Thanks very much, Michael (Kirby)—
I am honoured that you were able to make time to launch my book today and that (the Dean, Faculty Life and Social Science) Professor Russell Crawford arranged such a splendid event.

My book is the result of four years’ labour. I first conceived the idea just after my first book was published, not because I am masochistic or a work-aholic but because once writing gets in your blood, which it did for me when I wrote my PhD thesis and then my first book, it becomes addictive, almost compulsive, as I am sure journalists in the room will attest.

So, in late 2008, I first began sketching a project to interview an international sample of gay men from Australia, England, and the USA. When I received the publishers’ report in 2009, their reviewer said she thought it was a good idea but that it was a little too ‘white bread’ (my words). My proposal was to examine the effect of age and ageing on the lives of middle-class white men in three English-speaking advanced economies. I wondered then if she was concerned my findings would be predictable, likely to reinforce a view that gay is largely middle-class, white, and western.

Excited by the prospect of a book contract, I considered her comments in a positive light and wrote back to the publisher to say I would reduce the number of cities I planned to visit in the USA and England and instead recruit interviewees in Hong Kong and Mumbai.

As I explain in the book, I chose these two cities because I am monolingual and was fairly sure I could rely on finding English-speakers in both cities.

Despite my well laid plans, my monolingual-ism got in the way of my first research trip to Hong Kong.

Through three, perhaps four degrees of separation, I was able to contact a British-educated Chinese academic working at one of the Hong Kong universities and asked him if he would like to meet for a meal or if he could help me when I got to Hong Kong.
Not fully aware that he was interviewing gay men for a project similar to mine, I did not anticipate the professional insult he inferred from my simple request for help. Very curt and very much to the point, he replied that without an extremely good working knowledge of Cantonese my research project was doomed to failure and I should stay at home in Australia!!

He did have a point and explained that without Cantonese I would not be able to interview working-class Asian men in Hong Kong because they do not speak English. Again, as I explain in the book, he was right. My first research trip to Hong Kong was barely successful: I left with only three interviews on my digital recorder, all of which were with non-Asian expatriates, which was not what I had gone to Hong Kong hoping for.

As sometimes happens, a solution came about in a casual conversation with friends in Melbourne. I could have been extremely pragmatic and settled on the three interviews with expatriates, using them as evidence of Hong Kong’s continuing colonial status but that irked me because my original plan had been to recruit non-Europeans in Hong Kong and Mumbai. I had been able to do so in Mumbai and the point of interviewing in Hong Kong was to include Asian voices in an area of study where European voices were more than well represented.

I was determined therefore not to waste the work I had already put into Hong Kong or to disregard the germ of the original idea—to avoid the ‘white bread’ sample. When discussing this with friends, one of them suggested I get in touch with a friend of a friend from New Zealand who was now living in London and who could put me in touch with another friend’s friend who was working in Hong Kong.

Making use of four, five degrees of separation, I was able to get in touch with a social group in Hong Kong. The moment I did so, the doors in that conservative, old-fashioned port city began to open to me and the number of Hong Kong interviewees grew so that in the end it provided the third largest group of interviewees after Melbourne and Auckland.

Okay. I have almost used up all my time and am now only getting to the serious end of my speech.

So what’s in this book, you ask?

It has seven chapters and looks at

- Long-term relationships arguing their nature is mostly companionate
• Fatherhood, arguing that most men I interviewed became fathers as a result of heterosexual relationships before they came out as gay men

• Marriage and cohabitation showing that gay men are not universally in favour of gay marriage

I would like to say something about two other chapters, which I enjoyed writing and why—

The first was the one on HIV-AIDS because in it I compared the effect the disease had on the baby boomer generation who lived through it and lost so many friends to it and a second generation, men in their 20s and 30s in the early 2000s who had not seen the deaths or lived through the sadness and grim times but who seemed not to be taking notice of safe sex messages because infection rates were rising.

This was enjoyable? In a sense it was because by analysing the men’s stories of the effect of the disease on their identity as gay men I was able to speak up about what had happened and what was happening to same-sex attracted men when in the late 1980s and 1990s I had too terrified by fear to say or do anything except bunker down and hope it would pass.

The second was the chapter on single men, the idea for which arose from comments some friends made on reading my first book, which was I had overlooked the single man, the life single gay men shape for themselves.

I hesitated to look into the topic because of the stigma many of the men I interviewed for the first book said they felt when telling their parents they were gay. Often, one of their parents would say how sorry to hear the news—because they said their son was destined to live a sad, lonely life.

When I was in a conference in Adelaide recently when a group of British and Australian researchers exchanged work on care, in my case, care needs of older gay men, I suggested a couple of possible reasons for this reaction.

One: the parents had never met a gay person and did not know about their life course.

Two: it was a last ditch attempt to warn the son against the path he was treading.

Third: and this a British researcher suggested and it is common sense when you think about it—gay men rarely had children and many couples believe their old age will be easier, less frightening b/c of their children.

What I found contradicted the dire warnings of those parents. All the single gay men in my sample and there were 41 lived relatively good
lives, those who in their 50s and 60s who still immersed themselves in the gay club and bar scene and those who studiously avoided it.

I think this has an important policy dimension as well because as demographers here in Australia and in the Europe and the USA have been observing for some time now, there is an increasing body of people living single lives and I reckon it is good to know that it can be done well and does not represent a ‘failed life’.

It’s a great honour for the Faculty to launch my book this way and I would like to thank Russell Crawford for hosting the event, thank Michael Kirby again for taking time out his busy schedule to be here.

Finally, I would like to thank two very important people who put in many, many hours of hard work to make this happen—and they are Leah Slee and Hayley Mowatt, who make up the Faculty’s marketing team. It was they who thought of the High Tea with champagne and managed the invitations and looked after the RSVPs and all the other small things that have to be done for something like this to come off—so thanks very much Leah and Hayley.

That’s all from me. Thank you.