on the other hand, involves a melding of femininity and masculinity, while ‘transcendence’ is the form of androgyny in which femininity and masculinity are no longer relevant and they have transcended above gender and sexuality (Lorenzi-Ciolodi 1996). It
is suggested that transcendence provides the means to overcome the physical, social and cultural restraints of sex and gender.

*Polygendered*

In her book, *Polygendered and Ponytailed: The Dilemma of Femininity and the Female Athlete*, Dayna Daniels (2009) presents a bold, although not new call to view bodies as not two dichotomous categories of male and female, but rather as one ‘polygender’. She argues that traditional understanding of masculinity as dependant on a male body and femininity on a female body, is one of the most significant barriers in sports. Drawing on Butler's (1990) notions of performativity discussed earlier that views gender as non-essentialist and fluid, Daniels (2009) argues that bodies should be viewed as being able to be both masculine and feminine to various degrees at any one time and need not be seen as being mutually exclusive. To varying degrees everyone is “a mix of those characteristics, interests, behaviours, and appearances that have been traditionally used to sort females and males into exclusive categories called feminine and masculine” (Daniels 2009, p. 1-2). Polygender is a useful, albeit optimistic, concept but underplays the role of hegemonic gender relations. Until the inequality in the current gender order and the binaries inherent within it are broken down further, polygender is not likely to provide a space to challenge gender norms.
Conclusion

There has been significant research exploring women’s gender expression, however it is still substantially less than has been given to masculinities. A review of the literature reveals that the frameworks for understanding the relationships between multiple femininities are still under theorised and disjointed. It is important to note that much of the work in this area comes from the Global North, and in particular from the US and the UK. While there are some differences in women’s gender expressions that can be noted across Global North nations, there are many similarities in the gender hierarchies and ideas around dominant, hegemonic gender expressions. However, Australian research is noticeably absent, particularly with relation to empirical works that engages with the theoretical frameworks and language related to gender expressions.

The concept of emphasised femininity has been challenged with many expressing dissatisfaction with the term and instead preferring to use alternatives. Other researchers use hegemonic and emphasised interchangeably while others do not utilise any of these main theoretical frameworks at all. These works still provide valuable insight into femininities and gender expression, but do not further our understandings of the intra and intergender relations. Based on the review of this literature, hegemonic femininity appears to provides us with a manner with which to explore multiple femininities through the use of gender manoeuvring, and alternative and pariah femininities. However, this framework is not without its problems. As such, this thesis will also use the term ‘dominant femininities’ to refer to the most culturally celebrated form of women’s gender expression within
a specific culture. This will be done to provide a means by which to explore beyond the hegemonic femininities framework.

As discussed earlier with regards to Messerschidt's (2004) research, there are forms of femininity that can become the most dominant within a social situation or localised context that do not necessary align with the notions of hegemonic femininity. Furthermore, non-dominant femininities will be used to describe those that deviate from the dominant and hegemonic forms. In line with the critiques from Charlebois (2012), it is argued that to limit non-hegemonic women’s gender expressions to only the categories of alternative and pariah femininities would restrict the full exploration of the possible resistant forms of femininity that may develop. Thus, the term non-dominant femininities will be used as an overarching term to refer to forms of gender expression such as oppositional, resistant, alternative, or pariah femininities - those that carry with them some form of stigma for upsetting the balance in the gender order.

The second half of this chapter has provided a brief overview of some to the literature regarding particular subtypes of women’s gender expression that are located, to some degree, ‘outside’ of femininity. These included the ‘tomboy’, the ‘butch’ woman, ‘female masculinity’ and ‘androgyny’. These are categories were examined as they provide avenues through which women can come to understand their gender identity that are not within the hegemonic and dominant femininities frameworks. They will each be considered for their usefulness in understanding the ways that the women in this research understood their own gender and others’ expression.
Femininity does not necessitate female bodies, nor does masculinity male bodies (Halberstam 1998), and yet the majority of research that analyses gender expression does so by drawing on binary notions of femininity and masculinity. Even when subverting femininity, theorists still attach the act as a form of being ‘feminine’. As yet, definitions of androgyny are inadequate in providing an avenue to explore these areas as, despite its best efforts, it is still constrained by the physical body. So, what do we call these non-dominant forms of gender expression that women’s bodies ‘do’? Butler (1990, p. 9) suggests that we are constrained by “…what language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender”. The current language to explore women’s gender expression is constraining our understanding of the experiences of women in their everyday lives.

A great deal of the research into hyper-femininity, the girly-girl, and the tomboy has been undertaken with young women, most still school aged. When research has been done with athletes and sporting women, the participants are often still young. Little research has investigated adult versions of ‘girly-girls’ or how heterosexual tomboys embody their gender when they become adults. There has also been a lack of investigation on what other forms of femininities exist for adult, professional, heterosexual women from a variety of walks of life (Hockey et al. 2007). This thesis seeks to examine these issues in an Australian context. The next chapter will provide an overview of the method for the present research that sought to address these concerns.
Chapter 4

“Why aren’t you talking to lesbians?”

In Chapter 2, I highlighted the discursive and social nature of gender constructions. It is through performativity, the repetition of everyday gender acts, that gender comes into being. Intertwined within this in the context of the present study, is the complexity of the relationships of gender with sex and sexuality and the pervasive understandings of these categories as dichotomous. The previous chapter followed on from this discussion with a detailed analysis of women’s gender expressions research. While there has been a small but significant amount of research in this area, the need for further exploration into women’s gender expression is needed and the ways experiences of heterosexual women who embody non-dominant forms of gender expression is yet to thoroughly investigated. As noted in Chapter 3, much of the literature and research on gender expression has focused on queer women as ‘troubling’ the sex/gender binaries and the heterosexual matrix. However, like Connell’s (1987) work on masculinities, this thesis aims to decentre the norm and examine how the heterosexual matrix and institutionalised heterosexuality is maintained. Understanding those on the ‘inside’ is vital to understanding how others come to be on the ‘outside’ of the gendered social norms. This is the primary focus of this thesis, as well as to contribute to the general understandings of multiple femininities. This chapter will provide a rationale for the approach I have taken in addressing these issues. As such, the research questions are as follows:

• How is femininity understood by heterosexual cis women?
• What do dominant and non-dominant forms of gender expressions for heterosexual cis women look like and what differentiates the various forms from one another?

• What are the experiences of heterosexual cis women who embody non-dominant gender expressions and femininities?

To explore these questions, I used a mixed method approach and conducted five focus groups that included visual mapping data collection. In total, 36 women participated in the study. Each group was made up of self-identifying heterosexual women who came from communities of practice where they were familiar with each other and had a common interest or experience. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the methodologies underpinning the research. Details regarding recruitment are then presented, followed by an outline of the procedure and analysis undertaken. Participant details and information regarding the focus group composition are provided, and finally the ethical issues of the research are considered.

**Feminist and Qualitative Methodologies**

Feminist methodologies have informed the design of this project. This section will provide a background of what that entailed and a rationale for implementing such a method. Feminism has been described as both a theory and a practice (Kelly, Burton & Regan 1994), and while its goal is to understand women’s oppression, it is at the same time an active attempt to illuminate it and eliminate it (Kelly et al. 1994). With this in mind, feminist research can be seen as
contributing to knowledge of gender oppression as well as trying to change it (Kelly et al. 1994). Such research requires acknowledgement of the weight of responsibility on the researcher for their politics and practice (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002).

Central to a feminist approach to research is the assumption that oppressive gender relations exist and there are common interests between women while simultaneously acknowledging the dangers of ‘universalism’ in the experiences of women (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). In order to address this, this thesis will not aim to make any universal generalisations from the data, but rather will draw out understandings that are relevant to the specific time and place in which the participants are located.

Another key aspect to feminist research is the acknowledgement of the reciprocal nature of the relationships between interviewer and interviewee during the research experience (Bailey 2007). As such, during the focus groups there were times where it was important for me to share information about my own life and experiences. This enabled me to establish a reciprocal setting for the focus groups by sharing with my participants what I was requesting of them and to attempt to make the participant feel comfortable and free to open up about issues that at times may have been difficult to discuss. On several occasions, I shared stories of my own life, interactions with my partner, or anecdotes from work or playing sports. At times this was done simply to provide a manner in which to help the participants to connect and feel more comfortable with me and the setting. Other times it was done deliberately to help steer the conversation back on track as
once the women were more comfortable, stories would wander off track. By sharing a similar experience with the women, it enabled a gentle segue from storytelling back to the research questions, refocusing the conversation on the topics of interest. I would invite the women to reflect upon the stories we all shared by asking direct questions of the experiences and tying them into the interview schedule. This seemed an effective method for keeping the conversations on track so as to not run beyond the time commitment asked of the participants during recruitment. It is important to take into account that these interactions can significantly impact the findings and outcomes of the research and thus it has been vital to be aware of them during the process (Bailey 2007). Reflexivity is important not only for feminist research, but for qualitative research in general. As such, it has been crucial that I reflect upon my own role as researcher and how my experiences may impact my understandings and interpretation of the participants’ stories. I have endeavoured to keep this in mind when conducting all aspects of this research.

While feminist studies do not necessitate the use of qualitative techniques, they are commonly used by feminist researchers (Kelly et al. 1994; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002) as is the case in the present study. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to focus on the subjective experience and meanings (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002); notions in line with the political nature of feminist research and for gaining the types of knowledge seen as important to feminist researchers (Kelly et al. 1994). This study is primarily concerned with women’s subjective understandings of femininities in general, as well as their own social identities, gender expressions and views of femininities. Qualitative methods enable
interpretation of the participants’ meanings attached to notions of gender expression and femininities. Furthermore, the use of open ended questions facilitates the exploration of the participants’ views on their lives and experiences, allowing them to freely discuss issues and consequently makes it possible for “the researcher to generate theory” (Reinharz 1992, p. 18). With this in mind, my analysis has drawn heavily on the women’s stories of their own experiences and observations of people in their lives in addition to their direct responses to the specific focus group questions. Qualitative methods enable analysis of participants’ social worlds through exploration of their experiences and understandings of their lives (Wheeldon 2009) and focus groups in particular, facilitate exploration of how these are constructed socially.

In addition to using a semi-structured focus group schedule, concept maps have also been utilised to collect qualitative data for analysis. Concept mapping is a qualitative technique that functions as a geographical means to arrange and represent knowledge. Concept mapping enables the analysis of levels and hierarchies, and the visualisation of relationships between concepts (Wheeldon & Åhlberg 2012). Generally, concept maps use a series of concepts represented as nodes which are then connected to other concepts with lines (Wheeldon & Åhlberg 2012). However, Wheeldon (2009) argues that concept maps need not be thought of in such strict terms and suggests instead that other types of maps that may not have ‘lines’, such as those utilised in the present research, can still represent relationships between concepts including hierarchies. It has also been argued that these tools should be used in conjunction with other research methods, such as focus groups (Wheeldon 2009). As the present research is
interested in investigating the relationships between various forms of dominant and non-dominant women’s gender expressions, such a method facilitates participants to illustrate their understandings through qualitative, visual means, in addition to the focus groups.

Chapters 2 and 3 outlined the theoretical approaches being utilised within this research and the importance of social constructionism in understanding issues related to sex, gender, and sexuality. The ‘doing’ of gender can be seen in the symbolic relations between and among femininities (Connell 1987). Further to that, symbolic interactionism and phenomenology underpin the epistemological base for the current study. Symbolic interactionism is interested in uncovering a shared set of symbols and understandings that inform the meanings people make from their experiences (Patton 1990). This epistemological method is ideal for use in group discussions (Patton 1990) and as such is particularly pertinent to the study. The aim has been to understand the participants’ collective understandings of traditionally feminine women and those who diverge from this form of femininity. The symbolic interactionist tradition enables the unearthing of the ways in which the participants make meaning from interactions they deem to be either traditionally feminine or ‘unfeminine’, as well as their own experiences of being within these categories.

A phenomenological approach assumes that there is communality to the shared experiences of a particular phenomenon (Patton 1990), such as with the women in each focus group of this research and their ongoing experiences of gender expression. Such an approach is most appropriate for researching the lived
experiences of participants as it is concerned with trying to “see things from that person's point of view” rather than generalise (Bryman 2008, p. 27). Focus groups enable discursive understandings of social norms to be highlighted, providing insight into how women view gender expressions not just from a personal perspective, but also how group understandings influence these. Individual interviews would not have allowed for the group understandings within particular communities of practice to be fully examined, in much the same way quantitative methods would have restricted exploration of the complexity the women’s experiences of gender expression. This approach also influences the type of participant sampling used. Rather than recruit a random sample of women, specific selection criteria were important in ensuring that the participants for each focus group were part of the same community of practice, female-bodied and heterosexual.

There are many benefits to employing feminist reflexivity in one’s research. Firstly, such an approach enables the researcher to examine their impact and involvement in their research through their interactions with their participants while also acknowledging potential unconscious motivations and biases, and the role of power relationships within the research process (Finlay 2002; Fonow & Cook 2005). In addition to this, reflexivity is associated with accountability for the knowledge that is produced through one’s research (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). However, it is important to acknowledge the concerns with using such an approach. Finlay (2002) notes that researchers positioning themselves within the work may inadvertently result in their voice overshadowing that of their participants’. As such it is important to be conscious of not unintentionally
claiming more authority (Finlay 2002). These concerns have been kept in mind through the research process.

In the findings chapters of this thesis I will discuss my interpretations of the stories and experiences my participants shared with me in the context of the concepts and literature outline in earlier chapters. Keeping in mind the intuitive and creative nature of many feminist methodologies (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002), I do not claim the way in which I recount and draw meaning from their stories is the only truth to be told, but merely my reasoned understanding of them in the context of my previous research. However, I endeavour to present the participants experiences from their point of view (Grbich 2009; Bryman 2008) and through drawing on the theories, literature and frameworks.

**Recruitment**

As the goal of the focus groups was to explore everyday views of women, sampling aimed to have a broad range of women from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds as well as various education levels. In order to facilitate this, each focus groups consisted of different communities of practice. I have selected communities of practice in order to elicit a broad understanding of the women’s shared repertoire.

Focus groups inspired by communities of practice were used as sites for my data collection. Communities of practice refers to groups where there exists regular
interaction, a general shared goal and a ‘shared repertoire’ in which terminology,
routines and gestures have specific meaning within the group (Homes &
Meyerhoff 1999). Rather than just ‘communities’, the communities of practice
concept emphasises the notion of ‘practice’ as central to understanding, allowing
the discursive interactions to be examined in more detail (Holmes & Meyerhoff
1999). For this reason, the communities of practice concept lends itself well to
the social constructionist and social practice theory approaches as it enables
analysis of a group’s “active engagement in the reproduction of or resistance to
466). The focus groups in the present research consisted of groups of women
who were all familiar to each other, shared a common goal, and often engaged in
group specific forms of communication.

In total, there were five focus groups conducted. They were roller derby players,
circus performers, a mothers group, Aussie rules football teammates, and women
in executive and management roles in a large corporation. The participants for
this study were all women who identify as female-bodied and heterosexual. The
majority of the women lived within the greater Melbourne area, while one focus
group consisted of women from a rural town. Further details, including
demographics, will be discussed later in this chapter.

While gaining a variety of backgrounds for the participants was important, the
sample was also purposive in that it aimed to make use of participants that
enabled full exploration of the experiences of women who were able to speak to
various different forms of gender expression (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2013). It was
for this reason that each of the focus groups were specifically chosen as they each represented locations for various forms of femininities to be present. For roller derby, there is substantial literature suggesting that while at times hyper-feminized, it also an aggressive sport (Carlson 2010; Cohen 2008; Finlay 2010). This makes it a valuable site for exploring resistive or alternative femininities. Similarly, research on circus women suggests it as a site for ‘non-normative’ femininities (Douglas 2014). Rugby, and similar sports such as Australian Rules football, also fall into a category where ‘non-normative’ and competing discourses around femininities are present (Chase 2006). These types of ‘masculine’ sports are viewed as sites of resistance to hegemonic femininity (Broad 2001; Wheatley 1994) and as such provide a rich insight into understandings and experiences of gender expression.

Research with women in positions of authority in the workplace suggests that they are expected to be both ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ depending on the task at hand, creating a complex environment for gender expression (Demaiter & Adams 2009). A further area of interest for gender expression is in relation to motherhood. As was discussed in Chapter 2, to be a ‘good woman’ one must be a mother (Skeggs 1997). Motherhood is seen as the ‘cornerstone’ of femininity (Nakano Glenn 1994; Russo 1976; Skeggs 1997). However, Gillespie (2003) suggests that in more recent times some women experience a ‘rejection’ of sorts of motherhood and with its associations with hegemonic femininity. This makes a mothers group also an ideal place to explore notions of gender expression. It is for these reasons that I have run focus groups with the women I did as they all provided a rich and varied source of experiences from which to draw on.
All participants within these groups self-identified as cis heterosexual women. It was important during the recruitment process to form the correspondence in such a way as to make it clear that the rationale for only inviting heterosexual women to take part was the desire to address a gap in the literature.

The participants were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling through people known to me and through established connections with various community groups. Participant did not have a direct relationship with me. Recruitment took place through various means including email, Facebook, telephone and personal invitations upon attending women's group meetings. Initially, I approached various sporting clubs and other potential groups through formal channels, writing emails and calling the state or regional departments. For the most part, these methods did not result in much interest so I turned to Facebook to reach out to my existing contacts. This resulted in establishing connections that led to the recruitment of in the Aussie rules football group and the mothers group. Facebook was also instrumental in organising both the roller derby and circus sessions. During this process, I found that one of the main questions I was asked, was why I wasn’t talking to lesbians for my research. In response to this, I provided a small section in the recruitment information explaining the need to fill the gap in the literature regarding heterosexual women. I highlighted that the present research was drawing on and adding to work previous conducted with lesbian and queer women in order to enable broader understanding women's gender expressions.
Upon initial contact with potential participants, I provided either a printed copy or an emailed version of the Consent Information Statement (Appendix A). Potential participants were asked to contact me if they were interested in taking part in the research, upon which further email or phone contact was used to organise a date and location for the focus group to take place.

**Focus Groups and Procedure**

To identify how women perceive forms of gender expression that diverge from traditional and/or dominant forms, it has been essential to collect data from a broad range of women to investigate the normative understandings of what it means to be feminine and what it means to differ from this. Using such techniques facilitates the development of more holistic description of what these forms of gender expression ‘look like’ (Weiss 1994). Within social interactionism, ontological assumptions view social meanings as collectively constituted. Focus groups, in particular, enable researchers in uncover the meanings and processes that facilitate group assessments (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson 2001). Furthermore, the use of focus groups provides access to how groups formulate normative understandings (Bloor et al. 2001). By utilising such a method, a more thorough understanding is gained of how women view various forms of gender expressions and the sites where women differ from their self-defined understanding of what it is to express being ‘a woman’.
The procedure for the study entailed holding five separate focus groups: roller derby players, a mothers group, circus women, football players, and women in executive management at a large hardware store. All of the focus groups were held at central and convenient locations for group members, including their own group meeting rooms and privately hired meeting spaces. The sessions were recorded using digital audio and video recording devices with the participants’ permission. Initially it was anticipated that each focus group run for approximately 60 to 90 minutes, however several groups chose to continue discussions for up to 120 minutes. On multiple occasions discussions continued for significant lengths of time after I had finished asking questions and began to pack up. This was particularly the case with the executive management group (EM), where I stayed nearly 45 minutes after the recordings had stopped.

Group discussions began with a brief overview of myself and the research, at which time I then asked the participants to review and fill in paperwork, including a Consent Information Statement (see Appendix A), Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) and brief Demographics Questionnaire (see Appendix C). I also provided each participant with a Blank Gender Expressions Map to fill out (see Appendix D). Nametags were provided and individual introductions were used to help familiarise myself with the women and to get the participants talking.

A pilot focus group was run several weeks before the first formal focus group. This was done for several reasons, firstly, to enable myself to gain experience in running a group session, and secondly to get a feel for how the intended
questions would work with the participants. From the pilot focus group, I was able to rearrange and reword several questions that were not sufficiently clear. I also found that the concept map needed to be redesigned for the participants to have enough space to write their responses. After the adjustments were made, the formal focus groups were undertaken.

Prior to starting any group discussions, each participant was asked to fill in a blank concept map. The participants were instructed to fill out the map by placing words, terms or labels that they felt were related to the ideal or most common types of women towards the centre, and those that were less so, towards the outside. Through piloting the focus group prior to formal data collection, I had found that the concept maps needed some explaining in order to get the women started. As such, I demonstrated an example of how they could be filled out using male characteristics. It was done as a group process, with me asking the participants to suggest what terms to use and where to place them. Examples of some of the prompts include: “If you were to think of a really ‘manly’ man, what words would use to describe him?” and “What types of men or words might you put towards the outer edge?”. This helped the women to understand what the activity involved and gave them an opportunity to ask questions. I gave the groups approximately five minutes to fill in the maps. On the following page is an example of the blank concept map used during the focus groups.
The concept maps served several purposes. Firstly, as they were filled out at the start of the focus groups, I was able to see the types of ideas the women held prior to discussions began. While some women added words to their maps during the discussions, I asked the women what they had added and these were recorded in my notes of the sessions. The concept mapping also enabled a visual means of analysing the relationships between multiple femininities by the distance and location of the different labels or terms. It is interesting to note that although I asked the participants to put their names on the maps, most either chose not to or forgot to do this. As such, many of the maps used in the findings do not have the names included. Where possible, I have provided the participants pseudonyms with their maps.

After the concept maps were filled in, I began to pose questions. I encouraged open discussions amongst the groups, however a semi-structured Focus Group Schedule (see Appendix E) was utilized to ensure particular topics and areas
were discussed, as well as a rolling interview guide. A rolling interview guide is a method for conducting focus groups in which the initial focus group schedule is reviewed after each group and altered as needed to elicit further data collection. Such a technique enables more detailed information about a topic to be explored by focusing in on newly uncovered topics or areas of interest that arise without direct questioning during the focus group discussion (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook 2007). This technique allowed for minor alterations to the schedule based on the findings of the first focus group. Such alterations included rearranging the order of the questions to align more naturally with the directions the conversations tended to go in. Initially, my focus group schedule began with questions exclusively related to femininity, and then moved onto questions focused more on non-dominant gender expression and masculinity in women. However, in each focus group participants began to discuss both dominant and non-dominant femininities and gender expressions in relational terms. As such it became evident that separating out the sections was not effective and I needed to alter the interview schedule to allow for this to occur without doubling up on topics and questions.

It can be argued that since the use of a rolling focus group guide means that no focus group will be asked exactly the same questions or in the precisely the same manner, comparisons between the groups can be more challenging (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook 2007). However, as the alterations were minor and more structural in nature for this research, this was not of a major concern and did not outweigh the benefits of being able to create a more organic conversation like
series of questions. Furthermore, this technique allowed for me to elicit more details about areas that were not previously considered.

**Analysis**

Each focus group was transcribed verbatim along with the field notes taken during the sessions. The field notes were used to keep track of discussions to ensure that if a topic had already been covered, it was not repeated. They also enabled me to keep track of any probing questions without interrupting the participants as they spoke with each other. Additionally, the field notes allowed for me to record participant observations (such as body language), as not all faces were visible in the video recordings. Transcribing each focus group prior to the next allowed for changes to be made as noted above. Transcription proved to be challenging at times due to participants speaking over each other. As a consequence, I found the use of video recordings invaluable for determining not only who was speaking, but also as a secondary source audio source. In particular, one focus group that was conducted with mothers whose children were present, required substantial time to transcribe as there was a great deal of background noise. My field notes also proved to be a useful tool in clarifying statements and the terminology used by participants.

The transcripts of the group interviews have been thematically analysed. I used an iterative approach to the data. Iterative analysis provides for both emic and etic readings through a reflective process where the data is continually revisited
to provide further connections and deeper understandings (Srivastava & Hopwood 2009). Through this process coding was used to classify the themes and concepts as they were identified. Initially this involved careful rereading of the transcripts and selection of pertinent sections of the discussions and quotes based on the questions, or cluster of questions, from the interview schedule. These quotes were then arranged according to themes and recorded in an analysis grid. From this, words, phrases, or areas of discussion that focussed on similar ideas enabled the identification of patterns and themes that informed the identification of three dimensions of femininity that will be discussed in the following chapters.

The completed visual concept maps have also been used for data analysis. By having the participants locate and label various forms of ‘femininities’ or ‘types of women’ on pre-designed blank maps, the relational and hierarchical aspects of women’s gender expressions are able to by examined. Participants were instructed to place terms and words located towards the centre of the maps that were indicative of those they felt were strongly symbolic of or related to women’s gender expressions. The further out from the centre, the less strongly the participants related those words or terms with dominant women’s gender expressions. Rather than having a vertical hierarchal map, I chose to use a circular bulls eye map. This facilitated more complexity for mapping the different locations of words associated with women’s gender expressions. Such a method allowed for more overlap and grouping of similar words that would not be possible with a vertical hierarchy. By having the participants fill in the maps prior to our discussions, it allowed for the women to provide me with information that
was not constructed as a result of our discussions and interactions. The words and phrases on the concepts maps were entered into a spreadsheet based on the ‘ring’ within which they were written. Similarities regarding the types of words or expressions were found to correlate with these locations. From this, I have used the concept maps in various ways, including to get a sense of hierarchical relationships present between different women’s gender expressions, as well as to identify themes.

**Participant Details**

As noted above, the 36 women who took part in this research came from Greater Melbourne and rural Victoria. All focus groups, except for the Mothers Group, took place in Melbourne. Geographical details are included in Appendix F, however most women either currently lived in, or were previously from the Greater Melbourne area. Further details about their ages, occupations, education levels, race and ethnicity, relationship status and children is provided below and in Appendix F. Information about each community of practice is discussed below.

**Ages**

The average age of participants was 37 years, with the youngest being 18 and the eldest 60. The executive management group had the oldest average age, while the football group had the youngest. The range of ages for the participants was reflective of those who chose to participate in the research. The variety provided for a broader understanding of constructions of femininity that were not
restricted to particular age cohort. However, it should be acknowledged that doing so also reduces the ability to identify generational specific understandings of women's gender expressions.

*Occupations*

Experiences in the workplace played an important role in the groups discussions. All of the participants were either working at the time of the sessions, or stated that had been in paid employment within the past 12 months. Occupations listed by the participants included: manager, jeweller, retail worker, truck driver, teacher, designer, lawyer, and social worker, to name a few. Two participants stated that they were unemployed and there were six students.

*Education Level*

There was a range of education levels throughout the focus groups, however the majority of women had completed some form of higher education. Sixteen women had completed an undergraduate degree, and seven a postgraduate degree, while seven listed a diploma, certificate or apprenticeship as their highest level of education. Three of the women had not completed Year 12 and another three listed Year 12 as their highest level of education.

*Race/ethnicity*

The majority of the participants identified as ‘Australian’ or ‘Anglo’. One participant identified as Dutch, one as Italian, one as British, one as American and one as Aboriginal. Therefor the majority of the participants were from a European background.
**Relationship status**

Most of the women were in relationships, with twelve being married, two engaged and seven in de facto relationships. Eleven of the women were single and one had a ‘complicated’ status. All women in all of the groups had been in at least one ‘serious’ relationship. Notably, all of the women in the circus group were single at the time of the research.

**Children**

Two of the participants were pregnant and seventeen had children. The average number of children was two. There were no mothers in the circus group and only one in the roller derby group.

**Focus Group Composition**

The following section will outline some details about the make up of each group. Each community of practice that I conducted focus groups with varied in the number of participants. The smallest focus group consisted of three women and the largest had 14. Throughout the findings, all participants’ names are followed by two letters in parentheses that indicate which focus group they were a member of.

The roller derby group (RD) consisted of three participants, as two others were unable to attend at the last moment. Due to the difficulty in recruiting women for this group (mostly due to family responsibilities), a second focus group was not
organised. While large focus groups are often seen as the ideal, small focus groups sizes (particularly with young women) have still been found to facilitate meaningful discussions (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson 2001). However, small groups can be at risk of a more ‘question and answer’ session if participants are reticent (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson 2001). This was not the case with the roller derby players, as all were open and responded enthusiastically to myself and each other. Two of the women were roller derby players, and one a referee. They had all been playing for between 6 months and 8 years. All were from Greater Melbourne, one was a mother of a teenager. While the women all knew each other, they had not spent time with each other outside of roller derby.

There were four attendees for the circus group (CG). All had been with the same local women’s circus for at least a year, regularly seeing each other at training and performances. The women got together outside of the circus on a regular basis. All of the women came from the Greater Melbourne area.

All six of the women from the mothers group (MG) lived within the same rural area in Victoria and had children aged between the 1 and 4 years. Children attended the focus group session with their mothers and were cared for by a babysitter organised by myself. This, however, did not prevent the children from routinely joining in on the discussions with requests for snacks or the toilet. This made for challenging, but also rather amusing transcription of the session.

The Aussie rules football group (FG) consisted of members from the same football team. Nine women attended the session which was held directly after
training at a local eatery adjacent to the training grounds. The women were very vocal and comfortable with each other, sharing in-jokes and laughing as they had just finished up training. There were several women with children in this group. The women in this group came from similar areas in Greater Melbourne.

Fourteen women participated in the focus group for women in executive management (EM). They all worked for the same organisation, but in varying executive and management positions, which meant that not all women were well known to each other. Around half of the women were mothers. The women lived in different suburbs within Greater Melbourne at the time of the research. Seven of the women had grown up on rural farming properties, a topic which formed a large part of the conversations in this focus group.

**Ethical Issues and Limitations**

Informed consent is crucial to ensure sound ethical foundations for practice (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2013). Upon receiving approval from the Swinburne University Humans Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix G), detailed information regarding the intent of the study was provided to each participant to ensure full disclosure of the purpose and objectives. Written permission from each individual was obtained before commencing interviews. Within the Informed Consent form, questions regarding further contact for follow up questions were included.
Confidentiality is vital to the research design to ensure that (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2013). Prior to each focus group session and individual interview, confidentiality was discussed with the participants to ensure they felt comfortable that anything they say will not be identifiable. I explained the importance of not discussing the content of the session outside of the interview setting with each group. Upon transcription of the interviews and all recordings and materials relating to the participants have been kept in a secure location until completion of the research, at which time they will also be destroyed. External confidentiality was additionally ensured through the use of pseudonyms for all participants. In keeping with a feminist nature of this research, the participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonyms. This was done to provide the women with more control over the interviewing process. Unintentionally, it also served as an ice-breaker, allowing the women to joke and laugh about the ‘names wished they always had’.

Although the possibility of causing distress or harm due to the research was low, I was aware that some of the questions raised may have brought up some uncomfortable feelings regarding the participants’ experiences. Sensitive issues were discussed with participants before proceeding any further, and the option of stopping the interviews was made clear. Contact information for the Swinburne Ethics Committee was made available to the participants should they required further assistance with any aspect of the research. Additionally, I encouraged the women to contact me if they had any concerns about the information they disclosed.
Qualitative research is often criticized for its lack of generalisability of results to the general population (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2013)). This is the case in the present research, and the findings of this study can only be seen to represent the patterns and trends of the people interviewed. However, the aim of this research is not to ascertain a clear-cut answer to specific questions but rather to explore discourses related to the issues of femininity and girlhood, and to gain insight into the experiences of a small group of women. As such, generalisability is not a primary concern.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined some of the epistemological, methodological and practical considerations involved in researching women’s gender expression. Feminist and qualitative methodologies were discussed to provide a rationale for the use of focus groups and concept mapping techniques. Details regarding the recruitment and sampling were provided. Communities of practice were utilised in this research as they provide a site that compliments the social constructivist approach and enables the exploration of shared meanings. The procedure of the focus groups was explained, highlighting how techniques such as group discussions enable exploration of the ways in which sex, gender, and sexuality are social constructed. Concept mapping further facilitated this by allowing a visual representation of the relationships between various types of women’s gender expression. Information regarding the data analysis has also been discussed, followed by a brief overview of the participants’ details and the focus group
composition. Finally, the ethical issues and limitations were considered. The next chapter will focus on how the women in this research make sense of dominant women’s gender expression, and providing a description of what they understand femininity to be.
Chapter 5

Hegemonic Femininities

This chapter will explore what the term femininity meant to the women in this research and provide an understanding of how this aligns with the literature in this field. The findings discussed below are drawn from focus group discussions and the completed concept maps. General understandings of ‘femininity’ are discussed and then broken down into three main dimensions: the physical (body), the malleable (appearance), and the restrictive (demeanour) aspects of femininity. Within these categories, topics relating to the physical body, appearance and demeanour are explored. Aspects of the findings presented support the research in this area, outlined in Chapter 2 and 3. Lastly, the dominant tropes of femininity as evidenced in this research, the Barbie and the Mother are discussed. These ideals represent the most culturally dominant form of women’s gender expression for the women in this research, but these cannot be understood as ‘emphasized femininity’. Connell’s (1987) notion of emphasized femininity suggests that there are little to no power relations between women, as they all occupy an inferior position to males. Schippers (2007), on the other hand, argues that there are hierarchical relationships between different femininities. This intragender order became apparent through the discussions with the women in this research. When the various dimensions of femininities overlap and intersect, a multitude of gender expressions can manifest, some with more
cultural acceptance than others. The symbolic power of the hegemonic ideal femininity was felt by all of the women.

“I understand what the word means, just not how to say it”

When I initially asked members of each of the focus groups what the word ‘feminine’ meant to them, I was often met with stares and silence. I began each group with some general conversation to ease the participants into feeling more comfortable speaking in the group environment and had them fill out their concept maps to get them thinking about the ideas of femininity and gender expression, but this first formal question seemed to close everyone down. Rather than a sign of research weakness, this seemed to be more as a result of not only the difficulties in discussing gender expressions, but also in how to describe such a broad concept. Emma (RD), from the roller derby group, smiled and said in what appeared to be a joking manner, “You’re asking about mainstream stuff from those who are sitting outside of the mainstream?”. The participants expressed an awareness of the hierarchal nature inherent within gender expressions and that there was a culturally dominant or ‘normative femininity’ (Ambjörnsson 2004; Cole & Zucker 2007; Renold & Arnold 2006; Shoemaker 2004; Schippers 2007). After the difficulty the first focus group showed in responding to the question, I chose to alter the wording of this first question slightly to begin by examining what they thought society viewed femininity as. However, I was still meet with some nervous laughter in the mothers group, where Cece (MG) said, “I know what the word means, just not how to say it.” And
much the same, Karen (CG) in the circus group said: “I know what it is, but I don’t know how to articulate it”. I used some gentle probing for several of the groups, including asking, “If you had had to describe the term to someone, what words would you use?” and while this elicited some responses, it seemed that most of the women needed a bit of time to think on this question before they could respond. However, once they did get talking about what ‘feminine’ meant to them and what words they would use, they all had a lot more to say they expected.

The one exception to this was the football group, where the women jumped straight into responding, calling out multiple responses over each other. Several factors seemed to contribute to this. Firstly, the women were engaged in regular competition, and the question seemed to spark an opportunity for the women to ‘one up’ each other in a friendly way. Secondly, it was clear that femininity was an issue that these women had spent considerable time reflecting upon due to the masculine nature of football. The responses they provided included such as being ‘girly’ and ‘ditzy’, spending hours in the bathroom, high maintenance and having lots of shoes. These types of descriptions were similar to what many had written on their concept maps (see Figure 1 below). The women were asked to place words or phrases they associated with acceptable ways of being a woman (dominant femininity) towards the centre of the map. This could be in the form of descriptors, labels, types of women. Those that were placed further out, indicated words that were less associated with femininity. As can be seen, towards the centre of the image below, dresses and princess have been placed near the middle. These ideas tie in with the notion of hyperfemininity, where femininity is seen as a performance that is exaggerated, primarily focussed on looks and
behaviour (Allan 2009). Hyperfemininity is an extreme form of hegemonic femininity.

There seemed to be a fair amount of laughter and negativity present in the group when speaking of things that were ‘feminine’, with one participant equating feminine girls to ‘scary’ drama queens and divas (discussed further in Chapter 6). Some resisted these generalisations and painted a more positive view of general femininity, but overall, Donna (FG) summed up the feeling of the group well when she described feminine as “not doing sporty stuff”. The central element that brought these women together was, exactly that – sporty stuff. Additionally, out of all the groups, the footy women were part of a community of practice that embodied the most overt masculine characteristics as described in the literature (Connell 1987; Messerschmidt 2010; Whitehead 2002), perhaps forcing the
women to reflect upon femininity more than most, explaining why as a group, they were so quick to respond to questions about femininity.

Each focus group had particular areas that they emphasised during the sessions, despite these differences there were strong overarching themes that emerged as to what femininity constituted. These themes all centred around aspects of hegemonic femininity. As outlined in Chapter 3, hegemonic femininity is the form of ideal form of femininity that women compare themselves to (Schippers 2007). As such, it is not surprising that the emphasis of their discussions centred on the behaviours and qualities that are theorised to be central tenants of hegemonic femininity.

As mentioned, through the various discussions on what femininity constituted, there were several themes that emerged. They included various aspects of femininity that tended to fall into either physical dimensions, ‘malleable’ dimensions or restrictive dimensions. The section on physical dimensions focuses on aspects of femininity that were seen to be related to the body, including control over and shape of one’s body. The malleable dimensions of femininity are the components of femininity related to appearance that are easily put on or taken off each day, including clothing, make-up and hairstyles. These parts of femininity create a sense of agency for women’s gender expression at times. Restrictive dimensions of femininity on the other hand refers to the aspects of femininity that women feel they are confined by, including demeanour, appropriate behaviour and interests. These restrictions often are felt through judgements and pressure, not from specific people, but from society as a whole.
When these dimensions were discussed, the women often drew on what ‘was not’ feminine to illustrate what ‘was’. This highlights the relationality of femininity with masculinity and will be explored further in Chapters 6 and 7. However, those discussions are also included here as they help to paint a picture of what the participants understood femininity to mean and to provide an understanding of how hegemonic femininity is constituted.

**Physical Dimensions of Femininity**

One of the first themes that became apparent when analysing the data, was the relationship between femininity and the body. There were many comments regarding not only the way in which women move their bodies, but how our bodies are shaped. The body has at times been seen as problematic for gender researchers as it often reifies a two-sex model. However, while there may be some bodily differences between males and females, it is through social practices that these distinctions become more pronounced, creating both sex categories as well as gender categories (Butler 1990; Foucault 1979; Greer 1970). For the women in this research, these small bodily differences carried significant meaning for their understandings of their own bodies. This occurred with regards to the body itself, and the way in which the body moved and took up space. Drawing on the notion that women are on average physically smaller than men, femininity encompassed “petite” physiques, occupying less space, and having more controlled and contained movements than males. These notions underpin
hegemonic femininity, where femininity is constructed oppositionally to masculinity.

*Occupying Space and Moving with Purpose*

The manner in which women occupied and moved through space played a significant role in our discussions. These discussions implied that they were not always conscious choices, but rather ‘the way you were’. The role of the body and how it is constructed is central in understanding one's identity (Butler 1990; Butler 1993a; Connell 2002; Gatens 1992; Kelly et al. 2005; West & Zimmerman 1987; Young 2005). The notion that how you use and experience your body is just part of the way you are touches Butler's (1990) conception that gender as not something that ‘we are’, but something that is imposed upon us through unconscious repetitious acts. Butler (1988, p. 519) explains: “Gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.” Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity goes beyond a gender displays as simply a performance; it is the repetition of the acts, or performance, that establishes a set of meanings, and in this case, that of a gender identity. Many of the women were not conscious of how they moved their bodies in feminine ways until it was discussed in the focus groups. Once made aware, this was often attributed as “just how I am” (Louise - RD); it was just “natural” (Kim - MG). However, there were other women in the groups who suggesting that they were trained into knowing how to move their
bodies, resulting from performing repetitious acts until they became an unconscious part of themselves and their identities. Butler (1990) argues that the illusion of gender displays as natural is in fact a consequence of coercion and social sanctions. This can be seen in many of the comments the women made about how not to be feminine such as sitting with your legs too wide. These are discussed further in the following section.

The way women made use of their bodies both when in motion and when still were also seen as indicators of femininity, in line with the literature on performativity (Blaikie et al. 2003; Bordo 2003; Cole & Zucker 2007; Young 2005). The topics the women discussed included walking, sitting, shaking hands, the strength of their touch and amount of space they occupied. Views on feminine movement were similar for all participants. In the mothers group, Cece (MG) described femininity as, “Moving with purpose”. Young (2005) argues that feminine modes of comportment mobility and spatiality are intentional, working towards a particular goal while also resisting any big movements.

Louise (RD) spoke of feminine women holding themselves in a particular manner, one which was delicate and gentle. ‘Gentle’ is one of the key criteria used by Cole and Zucker (2007) to assess femininity, and came up often in the discussions of feminine as well as the concept maps (see Figure 2 below). In the figure below, the words “soft”, “gentle” and “delicate” are written at the centre of the map, indicating that these characteristics are seen as central to femininity.
Feminine women were seen to walk with grace and poise; their touch was soft. Alison (EM) said it was, “the way you walk into a room”. Joey (FG) felt that feminine women, “…understand their bodies” and Barb (FG) that they have a stronger “connection to their bodies” than non-feminine women. This is not surprising given the expectations of women to manage and discipline their bodies on a daily basis (Blaikie et al. 2003; Bordo 2003). It also speaks to Ortner’s (1972) discussion of women and nature. Women are seen within society as closer to nature than males as their bodies are responsible for reproduction and nurturing infants (Ortner 1972). This connection between body and nature then becomes natural and instinctive, while males use their body to overcome nature (Ortner 1972). A woman who is not connected to her body is then seen as less natural and unfeminine.
The connection with a woman’s body was evaluated through one’s ability to control it in particular ways, and failure to do so disrupts the feminine performance. As with many aspects of femininity, when describing how women ‘walk’, the participants often told me what feminine women ‘didn’t do’. Mary (CG) stated that feminine women don’t “stomp when they walk” and Laura (MG) said they shouldn’t “swagger”. According to Kylie (FG), woman should “float into the room”. There was a sense that women should be light and delicate on their feet, and be graceful and elegant when they move. This way of walking was not a deliberate and conscious act, but rather something that was ingrained in them from a young age, again illustrating Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity. Research on gait and gender differences attributes ‘habit’ as a significant factor that influence the way a person walks (Kozlowski & Cutting 1977). These habits are often distinctly gendered where a masculine men’s stride is proportionally longer than a feminine woman’s and where generally women are “not as open with their bodies” in comparison to men (Young 2005, p. 5). This was similar to the descriptions that the women in this research gave.

Often in describing feminine attributes such as walking style, the women found themselves drawing on what was not feminine in order to illustrate what was. Much of this behaviour was typical for men, but inappropriate for women. Feminine women “don’t sit with their legs spread out wide” (Joey - FG). This was seen as one of the most unfeminine things a woman could do, and when I asked what would happen if a woman did this while in a skirt or dress, the responses went from laughter to disgust in all of the groups. The women said they sat with their legs together out of habit. As Young (2005, p. 43) suggests, “The girl learns
actively to hamper her movements”. In contrast to Goffman's (1976) dramaturgical theory, which suggests that when we are backstage we 'stop' the performance, the women noted that even were at home by themselves they found themselves sitting with their legs crossed. This was also the case when wearing pants, suggesting that this behaviour was not based on a need to keep undergarments hidden, but rather as an embodiment of femininity that had been learnt and eventually ingrained into how they understood their own bodies. These experiences can be better understood through performativity (Butler 1988; 1990) as discussed earlier. Young (2005, p. 41), also suggests that the feminine “body's space is lived as constituted”. Georgie (MG) spoke of being careful not to look too casual when you sit, and explained that it was important for women to, “be at attention and aware of your surroundings”.

Sitting with your legs together was also seen as part of a larger component of femininity, that of “taking up as little space as possible” (Lily - CG). By sitting with your legs apart, you were “claiming” more space. To be feminine was to occupy as little space as possible (Bordo 2003; Crowder 1998; Nguyen 2008; Pascoe 2012). For Lily (CG), small and lean were seen as “attributes” of femininity, and although she didn’t necessarily desire it consciously for herself, she was aware of the pressure to fit into that ideal:

That thing about not taking up too much space, I think that is something I really attribute to femininity. It's sort of, it's being passive, but also... I was brought up in an all-girls school, everyone was on diets, but it is always that thing, lots of females want to be little, want to be thin. Lots of females have this idea of being small and lean and I think that still sort of sticks in
my head as a female attribute. Not that I have to be like that but that it’s expected.

This ‘sticking’ of the notion of a particular type of feminine physique manifests through unconscious repetitious acts. Performativity establishes a set of meanings (Butler 1990), such as in this case that thin equals feminine. Coffey (2012, p. 138) found her participants expressed similar sentiments describing the ideal woman’s body as “definitely not fat” but also not too muscular as this was seen as masculine. Such findings support Bordo’s (2003) discussion of the slender ideal that comes about from women striving to meet the cultural expectations of weakness, passivity and occupying less space.

Kim (MG) pointed out women shouldn’t “slouch”, they should maintain good posture. I asked if there were particular situations were ‘slouching’ was acceptable. The mothers group all agreed that when in their weekly meet-ups, the traditional rules regarding sitting and slouching did not apply. For Laura (MG), men being present didn’t affect this. However, Ez (FG) felt that “women were more aware of people looking at them” and that this was particularly the case with men looking at them. We can see here the impact of the ‘male gaze’ with the awareness of male presence bringing about a need to present themselves in more feminine ways. The women felt this in particular in public spaces, feminine women were expected to be, “held and composed so nicely, even when the tram bumps around” (Mary - CG).

Women’s bodies and the manner in which they are moved, held and maintained play a crucial role in the performance of femininity. Much of this work can be
understood as being done, whether consciously or unconsciously, with male desires in mind. We can see the power of the heterosexual matrix here. The pressure to appeal to male desires is maintained by the underlining assumptions of heterosexuality that structures the relationships between masculinity and femininity. It is the complementary but asymmetrical relational variations between men and women allow for this hegemony to be maintained. Feminine physical mannerisms and movements help to distinguish femininity from masculinity and thus supporting the positioning of masculinity as superior, but also establishing a hierarchy among femininities. There was consensus amongst the groups that those women who do not engage with the typically feminine movements and posture become subordinate to those that do. This was also the case for the physical body types, although this was more difficult to control in some aspects.

The Ruler and the Hourglass

The women in the focus groups identified several key aspects and physical types that represented feminine bodies to them. It was suggested that without these physical characteristics, you would have to work harder to appear feminine.

One of the words that came up on several occasions across the focus groups was ‘curvy’. The size of breasts, hips, waist and bottom all helped to increase a woman’s perceived femininity. In the discussions, I asked the women which of these body areas was most influential in determining someone’s femininity. The
responses varied, but overall, the consensus was that if a woman "has well-proportioned features" (Louise - RD) in the right places, she would be considered feminine. Ideal feminine breasts were medium sized and round, hips should be "almost plump", waist needed to go in significantly in the stomach area, legs long and her bottom round – not square or flat; she should be an “hourglass” (Kylie - FG). As Karen (CG) put it, this was “having all that is the ultimate woman”. While research on ideal women’s body types often highlights the importance of ‘slimness’ (Bordo 2003; Grogan 2000), the focus for the women in the present research was on shapeliness. Many of the women suggested that even if a woman wore feminine clothing, make-up and jewellery (discussed further in the following sections), but had a “ruler shaped” (Joey - FG) body (one which did not have a distinct waist, defined hips and no breasts), she would not be viewed as ‘feminine’. This sentiment was present in all of the focus groups.

Surprisingly, slimness was not seen as the most important factor in determining femininity, but this may be due in part to the nature of the communities of practice they came from. Roller derby, football and circus are all groups that centre on physical activity and there was a strong emphasis on muscular bodies as being feminine. Muscular bodies inherently have more curves than non-muscular bodies. And while at times the presence of breasts was mentioned as a hassle, “they just get in the way sometimes” (Mary - CG), they also help to reaffirm a woman’s heterosexuality. Research suggests that to combat assumptions of homosexuality, women often ‘ramp up’ their femininity (Ezzell 2009). As outlined in the literature review, Ezzell (2009) refers to this as ‘heterosexy-fit’, where women who are engaged in more masculine sports play up
their ‘sexiness’ to reinforce heterosexuality. This was present for some of the
women in the football group and is detailed further in Chapter 7. While for the
mothers group, an emphasis on a shapely body is also not surprising given the
connections between being a woman and feminine with breasts, breast feeding,
hips and childbearing (Ortner 1972). Thus, weight had little impact in their ideas
of femininity if the curves were in the right places. As long as someone had at
least one of the ‘womanly’ body characteristics, she would present as feminine: “If
she is chubby, but has boobs, yeah, she will be feminine” (Louise - RD).

Differences were noted between the groups in their views on the role of the body
in femininity. Acceptance of all sizes of body shapes in roller derby is also
common and often the breast and curves are emphasized and celebrated (Cohen
2008). Ez (FG) stated that “The boobs are all that you need” while Joey (FG) said
“It doesn’t matter if she is thin and has no boobs, if she has a waist, it’s fine”. In
both cases the presence of curves was emphasized. For the circus women, it was
similar. Mary (CG) explained that if you were, “too fat, and don’t have the right
curves then people see you as not feminine,” and had been told that she shouldn’t
do too many push-ups “cause it would make my boobs get smaller”. In the
mothers group, Cece (MG) told us about two of her friends, one a man and one a
woman. She described them as both round, with no real shape. This lack of shape
“took away his masculinity and her femininity” (Cece - MG). Coffey’s (2012; 2013)
research on body work also found that one’s body shape, albeit different for men
and women, was important for her participants in feeling good about themselves.
The manner in which Cece (MG) shared her story suggested that the lack of
gendered signifiers in her friends’ body shapes was something having a feminine body shape was important and valued.

Again, drawing on the notion of taking up as little space as possible, height influenced how feminine a woman appeared, but only at the extreme end. Perhaps also due to the idea that overly tall women tended to have more ‘ruler’ like body shapes, feminine women were seen as ‘short to medium’. The other exception to this was muscles. Karen (CG) told the group that people often have said to her things like, “You’ve got really big muscles, that’s not really feminine, that doesn’t really work with a dress”. Even if a woman had several of the ideal feminine body characteristics, if she was overly muscular, she was less feminine. In this way, femininity was fragile. While not embodying all of these physical aspects of femininity did not prevent you from being able to achieve femininity, if a violation is significant, such as no breasts and lots of muscles, femininity becomes harder and harder to achieve. However, there were further aspects of femininity that could be ‘added’ to aid in this performance. These fall within the dimension I have labelled ‘malleable femininity’.

**Malleable Aspects of Femininity**

While some aspects of femininity seemed unchangeable, such as body shape, many of the other elements were clearly learned behaviours, such as those discussed above. For Mary (CG), this was a source of disappointment, “I’d like to be more feminine, but I never got taught how to do it.” Despite her
disappointment, there was a sense that if she wanted to, Mary (CG) could learn how to do ‘feminine’. The following sections will discuss some of the ways that femininity is ‘done’. Clothing, high heels, make-up, jewellery and hair were all identified by the women as playing a significant role in making someone seem and feel feminine. These malleable or removable aspects of femininity were seen as optional choices that enabled women to ‘become feminine’. There was a strong sense of agency in these discussions at times, and at others a sense of resentment that there was such pressure to appear a certain way. This pressure related not only to dating and the ‘male gaze’, but also in relation to work situations, formal family affairs, and society in general. In these situations, the ‘female gaze’ was also felt by the women. These ideas will be explored through looking at dressing like a ‘sensible woman’, the importance of shoes, accessories and personal grooming, and looking ‘sexy’. It will do this by examining these aspects of femininity as a performance rather than as performative.

The Sensible Woman

When the women I spoke with began describing what a feminine woman looked like, ‘well dressed’, ‘respectable’, ‘elegant’ were all terms that were used. It was clear that to be feminine was to be, as Caroline (EM), Cece (MG) and various others put it, ‘well kept’. The main types of clothes that were associated with feminine women were dresses and skirts. Karen (CG) said it was the way the clothing was cut that was important; fitted v-line necks or shirts that emphasized the hips and waist were all seen as feminine, reaffirming the importance of
particular body shapes in femininity. However, upon further discussion of this feminine ‘archetype’, an important distinction was made that it wasn’t just what you wore, but how you wore it.

Caroline (EM) told us that when she thought about feminine, the first thing that came to mind was a woman in a “frilly pastel dress”. Femininity often conjures up images of “frilly pink party dresses” as symbolic of their demureness and lack of power (Holmes & Schnurr 2006, p. 32). The women in the focus groups also spoke of the soft gentle ‘lady’ who wore floral prints and the stylish ‘woman’ in fitted fashionable dresses, both of which were seen as ideal, but somewhat different, forms of a feminine woman. In either case, the women in this group felt that the common thread was being ‘sensible’ about wearing appropriate clothing for the situation. Dorothy (EM) explained that being feminine “…means I know that I am a woman. I am practical, I dress practically”. Alison (EM) agreed with this sentiment and added that it did not necessarily matter what you wore, it was all about presentation of it. The performance needs to be convincing, it was not simply enough to wear a dress, you needed to wear a dress in a feminine way. This meant something that was flattering, and fit you so as to accentuate the right curves, and was appropriate clothing for the particular situation.

Lou (FG) from the football group also pointed out that for her it isn’t about wearing specific types of clothing, but how you wear that clothing: “Look at me in my trackies and top, compared to Belinda (FG) in her trackies and top, we are essentially wearing the same thing, but we look totally different”. Lou (FG) wore “daggy” (her words) black tracksuit pants, thick and straight legged. Her hoodie
was heavy and navy with bold lettering across the chest. It was not “shapely” as Ez (FG) put it. Belinda (FG) on the other hand had worn a thin fabric, tight, white hoodie, bright pink fitted tracksuit pants and her hair in a high bun on her head. Underneath their clothing both of these women had the same physiological markers of being female, but as Greer (1970) argues, gender, and thus gender expressions, are emphasized through manners of dress to help create the illusion of difference.

Belinda (FG) made clear the differences between she and her male counterparts, wearing clothing produced specifically for women to accentuate their bodies in the appropriate places, emphasizing the curves of the hips and breasts. This ‘heterosex-y-fit’ approach to gender expression is often seen when women engage in sports that are rough and more associated with males and masculinity, they often encounter sexist and homophobic stigma (Ezzell 2009). By playing up the sexiness of their clothing and appearance they are able to combat this stigma, combining aspects of hegemonic femininity and assertiveness and athleticism to create a distinct form of femininity, the heterosex-y-fit identity. Ezzell (2009) explains that despite incorporating characteristics that are often associated with males, this is not a subversive or resistant form of femininity. Rather it reinforces both the gender order (by appeasing male desires) and heteronormativity. Although Lou (FG) and Belinda (FG) wore items of clothing that had the same function and labels, there was a stark contrast that the group was very aware of, referring to Belinda’s (FG) appearance as the ‘dressing sexy’ look and Lou (FG) as just being ‘comfortable’. Comfortable was not seen as feminine for these women; being feminine required “lots of work” (Karen - CG) to ‘do’ femininity.
In a similar vein, the circus group discussed the amount of “effort you need to put in to create the right outward look” (Karen - CG). But they also tied this in with the idea of knowing when and how to wear particular things. Mary (CG) spoke of the woman who has, “got it all together; she is composed and knows what to wear, when....You can be ‘Sally Homemaker’ and wear a pretty dress, or a tough girl in leather and heels, but you know when and where to wear it”. Being aware of your audience was crucial. Despite many of the women across the focus groups stating that they ‘dressed for themselves’, it was evident that this was not case through their stories. This sense of agency began to be challenged later in the discussions when they spoke of the pressures to look a certain way in certain circumstances or when trying to attract male attention and being other-oriented, both of which are further discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 7.

Joey (FG), in the football group, described the “functional woman”, who may wear work appropriate clothing during the week that includes track suit pants or a daggy uniform, but come the weekend, will wear more feminine attire and ‘dress up’, or as she put it “Being who I need to be based on what I need to do and dressing the part”. Importantly, the functional aspect here was not about the clothes being purposeful (ie runners for training), but rather about smoothly transition from one style to another and knowing what to wear when. Joey (FG) said she liked to tell her younger peers that, “You don’t have to be just one kind of person, you don’t have to be just one category” meaning that wearing comfortable clothes doesn’t exclude you from putting on a sexy outfit and ‘dressing feminine’. Similarly, Caroline (EM) spoke of putting on a dress and
instantly feeling more “elegant and feminine”. Ez (FG) suggested that “sexy undies” could make you feel feminine, despite what you might be wearing over them. In this context, feminine was something you did, you put on particular clothes in a particular way and you could ‘become’ feminine, but knowing when it was appropriate was also crucial to pulling off ‘feminine’.

However, quite a number of women didn’t feel that they could present themselves in a typically feminine way. Donna (FG) said: “When I wear a dress and stuff, I feel like a bloke in a dress. I look in the mirror and I see a big butch bloke in a dress and it just doesn’t look right. But I do it...” Once the group’s laughter settled down, I asked her why she did if it made her so uncomfortable. Belinda (FG) answered for her, “sometimes the occasion calls for it” and another called out, “because we are made to do it, we’re girls”. This quote epitomises Butler’s (1990) notion of gender being done to us. From the moment a child is born and pronounced a girl, the gendering begins (Butler 1990). Even when she felt uncomfortable and not herself, Donna (FG) felt pressure to conform to the expected norms of being a woman. If she did not at least attempt to present herself in this way she feared letting her family down and that she hadn’t made “any effort”. The group seemed to feel that even when wearing a dress felt unnatural and was not liked, it was a necessary part of being a woman. However, as is touched on in Chapter 6, when a woman is lesbian, this is not a prerequisite. The mandatory wearing of dresses in certain circumstances was seen as a purely heterosexual demand.
Particular occasions called for a more outward expression of hegemonic femininity, such as weddings and baby showers. For these events the women expressed increased pressure to wear more feminine clothing, “I feel like I should wear makeup if I go to an awards ceremony or something formal” (Emma - RD). In these formal events, the expectations were even greater to present one’s self as clearly feminine, requiring more maintenance not just to look respectable, but to look respectably feminine. Wearing “a nice pair of pants and loose blouse”, in other words looking more androgynous, would not suffice in these circumstances. There was a clear pressure expressed by many of the women to wear a dress and heels, do their hair and wear makeup. The influence of the heterosexual matrix can be seen here (Butler 1990). Not only does a female need to be clearly presenting as a woman, she also needs to express this through displaying femininity in her dress, making clear she is also feminine and heterosexual. This process is not done just for the male gaze, but also for the female gaze. Much like the male gaze, the female gaze influences how women construct their identities (Allan 2009; Renold & Allan 2006). Women play a role in the surveillance of each other, or as Renold and Allan (2006, p. 462) state, they are “faithful employees of the “male gaze””, ensuring that femininity is adhered to. The women I spoke with acknowledged that they judged each other on their femininity, but denied that this was in any way related to males. For them, it was more about fashion and preferences.

While most of the women articulated the pressure they felt to dress up, many of them also enjoyed this process. In Francombe’s (2014, p. 594) research with young girls, body work, and leisure time, she found that while actively
questioning many of the practices involved in maintaining a feminine body, the girls often continued to aspire to the “popular ideal” and even found pleasure in the process. This was echoed in the present findings, where most of the women were critical of the societal pressure to conform to the ideal, but many still took enjoyment in dressing up. This type of behaviour, where attention to one’s appearance is seen as a leisure activity, is associated with hyperfemininity (Holland & Harpin 2013). The women were aware of the need to ‘amp up’ their femininity in order to seen as attractive to males, and their enjoyment in doing so was at times expressed as agency and choice. However, the notion of ‘choice’ can be argued to be merely an illusion that simply serves as a method to maintain regulation of young women (McRobbie 2007). This will be examined further through the coming chapters.

Shoes, Shoes, Shoes: Accessories and Personal Grooming

Ez’s (FG) response to the question of what is feminine, was “Someone who owns more than ten pairs of shoes”. This was followed by group laughter, but Barb (FG) jumped in to point out that “…there’s a difference! I have ten pairs of shoes, ten pairs of runners!”. Ez (FG) clarified, “Ten pairs of heels.” Shoes came up frequently. And while until recently there has been little literature specifically on women, femininity and foot wear, recent qualitative research suggests that shoes are a signifier of femininity (Dilley, Hockey, Robison & Sherlock 2015; Grogan et al. 2004; Holland & Harpin 2013; Kelly et al. 2005; Paechter 2010; Robinson 2015).
In Kelly et al.’s (2005) study on skateboarding and femininity, they speak of the high-heeled shoe as a powerful and common symbol of femininity. This was also true for the women in this research. Dorothy (EM) told me she never thought of herself as a “girly girl”, but when expressing that to a colleague the previous week, “he laughed and said, ‘Please, yes you are. You love shoes!’ And it’s true, I love shoes!” Even when a woman doesn’t view herself as feminine, by simply engaging in one of the key signifiers of femininity, it can alter how you are perceived by others, regardless of your own self-image. Similarly, Kim (MG) told us of her husband’s colleague, Sarah, whom she has come to know through the working environment. Working on building sites, Sarah wore steal capped boots whenever Kim (MG) saw her, but last year she came dressed up to a Christmas party, “…and she was wearing the highest pair of heels I have ever seen! It was like this transformation! It did my head in a bit. I thought, ‘you can really step on both sides of that line’”. Kim (MG) had thought of Sarah as “non-traditional” when it came to her gender performance, but by wearing high heels and a dress she was, in an instant, seen as able to be feminine. Robinson (2015) has written about the “identity shift” that occurs with regards to one’s sense of femininity by wearing different types of shoes. Such a shift is indicative of gender manoeuvring and agency (Robinson 2015).

High heeled shoes were a particular type of shoe commonly association with being very ‘feminine’ that each group brought up at various different times through the discussions, but it was always spoken of as a crucial component of what they saw as feminine attire. The EM group spoke of ‘Power Heels’ as part of
‘Power Dressing’, while Georgie (MG) saw them as making a woman, “willowy and fragile” as is argued by Jeffreys (2005). High heels have been seen as a way in which to keep women’s steps short and more delicate as well as accentuating the curve of a woman’s body (Jeffreys 2005; Rossi 1989), both of which were discussed earlier in this chapter. The power of wearing heels in a work environment was being able to integrate confidence and femininity. Andrea (EM) said, “It can be a masculine style, but you've got your heels, your necklace, you look feminine”. Here femininity was seen as a strength, this imagined woman was owning her femininity and doing it in a way that worked for her. Coming from a slightly different perspective, the mothers group focused on the physical impact of wearing heels. Laura (MG) pointed out that heels increase the curvature of your bottom, enhancing your body in a feminine manner and Zoe (MG) spoke of the instability they caused adding to the ‘delicate’ nature of feminine women. They were seen here as more problematic than the other focus groups, perhaps due to the practicality of heels when you have young children you are caring for. Regardless of whether heels were seen in a negative or positive light, Ruby (CG) from the circus group summed up everyone’s feelings, “Everyone just seems more feminine in heels.” In line with the literature, the women in my focus groups saw footwear as a part of femininity.

Wearing jewellery was often also a marker of femininity. Earrings, necklaces, rings and bracelets all helped to adorn the body in such a way as to increase femininity. Handbags were another important accessory mentioned by the FG group. Kylie (FG) told us:
I was on my way here and one of the other younger players had her period but was too awkward to ask any if the others if they had any 'stuff', so I just said to one of the girls, do you have your handbag here? And she said, 'Ah, I don’t have a handbag' and I was like, oh yeah!

Everyone laughed and Ez (FG) said, “You were asking the wrong girl!” What was implied through this exchange and the comments that followed was that she had asked one of the many non-heterosexual players on the team. These women were seen as unlikely to have feminine accessories like handbags. “Something as simple as a purse or a handbag can be really defining. You get every girl at the club to put their bags on the table, and I bet you could tell.” (Kylie - FG) I asked what it was that you could tell, to which Ez (FG) said, “The girly-girls will have the purses and others will just have wallets.” Again, what was being implied was that if you weren’t a girly-girl and didn’t have clear markers of femininity, your sexuality was questionable. Donna (FG) pointed out she didn’t own a purse, while Lou (FG) took out her wallet and dropped in on the table. Everyone laughed hysterically. Clearly this comment was not just about levels of femininity though, it was also laced with assumptions regarding sexuality and these two heterosexual women had just illustrated nicely the problems with such thinking.

Belinda (FG) felt that someone who is feminine takes pride in their appearance while Ez (FG) called this “caring about personal grooming”. While discussing these issues, the topic of waxing and shaving came up with the footy group. For the women to wax was an important part of being feminine. Even when men engaged in waxing activities for athletic purposes, it was still seen as somewhat feminine behaviour due to its connection with beautification. Eyebrows and the
pubic region were considered important areas to ‘maintain’. In reference to shaving armpits, Joey (FG) said: “It seems unhygienic not to, but guys... it just different.” These findings support research that suggests body hair removal is an essential part of producing a socially acceptable femininity (Francombe 2014; Toerien, Wilkinson & Choi 2005).

When I asked what the feminine girl might look like, Kylie (FG) spoke of a girl who takes a long time to get ready, spending forever on her makeup, can’t choose between hundreds of pairs of shoes and that would first straighten her hair only to then use a curler on it. This idea resonated with the other women and was referred to several times throughout the session as: ‘the girl who straightens her hair then curls it’ to represent a girl who was extremely feminine. It also demonstrates the importance of hair and hairstyles in the perception of femininity.

In every group discussion, the participants all agreed that short hair was not feminine. Emma (RD) told us she would never cut her hair short again. As a year seven girl, her mother had made her cut her hair short “like a boy”. She described this experience "horrible" as she no longer felt like a girl, “I was 12, I didn’t have tits, I didn’t any identifying features that made me a girl. I didn’t feel particularly feminine, but that was really unpleasant. So, I keep my hair long now.” Fiona (RD) said of hair, “That’s what comes to mind when you think of traditionally feminine women, a nice pretty little up-do.” In their research of girls and skateboarding in the United States, Pomerantz et al.’s (2004, p. 553) participants spoke of a group of girls they referred to as the “Bun Girls”. These girls got their name due to the
way they styled their hair often – up and in a bun. They were popular, thin, displayed a particular type of ‘sexiness’ and were seen to be constantly trying to attract male attention. These same types of judgements could be seen in some of the discussions in my focus groups. Putting your hair ‘up’ went hand in hand with other aspects of femininity, however women who were seen to spend too much time beautifying themselves were often heavily critiqued or made fun of. Women in the mothers group described those who spent too long doing up their hair as ‘superficial’. As with many aspects of femininity, when done in the extreme it came to be seen as a bad thing for the women in the focus groups. Mills (2005) argues that femininity conjures up a stereotype often seen negatively but acknowledges that there can be a difference between femininity and womanliness.

Women needed to have long hair not just to feel feminine, but to specifically be seen as feminine in the eyes of men. This was illustrated through a story Ruby (CG) told us regarding a recent trip to the hairdresser. Ruby (RD) explained that she was “very reluctantly” not cutting her hair at the moment as she wanted to be seen as “one of the girls”. Prior to going to the hairdresser, she mentioned to a male colleague that she might cut her hair short. She told us that he acted “weirdly” and told her not to cut it. For her, this represented the influence men placed on women regarding their appearances and femininity and demonstrates the influence of the male gaze. While he was not mean or unpleasant in any way, the power of his comments was felt strongly by Ruby (CG). With each focus group, short hair was a clear symbol of ambiguous sexuality. By having long hair, women were able to escape the questioning of their sexuality.
The EM group expressed their view on hair in a different way. Wearing your hair down was seen as more ‘fun’, which is not surprising given the young girls in Pomerantz et al.’s (2004) study saw the Bun Girls as trying to be more sophisticated and mature. In the EM group having your hair up symbolised a level of maturity that was needed for the workplace. During this discussion, Caroline (EM) shared that she had been “thinking about getting a haircut because I don’t look professional enough...I just wonder if I would be taken more seriously if I had shorter hair.” Dorothy (EM) agree with this notion, pointing to herself and saying, “Long, blond, curls... comes across as less professional.” There was a sense that long hair, when worn down and in a professional business setting, was problematic. Perhaps for the very reason that the other groups identified – it symbolised femininity and thus weakness and passivity, not characteristics you aspire to when in positions of management. However, through discussing it with the other group members, it was decided that despite the potential to be taken less seriously, she should not cut her hair. There was almost a reverse resistance whereby the women suggested that she should not give into becoming more masculine (through cutting her hair shorter), but rather reclaim her long, feminine hair.

Hair length was seen by the women in the focus groups as an influential factor for determining sexuality in broader society. As such, long hair was seen as valued as it represented heterosexuality and femininity, appealing to male desires. However, some of the women resisted this by choosing to have short hair styles, but for the most part there was a sense that long hair was a necessity if they wanted to be accepted. The power of hegemonic ideals rests in these types of
choices. In order for the women to feel attractive, they must feel feminine. But feminine in this sense was not what they personally felt, rather it was the hegemonic ideal that they were comparing themselves with.

“You can still be sexy in Hard Yakka”

During these discussions, the football group spoke about women who work in traditionally male dominated workplaces, such as in construction. Lou (FG) pointed out that even in these jobs, there were feminine 'looking' women, “You can still be sexy in Hard Yakka”. Hard Yakka is a brand of work clothes that are typically used by male labourers and construction workers. Ez (FG) attributed this to those who wear make-up and those who do not. Louise (RD) felt much the same, “I get around in jeans a lot, so the feminine side is the hair and makeup.” By engaging in these aspects of beautification, women felt able to transform themselves into being feminine, regardless of what they were wearing.

Makeup was a big discussion point for all of the groups, and a clear indicator of femininity. By putting on eye shadow and lipstick, women felt they could go from “blah to a girl” (Kylie - FG). Lily (CG) said that make-up “helps you feel feminine, but it's not necessary”. While Louise (RD) spoke at length about the transformative power of makeup for her, it was how she felt “feminine on the track”. The football group had different views about makeup on the field:
The girls who go out and play footy being the really girly-girls – do you remember Princess from that team we played? She used to wear a full face of makeup to play - those people are ridiculed because they are not fitting the type of right then. It’s not practical. (Ez - FG)

By wearing makeup, a typically feminine thing to do, in the non-feminine environment of playing a rough sport, ‘Princess’ became unfeminine within this environment. It was seen as inappropriate while on the field, but off, it was acceptable – to a degree. Too much makeup was associated with women who were ‘high maintenance’, demanding and diva-esque (see Figure 3 below). To know when and where to wear makeup was part of ‘doing’ femininity. The concept of ‘doing gender’ is visible here (West & Zimmerman 1987) as well as the dramaturgical approach (Goffman 1976). The women ‘did’ feminine through engaging in the feminine practice of wearing makeup, performing in a gendered manner.

![Figure 3: Sammie - Football Group](image)
As can be seen in the figure on the previous page, Sammie (FG) positioned the phrase “high maintenance” towards the centre of her concept map, indicating this was central to her understanding of dominant women’s gender expression. During the discussions, the football group were rather critical of women who were high maintenance. In the mothers group, the participants also spoke fairly negatively about makeup, seeing it as part of a broader superficial form of femininity, similar to the ‘high maintenance’ girl the football group spoke of.

While the malleable dimensions of femininity were seen as a place of agency where the women could choose to enhance their femininity through particular styles of dress and attire, it was also clear that there was a frustration when this performance was expected of them. The hours of work that were required to appear feminine and the discomfort that often accompanied this was seen as part of what was required of them if they wanted to attract positive male attention.

**Restrictive Dimensions of Femininity**

There were aspects of femininity that the women spoke of that carried with them a number of restrictions and limitations. These included behavioural aspects such as speech, mannerisms, employment and activities and were often accompanied by statements regarding ‘what not to do’. In order to understand something as feminine, it was constructed relationally with masculinity. Statements such as, ‘men can do this, but women can’t’ were common and painted a picture of what hegemonic femininity was by highlighting what femininity was not. Thus, this
dimension of femininity centres on the ways in which femininity consists of restrictive aspects, a list of ’what not to do’s’ (most of which were behaviours and traits that were common and acceptable for males). When discussing these topics, the women often seemed resentful and judged if they did not adhere to them.

*Behaviours and Traits: Waiting Your turn*

Throughout our conversations, the women mentioned certain expected behaviours and traits that were seen to be important for a heterosexual woman’s gender expression. Adhering to these promoted a person’s perceived femininity, while violating them resulted in women being labelled in a variety of different ways, establishing a hierarchy of femininities (discussed further in Chapter 6). For instance, there were also many comments about passivity and compliance, being “not outspoken” (Alison - EM), sensitive and nurturing. Expectations of “having it all together” (Karen - CG) and being able to multitask were also seen as feminine. These qualities align with the literature on hegemonic and dominant femininities (Charlebois 2011; Messerschmidt 2010; Pomerantz et al. 2004).

As the women in the circus group discussed feminine speech, Mary (CG) said with a smile, “And you should wait for your turn to talk, like I just did.” This notion of not speaking over or interrupting has been studied (Cutler & Scott 1990; Smith-Lovin & Brody 1989). Mary (CG) also spoke of what happens when you don’t wait to speak: “If I am with a group of women and I interrupt, they are more likely to listen to what I have to say. But if it is a group of men, it gets ignored and the
other person just keeps talking.” This quote suggests that even when it was another woman interrupting, women are more likely to be compliant and allow them to do so. Karen (CG) reframed this experience into something positive, a strength to be proud of, “We are used to waiting, we have had to for society, but it means we can multitask. I can keep track of what I want to say and wait, I don’t need to blurt it out.” This was not seen so favourably by the others, “But what if I want to blurt stuff out?” (Lily - CG). Again, the sense of restriction was present here. It was interesting to note, that for the rest of the focus group session with the circus women, interruptions were fewer and when they did occur, there were often apologies exchanged.

There was a general sense that women spoke ‘gentler’ than men. These findings support research on speech and gender (Mills 2005; Sung 2012) which suggests that women’s speech is interpreted relationally as more ‘polite’ than men’s. When women speak in more masculine ways, this behaviour is seen negatively and inappropriate (Mills 2005). The women were very aware of these cultural norms expected of them. Karen (CG) told me, societal expectations included that: “Women should be restrained, not dominant in any way, or else they don’t seem feminine.” Again, the women are drawing on what women should not do in order to establish what they should to be understood as feminine. As established in Chapter 2, women are conceived of as relational to men; they are what men are not. Most of the responses about how feminine women behave were brief; it was how they shouldn't behave that the participants spent the majority of their time discussing.
Speech: No Yelling, No Swearing, No Laughing

There seemed to be a view that in order to maintain the perception of being feminine, one must monitor the level of their voice, the types of words they use, and how loud they laugh. In telling me of these restrictions, many of the women expressed a clear dislike for such expectations to put upon them.

Tess (MG) said femininity was “not yelling at your kids loudly all the time”. This idea ties into both that of the mother who should be patient, and that of women in general who should monitor their tone and volume. Others mentioned being able to moderate your voice or to speak softly. Raising one’s voice was seen a form of losing control and maintaining control was an important part of being feminine.

Laughter was also an area when women felt restricted in the ways they expressed themselves, as laughing too loudly was considered unfeminine. Interestingly, research has found that women laugh at men more than men laugh at women (Glenn 2003; Provine 1996). What seemed to upset the roller derby women was the limit on laughter, as they all acknowledged that a cute ‘girly giggle’ was okay, but a loud ‘roaring’ laugh was not. Even within their expressions of pleasure and delight, there was a sense of restriction present. The FG and MG women also spoke of giggling as a feminine behaviour and differentiated it from laughter which was viewed as less attractive or feminine. Again, we see here the sense on restriction required of women – a giggle is small, cute and controlled. Laughter on the other hand is loud and free flowing.
Similarly, the issue of swearing came up in all of the focus groups. Unequivocally, to swear is to not be feminine. This felt restrictive and unfair to many. Emma (RD) put this bluntly: “Saying ‘cunt’ is un-ladylike. But I’m the one that has one, shouldn’t I be the able to say it?” The EM group discussed swearing in the workplace, with many saying that it seemed acceptable for their male counterparts to engage in, but for the women is was seen as extremely inappropriate. Swearing has been associated with masculinity and thus feminine women are expected to find more ‘lady-like’ ways of expression their displeasure (Jackson 2006a; Krane et al. 2004; Sasson-Levy 2003). Swearing also extended to not just the women engaging in these ways of speaking, but also the idea of swearing in the company of women. Suzanne (EM) shared stories of men feeling frustrated at not being able to swear because they were present at the time, “They always say things like, ‘I can’t say that with a lady present’ or ‘Well, if you weren’t here I’d say what I really thought’”.

Not only was swearing restricted, but the types of discussions women were expected to engage in also caused frustration for some. The topics feminine women were described as being interested in, such as gossip, celebrities, and fashion, was seen as “superficial crap” (Georgie - MG). Notably, Georgie (MG) later admitted to reading “trashy mags”. In the same way that they thought men were expected to discuss sports when in each other’s company, women were felt the need to discuss topics that related to appearance and style when around others they did not know well. The theme of superficiality was evident in all of the focus groups, where women who spent too much time or energy on their appearance
were seen as shallow. But the line between how much was enough and acceptable and what was superficial was not clear.

*Mannerisms: You Can Play with the Ball, but Don’t Get Dirty*

In the circus group, as with each of the other groups, most of the members saw netball as a feminine sport, citing the skirt and non-contact rules as key factors. However, Ruby (CG) disagreed with this assessment, “I have always loved netball, I play netball. I don’t think it has to be feminine.” By calling netball feminine, it had implied a negativity that Ruby (CG) reacted to. She explained that men sometimes played netball on her team, drawing on their participation to justify it as a valid and non-feminine activity.

Hockey players were seen as less feminine than netball players, even though they both wore similar uniforms. The difference seemed to stem from the perceived level of aggression and likelihood of serious injury. Zoe (MG) used the image of Brett from the TV show Kath and Kim playing netball to demonstrate of the level of femininity that was ingrained in the sport. When men take part in netball, their masculinity seems to come into question. The mothers group also used roller derby as an example of a ‘strictly’ feminine sport as no men took part other than to referee or be a spectator. Rhythmic gymnastics, synchronized swimming and calisthenics, with their emphasis on grace and tight clothing, were also deemed highly feminine (see Figure 4 on the following page).
In Kylie’s (FG) figure above, gymnastics are placed in the middle, indicating that this sport was considered to be typically feminine. Sports such as gymnastics are seen as a socially acceptable activity for women that emphasises flexibility, grace and a “waiflike body” (Cahn 1994, p. 207).

The women in the circus group found some enjoyment in discussing ‘feminine’ sports and activities despite that there was a clear distain for dominant mainstream femininity in this group. They poked fun at the idea of what these women would get up to. Ruby (CG) joking said, “Anything to lose a bit of weight”, which was followed by the others laughing and saying, “Anyone for a bit of cardio? Bit of aerobics? Bit of cycling?” This interaction demonstrated the frustration these athletic women felt towards what were acceptable and unacceptable forms of physical exertion.
The football groups had a lot to say about sports and femininity and it was interesting to see the ways in which they feminised their mannerisms and appearance to combat the negative stigma associated with such a masculine sport. During a discussion on sports clothes, the following exchange took place about football boots:

Kylie (FG): I like them girly. I want them girly.

Ez (FG): You can usually tell the girly footy players ‘cause they have pink boots.

Joey (FG): Can I say that I matched my footy boots to my uniform? Which makes it as girly as possible!

Kylie (FG): That’s a feminine thing!

Jenna (FG): When I buy boots, I usually try them on first by what colour they were. Then even if those ones fit better, I’ll get the ones cause it’s a nicer colour.

Kylie (FG): That’s a feminine thing! Going away from comfort.

Ez (FG): Going away from practical for the prettier things.

While these comments contradict some of the earlier discussions regarding feminine as being practical by knowing what to wear and when, it highlights the constant challenges the women experience between when trying to negotiate femininity and athleticism.

The acceptable forms of exertion and sports were those that helped to reinforce femininity, either through attire (netball skirt) or through type of activity (graceful dance movements). This was similar with the types of interests women were expected to have. Crafting was universally seen as feminine by the women I
spoke with. Crafting is often a leisure time activity, not one which usually produces paid employment or practical outcomes for the home (as compared to gardening or “fixing up wood stuff” (Mary - CG)). Each group mentioned crafting as an activity that women do, but not men, thus making it seem even more feminine to them as they spoke about it. This is not surprising given the ways in which crafts have been taught in gender based ways as primarily focussed on women (Kokko 2009). Art in general was also seen to have an element of femininity to it, whether you were a man or a woman. Ruby (CG) put this down to the idea that art was about expressing emotions and creativity, both seen by her as feminine characteristics. However, if tools were involved in the art process, it became more masculine again. Tools implied creating something that was useable and hence masculine, whereas craft was about making ‘pretty’ accessories. Karen (CG) explained this as, “Men get to use hammers and nails and make real stuff, women make useless doilies”. This difference in leisure time activities supports the asymmetrical nature of hegemonic femininities and masculinities.

_Employment: The Cook and the Chef_

In line with the literature on women and work, feminine jobs were seen as less valued than the more masculine equivalents and taken less seriously (Demaiter & Adams 2009). Ruby (CG) told us about something she saw on TV recently, “I love the show, ‘The Cook and the Chef’, but it shows, like, if women are involved it is not as professional” (in this program, the cook is a woman, the chef, a man). Zoe
(MG) made the important distinction that while there are stereotypically feminine jobs, the women in those jobs are not necessarily themselves feminine. She acknowledged that because these types of industries employed a significant number of women (i.e. nursing and childcare), the jobs became feminised. Once feminised, they were devalued (Demaiter & Adams 2009). Similarly, Lily (CG), who worked in caring role in her job, said that nursing was seen as “essential work, but not valued work”. Anything to do with nursing, disability work, teaching, all were seen as feminine, and fit within the ideal feminine category of ‘mother’, as is discussed in the next section. These jobs centre around the notion of women as inherently more patient, emotional and empathetic. “Any caring type roles, like social welfare workers, they are seen as feminine, ‘cause people think that’s what they are good at” (Ez - FG). This included childcare. Cece (MG) suggested that this was only when it was paid childcare, “I think if it’s unpaid, times are changing, it’s more equal now.” However, later in the session she spoke of the difference between women and men, “When the husbands stay home with the kids it’s called babysitting, but when we do it, it’s nothing, it’s normal.” Childcare was seen as a natural extension of being a woman.

Other professions that were seen as feminine included hairdresser, stylist and model. This cluster ties in with the other ideal feminine type, that of the Barbie. “Hairdressers always look so done up, they have the big hair and the make-up. It’s totally feminine” (Karen - CG). ‘Hairdresser’ were one of most common terms placed at or near the centre of the gender expression maps, and was clearly seen as a typically feminine role. Lily (CG) pointed out that even when men are hairdressers, they are assumed to be gay as it is such a feminine role.
Through my discussions with the women, three main dimensions of femininity were identified, that of the physical (body), the malleable (appearance) and the restrictive (demeanour). These three dimensions cover different, but often overlapping aspects of femininity. Much of these are part of what the women saw as 'ideal' femininity. This ideal femininity reflects hegemonic femininity; it is the dominant form that garners the most power and status within the femininities hierarchy. Hegemonic femininity involves participating in practices and embodying characteristics symbolically understood feminine such as those described by the women across the three dimensions outlined. It was this form of femininity that the women compared themselves against. The physical elements incorporated not only the shape of one's body, but also the way in which it is used. The women suggested that although one cannot always change their body shape, they can, in theory, alter the way in which they use it to appear more feminine. However, it isn’t always as easy as simply ‘deciding’ to do this as many of the more feminine aspects, such as a delicate gait or occupying as little space as possible, have become so ingrained through repetition that they are hard to alter. It is through these stories that we can see Butler’s (1990) performativity at work. This performativity enables the maintenance of hegemonic femininity, but also additionally provides for avenues for multiple femininities to manifest.

The malleable dimensions of femininity were those that the women felt they could easily ‘do’ in order to enhance one’s femininity. These included things such as clothing, make-up and hairstyles. By engaging with such practices in feminine ways, women who didn’t necessarily have a feminine physique were able to aid their presentation of femininity. This often involved lots of work and effort,
something that many of the women openly expressed disdain for, but they were presented as ‘optional’. The restrictive dimensions on the other hand were those that women felt they had little control over. These included the way in which the women spoke, their demeanour, and their interests. Being feminine required adhering to a particular set of behaviours that were seen as limiting to the women in this research and not reflective of their own desires.

The Tropes of Hegemonic Femininity

The three dimensions, the physical (body), the malleable (appearance), and the restrictive (demeanour), work together in a way that allows for various manifestations of femininity, but ideal femininity incorporates all the ‘right’ elements of these. While there were many labels the participants used to describe different ‘types’ of women when filling out their concepts maps, there were two main themes that were immediately evident as being the epitome of femininity and women’s gender expression: they were the Barbie and the Mother. These terms also came up throughout every focus group. Georgie (MG) made the following observation during our discussions: “I feel like we are describing two types of women: the mother goddess type of woman, who I feel quite positive about, and then there is the other one that I brought up that’s more superficial and about appearances.” This statement captures much of the sentiment noted across the five focus groups; the ideal woman was at times at odds with herself – the appearance focused Barbie or the caring Mother figure. For the category of Barbie, other similar labels that were used were ‘Cheerleader’, ‘Princess’, or just
simply the term ‘Make-Up’, while for the Mother category terms also used were ‘Sally Homemaker’ and ‘Soccer Mum’. While in many ways these ideals represented very different forms of femininity, the key similarity was that they were both about “pleasing other people” (Mary - CG). These ideas were discussed at length, and while not every participant used one of these labels on their maps, almost all discussed the ideas in much the same way.

The Barbie

The term ‘Barbie’ was used by women in all five focus groups to discuss not just the physical body, but also on the way that is was adorned and particular personality traits; she embodied key aspects from all three dimensions of femininity. Barbie was also written down by many women on their concept maps, always located towards the centre, suggesting this ‘type’ of woman encompasses a form of dominant women’s gender expression (see Figures 5 and 6 on the following page).
Barbie is positioned towards the centre of both of these concept maps, suggesting that the women viewed characteristics of Barbie dolls as central to their
understandings of dominant women’s gender expressions. While the participant from the Circus group had myriad words written on her map, the woman in the mothers group only had a couple. However, both included this notion of a “barbie doll”. ‘Barbie’ women were described as being skinny, well proportioned, had a ‘softness’ and fragility to them, wore make-up, jewellery, had long hair, got manicures, and wore dresses and skirts. She was the girl who straightened her hair and then curled it, who “wears pink and acts like a princess” (Kylie - FG). This type of woman was also referred to as the ‘girly-girl’ by every group. The picture they all painted is the similar to that found by Allan (2009) in her discussion of hyperfemininity and girly-girl femininity. Sitting at the far end of the gender expression spectrum, hyperfeminine women are seen to engage in a performance of exaggerated and ideal femininity that is strongly connected to heterosexuality (Allan 2009; Paechter 2010).

By using the expression ‘Barbie’, the women in the focus groups are drawing on ideas of unattainable beauty, void of depth. As one participant put it, it’s “superficial you know? Skin deep”. The notion of beauty and appearance as a central component to being feminine ties in with general understandings of femininity as being closely intertwined with appearance (Holland & Harpin 2013; Skeggs 1997). Participants from all the groups expressed a clear negativity towards those who embody this characteristic, describing them as ‘off-putting’, ‘shallow’, ‘flakey’ and ‘bitchy’. Tracy (EM) described the ‘girly-girl’ as “more interested on the outside than the inside”.

However, after describing the Barbie girl, the conversations often shifted towards rationalising the behaviours. Taylor (EM) drew on the film *Legally Blonde*, in which a seemingly shallow, blonde fashion focussed girl who decides to become a lawyer and in the process “it turns out the girl has a lot of substance”. Some of the participants in the mothers group also pointed out that there may be more to it that we don’t get a chance to see when we make these snap judgments. Zoe (MG) discussed these ideas further, suggesting that in most of those cases the women were engaging in these behaviours for reasons outside of one’s control:

Yeah, but underneath, you might see that person and not feel great about them, like they are a bit of a barbie, but underneath of that they might not be like that, but they need to do that to feel good about themselves, or they need to do that because that is what their boyfriend wants them to look like. Or that is what they have to look like for work. It might not be who they are, they might just look like that, but sometimes it’s really hard to separate it because you don’t get to talk to those people.

Similar to this, Kim (MG), felt capitalism and consumerism were significant factors in the pressure on women to focus on their physical appearance, “We live in this world that puts a lot of pressure on women.” For some, the girly-girl or barbie women were unconsciously being manipulated into buying products to beautify themselves, keeping the massive beauty industry booming. Georgie (MG) expanded on this further:

I think it’s largely environmental, pop culture, entertainment culture, the marketing is so clever, and you get it from such a young age. Everyone around you is enacting it so its compounded. And the penalties for not adhering to the gender codes are so strong.
The women in the circus group presented a somewhat similar view on make-up and the Barbie image, “It's just about different choices. You know, like, for me, it's not essential to my everyday identity” (Karen - CG). Generally, for the circus women, to engage in the beautification related aspects of femininity was something one could opt in or out of, drawing on the discourse of ‘choice’. For Lily (CG), it came down how much you wanted to please other people and how agreeable you were, and an ‘off-putting’ quality to have. She seemed aware that the ‘choice’ was still mostly about others, rather than herself. Several of the women acknowledged the societal pressure to ‘look good’, to live up to the ideals associated with Barbie – thin, pretty, blonde, shapely in all the right places, and non-threatening. It was evident that the Barbie trope was intertwined with ‘Ken’; the male gaze and the power of heteronormativity were seen to be central to her decision making. But the Barbie girl was also seen as, “a bit of a bitch” (Lily - CG) towards other women. The labelling of a woman as a ‘bitch’ can have multiple meanings (discussed further in Chapter 7). In this case, she was seen as being competitive, but not in a masculine way; rather she was challenging other women for men’s attention and approval and in doing so is seen as bitchy towards other women. Finley (2010) suggests that this competition can be understood as a “negotiation between femininities within the patriarchal system”. By labelling others in particular ways, such as a bitch or slut, these subject positions because stigmatized. The classification of the ‘bitch’ is constructed in relation to the ‘nice girl’, a comparison between femininities establishing a hierarchy of women’s gender relations separate from masculinities. Connell’s (1987) concept of emphasized femininity suggests that women have little hegemonic power over each other, but it is in these types of examples that we can see that this is not the
case. To suggest that there is no hegemonic femininity underestimates the complexity of women's gender expressions. Thus, the Barbie had to walk a thin line between looking good and being a bitch in order to occupy a dominant position in the hierarchy.

In the roller derby group, the focus also leaned towards the bitchy, deceptive and destructive aspects that were perceived to be associated with women who are focused on their looks. Unlike the other groups, little direct connection was made to it being about ‘choice’ when it came to the superficial aspects, however the participants did describe women who engaged in these types of activities as being pressured to look ‘pretty’ in order to feel okay about themselves as women. For the women in the circus group, concentrating on your physical appearance meant ‘giving up part of yourself’ or as a tool for manipulation.

It is interesting to note that the participants did not associate themselves with engaging in any of these types of behaviours. When attention was paid to their own appearance it was always seen as a purely selfish act being done only to please themselves. In these instances, attention to one’s appearance was always a choice, and a choice that had little or no outside influence. When asked about what it felt like to ‘dress up feminine’ (i.e. makeup, female specific clothing such as skirts and dresses, hair styled), the women described it as empowering evoking a sense of agency. And yet, when talking about feminine in more general terms, one participant in the circus group stated that “Feminine is the opposite of powerful”, to which the other participants agreed. This contradiction between
agency and structure was a common theme in the women making sense of their own gender expressions and is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

While an ideal type, the Barbie was necessarily seen in a favourable light, “...it's kinda of a negative stereotype, you know, calling someone a Barbie doll” (Zoe - MG).

![Figure 7: Lily - Circus Group](image)

On the figure 7 above, Lily (CG) has included many negative traits that she associated with women’s gender expression. When the women discussed others who embodied the characteristics of the Barbie ideal, there was a clear distain for them. She was fake, ditzy and vain. And yet for some, such as Karen (CG), there was a clear pressure and at times desire to be more like her, "I wish I was more feminine sometimes, I wish I didn't care, but that's what makes you seem, you
know, pretty. Guys like that.” While Mary (CG) said, “I find it [feminine girls] off-putting ‘cause I think I won't have anything to say to them. If they look like a really girly-girl, I’m just not that interested in talking to them.” And yet, it was this form of hegemonic femininity that they often found themselves unconsciously comparing themselves against.

The other term that was present throughout all of the focus groups, was ‘mother’. This was brought up by those who had children as well as those who did not. The ‘mother’ was seen to encompass all three dimensions of femininity, albeit in a different manner than that of the Barbie. Also like the Barbie, the Mother was centrally located within numerous concept maps as illustrated. Research by Gillespie (2003, p. 123) explored the discourses of motherhood, finding it was viewed as the “ultimate fulfilment for women and the cornerstone of feminine identity”. Motherhood as central to femininity has been well researched (Connell 1987; Firestone 1971; Gillespie 2003; Nash 2014; Ortner 1972; Rich 1980), and much of what they women discussed aligned with the ideas from the literature. While the notion of the Barbie was focused on appearance, the Mother was more focussed on the behavioural aspects of being a woman. Words and phrases such as gentle, caring, emotionally tuned in, selfless and warm were all used when talking about femininity and mothers.
The ‘mother’ ideal didn’t just apply to actual mothers, but rather it was an expectation that women should have the characteristics of a good mother whether they had children or not. When explaining why she placed the term mother in the centre of her gender expression map, Cece (MG) said, “I think it’s about nurturing, expressing that to your own children or to someone or something else. It’s those attributes that are important, not if you have children.” This included work and activities. Wendy (EM) felt that, “nurturing, that mothering ‘thing’, it’s still that as femininity.” For her it was central to understanding women’s gender expression. She herself was not a mother, but she felt all of the expectations that she not only should be, but also she should naturally have the assumed nurturing qualities that go hand in hand with being a mother. Pixie (EM) said she felt pressure to be the “caring one” in her family, taking care of others emotions from a young age even though she had two older brothers: “I feel like that has been placed on me as a daughter. It’s just an unwritten expectation.” The structural impacts of motherhood are explored further in Chapter 7.

The idea of woman as ‘wife’ was also strongly connected to motherhood and is also discussed further in Chapter 7, but it is important to note here as these notions form what was deemed to be the ‘ideal’ forms of heterosexual femininity. Inherent in the term ‘wife’ (as compared to partner), is a level of hierarchy and dominance. This came through in the discussions with women referring to a ‘good wife’, meaning one that was submissive to their husband, the ‘Sally Homemaker’ ideal who has a hot dinner waiting when her husband gets home from work each day. Zoe (MG) described this as the type of women who was
happy to say to her male partner, “...you go off and have a beer, I’ll stay home and do the dishes.” This type of woman was also described as the “Soccer mum” (Tess - MG). The soccer mum conjured up ideas of the ideal mother, one who puts their children’s need ahead of their own and manages to get a healthy meal on the table each night and keep a clean house (Reger 2001; Russo 1976). As with the Barbie, the Mother was often seen in somewhat negative ways – that of the boring, compliant woman. But, as with the Barbie, it was also this woman that the participants measured themselves against.

Both the Barbie and the Mother present ideal forms of hegemonic femininity. They encompass the most culturally valued aspects of being a woman, albeit with slightly different emphases. The Barbie is more focused on appealing to male desires, while the Mother encapsulates the behaviour characteristics and traits expected of women. Thus, Barbie’s Mother becomes the ultimate ideal type, a woman who looks good while caring. However, as Nash (2011; 2014) has highlighted, contradictions arise when trying to embody ideal femininity and good motherhood.

**Conclusion: Changing times? Maybe not...**

This chapter has discussed three dimensions of women’s gender expression, the physical, malleable and restrictive. The physical elements of femininity focussed on the aspects of femininity that were more centrally located within the body itself. This included control over movement and the shape of one’s body. The
women’s accounts of their experiences of their bodies reinforced the norms expected from hegemonic femininity; women felt they needed to be small, graceful and controlled. The malleable aspects carried with them a stronger sense of agency. This section included discussions on appearance including styles of dress, accessories, and makeup. While many of the women felt that they could choose to engage in these feminising activities, there was also a sense of pressure to adhere to them in particular situation, creating a sense of frustration. This frustration was further expressed when discussing the restrictive dimensions of femininity, which included demeanour, behaviours, traits, verbal communication, leisure activities and employment. While on the surface these may appear to have some choice associated with them, the women felt that there were constantly being judged if they did not ‘choose’ correctly. This highlight the ‘illusion’ of ‘choice’, where women are being re-regulated through such discourses (McRobbie 2007).

Connell (1987) argued that all femininity is positioned as subordinate to masculinity and thus, there can be no hierarchy of femininities or hegemonic femininity. But as was evident within the discussions in my focus groups, there are forms of femininity that do have power each other. The dominant tropes of the Barbie and the Mother constitute forms of hegemonic femininity that both support the dominance of men over women, and of women over women. In line with Schippers (2002; 2007), it can be seen that these dominant femininities help to maintain the gender order and it is only by examining further the hierarchies within women’s gender expressions that we can understand these processes further. While hegemonic femininities are archetypes that cannot be fully
embodied, too much variation from these ideas of what it means to be a woman results in harsh social penalty. Femininity was a fragile performance, easily disrupted by even the slightest of transgressions.

Throughout all of the focus groups when we spoke of gender and femininity, I heard the participants tell me that ‘times have changed’ or ‘it’s different now’. These comments speak to the work on new ‘girlhood’ where there are shifting notions of ideal femininity (Adams & Bettis 2003; Budgeon 2014; Harris 2004). There was a sense that there were more choices now, and thus the rigid rules of feminine appearance and behaviour were not enforced and women didn’t have to adhere to the societal pressures. And yet, after listening to story after story, a different picture emerged. An example of this occurred during the circus group where Lily (CG) stated that femininity had “changed over the years” but began to describe the importance of makeup and dressing in the feminine ways discussed earlier in this chapter. Karen (CG) cut her off and pointed out that, while she said things had changed, she had drawn on exactly the stereotype of what it has been for decades. She went on to say:

There are ways of being a woman that aren’t maybe being traditional and they are slowly more accepted nowadays, but the idea of being “feminine” [hand quotes], is about long hair and make-up and being seductive and caring for people and that kind of crap. That’s what feminine is. (Karen - CG)

The general notion of ‘feminine’ was, for most, not a good thing. The Barbie was the epitome of these negative ideas around femininity; she is shallow, superficial, unattainably attractive, overly concerned with appeasing males - but she was
what the women compared themselves to. ‘I’m not feminine like that’ was a sentiment I heard often. The Mother also had its negatives – she was boring and too self-sacrificing. While these may seem like opposing versions on femininity, both are constituted in relation to, and in support of, males. The Barbie presents herself in ways that will appeal to male desires, the Mother takes on the subordinate parenting and caring roles to enabling men to pursue other endeavours. Neither of these ideals appealed to the women in the focus groups and many actively rejected such subject positions. Instead they found their own type of gender expression that they were willing to embrace, one that enabled them to pick and choose which elements they would engage with, and which they would leave behind. It was in these subject positions the discourses of new ways of being feminine emerged. These will be discussed in Chapter 7, but first the “less traditional” (Karen - CG), non-dominant gender expressions will be discussed, as will the lack of established social or sociological language to discuss them and the social consequences of embodying them.
Chapter 6

Non-Dominant Gender Expressions and Pariah Femininities

The previous chapter focused on dominant and traditional women’s gender expressions, it examined the various dimensions with which women understood and described such femininities. In line with Schippers (2007), dominant femininities are understood as hegemonic as they wield power over other forms of women’s gender expressions. The forms of femininity that intentionally confront or reject hegemonic gender relations are described by Schippers (2002; 2007) as ‘alternative’ or pariah femininities. The alternative femininities as described by Schippers (2002; 2007) enabled women to create acceptable women’s gender expressions that resist the gender order in localised contexts. As the next two chapters will demonstrate, this was not the case for most of the women I spoke with. While there were degrees of agency, often it came at a price. In some situations, the women were able to create an alternative femininity, but more often than not, this was not achieved and the transgressions resulted in them being labelled in terms indicative of pariah femininities.

This chapter will explore understandings of non-dominant gender expressions and the ways the women in the focus groups made sense of these, both by drawing on their own experiences and as well as others. This is done through
discourse analysis enabling examination of how assumptions regarding gender and gender expressions are produced discursively. While discourse influences society, society also simultaneously shapes discourse. Such an approach allows for consideration of how such understandings are maintained, negotiated and resisted as well as the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures (Lazar 2007). However, it should be noted that there has been debate regarding the biased interpretations that may arise through the application of discourse analysis (Lazar 2007). Wodak (2013, p. xxxiv) explains there is “inherent fuzziness of its concepts and definitions”. Therefore, it is important to clarify that for the purposes of this thesis, understandings of discourse and discourse analysis will stem from a Foucauldian view that ‘texts’ are “sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance” (Wodak 2013, p. xxix).

Overall, the conversations about non-dominant gender expression were more varied than those regarding femininity. Some groups focused on trying to find a suitable term and sexuality was raised as a significant issue. The chapter is structured around the terminology that came up during the focus groups. The first section discusses language and subject positions, exploring the usefulness of the terms ‘androgyny’ and ‘masculinity’. This is followed by a discussion regarding the inescapability of femininity for women. The ‘tomboy’ and the ‘heterosexual butch’ are highlighted as examples of this. The restrictions of the language available for the women in this research was evident in their struggle to find terminology that matched their experiences. Often the non-dominant forms of women’s gender expression were constructed specifically in relation to what is
‘not’ feminine. This is discussed with relation to the participants’ usage of the word ‘unfeminine’ as an umbrella term to describe all non-dominant forms of women’s gender expression. Despite the linguistic limitations, the patterns of behaviours that are positioned as pariah femininities (that is, those that reject hegemonic gender relations, or that deviate from traditional feminine practices), will be discussed in relation to their relative positions within the femininities hierarchy.

**Language and Subject Positions**

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is debate about to what extent meaning is constructed through language. Foucault (1979) and Butler (1990) argue that identities and knowledge form as products of localized discursive interactions. Discourses provide conceptual ways of being, or subject positions, that enable us to describe, categorise and make sense of ourselves and others (Davies & Harré 1990). This section will explore these subject positions and the language used by the participants to gain insight into how women understand and construct non-dominant forms of gender expressions. As with the previous chapter, the labels and terms on the outer edges of the concept maps are also drawn on to explore these ideas further.

In the discussions, ‘masculine’ was generally considered too strong and loaded for many, butch worked for some, but was unable to be separated out from sexuality in most of the groups to be useful in a heterosexual context, and tomboy
was restricted by age for all of those who discussed it. These terms, and others, will all be discussed in further detail later in this chapter, but the debate around them demonstrated there were no clear words within the participants’ lexicons that adequately described these non-dominant heterosexual gender expressions that they both experienced themselves or saw in others that they knew. This points to a lack of words within our everyday language to explore such topics. In the previous chapter, the participants discussed femininity with ease. Although at times there were some aspects that were more emphasized than others between the groups, there was little difference as to what constituted dominant forms of femininity. Not surprisingly then, femininity was often drawn on to try and illustrate their own understandings and experiences.

One of the first questions I asked regarding non-dominant gender expressions was if women had to be feminine or could they be something else. In the circus group, there was an instant echoing of ‘no’s’ indicating that indeed they considered there to be an alternative to being feminine. However, when I asked them to describe what this was, there was a long silence. Two of the women laughed, another leaned back in her chair and put her hand on her chin, looking off in contemplation. Finally, Mary (CG) said, “I don’t know, I guess they are just female. They’re themselves. They’re just not ‘feminine’.” In every focus group, there was no escaping the connection of feminine and masculine to cis females and males, even when the women wanted to. While women often expressed that one could have traits of both femininity and masculinity, further discussion suggested that these ideas were still very much rooted in notions of dimorphic sex and gender norms and that sex and gender were co-constructed.
One participant, Mary (CG), explain that she felt there were “just female ways of being that are irrelevant to being feminine”. This statement implies that femininity is not the only way women’s gender expressions can be understood. This was a common sentiment, that people should just be thought of by their abilities, and not have gender placed on them. And yet, it was impossible to escape binary gendered categories and language during our discussions; as Mary (CG) put it, “society just doesn’t have the words yet”. During the focus groups, it became apparent quite early on that the language within the participants’ lexicons was not adequate for understanding the experiences and feelings about gender expressions that deviate from the dominant tropes. This will be explored by looking at the concepts of ‘androgyny’ and ‘female masculinity’ and their usefulness.

Androgyny

After our discussion of what the term ‘feminine’ meant, I spoke to the participants about women who didn’t fit neatly into the idea of ‘feminine’ that they identified (as discussed in Chapter 5). In some of the focus groups I specifically asked the women what they thought of the term ‘androgyny’, in other groups it came up without prompting. It became apparent from their discussions that androgyny was not an adequate concept to describe the experiences of the women in the focus group. As discussed in Chapter 2, the term androgyny historically referred to consisting of both male and female physical characteristics (Ferguson 1974). Over time for field of psychology it came to mean the ability to choose between or
draw on feminine or masculine traits in a given situation (Bem 1974; Singer 1976; Woodhill & Samuels 2004; Young 2002). However, some disciplines began to view androgyny as a utopian ideal (Ferguson 1974), while others use female androgyny as more of a way of describing a woman or girl being “one of the boys” (Reynolds & Press 1995). In an attempt to shift away from viewing androgyny as dependent on gender as consisting of masculinity or femininity, or a combination of the two, Lorenzi-Cioldi (1996) suggested that there was the possibility of androgyny in the form of ‘transcendence’, which broke away from the constraints of gender altogether. While ideas like this theoretically provide an avenue to break away from the binary and restrictive nature of gender expression, through the discussion in my focus groups this did not appear to be the case. It is interesting to note, that while the term came up many times during the focus groups, not a single participant wrote it down on their concepts maps suggesting it was not seen as a form of gender expression but rather encapsulated another set of meanings as discussed below. As with the debates within the literature (discussed in Chapter 2), androgyny was not a cohesive concept for the participants. Some were unfamiliar with the term, others found it insulting, and others still simply saw it as a way of describing a particular style of dress. The theoretical and academic understandings of androgyny did not have that same meaning in the everyday language used by my participants. It just wasn’t a word they felt they could either connect with or that had any significant meaning to them.

The women defined androgyny through feminine and masculine terms, but rather than a combination of the two, it was often seen as a lack of either. Mary (CG)
explained: “I think of androgyny as not on either end of the extreme of masculine and feminine.” In the football group, Kylie (FG) expressed a similar idea: “It’s not either, it’s in the middle.” These definitions differ from the notion of androgyny as an overlapping of feminine and masculine traits suggested by some theorists such as Bem (1974) and Woodhill and Samuels (2004). Instead of seeing androgyny as a mixture of gender expressions, for many of the participants it came to mean more an absence of gender expression at all, particularly the absence of femininity.

In many cases, androgyny wasn’t just seen as the absence of femininity, but often it was the presence of masculinity. While in the research androgyny suggests that androgyny provides the possibility to explore gender expression outside of purely feminine or masculine terms, in practice, this was not the case. The women in the roller derby, executive management and mothers groups generally tended to view androgyny as much more masculine, but only in so far as to describe appearances. In the circus group, I asked Mary (CG), who was averse to using the word androgyny, to describe what an androgynous woman was to her. She said, “I would say she has like specific traits. You might say she has really short hair, and she is really strong [looking]. She wears a lot of men’s clothes.” Karen (CG) then responded, “See you’re describing masculinity!” Note that these ‘traits’ were not so much traits as they were physical descriptions. This is not an uncommon social understanding of androgyny. Kelly et al. (2005, p. 136) describe the women skateboarders in their study who had adopted masculine traits as exhibiting “non-sexualized androgyny (read: masculine dress style)”. Such understandings do not correlate with much of the earlier academic literature that
views androgyny as a balanced combination of masculine and feminine characteristics (Bem 1974). The androgyny discussed by the women in my research more often than not, drew heavily on masculinity. In other words, the participants saw androgynous women as more masculine but at the same time void of heterosexuality as they lacked femininity.

The masculinity that was seen to be present in androgynous women, came in the form of clothing. When I first asked the circus group if there was word to describe women who are heterosexual but not feminine, the following exchange took place:

Ruby (CG): What's that word? And...

Lily (CG): Androgynous?

Ruby (CG): Androgyny is more, like, neither too feminine or too masculine.

Lily (CG): That's not what I think of when I think of androgyny.

Karen (CG): Yeah, I think of a more polished look, they care a lot about how they look.

Ruby (CG): Yeah, how they dress.

While the women in this group had touched on the idea of androgyny as a mix of femininity and masculinity, the discussion on physical appearance dominated the conversation. Short hair and clothing style elicited a stronger response and greater discussion than the idea of some kind of balance between masculinity and femininity. However, this focus on appearance is a more typically feminine characteristic (Skegss 1997). This was also the case for the women in the
executive management group where was seen as a “fashion thing” (Alison - EM) most often associated with young people.

Several women, including Donna (FG), had never heard of androgyny, so the other members of the football group provided descriptions of what it meant to them, mostly around similar notions to what is described above, but I also provided a more academic definition of being able to draw on both masculine or feminine traits when needed. I then asked Donna (FG) if she felt androgyny was a useful term for understanding gender expression. She replied, “No, I mean, if you’re playing footy, you’re not gonna to run out all fenimim, or girly or whatever, you’re gonna run out there like strong, and stride and stuff. But that’s not necessarily being masculine. So, no.” [Donna (FG) struggled with the pronunciation of feminine, the above spelling is phonetic] There were various other times where the women described someone as a bit masculine and a bit feminine, or a person who switched between the two, and while this describes much of what the term androgyny purports to mean (Bem 1974), the term simply had no relevance to the women and they were reluctant to use it. Kylie (FG): “Androgynous? Sounds like you’re a weirdo or you got something wrong with you. I find that word more insulting than if someone said I was butch. It’s like queer and stuff.” Not only was the word seen negatively, there was an assumed link between androgyny and sexuality. This slippage between gender and sexuality came up throughout my conversations with the women, both in relation to androgyny and also various other forms of non-dominant gender expression that came up discussed throughout this chapter. By referring to an androgynous person as “queer”, the power of Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix becomes
evident. The heterosexual matrix positions biological sex, gender (gender expression) and sexuality within a framework that enables meaning to be extracted. When gender naturally follows on from sex, and sexuality follows on from gender, ideal heterosexual relations are produced. This matrix demonstrates the interdependence between sex, gender, and sexuality and how when a person deviated from the expected gender expression for their assumed biological sex, their heterosexuality comes into question.

This was visible in the football group. Ez (FG) explained: “It’s like saying someone doesn’t have any kind of sexuality. I think of androgynous as not masculine or feminine.” In other words, androgyny was akin to asexuality. For a heterosexual woman who identified as feminine, the idea of not wanting to appeal to male desires through femininity confused Ez (FG). She felt fairly negative towards the word, making a scrunched-up face when saying the word and using descriptors such as “silly” when discussing the term; this sentiment was not uncommon in the focus groups. This can be understood through the lens of the heterosexual matrix, where all sexuality ‘should’ be heterosexual and thus women ‘should’ be feminine. As Ruby (CG) points out, androgyny to her was an absence of femininity, and thus an absence of sexuality. In addition to reading androgyny as asexual, many others saw it as associated with lesbians, particularly in the way they dress. Lily (CG) discussed that calling someone androgynous could be presumptuous and should be avoided, “I mean, are you calling that person gay?” She went on to explain:
Lily (CG): When you are describing a really masculine girl or a really feminine guy, it’s almost like when you are a white person and you are describing a person in a way that you don’t want to appear as racist. It feels like you are doing the same thing. You are really tip toeing around it. You know [gesturing in the air], they are tall, dark hair… you are really trying to go around the topic. You don’t want to get straight to it. You don’t want to say it. Cause, is that word right.

Ruby (CG): Yeah, as soon as you are different, it becomes a negative.

The negativity seems to come from the lack of conforming to the expected norms for gender expression. By calling someone out on this, they bring the person’s sexuality into question. This too can be understood through the heterosexual matrix where women are assumed to be attracted to masculinity as part of heterosexuality (Butler 1990). Thus, if a woman is displaying signs of traditional masculinity by being androgynous, they must then be attempting to attract women.

There was a lack of consensus as to exactly what androgyny referred to. This was a stark contrast to the ease and agreement that was present when discussing femininity. The everyday understandings of androgyny by my participants and its inseparability from sexuality demonstrate the power of heteronormativity, or the privileging of heterosexuality above other forms of sexuality and positioning them in relation to it (Berlant & Warner 1998). For the women, androgyny does not adhere to their understandings of the expected of gender expression, and in doing so becomes linked to something other than heterosexuality, that of asexuality or homosexuality.
Contrary to much of the literature (Bem 1974; Lorenzi-Ciolodi 1996; Singer 1976; Woodhill & Samuels 2004), the term androgynous was not used to describe the manner in women spoke, the activities they engaged in, the way they held themselves or other traits inherent to gender expression. Androgyny was understood to be more of a fashion statement about being either masculine or asexual, femininity was never incorporated into the idea. This is not surprising given the fragility of femininity and how easy it is to disrupt the performance. In this case, when a woman chooses to wear more typically masculine clothing, they have violated the malleable aspects of femininity and their gender becomes somewhat unintelligible, conflating their dress style with their sexuality.

What did become clear through our discussions was that the participants did feel that women could embody both masculine and feminine traits, it just wasn’t seen as ‘androgynous’. Non-dominant gender expressions for women are more complex than can be captured by a ‘third’ category that sits in-between masculine and feminine. Lorenzi-Cioldi’s (1996) notion of ‘transcendence’, in which gender expressions have transcended above gender and sexuality were not relevant for my participants. Non-dominant gender expressions that have ‘masculine’ aspects are not a homogenous category. Nor are they simply a matter of bracketing off masculine and feminine traits and mixing bits here and there create androgynous gender expressions. The same acts performed by a man and a woman were not in fact the same thing, each were read differently; we have not yet broken free of the binaries of gender.
In most of the focus groups, small debates arose around what words to use if someone was seen as something other than feminine. When I asked the participants if they though women could be ‘masculine’, it stopped conversation and required further thought. In the footy group, Joey (FG) said, “Yeah, women can be masculine.” I probed further and asked if being a masculine woman meant you weren’t feminine, she replied, “No, I don’t think that’s true. You can have traits of both.” This sparked a discussion about a fellow teammate who was not present. She was described by Donna (FG) as “really girly-girl, like with hair and makeup and dress code and everything, but then on the other side she’s really masculine. Burps, farts, swears, strong.” This notion, of the woman who is both feminine and masculine, came up throughout each of the focus groups. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, this was not seen as androgyny. Nearly every woman who took part in this research saw themselves as some sort of combination of feminine and masculine when it came to particular traits or interests. However, in terms of how they understood themselves or their gender expressions, none of the women saw being only ‘masculine’ as possible; femininity was always present.

The idea of embodying aspects of traditional femininity and masculinity aligns with Sasson-Levy’s (2003) work where she found her participants rejected dichotomous gender identities and instead created a new form of gender identity that broke down the boundaries between masculinity and femininity where they combined aspects of both. However, there are significant differences. Sasson-
Levy's (2003) research was undertaken with women soldiers who were in very different daily scenarios than the women in this research. The need for the women in her research to 'be more masculine' was very much situational and they often explained that when they returned home, these mannerism and traits diminished. As she explains, the women in her research learned how to 'do masculinity' within the context of the military. The identity that the women then created was founded on integrating the masculine ideology and values inherent to the military, rather than an androgynous balance between masculine and feminine traits (Sasson-Levy 2003). Thus, her proposed 'in-between' gender identity does not fully account for the experiences of the women in this research, however it demonstrates a similar experience in that gender expressions were seen as something that one could subvert and recreate in particular circumstances. This was particularly evident with the women from the executive management group, a community of practice where masculine traits are highly valued.

In the executive management group, the women were reluctant to describe themselves or their behaviours as masculine (or feminine as discussed in Chapter 5). Dorothy (EM) told us that she could see where in her family she got her stubbornness from, “I don’t think of it as particularly masculine though, even though it comes from my father, it’s just who I am.” There was a sense in this group that the traits they embodied which helped them in the senior roles at work, were qualities that came about through personal achievement. They had gotten to where they were not because they were women, nor in spite of being women. Because of this, the women were initially resistant to label any of their
behaviours as masculine. But as the focus group progressed, Pixie (EM) said that she felt she had some characteristics that were more masculine. This opened up the way for more women to talk freely about masculinity during which many of the women began to share stories and accounts of how they did masculinity. This began with a discussion on the importance of a firm handshake, with many suggesting it wasn’t gendered, Tracy (EM): “If a man has a weak handshake, they’ll say, ‘Oh what a weak handshake he has, don’t trust him’, so a strong handshake is just about power, not if you are a man or a woman.” However, I asked if that would be the same response if a woman had a weak handshake, there was a moment’s pause before Alison (EM) said, “No, it’s different. It’s okay for a woman to be weak, they expect it. I’ve got a strong one, and men are always saying, ‘Wow, you’ve got a good handshake there’ as if it is a surprise.” Despite initially denying the influence of gender on their working experiences, it was evident that on some level the women were ‘doing gender’ and will be discussed in greater detail in next chapter. Doing gender, as discussed in Chapter 2, refers to the way in which gender is ‘done’, or rather performed, through our daily interactions (West & Zimmerman 1987). Meaning is drawn from these interactions, and expressing common notions of traditional masculinity, in this case shaking hands, walking and sitting, the women create subject positions for themselves in which they are able to express power and control.

In the mothers group, Cece (MG) told us: “I know this girl and I often think of her as more boyish because her movements are often very large [gestures outwards with her arms]”. Again, the use of more space by someone is deemed by others to be a masculine trait in line with the literature (Young 2005). Simply by making
large gestures, the girl in the quote has been perceived as masculine by Cece (MG), and thus not feminine. This can be seen in the recent internet interest in men occupying an unnecessary amount of space on trains, also known as ‘manspreading’. An entire website has been set up dedicated to this phenomenon (Men Taking Up Too Much Space on the Train 2015), and there have been multiple news reports on the matter (Fitzsimmons 2014; Johnson 2016; Tovey 2015). The attention that manspreading has received indicates a public awareness of how gendered bodies occupy space. However, there were some women that disagreed with the idea that taking up space always constituted aspects of masculinity. Several women insisted that that they sat in such ways, but they didn't see themselves as butch or masculine, “I'll sit in the chair and I just relax, got my legs out, all comfortable, but I'm not butch” (Dorothy - EM). But while Dorothy (EM) didn’t see herself this way, it was clear through the discussions that others did perceive her as such.

Unlike the executive management group, the women in the football group openly discussed the need to ‘do masculinity’, although they didn't always agree if this was actually masculinity or something else. In order to be successful when playing footy, the women needed to draw on traditional masculine traits such as being strong, aggressive, and competitive (Charlebois 2011; Francis 2010). They found various ways of making sense of this, but mostly it was through reading these qualities as extensions of femininity. Fiona (RD) from the roller derby group felt that women could be masculine “in terms of competition and stuff, but they probably still need to look good while they’re doing it”. Just as with Ezzell’s (2009) notion of ‘heterosex-y-fit’, Fiona (RD) was aware of the pressures to
enhance sexual appeal when engaging in competitive sport. This came up a lot in both of these groups, but was seen as more highly valued by the women in the roller derby, whereas the football group tended to poke fun at those who dressed up too much.

The discussions in the circus group also touched on the interaction between strength, masculinity and femininity. Ruby (CG) said: “You can be strong and be feminine. I think we just define what femininity means to us.” But Mary (CG) disagreed with her, “When I think of feminine I think of that extreme girl, but I think someone can be more in-between, more masculine.” Mary (CG) continued to explain this further suggesting that she felt that the further she moved away from the dominant “mainstream” femininity ideals, the masculine she was becoming. By constructing herself in opposition to hegemonic femininity, she became more masculine. The relationality between feminine and masculine as opposites stems from the inability for gender expressions to be separated out from gender, and at its core, the power of the binary discourse of gendered bodies. Lily (CG) expressed similar sentiments to Mary (CG) saying she didn’t “need to be called feminine” as she was “okay being seen as masculine”. Again, to not be feminine was to be equated with masculine. However, this form of masculinity that women were relegated to is not the same space that men occupy.

Halberstam (1998) argues that when masculinity exists within queer or female bodies, it loses its power and dominance, becoming a form of subordinate masculinity. This was evident in the stories the women shared; despite their suggestion that they were able to embody aspects of masculinity at times, there
was a difference in what this masculinity looked like compared to their male counterparts. The way in which masculinity was read when performed by a female body came up in when Belinda (FG) told us about her teenage years: “I was called a half girl because I can play basketball and they said that girls can’t play basketball so I must be a half girl.” Her athletic skills, her interest in a mostly masculine sport, and her “aggressiveness” (as she described it) did not wield her the same respect and power on the court. Instead, she was seen as not a ‘real girl’. Such an experience is reminiscent of the stories from Frosh et al.’s (2002) research on young boys’ discussion about girls.

In their research, Frosh et al. (2002) found that boys often ridiculed girls who wanted to play football. In one particular case, a girl who liked to play football, wear clothes and make comments to boys as they walked past was seen “as ‘rude’ rather than jokey, it would seem, precisely because of her gender” (Frosh et al. 2002, p. 105). As with Belinda (FG), the girl’s behaviour was interpreted differently than her male counterparts, and in doing so, the positive characteristics normally attached to masculine traits are transformed into a subordinate position. Stigma becomes attached to displays of masculinity, creating pariah femininities. Women who exhibit particular behaviours that do not align with the asymmetry of the gender order are labelled in feminised ways. Mary (CG), Dorothy (EM), and Emma (RD) all shared experiences of being called a “bitch” for being too assertive. The feminised labelling stigmatised the women, establishing them as socially undesirable as a means to ‘contain’ them. Because of the way in which they are so severely stigmatised, pariah femininities do not provide much of a threat to hegemonic relations.
This type of experience was seen in a story shared by one of the women in the executive management group. Early on in our group, Alison (EM) gently interrupted a discussion about what femininity meant to point out the difference for men being seen as feminine.

Alison (EM): If you are using [femininity] to apply to men, it is perceived as a weakness or more of a derogatory term. It attacks their masculinity, its rarely used as a compliment.

Taylor (EM): And the same goes for women. If they are called masculine, that is not a compliment.

Sonia (EM): I get told I look feminine, but that I seem like a man. And that’s ’cause I have opinions, I don’t have tact, and I am very direct and to the point. And because of that I get told I’m like a man.

Dorothy (EM): Ah! I really dislike that.

Many of the women in this group had been compared to men in their working life, but it was clear that this was not intended as a positive thing. When they embodied the traditionally male characteristics discussed in Chapter 2 such as being assertive, not overly emotional, confident or opinionated (Charlebois 2011; Francis 2010; Messerschmidt 2010), the result was not the same as it would have been for a male in the same situation. Every woman in this group seemed to have a story of being received negatively when exhibiting masculine traits. Their ‘masculinity’ was often mocked or viewed as inferior. This highlights how the power of masculinity remains intertwined with male bodies.
A further complexity for women in being viewed as masculine, was that of sexuality. Butler (1990) sees sexuality as preceding sex/gender, and that can be seen in the way that the participants spoke people’s assumptions about their sexuality. In order to make sense of women’s non-dominant gender expressions, people often framed others as not heterosexual. Mary (CG) explained that, “it is assumed that if you are masculine then you are gay”, but she was careful to point out that this was of little concern to her. There were many similar stories where sexuality came into question due to not displaying clear dominant femininity.

The simple assumption that if one’s gender expression does not match their gender, then they must not be heterosexual can be understood through Butler’s (1990) heterosexual matrix. If the gender expression does not align with what is expected for the assumed sex/gender, the matrix is violated and the person is perceived as not heterosexual. The lack of terminology to describe one’s gender expressions as only either masculine or feminine was a problem. When it came to discussing lesbians or gay males, it was much easier and acceptable to use terms such as feminine to describe a man, or masculine to describe a woman. But when the person was heterosexual, these words didn’t fit. The influence of heterosexuality on one’s gender expression was acutely evident.

Often when I asked if women could be masculine, the conversation turned to discussions about sexuality. Separating out the two was hard for some of the participants, while for others it was easy, but they felt society couldn’t do the same.
I’ve got a friend that gets around in an Akubra [hat], I’ve never seen her in a dress or a skirt, she’s a farm girl, and I am sure that when she comes to the city, everyone assumes that she is gay...it’s just the way she looks. She has short hair, you’d never see her in a pair of heels or skirt or dress. But she’s completely heterosexual. (Taylor - EM)

An Akubra is a brand of hat that has wide brims and is typically worn by farmers or those who live in rural Australia. Wearing such a hat, alongside an absence of other feminine markers such as dresses indicates then the presence of masculinity. There was a strong link between masculinity in women and sexuality, but it seemed that at times, the particular attributes of masculinity that were embodied made a very different impact. This was evident in Wendy's (EM) account of her sister, who had “changed from being quite a girly-girl” when in school, but as an engineer she was “always in male dominated environments, in her uni classes and now at work”. Wendy (EM) explained that in order for her sister to “fit in with the guys”, she began exhibiting “a lot of male attributes, burping and farting and that sort of stuff”. She also explained that she saw her as more ‘masculine’ because she played soccer. This was seen as a masculine sport to play and impacted upon her view of her sister’s gender expression, impacting the perception of her as feminine. As discussed earlier, such behaviours were considered to be unfeminine. What was interesting to note here though, was that Wendy (EM) continued to explain that while her sister was “masculine, she still loves dressing up and goes shopping all the time”. It became clear that Wendy (EM) was implying that despite the masculine aspects, her sister was still heterosexual and this was evident in her engagement with typically feminine
behaviours. Her ‘masculinity’ was simply a tool to “fit in with the guys to make work easier”.

Time after time, the women emphasised the link between sexuality and gender expression. Louise (RD) responded to a comment about women being masculine with: “Yes, but you’re probably a lesbian then”. There was little doubt though for the women in the focus groups that the link between femininity and heterosexuality was quite strong, and as with the discussions on androgyny, the power of the heterosexual matrix was evident in these conversations. The slippage between a person’s gender expressions and their sexuality demonstrates not only this, but also Butler’s (1990; 1993) notion of intelligible genders. In order to make sense of a ‘body’, there must be present intelligible gender markers. These markers are discursive products and provide us with a way to work out if someone is a man or a woman. When these markers are not clear, as is the case with cis women who seem masculine, their gender is not intelligible, disrupting how we understand them within the heterosexual matrix, and thus relegating them outside of it. Such violations take place on the physical and malleable dimensions of femininity.

At times topics such as baggy clothing, or laughing loudly came up in conversation and the women would refer to it something as ‘not very feminine’. These types of acts or people that were understood as ‘unfeminine’ usually involved engaging in typically masculine behaviours, attitudes or mannerisms such as being aggressive or burping loudly. As Schippers (2007) and Sasson-Levy (2003) discuss, these behaviours are understood differently to men exhibiting the
same things. In the end, every group tended to simply use the term ‘unfeminine’ to describe women, or traits, that were outside of the dominant, ideal feminine woman. By not being able to define non-dominant gender expressions through any other means than to refer back to femininity speaks volumes about how restrictive and enabling language in this area can be. If one exhibits behaviours or traits that are not traditionally feminine, they were not labelled as some other term nor were they not seen as androgynous or masculine in the traditional sense. Rather they were ‘not feminine’. At times, some of the participants attempted to articulate these non-dominant forms of gender expression without drawing on femininity, but in these cases they often either found themselves confused as they spoke, pausing for long periods before giving up. Despite the women often searching for other ways to describe women’s gender expression, in the end there were just varying degrees of ‘feminine’ and ‘unfeminine’. These are discussed next.

“Other kinds of feminine”

The previous sections have shown the difficulty for my participants in finding the ‘right’ words to describe women who display non-dominant gender expression. Neither androgyny nor masculinity described their experiences or understandings adequately. Despite many women not ‘feeling’ feminine, the lack of language to describe this experience resulted in women still needing to draw on ‘feminine’ and ‘femininity’ to articulate how they understood themselves. This section will explore some of the complexities that arose from this, and in
particular look at some of the various subject positions that the women were able to relate to, including that of the ‘tomboy’ and ‘butch’. Subject positions are discursively produced, providing us with a way to understand not only ourselves, but also others (Davies & Harré 1990) and it was through our discussions that the women were able to articulate spaces in which they felt they could locate their gender expressions. None of these categories were clear cut, there was debate and disagreement within each focus group, and there were at times very different understandings from one group to another.

One thing that did help to delve into the difference in various gender expressions for women, were the concept maps. Many of the women in the focus groups referred back to them, or even picked them up and showed them to the others when trying to explain where they saw particular behaviours or ‘types’ of women were situated in relation to the dominant forms identified in Chapter 5. When asked if there were words to describe their gender expressions other than feminine, Ruby’s (CG) response summed up many of the women’s comments well:

There’s feminine, it’s here, in the middle [gesturing to the middle of an imaginary circle with her left hand and circling around it with her right]. But then there are these other kinds of feminine, they go from one extreme to another, butch and slut and stuff, and they are all over, around it, some the same kinda area, some opposite sides.

Others also felt similarly, explaining that femininity was about belonging, and if you weren’t feminine you were “excluded, on the outside” (Lily - CG). But the women in the group did not see this as a bad thing, as Karen (CG) explained: “The
less feminine you are, the more interesting you are.” As with Karen (CG), many women saw feminine as negative, however there was little alternative for them to make sense of their own gender expressions.

For some of the footy players, playing football was seen as butch or masculine, while others saw it as neither, Joey (FG): “I’m not feminine or masculine when I’m playing sports. I’m a sports person.” But for most people in the group, it was felt that footy could be and was feminine. Joey (FG) said to Belinda (FG): “When you [gesturing to Belinda (FG)] play footy, it’s feminine. You get excited like a girl when you get a goal.” Also speaking to Belinda (FG), Lou (FG) said, “And the fact that you avoided the mud. I don’t think you ever got muddy.” As discussed in Chapter 5, being or staying clean was an important part of maintaining femininity. To get muddy was to let go of your appearance. I probed further as to how gender expression manifested when they played football:

Me: What is feminine on the footy field?

Barb (FG): There is none.

Kylie (FG): Yeah, you can be compassionate.

Joey (FG): But are you saying boys can’t be compassionate?

Kylie (FG): No, I just think that it’s a feminine trait.

Ez (FG): That’s the difference between women’s footy and men’s footy, and that’s what makes women’s footy feminine.

Belinda (FG): We’ll apologise.

Donna (FG): Imagine a guy on the field saying, ‘Oh, sorry mate’.
This last comment speaks to the both femininity, masculinity and gender expression more generally. Football, a typically masculine sport, can become feminine not simply because the player is female-bodied, but because of the manner in which she performatively ‘does’ it. There were also relational properties to the understanding of women’s footy:

There has to be an aspect of femininity in women’s sport, otherwise it would be exactly the same as men’s. And it’s not... We aren’t men, so we obviously have some sort of femininity, it’s just on the outer spectrum of it. It’s a different level of it. (Ez - FG)

Ez (FG) felt that femininity was inherent to female-bodied women, and any expression of gender was framed in that way. While at times one could have masculine traits, underneath it the woman herself, was still feminine. This is explored further through discussions on the notions of the tomboy and the heterosexual butch.

*The Tomboy*

During our conversations, the idea of the ‘tomboy’ came up again and again. Many of the women had either been called or had considered themselves to be a tomboy at one point or another. For these women, the term tomboy was used to refer to a girl who enjoyed doing ‘boy things’ including playing sports, getting dirty and being rough. She was also seen to prefer to wear pants and shorts over dresses and skirts. This understanding was similar to the academic literature. Tomboys, as discussed in Chapter 2, are understood to be “girls who claim some
of the positive qualities associated with the masculine” (Thorne 1993, p. 111). Paechter (2010, p. 226) extends upon this definition to suggest that a tomboy is someone who is female-bodied but ‘does boy’ and those that are ‘a bit tomboy’ are female-bodied but “performing a form of girl which includes some ‘boy things’”. Both ‘tomboy’ and ‘bit of a tomboy’ were used by the women in my research, often with reference to the concept maps they had filled out at the start of the focus groups.

Donna (FG), who had written tomboy on the outer edge of her concept map (see Figure 8 below), told me: “Well, I’ve been called a tomboy my whole life.”

![Figure 8: Donna – Football Group](image)

Placing the word ‘tomboy’ towards the outer rim of the concept map indicates that this label is associated with less dominant women’s gender expressions. This
was not an uncommon association; every footy group member also had been called a tomboy at some point as a child, even Kylie (FG), “with two hundred pairs of shoes”. She saw this as due to the fact she “liked to play soccer on the oval with the boys and not cupcakes with the girls.” Playing sports was clearly a significant factor in being considered a tomboy, including skateboarding, “the ‘Skater-chick’ is kinda like a tomboy too” (Lou - FG). Skateboarding provides a space for alternative, non-dominant femininities to develop and be expressed (Kelly et al. 2005; Pomerantz et al. 2004) so it is not surprising for the women in the focus groups to view skating as engaging in tomboy behaviour. Lou (FG) saw this type of “alternative girlhood” (Kelly et al. 2005) as tomboyism and spoke fondly of it. There was a sense that the ‘skater-chicks’ got to do more “fun” stuff. Given that tomboyism is seen to be an expression of the more positive qualities of being male, this is not surprising. Carr (1998, p. 537) also found that the women in her research viewed the ‘boy stuff’ as “more fun”.

Like the women in the other groups, many of the circus women spoke positively of the experience, smiling. Ruby (CG) told us, “I had a period of time where I wanted to be a boy, I was a bit tomboy-ish.” Tomboy-ish seemed to be the equivalent of Paechter's (2010) idea of a 'bit tomboy'. Ruby's (CG) experience aligns with the findings of Burn et al. (1996) who suggest that tomboyism is a form of ‘masculine’ identification. But this explanation didn’t account for everyone’s experiences. Being a tomboy was not seen so positively by Lily (CG) who said, “I didn’t like being called a tomboy, I still don’t. I was one, but I didn’t like being called it.” She wasn’t able to articulate specifically what it was about being called a tomboy that bothered her so much. For Mary (CG), being a tomboy
was a mixed experience: “...if a female said it to you it was like a way of saying, 'you're not like me' but if a boy said it, it was like, 'you're one of us'.“ Georgie (MG) also felt this way, “It was kind of awesome to be called a tomboy cause that means the boys like me as a friend.” Renold (2006) argues that the subject position ‘tomboy’ both consolidates gender hierarchies while also subverting gender and sexual norms. With her research with young children, she found that they were simultaneously 'doing gender' while ‘doing sexuality’. This is also evident in my participants’ recollections of their childhoods. For Mary (CG) and Georgie (MG), their experiences of being tomboys meant they became ‘one of the boys’, but it also enabled them to be positioned as ‘friend’ rather than potential girlfriend as was the case in Renold's (2006) research.

When I asked the women in the focus groups what became of tomboys when they grew up, the responses created a lot of amusement in the circus and mothers groups, with various women in each group suggesting they became ‘tom men’ amid laughter. Zoe (MG) then suggested that either people grew out of it or that it was expressed differently: “You’re still a tomboy in here [gestures to her heart/chest area], you might play sport a lot and get dirty, but then you put on a dress.” Becoming a woman meant appealing to male desire and dressing in socially deemed ‘attractive' ways, by wearing a dress she became feminine again. Some of the women felt that tomboy could be a precursor to being butch, but there were several key differences. Joey (FG) articulated this well:

[Tomboy] is almost an endearing term, whereas butch kinda has that negative connotation to it. [pause] And I reckon tomboy's almost a kiddy term, like, I reckon as soon as you get to like 16, 17, you’re no longer cute.
It’s not, oh look, she’s playing around with the boys, it’s like, oh, she’s a butch.

These comments are in line with the findings from several studies that have looked into tomboyism (Burn et al. 1996; Carr 2007; Halberstam 1998) where social pressures are seen to influence women to become more feminine. Once you reach an age where you become seen as a sexual being, the acceptability of male interests and behaviour disappears and is met with disapproval (Halberstam 1998). The restrictive aspects of femininity become more pronounced as puberty approaches. Kylie (FG) agreed with Joey (FG): “I don’t think there is a grown-up word for tomboy that is about being a bit masculine and feminine, that isn’t rude.”

The only word that came close was ‘butch’. While the tomboy is cute, is it assumed she will grow out of it to become a proper woman, but if she doesn’t and she maintains her more ‘masculine’ traits, she risks being labelled ‘butch’.

*Heterosexual Butch*

While the word ‘tomboy’ had mostly positive connotations associated with it and did not imply anything about sexuality for the women in this research, the ‘grown up’ version as the women often referred to it as, ‘butch, was much the opposite. Butch came up a lot when talking about women who were ‘unfeminine’. As the following evidences, the word ‘masculine’ divided people, sparking debates over what the word meant and whether or not a straight woman could be considered butch. While many of the participants related to the term, it was ultimately
deemed not to be a tremendously useful term as its meaning varied when applied to heterosexual women.

Many of the women in the focus groups saw themselves as “a bit butch, but feminine” (Karen - CG) and others strongly identified with the term, “What else would you call me but butch?” (Donna - FG). Cece (MG) women felt that the term meant being “a bit of feminine and masculine” while Georgie (MG) saw it as a form of femininity. Either way, butch was one of the most common topics in the focus groups, coming up naturally throughout the sessions to refer to women who were perceived to be ‘unfeminine’.

In discussing what the term ‘butch’ meant, Sonia (EM) felt that the key defining characteristic was “the look”. Through discussions it was identified that there were two types of butch women, the ‘heterosexual butch’ and the ‘lesbian butch’. They differed in their appearance. Butch straight women were described as women who wore jeans, boots, and baseball caps or Akubra hats. Clothing and dress style are malleable aspects of femininity, and as such, the way in which one transgresses in this respect will impact on how they are interpreted. Butch straight women were seen to spend little time on their appearance, although this did not mean they were dishevelled, rather they “dress plainly” (Pixie - EM). Dressing plainly was only a minor transgression, and therefore not a major threat to one’s perceived heterosexuality. This can also be seen in an entry on a concept map from the executive management group (see Figure 9 on the following page) where towards the outer edge of the map the participant has written: “work boots & jeans on women”.

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This style of dress was seen as typically butch, but still within the often within the heterosexual realm. As can be seen from the concept map above, work boots and jeans were positioned within the outer ring, indicating a more minor transgression of the malleable aspects of femininity. The lesbian butch woman, on the other hand, was seen to wear clothing that was more clearly male: buttoned up shirts, men’s t-shirts, ties, and slacks.

The understandings of butch straight women also incorporated the physical dimensions as well. Alison (EM) said: “She’s built, on the heavy side, but really strong, does as much manual work as her husband, she drives trucks, farm equipment. I don’t know when she would have last had her nails done, worn a skirt, had her hair done.” There was a fair amount of agreement regarding the
butch ‘look’, but there was not as much consensus as to whether one needs to have the ‘look’ to be considered butch. Halberstam (1998) suggests that gender is predominately about how one is recognized by others, and in this sense, those who felt they could determine a person’s gender identity as butch through how they read them, adhered to this notion. However, for many others, being butch was just as much, if not more, about how you felt regardless of how you looked or how you were read. In this case, it was the restrictive aspects of femininity that were most defining.

Kim (MG) and Georgie (MG) felt that butch didn't fall into the category of femininity. Georgie (MG) in particular felt the word butch had a “really negative connotation” and explained that when she was in high school calling someone butch meant “you’re ugly and tough in not really a girl way”. Zoe (MG) also felt it was used by men to say, “you’re not interesting, in, like, a sexual way”. For her it also had a similar meaning in high school and was used by guys to put down a girl if she wasn’t interested in her male peers. Lou (FG) had similar feelings about the term, “If you are called butch, it’s nothing positive.” This was a common sentiment, that butch was a word laden with the power to call your gender and sexuality into question. During this discussion, Donna (FG) asked the group, “I know butch is pretty harsh, but what else would you call it? Look at me, what else would you call me but butch?” The negativity in this label was instantly apparent with several members of the group jumping to her defence: “Why do you need a label?” (Joey - FG) and “Can’t you just be yourself?” (Kylie - FG).
Karen (CG) told us that her father thinks she is “really butch” because she has defined muscles and can “hold a plank” (a type of exercise where you hold a push up position for as long as possible). He came from a traditional background and didn’t approve of her doing circus work; he feared it was making her less ‘feminine’. The implication was that if she was not feminine, and was indeed butch, she would then be a lesbian as well. The butch identity can be seen as an example of “sex/gender/sexual conflation” (Carr 2005, p. 121). Karen (CG) was a woman, but her gender expression did not adhere with her father’s expectations, and thus she was deemed butch and her sexuality became questionable.

The slippage between gender and sexuality was evident throughout the discussions on being butch. Donna (FG) felt there was a strong link between butch and being a lesbian, “I think it is pretty much calling you gay, straight up.” This was an interesting comment for Donna (FG) to make as she very strongly identified with the word butch but defined herself as heterosexual. While she herself did not see butch as being associated with sexuality, it was clear that she felt the rest of society did. In the mothers group, Georgie (MG) expressed a similar sentiment, “People think if you’re butch, you’re a lesbian.” Like Donna (FG), she also indicated that she did not feel this way herself, but that the “mainstream” did. This was also discussed in the circus group where Mary (CG) said, “There’s an implication that if a woman is butch, she must be gay.” These ideas support the findings from various researchers who have emphasised the connection between being butch and the implications for sexuality (Carr 2005; Ezzell 2009).
Amongst those who agreed that a heterosexual woman could be considered ‘butch’, there was still a significant variation in how it was understood. For some it referred simply to appearances (malleable femininity), or body types and the way they occupied space (physical femininity). For others, it was about their interests and activities, or just personality characteristics such as aggressiveness (restrictive femininity). The elements of classifying a person’s gender expression as butch aligned with those of classifying a person as feminine. However, butch was presented as much more of a choice at times. One has to actively decide to go against the societal expectations of femininity to be butch, whereas being feminine was expected of you. This contradictory position was hard to reconcile for many. Being butch was easy because you didn’t have to ‘do’ femininity, but it was hard because you had to go against everything you were told to do. Despite this, the subject position of the straight butch was quite appealing to many of the women; the main restriction seemed to be in terms of attracting males. As Cece (MG) put it, if you’re butch, you’re “ugly, tough, just not sexually appealing”. Implicit in this comment is the notion that you are not sexually appealing to males. Some felt that to be considered butch, a woman fit into all of the factors just mentioned, while for others, any one of these aspects could cause a person to be deemed ‘butch’. In these cases, the women felt that any violation of the ‘feminine’ was significant enough to make them ‘not-feminine’ and thus placed them in a category of ‘butch’. This highlights the fragility of gender and gender expression.

Being butch for heterosexual women was seen as fluid, something that a person could shift in and out of. A person was not considered inherently butch, but
rather could either ‘appear’ or ‘behave’ butch in one instance, but then just as easily “put on a dress and make-up and be a girly-girl” (Alison - EM). For most of the women, butch was seen not so much as an identity, but rather as just another way of being a woman, although this was not the case for all of the women (discussed below). As cis females, who often have not needed to consider their sexuality in as much detail as those who identify on the queer spectrum, they were aware of the consequences in being butch, but they saw this as easy to combat if they conformed to the expected societal norms by dressing ‘feminine’.

For the circus women, the term butch didn’t fully work to describe a more masculine heterosexual woman as it did in some of the other groups. When I asked how they would describe this type of person to someone they said they would define her by traits and listed off: she has short hair, she is kinda strong, and she wears men’s clothes. Upon reflection Karen (CG) said, “Hmm, but we are all sort of describing masculine-ish things though.” This left the women in silence before Lily (CG) said:

When you’re describing a masculine girl, it’s like you’re a really white person and your describing someone in a way that you don’t want to be seen as racist. It feels like the same thing, if feels like you are really tip-toing around it, saying all sorts of other things around it ‘cause you don’t want to say that thing, cause, is that word right? (Lily - CG)

The women resisted using the label of butch because of the inherent negativity in it for heterosexual women. Through the power of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) and heteronormativity (Warner 1991) you are assumed to be heterosexual until it is confirmed that you aren’t. And thus, due to the slippage between gender
expression, gender and sexuality, to call someone butch is, in essence, to call them a lesbian.

Pixie (EM) felt that she was not masculine, but rather she felt she was a butch straight woman. While butch was seen as a form of femininity by many of the women in this and other groups that could easily be slipped into and out of, it seemed to be a more distinct form that was all encompassing for Pixie (EM). It was more of an identity as compared to the form of butch described by Alison (EM) above. For Pixie (EM), to be butch was a conscious decision – not in that one chose to have those traits or qualities, but rather they chose if they allowed them to be expressed and go against the social expectations of them. Pixie (EM) described her experiences of this through her interests, which included her tractor, enjoying software engineering, and getting her pilots license. However, this comment sparked one of the many debates regarding ‘what was butch’. Leah (EM) disagreed with the classification of Pixie’s (EM) interests saying, “I don’t consider that butch though.” This remark sparked almost everyone in the group to talk at once; I could make out several words of agreement as well as quite a few no’s. The discussion continued:

Caroline (EM): If someone was to be butch, it could just be in that instant, it doesn’t necessarily mean it is all the time, it can be just a behaviour.

Pixie (EM): So, what do you mean by butch? Is it because of what you do? Or how conduct yourself? Is it just a behaviour?

Wendy (EM): I think it’s a look.

Pat (EM): And mannerisms.
Melissa (EM): It's the way you act.

Suzanne (EM): It's not necessarily interests, though is it?

Pixie (EM): But that's the thing for me though. A lot of what people were saying was that these interests equate to someone who is like that [butch]. So, what is butch?

Again, everyone spoke over each other with different suggestions, clothing, gait, the way you talk, and appearance. The debates on this topic continued several times during the focus group, and no consensus was formed as to what butch meant if you were heterosexual.

Interestingly, the EM group had a surprising large number of women (6 out of 14) who grew up on farms. These women had particular set of views others on whether or not women could be called masculine or butch (some of which are mentioned above such as the comments by Pixie - EM). For them, living on a farm entailed many activities that some may consider masculine. Manual work required women to be strong and tough. They drove tractors, used tools, got dirty, and wore clothing that was typically seen as more masculine. However, none of this seemed to impact on their understandings of themselves as feminine. These women often saw themselves as tomboys when growing up or called themselves butch, but this form of butch was not associated with sexuality, rather it was descriptive of masculine interests and traits and was a deep seeded identity that incorporated toughness and practicality with interests. It was not connected to any particular ‘look’ other than wearing what was practical for the work at hand. Unlike the other participants' understandings of butch as a form of ‘other’ to feminine, these women didn’t see what they were doing in opposition to
the feminine, but rather as an extension of the feminine. Paechter (2006, p. 10) explains that “Without femininity, masculinity makes no sense; without the rejection of femininity, butch is simply another way of ‘doing woman’” and in this sense, it loses its “transgressive and oppositional quality”. The form of butch that the women from farming backgrounds described was not understood by them, or described in any way to be ‘transgressive’.

The term ‘butch’ is full of complexities, from its conflation with sexuality to its ambiguous meaning for heterosexual women, and as such was not adequate to describe the experiences of the women in the focus groups. When the term butch was self-applied by the women, the sexuality component was removed, and in essence being butch became more about things such as being able to carry heavy boxes, drink as much as the boys, wear a plain t-shirt and jeans, or be argumentative. There appeared to be little conscious thought or effort put into being butch in this way. It was seen as fluid, something that a person could shift in and out of. They didn’t consider themselves to have a butch identity, but rather could either ‘appear’ or ‘behave’ butch in one instance, but then just as easily “put on a dress and make-up and be a girly-girl”. They saw themselves as “a bit butch, but feminine”. But if it does not reject femininity, the ‘heterosexual butch’ remains a form of doing woman without any oppositional qualities and is not a ‘transgressive’ gender identity as is central to the lesbian butch identity.
Unfeminine

While the term ‘unfeminine’ is often present within the academic literature, it is primarily used descriptively without any clarification or explanation and no real definition of its meaning in relation to gender expression exists. However, within this research, the frequency of the use of word ‘unfeminine’ for all of women in all of the focus groups suggests it is a term that has significant discursive meaning and power. The use of this word highlights the inability for women to view women’s gender expressions as anything but a form of femininity. It was often used to describe any violation of the aspects of hegemonic femininity discussed in the previous chapter that caused a person’s gender to be less intelligible. This section will explore understandings of ‘unfeminine’ to unpack further how this word is used by the women in this research, and explore how it is situated amongst the other terms used to describe women’s gender expression.

There were a few women in various groups who felt strongly that all women were feminine, they just vary in the manner in which they express it. Regardless of the trait being expressed, it was still deemed feminine as it was being performed by a female body. Others were vocal in saying that women could embody both femininity and masculinity at different times depending on the situation, and still others said that you could embody them both at the same time. Many of those who felt a woman could be masculine would later suggest otherwise, others changed their minds midway through our discussions, and still others simply never really felt sure how they felt about some of these issues. These differences highlight the complexities and contradictions of gender
expression experienced by these women. What was fairly consistent though, regardless of above differences, was the use of the term ‘unfeminine’.

After several of the women in the football group used the term ‘unfeminine’, I asked them what that word meant to them. Joey (FG) paused for several seconds and appeared to be thinking quite intently before saying: “Unfeminine is chewing with your mouth open.” This simple statement encapsulated much of the discussion of what unfeminine was to them. While a man may eat with his mouth open as be seen as rude, the same behaviour performed by a woman carries with it a further set of issues, complicated by the heterosexual matrix. Behaviours such as eating with your mouth open, ones that were “unbecoming” or “not lady-like” disrupted a feminine performance. By doing so, even their sexuality would come into question, such is the fragility of gender performances. With the pressures of heteronormativity, even the act of eating needs to be monitored in order to ensure that males will still find you attractive. To eat with one’s mouth open defies the delicateness and control expected of a woman (Allan 2009; Greer 1970).

Unfeminine was also described as: “Ugly, tough, just not sexually appealing” (Cece - MG). Mary (CG) felt much the same, “I don’t think you can be attractive if you aren’t feminine”. The link between being feminine and one’s attractiveness was inescapable. However, it was not the equivalent for males: “Guys don’t need to be all hot and stuff to be masculine. In fact, if they’re too hot, they’re not as masculine” (Joey - FG). Clearly there were a different set of rules for men and
women where physical attractiveness was seen essential to femininity, but not for masculinity.

The majority of the literature on femininity, regardless of which model is utilised to understand the power dynamics both between masculinities and femininities, or within femininities, highlights the importance of women ‘appealing’ to men, both through appearance and behaviour (Adams & Bettis 2003; Allan 2009; Ambjörnsson 2004; Charlebois 2011; Grindstaff & West 2010; Halberstam 1998; Schippers 2007). This was evident throughout the focus groups. When attractiveness was not a priority for a woman, she was then seen as unfeminine. Or if, as described above, there were slight transgressions, a woman’s femininity temporarily becomes unfemininity. As a woman’s perceived physical attractiveness decreased, they became less of a ‘woman’ and this was particularly pronounced if the woman was seen as having masculine physical characteristics. This was also evident when the women described unfeminine women as having “muscular arms and legs” (Ez - FG) or a “strong body” (Laura - MG). Kylie (FG) expanded on the physical description of unfeminine and provided an explanation:

Unfeminine is strong, physical, the protector, I guess that comes feminine being needy and vulnerable and stuff. There’s some girls out on the footy field that are, like, my protector. And that makes them masculine.

Here we can see the relationality of femininity and masculinity. To be unfeminine was to be masculine, to challenge the power relations and dominance inherent within the gender order through being physically tough and protective. This was often the case. Women would use masculinity as a reference point for not only
what was feminine (i.e. the opposite and thus complimentary), but also for
demonstrating how when one’s appearance, demeanour or interests trespassed
into perceived masculine spaces, the women were described as unfeminine,
carrying with it a negativity and social penalty discouraging such behaviours.
This extended beyond simply more typically masculine characteristics as
described in Chapter 2, but also to anything that fell within the unfeminine
category. Unfemininity in a sense also becomes relationally understood in
contrast to the feminine.

Swearing, burping, “farting proudly in public” (Belinda - FG) and being generally
loud, also fell into this category. These characteristics seemed to be more about
what feminine women shouldn’t do, rather than what non-dominant forms of
women’s gender consist of. You didn’t need to burp and fart to be unfeminine, but
if you did these things, you automatically lost your femininity.

Figure 10: Belinda - Football Group
In Figure 10 on the previous page, Belinda (FG) positioned burping and farting towards the outer edges, away from the notion of what is traditionally feminine. Again, we see here not only the relationality between the feminine and the unfeminine but also the importance placed on the notion of control over one’s body and its functions for women. While it may be unpleasant when men engage in such behaviours, it was seen as more acceptable. But when it came to women, the response was described as disgust and mortification, disrupting the expected gendered performance.

When describing what unfeminine women look like, they were portrayed as wearing sporty clothing, shorts and shirts, but less fitted. In the EM group, one of the participants wrote “work boots and jeans” on the edge of her gender expression map, indicating that such attire was deemed far from feminine. This also came up during our discussions, with many of the women agreeing that work boots were ‘butch’. Ez (FG) also described unfeminine women as wearing “things that lose your shape”. The point of clothing was to emphasize the hips and breasts, to reinforce one’s appeal to males as discussed in Chapter 5. However, in the mothers group, Cece (MG) pointed out that, “even if you had a loose-fitting dress on that showed no shape, it would still be feminine because it’s not masculine”. The dress is a distinctly female piece of clothing and becomes so through its relationality to the masculine. Deleuze (1992) argues that bodies are constituted relationally and cannot be understood without knowing first what they are relational to. Through clothing, women are able to construct themselves as what men are not.
There were other behaviours that the women mentioned as unfeminine that began to overlap with their descriptions of masculine and butch women. At times these words were used interchangeably, at others women disagreed as to whether or not they meant the same thing. The contradictions not only between the women’s understandings of non-dominant women’s gender expressions, but also within the same person as well highlighted the complexities of making sense of the topics we discussed. Through these discussions, it became acutely apparent that there was no language to describe accurately what the women saw as unfeminine, other than simply ‘unfeminine’.

Despite the influence of such strong social norms as to what is feminine, there was at times a sense that being unfeminine meant being whoever you want to be. There was freedom in it; much the same way that being a tomboy was seen as being able to do all the “fun stuff” (Lou - FG), being unfeminine was often about expressing or engaging in the positive features of being male. Much like Carr’s (1998) research, women saw the masculine activities and traits as more interesting and enjoyable. The image of the unfeminine woman was that society pressure did not influence her choices, “They don’t care to impress anyone” (Belinda - FG) and “They are just themselves, they walk, they sit, they dress, they do everything just how they want to” (Donna - FG). A woman who defies the influence of broader society and choses to ‘do their own thing’ was seen as a positive and freeing manifestation of the ‘unfeminine’ woman. However, this sentiment contradicted many of the other factors described by the women as being unfeminine, including the pressures and consequences of not having the right appearance, demeanour or interests. The negative connotations for
engaging in ‘deviant’ gender expressions often result in significant social penalties, such as those discussed earlier regarding pariah femininities. The “fun stuff” may conjure up feelings of freedom, but at the same time the social repercussions placed upon women who embody such femininities often take the form of severe stigma, labelling such women as ‘crazy’. Similarly, those who are seen to be quite sexually active are stigmatised as ‘sluts’, and women who ‘do their own thing’, labelled as lesbians for not conforming to male desires. The allure of being able to just express yourself regardless of the gender restrictions was expressed by many of the women. While women either enjoyed the benefits of being unfeminine themselves or saw the positives in it when others were, they also felt tremendous pressure to adhere to more ‘normal’ or dominant forms of femininity as described in Chapter 5. The social price was restrictive, and often painful.

Bodies were also a site for femininity to be lacking, or rather unfemininity to be present. As discussed in the previous chapter, within the physical dimension of femininity, acceptable gender expression for women involved occupying as little space as possible and being graceful. When it came to discussing the body in relation to the ‘unfeminine’ woman, many of these same attributes were brought up by the participants. The theme that was present through these discussions was that if one did not maintain constant control over their body, both in regards to how it moved, but also in regards to how it was presented, then the gendered performance was perceived as unfeminine.
In several of the groups, the topic of tattoos came up. There was a distinct style of feminine tattoos, small, delicate, colourful, with flowers or animals. However, having lots or large tattoos was seen as particularly masculine, especially if one had “a sleeve” (Belinda – FG) (having an entire arm covered in tattoos). Although those who brought up tattoos were not able to articulate exactly why this was unfeminine (this question was often met with comments such as “they just are” (Karen - CG), they simply knew that to have them in the wrong places or too many, was “off-putting” (Ez – FG). Research has found that the presence of tattoos for both men and women is associated with earlier sexual activity (Guéguen 2012; Koch, Roberts, Armstrong & Owen 2007) as well as risky behaviour, including drug and alcohol abuse (Burger & Finkle 2002; Guéguen 2012). Women’s sexual encounters are heavily controlled through the stigmatizing of women who sleep with multiple partners as ‘sluts’ or ‘easy’ as sexual promiscuity is understood to be a masculine characteristic (Schippers 2007). Accordingly, tattoos have become signifiers for these types of behaviours then in turn results in heavily tattooed women being seen as symbolically intruding on masculine terrain, and thus deviant. Hegemonic gender relations rely on males’ dominance and superiority over women, any embodiment of male characteristics is sanctioned (Schippers 2007). There is also an expectation that women will modify their bodies for the pleasure of males, but still maintain a softness (Atkinson 2002). If a woman does get a tattoo, it is expected to be more delicate and out of sight, keeping up the appearance of an unblemished body (Sanders 1988). Thus, when a woman gets a large tattoo, or a full sleeve as mentioned by the women in the football group, this disrupts notions of femininity and the relationality of masculinity to femininity.
There was a similar sentiment in relation to body hair. The first thing that came to mind when Ez (FG) was thinking of what unfeminine meant to her was, “Girls that don’t shave their arm pits.” Donna (FG) also felt this way, “Everyone just expects a girl to shave her arm pits and shave her legs, and if she doesn’t then it just doesn’t look right.” Belinda (FG) on the other hand had a slightly different view, “Oh, no, girls should wax, not shave!” Regardless of the method of hair removal, it was clear that not maintaining a hair free body was seen negatively and was associated with being unfeminine within this group. The hypocrisy of body hair removal for women as compared to men was pointed out: “It seems unhygienic if you don’t do it. But guys aren’t [unhygienic]” (Joey - FG). This was met with murmurs of agreement. These comments support the arguments put forth by Toerien, Wilkinson and Choi (2005) who suggest that body hair removal has become part of the taken-for-granted work needed to create one’s femininity as ‘acceptable’. Several of the women in the circus group chose not to engage in body hair removal practices and were well aware of the social repercussions: “Hairy pits, you’re obviously a lesbian feminazi” (Karen - CG). Toerien et al. (2005, p. 405) suggest explain how practices such as body hair removal reinforce the notion that women’s bodies are “unacceptable if left unaltered”, a fact the circus women were well aware of. Darwin’s (2017) argues that women’s body hair poses a threat to patriarchal gender relations and as such is viewed as form of pariah femininity.

Walking was also seen as a signifier of gender expression. Unfeminine women carried themselves differently, “It’s their posture, they walk with their shoulders big” (Ez - FG). The other women in the footy group agree and included stomping,
being heavy footed and walking with ‘swag’ as also falling into the category of unfeminine. Caroline (EM) explained: “When I am in jeans I stride faster”. Jeans made it easier for her not only to walk, but also to feel more powerful. Skirts or dresses often went hand in hand with heels, which as discussed later, slowed down a person’s walk and often gave a sense of fragility. Caroline (EM) felt that wearing jeans made her feel “butch or masculine or something”. Tracy (EM) also noticed that her walk was situational. “I'll change my walk depending on what I am wearing. If I am going into an aggressive meeting, I will consciously lengthen my stride and walk in there strong and confident…It changes how they look at me as a woman.” This again reflects the fluid and performative nature of gender expression. When wanting to project a stronger image, the women took on more masculine ways of doing things, such as walking. But once a particular performance was done, they were able to go back into different ways of doing things. For some this was a very conscious act, but for others, particularly those who didn’t see themselves as embodying non-dominant gender expressions, there was not much of an awareness of these types of behaviours within themselves. As discussed in the previous chapter, several of the women in the football group mentioned sitting with their legs closed purely out of habit. These women all saw themselves as mostly feminine, they tended to be dressed in the more feminine attire and were also the women who expressed more enjoyment in getting ‘dressed up’.

In relation to sitting in unfeminine ways, Joey (FG) described this as: “legs open, showing where their jewels sleep” (referring to genitalia), while Kylie (FG) explained this as sitting “where the body goes naturally without making an
effort”. To be feminine is to be controlled, so by letting go of the control over your body, you became unfeminine. This control not only applies to how one holds their body, but what they do with it particularly in relation to sex.

A further restriction the women felt was inherent to femininity was the types of leisure activities they engaged in. Un-feminine women, “play sports where they get dirty. Or anything physical, anything that causes bruising” (Lily - CG), “anything with lots of adrenaline” (Ruby - CG) or “where you might sweat” Karen (CG). Cricket, extreme sports, rocking climbing, cricket and football were all seen as unfeminine. All of these activities had elements of risk involved in them. Hanging out with lots of males and not enjoying shopping were all also discussed.

Kylie (FG): Women that don’t like shopping are weird.

Belinda (FG): Yeah, I think if a girl doesn’t like clothes shopping it’s very unfeminine.

Donna (FG): I don’t like clothes shopping.

Belinda (FG): Sorry.

Donna (FG): Nah, it’s okay. It’s just I go to one store and I’m size 16 another I’m 22. I can’t find stuff that fits me.

Belinda (FG): Me too, I have to buy kids clothes sometimes.

Joey (FG): Yeah, kid’s department is awesome.

Belinda (FG): Nah, the shapes are wrong.

Joey (FG): Oh, nah, boy’s kids. Apparently, I’m a boy-kid. Girl-kid no way, not going near that shit.

Ez (FG): There you go, put that down, unfeminine is a boy-kid!
Donna (FG): Buying boys clothes is different. Buying boys clothes is no drama.

This exchange highlights a number of interesting issues. When Kylie (FG) and Belinda (FG) both say that shopping is a feminine activity, Donna (FG), who is a self-defined butch woman, illustrates her perceived lack of femininity by not enjoying this pastime. The need to apologise to her for indirectly calling her ‘unfeminine’ highlights the value placed on being feminine. To be labelled as ‘unfeminine’ is an insult. It is also interesting to note the differences in experiences of buying kids clothing. For Belinda (FG) the lack of shape is off-putting. As discussed in Chapter 5, clothing that accentuate curves are an important part of dressing feminine. But for Joey (FG) and Donna (FG), who don’t value being feminine in the same way as Belinda (FG), male clothes are an acceptable alternative. This was clear in their choice of training clothes on the night. As described in Chapter 5, Belinda (FG) wore typically feminine clothes, fitted and light colours. Donna (FG), on the other hand, wore what appeared to be possibly men’s clothing, a large oversized hoodie and shorts.

Joey (FG), who expressed felling both feminine and masculine at times, was in skins with a footy jumper over the top. Skins are skin tight performance enhancing athletic wear which, interestingly, Kylie (FG) pointed out, were often not available in women’s styles or sizes at stores except in junior sizes. This ties in with the notion of the tomboy and acceptable behaviour for young women as discussed earlier in this chapter. Despite wearing men’s clothing, Joey (FG) said having footy boots that matched her uniform was important, and told me “that makes me a bit more girly”. Kylie (FG) agreed, “That’s definitely a feminine thing!”
Other ‘feminine things’ discussed in relation to footy clothing, were the choice of colours. Jenna (FG) told us that she had chosen to buy a top that was less comfortable than others she had tried on because of the liked colour more. Again, Kylie (FG) pointed out, “That's a feminine thing!” The need to reinforce aspects of femininity while engaging in a masculine activity came up on many occasions. There was a sense from most of the group that while it was okay to be unfeminine is some respects (playing footy), this needed to be combated by doing things such as coordinating training outfits and boots, and making sure your hair was okay. These types of behaviours help to reinforce their femininity, and thus heterosexuality and align with Ezzell’s (2009) notion of heterosexy-fit. But as with all of the groups I spoke with, a certain amount of being ‘unfeminine’ or displaying non-dominant gender expressions was acceptable when it was only temporarily engaged with.

The word ‘unfeminine’ was used by the women in this research to capture a variety of transgressions of femininity. But rather see these as masculine or some other type of category, they were read as a form of femininity, albeit a relational one that was defined by what feminine is not. The behaviours, activities and mannerisms that fell into under the unfeminine label were almost always things which, when done by males, were read as normal masculine behaviour. By a female body preforming them, they were transformed from normal to deviant, and the women became unintelligible. The power of binary constructions of gender were inescapable.
Hierarchy of Femininities

While there was not always clear consensus on terminology that spoke to the women’s experiences beyond the ‘unfeminine’, analysis of the concept maps enabled further unpacking of this on a broader scale. The concept maps are a visual representation of the women’s understandings of how society views and groups different types of women, including those who are not heterosexual. While this study is primarily interested in the heterosexual experiences of gender expression, societal expectations of gender expressions are intertwined within these understandings. Although not all of the women in the study agreed upon what butch meant for heterosexual women, the impact of being externally labelled butch has social power. Furthermore, despite the lack of cohesive labels for their experiences, the women were still able to articulate their experiences in a variety of ways that often overlapped in meaning.

In order to establish a typology of un-femininities, this section will draw heavily on the words and expressions used by the participants on the concept maps. This allows for a visual method of organising differing forms of women’s gender expressions. The topics mentioned through this section are also discussed throughout the current and previous chapters, but particular themes that were revealed through the concept maps will be highlighted. As was established through the literature review chapters, gender expression research has been lacking with respect to the hierarchy of femininities. The less intelligible the gender expression, the further it is located from ideal femininity, but not all unintelligible femininities are the same. The findings from my research indicate
that there are different ways that women express their gender that attract more stigma than others. The various forms of non-dominant women’s gender expressions identified earlier will be discussed in conjunction with the findings from Chapter 5 to provide an understanding of the ways in which some forms of femininity are privileged above others.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the most common words used by the women to describe hegemonic femininity were that of the Barbie and the Mother. These tropes were routinely placed in the centre of their maps and the women them as encompassing the right ‘amount’ of each of the dimensions of femininity outlined (physical, malleable and restrictive). In the second level/ring of the concept maps, the most frequently used terms included: drama queens, divas, and attention seekers. These forms of femininity entail aspects that are decidedly feminine, however were seen to be extreme forms of femininity where the exaggeration of feminine qualities deviate from the ideal. As can be seen in Figure 11 on the next page, ‘diva’ is written in the second ring of the map.
While divas are often perceived as feminine, the demanding nature that is associated with such behaviours deviates from the selflessness inherent to hegemonic femininity. The diva may not challenge men's possession of masculine characteristics, however they do present a form of femininity that is not completely supportive of hegemonic gender relations. By not presenting an other-oriented demeanour, they 'violate' the restrictive dimension of femininity. For these reasons, I argue that drama queens, divas and attention seekers can be understood as a form of pariah femininity. However, because the diva embodies many feminine characteristics, the social penalty and stigma is limited as it does not pose a significant threat to the overall gender order. Another common term that appeared in the second ring, was that of 'bitch'. In Chapter 5, Lily (CG) described the Barbie as a bit of a bitch due to her competition with other women for men's attention. This example highlights how a woman who may be feminine
in the physical and malleable dimensions can shift away from ideal femininity by enacting masculine qualities such as competition.

The most frequent terms placed on the third level/ring by women throughout all five focus groups included can be grouped into the following categories: slut, activist, and athlete. Schippers (2007) argues that the ‘slut’ is seen as subordinate to hegemonic femininity because of the way in which sexual promiscuity is seen to be a male characteristic. Sexual non-compliance therefore attracts heavy stigma, positioning the slut below not only hegemonic femininity, but also below the divas (see Figure 12 below).

![Figure 12: Sonia - Executive Management Group](image)

In the above map, the participant has listed slut and whore on the third ring out, indicating that these types of women were understood by her to be less feminine than the other labels she had used. There is less cultural acceptance of these
types of femininities than of those that are located in the level above. Women who have multiple sexual partners can be labelled a slut as a way of stigmatising their behaviour (Schippers 2007). As with the diva and the bitch, the slut is positioned away from femininity because of the way in which it violates the restrictive dimension of femininity. However, the word slut can also be in reference to one’s appearance and have little to do with sexual encounters. In these cases, the use of the word slut is a sanction used to highlight that a woman is dressed in a way that is not feminine (i.e. lots of exposed skin, tight fitting clothing) and not conforming to the malleable dimensions of femininity (Schippers 2007).

The women also categorised terms and expressions such as ‘out spoken’, ‘activist’ and ‘feminist’ on the third level of the maps. In Figure 13 (on the following page), the map is sparse, and the positioning of the terms the participant has used are insightful into what the main forms of women’s gender expression are to her. By placing feminist away from the centre, the participant has implied that women who embody these traits are less feminine than mothers or working mothers, but are closer to ideal femininity than dykes or ball breakers.
A similar pattern was found in several other maps, included the one below (see Figure 14 – *note: this map was used in Figure 5, however it is also relevant here*).

**Figure 13: Anonymous - Executive Management Group**

**Figure 14: Ruby - Circus Group**
Again, feminist is located in the third ring. The feminist discourses present in this research reflect the findings in Schippers (2007), Budgeon’s (2014), and Darwin’s (2017) work. Women activists and feminists were seen as: “aggressive and demanding; qualities which threaten heterosexual norms of attraction and the loss of approval by men and therefore undermine hierarchical gender complementarity” (Schippers 2007, p. 327). Feminists are also still seen as women who do not shave their body hair. Such a transgression upsets the malleable aspect of femininity. For these reasons, both sluts and feminists are positioned in similar levels of the femininities hierarchy.

The most frequently used phrases on the third level amongst all of the groups, were athletic and sporty (see Figure 15), although many women simply included particular sports in different location throughout the maps.

*Figure 15: Anonymous - Executive Management Group*
While the women did not always specify a particular sport on their maps, there were others that did, such as in the above map (see Figure 15). Within the sporty femininity type, softball was seen as more feminine than footy. Of all of the sports listed on the maps, football was the most common, and it was always positioned in either the third or fourth ring of the maps. As has been noted earlier, research on aggressive sports such as football, rugby and soccer has demonstrated there is significant stigma experienced by women who engage in such activities (Caudwell 2003; Cox & Pringle 2011; Ezzell 2009; Gill 2007; Scraton et al. 1999). Engaging in physically violent sports often results in women’s sexuality coming into question as displays of such masculine qualities are unintelligible in women. However, softball is seen as a less aggressive sport than football (Ross & Shinew 2008), and therefore it is not surprising that the participant placed these two sports away from each other.

The outermost ring of the concept maps had strong themes that related to sexuality and toughness. Words placed in this area included: roughian, tough, tradie, muscles, tomboy, lesbian, dyke and butch (see Figure 16 on the next page).
Given the discussion earlier in this chapter, it is unsurprising that labels associated with not being heterosexual would be placed on the outer most edge. Butch women violate not only the physical dimension by carrying themselves in more masculine way, but their appearance also does not align with dominant femininity, disrupting the malleable dimension. Furthermore, as was discussed earlier in the chapter, butch women are not seen to behave in typically feminine ways or have interests that are normally associated with women.

The tradie is also a form of femininity that embodies strong masculine characteristics on all three dimensions: use of the body, attire, and choice of activities/interests. It is through complementary but asymmetrical gender expressions that hegemony is maintained. Traditionally masculine traits in women are unintelligible, calling into question one’s gender and sexuality (Butler...
As such, these forms of femininities are heavily stigmatised as pariah femininities on multiple levels, resulting in them being positioned the furthest away from dominant femininity. In Chapter 7, I will explore the impact of heterosexuality on gender expression in more detail.

While not all of the terms and labels used by the women on their maps spoke to their own experiences, they did provide insight into how they saw different types of femininities in relation to each other, demonstrating some cultural norms and patterns. When given instructions to fill out the concept maps, I did not ask them to only list heterosexual forms of femininities as I wanted to capture the broad view of all women’s gender expressions. What has resulted is a map of femininities that allows us to see not only what constitutes hegemonic femininities and pariah femininities, but also to see the hierarchy present within pariah femininities. Not all subordinate forms of femininity are equally stigmatised (Darwin 2017), and this is the case with the current findings. At the top of the hierarchy are the ideal hegemonic feminine tropes of the Barbie and the Mother. Feminine women who were overly concerned with themselves, for example the ‘divas’, are situated just below hegemonic femininity due to their lack of being other-oriented. However, the typically feminine traits, such as appealing to the male gaze, are still often found in this form of femininity and thus they only partially pariah femininities. Below the divas are the more identifiable pariah femininities of the slut, the feminist, and the athlete. These forms of femininity present active challenges to male characteristics such as sexual promiscuity, assertiveness, strength and competition. The stories throughout the sections preceding this discussed the experiences of these subject
positions for my participants. The women spoke of the often harsh social penalties for embodying these forms of pariah femininities. These findings support Schippers (2007) model of hegemonic femininities and pariah femininities, but also extend upon it by providing a more detailed breakdown of the different forms femininities that make up pariah hierarchy. On the outer most ring were women’s gender expressions that did not align with heterosexuality and violated all three dimensions of femininity. These are the most stigmatised and unfeminine forms and included categories such as lesbians, and women who were strong, both in body and manner.

It is interesting to note that only a few women placed words outside the borders of the maps. I gave instructions to the women stating that they could do this and provided an example to each group of how this might work using a male gender expressions map. Words placed outside of the final ring were explained as those that may describe a woman or things a woman may do, but that are not considered to be feminine. However, there were only five women who did this. The terms and phrases included: chooses not to have children, androgynous, dyke and tomboy, lesbian and femme lesbian/queer. This finding supports the argument made throughout this chapter that women’s gender expressions, even those that involve traditionally masculine characteristics, are still understood as a form of femininity.
**Conclusion: Inescapable Femininities**

In Chapter 5, the most culturally celebrated forms of gender expressions were discussed. The dominant tropes of the Barbie and the Mother were the foundation for the main dimensions of hegemonic femininity, that of the physical, the malleable and the restrictive. These dimensions were also used to make sense of non-dominant forms of femininity, although in less coherent ways. Rather than identifying clear subject positions that could be situated alongside hegemonic femininity, all forms of women’s gender expression were understood as forms of femininity. When transgressing one or more dimension of femininity, various possible subordinate femininities were formed. This was discussed in relation to the subject positions of androgyny, female masculinity, the tomboy, and the heterosexual butch. Despite the large bodies of work that have explored notions of female masculinity and women as masculine (Francis 2010; Halberstam 1998; Nguyen 2008; Pascoe 2012), these notions did not apply to the women in this research, nor did androgyny. Tomboyism was something women were expected to grow out of, but the term butch was too intertwined with sexuality to apply to heterosexual women. These terms did not provide viable alternatives for the women as there was a lack of consensus on their meanings or applicability to their own experiences. Furthermore, there was a lack of linguistic alternatives beyond this. The pervasive understanding of gender as dimorphic restricts the creation of discourses that would allow for fluid constructions of gender expressions. The everyday language available to the women was confined to binaries, where men were masculine and women were feminine, preventing them from understanding gender expression in any other way. As such, all gender
expressions were read as femininity and unfeminine became an umbrella term that was used to describe any female gender expressions that violated the delicate dimensions of femininity. The forms of unfemininity were then examined through analysis of the concept maps to establish a hierarchy of women's gender expressions that allowed for a new more detailed typology of pariah femininities.

The pressures of being a woman were evident in the stories the women shared; the reliance on using the word feminine or masculine as points of comparison or departure for their experiences demonstrated how restricted they felt their gender expressions were. As was discussed, several of the women wanted desperately to escape being categorised by their gender and the expected gender expressions that accompany it. Some of the methods the women used to do this are discussed in further detail in Chapter 7. The difficulty found in talking about the issues of gender expression were summed up nicely by Laura (MG) when she said, “it feels like it should be simple [to explain], but I don't know how to explain it, explain the complexities...There are so many layers”. Some of these layers will be discussed in the next chapter when exploring the contingent and relational aspects of women's gender expressions.
Chapter 7

Contingent and Relational Gender Expressions

In Chapter 5, the women I spoke with expressed views on dominant femininity that reflected research on hegemonic femininity. In the previous chapter, it was argued that binary understandings of gender expression were pervasive and difficult to break away from. Various subject positions and ways of being a woman were discussed, however, there was little consensus around terms that were useful for describing the women’s own experiences. Despite the lack of everyday language to express non-dominant femininities, the women had sophisticated understandings of what they were, what they meant, how they were enacted and what the consequences were for enacting them. By grouping these ideas into categories based on the concept maps, a hierarchy of women’s gender expressions was proposed in Chapter 6. This hierarchy enables a clearer picture of how women’s gender expressions not only differ from one another, but also the ways in which some become more, or less, culturally acceptable than others. The types of categories that were identified included subject positions such as mother, diva, athlete and tradie. Notably, these various ways of being a woman can all be experienced by one person, creating conflicting subject positions. Femininity does not consist of a coherent set of experiences, but rather it manifests through practices from a variety of subject positions that “may well contradict each other in a particular situation” (Leahy 1994, p. 49).
This chapter explores the contradictory and contextual nature of gender expressions and looks at the ways in which the women in this study reconciled these experiences by ‘playing’ with gender in individual ways. Often understandings of one’s own femininity and gender expression were also linked to the particular communities of practice the women were part of. There was a sense of agency present though many of the discussions that was often contradicted later through the personal stories that were shared. While femininity is a restricted category, the women found ways to create space to move within it. These stories highlight the enabling but also powerfully restrictive structural complexities of femininity and women’s gender expression. Some of these restrictions can be understood as a result of the social penalty experienced for embodying unintelligible gender traits and consequently being treated as pariah femininities. This was also a space that enabled a semi-alternative femininity to develop and challenge the intragender order, but this was limited in its scope.

In the previous chapter, the linguistic restrictions prevented the women from articulating a coherent term or set of terms to describe non-dominant heterosexual women’s gender identities. Instead, all femininities that transgressed hegemonic ideals were read as unfeminine. Unfeminine was not always a useful way for the women to understand themselves as it covers such a broad range of gender expressions. As such, the women sought out ways to reconcile this by framing their own ways of doing femininity that emphasised a sense of agency, on an individual and community of practice level. This was not without its problems. The contradictory subject positions often resulted in the
women feeling both empowered and oppressed for the same actions, similar to Budgeon’s (2014) ideas around new femininities discussed in Chapter 3. The experiences of the women were only further complicated by their heterosexuality and relationships.

Similar to three layered models developed by gender theorist Risman (2004) and Lorber (1994), Budgeon (2014) suggests that there are three key dimensions that enable thorough investigation and analysis of gender: examining the production of the gendered self, cultural expectations that influence everyday interactions, and structural and institutional domains. In following this analysis, this chapter will first discuss the ways in which the women viewed their own sense of gender expression, through the more individualised understandings of their own personal gender expressions and then by looking at the influence of their communities of practice. This will be followed by a discussion of how various contexts highlight the influence of gender structures and cultural expectations in creating contradictory experiences due to the inherent relationality of gender expression.

**Agency and Individual Femininity: This is How I do Femininity**

Central to the notion of choice in gender expression is that gender is not static or fixed (Beasley 2005). While this was apparent in the discussions with the women in the focus groups, there was significant complexity to this fluidity that was often dependent on particular contexts beyond their communities of practice. This was
an important and empowering part of how women made sense of their own experiences. The sense of fluidity with gender expression enabled the women to create their own ways of doing ‘femininity’ by taking up different subject positions depending on circumstances. One of the most prominent aspects of this personalised femininity was that women felt they could slip in and out of subject positions when it suited them. By dressing in or behaving in particular ways, the women suddenly ‘felt’ more feminine through engaging in a particular performance. This notion of internal feelings of femininity versus how one is read was also touched on in the previous section, but will be explored in greater detail here as it was a common theme both in the contradictions women expressed around agency and social pressures, and in the importance of the contexts one is in when making sense of femininity. This will also be examined through the postfeminist notion of ‘choice (McRobbie 2007)’.

When I asked participants if women could be something other than feminine, Caroline (EM) responded by asking, “Do you mean what society thinks is feminine, or what I think is feminine? They aren’t the same thing.” This quote encapsulates the sentiment I was met with in nearly every focus group, that there was a difference between their own, personal understandings of femininity and that of the societal discourse. These discussions often ended up with the women explaining what they saw as feminine for them specifically, suggesting that this differed from more general notions of femininity. Within their communities of practice, the women discursively created their own group norms. These conversations also led to examining other forms of gender expression in addition to their own. Alternatives to dominant femininity were often understood to be
not so much about specific non-dominant or deviant gender expressions, but rather about how their own gender expressions were not like the idealised understandings. These personal accounts of femininity provided valuable insight into the variability of understandings of femininity, both dominant and not, and alternative women's gender expressions. The actual lived experiences differed significantly from the perceived idealised societal norms of gender expression, often at times causing conflict and internal contradiction. There were also noteworthy but somewhat nuanced differences in how the women made sense of their own gender expressions within the focus groups, as well as differences between the focus groups. This manifested in their emphasis and expression as to what ‘should be’ or what ‘they’ saw as feminine (as opposed to what society views femininity as). In doing this, their own stories of femininity and non-dominant gender expression were presented positively. These areas will be discussed in the following sections.

As discussed in the previous chapter, embodying characteristics that the participants saw as masculine resulted in a woman being deemed ‘unfeminine’ and with it came stigma. The discrepancy between ideal and individual caused some women to feel increased pressure at times, but for many it was a space to be played with, where they could create their own ways of doing femininity. In order to reconcile their own more masculine characteristics and traits, the women constructed notions of individual gender expression they viewed as their own way of ‘doing’ femininity. Ruby (CG) said, “How you look, how you dress, make-up, all that outside stuff, is about how you define yourself from that perspective, but for me...I've developed my own response to that.” She was
conscious of where the pressures to ‘look feminine’ came from; she had critiqued the lack of progress in women’s roles within the home, and saw the beauty industry as a source of manipulation. And yet, she chose to dress up and be part of this “societal ideal femininity”. She made it clear that she didn’t always feel the need to do this, but on the odd occasion, she found pleasure in dressing up in more emphasised feminine ways. The manner in which she spoke evoked a sense of agency and choice about how and when this occurred, that she did it not because of an expectation that she should but because she wanted to. This understanding suggests she viewed engaging in femininity as a performance, while the other less overt aspects of femininity, such as not interrupting when others are speaking (as discussed in Chapter 5) were more reflective of the performative aspects of gender identity. When agency was drawn on to make sense of the women’s expressions of femininity, it was almost always done in this way, seeing it as a performance they consciously choose to engage in as opposed to repetitive acts that have become reflexively internalised. This reflects a recent trend in feminism towards emphasising ‘choice’ which has also come with critiques (McRobbie 2007; Thwaites 2017). Discourses around ‘choice’ present femininity as a way to take control and reinvent yourself, however many argue that in fact this is merely a decoy for a re-regulation of women and their bodies (Baker 2008; McRobbie 2007).

When I asked the women how their own ideas of feminine differed from what they thought to be society’s expectations, it was often connected to expressing aspects of either masculinity or non-traditional femininities. Ruby (CG) articulated what made ‘her’ femininity different: “Because I don’t do it all the
time, I choose it...I can flip between masculinity and femininity.” Karen (CG) agreed with this sentiment, “I can look like this [referring to her feminine physique], but still lift a heavy box”. Similarly, Alison (EM) told us, “I grew up on a farm, I wear boots, get dirty, drive a tractor, but I like to get my nails done. Women are adaptable, we can be both [masculine and feminine].” And again, when discussing femininity and playing football, Ez (FG) said, “The type of feminine you are out there [pointing to the footy oval] is different to the type of feminine you are on a Saturday night.” This was similar for Emma (RD), but in her case, it was to do with roller derby. She explained that as a roller derby player, there was a persona she put on during bouts. This enabled her to further emphasise a part of herself she didn’t necessarily make the effort to in her everyday life:

I wear my hair, for bouts [matches] in plaits, it's part of my character, it's part of who I am when I am being that person. The rest of the time, my hair is just however it is. It might be in bun that day ‘cause that is how I left it after the shower. (Emma - RD)

Emma (RD) knows what is required to ‘perform’ feminine. She can choose to display herself in these ways when it suits her, thus her femininity is something she controls and not something that is forced upon her.

Karen (CG) remarked how hard it was to not get caught up in the pressures to present one’s self in particular feminine ways, to which Ruby (CG) agreed:

It is hard, but it’s not that important to me. It doesn’t define my life, I like dresses, I like dressing up, and that’s part of my identity. But it’s not just about femininity, it’s feeling good, dressing up how I like. Over the years I
have worked out what that is for me, not for society, and that’s what I
dress up to. I choose to do that.

While Ruby (CG) acknowledges that her ‘dressing up’ is in line which much of the
societal ideals of femininity, she felt she had a say in it and like Emma (RD), it was
on her terms. By doing so, she made it her own. Francombe (2014) found similar
responses in her research on body image and young women. She argues that
while girls actively question many of the practices that go into constructing their
bodies in accordance with the discourses of what is "appropriate" (Francombe
2014, p. 594) for women, they also still aspire to the ideal female body.

In the circus group, Karen (CG) explained that for her femininity could be “...the
outward look, from society. But for me, it is inward, it is something you feel
yourself”. Karen (CG) also expressed this: “I’d say I’m feminine, but I’m not
society’s idea of feminine because I don’t always put the effort in.” There were
many people who felt that being feminine require a lot of effort: “I’d like to be
more feminine, but I can’t be bothered, it is so much work. But I am okay with
how I am.” (Lily - CG) and “I wish I cared enough to do that [hair and makeup]”
(Ez - FG). But despite this lack of ‘effort’ the women still felt feminine, they simply
didn’t see themselves as too feminine or the stereotypical feminine woman
described in Chapter 5.

In the EM group, Suzanne (EM) told me: “I feel feminine, but not a girly-girl”. This
was echoed by Caroline (EM) who added, “I’m not a girly girl either, I don’t wear
frilly things or make-up. I’m a jeans and boots person. That’s my kind of thing. But
that doesn’t mean I don’t feel feminine. I do in my own way.” When asked what
that type of feminine was, it became harder to articulate, as happened with many of the women. This personal form of femininity was relationally understood by what was *not* femininity but did not carry with it the stigma of the unfeminine as it revolved around the notion of choice, both in how it was expressed and when to express it. Joey (FG), from the footy group also communicated this idea:

> How ever we choose to express our femininity is, like, it’s good that people can express it in different ways. Even like you [gesturing to Donna (FG)], chucking on a dress, like if that’s how you chose to express yourself, like, nobody is saying ‘you have to wear a dress’. Yes, there’s peer pressure but standing at home or where, you still go, ‘yeah, I’m going to wear this’. And whether you kind of subconsciously do it or not, that is you going, ‘I want to express this part that doesn’t get to get out all that often’, and I think that is something to be proud about. We can express it how we want. It’s just what we do.

A sense of agency is present throughout this quote; Joey (FG) saw her femininity as a choice that was empowering. And yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, she often made comments that told a rather different story. She spoke of the double standard for women needing to be “hot” and not men, of the pressures for women to remove body hair as it is seen as unhygienic on them but not on men and the restrictions on how women sit and hold their bodies. While Joey (FG) saw that much of her expressing femininity was a choice, she at the same time expressed restrictions on her behaviours simply because she was a woman. This was a common theme with the women in this research, the struggle between a sense of agency to express their femininity any way they like, and the social
pressures they felt to adhere to particular norms about what it was to be feminine. This struggle highlights the illusionary nature of ‘choice’ for women.

Louise (RD), is a roller derby referee. While roller derby is played by only women, referees are almost always male. She had a positive view on her expression of her femininity. She, like Joey (FG) and many of the others, saw engaging in the feminisation of her body as a choice. She explained to us her attitude towards femininity when refereeing:

When I do roller derby, because there is the pre-belief that it is a lesbian sport… I like to look feminine, but still yet still be in a position of power. I will still do my hair in a particular way, still do my makeup, because if there are photos taken I don’t want to be seen as one of the boys. I want people to recognise that I am one of the girls. I am very reluctantly not cutting my hair at the moment because I don’t be one of the boys. Hair and makeup are how I express my femininity on the track. (Louise - RD)

These comments challenge the notion of choice. In order for her to not be labelled as a lesbian and to maintain her femininity, she needed to engage in feminine body practices. And yet she framed these experiences as a choice, something she was free to opt in and out of. However, the social penalties were clear to her: if she did not present herself in particular ways, she would not be feminine to others. Feeling feminine and presenting feminine were two different, but often intertwined ideas. She wanted to be read as heterosexual which resulted is a sense of conflict.
On the other hand, Emma (RD) said, “Makeup is not something I do to be feminine. I feel feminine and strong when I fix things around the house.” For Emma (RD), being feminine was associated with a sense of strength, adaptability and the ability to do what was needed in any given situation. As a single mother, doing handy work around the house was part of her understanding of what being feminine was for her personally, but not on a societal level. This idea of multiple ways of ‘doing’ femininity reinforced a sense of agency in a way that rejected social norms around what was feminine. Several women expressed that they were aware of the societal pressures, but it didn’t always weigh heavily on them enough to cause guilt or motivate a change in behaviour. Nor did it necessarily shape how they chose to internalise their own sense of femininity. Rather, ‘doing femininity’ was about doing it for themselves, on their own terms. As such, femininity was not seen as central to one’s identity but rather something they could opt in or out of. The difference between these personal experiences of femininity and the accounts of femininity in general stemmed from the notion that the women who embodied the ‘feminine ideal’ were unconsciously caught up in appearance and the pleasing of others while the women I spoke with felt they defined their femininity for themselves. This is a testament to how powerful the neoliberal discourse of ‘choice’ has become.

However, what became evident upon reviewing the focus group data was that there were almost always contradictions present in the women’s accounts. At various stages of the focus groups, almost every participant shared a story of both how they did their own version of femininity or had individual understandings of their gender expression eliciting a discourse within the groups of agency, choice,
freedom – all presented with a positive empowered sense of control over one’s gender expression. And yet they each told stories of pressure to be a particular way and the consequences they experienced for not adhering to the norms of dominant femininity. But this all appeared to occur on an unconscious level, they were not aware of these contradictory statements in most cases.

Donna (FG) considered herself to be “not really feminine, but more butch”. She explained this further: “When I go out on the weekend and get dressed up to go out for dinner, I don’t put on a dress, I put on nice shirt and a pair of pants or something. Maybe some foundation. That’s it, that’s me being girly.” Kylie (FG) responded, “Well, I guess it’s in the eye of the beholder then. You putting on a bit of foundation is you being feminine then. For me, it’s doing the ‘straight and curl’.” Kylie (FG) made the point that many others eluded to, that each woman in the group had their own idea of what it was to be feminine for themselves, implying that individual notions of femininity were significantly different from the societal understandings of femininity. However, most of the things that made a person ‘feel’ feminine stemmed from one or another aspect of the norms of dominant femininity. While there was a different way each woman saw herself as ‘doing’ femininity, it was still dependant on the cultural understandings.

A common theme amongst the women in the focus groups was the resistance to categorise people, or themselves, under the heading of any particular gender expression, whether that be feminine, masculine or other. Often women said things such as: “You can still be you without fitting into one of those categories.” (Ez - FG). When I asked them, what do you call people who don’t fit into your idea
of what is feminine, Mary (CG) responded with “a person”. Similarly, Joey (FG) said, “I’m not feminine or masculine when I’m playing sports. I’m a sports person.” This lack of language to capture their experiences was present in all discussions. There was no word for the non-dominant forms of gender expression other than basic descriptors as Joey (FG) used, or the fall-back term of ‘unfeminine’; and there was no word to describe being simultaneously feminine and unfeminine. The concept of ‘new femininities’ suggests that current ways of being womanly involve elements of both traditional femininity and of masculinity (Budgeon 2014). However, the lived experience of this was far more complex than simply embodying aspects of femininity alongside discourses of empowerment. Budgeon (2014, p. 331) has explained that:

...gender evidently remains a fundamentally binary structure which facilitates the management of those contradictions in a manner that preserves gender hierarchy, maintains complementarity (albeit in multifaceted ways), organizes understandings of gender difference and orients social action.

My findings support Budgeon (2014) and provide further evidence that while the gender order and masculinity have the capacity to be altered, discourses of new empowered femininities need to be approached with caution. The complexity of the lived experiences suggests that when individual femininities do not easily fit into the already established femininity categories, women are still read as unintelligible. Despite this, there was a sense that the women could move across these boundaries, in-between the feminine and unfeminine, constantly negotiating the dominant norms and creating their own subject positions. The subject positions the women occupied already exist outside of themselves, such
as that of the worker, mother, and partner. The result of this became evident when discussing their lives within these contexts, exposing the structural pressures and contradictory experiences of their gender expression noted in Budgeon’s (2014) quote above. This will be discussed after the exploring the agency found within the communities of practice.

**Agency and Femininity in Communities of Practice: This is How *We* do Femininity**

It became clear by the third focus group that there were distinct differences between the groups in the emphases placed both on what were seen as both dominant and non-dominant women’s gender expressions. Some of these were discussed in Chapter 5, but they will be elaborated on in the following sections in order to highlight the way in which views on gender expressions not only vary but also are dependent on particular contexts. The women understood their contextually shifting experiences of gender expression through a sense of agency where they were able to engage with particular subject positions that were reflective of their own values, both on a group, community of practice level, and on a more personal, individual level. The following section will explore how the different communities of practice constructed notions of femininity that were often in contrast to the broader more dominant forms of femininity as discussed in Chapter 5, but that developed through the performativity required within their particular contexts. However not all of the groups had similar views on how much
agency there was in their gender expressions as will be discussed in the following sections.

While a rolling focus group schedule was used for this research, the same core topics and questions were covered in each focus group and it was mostly minor alterations to the wording of questions that was changed. As I went from one group to another, I noticed that each put a particular ‘spin’ or ‘flavour’ on how each group of women viewed femininity. Ideal feminine types were for the most part extremely similar, but the areas of femininity that were emphasized positively by each group differed slightly. The ideal types were an outward projection, and did not speak to the women’s own experiences. The individual notions of femininity were inward understandings of what femininity mean to them, their own experiences and their own lives, and it was this aspect that brought out the different emphases. By creating their own localised discourses around what constituted femininity, the groups seemed to feel a sense of agency in how these spaces provided the opportunity to express different subject positions in supportive environments. When in these spaces, the women engaged in performative acts they came to understand as part of their gender identity, although it quite often differed from the dominant understandings discussed in Chapter 5. Rather than see themselves as resembling any form of hegemonic femininity, they instead felt that they could opt into the role of being feminine without actually taking on all the dimensions of femininity as an identity. The ability to slip in and out of these subject positions, to go from being the girly-girl to the tough football player, the wife or mother to the manager, enabled the women to create spaces where they could redefine femininity in their own terms.
There were constraints, and the agency they felt in was often underscored by larger structural influences. The communities of practice often provided a space to escape these to a certain degree, thus creating a sense of agency. The focus on particular aspects of femininity for each group seemed to be relatively stable concepts and represented what ‘their’ version of femininity looked like, influencing the areas they tended to discuss most positively about femininity. Each group is examined here in turn: the football group, the roller derby group, the circus group, the executive management group, and the mothers group.

_The Football Group_

For the footy women, being able to swap between tough and strong to pretty and girly was highly regarded. For Kylie (FG), there were parts of her life that had a strong feminine emphasis, such as when she went out with her friends, getting dressed up, or going to work. In these situations, she felt feminine. But she explained: “Football’s my non-feminine”. When she went to training or a game, she was able to compartmentalise much of what she saw as ‘feminine’ and emphasise her ‘non-feminine’. This included getting dirty, aggressive and tough. However, she did also incorporate aspects of femininity into these activities through her attire (fitted feminine clothing, hair and jewellery). This gender enactment aligns with Ezzell’s (2009) concept of ‘heterosexy-fit’, where femininity and sexuality are emphasised when engaging in sports perceived as more masculine in order to maintain sexual appeal. But Kylie (FG) did not see it this way, she felt instead that by dressing in particular ways, it helped her to feel
confident on the field – it was her choice to do this, and she got pleasure from it. The ability to combine different aspects of her gender identity, that of the feminine and the unfeminine, at one time created its own subject position and a sense of agency that she could do feminine in her own way. But this can be also understood through critiques of the choice discourse that suggest in fact, such language merely provides a means through which hegemonic relations are maintained (McRobbie 2007).

Donna (FG) summed up the feeling of the group well when she described feminine as “not doing sporty stuff”. This response was not surprising given the women engaged in a typically masculine sport. In line with much of the research on women and sports, femininity (and heterosexuality) often comes into question when participating in male dominated sports (Butler & Charles 2012; Ezzell 2009; Obel 1996; Shea 2001). This aligns with Butler’s (1990) notion of ‘intelligible genders’, where gender and heterosexuality are so strongly interconnected that any deviation from the expected gender expressions for the assumed gender, in this case femininity, cast doubt on a person’s heterosexuality. This caused significant tension for the women in this group, who felt they were constantly having their sexuality questioned. Despite this, they still felt that football was feminine in particular ways. In Chapter 6, I discussed an exchange between several of the footy players who explained that by being compassionate when they played football they made it feminine. It was through the ‘doing’ of football in a particular way, with compassion, that helped them to understand what they did as feminine and thus redefining gender relations within that space, much the way gender manoeuvring suggests. Gender manoeuvring, as discussed
in Chapter 2, shifts the meaning of gender in local context allowing alternative gender relations to develop (Schippers 2007). But this manoeuvring is restricted to the field, and only amongst the women. Alternative femininities are not able to develop, and thus the subject position of footy player remains a pariah femininity, rife with stigma. Pariah femininities ‘contaminate’ the hierarchal gender relations by challenging male power and dominance (Schippers 2007). Pariah femininities are generally heavily stigmatized, but as can be seen through the women’s stories, the women in the present research used a form of gender manoeuvring to create an alternative space where their gender expression was accepted by incorporating toughness into their understandings of what it was to be feminine. Gender manoeuvring enables the meanings of gender to be altered within local settings allowing alternative gender relations to arise (Bäckström 2013; Finley 2010; Schippers 2002, 2007). These alternative femininities allow for women to both confront and reject hegemonic gender relations, but do so without stigma. However, this alternative femininity developed within a women’s only space, creating an alternative that only went so far as to disrupt the intragender hegemony but not the intergender order.

This reimagining of the feminine within this space was appealing for many of the women, and a significant factor in them playing the sport. Several of the women expressed similar sentiments, explaining that playing football gave them the opportunity to express the more competitive and aggressive sides of themselves, but they still maintained aspects of femininity. Much of the discussion with the women in this group came back to strength and toughness. These characteristics were highly valued within this group but rather than see their engagement with
this activity as masculine, they simply saw this one aspect of themselves as not so feminine. However, as noted above, by disrupting the fragile dimensions of hegemonic femininity, the women risked becoming unfeminine and socially stigmatised. The women wanted to view themselves as feminine, but the idea of actually ‘being feminine’ carried with it a strong connotation of weakness and vanity, qualities that did not align with the needs of football players. In order to reconcile these contradictory subject positions, of tough yet feminine, the women found their own ways of expressing their gender through gender manoeuvring. This enabled them to feel that they could step in and out of being tough in a way that didn’t impact on their overall femininity. Being tough on the footy field was different than being tough in other aspects of your life; there it was acceptable. As Joey (FG) said, “Wiping blood off my jumper, it’s not feminine, but I like it.” Such a statement highlights the degree to which the players moved away from the ideal femininity discussed in Chapter 5. But, as noted above, this was limited.

Belinda (FG) told us that she would not allow her husband to watch her play. She was concerned that if he saw her being aggressive, “spitting on the field, sweaty and red in the face”, that he would no longer find her attractive. The footy player subject position enabled freedom for the women to express non-traditional women’s gender expressions – but only within their specific women’s dominated space. Given this, it is not surprising that the subject position of athlete was situated as far from the dominant forms of femininity by this group. As the women engaged with these contradictory experiences, they were well aware of the societal views on athletic women. Almost every participant placed the word “princess” towards the centre of their concept maps (see Figures 17 and 18
below), indicating that they viewed this ‘type’ of woman as a dominant form of women’s gender expression.

Figure 17: Joey - Football Group

Figure 18: Anonymous - Football Group
As can be seen in Figure 18, the word “footballer” was written towards the outer rings, away from the notion of what was feminine. Football players were written down in this position for most of the women in this group, as well as for many in other groups as well. Sports entailed a level of aggression that at times was seen as violent; it was not uncommon for them to shove, push and injure themselves or others. Schippers (2007) describes femininities that exhibit physically violent behaviours (amongst other things), as pariah femininities.

Finley (2010) suggests that at times establishing new norms for gender expressions within localised contexts can help to remove the stigma of pariah femininities within that space. By doing so, gender relations more broadly have the possibility of being challenged. However, this was not the case with the women in this research as there was little challenge to gender relations in a broader sense. Rather, the women saw their time at training and on the field as separate from their everyday lives. There was minimal interaction with others beyond their teammates and competitors.

In much of the research that has utilised the concept of gender manoeuvring, the social settings have included both men and women. In the case of the women footy players, the only other males present were the occasional partner and their coach. As such, there was little opportunity to challenge gender norms on any level other than within femininities themselves. Sports can provide an arena for women to contest physical capacities and the experiences of engaging sports are influenced by the promotion of women’s participation within them (Bäckström 2013; Scraton et al. 1999). However, until very recently there has been little
incorporation of women's footy into the mainstream and as such, the challenges for women who participate are limited and the contest of gender norms doesn’t tend to leave the field. Despite this, there is a shift in the gender relations within women’s gender expressions. Recall the example of ‘Princess’ from Chapter 5 who wore makeup on the field when playing. In an everyday context, this would be considered a typically hyper-feminine thing to do (Allan 2009; Connell 1995; Holland & Harpin 2013; Paechter 2010; Renold & Allan 2006), however when playing footy this normally dominant form of femininity becomes subordinate to the femininity created in this community of practice which values strength over appearance.

*The Roller Derby Group*

The women in the roller derby group had somewhat similar experiences of gender manoeuvring to the football group, but there was much more of a focus on appearance and sexuality than in the football group. Roller derby has been an area of interest for researchers, with much of the work viewing it as a site for gender resistance and agency (Cohen 2008; Finley 2010). Two of the women, Louise (RD) and Emma (RD) felt that they saw roller derby as an opportunity to ‘own’ their sexuality. Their focus on the sexuality was also not surprising given that roller derby is often a site for sexualized femininity (Cohen 2008; Finley 2010). Cohen (2008) explains that the sexuality that is present in roller derby was not seen by those who participate as a form of passive sexuality, but rather a form of self-expression that was controlled by the women and serves as an
avenue to rebel against traditional heterosexual femininity. This rebellious notion can also be seen in Finley’s (2010) work, where she describes how women use ‘gender manoeuvring’ to recreate an alternative form of femininity. This was evident in the way the women spoke of their experiences on the roller derby track and within that community. Emphasising one’s sexuality is often interpreted as a sign of being slut, a form of a pariah femininity that is stigmatised for disrupting the normal gender relations (Finley 2010). But within roller derby, appearing in ways that may be deemed elsewhere as slutty (i.e. short shorts, crop tops, tight clothing accentuating curves) is acceptable. The normal stigma does not apply and in this way, the hierarchy of femininities are challenged and the women within this context were able to express a part of themselves, if they so choose, without social penalty. Femininity is redefined within the localised context and created a sense of agency for the participants.

The roller derby group made several comments regarding femininity as ‘an expression of your individuality’ or agency, being ‘comfortable with yourself’ and ‘knowing who you are’. Emma (RD) said, “Femininity for me is owning the space of being a woman. You can wear kick ass leather boots with heels or be a gentle wallflower, as long as you own it.” These notions fit in line with research by Cohen (2008, p. 28) who, based on her time both playing and researching roller derby, argues it is “a space for individual expression”. This was apparent throughout this group’s discussions and also had an air of agency about it. The women could make a conscious decision to emphasise their sexuality or not. Either way, there was an acceptance.
The Circus Group

The focus of the circus women’s group centred on the differences between society’s views and their own views on what was feminine. The women felt there was a significant disjuncture between what they thought and valued as feminine and what they considered the rest of society to understood as feminine. Discussions about the changes in gender norms and expectations of femininity and possible alternative femininities also came up frequently, as well as the interplay between ‘choice’ and societal pressures. These women appeared very comfortable arguing amongst themselves, enabling various views to be brought forth and explored in detail.

Like most of the other groups, the circus women had their own view of femininity that touched on the notion of strength, “There’s society’s expectations of what is feminine, and then there is what we think is feminine and we like it as being strong women. You can be a strong woman and still be feminine” (Karen - CG). This theme of ‘strength’ came up time and time again during my conversations with the circus women and referred to physical muscle strength as opposed to toughness (FG) or emotional strength (EM), as is discussed in the following section. They discussed at length the role of the body in gender expression and more specifically the role of muscles in femininity. Several of them acknowledged that while many don’t view muscles and strength as central to being feminine, that they did. “I think muscles are feminine and they show that you are a strong woman”. This finding is similar to what Obel (1996) found in relation to women bodybuilders who redefined their understandings of femininity to align with their
own bodies. Lily (CG) elaborated on this: “If someone told me at circus that I looked masculine, that my muscles were masculine, I’d take that as a compliment. I like that.” Everyone in the group nodded and agreed. She continued, turning to her right and speaking to Karen (CG), “You have much bigger muscles than me and you dress way more feminine. It kicks ass!” This combination of muscular strength and ability to express femininity concurrently was highly valued amongst these women. When I asked these women if they thought women could be considered masculine, Ruby (CG) replied, “I think we have described our own type of femininity, everyone here has their own way of thinking about it, but for us, it’s okay if it seems masculine”. Again, we see signs of gender manoeuvring where the muscular pariah femininity contests gender norms as it is valued within this particular context. But as with the footy group, there was almost no interaction with males as it was an exclusively women only space, thus confining the challenges to only within femininities. However, within this framework, the pariah femininity of the built and toned woman was able to be transitioned into a position of power within the hierarchy of femininities, losing its stigma and becoming a source of strength.

The Executive Management Group

Like the other groups, many of the women in the executive management group were very resistant to ‘generalise’ or make ‘judgements’. It was not surprising to see the women in this group focus on being diplomatic in their discussions given their career experiences and that they all worked for the same large organisation.
However, it was interesting to see the level of resistance to defining what was ‘feminine’. This was particularly evident when Dorothy (EM) asked why the word feminine had to be a “gender thing”. It was not just the question, but the manner in which it was asked. Her arms were crossed over her chest, her right leg folded onto her left knee, leaning back in her chair. After we had been talking for a while, she finally leaned forward and began to put her guard down. Her behaviour was indicative of many in this group who didn’t seem interested in answering the questions I asked, but rather challenging them by asking questions back. Women in positions of management or in male dominated working environments have been found to reject the existence of gender inequality as a coping strategy (Marshall 1993; Miller 2004). Denial of such inequalities enables the women to feel connected and more strongly affiliated with the workers and workplace (Marshall 1993). This appeared to be the case with this group initially, but towards the end of the session, almost all of the women were willing and eager to share stories about their experiences with gender in the workplace. Even after I had wrapped up, more than half of the women stayed on discussing the issues further. Not surprisingly, the focus of their discussions was on work related issues. On their concept maps, many of the women put professionals to describe ‘types’ of women (see Figures 19 and 20 on the next page).
Figure 19: Taylor - Executive Management Group

Figure 20: Alison - Executive Management Group
As can be seen on the above maps, the types of jobs that the women wrote towards the centre involved more caring roles, whereas roles such as their own where positioned further out. As with the football group, the women focused on issues that were related to their communities of practice, even prior to any discussions.

The executive management group's understandings of feminine were similar to that of the other groups in many ways, but also encompassed a much broader view. Their focus tended to be on femininity as encompassing emotional strength and being “thick skinned”. Given that women who are employed in masculine fields of work often feel that they need to display typically masculine traits such as authority and toughness (Demaiter & Adams 2009; Ezzell 2009), their focus on these characteristics is understandable. Research has also shown that women often feel the need to adapt their behaviour to work and act like men (Pierce 1995). At the same time, women feel pressure to be feminine in the workplace (Roth 2004). By understanding femininity as encompassing some of the more masculine characteristics, it enables women to simultaneously ‘feel’ feminine and work within the masculine ideals of the workplace.

However, unlike the previous groups where gender manoeuvring was able to be used for the women to create alternative femininities that successfully challenged the notions of dominant femininity and gender relations between different femininities, the women in the executive management group did not have these types of experiences in their communities of practice – the workplace. The assertive woman in a position of authority, often labelled as ‘bitch’ (Finley 2010;
Schippers 2007), was not able to be transcended and did not enable a challenge to gender relations. Two women wrote “ball breaker” on the outer edge of their concept maps, and this idea came up within the discussions as well. The structural barriers for the women in this group, while denied initially, seemed to impact upon their lives and experience more than those of the football, roller derby and circus groups. This was also the case for the women in the mothers group. The experience of working environments, gender and structural barriers will be explored further detail later in this chapter.

The Mothers Group

Similar to the executive management group, there were strong structural influences felt by the mothers group. However, there were still some areas that the women felt empowered and able to reconstruct aspects of their femininity and gender expression. The mothers group spoke mostly about nurturing and being other oriented, but also about community and softness as being a crucial component to femininity. Georgie (MG) explained that being feminine meant being “sensitive to other people’s emotions, and your own”. Relationships also featured highly amongst the mothers group. There was a sense that not only heterosexuality was important, but that being partnered was as well:

People just expect women to be constantly looking for a partner. I know women who are choosing to be on their own, they might have sexual partners and stuff, but they want to be on their own and people will think
there is something wrong with them. It’s like there is something wrong with them as a woman because they don’t want to be dependent on another person. (Zoe - MG)

The focus on the importance of relationships is not surprising given the average age of the women within the mothers group was 36; the social pressures places on women specifically within this age bracket to couple off and settle down are significant. The expectation for women of this age is for heterosexual coupling with offspring soon to follow, something the women made note of on a number of occasions. Gillespie (2003, p. 123) describes discourses such as these about motherhood as the “ultimate fulfilment for women and the cornerstone of feminine identity”. As Georgie (MG) pointed out, “We’ve only got a little window to get pregnant in, men can do it anytime.” The need to hurry up, settle down and reproduce is commonly felt among women in their thirties. Relationships are also an important factor when parenting and thus it is not surprising that the mothers group spoke about these issues. These ideas are explored further in later sections of this chapter in relation to impact of societal gender structures.

Despite expressing more pressure than many of the other groups to define femininity in more traditionally dominant terms (as discussed in Chapter 5), the women still found ways in which they defined their experiences of femininity as different to the generalised trope of the Mother, but this often resulted in the women contradicting themselves. This was particularly evident in the discussions of having their partners highly involved in the parenting or their decisions to go out and have a beer at the pub, sans children. While initially this was presented agency with the women being able to challenge and resist the stereotypes of
mothers, the conversation would often then turn to how their experiences were inherently different for them simply because they were mothers and not fathers.

When asked what feminine meant to them, the mothers group also spoke of emotions and nurturing as well as touching on beauty and superficiality briefly, again focussing on more traditional aspects of dominant femininity. For Cece (MG), the term feminine conjured up notions of community, and connecting and relating to other people. Cece (MG) viewed the term feminine as indicative of strength while Georgie (MG) felt that to be feminine was to be passive, a characteristic that is seen as a central component to femininity (Messerschmidt 2010). While the two women discussed these opposing views, Cece (MG) linked feminine strongly with motherhood and had difficulty separating them out from one another. This is not an uncommon connection. Russo (1976) and Gillespie (2003) have written about the power of the construction of motherhood and femininity. Ideas around ‘being a woman’ were central to the mothers group discussions, with gender and gender expression difficult to separate. It was perhaps for this reason that the women in this group tended to express less agency in how they experienced their femininity.

The differences in what each group focused their discussion on highlights the contextual nature in understanding femininity and the influence communities of practice have on the types of discourses that emerge. The communities of practice also provided arenas for the women to engage in various subject positions, some of which stayed within those contexts, such as with the footy and roller derby women, while for others these subject positions carried over into
other parts of their lives, as with the circus, mothers and executive management groups. However, within these communities of practice, the norms that had been created were further segmented by individual expressions and understandings of gender. These will be discussed in the following sections.

**Structure, Contradiction and Relationality**

The ideal femininities discussed in Chapter 5 were seen by the women in the focus groups as all-encompassing superficial performances, with women duped or pressured into them by society. There was a sense that superficial women lacked agency and that structural influences had a significant impact on how the women understood themselves. The women did not want to view their own experiences through this lens as was evident in the executive management group’s resistance to acknowledge gender as impacting their workplace experiences. However, the stories the women began to share contradicted these claims. Unlike their perception of the generalised ideal feminine types of the Barbie and the Mother, the ability to pick and choose how and when they would express their gender allowed them to find their own ways of being a woman, creating a sense of agency. But, as will be discussed, there were times when this sense of agency became murky in particular contexts, and the restrictions inherent in a dimorphic gender order became apparent.

There were several aspects of the women’s lives that seemed to highlight the structural pressures and relationality of women’s gender expression including
motherhood, heterosexual relationships and the workplace. Within Australia, women are viewed as mothers and wives first and workers second (Baird & Cutcher 2005). Baird and Cutcher (2005) argue that this notion stems from policy initiatives early in the 20th century that laid out minimum wages for workers where women earned significantly less. This established women as dependant on their husbands and cemented their place in the home (Baird & Cutcher 2005). This model became the dominant view of family in Australia, shaping the roles of mothers and motherhood ideology still present in society today despite the increase of women’s participation in paid work (Baird & Cutcher 2005). Through this lens, motherhood is understood relationally with fatherhood, and wives with husbands (Baird & Cutcher 2005). The subject position of mother and wife were experienced in contradictory ways by the women in the focus groups; at times with a sense of pride, others a sense of resentment. But the traits of these subject positions bled into their roles as workers as well, further illuminating the expectations of gender expression in all aspects of the women’s lives.

“If you don’t have a child, you’re not really a woman”: Motherhood as Femininity

Motherhood or mothering was understood as an essential part of femininity for the women in all of the focus groups and appeared on many of the concept maps near the centre of female gender expressions. Being childless was as unfeminine as you could get: “If you choose not to have children, you are failing as a woman” (Mary - CG). Zoe (MG) expanded on this idea:
I put on the outside of my circle [gesturing towards her concept map - see Figure 21 below], the thing that I think people think is most unfeminine is choosing not to have children. If you can't have children, that's okay. But if you make an active choice not to have them, people think there is something wrong with you. I've met women who don't want to have kids, and my instant reaction is: unfeminine, whoa. I don't mean to be judgemental.

![Figure 21: Zoe - Mothers group](image)

In the map above, Zoe (MG) has placed ‘chooses not to have children’ outside of the boundaries of women’s gender expression, indicating that such an act deviates from any norms of femininity. Research has found that people often perceived voluntarily childless women as choosing their careers over child rearing and in doing so, trying to be like men (Hird & Abshoff 2000) and as such, suffering from a psychopathological disturbance (Reading & Amatea 1986). It is
not surprising then that while nurturing and caretaking were seen as qualities that anyone could have, it was emphasised as being vitally important only for women to embody. If men were nurturing, it was a 'bonus' but if women weren’t, they were not seen as ‘real’ women. Some explained that it was easier for women to be ‘naturally’ good at caretaking for infants and children as they had more contact both prior (during pregnancy) and after a baby was born. Zoe (MG) explained during the group’s discussion of these ideas that “pregnancy gives you a head start on the bonding, but gender doesn’t matter once they are born, it’s about who spend time with them [the child]”. This bonding was assumed to help bring out the nurturing part of women, and since it is mostly women who are the primary carers for children due to the need to breastfeed and physically recover from birth. The women in the mothers group agreed that it was because of this that they then become more experienced in caretaking.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Ortner (1972) argues that women’s gender roles are seen as closer to nature due to the production of milk for infants. This results in the female body being seen as ‘natural’ and thus establishes an apparent ‘natural’ bond to form between child and mother through the feeding role (Ortner 1972). The differences in the division of parental roles is based on biological assumptions and the relational construction of parenthood as a whole (Bradley 2007; Lindsey 2011; Hird & Abshoff 2000; Ortner 1972). Consequently, women are viewed as more suited to child rearing.

As with other issues throughout the focus groups, the structural influence of gender was denied as being the key factor in the women’s experiences initially.
However, as the women spoke for longer about the issues and more and more person stories were shared, a different and contradictory picture emerged – one that was laced with frustration at imposed gendered expectations of what were acceptable women’s gender expressions, with a particular focus on motherhood.

Complementary roles were felt to be reinforced by childcare. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Laura (MG) said that “When the husbands stay home with the kids and it’s called babysitting, but when we do it, it’s nothing, it’s normal.” As the discussions progressed, the sense of agency and equality was no longer present in their accounts of parenting. Research suggests there is still a significant lack of equality in Australia when it comes to parental duties (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2015; Craig 2007). Tess (MG) acknowledged this in the way that her and her partner had small but significant differences in how they parent and manage domestic duties:

I don’t feel like I am a better parent. But I feel like for me, it’s that traditional thing, doing what your mum did. Jerry will probably relax on a day he doesn’t have the kids, but I'll do the dishes and things like that. Men grew up not needing to do those things. We work the same amount of hours, so technically we could do half and half, but don’t, probably because of that. It’s so ingrained, so it became kind of natural.

Motherhood and feminine chores have become part of Tess’s (MG) life so much that she now perceives it as natural. The performativity involved in looking after a child and being in a heterosexual relationship has resulted in her gender identity becoming firmly established and accepting of such roles as normal. Goffman (1976) however doesn't view presentations of gender as natural. He
argues that through continual displays in our everyday interactions we come to think of them as natural, but they are in fact simply a product of inequality. Such gender displays reproduce a gender hierarchy and inequality that is essentially an illusion (Goffman 1976). When Tess’s (MG) partner has time to himself, he is able to spend that time doing what he chooses – he has agency. But when Tess (MG) has time off, although she purports to have agency, she finds herself taking part in expected and gendered duties, unconsciously and performatively reinforcing her gender identity through repetitive feminine acts such as cleaning or checking up on how everyone is going.

The other women in the mothers group also shared their experiences of their partners looking after the children. Zoe (MG) said, “When Ben stays home with the kids, it’s not like they are missing out on something. It’s just different care.” Laura (MG) agreed:

Yeah, when David is home it’s different too. He is more likely to focus on activities, if they get upset he will change the activity they’re doing. Whereas I am more likely to see if they need a cuddle, are they hungry, are they tired.

The mothers group women told me that their partners tended to engage more in play related activities rather than domestic labour. There was a general sense of agreement regarding this with Zoe (MG) adding:

Yeah, I think that mothers in general are more emotionally in tune. Fathers are more like, ‘let’s do things but if you start crying I’ll probably just try to distract you rather than try and figure out what’s wrong’.
Emotion work featured prominently in the women’s discussions. There has been significant research examining emotion work, which is a crucial but often disregarded aspect of unseen labour within the home (Frith & Kitzinger 1998; Hochschild 1983; Seery & Crowley 2000). Emotion work refers to the management of feelings, providing support and encouragement to other family members as well as building and maintaining relationships (Frith & Kitzinger 1998; Hochschild 1983). In a study exploring emotion work and division of household labour, Rebecca Erickson (2005) found that gender construction and ideology predicted the performance of emotion work, indicating a key difference and inequality in men’s and women’s construction of self and their roles. The notion of women as responsible for the emotional wellbeing of others stems from the view mentioned earlier of women as caretakers. As women are seen to be more suited to child rearing, they also then have a natural ability to take care of others more broadly.

In the footy group, the discussion of motherhood and its impact on femininity divided the two mothers present. Belinda (FG) said, “I feel less feminine now ‘cause I have less time to do my hair and stuff.” To which Lou (FG) responded, “I probably feel more ‘cause I have that title ‘mum’ and that’s just a really feminine title.” These were the only two mothers present in the group, but both have very different experiences of being a mum.

Zoe (MG) felt that there were different expectations placed on her being a parent that her partner didn’t experience:
If you’re at a pub, you’re having a meal, you’ve got a beer, you can just sense it. Not everyone, but some people are just shaming you. Whereas if you were there without a baby, it’s just like, oh she’s having a beer... My partner, he doesn’t [experience it]. It really bothers me.

Georgie (MG) said that she felt much the same, “I feel ashamed, I can feel that external ‘gaze’ on me.” Carol Gilligan (1993) argued that women become other-oriented due to taking on parental responsibility and caring roles. Through this process, women come to understand acting in their own interests as ‘wrong’.

Georgie’s (MG) comments reflect the pressure of these societal expectations. She also told us about several bands that had names such as ‘Mum drinks’ that, as she put it, “just sound awkward and wrong. It’s like a play on what’s, like, okay.” Cece (MG) said it was “contradictory”. The idea of a mother, who should be at home and focussed on others over herself, out enjoying a drink, somehow seemed almost shocking. This sentiment was also included in Lou’s (FG) concept map:

*Figure 22: Lou - Football Group*
As can be seen in Figure 22, Lou (FG) wrote ‘drinks beer’ towards the out edge of her map, suggesting she viewed this as an unfeminine activity. Drinking has long been viewed as a gendered consumption practice (Rolfe, Orford & Dalton 2009) and women’s drinking as particularly taboo and unfeminine (Plant 1997). Georgie (MG) related this type of experience to an article she had read recently about celebrities Kim Kardashian and Kanye West who had both gone on tour, but only Kim had been criticised as being a bad parent. I asked how the women felt this type of issue related to gender expression, Kim (MG) said, “I think that’s one of the biggest things you can do, not be a good mother”. By not ‘being there’ for your child, you were a bad mother, and thus unfeminine. Emotion work was distinctly feminine and crucial to how the women both evaluated themselves as mothers, and hence women, as well as a source for constant judgement. While fathers were allowed to take time out and be selfish, mothers were not. Young (2002) notes that unpaid caring and house work tends to be done by women and that this results in less time and energy to spend on themselves or engaging in other types of activities.

Furthermore, the ‘mother mandate’ suggests that mothers should be sensitive and aware of the needs of others, engage in caretaking activities and be mothering in all aspects of their lives (Gilligan 1993; Reger 2001; Russo 1976). Mothers are expected to be self-sacrificing and emotionally devoted to mothering (Arendell 2000), and always on hand to provide suitable stimulation and attention, and get pleasure from doing so (Hays 1996). These ideas suggest that motherhood is more a state of being rather than a particular skill set (Maher 2004).
Some argue, however, that the skills gained through maternal practices are important in delineating motherhood ideologies (Arendell 2000). Such parenthood ideology formations tend to be overtly hegemonic in construction, normalizing the gender divisions of mothers and fathers (DiQuinzio 1993). Although there have been significant changes for women over the past century, the patriarchal myth of motherhood as biologically inherent and care giving as natural persists (Abbey & O'Reilly cited in Austin & Carpenter 2008; Craig 2007; Oakley 2005; Ortner 1972). This biological narrative of motherhood suggests that nurturing and mothering are instinctive and that women are fulfilled by engaging in such activities (Austin & Carpenter 2008). Mothers are assumed to be selfless, always available, nurturing, emotional, and self-sacrificing (Brown, Lumley, Small & Asterbury 1994). Such narratives imply motherhood does and should entail these qualities and creates a culturally dominant way of thinking about women (Austin & Carpenter 2008). Myths such as these are commonplace and over time have assumed the status of powerful cultural narratives with the ability to restrict and influence the ways women make meaning of their own experiences, informing the cultural ideologies that evolve (Austin & Carpenter 2008).

This section opened with a discussion of the importance of being a mother in the women’s understandings of what it was to be feminine. This pressure not only influenced how the women understood themselves, but it was also directly linked to ideas of heterosexuality and the transition from girl to woman (Gilligan 1993). Karen (CG) articulated this: “You are treated like you haven’t really reached adulthood if you don’t have a child, you’re not really a woman”. However, having a child wasn’t enough, you also needed to do it ‘properly’ as Ruby (CG) explained,
“I have a friend who wants to have a child on her own, but that’s against what all of society view as what is feminine.” Karen (CG) responded to this story with frustration, “But if she had a husband and he fucked off, then that’s okay, she did it the right way but she is going to get labelled totally different because of that.” This idea was also noted on the concept map of one of the participants in the mothers group (see figure 23 below).

![Figure 23: Georgie - Mothers Group](image)

The heteronormative expectations are particularly pronounced when it comes to raising children. Karen (CG) added: “The point is to make babies and people think women can’t do that on their own”. The relationality of femininity is apparent in these discussions; women are understood in relation to men, they are complementary and opposite, creating a complete whole. To not engage in this role was to be unfeminine and underpinning this was the notion of
heterosexuality. The subject position of ‘mother’ imposed expectations on the women, whether they wanted it to or not.

“I’m not feminine - unless I’m dating someone”: Heterosexual Relationships, Dating, and Gender Expression

As with motherhood, relationships carried with them a set of subject positions that restricted participants’ sense of agency. This began with the process of attracting men and dating, and culminated in the roles of ‘wife’. As mentioned in Chapter 5, femininity was intertwined with notions of submissiveness and the ‘good wife’. When the women talked about their heterosexual relationships, femininity played a vital role in how they understood themselves. Women in all of the groups agreed that feminine is attractive to men and being ‘unfeminine’ makes dating harder. Many told me that they would play up their femininity to ‘get the guy’ and then once you are in a relationship “you think you don’t need to worry about it as much anymore, but then you realise you are falling into [feminine] roles” (Fiona - RD). Often this was described as something that just happened and not as a direct result of pressure from their boyfriend. The women had internalised what was expected of them as women – to be appealing to males. This was not an overt expression from a male partner, but rather a learned process ingrained through heteronormative expectations, reinforcing the relationality of gender expressions. As discussed in the literature, relationality suggests that the category of woman, and thus femininity, is constructed in relation to males and masculinity, and marked by difference (Frosh et al. 2002;
Woodward 1997), while heteronormativity refers to the expectations and constraints placed upon people through society to adhere to heterosexuality (Berlant & Warner 1998; Chambers 2007). Inherent within heteronormativity is also the notion of patriarchy and inequality where heterosexual men enjoy the most privilege.

Describing the dating process, Karen (CG) said, “It’s them that’s gotta lead the way, they’ve gotta feel more masculine”. Simon and Gagnon (1973) discuss the roles men and women play within sexual encounters using the analogy of ‘scripts’, but their analysis applies here as well. They suggest that sexuality is woven throughout our everyday lives and through sexual scripts we are able to assess who should be doing what. These scripts reinforce heteronormativity through laying out what the male and female parts are. Mary (CG) elaborated on Karen’s (CG) comment and the types of expectations she felt were placed upon her: “[When dating] there’s an expectation that you will make more of an effort to fit into society’s ideas of what femininity is, no matters what your views are.” This manifested in many different ways for the women, including dining etiquette:

I went on a date with a guy, and we went out for burgers. You know how messy burgers are, and so I am eating my burger with my hands, just like he was, and some lettuce, and I think a bit of pickle, got on my jeans. And he was just like, I’ll pretend I didn’t see that. And I thought, am I not a human? What, as a female, I am supposed to be able to eat the same burger as you but do a nicer, prettier more precise job of it? (Lily - CG)

Lily (CG) was clearly annoyed by this double standard, and needless to say there was no second date. This annoyance was also felt by Karen (CG) when going out
with men, “You have to use a knife and fork for things, show restraint. It’s crap.”

But for many women, this sense of ‘necessary’ femininity went beyond manners to include what they said and how they said it: “You can’t be as outspoken” (Karen - CG) and “you don’t want to be intimidating” (Zoe - MG). These ideas tie into the notions of dominant femininity described in Chapter 5 which suggests that to be feminine one should speak ‘gentler’ than men (Mills 2005; Sung 2012).

The performative femininity in the dating scenario was one that was very much about getting male approval:

   Even if I personally find that stuff [femininity] really distasteful and I don’t really give a fuck about it, I still feel pressure, more from myself more than anything, to try and be some kind of woman because if I don't I'm never going to be attractive to men. (Mary - CG)

In order to be attractive, one needed to try and liken herself to the Barbie ideal as much as possible: look good, be passive and soft, emphasise her femininity. Emma (RD) told us that she doesn't wear makeup in her everyday life, but when she gets ready for a date she often thinks to herself, “Maybe I should wear makeup...” This sense of ‘what I should do to seem feminine’ seemed strongest when women were dating. By wearing makeup and emphasising femininity, women are constructing themselves relationally to males – they are what men are not. These assumed complementary subject positions are reinforced through heteronormativity throughout society, creating a sense of restriction for women and the possibilities for expressing their gender.
Once a relationship became established, it only served to further reinforce femininity, both in relation to gender and parenting roles, housework and caring, and less about appeasing male sexual desires. These will now be discussed.

“I used to mow my lawn”: Relationships, Gender Roles, and the Home

While not all of the women were in relationships at the time of the focus groups, all but one had had been in a serious long term relationship. Relationships were a further site where structural pressures and influences became pronounced. The women’s stories also highlighted the relationality that exists in understanding women in relation to men and femininity to masculinity within heterosexual contexts.

When describing themselves in a relationship, many of the footy women expressed they became more feminine: “I’m way girlier at home when Steve is there” (Kylie - FG) and “I become needy” (Ez - FG). Being needy was seen as a distinctly feminine trait identified by the women and became exacerbated by being in a relationship. Jenna (FG) told me that, “If I’m at footy and Brad comes to watch then I like to show that I can tackle and do all the boy-y stuff, but if I am at home, I’m more of a girly-girl.” The presence of a heterosexual relationship altered Jenna’s (FG) gender expression illustrating the power of heteronormativity, sexual scripts and relationality. The sense of agency expressed by the women in regards to their ability to perform various subject positions, such as the feminine or unfeminine, was undermined in their relationships and
became more about the performativity of gender identity and the relationality of feminine to masculine.

The women spoke about their relationships at great length. Many of the women, particularly in the FG group, said that things were different now and there were more choices for women in society than for past generations. They implied that there was more gender equality and that women had agency in how they interacted within the home. Such comments align with postfeminist discourses around ‘choice’ (Budgeon 2014; McRobbie 2007). However, moments after Kylie (FG) said that “society has changed” and Joey (FG) had told me “making decisions isn’t a feminine or masculine thing”, the women unconsciously contradicted themselves. Kylie (FG) explained, “At home I’m like, ‘cuddle me!’, but the second we are in a group, I’m the boss.” Kylie (FG) was illustrating how she was more “feminine at home, but masculine when...with people”. And Joey (FG): “We like to make the boys think we are letting them make the decisions, but really we are the ones doing it.” This need to have men feel like they were in control indicated the importance of decision making for masculinity but they felt that, in fact, it was them that had much of the power within the relationship when in social settings. And yet, at home, when engaging in more intimate settings, the gender relations mimicked those within broader society where men were expected to be the ones in control and women were dependent upon them. These discussions support arguments such as Young’s (2002) that despite changes occurring in many societies, the gendered nature inherent in the division of labour has altered little.
Another contradiction the women began to expose was in relation to gender roles within the home. The following exchange demonstrates the expectations that still remain in heterosexual relationships:

Kylie (FG): Steve is assumed to take over my father’s role, where I am assumed to take over his mother’s role. She does everything around the house. No way I want to do that!

Lou (FG): When we moved in together, it was just assumed that I would do the inside stuff and he would do the outside stuff. And I ended up doing it.

Ez (FG): Yeah, that’s actually probably the same for me.

Despite many of the suggestions that ‘society has changed’, the stories these women shared suggested that for many, they have, in fact, not. This is not surprising given the current research on gender roles in the home (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2015). Duties around the home were segregated, where food preparation and cleaning was the woman’s domain, while outdoorsy and mechanical stuff was the man’s. Lou (FG) told us that, “Charlie doesn’t cook because I like my food warm,” implying that he was not an adequate cook. Kylie (FG) had a different experience with her in-laws, “The first time I met his mum and dad, I thought they were odd. Steve’s dad cooked every night.” Lou (FG) pointed out that this was probably strange as it was a “role reversal”. Most of the women within the group cooked and cleaned more than their male partners, consistent with the research on the gendered division of labour (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2015; Craig 2007). However, there were several women in each of the various groups whose partners cooked and helped around the house. It was interesting to note that each time a woman would share this type of anecdote, the other women expressed surprise and friendly jealousy with
comments. Joey (FG) shared that when she was unwell, her partner would often tell her to sit down, that he could do the housework. She viewed this as him being protective of her. This was reinforced through Ez’s (FG) comment, “Just you wait, that’s what happens when you are pregnant too. That’s why I’m gonna have six more kids!” When pregnant, the sense of protection increased and women were seen to be even more frail and vulnerable. But such caring did not seem to stem from a sense of equality, but rather it was seen as protective, reinforcing notions of women as needing to be taken care of by their male partners (Young 2003).

Belinda (FG) told us about her relationship, “We do everything shared. Daren will cook dinner and give Lucy a bath.” This was followed by: “I want to marry Darren!” (Jenna - FG) or “No way. That’s not fair!” (Ez - FG). However, despite Darren being a helpful partner to Belinda (FG), there was a sense of loss that occurred in taking on this shared partnership as while some of the roles became more blurred on gender lines, others became more pronounced.

Belinda (FG): Before I met Darren, I used to check the oil on my car, I used to fill up the petrol, I used to wash it–

Lou (FG): I used to mow my lawn–

Belinda (FG): Yeah, I used to mow my lawn too!

Lou (FG): Shit what happened?

Here, Belinda (FG) and Lou (FG) acknowledged the shifts that had taken place within themselves. The transition away from ‘masculine’ chores represented a shift within themselves. Despite the women in this group telling me that gender expressions were not part of their identity but rather a series of fluid subject
positions they could opt in and out of, comments like this suggests that engaging in more masculine and feminine activities did influence the way in which they viewed themselves. It was also interesting to note how unconscious this process was.

Speaking about her experiences in relationships, Emma (RD) said, "I feel like I become more feminine, I take on a complimentary role without realising it, suddenly look at myself and realise that I am doing the vacuuming, he is doing the rubbish." This wasn’t an uncommon occurrence with many women in the other groups also expressing similar experiences where they felt more comfortable being the ones to take on these responsibilities around the house. Lou (FG) from the football group said, “I wouldn't let my husband near the washing machine, no way, he would just break it. He's such a bloke, he doesn’t even know the difference between lights and darks.” Louise (RD) was also conscious of the gendered nature of chores for herself,

I put some info on a dating site recently and it said, ‘I want a yin to my yang’ and then basically it says, ‘I want a guy to do the outside jobs while I do the inside jobs’. I want to do that stuff, I want to do the cleaning, cooking, washing. I guess that’s the feminine side of me coming out.

This feminine side not only encompassed the division of housework, but also is understood as the ‘opposite’ of the masculine. And while at times this relationality was embraced, the impact of such constructions was often felt negatively:
My husband just doesn’t think about it. You know, it’ll be his mother’s birthday and I’ll ask him, ‘You get a card?’ And he’ll say, ‘Oh, shit, nah.’ So, of course, I have to get one. (Dorothy - EM)

As discussed earlier, the maintaining of relationships in families is a form of emotion work that is predominantly undertaken by women (Frith & Kitzinger 1998; Hochschild 1983). Dorothy (EM) seemed annoyed at having to purchase a card, but even the act of asking about it is a form of emotional labour. There were many other similar stories to this, where women took on the responsibility to maintain connections with extended family, but also to be there for the immediate family members when they needed emotional support.

These clearly gendered roles were met with mixed reactions, at times presented positively, even with amusement, but at other times they were expressed as a source of sadness, resentment and frustration.

"Why am I supposed to care?: Gender in the Workplace"

Almost all of the women were engaged in paid work. Their occupations varied in each group; there were school teachers, social workers, a truck driver, a nurse, and of course managers. It was in the stories of being at work that the contradictions between agency and structure began to emerge most explicitly. From accounts of being asked to get cups of tea and colleagues not swearing in front of them, to the complexity of emotion work and the balance in expressing their own emotions, the experiences illustrated the influence of already
established subject position of the female worker. Young (2002) suggests that this is due to domestic divisions of labour underpinning the way in which paid work is structured.

As with other aspects of their lives, emotion work came up in the discussions regarding women’s experiences of paid work. For some it was something placed upon them, others felt was an undervalued part of their roles, and in some cases seen as a weakness.

As a manager, I get instantly more team members coming to me with personal issues rather than going to my male equivalent. And often time I get, ‘I found it easier to communicate with you’ – not because I was more feminine or any of that, it’s the perception of being able to communicate to a woman and maybe that I will be more empathetic. (Zoe - MG)

This type of emotion work seemed to be undertaken by women across various professions and was understood as part of being feminine. Many of the women who spoke about their experiences of undertaking social work felt that it was not something they choose to do; it was subtly imposed upon them in such a way that they did not always notice it was occurring.

However, when empathy was applied to clients as opposed to colleagues, it was a different story. Ruby (CG), who was employed as a social worker previously, as with many of the other women saw empathy as an important part of women’s work but felt others saw it more as a weakness, “...it’s not about empathy, it’s just about getting the work done. If we are empathetic, we aren’t seen as professional.” Ruby’s (CG) perception was that if her colleagues viewed her as
empathetic, she wouldn’t be able to also be seen as rational in her decisions. Rationality is often associated with masculinity (Ross-Smith & Kornberger 2004) and is valued in the workplace (Demaiter & Adams 2009). Expressing emotions undermines appearances of rationality and yet, the women in my focus groups often found that males would expect a level of empathy from them. Speaking of her time as a manager, Tracy (EM) said:

I’m positive I get more personal stories told to me, about their wife’s medical conditions and stuff, because they didn’t read it on my face where it said ‘I don’t really care’, but I listen, ‘cause I am a good manager. And they say, well, I can’t tell the blokes about this. But they do honestly think that you want to know all the little details of their wife’s most recent surgery. Why am I supposed to care? ‘Cause to a male manager they would’ve just said, ‘Hey mate, missus is sick’.

It was assumed that Tracy (EM) would be more interested and approachable in matters of a personal nature because of the assumptions attached to her being a woman. But the stories of negative reactions to expressing emotions in a work environment were common in our discussions. Mary (CG), from the circus group shared her experiences in the workplace: “Women tend to get shut down really quickly when they are [emotional], it becomes about you as a worker and not the issue. That doesn’t happen to men.” Karen (CG) agreed, sharing her experiences of being told she was too emotionally involved if she showed any type of concerns for her clients. If her male peers discussed similar issues in what she called, “more direct means”, they were taken seriously and acted upon. This aligns with research that suggest when women show strong emotions such as anger, they are
often taken less seriously while men gain more influence (Salerno & Peter-Hagene 2015).

In order to combat the types of restrictions and expectations the women encountered in the workplace, the women found ways of combining aspects of femininity and masculinity. In a lengthy discussion regarding “stupid” things male colleagues had said to them, or about them, at work Caroline (EM) told us she had overheard some men saying that they were upset that they couldn’t swear, as “a woman would be present”. She was not the only one who had experienced this type of behaviour. Suzanne (EM) responded with, “Well, it doesn’t stop us!”

As was discussed in Chapter 6, the importance of a firm handshake was seen by the women to be related to power more so than gender, however Alison (EM) pointed out that for women to have weak handshakes is expected. Having a firm handshake was for these women vital in their attempts to create a subject position for themselves within the workplace that was taken seriously. Dorothy (EM) also told us that she deliberately walked with “swagger” and sat in in such a way as “to take up space”. She did this consciously to “claim” her space. The awareness of these actions is in stark contrast to the descriptions given by the women unconsciously cross their legs or sit ‘small’ in Chapter 6. Caroline (EM) agreed with these experiences and said it was, “a deliberate attempt to reclaim power in a power struggle that men were not even aware of”. But despite these conscious choices around clothing, gait, and emotional control, the existence of external expectations hampered their attempts to do so. This was most evident in how their demeanour was read by others.
The term ‘bitch’ was discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to women who were competitive with each other, but it also came up in relation to women’s working experiences on a number of occasions as noted earlier in this chapter. Dorothy (EM) shared a story about her first role as a manager. After several weeks in the new role, a male employee came to see her in her office, “He told me that I was actually quite nice. He said, ‘I thought you’d be more of a bitch’. He said it as a compliment.” The notion of ‘being nice’ was seen by the women as expected of them but not their male counterparts. However, when women exhibit characteristics such as assertiveness they challenge and contaminate the relationship between masculinity and femininity and create pariah femininities (Schippers 2007). It does not matter that by being assertive women are simply ‘doing’ what men often do, as the “social institution of gender insists only that what they do is perceived as different” (Lorber 1994, p. 26, italics in original). The women are then labelled in ways that create stigma, such as being a bitch, so as to socially punish women and maintain some semblance of control within the gender order.

Work life was inevitably gendered for the women; their gender expression always being read through a feminine lens. The ideals of motherhood and the caring role bled into the workplace, underpinned by notions of heterosexuality – they felt pressure to be ‘Barbie’s Mum’, the ideal woman, attentive and attractive and ultimately feminine.
Conclusion: Limited Agency

As noted at the start of this chapter, femininity is not a “unified” experience but rather a contradictory array of various subject positions that women engage with (Leahy 1994, p. 49). While initially positioned as not problematic, the women soon found themselves sharing stories laced with frustration and anger at the inherent restrictions of femininity. This femininity was constructed relationally to masculinity, and they found that when they embodied masculine traits, they were unable to escape the binary gender structures, always being viewed as some form of feminine. Despite this, the women found ways of reconciling these experiences, finding spaces where they could engage in gender manoeuvring and create their own forms of gender expressions and femininities. And while the reach of these spaces was limited, when in these locations, the women experienced greater freedom in how they expressed their gender, with few social repercussions. It was here that the women seemed to really express their agency. These freedoms did not, however, translate over into other parts of their lives. The expectations of the women at work, at home, in other social environments or everyday interactions, were ever present. The power of hegemonic femininity restricted the creation of any true alternative femininities, leaving the women in a constant negotiation between resisting and adhering to the dominant tropes of the Barbie and the Mother. The relationality between femininity and masculinity, and hegemonic and non-dominant femininities coupled with a lack of linguistic alternatives leaves little room for women to challenge the gender order.
Chapter 8

Resistance

In the introduction, I shared my personal experiences of playing with gender as a young woman. While these experiences may have been a catalyst for this research, the findings have extended well beyond my initial curiosities. Both Nancy Finley (2010), Mimi Schippers (2007) and others (Hockey, Meah & Robinson 2007; Robinson 2015) have called for more research into multiple femininities in order to better understand how the gender order is maintained. At present, there is still little literature that has examined femininities, and even less that has had a focus on heterosexual gender expressions. As more and more non-dominant forms of femininity are represented in greater numbers in the media and become visible in our everyday lives, the need for a comprehensive framework for making sense of these increases. Within the global gender order, femininity remains subordinate to masculinity. Addressing this asymmetry requires an interrogation of the ways in which gender expressions are constructed and maintained. This thesis provides insight into a piece of that puzzle.

Through the literature review in Chapter 2, key debates around the construction of sex, gender and sexuality were discussed. Drawing on the work of Butler (1990) and others, gender is presented as not a result of one’s sex category, but instead something that comes into being through repetitive everyday gendered acts. Central to this is also the understanding that heterosexuality influences how
we come to understand both sex and gender. These discussions were further explored through closer examination of women's gender expressions in Chapter 3. In particular, two key theoretical frameworks, that of Connell's (1987) emphasized femininities and Schippers (2007) hegemonic femininity, are outlined. I argued that hegemonic femininity enables a more useful way through which to understand and analyse women’s gender expressions. While there have been a number of studies with relation to women's gender expressions and femininity, there has been a lack of a cohesive framework in these works. Furthermore, there has been very little work examining heterosexuality specifically, or within an Australian context. In response to this, this research was interested in not only understanding heterosexual hegemonic femininities, but also those that deviate from what is viewed as intelligibly feminine within an Australian context.

This project was essentially a study on unintelligible gender. My goal was to shed some light onto the experiences of women who embody gender expressions that are not legibly feminine. In order to do this, I sought to answer the following questions: How is femininity understood by heterosexual cis women? What do dominant and non-dominant forms of gender expressions for heterosexual cis women look like and what differentiates the various forms from one another? What are the experiences of heterosexual cis women who embody non-dominant gender expressions and femininities? In answering these questions, I have argued that femininity manifests through three key dimensions, that of the physical (body), malleable (appearance), and the restrictive (demeanour). Through these dimensions, women's gender expressions become positioned within a hierarchy
where hegemonic femininities receive the most status and power. These intelligible gender expressions are what women compare themselves against. However, while women do embody less intelligible femininities, our everyday language is not adequate in fully capturing these expressions of gender. This does not mean that women do not understand these experiences or their consequences, in fact, the women in this study were acutely aware of these issues.

Drawing on the discussions and concept maps created by my participants, I proposed a framework for conceptualising multiple femininities. Within this hierarchy, violations of the three dimensions of femininity results in a lowering of status and an increase of stigma. The overarching structural power of heteronormativity placed significant pressures on the women to adhere to the expected gender norms. However, within this limiting hierarchy, women were able to find ways through gender manoeuvring to find sources of agency. While the binary was inescapable, women still found ways to play with gender.

In Chapter 5: Hegemonic Femininities, the ways in which the women made sense of femininity were discussed. Ideas around what femininity constituted were similar across all of the focus groups and through discussions, three main dimensions of femininity emerged: the physical (body), malleable (appearance), and restrictive (demeanour). These grouping were made based on the thematic analysis of the participants’ discussions. Within each dimension there are aspects that enable or facilitate the achievement of ideal femininity. The physical dimension encapsulated not just the shape of a woman’s body, but also the way in which she held and moved it. The analysis of the body was not undertaken as a
reification of the two-sex model, but rather to understand the social practices we engage in that create the illusion of gendered bodily differences. These included being delicate and deliberate in movements, taking up as little space as possible, and having a physique that is shapely and soft. Through these characteristics, one’s gender became intelligible. The repetition of these practices, and the maintenance of the body in these ways, enable the body to be understood as female. This form of intelligible women is constructed relationally as what a man’s body is not.

There were aspects of femininity that were seen to be more malleable than the physical characteristics. These focussed on the way in which women adorned themselves, including clothing, shoes, make up and accessories. By ‘adding’ the right components, a body could move towards a more feminine way of being. The third aspect of dominant femininity, is that of the restrictive, encompassing behaviour and demeanour. When women show interest in certain activities, laugh too loud, or speak in certain ways, their femininity is called into question. These experiences were presented as restrictive in that they were focussed on ideas around what women ‘shouldn’t do’. Hegemonic femininity requires all three dimensions of femininity to be adhered to. When this occurs, a woman’s gender expressions are made legible and she is understood as feminine. This manifests into two main tropes, the Barbie, and the Mother, both of which hold hegemonic status. While both of these ideals were constructed as relational to masculinity, they also differed slightly from one another with the Barbie primarily being appearance oriented, and the Mother, other-oriented. However, the women in my
research did not generally view these forms of femininity positively and their own experiences differed greatly from these ideal types.

In Chapter 6: Non-Dominant Gender Expressions and Pariah Femininities, discussions of non-dominant gender expressions revealed a complex array of experiences that the women did not always have language to adequately capture, particularly with relation to the expression of traditionally ‘masculine’ characteristics. ‘Androgyny’ was seen as fashion statement, ‘masculinity’ was read differently when performed by women’s bodies, ‘tomboy’ didn’t apply after puberty, and ‘butch’ was too intertwined with queer sexuality to apply to heterosexual women. Due to a lack of linguistic alternatives, transgressions of any of the three dimensions of femininity were best understood as ‘unfeminine’. However, within the realm of the unfeminine, there remained variation. Further research into these variations, including the intersectionality between location (rural and urban), class, and ethnicity, will enable a more thorough understanding of the ways in which unfemininity manifests.

A hierarchy of femininities was proposed where hegemonic femininities were seen to have the most power and status, while those forms of women’s gender expression that were less intelligible were situated in various subordinate positions. Women who were too self-interested, such as the diva, were seen as a soft form of pariah femininity for not adhering to the expected norm of femininity of being self-sacrificing. While they were seen negatively, because of the adherence to the majority of the aspects of femininity they still displayed legible femininity and as such, the social penalty was only minor. Feminists, athletes and
women with multiple sexual partners were also pariah femininities, however the stigma attached was much greater. These women were seen to be upsetting the balance of more than one dimension of femininity and their gender expressions less comprehensible. The most heavily sanctioned groups of women included those who were overly muscular, engaged in aggressive sports, or not interested in appealing to male desires. The violations for women in this category took place on multiple dimensions of femininity and their gender was the least intelligible.

Discussions in Chapter 7: Contingent and Relational Gender Expressions explored the contradictory and contextual nature of gender expressions. Despite the limitations of everyday language for the women to label their non-dominant gender expressions, participants were able to talk about their experiences in sophisticated and insightful ways. On an individual level, the women found ways of creating their own forms of femininity, where the core values were shifted. By engaging in gender manoeuvring in their communities of practice, women were also able to transform their pariah femininities into alternative femininities, eliminating the stigma that would normally be attached to particular behaviours. However, this was often limited, either in that only intergender relations within a very small location were challenged, or in other cases, only the intragender relations. The agency experienced in these situations did not translate over into other parts of their lives. The second half of Chapter 7 described the ways in which structural influences impacted their lives. The areas where this was most evident were in relation to heterosexual relations, from dating and relationships to cohabitation and child rearing. The power of the heterosexual matrix was felt throughout these experiences and the expectations
placed upon the women to conform to more hegemonic forms of femininity were pronounced. The power of binary gender expressions created pressure that was inescapable.

In line with Butler (1990) and Schippers (2007), I argue that those who have intelligible genders have more power than those whose who do not. Having a framework from which to conceptualise and research women’s gender expressions is crucial for mounting a challenge to the gender order. Without a clear understanding of how the subordination of women is maintained, both by men and other women, successful resistance is unlikely. This thesis has contributed to the understanding of these issues by providing an account of the lived experiences of heterosexual cis femininity and non-dominant gender expressions for Australian women. Through this, an outline for theorising the construction of femininity was discussed and a framework was presented for conceptualising how women become subordinated within the femininities hierarchy.

Women’s gender expressions are understood relationally. This occurs with respect to intergender relations, where femininity is understood as what masculinity is not. Relationality can also be seen within femininities, where unfemininity is understood oppositionally to femininity. The power of the binary was all encompassing. The more heterosexualised a woman’s life became, the more power heterosexual norms had on their gender expressions. This supports Butler (1990), Hockey et al.’s (2007) and VanEvery’s (1996) contentions that gender operates through the institution of heterosexuality.
While my research only speaks to some experiences for Australian women, the findings provide insight into the ways in which femininity is constructed and how particular forms become privileged over others. Future research exploring other sites of gender manoeuvring will help to see what other ways women are resisting hegemonic gender relations and provide insight into how multiple femininities interact and become privileged. Additionally, further exploration of the hierarchies of women’s gender expressions in various contexts, both within and outside of Australia, would provide for more detailed understandings of the variations and similarities that underpin and challenge the gender order.

In the closing paragraphs of Mimi Schippers (2002, p. 189) book, Rockin’ Outside of the Box, she asks the reader:

What are the [expectations and requirements] for femininity? How do those expectations get produced and sustained? And most importantly, how can you fuck with them?

My research has helped to answer the first two questions, and as for the third - her recommendation is to go out and seek spaces to manoeuvre. While this alone will not dismantle the social inequality between men and women, it is one small step towards it. So, go out and cut your hair short, laugh too loudly, get blood on your jumper, and mow your lawn again.
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Appendix A

Consent Information Statement

Swinburne University of Technology

Project Title: “You can play with the ball, but don’t get dirty”: A hierarchy of heterosexual female gender expressions

Principal Investigator(s): Kythera Watson-Bonnice and Dr. Paula Geldens

My name is Kythera Watson-Bonnice and I am a PhD student at the Swinburne University of Technology. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting. This research is supervised by Dr Paula Geldens.

This study is about different forms of gender expression. I am interested in exploring how young women understand the various ways women can express their gender and/or femininity, from more socially accepted forms to those that may be seen by some as less traditional and even more masculine. Participants need to self identify as heterosexual and female. If you choose to participate, you would be part of a focus group that would explore a number of themes, including what it means to be female and express your gender, what dominant or traditional gender expressions look like, and how people feel about women who do not embody these types of gender expressions. Notions of femininity and masculinity will also be discussed. Participating in the research will provide you with the chance to discuss your thoughts and feelings about what femininity means to you.

The focus group will have approximately 6-8 participants who participate in Skateboarding. It will last approximately between 60 to 90 minutes and will be conducted in at a venue in a central public location. If you agree to participate in this study, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by myself for analysis. You may be contacted after the initial interview to clarify or follow up where necessary. It is important that you know that your responses will be treated as confidential, which means that in all publications you will not be identifiable (a pseudonym will be used in place of your name and any identifying material will not be included). All data collected for this study will be retained by myself and Dr Paula Geldens for the requisite period of 5 years before being destroyed.
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to refuse to take part, or to withdraw your participation at any stage during the interview. Before proceeding with the interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form to ensure that you have been advised of your rights as a voluntary participant. If there are any particular questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, you will not be required to answer them. We do not feel that there are any risks associated with your participation in this study, in fact, we believe that this might be a valuable opportunity for you to reflect upon your understandings of gender expression for women.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at telephone number below:
Kythera Watson-Bonnice (student researcher): 0466 393 039 or kwatsonbonnice@swin.edu.au
or Dr Paula Geldens (supervisor): 9214 4677.

Please retain this sheet for your information.

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122.
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Swinburne University of Technology

Project Title: “You can play with the ball, but don’t get dirty”: A hierarchy of heterosexual female gender expressions

Principal Investigator(s): Kythera Watson-Bonnice and Paula Geldens

1. I consent to participate in the project named above. I have been provided a copy of the project information statement and this consent form and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. Please circle your response to the following:
   - I agree to be interviewed by the researcher
     YES ☐ NO ☐
   - I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic devices (including audio and video)
     YES ☐ NO ☐
   - I agree to make myself available for further information regarding the interview if required
     YES ☐ NO ☐

3. I acknowledge that:
   (a) my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;
   (b) the project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;
   (c) my anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in publications or otherwise.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant: .................................................................

Signature & Date: .................................................................

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Appendix C
Demographic Questionnaire
Swinburne University of Technology

Project Title: “You can play with the ball, but don’t get dirty”: A hierarchy of heterosexual female gender expressions

Principal Investigator(s): Kythera Watson-Bonnice and Dr. Paula Geldens

Name:

Preferred Pseudonym:

Age:

Race/Ethnicity:

Do you have any children? If yes, please list their ages:

Relationship Status:

Current Town/Suburb:

Occupation:

Education (please check box):

- Did not complete Year 12
- Completed Year 12
- Diploma or Certificate
- Completed Undergraduate Degree
- Completed Postgraduate Degree
- Other:
The above map was presented to the participants at the start of the focus groups. They individually labelled and situate various forms of women and gender expressions on the map, with those located towards the centre representing terms or expressions that they associated the most with dominant female gender expressions.
Appendix E:

Interview Schedule

Focus Group

Name Tags Issued

Welcome and paperwork

Concept Maps:

I would now like to ask you all to write down on the blank maps provided different words, phrases or thoughts about different types of female gender expression. Please write those that you consider to be the most dominant forms towards the centre, and those that are less dominant towards the outside, or on the outside of the circles.

Questions:

1. What do you think it means for a female to be ‘feminine’?
   
   
   1.2. What kinds of things do they do? (i.e. activities)

2. Are there different types of ‘feminine’ women?

   2.1. If so, what are they?

   2.2. How do they differ from one another?

   2.3. How do you feel about women who are ‘feminine’?
3. Do women have to be ‘feminine’, or can they be something else?
   3.1. If something else, how would you describe that?
   3.2. Can women be ‘masculine’?
   3.3. If so, is that still a form ‘femininity’? (i.e. butch, tomboy)
   3.4. What role does sexuality play in these understandings?
4. What makes a female seem ‘unfeminine’?
   4.2. What kinds of things do they do? (i.e. activities)
5. Are there different types of ‘unfeminine’ women?
   5.1. If so, what are they?
   5.2. How do they differ from one another?
   5.3. How do you feel about women who are ‘unfeminine’?
6. What is the difference between ‘feminine’ and ‘unfeminine’ women?
7. Where do you think notions of acceptable and unacceptable types of gender expression come from?
8. Is there anything else anyone would like to say before we finish?

Thank participants
### Appendix F:

**Participant Demographics**

#### Executive Management Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
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## Participant Demographics

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<td>Cairntea</td>
<td>Mum/retail</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Caroline Springs</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Dr Geldens,

SUHREC Project 2011/233 The In-Between Spaces: Exploration of Non-Traditional Forms of Femininities
Proposed Duration From: 12/09/2011
Proposed Duration To: 12/09/2013

Ethical review of the above project protocol was undertaken on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) by a SUHREC Subcommittee (SHESC1) at a meeting held 23 September 2011, the outcome of which as follows.

The project has been approved subject to the following addressed to the Chair (or delegate’s) satisfaction:

1. A8:
   (i) Please respond with regard to Chief Investigator,
   (ii) Please clarify if Student Researcher has qualitative research training;

2. B(d): Researcher needs to address the subsidiary question under this criteria regarding confidentiality;
3. Section E: need to tick check box at top of page to indicate that this section is not relevant to study;

4. Appendix B, Consent Information Statement 1:
   (i) Please revise Researcher Titles to identify specific roles, for instance, “Chief Investigator, Dr Paula Geldens, Student Investigator, Ms Kythera Watson-Bonnice”,
   (ii) Please proofread document – see for example, second paragraph, first sentence,
   (iii) Please revise last sentence in second paragraph as follows: after “be retained” add “in a secure location”;

5. Appendix C, Recruitment Poster:
   (i) Please revise Researcher Titles as in 4(i) above,
   (ii) Please delete Complaints Clause – not required here;

6. Appendix D, Consent Information Statement 2: Please revise Researcher Titles as in 4(i) above;
7. Appendix E, Informed Consent Form: 3(c): replace “anonymity” with
“confidentiality” - anonymity cannot be guaranteed;

To enable further ethical review/finalise clearance, please would you respond to the above items point by point (by direct email reply if preferred).

Re your responses:

- please DO NOT submit a full revised ethics clearance application unless specifically required
- queried, missing, additional or revised text from the ethics application can be incorporated into your responses (within the body of the email if appropriate and to save disk space)
- attach proposed or revised consent/publicity/other instruments in light of the above (if available, converting these documents to pdf before submission will disk space)

If accepted by the SUHREC or Subcommittee delegate(s), your responses/attachments will be added to previous documentation submitted for review, superseding or supplementing the existing material/protocol on record. Please also note that human research activity (including active participant recruitment) cannot commence before proper ethics clearance is given in writing.

Please contact me if you have any queries about the ethical review process undertaken. The SUHREC project number should be quoted in communication.

Yours sincerely

Kaye Goldenberg
Administrative Officer (Research Ethics)
Swinburne University of Technology
Dear Paula and Kythera

SUHREC Project 2011/233 The In-Between Spaces: Exploration of Femininities, Masculine and Gender Expression in Female-Bodied Heterosexual Women (formerly “The In-Between Spaces: Exploration of Non-Traditional Forms of Femininities”) Dr Paula Geldens, Ms Kythera Watson-Bonnice; FLSS Approved Duration Extended to 30/03/2014 [Modification July 2013]

I refer to your progress report and email of 2 July 2013 in which you requested reactivation and extension to your project. The documentation, including focus group questions, was reviewed by the SHESC1 delegate. There being no other changes to the research protocol approved to date, the project may continue in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions previously communicated and reprinted below.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the SUHREC project number. Copies of clearance emails should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

As before, best wishes for the project.

Kind regards,

Sally Fried
Secretary, SHESC1
Swinburne University of Technology
Dear Kythera

Subject: Change of thesis title

I am writing to advise you that your application to change the title of your thesis was approved in accordance with the provision of the Research Training Statement of Practice.

The approved title is, as requested: "You can play with the ball, but don't get dirty": A hierarchy of heterosexual female gender expressions.

Yours sincerely
Graduate Studies

Swinburne Research
Swinburne University of Technology