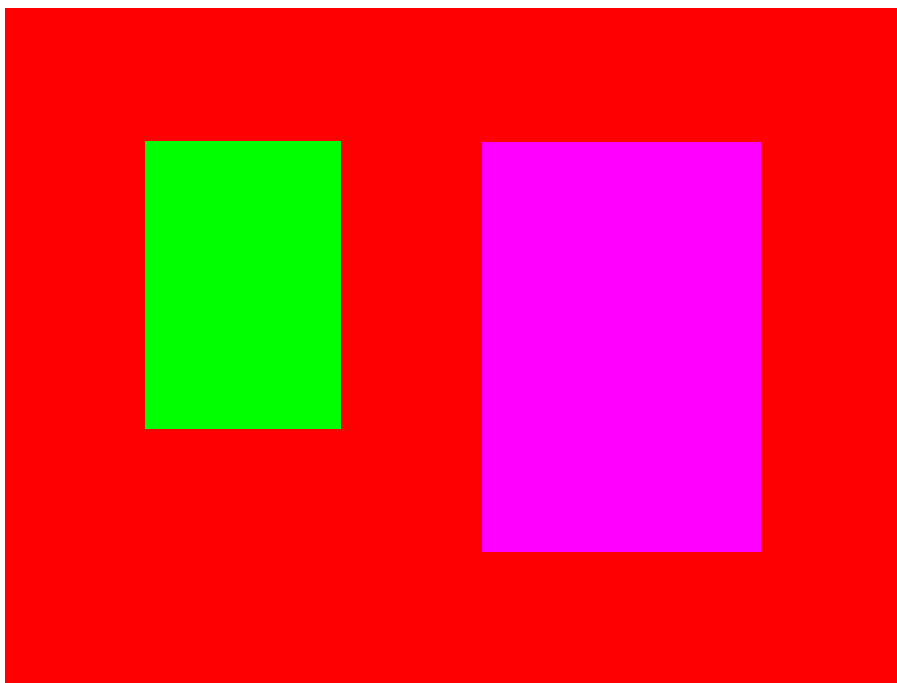


# **More Conversations with Queer Young People**

**To Be Read Aloud**



**Michael Crowhurst**







# **MORE CONVERSATIONS WITH QUEER YOUNG PEOPLE**

TO BE READ ALOUD

---

*MICHAEL CROWHURST*



# MORE CONVERSATIONS WITH QUEER YOUNG PEOPLE

TO BE READ ALOUD

---

*MICHAEL CROWHURST*



Common Ground



**RMIT**  
UNIVERSITY

First published in Australia in 2009  
by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd  
at OnDiversity.com,  
a series imprint of TheUniversityPress.com

Copyright © Michael Crowhurst 2009.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this book may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the publisher.

The National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication:

Crowhurst, Michael.

More conversations with queer young people: To be read aloud.

Bibliography.

9781863356152 (pbk.)

9781863356169 (pdf)

1. Sexual minorities—Identity. 2. Gender identity. 3. Queer theory.

306.76

Cover Image: Michael Crowhurst



## Contents

### Part 1

#### Introduction

---

Why is the workbook necessary? . . . . . 3

Methodology . . . . . 13

Reasons for reading aloud . . . . . 19

### Part 2

#### Edited Conversations

---

Andrew . . . . . 27

Leah . . . . . 41

Heathcliff . . . . . 49

Rachel . . . . . 63

Jacob . . . . . 75

Anne . . . . . 89

Peter . . . . . 103

Sarah . . . . . 113

Ashley . . . . . 129

Kira . . . . . 139

### Part 3

---

Afterword . . . . . 151

References . . . . . 153

## **Acknowledgments**

I'd like to acknowledge a number of people who made big contributions, in one way or another to this project.

Thanks to all who gave their time to be on the reference group – they are listed below.

Thanks to Anya Latham for transcription and for proofing the text.

Thanks to the youth workers who supported this project and facilitated contact with young people.

I'd particularly like to acknowledge and thank the 10 young people who shared their stories.

I'd like to thank RMIT for providing funding through an 'Emerging Researcher Grant' as this has meant that this project has been able to happen and that the 'Workbook' has been able to be published.

## **Reference group Members**

I'd like to thank members of the reference group for their support.

Mark Camilleri, BBV Community Educator / Project Worker, 'The Action Centre', Family Planning Victoria.

Dr Barbara Chancellor, Lecturer, School of Education, RMIT University.

Lyle Cleeland, Graduate Teacher, School of Education, RMIT University.

Dr Greg Curran, Lecturer, School of Education RMIT University, Victoria University TAFE.

Mic Emslie, Lecturer, School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning, RMIT University.

Dr Julie Faulkner, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, RMIT University.

Kavitha Chandra-Shekeran, Project Officer - Community Education, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

Dr Gloria Latham, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, RMIT University.

Felicity Marlowe, State Wide Project Officer, Rainbow Network, Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, La Trobe University.

Dr Jude Ocean, Lecturer, School of Education, RMIT University.

Associate Professor Geoff Shacklock, School of Education, RMIT University.

Kevin Whitney, Teacher Librarian.

## **Part 1**

### **Introduction**



## Why is the workbook necessary?

*Introduction - A few thoughts on broad aims, on why I think this workbook is necessary, and on “Reading Aloud” as a change methodology.*

The purpose of this collection of materials is multiple. I am very interested in the process of interviewing young people who identify as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender or intersex (GLBTI Young People or Queer Young people – QYP) about their life experiences – particularly about their school experiences. Further, I am also interested in transcribing and editing these conversations and in making these available to as wide a readership as possible in order to support change. Broadly, I am interested in doing these things primarily because it is my feeling, and it is reported in the literature (see below), that school settings are not always experienced as safe or welcoming places if you identify as a QYP and secondly because I feel that making available the stories of QYP, and asking people to read these aloud, is a very strategic way to generate change.

Make no bones about it I have an agenda, and without trying to sound too inflated, it is to make a contribution to the expansion of this culture's acceptance and acknowledgment of sexual and gender diversity. This workbook is an attempt to move towards this aim and to acknowledge this as a necessary and essential step in working towards enhancing the wellbeing and learning of QYP (of any young person) in school settings. The wellbeing of QYP is *always* compromised in settings that are not fully affirming of sexual and gender diversity.

The aims of attending to discrimination and affirming diversity are often held apart. I have noticed that academics, workers and others in the field, often fall into camps and spend inordinate amounts of time criticising each other for writing, or working, in ways that on the one hand are said to pathologise QYP (that focus on negative aspects of experience such as disease, drug use, suicide and discrimination) or that on the other “unrealistically” focus on expansion in “naïve” ways ignoring the ways that power can function to limit or constrain.

Why are we talking about drugs, suicide, discrimination, rights and bullying all of the time? Why are we focusing on constraint and not on expansive potential? – says one side. When we focus on diversity, position subjectivity as fluid, and focus on the productive potential of deconstructive techniques, aren’t we ignoring the real problems that people face in the world as they brush up against power? Why are we wasting our time writing about such things, when in the “real world”, these things are irrelevant? – says the other.

At a conference I heard a teacher say to an academic that while the ideas being explored around constructed sexualities and queer pedagogies “were all well and good” that they weren’t much use “where the rubber hits the road” – that such ideas were irrelevant. At the same conference I listened to a panel of queer young people telling their stories, one of them in tears. Now while I think it is worth reflecting on why “we” are seemingly so invested in replicating stories that bring speakers and audiences to tears, and the importance of balancing these with stories of hope, the conversation that I had with an academic after this panel really surprised me. The academic’s response to the panel was dismissive “What do we learn from that?” was the response to a teenager in tears.

I am making a move in this collection of materials, to guard against pathologising, mainly through the use of a “multi-lifeworlds” framework (tapping into different aspects of participant’s lives). This being an attempt to ensure that where conversations move into arenas of constraint that these are balanced with stories of hope or expansion (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005). Hopefully focusing on different life spheres will also amplify the diversity of the stories that are told across the group of participants.

I am also making a choice to refuse to move away from the centrality of people’s stories into an academic style that privileges abstraction at the expense of lived experience. I refuse this primarily because it isn’t a style of writing that I am particularly good at and also because I want to foreground people’s lived experiences in most of my work (having said that I want to make it clear that I see a place for such theoretical writing and that I enjoy reading and using it – it is just not a place that I have the desire to occupy at this point in time and particularly in this project).

I am, however, going to balance this focus on story with a theoretical component where I outline some of the reasons why I think that “reading aloud” works as a change methodology. The explanation of the methodology that I am deploying here explicitly moves into the realm of theory, in particular into the realm of poststructural theory and a consideration of

subjectivity and change. My aim here is to theorise this pedagogical approach rather than the stories of participants (this will be my next project), and further to demonstrate how poststructural theory does indeed lend itself to political ends (see also (Rasmussen 2006). To demonstrate how poststructurally informed work is indeed capable of “doing donuts”.

I also want to note, in line with poststructural theory, that my commitment to “story” does not stem from a desire to uncover an authentic, unmediated, romanticised “queer” space. The stories that we tell about ourselves are woven through available discourses and in this sense they are not authentic (Butler 1997; Riessman 2008). We make the stories that we are able to make within a given cultural context. What is interesting about people’s stories are the larger stories and the cultural details that they illuminate (Davies 1993).

### Previous Related Work

This workbook is the second that I have produced. The first has been delivered to well over 3000 people at this stage (Crowhurst 2004) . I have documented in the first collection how I came to stumble upon the methodology of “reading aloud”. Essentially I was asked by Debra Tyler and Helen Stokes from Melbourne University’s “Australian Youth Research Centre” to run some sexual and gender diversity “training” sessions, based on my Doctoral work, within the Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare program that they co-ordinated. I thought about how I might make the sessions more engaging and decided that I wanted the participants to spend a considerable amount of time working with the stories of the young people that I had interviewed for my PhD research - I had already edited and turned these interviews into small case study booklets for my own use so that they were easier to use when I was writing up my thesis.

I decided that a good way to facilitate engagement and also to break the monotony of being in a training workshop might be to ask people to read the conversations “aloud like a play script”. I was also expecting a degree of resistance and tension from some participants and wanted to minimize this and to that end I thought (correctly) that focusing on the stories of young people was the way to proceed. For these sorts of reasons I decided to plan a workshop that included 20 minutes of reading aloud in small groups of 4, and 20 minutes discussing what had been read as a whole group. I’ve never looked back. The session worked like a dream - it ran itself. As I indicated above I have delivered “reading aloud” workshops to well over 3000 people at this stage and I can only recall encountering one person who had “problems” with the nature of the workshop.

I think that exposure to the stories of young people, engaging in an initial analysis of the factors that might be generating these stories, and *most importantly* reading the stories aloud is part of the reason that this is so. I will write more about why I believe this later but before I do this I’d like to

turn to outline the reasons why a workbook that focuses on QYP is necessary.

### Why focus on Queer Young People?

Queer Young People, have received an increasing degree of attention in the academic literature, in queer activism and in the youth work and education fields, in Australia particularly over the last 15 years or so. In the early 1990's I took on a Master's of Education that focused on gay men's memories of secondary school (Crowhurst 1993). I remember working to compile a literature review at this time and realising how little had been written about the school experiences of QYP (this term wasn't used in those days – and in fact QYP is a label that Greg Curran and I decided to use when we were writing a course on queer issues and education in 2003). Karen Harbeck (Harbeck 1992) and Debbie Epstein (Epstein, O'Flynn & Telford 2003) were yet to publish early work and the field was indeed sparse. In Australia there were people like Val Webster and Sue Wright (in Education at Melbourne University) running courses, Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli and Wayne Martino (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005) had started publishing, and the groundbreaking "Young Gay and Proud" had been published 12 years previously (Jaynes 2000). Even so, I think it is true to say that published work that focused on Queer Young People was hard to find and was written by a very small field indeed.

This situation changed significantly in the 1990's and since that time there has been a proliferation of academic and other writings focusing on the experiences of QYP in schools and other youth sector settings from within and beyond Australia (I don't want to run through a lit review at this stage as I feel I have done that elsewhere – for a good survey of some of the literature *up to the early 2000's* see - (Frere, Jukes & Crowhurst 2001). Themes relating to school cultures that impact in negative ways on same-sex attracted young people are prevalent in the literature. Reports of widespread harassment, bullying and discrimination coupled with a paucity of support services are frequently referred to. In the earlier collection I detail themes that run through this literature arguing that as the social context has changed and Queer adults have gained more rights that there has been a shift of emphasis in the literature. There has been a movement from the documentation of various "problems" to the documentation of "difference" and expansion – see (Crowhurst 2004).

I would like to briefly mention some key pieces of research that have been very influential in Australia. In 1998 researchers at The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, published the groundbreaking "Writing Themselves In", based on an internet survey of around 750 same-sex attracted young people aged between 14 and 21 (Hillier et al. 1998). "Writing Themselves In" reports that in a series of research projects that between 8-11% of young people surveyed do not identify as heterosexual. In



the “Writing Themselves In” project school is identified as being *the* place where young people were most at risk of abuse. The writers report that:

*More young people (70%) were abused at school than anywhere else, with other students being the perpetrators for 60% of abuse cases...Verbal and physical abuse had a profound effect on these young people. It affected their feelings of safety at home and at school and was related to the use of drugs and a reduction in their sense of well-being.*

(Hillier et al. 1998:3)

On one level this sort of finding would tend to make sense as “school” is “the” place where many young people spend most of their time. Be that as it may, the finding above was not a ringing endorsement for schools in 1998 and in recent work “school” still rates highly as a dangerous and unsafe place to be if you identify as or are suspected of being queer. (“Writing Themselves In” has recently been updated - (Hillier, Turner & Mitchell 2005) - and this time draws on data provided by 1700 young people).

Ray Misson, Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, Catherine Laskey, Debbie Ollis, Anne Mitchell, Deb Dempsey, Lynne Hillier, Lyn Harrison, Catherine Beavis, Keiran O’Loughlin, Catherine Laskey, Daniel Witthaus, Lori Beckett, Will Letts, Mary Lou Rasmussen, Daniel Marshall, David Telford, Wayne Martino, Ian Seale, Liz Alexander, Greg Curran, Mic Emslie and myself are some other writers with connections to Australia and specifically with connections to Education, who have written about how teachers and school communities might respond to the harassment and discrimination that GLBTI young people often encounter, and about how school communities might begin to nurture and support sexual diversity (I’m not going to list work by all of these people here). Some of these writers (as I have indicated previously) have also called for an examination of our investment in reproducing academic discourses that return again and again to themes of constraint and discrimination and for more focus on stories of hope to appear in the literature (see Curran 2003; Rasmussen 2006).

This increased amount of attention, as indicated above, has occurred at a point in Australian history where Queer adults have gained more rights and recognition and this changing context has meant that questions relating to young people have been ripe to be considered. This awareness of expansion in other areas of queer life, has drawn attention, I would argue, to the levels of unacceptable constraint evident in the school system.

It is indeed a paradox, fitting of Foucault’s repressive hypothesis (Foucault 1990) that this time of gains for QYP and Queer adults has been dominated by the “right” in Australia – recent history has seen, neo conservative and neo-liberal governments, the emergence of the religious right, the rise of managerialism and economic rationalist agendas, cuts to taxation, attacks on multiculturalism, aboriginal rights, public education, public health, and workers rights. It is very interesting indeed that what some would describe as a radical (or expansive) time in terms of sexual and gender diversity has occurred precisely when many other factors would suggest that this doesn’t seem to be the right time that this should be happening at all.

In the academy, feminist, anti-racist and leftist activists and academics have constructed spaces that are affirming of diversity and these have in turn been replicated or appropriated by Queer “rights” activists and academics. Queer academics and activists have *also* carved out new spaces that have reinvigorated, recharged or “queered” “older” leftist or progressive movements. At this point in time, as a result of a lot of effort, from many different fronts, I would argue that acceptance of interpersonal and intrapersonal diversity in the academy is orthodoxy, and this is perhaps best exemplified in the broad stream of theory known as poststructuralism.

## Poststructural Theory

Poststructural theory draws a distinction between the labels “identity” and “subjectivity”. Identity is a label that positions personhood in line with liberal humanist frameworks whereby “it” is understood as unified and where “the” individual is positioned as rational and autonomous. Within this framework individuals freely make choices, that are consistent with internal desires and set about the work of realising these, or expressing their identity within a given cultural context. Sexuality, within such approaches, is an essence that unfolds in culture, or that is constrained by culture, as are other aspects of self. (Foucault 1990; Rasmussen 2006; Weeks 1991 [1986])

Conversely poststructural theory suggests that personhood, that subjectivity is “multiple”, “fluid” and “constructed” - and that sexuality as one dimension of subjectivity is similarly so. Sexuality is understood to be one aspect of subjectivity that coexists with other aspects (such as ethnicity, class etc). Sexuality “itself” is also not understood to be “one” thing - Individually, I “do” a different sexuality when I am at school and another version when I’m on the web. I do and have multiple sexualities. I take up space in the world via the deployment of sexuality in multiple ways.

Subjectivity is an effect of the weaving together of different aspects of self - aspects of self that are constructed via the actualisation of discourses that simultaneously function as limit and as possibility. We actively shape selves as we engage in social practices, as we do the work of identifying and acting in certain ways, and as we do the work of foreclosing others. Subjectivity is an effect of these identifications and foreclosures - an effect of our engagement with culture. (Foucault 1990; Freire 1999; Rasmussen 2006; Weeks 1991 [1986])

The positioning of subjectivity as multiple provides a theoretical model that seems to account for our ability to engage in self reflection. One reason I am aware I am positioned as “white” is because I am aware that there are other people who are not positioned as “white” and I am in relationship with these people. Another reason I am aware that I am positioned as “white” or construct myself as “white” is because I am able to notice this observation from some other vantage point that is also a part of who I am.

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli was one of the first writers I read that deployed this sort of modelling. In the mid 1990’s she wrote an account of a woman

who identified as an Italian-Lesbian (to focus on two aspects of subjectivity) (Pallotta-Chiarolli 1996). In line with poststructural theory Pallotta-Chiarolli argues that ethnicity and sexuality are not innate aspects of self that unfold in culture but rather aspects of self that are constructed through culture – and that each of these aspects are in turn constructed through the other. Within this model, culture both frames and is a product or effect of this work. Ethnicity and sexuality, (like culture and subjectivity generally) for instance, are woven through each other and are inseparable. People become aware of this multiplicity when they are confronted with situations that provoke tension because a seemingly irreconcilable difference in subjectivity is foregrounded – is rendered visible or moves into consciousness.

Can I be a Catholic and queer? Can I salary package and argue for the provision of welfare services? Can I belong to almost any organised religion and profess to be a feminist? Can I construct myself as someone who believes that education is a right and work in a user pays tertiary education system? Can I be a proponent of multiculturalism and diversity and insist that my students produce all assessable work in English? I think these are takes on a related theme – and they all pose the question: “Can I be two things that seem to contradict each other at the same time?” – and what does it feel like when I become aware that this is the case?

I wrote about similar tensions in an article at the end of the 1990’s that also appears as a chapter in my Doctoral thesis. “Are you gay/sir?” is an autobiographical narrative (written to be read aloud by the way) that explores the tensions that surface where one aspect of subjectivity seemingly contradicts another (Crowhurst 1999). In this article I argue that “gay” is positioned as a less powerful subject position than “sir” in the context of a secondary school and that this is thrown into relief the moment a student asks: “Are you gay/sir?”. Different aspects of subjectivity come into contact with each other and while the result is not always comfortable this can generate the conditions necessary to move into new ways of being – that can generate the conditions that stall foreclosure.

In the article above I also briefly reflect on the tension provoked in the students that I taught. I didn’t answer their question regarding how I identified and they became very unsettled and disruptive. I still really don’t believe that these students moved into disruption to secure power – in the “we’ll use his gayness against him” sense – I am of the opinion, all of these years later, that the misbehaviour that followed my refusal to answer their direct (and intrusive but they were only 14) question was a result of my moving into an ambiguous, unintelligible, abject place and that this moved the students into a similar type of place, a place where they didn’t quite know what type of relationship they should be having with me – a place where they didn’t quite know where they stood – a place that stalled foreclosure.

Later in this introductory section I will return to these themes, drawing on the work of James Paul Gee, to briefly explore why I think “reading aloud” works as a change methodology.

## Tensions around Labels

Poststructural theory also suggests the importance of moving beyond the limits of labels and beyond the power dynamics that adherence to labels can provoke. The label “queer” is a case in point and not only represents an attempt to move away from liberal humanist notions of “identity”, but also an attempt to move on from the way that rights often accrue to particular types, are won by particular types of identities rather than by all within such framing. There is another critique of labels that focuses on the limits involved in the adoption of any label. If personality is a constructed facet, then making a choice to construct any self that is bound up in cultural ideas about what it means to be this or that at this point in time is limiting – limiting in the sense that choosing to identify as “this” can foreclose choosing to identify as “that” (Rasmussen writes about this where she explores Butler’s notions of subjection). (Butler 1990, 1997; Rasmussen 2006.)

“Queer” as it relates to sexuality, is about understanding sexuality as constructed, as open to the possibility of change and as not fixed. As such, everyone, regardless of who they are “attracted to”, is queer. This is not to say that we are able to voluntarily choose to be attracted to this type of person today and that type tomorrow. It is to say though that if we did find ourselves surprised by a particular attraction or desire that we wouldn’t balk at that because it didn’t fit with our preconceived notions of who we were. Queer is about being open to the possibility of our own radical difference, and about making conscious decisions and taking responsibility for these decisions. Queer is about being open to the idea that over time *we* might change and a part of what might support this open-ness is if we were to be less dependent on fixed labels – labels that are positioned as reflecting internal essential aspects of identity rather than socially constructed aspects of self.

Queer is about recognising that the threat of witnessing difference, and the tension that this witness can sometimes throw up, is to do with the possibilities that such acts of witness reveal. If subjectivity is constructed, “it” can also be reconstructed, I might change. The fear and anxiety that “I might change” generates is (I would argue) responsible for much (not all) of the violence that is inflicted on those who are witnessed as different.

Queer ways of thinking about sexuality also position “it” as being about much more than sexual desire or behaviours. Sexuality within poststructural accounts is positioned as a way of “taking up space in the world and a social category that mediates relationships” (see: Frere, Jukes & Crowhurst 2001). Sexuality comes into play in the world beyond the bedroom all of the time. This workbook works from and with such understandings.

Critics of poststructural theory often suggest that while such ideas do have merits, that in the “real world” they can also lead to a political cul de sac of sorts. Sexuality, or gender, or ethnicity *may well be* fluid constructs but it would seem that there are moments when it would appear that

identifying with “this” fluid construct rather than “that” fluid construct can result in the activation of a set of (albeit non monolithic) power relations that disadvantage some and advantage others. Labels may be deployed by people with institutional power in ways that do constrain individuals who chose to identify in particular ways (i.e. queers do not have equality around marriage). Labels can also provide a basis for collective action to challenge inequality and claim rights. (Connell 1987; Connell 1993; Dempsey 2000; Freire 1999; Hillier, Turner & Mitchell 2005; N.S.W. Attorney General's Department 2007; Weeks 1991 [1986]; Wyn & White 1997)

As a good poststructuralist I am going to resist the urge to bring closure to that tension by coming down on one side of the fence and instead say that I hold a contradictory set of views on this. On the one hand I see that there are advantages to ditching labels and on the other I see that clinging to a label of some sort lends itself to organising against a problem (being in two places at once is an important aspect of why I think this workbook is likely to work – but more on this later). While labels can provide one basis for political organisation the cost, as I have been outlining, is that they can limit potential.

That is all assuming, of course, that people who choose labels do so in ways that absolutely close off possibilities. I would argue that many people consciously queerly identify with labels currently and that queer or tentative identifications are an available subject position at this point in time. This type of thinking also extends to the subject position “teacher”.

I have known many people who have been teachers for many years and while they have described themselves as teachers consistently over time, their teaching identities have been fluid and they are reflective around this and aware of this. Identification with a label doesn't need to preclude fluidity – in fact subjectivity is impossible outside identifications of some sort or another. I am going to deploy such notions here – notions around being tentative, around stalling identification, and around identifying with a subject position in a manner that leaves it to some extent an open project.

The type of idea that I've worked toward making here is integral to this workbook. The idea that the subject positions that we chose to occupy are multiple, open-ended and fluid not only applies to sexuality but applies to “being a teacher” as well. This provides a framework that allows for teachers to consciously reflect and to reconstruct themselves as new types of teachers (to take up space in the world as new types of teacher subjects) over time.

## Summary

It is my feeling that it remains important to document the experiences of queer young people (QYP) in school and other youth sector settings. I hold this point of view for a couple of reasons:

1. young people who identify as queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex) often experience harassment and discrimination in youth sector settings, especially schools,
2. and balancing this it is important that the expansive and powerful ways that queer young people construct their subjectivities and the cultural contexts that support this work are identified and proliferate,
3. and finally it is also timely as there seems to be increasing attention and support being given to this issue at an official Departmental level.

Consequently I hope that this collection of training materials comprised of edited conversations might:

1. make some contribution to reducing the prevalence of discrimination via raising awareness and challenging the social conditions that generate such behaviours,
2. and draw attention to the social conditions that QYP identify that support expansiveness and diversity.

I aim to make a contribution here by including the recent collection of conversations and by elaborating an effective change methodology. I will turn to a consideration of methodology and specifically the change methodology now.

## Methodology

### A – The interviews

### B – Multi-Lifeworlds

### C – Reading Aloud

#### Section A – The Interviews – Dialogic Spaces

As I have previously written, “More Conversations with Queer Secondary School Students: To Be Read Aloud” builds on an earlier collection of awareness raising materials entitled: “Conversations with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Secondary School Students” that I completed in 2004 (<http://eprints.unimelb.edu.au/archive/00000488/>) (Crowhurst 2001). In this project I again set out to conduct face to face interviews or “conversations” with 10 young people who were currently enrolled or eligible to enrol in a Victorian secondary school and who identified as Queer. I located these young people through existing youth service provider networks (such as the Rainbow Network) to ensure that the young people were in contact with a supportive youth professional or support group.

Much research in the area of queer school experience has involved:

The use of adults who have offered retrospective accounts of their school experiences,

The observation of school situations where issues regarding queer sexuality have surfaced as a side issue, by 'accident', or at the instigation of queer students who found themselves within the research,

The collection of written material via the internet or questionnaire.

(Crowhurst 2001: 89-90)

While such research has been, and continues to be, very useful indeed, in this project I intended to interview queer secondary school students, or young people, who were of school age but not attending, for between 45-60 minutes, “face to face”. There have been very few published accounts of extended face to face interviews with Queer Young People. To my knowledge the interview data that makes up the initial “Conversations” materials, for instance, is quite unique internationally. I am not aware of any other data like it. This current workbook continues in that vein.

I chose the “face to face” conversation here for similar reasons to those that I mapped out previously in my Doctoral work – the main reason being that I prefer this method as it provides for a flexibility that other methodologies do not. The “face to face-ness” also means that there is another layer of meaning that is present in the conversation – the participant’s body movements, pauses, intonation and so forth add shades of meaning and give the interviewer clues regarding areas to probe and regarding areas that may need to be treated with a degree of caution.

In Johnson and Reeds “Philosophical Documents in Education” (2008: 218-32) there is a chapter devoted to Nel Noddings. At one point in this section Noddings discusses “dialogue” suggesting that if a space is to be described as “dialogic” that it must be a space that is open, uncertain and *potentially* transformative – participants in any true dialogue are not only open to the idea that the dialogue will move where it will but that they may be changed as a result of entering into it. There are echoes of many writers here but one that comes to mind is Deborah Britzman who also writes around related themes of uncertain destinations, difference, subjectivity and tension and there are further connections to be made here around questions of subjectivity and fluidity briefly touched on previously (Britzman 1998.)

This type of uncertain open dialogic space is what I aimed to construct in this series of conversations – not a space where I obtained answers to pre-set questions but where (as far as possible) I attempted to enter into a dialogue with each person that was more or less (within the constraints of the focus we had agreed to) free to go where it would go. (I do want to stress here though that while I am aware of the possibilities of personal change that dialogue affords I was not aiming in these conversations to set about changing participants in any way).

Practically I actualised the methodology in the following way: At the beginning of each interview I gave participants a focus sheet and explained that they could discard this if they chose to, and that there was no obligation to answer any of the questions or speak about any of the areas outlined. The focus sheet identified: School; Family; Friends; Culture; Recreation and the Queer Youth Support Group. I asked participants to talk about the areas that they chose to in any way that they wanted to. Occasionally I entered the conversation but I endeavoured to say as little as possible – the conversations were about them not me.

I audio-taped the interviews and asked participants to discuss their experiences at school, but in an effort to incorporate ideas around multi-



lifeworlds and to tease out the complexities of their stories, I also asked participants to discuss some other spheres of their lives (such as friends, family, culture, and the “queer support group” that they attended). The new workbook is different from the first set of materials in this respect. My aim here has been to ensure that I collect contrasting life accounts. While I wanted these interviews to identify areas that were problematic I was also eager to illuminate areas where participants were living in powerful and or in expansive ways (as outlined previously).

The interviews were transcribed and these were co-edited with participants. I provided participants with a copy of the transcript and asked them to edit sections that they wanted excluded. I sought permission from the young people to use the materials to produce an awareness raising resource (and other written materials) designed to be used with practicing and pre-service teachers (and other relevant professional groups). These materials would contain the edited transcripts of the audiotaped conversations. Participants were asked for permission for these materials to be used in teaching situations and as the basis for conference papers, book chapters and so forth.

Participants were free to withdraw consent at any time prior to publication. Participants were also provided with a Family Planning Victoria’s “Action Centre” book mark so that they could seek support if the interview had upset them in any way and they didn’t want to talk to their youth worker about this. It is important to note here as well that all participants were recruited into this study through youth workers and youth work networks.

I sought parental permission *where it was possible to obtain* (and this was my preferred stance) but as with other studies that have been done in this area (Crowhurst 2001; Hillier et al. 1998; Hillier, Turner & Mitchell 2005) I did not require this of participants as a pre-condition for participation. Young people who have valuable stories to share and who are not yet “out” to parents should not have to risk the consequences of disclosure to parents to participate in studies such as this. It is also very important that researchers are able to tap into the stories of young people who may not be “out” to parents as this is documented in the literature as a time where young people experience a great deal of stress. This point has been argued and debated through the RMIT University ethics committee and is also the main reason that the only way I made contact with young people was via a youth service provider.

## **Section B - Methodological and theoretical emphasis of this project is Multi-Lifeworlds**

My intention with this new project, as I’ve indicated, is to incorporate notions of “multiple-lifeworlds” into the materials and to use this as a type of methodology. As I have already outlined “multiple-lifeworlds” is a way of understanding subjectivity that is informed by Poststructural theory.

Essentially this theory suggests that people shape selves within multiple cultural contexts and that in the process they too take on this multiplicity. Further, poststructural theory suggests that subjectivity itself is fragmented (rather than unified) and that we become aware of this fragmentation when we encounter situations where one aspect of who we are contradicts, or rubs up against, another aspect (Crowhurst 2001). I used this theory as a starting point from which to interview young people who identified as queer (not straight), in order to tap into an array of stories.

As I have indicated previously, there is an extensive amount of literature that documents that the school experiences of queer young people are problematic. There has been an expansion of such literature over the last 16 or so years. A great deal of this body of research has often been framed or couched within discourses of discrimination and of late there has been increasing attention in the literature paid to the importance of tapping into stories of hope and power – of tapping into stories that highlight expansion.

I am not prepared just yet to let go of the need to document and theorise the problematic dimensions of the experiences of Queer Young People (particularly within school contexts) as I feel that there is still a long way to go in this regard and this is where my main interests lie, but I am also eager to explicitly bring about a change of balance in my own work and I think that it was important that this project be structured in such a way that the possibility of tapping into stories of hope was heightened. A “multi-lifeworlds” framework hopefully has accomplished just that, it has allowed me to tap into and document a plurality of stories – some positive and some negative.

## Section C - Reading Aloud Multi-Lifeworlds and Transformation

The methodology that is involved in delivering or using this workbook (involving reading the transcripts aloud like a play script) is quite innovative in the field of Queer Youth Work and research – and is a methodology that I am quite excited by and keen to pursue and further develop. In the sections that follow I would now like to venture a few reasons as to why I think this methodology “works” that are also in line with “multi-lifeworlds” theory or notions of multiple subjectivity. While I will try not to ramble too much I’d like to tackle this in a style that is as conversational and as accessible as possible. In the original conversations kit I wrote:

*...in mid 2000, Debra Tyler and Helen Stokes from The Australian Youth Research Centre at Melbourne University, asked me to facilitate some sexual diversity training sessions within the Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare course. My aim in those sessions was to raise awareness (rather than develop strategies for instance) and I decided to use the edited transcript conversations in order to do so. I also wanted the workshop sessions to be as active as possible, and so I decided to ask people to read the transcripts aloud like a play script (really just to break the session up somewhat). I found that this type of training methodology worked very effectively.*  
(Crowhurst 2004:4)

The decision to ask participants to read the materials aloud came about almost by accident, as did the production of the first version of the transcripts into “training” booklets and as did the idea of producing a “training” resource itself. Deb Thomson, who worked as the office manager at Melbourne University’s “Australian Youth Research Centre”, suggested to me two days before I was going to facilitate the training sessions for Deb Tyler and Helen Stokes that I might “spring bind” the photocopied transcript materials that I was going to use, and use OHT sheets as covers as this way I’d be able to use them again and again. Deb told me there was a spring binding machine on the 3rd floor of the Queensbury Street Building that I could use (there is something about seeing your work in a “spring binder” that makes it look and feel professional).

I bound the materials and ran the session for Deb Tyler and Helen Stokes and it seemed to go quite well. I mixed a presentation of facts and figures and policy and theory with the “reading aloud” activity. The sections of the training session where people simply read the transcripts aloud like a play script was the part of the session where participants were the most focused. They were far more interested in this part of the workshop than they were in me and in what I had to say. The transcripts generated a great deal of discussion. I began thinking a little about “reading aloud” and why it is that this is an effective methodology.



## Reasons for reading aloud

### Reading Aloud – Generates Dis/Connection

#### On - Connection

In 2001, at the time I was delivering “training” to students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Student Welfare, Mic Emslie and I were involved in organising a performance piece for Melbourne’s GBLTI Midsumma Festival. We had been working for many years together at that stage through “Context” (Ian Seale was also involved with “Context” see (Context)). We decided to “push” the idea of “reading stories aloud” a little further and to incorporate the stories that we were collecting for another “Context” project into a performance piece called “Voices through Voices”. Sections of this project were later published by The Youth Research Centre and appear in *Doing New Work: Materials for Queer Teachers and Youth Workers* (Crowhurst & Emslie 2003).

In the introduction of the “Doing New Work” materials Mic and I briefly outline why the transcript materials in that collection are included and also how we would encourage people to use them. Essentially in the introduction we make a brief argument about the power of “story” and the beginnings of another to do with how “reading aloud” is a strategic way to generate a sense of connection to a story (and hopefully to minimise any opposition and to encourage action). Consider the following quote:

*There is something very powerful about reading and speaking a story aloud. The listener often becomes connected to the story, in ways that they may not have if they had silently read the story. The same sort of thing happens when a person reads aloud the story of another. There is a connection made that is greater than that which would have been if the story was silently read. When the words on the page are accompanied by sounds their effect is amplified.*  
(Crowhurst & Emslie 2003: 8)

When I run training sessions I always return to the central sociological notion that people are inseparably linked to cultural context (and visa versa) and that subjectivity is constructed and open ended. When I ask people to read stories aloud I ask them to reflect on the following quote from Judith Butler. This quote is a mantra of mine and I use it all the time. I use it to highlight that work that aims to promote expansive change in people needs to attend to contextual factors – in relation to schools this quote provides the rationale for working across the whole school on any issue. It is one of the most powerful collections of words that I have ever read.

*The racial slur is always cited from elsewhere, and in the speaking of it, one chimes in with a chorus of racists, producing at that moment the linguistic occasion for an imagined relation to an historically transmitted community of racists. In this sense, racist speech does not originate with the subject, even if it requires the subject for its efficacy, as it surely does.*  
(Butler 1997: 80)

Butler spells it out very clearly here. All speech acts, or other forms of discourse for that matter, whether they be racist, sexist, homophobic or not, have a history, a genealogy, are diachronic, and in many ways they exceed the actual speaker or do-er. I usually ask people to reflect on this as they enact the stories that are typed as transcripts. I ask them to reflect on the fact that as they read these stories the words of other people are moving through them and that they have brought these words back to life in a sense. I ask them to think about racism, homophobia and sexism as enactment (rather than as originating with the perpetrator) in the way that Butler theorises it. I then ask them to identify themes in their particular story. What they discover is that while the stories are all different that there are similar themes or discourses that run across all of them (Riessman 2008). We identify some of these and reflect on the broader contextual factors that might be generating this state of affairs. We ask why it might be, or whether we notice that people draw on particular discourses to tell certain stories.

“Reading the stories of others aloud” offers the possibility of transformation first because it affords an opportunity for the speaker to connect to the history and context of a particular conversation – to the history and context of those words.

“Reading Aloud” also affords the possibility that there may be a connection of sorts made, via words, at the rational level to “the other”. The idea that we can step into the shoes of another via accessing and enacting their story and that this might generate empathy and challenge the negative stereotyping that fuels discrimination is taken up and explored by Kate Donelan where she writes about the “...humanising impact of dramatic

storytelling performances”, and the potential that such spaces have to impact on changing such attitudes (Donelan 2002: 32-5). Of course while it is impossible for a person to inhabit or know what it’s like to be someone else, a connection of sorts is indeed possible.

Cicely Berry’s work with the Royal Shakespeare Company is also of relevance here (Sojourner). Berry is a voice coach with the RSC and is a passionate advocate for the Shakespearean text. Berry is on a mission to entice young people to engage and become excited by the Bard’s work. Berry facilitates workshops where young people are encouraged to speak sections of Shakespearean texts aloud in an attempt for participants to make an embodied connection with said texts. A documentary on Berry and her work shows groups of young people enthusiastically working their way through texts and speaking about how they feel as a result. While reading aloud and performing the text in this instance is argued to be consistent with the way that the texts were meant to be received – i.e. heard and watched and not read - what is also argued is that this is an effective way of generating interest, connection and engagement with a challenging but rich text.

The work of Barthes also supports the argument that “reading aloud” can facilitate a “deeper” level of connection. In the final two pages of “The Pleasure of the Text” Roland Barthes (Barthes 1990 [1973]: 66-67) commits to paper some of the most poetic words ever constructed. Barthes writes about the voice of the actor and meditates along phenomenological lines that speech acts connect the speaker to the listener in physiological ways. When I speak, my vocal chords vibrate and this in turn makes air particles vibrate. These vibrations connect with the listener and produce a related set of vibrations. The sounds I make connect me to other people. The sounds that I hear are the effect of movements created by others transmitted through time and space that enter me, that resonate or repeat themselves within me.

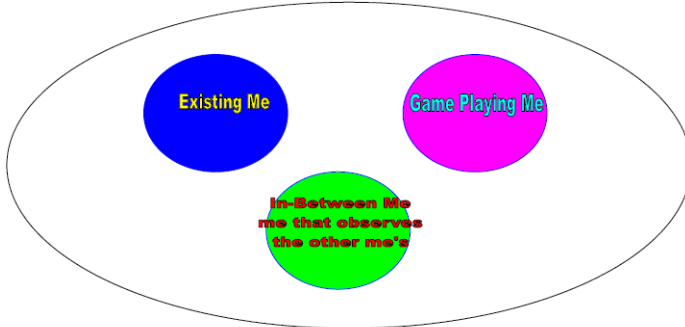
“Reading the stories of others aloud”, I am arguing, offers the possibility of transformation because as a methodology it offers embodied and rational opportunities for connection.

## **On – Disconnection**

Donelan, in an article that really says much of what I am attempting to say here already, suggests a further way of thinking about how “reading aloud” might facilitate transformation. Donelan argues drawing on the work of Heathcote and Bolton that the drama classroom can also facilitate a type of disconnection or “de-centring” (Donelan 2002: 32-5). The argument made is that enacting the stories of “others” generates a reflective and potentially transformative space (an additional aspect of self) where the drama participant experiences a sense of distance which enables reflection and the possibility of transformation. The subject expands, becomes different and more diverse, and this expansion, and the resultant reflective possibilities it opens up, can be the precursor to change.

These themes are also evident in James Paul Gee's work. In "What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy" (Gee 2003) Gee, like Donelan, also works within a framework that positions subjectivity as multiple. Gee is interested to explore why or how video games promote effective learning (Gee 2005). He articulates many principles throughout this book but the one that I want to focus on here is what I will term "inhabitation". Gee suggests that video games promote effective learning because they require that participants inhabit a particular virtual identity and that within the bounds of this virtual identity people actively engage with the virtual context that they are inhabiting to construct and produce knowledge or understanding. Gee argues that learning work is achieved through, supported by and deepened via this inhabitation. Gee's central argument is that learning isn't just something that I "do" but rather something I "become". Learning for Gee is inseparable from, and constitutive of, subjectivity – we are what we have decided to learn to become, and we decide to become many different things.

I think Gee explains this very complex terrain very clearly or far more clearly than many other accounts I have read. If we return to his focus on video games and learning (and at the risk of oversimplifying what he has to say) at the heart of Gee's argument, and there are echoes of this in Donelan, is the idea that *it isn't so much the simple act of "inhabitation" that generates learning or change, but rather the additional observational or reflective or generative space that this "inhabitation" affords*. An observational and inhabitative space that a multi-subjectivity framework can accommodate. The Diagram that follows is a simple attempt to visually represent this idea.



My argument here is essentially that another way of arguing that "reading aloud" is an effective change methodology is that it promotes a type of generative dis/connection in line with the ideas of Donelan and Gee briefly discussed above. Reading aloud simultaneously promotes or provides opportunities for connection (a la Berry) and disconnection (a la Donelan and Gee). These dis/connective possibilities offer the possibility of personal transformation, for reasons in line with a poststructuralist theorising of multiple subjectivity, that I've very briefly sketched out.



Mary Lou Rasmussen (Rasmussen 2006) drawing on the work of Butler (Butler 1990, 1997) tackles the areas of identification and foreclosure and introduces a further idea that I want to briefly throw into the mix. Essentially, as I understand it, and as very clearly worked through by Rasmussen Butler suggests that subjectivity is achieved not only via certain identifications (I want to be or feel I want to be “this” and I set about doing things that are consistent with this desire) but also via foreclosures (I don’t want to be “that” and therefore I don’t desire to do “this” or “that”) – the foreclosures that some identifications can produce. Butler explains the work of becoming a subject (subjection) as often involving this kind of trade-off – gaining “this” often involves losing “that”.

I would argue, drawing on Rasmussen’s working of Butler, that the observational space that “reading aloud” opens up is productive not only because it provides a vantage point that allows for connections and disconnections of sorts but because it provides a space from which foreclosures and identifications can be stalled – where they can be held in a productive (abject) tension.

## In Conclusion

I began the introduction to this workbook by saying that I was interested to put these materials together because I wanted to make a contribution to minimising the negative experiences that Queer Young People experience (particularly in school settings) and also because I wanted to make a contribution to furthering the goal of expansion as far as sexual and gender diversity are concerned. I also wanted to put forward in this introduction the idea that “reading aloud” can function as an effective change methodology and further I wanted to put forward some reasons, drawing on a Multi-lifeworlds/multi-subjectivity framework, as to why this might be the case.

Essentially I have argued mainly in line with Gee, Donelan and Rasmussen that “reading aloud” might work as an effective change methodology because it has the potential to promote on the one hand a type of productive connection and on the other a type of productive disconnection, and that these contradictory effects, within a “multi-lifeworlds” or multi-subjectivity framework, might occur simultaneously. The feeling of being in two places at once is difficult, often fraught with tension, but also often pregnant with possibility.

When we “read aloud” we connect to others, and we simultaneously disconnect from our own sense of self, and a generative space is established on this account. When we read aloud we may also *on some level* become aware of this multiplicity, the doubleness of being connected and disconnected at the same time, and a further generative space on this account might be established.

Living with tension is often part and parcel of what participating in programs that aim to attend to enhancing social justice entails. Moving to socially just spaces, entails being prepared to entertain the possibility of

change – entails being prepared to let go of parts of ourselves – entails being prepared to do things differently – entails a preparedness to “be” different. The “reading aloud” change pedagogy is essentially a way of going about doing the work of moving from here to somewhere else and acknowledging that this type of movement will often entail tension because it is about asking people to entertain the idea of change.

I believe that one way to support this process is to begin by gaining agreement, through dialogue, that the direction of change is worthwhile and that once agreement has been reached on this to ask people to further agree to consciously “go to a place” where they entertain the idea of change. I believe that making explicit how a particular methodology might work towards making such change is a crucial part of this type of change work, and will increase the effectiveness of such work.

The “reading aloud” pedagogy produces (can produce) a space that is about change. It is a space that I imagine people might be invited to enter where they agree to take on, try out or inhabit different voices, different personas, and different ways of taking up space in the world. A space where they *consciously* agree to attempt to stall identifications and foreclosures. A space where they entertain the idea of change, of moving beyond where they are now, via the construction of generative “observational” spaces, where reflection and the collective and individual dialogues that follow may take place.

I am going to name such spaces – “Pre-Beyonds”. A “Pre-Beyond” is any space that people freely enter when they have a preparedness to change and where they understand that such a space might facilitate change. A pre-beyond is a space that is governed or grounded by or in where you are now but that offers the possibility that this may not be where you chose to remain. “Reading Aloud” I am arguing can be such a pre-beyond space.

I am hoping that the edited conversations that follow might be read aloud by interested teachers and youth workers and that any dialogue that follows might fuel change.

## **Part 2**

### **Edited Conversations**



## Andrew

- Andrew: My name's Andrew, and I'm 17. I'm male and I identify as gay. I probably identify myself as Anglo-Saxon and I'm from the middle class.
- Michael: Okay and is there anything else you would like to add in there to identify or define yourself?
- Andrew: Um, no.
- Michael: And the school that you're enrolled in?
- Andrew: Okay um well I'm in Year 12 at a private co-ed school.
- Michael: How many students would be there roughly?
- Andrew: Sixteen hundred...It's a prep to twelve school...I should add that it's a Church school.

### *The conversation started:*

- Michael: If you have a look at those categories I've got there - school, family, culture - that would be including for instance ethnicity, gender, religion, class - recreation, friends, queer youth support group or other, from the perspective of someone who identifies as gay I would like you to talk about anything you want to talk about, in any order that you want to talk about those prompts there.
- Andrew: Okay well I'll probably start with school because it's first, for no other reason than that really. Yep. I guess one of the biggest

challenges for me at school has been that my school doesn't really have any programs that would help you understand what is a fairly difficult thing to go through in life. And because of the area it's in, it's not a really high density area for gay people to live so I've never had that opportunity to say "I am this" and I've never had the opportunity to understand myself as...Not that I think it's a really abstract sort of thing but it's taken me basically my whole life to understand something that could have been explained to me quite simply but I never had the opportunity to.

Michael: So what sorts of programs, are you meaning there?

Andrew: Oh well not that I can really suggest how to fix the problem but I guess much of what we know we learn through our parents and it seems to me in my family it was always assumed that I would be straight just because it would just be the logical, statistical sort of assumption. But at school, we have a Life Skills program as I think all schools do and I guess it (gayness) was never addressed as an issue and in fact it's pretty much a taboo at school to (discuss) and so I think that and I still do that if 10% of the people at my school are gay that there are 10% of people that really should be getting information and we do programs for smaller minority groups so it just seems a bit strange to me.

Michael: So would you say that there are times when you've heard information, about straight perspectives where you thought this should be inclusive of queer perspectives or gay perspectives?

Andrew: Um well I guess one of the biggest things which I guess is sort of direct is that in Life Skills we were taught sexual education.

Michael: Yes.

Andrew: And in "Sexual Education" basically you learnt how to have heterosexual sex and protect yourself against the sort of STI's that heterosexual people encounter and that's not a problem for me because I'm not a sexually active person but hypothetically if I was there would be a problem because I wouldn't be educated at school, and of course I can go out and find this information for myself but not at school and some people don't get (such information) out of school.

Michael: Would there be difficulties to find that information at school?

Andrew: Um well I guess if a person wasn't "out" and wanted information you couldn't exactly ask for it without sort of...

Michael: "Outing" yourself.

Andrew: ...compromising that secrecy and so that could be a problem for some people. Of course it's available on the internet but not everyone has the internet and not everyone has the courage or the interest really to go out into the real world and get it.

*We then talked about being "out" at school:*

Michael: So what is your situation at school, are you “out” at school?

Andrew: Um well I’m not open with it with everyone but most of my friends know, a couple of teachers know but I’m not really, it’s not at the stage where I’ve told everyone, no it’s simply because that would take a lot of work and could create problems and I don’t really want to deal with that.

Michael: So you’ve made a decision not to do that for that reason. Do you feel any pressure to be “out”? ... When did you start “coming out” at school?

Andrew: I didn’t start telling people that I knew until 2006 so it was, and then I sort of told some friends sporadically throughout that period, 2006 – 2007, um and as to whether I feel pressured or not, it’s something that I feel able to do because I don’t think I should have to hide anything about myself but at the same time it’s something that could cause problems for myself and my friends and sort of out of consideration for my own well being and just for like social harmony and things like that I don’t want to cause problems until...

Michael: Like what sort of problems might it cause?

Andrew: Um well I have friends who are really conservative and who sort of understand me as a straight person and that’s just an assumption and that’s their own assumption but then again at times in the past if I’ve been asked am I straight I would have lied and said “yes” because it was something that I did when I was younger and now I use sort of general inclusive terms so I don’t feel as guilty but effectively that would mean I would have to tell all my close friends that I had directly lied to them which is a problem with me but also my more conservative friends may not want to be friends with me if they knew that I was gay.

Michael: Does that put you under any pressure?

Andrew: Oh yeah well definitely, I guess sexual identity is a huge part of anyone’s identity and having to lie about your identity for a certain period of time is a pressure that heterosexual people don’t have because no one really assumes that someone is gay, it’s just not, it’s just a social norm I guess. So it’s a pressure that is only felt by that particular group.

Michael: In relation to sexual identity?

Andrew: In relation to sexual identity yeah. I guess there are other situations like people who (may lie) about their religion.

*Later we returned to talk about being “in” and “out”:*

Michael: There was a time at school when you weren’t “out” and there was a time at school when you’re “out” to some people and not “out” to others. Is it better being “out” to some people and not being

“out” to others than not being “out” to anyone?...And what made you start to decide to tell people, why was that important?

Andrew: Okay, I'll try and answer that all I'll try and remember everything you said, let's see, the difference between the two (being “out” and not being “out”). I guess um, now I guess it's a bit like living a double life, which is a terrible way of putting it but I'm also glad that I've told my friends and it's also a learning experience to cast off things that you've denied and just have someone accept you for who you are and at the same time know that if someone doesn't accept you for who you are that's just tough luck ...Um, what was the next one, I'm sorry?

*The conversation then turned to: Why Andrew had decided to “come out”:*

Andrew: Um well I guess I'm fairly passionate about human rights and sort of living the “good life” in some way and I guess I sort of feel that no one should have anything to be ashamed of...I sort of got to a point where I thought that, I just couldn't, I thought I was morally compromising myself by being dishonest to so many people and that it was also something that I wanted to share with my friends, that I wanted my friends to um, to sort of know who I really was in the entirety of myself because I'm quite open with my political views or my moral views or my religious beliefs and things like that. And so, I guess I didn't feel that I was a part of a real world when I wasn't being entirely open with who I was so it was sort of entering into a new world with each individual person.

Michael: Oh.

Andrew: Um well I guess I told, I told my first friend from school casually but probably a little bit more dramatically (than I would have liked) because kind of like the only guidance I'd had about how to do that was what I'd seen in a movie or something that I could imagine with my Hollywood conditioned brain. So when I told my first friend she sort of said that she was really proud that I had told her...And I think it does say a lot about the person, not so much that you can judge them by what their sexuality is but it helps you understand who they are because you know the sort of past that they've had. And I guess, it really, well it is quite a big thing, not in an individual sense but because of the life you have to lead because of it. So having a friend to understand that I guess was a really um, I can't think of a word other than liberating but I felt that I was part of that world that everyone else is a part of, whereas I always felt a bit detached from that.

*We then talked about friends that Andrew was “out” to and those that he wasn't “out” to:*



- Michael: Okay I'm interested if, maybe if you compare and contrast now the friends that you're "out" to and the friends that you're not...
- Andrew: Yeah and I guess, well who I've told has depended on a number of factors so whether they'd take it okay like if they'd think that being gay was a bad thing like I wouldn't tell them at this stage and there are some of my friends who are really passionate about gay rights which I always got a bit of a laugh about before I told them, so I haven't really told the friends that wouldn't take it well and have told the friends I think would have...
- Michael: And okay and in forming those judgments what is it about, in terms of friends that would take it well and others that wouldn't, are there any sort of patterns in the friends that would take it well and the ones that wouldn't?
- Andrew: Well I think typically women take it a lot better than men, I think that's just a social observation, it is a big generalisation but um I guess I've told people who are a little bit more liberal thinking, not in the political sense but in a moral sense and most of the people that I haven't told are more of my religious friends because of their religious beliefs that it's a perversion or a sin and it would sort of be a bit of a shock for them and would possibly damage our friendship...and that is something that I've avoided so far.
- Michael: Now again, you don't have answer any of these things but how do you feel about any of your friends possibly thinking that you're a sinner or that you're perverted? How do you deal with that?
- Andrew: Well I guess I understand, better than most I think, that people have different views and I'm very passionate about discussing issues in an open, casual forum and really the idea that being gay is okay is a conviction, there's no sort of proof that it is, I just think in my mind that it is okay because that is who I am and (discussion is) the way society works best and saying "it's not okay" is a really repressive, sort of damaging ideology and for me that sort of egalitarian idea is what is right so...One friend that I've sort of spoken to about the idea of homosexuality said that he doesn't agree with it because of religious beliefs...and he just doesn't, but at the same time he said he'd be okay with it, it isn't a big concern for him. But I've spoken to other people, perhaps who aren't my friends, because I do tend to be friends with people who are a little more liberal who've said that, like if they had a sibling, like if I spoke to someone who was really conservative, if they found out they had a gay sibling they have quite outright said that they would end conversations and all social interaction with that person which is a fairly big step for someone to say and I guess I just respect that some people feel like that and I'm quite fortunate not to be friends with a lot of people who are like that but that's their belief and it's not like I can really change it...but at

the same time if they knew someone under the assumption that they were straight and then found out that they were gay, they might (begin to) understand...

Michael: Okay so your take on the attitudes of peers and school friends is really to accept that they have a right to a different point of view?

Andrew: Yeah well being gay is one aspect of me and I have people hypothetically in the world who will not want to socialise with me because I am gay and then at the same time there are people who will not want to socialise with me because I am not religious and there will be people who will not want to socialise with me because I am middle class, and all sorts of things and this is just one aspect, and coming from the middle class um and being not being in a religious minority like I'm not accustomed to being oppressed, of having things about me that really aren't my choice that people won't like.

*We then returned to talk about family:*

Michael: Alright well as you flip down the list of those points there, are there any things that you want to pull out and comment about?

Andrew: Okay well going down the list, family, my family, I've got an atomic family, a nuclear family, none of my family members know that I'm gay and that's sort of my choice but and because I'm not quite yet comfortable telling people that I've known for 17 years...I guess with friends...if a friend doesn't take it well or I don't like how things end up, not that I would but hypothetically I could just say goodbye to that friend, that's sort of in my power to do so. But with family I'm sort of stuck with them so, and I'm also financially dependent on them so it's a bit of a bigger issue there, not that I think that my parents would reject me or they wouldn't stop loving me but that is a big change that I'm just not ready for at this point in time.

Michael: So do you have any brothers or sisters?

Andrew: Yep, I have a sister...No, um how would my sister take it? She probably wouldn't mind, she's not the greatest fan of me generally...I think my parents and my sister probably realise that I haven't been doing heterosexual things for 17 years so I don't think it would be a huge shock to them either, yeah.

Michael: So what, so you've just made an interesting phrase there, heterosexual things, so what sort of things are markers of heterosexuality?

Andrew: ...Um because I don't want one and I think normally people my age have had girlfriends but then by the same token, from my parent's perspective, they are the sort of people who would link the sort of things that I do to gay people...I'm interested in community...and politics and things like that, which is generally not a

heterosexual interest, I know I'm making sweeping generalisations and things like I might not be interested in football or sports and things like that sort of identify me as being gay shall we say.

Michael: So football, not being interested in football...that still is a marker of...

Andrew: Yeah I think socially people still think that football is just a heterosexual thing and of course it's not because I know gay people who like football and gay people who play football but I think it is still a very traditional sport to follow.

Michael: Well I'm interested in the activism...so you'd see activism as something that is understood as an activity that gay people would be involved in?

Andrew: Well I think a gay, I'm making sweeping generalisations but people who are interested in advocacy and things like that generally come from a background where they have been in adversity because that helps them, identify a problem, so I don't imagine there are a lot of people who are interested in homosexual affairs who are not, or do not have a connection...Yeah and I have no gay family members because I have a very small family and I guess coming from a reasonably normal background, not really having to struggle through anything that's (gayness) sort of the only adversity that I could encounter really.

*Later the conversation moved to struggle:*

Michael: So you, sort of talked about struggle, has gayness ever been a struggle?

Andrew: Well I think that it's given me and I think most people, well some gay people a really unique sort of experience in life because I have had an opportunity to digest new information without anyone really telling me what to do...

Michael: So what do you mean by that?

Andrew: Well I mean that society is geared so that people understand that people are, born straight or they are straight or whatever, um and so for me knowing, I guess I probably knew since I became sexually aware, I knew then that I was gay and that I was attracted to the same sex instead of the opposite sex and this was something that I had to digest myself and I had to figure out reasons for this and try and understand it and that is sort of one of the situations in life where you really have to digest new information because in any other sort of situation of adversity, not trying to link it but um if you were disabled physically or mentally, people would explain to you what your situation was and they would be available for you but (gayness)...It was sort of a really independent realisation.

*We then talked about contact with the queer community:*

Michael: Okay so are you connected with any other queer people in any way?

Andrew: Well I have friends that are gay or lesbian but not that I have actively seeked them out like through like a queer support group, I'm not involved with anything like that but I sort of identify myself as gay, because I think for many years I thought I was a straight person who was attracted to the same sex um, since identifying myself as gay I've wanted to keep company, more so, not that I am exclusively in the company of homosexuals but um I have wanted to keep company with people that I identify with.

Michael: So when you said before that you were a straight person, or that you thought you were a straight person who was just attracted to guys, I mean ...can you talk more about that?

Andrew: Well I guess that sort of gets back to what I've been told as a person growing up that the assumption is that you are a straight person so I guess I came to identify myself as, not exclusively because I don't think, heterosexual people walk down the street thinking in their mind "I am heterosexual" because it's just not a reality for them as it, just as I don't walk down the street thinking I am a gay person but um that at school and at home my parents or my teachers or my friends have never really said there is a chance that you might be gay, that was never a possibility and so I guess I just came to some stupid conclusion that, I've gone through many, that I would be gay for a period and then asexual or that I would be gay and then turn straight or whatever and I assumed many things basically without any guidance.

Michael: So you see sexuality or understand sexuality as something that can change?

Andrew: Oh no, I don't think I know the answer to that question but if I had to guess from my own experience I'd say that sexuality isn't fluid, that it's quite a solid part of our identity, I don't know why but and I would say that in my life I have always been exclusively homosexual but how I identify myself has changed.

*The conversation then moved to consider culture:*

Michael: Okay so any of the things there in "culture" that you want to comment about?

Andrew: Yep.

Michael: And it doesn't have to be a comment about your own experience necessarily, you might have a general comment that you want to make.

Andrew: Okay, well um well ethnically I am an Anglo-Saxon person but...I think that there are groups, and this would be the case with religion as well, there are groups that would be challenged because of their ethnicity by being gay so um a good example of that might be in Islamic communities and I'm sort (of loathe) to draw the common scapegoat at the moment that is Islam (but in Islam) homosexuality is really not acceptable so being from that religious group or that ethnic group would be a problem and if I was born into a Muslim family my life would be much different and I guess that would be the case for most ethnic groups that are more conservative...and gender-wise, I think that's another thing where being gay is effected differently, it depends on your gender. Um I think, because men have that position where we have a patriarchal society, being gay can be problematic but you've still sort of got the upper hand of gender um so if you take politics for example we had male gay politicians around before we had female, lesbian politicians, I think the first one was Penny Wall um and so you can see being a woman and gay creates an entrenched sort of problem rather than a male and gay because being male in this world is an advantage, not, I don't think it should be but it is. But I guess the other side to that coin is though that um, for whatever reason I think lesbians are more accepted than gay men and that sort of changes depending on the person...Religion sort of ties in with that basically because a lot of religions are based on ethnic groupings but definitely the more conservative religions would definitely have problems with homosexuality. I'm quite fortunate that my family is agnostic, although I tend to identify myself as atheist agnostic, so that's never been a problem for me. Oh and class um, I think again I'm from the middle class which is a more conservative class, the upper class being a more liberal, but if someone was from a really poverty stricken area, not just in Australia but internationally being gay would be, would represent a massive problem...

Michael: In what way, how?

Andrew: Well if you think about like um someone who is really, really poor and must marry, take a lesbian in that sort of section of society who wasn't allowed to get an education or can't get a job because she's a woman or whatever um must marry but of course lesbian women have no interest in marrying men, and again that's another generalisation but I'm pretty sure that one's class effects that experience quite a lot.

*We then diverted to discuss marriage:*

Andrew: Oh well in some situations, even in modern day societies we see that traditional institutions are breaking down. A lot of people

are turning away from marriage because couples don't believe it's a representation of their love and commitment. Partially it's because it's just a legal document and also they realise that same sex couples can't get married. So and other things like the Anglican church is now accepting gay ministers and we've got gay politicians and things like that, it's slowly starting to become a bit more...

Michael: Is like marriage something that you would aspire to as a gay man or...?

Andrew: That's sort of a difficult question. I understand marriage in the common law is a relationship between a man and a woman and gives you all these wonderful and legal benefits...

Michael: Which it does.

Andrew: Which it does and that would be great but um I don't think that, that sort of legal support is needed to have a relationship and I guess I am quite fortunate in that I've got relations who are in long term relationships without being married so I understand quite literally that you don't have to be married to be in a relationship but as far as aspiring to become married, as it stands I wouldn't want to buy into an institution that has been so exclusively heterosexual because that just does not seem to me to be a step towards marriage or what marriage is supposed to stand for but if we had civil unions like I think they do in the UK then I see no reason why I wouldn't want a civil union but the only reason that I would really want to be married is for tax, superannuation and division of property...

Michael: So you don't want to assimilate, you want the equality around inheritance, tax and all that stuff but you don't want to sign up for an institution that you see as problematic.

Andrew: Yeah.

*The conversation then moved to recreation:*

Michael: Any thoughts about recreation?

Andrew: Again I sort of link that back to there are some activities that are really heterosexual activities like football, I know it's a cliché but I doubt there's (gay) people in really working class sort of football clubs, I doubt they're fortresses of liberal thinking. So in some sense if you were really interested in football that could be a problem for you as a gay person if you wanted to pursue it as a career...

Michael: Can you think of any areas where sexuality might enhance your ability, or identifying as gay might be an attribute?

Andrew: Yeah I think identifying yourself as gay or any sort of diversity about someone does give you some advantage because you become someone, through no fault of your own, who has expertise in that area. So my interest in advocacy and things like that, being

from a diverse sort of background um is an advantage and some people are interested in conversing with people who are diverse.

Michael: Alright...you have mentioned advocacy a few times...What is important that adults and people who are in positions of power, hear?

Andrew: I go to school and I assume in the state system there is no real focus on um informing people about sexual diversity. Not to say there is a deliberate attempt to not raise that but I've never experienced anyone trying to make a positive step on that front and I think it's quite easy to, if it doesn't happen then people are free to get the wrong impression and as you said earlier if you met someone who thought that being gay wasn't good and they met someone who they liked that was gay that might change their views. In the same way if people understood that I guess the big problem that they don't understand is that sexual identity is only one part of what someone is and just because they're gay doesn't mean you don't agree with everything else they have to say...

Michael: So information can facilitate education and awareness?

Andrew: Yep.

Michael: What sort of information are you talking about?

Andrew: Um I think it's important, I would think it's important the young people who are gay receive information, and even people who aren't gay, receive information to help them understand um what they're going through and help them identify with who they are. Some people don't need that, like I know someone who is gay and their older brother is gay and this person probably has thought their whole life that is what I am and they've had someone to support them but for me, not that I've had a really rough time of it, I haven't had anyone who has supported me in helping me to understand my sexual identity so that's been a really individual thing and I don't think that that's the best way to do it.

Michael: Alright so information about sexual identity, any other sorts of information that young people might need or...?

Andrew: Um well information about places where they can get information possibly um I think it would folly for schools to spend a year teaching students what gayness is because 90% of the world aren't gay um I think there does need to be some information there should be some information about how you can go about getting that information.

Michael: Getting that information, okay and where, which subjects in school should that information come through?

Andrew: I think that in my school, I know that a lot of schools have Life Skills, I think that would be a really good place to put it. Some schools don't have Life Skills they have Pastoral Care...

- Michael: So you see it is as being, what I'm picking up is that you see it as being much broader than how to have sex, it's sort of much um, it's more about how you live your sexuality, life skills.
- Andrew: I think sex is fairly much optional so um I think it's more important that people understand who they are which they unconditionally have to deal with every day of their lives rather than *how* to have sex which some people may never get around to doing.
- Michael: Okay well I'm just trying to think if there's anything else. Is there any point that you'd like to finish on?
- Andrew: Oh, um...
- Michael: That's not on the sheet.
- Andrew: I should have worked this in casually but now it's going to be a bit blunt but I think one of the biggest problems for someone like me who lives on the urban fringe is the lack of services that are there. So I know in areas that are perhaps a bit more metropolitan they might have set up queer youth support groups. So even if hypothetically I wanted to join a queer youth support group it would be logistically difficult for me to do that.
- Michael: And I suppose what do you see, do you see any sort of ways around that, as well as spending more money?
- Andrew: Fortunately I'm young and can say spend as much money as you want without feeling guilty about it but I guess it's, it's partially because the programs don't get support because where I'm from they've tried to set the program up and it's failed because there weren't enough people to go but I really don't think it's something that we can just leave because people who never come to understand their sexual identity will lead pretty unhappy lives and I think it's really quite cruel to overlook certain people just because of where they choose to live...

*We then closed the interview by talking about the best thing about being gay:*

- Michael: I think we'll close on...I'll just get you to talk about what's the best thing about being gay?
- Andrew: The best thing about being gay um...gosh I don't know it's sort of I'm trying to think of a way without saying, "it's like entering an exclusive society", it's a, I guess it's an aspect of being diverse and a lot of people are really proud to be diverse in any way...like those people who go overseas and quite happily wave the Australian flag because in that situation they are the minority group and they're proud of who they are. And I live in Australia and I'm ethnically, fiscally, religiously, socially neutral so for me it's something, it's really good to have an aspect of myself that is diverse and different because it's something that I can identify with and change my identity based on...Um I guess the best way that I can put it is it's like being a more real person, or more real to



yourself so being able to freely identify myself, in every aspect of my life, knowing everything there is to know about myself and accepting it and stating it is I guess an amazing feeling of just understanding and knowing, I guess it's a wisdom that I denied for many years until I understood it really.



## Leah

- Leah: Leah - I'm 16.  
Michael: 16 and you're currently at a secondary school?  
Leah: Yep.  
Michael: Okay and what year are you in?  
Leah: Year 11.  
Michael: Year 11 so VCE?  
Leah: Yep.  
Michael: And in terms of ethnicity?  
Leah: In terms of like religion and stuff?  
Michael: Religion is part of background, do you have a religious background?  
Leah: I'm supposed to be Protestant but that's just my family so I'm just atheist.  
Michael: Okay you have a Greek background or...?  
Leah: Um sort of mixed European so yeah, part Viking.  
Michael: All right so a bit of Viking that's good and class in terms of income?  
Leah: Um what does that mean?  
Michael: Do you see yourself as rich, poor, in the middle?  
Leah: In the middle I guess.  
Michael: Okay and sexuality how do you identify?  
Leah: I'm bisexual.  
Michael: Now the school that you're in...

Leah: Yeah.  
 Michael: How big is the school?  
 Leah: It's about four hundred people. It's only like doing VCE.  
 Michael: Okay so it's a Year 11 and 12 school.  
 Leah: Yeah.  
 Michael: And it has a 7 to 10 campus.  
 Leah: Yep.  
 Michael: Do you live here; this is a large rural city yeah?  
 Leah: Yeah I live on the outskirts rather than in town.  
 Michael: Okay I've got a number of dot points. I am sort of keen if you could talk about any or some of these things.

*Leah started the conversation by discussing friends and school:*

Leah: Um with friends I'm pretty sure that my friends don't care because pretty much the majority of my friends are bisexual or gay so I pretty much just fit in anyway and the straight people don't seem to care anyway. And I don't have any problems with other people that I don't really know because they don't seem to care either.  
 Michael: Okay so how many gay, lesbian or bi friends do you have, because you were saying that most of your friends are...?  
 Leah: I can't count them so, um probably about 70% of the people I know would be?  
 Michael: A few gay, lesbian or bisexual people? So do you think that's unusual or...?  
 Leah: At first I thought it kind of was but then I got used to the idea that people are more open and accepting nowadays so people are less embarrassed to say what they are.  
 Michael: Okay so that is a lot of people.  
 Leah: Yeah, I've been to three different high schools so yeah.  
 Michael: Oh okay so across three different high schools.  
 Leah: Yeah.  
 Michael: So at each of those high schools, so why have you been to three high schools, is there any...?  
 Leah: Um I...  
 Michael: You don't have to answer any of these questions either...  
 Leah: No I'm fine. I started off at one high school and then I moved in with my mum and went to another one and then I had to move back to the first one but I didn't like that one anyway so then I moved to the one I'm at now.  
 Michael: Okay and it's through those schools that you've met those people that identify as queer, we'll use "queer" as an umbrella term to cover students who don't identify as straight and you've met quite a few by the sounds.  
 Leah: Yeah.

- Michael: Yeah across those three schools. Was there a time when you didn't know any other gay or lesbian or bi people?
- Leah: Yeah it's pretty much in the last 2 or 3 years and before that they were, they didn't want to talk about it or they were embarrassed or they didn't even know so.
- Michael: So that's probably from about Year 9?
- Leah: Yeah.

*The conversation continued, I asked what had happened or changed to make her "come out":*

- Michael: So is there anything that happened, like what would you put that down to, was it just that people were getting older or did the school do something...?
- Leah: Yeah, I think people were just getting more mature and more comfortable with themselves to talk about it.
- Michael: Yeah okay and people did make the decision to talk about it.
- Leah: Yeah and I guess when a few people opened up other people would as well so it set off a chain reaction kind of thing.
- Michael: Where did they open up when they opened up, like how did they do it?
- Leah: Um we'd just be talking like in my small group of friends and when they got used to it they might tell other people and yeah.
- Michael: Okay and, so can you remember a time when you hadn't told other people and you had a feeling that you were bi, when did you first identify as bi?
- Leah: Um probably Year 7 or Year 8.
- Michael: Okay Year 7 or Year 8?
- Leah: Yeah.
- Michael: And how did you feel about that when it happened?
- Leah: Um, I guess kind of like I didn't really care, I just couldn't really be bothered telling anyone and I didn't know what other people's reactions might be so I didn't tell anyone, yeah.
- Michael: And what made that change?
- Leah: Um I was just sort of with a group of friends and one of my friends was talking about how his girlfriend was bi and then pretty much everyone else in the room said they were bi as well so I said, "Hey."
- Michael: So this was girls and guys who said they were bi?
- Leah: There was only the one guy in the room so...
- Michael: So there was only one guy in the room.
- Leah: Yeah I think there was only one girl in the room, one girl who said that she was straight so.
- Michael: So how many people were in the room?
- Leah: Um about 5 or 6 people and then yeah from that it just kind of escalated in other groups so yeah.

*We talked about the gendered dimensions of this:*

- Michael: Do you think that the experience would be different for young guys than for young women?
- Leah: Um I'd say there's definitely a majority of women and yeah I don't really know that many gay guys but I know of some bisexual guys and they don't really talk about it or they just started mentioning it and then there are the really obvious ones.
- Michael: And why would it be less likely that they'd mention it?
- Leah: Um like guys might be a bit more sensitive about it. Girls are less likely to get bashed or something or other guys might, it kind of seems like guys are more homophobic so yeah it's just a confidence thing I think.
- Michael: Is that the impression you would form of young guys or guys in general that they are more homophobic than...?
- Leah: Yeah from what I've seen yeah pretty much.
- Michael: Okay and that's different to young women?
- Leah: Yeah.
- Michael: So why, how are young women different, or how are they better?
- Leah: They seem to be more accepting about that kind of stuff than um...
- Michael: And what do you make of that?
- Leah: I don't know it's, kind of it's just that they're more open with it and more comfortable with it so yeah.

*We then moved onto "school"... Leah compared students that she knows who are different ages:*

- Michael: Okay so school doesn't sound like it's been a disaster.
- Leah: Um the first school I went to it was pretty, it was a public school and the people were sort of snobby and a bit sort of "Westie" like.
- Michael: So "Westie" like, what does that mean?
- Leah: Sort of just kind of selfish and, I can't think of a way of explaining it, just like...
- Michael: Not welcoming.
- Leah: Yeah and they just like more, they were more violent than other people and more outgoing in that sense so yeah, plus it was a big school about 1000, no about 1400 people so it was hard to get used to...
- Michael: That size. So that school wasn't a great school in terms of homophobic attitudes and so forth?
- Leah: Yeah it was, like there were gays and bi's there but they had people picking on them and throwing things at them and getting into fights and then the second school I went to was, yeah they were more open about it but mainly with the girls I think.

- Michael: So at the second school the girls were a bit more receptive but the boys were still sort of quiet?
- Leah: Yeah I mean the guys were obviously accepting of the girls but I don't think anyone (guys) opened up or anything so yeah and the one that I'm at now a lot of my friends are bi or gay so yeah.
- Michael: And do you see that having any impact on the way classes run at all in any way?
- Leah: No I don't think so because everyone is pretty much accepting and they don't care about anyone's sexuality or anything like that.

*We then discussed subject content:*

- Michael: What about things like assignments or whatever like what subjects are you doing?
- Leah: I'm doing mainly "Art" subjects like Art, Drama, Photography...
- Michael: Do you feel you are able to put themes in related to sexuality, (do) you feel less constrained?
- Leah: Yeah.
- Michael: Like if you were not "out" as a bi, and I'm not saying you're "out" as in you're saying "I'm bi, I'm bi, I'm bi" but do you think that has an impact on the way you go about doing your work as a VCE student?
- Leah: Um no, I guess if I wanted I could bring it up in a subject or something, I guess I just never really thought about it.
- Michael: Of doing that.
- Leah: Yeah.
- Michael: Do you hear about gay and lesbian things, and bi things in the subjects that you do, do you get information that you need to get?
- Leah: Yeah pretty much like in Drama there are a few bi's in there and we could easily bring that up in Drama or something and we could make it exaggerated or make it realistic and no one had a problem with it so yeah.
- Michael: Any other subjects apart from Drama?
- Leah: It's never really brought up in any other subjects. Like I have a gay friend, two gay friends who seem to bring it up in Art and are fine about it and I guess if I wanted to do something on that I would do it.
- Michael: What about Sex Ed?
- Leah: I don't do that ...
- Michael: No but in the younger years did you do?
- Leah: Yeah that wasn't really brought up at all.
- Michael: So there was no coverage of same sex stuff in there?
- Leah: No there wasn't.
- Michael: No I sort of prompted you on that one because a lot of people have said in Sex Ed, that they don't get any information about safe

sex or whatever that is targeted towards gay sex - it's pretty much about straight sex.

Leah: Yeah pretty much. I think in one class they brought up like gay sex for a few minutes and no one was really interested so they just moved on.

Michael: They just moved on.

Leah: Yeah it was just like everyone had pretty much got the idea so.

Michael: Alright um, um is there anything else you want to say about school?

Leah: No I can't think of anything.

*We then talked about family:*

Michael: Okay, what about family?

Leah: Um because I live with my grandparents and my dad, my grandparents being Christian I haven't brought it up in front of them and I pretty much avoid the whole subject because I don't know what they're going to like. They know gay people and they talk about it, they could be friends with them but they say "Oh he's gay" and keep cracking jokes about it and yeah it's kind of like she objects to it but she's accepting of it because it's kind of like a peer pressure thing, other people are accepting of it, but I don't know what she would think if I said it.

Michael: And that doesn't cause you any problems or conflict?

Leah: Um na, like they don't seem to care and they haven't asked or anything. I don't think mum and dad would care but yeah because they know I have gay friends and they come by and they're fine with it so yeah.

Michael: Okay so you're not "out" as such to your parents and your grandparents but you're "out" to other people and you would have other (queer) people come around to your place?

Leah: Yeah it's like they don't care if other people are gay or bisexual or lesbian or whatever but I don't know how they would react if a part of the family was.

Michael: And would they ask, "Is this person gay?" or whatever, would that come up with them in conversation?

Leah: Um not really, they don't seem to care about other people like I was talking to my uncle and auntie and they asked and I'm like, "Oh yeah I'm bisexual" but that's because they don't really see the rest of my family and they think differently and they're atheist as well so, and they were fine with it yeah.

*The conversation then moved to religions and back to family:*

Michael: So were you Christian?



- Leah: Yeah I think when I was little, until I started thinking for myself yeah.
- Michael: And that didn't cause you any problems?
- Leah: No I just think that I can't be religious because I don't believe in any of the ideals that they say or all that kind of stuff so I pretty much think what I want yeah.
- Michael: Okay would you like to tell your family at some stage that you're bi or is it not an issue or...?
- Leah: Um eventually I might want to but at the moment it's not really bothering me so yeah.

*Queer Youth Support Group:*

- Michael: What do you get out of the queer youth support group?
- Leah: I pretty much come here to meet new people, I have friends here anyway and I have nothing to do after school so I pretty much just come along, yeah.
- Michael: So it's pretty much just a place to go?
- Leah: Yeah.
- Michael: Yeah, all right and do you think it's a good space to come to?
- Leah: Yeah, everyone is pretty much laid back and friendly so...
- Michael: And have you made friends here or have you met other people?
- Leah: Um yeah I don't, I'm not close friends with them but I just talk to them and yeah.
- Michael: So you said you mainly hang around with gay, lesbian and bi people and that's not an effect of the queer youth group as such, you've done that through school?
- Leah: Yep.
- Michael: I might be wrong but you're not coming here with issues around sexuality, you're just coming here generally.
- Leah: Yeah, pretty much.
- Michael: And it's just like a nice little (extra) that there's other queer young people here.
- Leah: Yeah.
- Michael: So (sexuality is) not the main reason you're coming here, would it be or not?
- Leah: Um about 50-50 just yeah because I pretty much only came along because I had friends here and everyone was pretty much bi or gay or...
- Michael: So there was a place to go and meet.
- Leah: It's like I already know I have something in common with these people so...

*We then moved back to talk about friends at school:*

- Michael: So you pretty much said with friends at school that you're "out".

- Leah: Yeah.  
Michael: So how do you go about doing that or...?  
Leah: Um, I just go about whatever I'm doing I guess if anyone asks...  
Michael: So if it comes up.  
Leah: Yeah if it comes up I just go, "Yeah".  
Michael: But you don't make it a, a big speech about it or...?  
Leah: Na.  
Leah: Yeah it's just like if it comes up I'll admit to it.

*I asked Leah what the best thing about being bi was:*

- Leah: Um, (pause) um it doubles your chance of getting a date. (laugh)  
No, not really. Um I think it kind of makes you more open to other things as well, because there are people who are homophobic and stuff so you can see what it's like for the other person so yeah kind of like it just makes you more accepting of other things.

## Heathcliff

Michael: What name do you want to go by?

Heathcliff: Heathcliff.

Michael: Okay I suppose the next thing is to just get some general information about how you identify so could you speak to that, how old are you, gender, all that sort of stuff?

Heathcliff: Well I'm male, 17 years old and I live in outer leafy suburbia and go to a school of roughly 700 people.

Michael: Yes.

Heathcliff: No, no make it 500 people.

Michael: Alright so 500 people, is it a 7 to 12 school?

Heathcliff: That's right.

Michael: Okay. In terms of ethnicity, do you understand what ethnicity...?

Heathcliff: It's predominantly, mostly Caucasian.

Michael: How do you define yourself in terms of your sexuality?

Heathcliff: Well I define myself as gay.

Michael: Yep...

Heathcliff: But in terms of my actions I guess you could call me asexual.

Michael: Don't feel that you have to disclose things that you are uncomfortable about disclosing, you don't have to say anything that's personal or that you don't want to say yeah? If you have a look down that list of dot points there, um I'd just like you to start talking about one of those that you want to start talking about.

*Heathcliff started by discussing school:*

Heathcliff: Okay. I'll start off with my school. I, in terms of what I am to other people, I'm fairly accepted, and I'm not harassed but sometimes I feel that I'm not completely respected by the staff especially when I bring up issues relating to sexuality and how can I get that message across to the rest of the school.

Michael: So can you give me an example of that?

Heathcliff: Well I tried to run, well no I submitted an article for the weekly newsletter about how identifying as gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender can be a rough experience but it's not necessarily a lonely one and that there are resources out there, outside the school and inside the school to seek help. That was pulled by the Principal.

Michael: From the newsletter?

Heathcliff: Well everything in the newsletter has to go by him and he rejected it which I think is a bit of a shame.

Michael: So is this a newsletter that goes out to parents or is it a newsletter that's designed for students or is it a school newsletter?

Heathcliff: It's mostly designed for the parents as well as the students as it's a way of the school communicating with all the parents which, according to the Principal was one reason why it was cut, that the parents deemed it inappropriate for that kind of material to be in the newsletter...

Michael: So thinking about it from the Principal's side of things for a minute, was there anything in there that you think might be controversial or...?

Heathcliff: Well the subject itself I guess is a bit controversial and I knew that upon submitting the piece to the newsletter and he's, I guess you could say he's a bit conservative, I mean he could be receiving phone calls or something like that but if it's not the school's place to interject on something like that where else are they going to learn that kind of information?

Michael: So in terms of the content that you wrote, can you remember what you wrote...?

Heathcliff: It was completely non-sexual really it was just saying, I wrote it on behalf of the young gay and lesbian group that runs out of the community health centre saying that yeah... Yeah, being a gay or lesbian at school can be rough depending on who your group of friends are and just all other factors that come into it but the fact that you can make that choice to say I want to belong somewhere, I don't want to be alone so I just listed a couple of resources...

Michael: So that young people themselves can access...

Heathcliff: Including the student welfare coordinator...

Michael: At school.

Heathcliff: And out of school groups.

Michael: Okay now to your knowledge what other stuff has been in the newsletter that you would think would be pretty much the same as what you put in there but maybe focused on a different topic or something? Does that make any sense?...What else has been in there that you think, that they have published that would be pretty much the same as what you had been writing about except that it dealt with a different group of people?

Heathcliff: Well the major portion of the newsletter is pretty much banal happenings that are going on in the school. I mean occasionally there would be tips on parenting or how to do homework and that kind of thing. But I submitted it under the illusion that it was relevant to the student body, at least to a minority of them.

Michael: So how did you feel about that and what did you do about that?

Heathcliff: Well I felt kind of angry, being that my Principal would not allow such a thing...I remember in Year 7 he gave out miniature pocket additions of the Gideon's Bible to all the Year 7's and it's a public school.

Michael: So you see that there's a contradiction there that it's okay to give some sort of information but not others, and that's the point that you're making and that you see there's a level of hypocrisy there.

Heathcliff: Well I think it's an important message that should have gone out.

Michael: So why is it important?

Heathcliff: When you come, when you start realising, having these feelings, you don't really know what to do with them. I mean while you're in a school atmosphere you keep on hearing these labels and "gay" as a derogatory term thrown around quite a bit so it's pretty different to get actual resources to actually help a person and if anybody would come to harm because they were misinformed then who would be responsible for that? I mean to some people reading the newsletter it might just be some words of print but to someone else it could have been a whole lot more.

Michael: So to someone who was gay or lesbian or bi or trans it could be a whole lot more because they could use that information to access support if they needed it.

Heathcliff: That's right.

*The conversation then moved to support:*

Michael: Yeah so um, so you sort of talked a little bit there about people needing support and a place to belong and that sort of stuff. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

Heathcliff: Well not everyone needs help I mean some people will come to terms on their own, other people will need a bit of assistance with that. But um the point is that those resources are there for those who want to seek it out.

- Michael: So what's your experience with that then, did you need assistance, how do you feel about being gay and identifying as gay and is that an easy statement to make or is that a statement that you have found difficult to make?
- Heathcliff: Well yeah I identify as gay but um I don't really think very much of it, it's just a label really, I mean I've "come out" at school, I'm fully "out", well I wouldn't say fully because well everybody knows but not everybody needs to know and frankly I don't really give a damn whoever knows.
- Michael: Is that a good place to be?
- Heathcliff: Well I'm not in the business, well I don't like making lies because then you've got to keep track of them and you've got to say the right things to the right people and in the event that something could go terribly wrong not only are you gay but you're also a liar plus you'd be a hypocrite which is the position that I don't really want to be in.
- Michael: Why is it important that you're not...?
- Heathcliff: Well I, yes you could say that I was brought up believing that honesty is the best policy.
- Michael: From what you say it sounds like it's just too much work to um, to keep track of.
- Heathcliff: And I feel really that there is no need to lie to other people. If they have a problem with me then I would appreciate it if they said it to my face.
- Michael: So basically what you're saying there is that you're locating the problem, if there is a problem, not with you but with the people that have got the problem?
- Heathcliff: You're going to have to back track on that one.
- Michael: So you're saying that if someone's got a problem with you being gay, it's not your problem, that's their problem that they can deal with, you don't really care what their attitudes are towards you...?
- Heathcliff: Well why should it really matter I mean I don't particularly know anything about them and they happen to know a little thing about me.

*We then talked about when Heathcliff first identified as "gay":*

- Michael: When did you first start thinking you might be gay?
- Heathcliff: Well I guess you could say it was about 11 or 12...and I kind of thought "wait a minute there might be some hope for me, I could be bi" but then that sexual journey of woman never really came and I kind of came to terms with that afterwards.
- Michael: And when would you have started to name yourself as gay perhaps?
- Heathcliff: Possibly around 13, 14.

*We continued talking about “coming out”:*

Michael: Okay so at that time had you told anyone, apart from yourself that you felt you might be gay? Was there anyone you could talk to at the time?

Heathcliff: No I didn't talk to anyone and I guess my “coming out” story is kind of funny actually.

Michael: So how, how is it funny, what happened?

Heathcliff: Well it's kind of tragic at the same time. In Year 9 I had to do a report about issues so I decided to do gay rights and we were talking about it at the kitchen table over breakfast and I said my topic and my mum said, “Oh are you gay?” And I said, “Yes” and she went, “Ah, ah, ahhh, you're not telling the truth you're joking with me?” and I'm like, “No.” And it got to a point where my mum was, my mum wanted me to swear on the bible that I wasn't gay but all I could find was a dictionary and I wasn't willing to swear on a dictionary that I wasn't gay, one because it's a dictionary and two that would be lying.

Michael: Ok...

Heathcliff: It makes an interesting story to tell to other people I suppose but sometimes I think she's got too big a mouth for her own good because after she found out she went onto the phone and told everyone and I don't really appreciate people knowing because it's not really any of their business.

Michael: Yeah so it was out of your control and she really “outed” you in a way.

Heathcliff: Yeah but that kind of made it a little bit easier between me and my dad so I didn't have to make that one step towards him because he came to me instead.

*We then moved back to school:*

Michael: Oh okay so, so back to school, are there any other things about school that you want to say, any other observations about school?

Heathcliff: Well it's pretty much on a need to know basis, I mean I'm not going out parading that I'm gay. I mean I have a rainbow sticker on my planner but I'm not really in anybody's face and I'm not trying to pressure anyone into anything. So that's kind of the approach I want to take to it, I mean it's not something to be particularly proud of but it's nothing to be ashamed of either, kind of in the same way as heterosexuality.

Michael: Um...

Heathcliff: Sometimes I get a bit of flack from the younger year levels. If they are going to do it it's going to be behind my back, which I think is even possibly more irritating, I mean you've kind of got people

talking rather obviously about heterosexuality and homosexuality while walking by me and yeah, I don't really care but um yeah.

Michael: So you feel that people are talking about you sometimes...?

Heathcliff: I don't feel as though, I don't *feel* as though they're talking about me, I *know* they are.

Michael: There's a difference isn't there.

Heathcliff: I'm not paranoid, I know that they're talking about me.

Michael: So have you ever talked to anyone about that or...?

Heathcliff: Sometimes I talk about it if I feel it's important but other times I just let it be. I mean if I thought it was relevant to the staff I'd bring it up and if I thought it was relevant in a school situation I'd bring it up with the Coordinator or the Principal or the Vice Principal but I don't really feel that it's come to a situation where I need to complain about it.

*We then talked about gay peers:*

Michael: Do you know any other gay people or lesbian people at school?

Heathcliff: There was a long time when I didn't know there was, I mean I thought that I was practically the only one for a while because, until other people started coming to the group from the school.

Michael: Yes.

Heathcliff: And as well as by MySpace which has these kind of details.

Michael: How did you find out through MySpace, can you tell me about that and how you felt about it, the changes...?

Heathcliff: Well I can't really say it did change very much because anyone, most of the people who identified as bi were girls and if there were any ones that, any males in the school they identified as bi so I still kind of considered myself...

Michael: Different.

Heathcliff: ...as gay yeah so in that respect I still pretty much think of myself as one of a kind.

Michael: Oh you're in Year 12 okay so there's no other gay people that you know of in Year 12 for instance?

Heathcliff: Well I know a person that's bisexual and verging on transsexual as well but um, no not gay.

Michael: Let's talk a little bit about MySpace, is MySpace something that's been a form of support?

Heathcliff: Well MySpace means different things to different people. I mean some people use it as a form of communication between people, kind of like SMS messaging and other forms of digital communication. Some people it would be a way of showing yourself in a way you would like to other people including photographs and your likes and dislikes. I mean yeah a communication tool, some people consider it a game, a lot of people...

Michael: So a game in what sense?



Heathcliff: Collect as many friends as you can.

Michael: And do you ever meet these friends?

Heathcliff: Not usually. What you do is you search around for profiles and click the add me and then they add, they get added to each others list. I mean of course there are some examples where you'd meet some people from MySpace but I would imagine they are not as common.

Michael: So with gayness on MySpace, how is that a different space to be compared to other spaces?

Heathcliff: Well it's just like anywhere else on the internet however MySpace doesn't promote a sense of...

Michael: Anonymity. Um when you go to MySpace do you go to the gay and lesbian pages in there or...?

Heathcliff: There aren't gay and lesbian pages unless they're in specific profiles. In um, in MySpace as part of the profile you can select your sexual preference as gay, straight, lesbian, undecided or leave it blank and that is one option that you can use to search in searching for members.

Michael: Locating some people.

Heathcliff: Yeah.

Michael: So does MySpace have a chat room and discussion forums?

Heathcliff: Um discussion forums usually occur within groups and schools, like every school has their own MySpace which threads and communicates on different topics.

*We talked about virtual identities:*

Michael: Yep, now do you feel differently gay in virtual space...?

Heathcliff: What a question. I don't think so. My internet activity is more to engage with myself rather than living a double life. I mean if I wanted that I could play "World of Warcraft" or "Second Life" or something like that.

Michael: Yeah so MySpace isn't a way for you to experiment with being "out" or like a safe way to do that. Because some people have said that the internet is really different to a real space in that they feel safer.

Heathcliff: Well I "came out" to a lot of people through SMS messenger a couple of years go. I felt as though, I felt it was a safe way to do it at the time because there was that level of distance. But in retrospect I feel that it was a bit impersonal and also possibly a bit of a cop out.

Michael: Why a cop out?

Heathcliff: Well if they are people that you value it might be better just to tell them in person rather than being in an SMS messenger hidey hole where they can't strangle you.

Michael: But you're going to run into these people at school the next day, a lot of gay people that I have spoken to have "come out" to people in letters...it might be really difficult to have a conversation up front but okay I'll just preempt this conversation by, I'll send it out, I'll write it down and that will sort of put it on the agenda. This is something that I want to talk with you about later on. It's really powerful, I mean do you see it as powerful too?

Heathcliff: Um, I don't know. Um one way that I "came out" to a lot of people was through my blog in which case I entered a post saying that this is who I am...I'm untouchable now.

*We then talked about Religion:*

Michael: Alright so that's very interesting so far, aspects of school, "coming out", the internet, um and those sorts of things. As you look down the list here, are there any other things that you'd like to talk about?

Heathcliff: Well I used to be heavily influenced by the Uniting Church.

Michael: Right, yes.

Heathcliff: I used to be part of it from the age of about 12 until last year when I was 16.

Michael: Yes.

Heathcliff: And even though I feel that it has assisted me in a lot of ways during that developmental time I also feel that it has inhibited me in a lot of ways, which could perhaps be considered a good thing or a bad thing.

Michael: So can you give me an example of how it has inhibited you?

Heathcliff: Well even though the Uniting Church didn't say anything about homosexuality you're still connected to the rest of the church which is still trying to demonize, which is something that I had trouble coming to terms with. I mean you've got books out there about how cool it is to be abstinent and stuff like that but...

Michael: Okay?

Heathcliff: I mean sure the church is allowed to have their own dogma and preach that to certain people but as long as there is always a balance people can make up their own mind I suppose.

Michael: You said people were demonized, what did you mean when you said that?

Heathcliff: Well the issue actually never came up in a church, except there was one time when we were talking about sex and puberty in a church youth group but um yeah the female minister took a certain stance that it was unnatural where like some of the other people at the youth group were saying "Hey, this doesn't seem right". So and how some people believe that god made gay people the way they are so there's always that dialogue going on there.

Michael: So you said before that you've left the Uniting Church?

Heathcliff: I just didn't feel as though it was relevant to me anymore. It served its purpose and now I need to move on...identify as Christian, I don't know, I'm more of a spiritualist but you could call me agnostic at the same time I mean it served its purpose and in the end I was there because I was locked into the technical side of things and I felt as though I was paying lip service and paying my time there and not getting any spiritual benefits out of it, which is why I left.

Michael: And to what extent was your leaving about um issues related to gayness and just issues related to questioning what was going on in the church sort of full stop...?

Heathcliff: Gayness may have been a factor but it was just the fact that I really didn't consider it relevant to my life anymore. I mean it's still a Christian church and they still have ties and the ministers are going to have certain opinions. I mean when I "came out" to the minister upon my leaving he said he didn't, he personally didn't want it to come between us but at the same time he was talking about stories about how a member of the congregation had a gay son and he had pretty much abandoned him on the streets and 20 years later when they meet each other on the streets they just walked by each other without making contact. I mean is that something that I really want to be part of?

Michael: How important was religion to you?

Heathcliff: And one point I would regard it basically as the "be all and end all" in that the Christian dogma has placed god and Christ above all else and then prioritised everything else below that but over time I guess you could say my *dogmaticness* changed.

Michael: Was that an easy change to make or...?

Heathcliff: It was more a progressional thing actually because I was at a time, and I still am where I've got to make a lot of decisions and although something that is impounded in me at age 13 or 14 was important, is not quite as relevant at age 16.

Michael: Okay, you don't seem to feel bitter about religion...?

Heathcliff: No I don't feel bitter because I met a lot of interesting people and learnt a lot of good skills and I can now, I feel as though, when talking about Christianity and religion in general I can add my own informed 2 cents worth but I can also say that that I'm not bound by it anymore.

*We then talked about "He's going to come onto me":*

Heathcliff: Well you know one of my friends who I "came out" to online, he kind of came at me with a sense of apprehension because he was under the delusion that because I was gay I was going to come onto him which I found quite laughable as well as quite saddening.

- Michael: So he was positioning you as someone who would make a move on him?
- Heathcliff: I think what I meant to say was that I “came out” to him as a thing of trust saying that I want you to know this about me, while he had another approach to the same conversation (he read it as) as I’m gay, and I might want to come onto you at any point. But that’s just him and it’s a fairly common misconception.
- Michael: Do you see any other evidence of that with friends at school perhaps?
- Heathcliff: Not really and quite the opposite happened where with a girl friend of mine who thought that every time I called her up to go out somewhere that I was coming onto her and it suddenly came to her as a relief that I was just doing it as a friend all that time. I hung out with I guess you could call it the “intelligencia artsy crowd” which worked in my favour because they generally approach life with an open minded view on things, they like to critique things in an analytical way and they don’t really have any misconceptions like that. I mean that worked in my favour really and made my “coming out” a lot easier.
- Michael: So you hang around with people who are a bit artier and into ideas, now what would that look like in a student in a high school?
- Heathcliff: Well you’ve got those who are into English Literature, those who write a lot of competitive essays, those that are into Biology and Computer Science and that do Painting, it’s a mixed crowd really....I imagine that there’d be some other crowds within the school that this would be a lot more difficult to “come out” to, which would be probably be the Sports crowds.
- Michael: Okay.
- Heathcliff: Well a lot of those crowds of “sports people”, especially in the younger year levels pretty much your masculinity is the be all and end all and to identify as gay or lesbian, well especially gay, would be considered a sign of weakness perhaps.

*Later we talked about the Queer Youth Group:*

- Michael: I’d be interested to hear about your experiences in the queer youth group too.
- Heathcliff: Well I started coming here about one and a half years ago because there was a little tiny poster up on the notice board amongst the eating disorders (laugh) pretty much teen pregnancy and that sort of thing.
- Michael: So why do you giggle when you say eating disorders and teen pregnancy?
- Heathcliff: The reason is the fact that a gay and lesbian group could be considered a sickness or an illness to be treated at a Community

Health Centre along side like young mothers and bulimia and other things.

Michael: And you wouldn't think of it as a sickness to be treated?

Heathcliff: I wouldn't really call it that no it's not a sickness because I don't feel sick.

Michael: I think the point you're making is a good one - that you very rarely might see something positive, you'd be more likely to see an advertisement for a support group than you would for (a social group.)

Heathcliff: I would just like to say that um even though it was amongst those statements, those groups, they pretty much all come under youth support services. But anyway I came here about a year and a half ago and I was pretty nervous about it but the worker... the worker made it quite easy I mean there were a lot of people that I didn't know and I didn't know an awful lot about the gay community and it was very soon after that that I got my first taste of (gay) experience.

Michael: So how did the worker make it easy?

Heathcliff: Well she runs the group for everyone. She tries to seem open and the fact that she is direct about what she wants to say to you.

Michael: So that was good and so has it been a positive experience coming to the group?

Heathcliff: Very.

Michael: So why, why has it been positive...?

Heathcliff: Well first of all it's a place to get some free snacks on a Monday afternoon.

Michael: Alright so that's good.

Heathcliff: Um but just a chance to hang out and talk about some material that you might not be able to talk about...in other places. And just a place to hang out. I mean I don't think I'm in need of counseling but to those people that do come here for that, that is there. It's just a place to learn and talk, it's more of a social thing than anything else.

Michael: Alright.

Heathcliff: The group's numbers have been dwindling for the last couple of fortnights but I believe in this group so I keep on staying here and there's quite a few more people coming now, noticeably a lot more from my school...The queer youth support group is um generally a space where you can bring up any particular subject and people of your own sexuality and of your own age will probably be able to identify with it and give you feedback.

*I then asked Heathcliff if there was anything else he'd like to say:*

Michael: Is there anything particularly that you would like to say that would end up in the finished report?

Heathcliff: Well I'm not quite sure who said it but for evil to prevail all you need is the inaction of a few good people. I mean if you don't stand up for who you are and what you believe in and what you believe that things are then how are people going to learn. I mean you've got the media but that presents a fairly loaded side of um gay culture and gay people and presents stereotypes which is something that is, something that I personally don't agree with or aim for.

Michael: So for example what sort of stereotypes?

Heathcliff: Well you'd have the stereotypes like gay people are all about fashion and food and they'd be "drama queens" and they can't be good at any physical or manual activity while with a lot of people it's quite the contrary. I mean sure there's a truth to any stereotype but it's something that people shouldn't have to be bound by and even less they should not have to live by it.

Michael: Okay so you'd say that it's all important that people stand up in relation to homophobia or identity or...?

Heathcliff: To remove misconceptions that gay people are evil and that they are trying to sodomise our kids and fix your curtains up and that kind of thing.

Michael: It's really important that gay people challenge those sorts of stereotypes wherever they present.

Heathcliff: That's right.

*I then asked Heathcliff what was the best thing about being gay:*

Michael: Alright and just lastly, what um, what's the best thing about being gay?

Heathcliff: Well one of the interesting things is, even though I don't really use them but you've got condoms coming out of everywhere I mean you'll never have to pay for a condom ever but um well I don't really think it's anything to be proud of but it's nothing to be ashamed of so what is the best thing about being gay?...I guess you could say that there are a lot of interesting events that go around and that says more about the community than about being gay. I mean sometimes you can have a lot of fun listening to or watching a drag show or something like that, which is something that you might not be able to do in another spot.

Michael: So, so being gay is good because it gives you access to a community that does some interesting things?

Heathcliff: I guess one thing that you could say about being gay is that you can take perspective on sexuality that you are a lot more aware of it and you are not approaching it in the same way a heterosexual person would.

Michael: So you can take a different perspective on sexuality, what do you mean by that?

Heathcliff: Well I guess it would mean that um, I'm not sure how to answer this question, how to take a different perspective well the views that we have might be a different to what is regular for heterosexuality I mean Virginia Woolf was able to push borders within her work and it's just about pushing borders. I don't know if I answered the question.

Michael: No you answered it very well. What I'm hearing you say is that gayness provides an opportunity because in some respects we are sort of on the edge. Not just in relation to what we do with our bodies but culturally, you know, we view the world in interesting ways is what you're saying I think.





## Rachel

- Michael: Alright Rachel, can we get some background information on you - so how old are you?
- Rachel: 17.
- Michael: 17, and in terms of ethnicity what would your background be?
- Rachel: Do you mean what countries and stuff?
- Michael: Yeah.
- Rachel: Dutch and Australian.
- Michael: Okay class, in terms of your class position, just in terms of wealth and...
- Rachel: Pretty average.
- Michael: Pretty average okay and gender?
- Rachel: Female.
- Michael: Female, and how do you identify in terms of sexuality?
- Rachel: Gay.
- Michael: Gay, some information about your school as well, without naming the school and where do you live?
- Rachel: I live in the centre of town.
- Michael: In the centre of town and it's a big rural town.
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: Okay, the school you go to.
- Rachel: It's fairly laid back we wear casual clothes.
- Michael: How many students would there be?

- Rachel: Probably about 500. We call the teachers by their first names - fairly laid back.
- Michael: State school or private school?
- Rachel: State.
- Michael: You're in VCE?
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: All right good so how many students in VCE, or Year 11?
- Rachel: About 200, 250, something like that.

*We then moved to talk about the areas on the focus sheet:*

- Michael: So what I want to do here, is talk about these areas and I'm particularly interested to hear from your perspective as someone who identifies as gay.
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: I suppose first of all do you define yourself as gay or as a lesbian?
- Rachel: Either.
- Michael: Either yeah but gay is the way you prefer?
- Rachel: I don't mind either way.
- Michael: Okay so as someone who identifies as gay or lesbian what do you want to say?

*Rachel started talking about family, friends and her girlfriend:*

- Rachel: I've got really supportive friends and family so...
- Michael: So starting with family, what makes them really supportive?
- Rachel: They respect me for who I am and they've learned to accept that I'm gay and they've accepted my girlfriend and that isn't a problem.
- Michael: Okay so you have a girlfriend.
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: Okay and how long have you been with her for?
- Rachel: About 6 months.
- Michael: And how did you come to introduce her to your family?
- Rachel: Well she was at "x" and stuff and so I told my mum about it and I thought it was time that she could come and stay and...
- Michael: And where did you meet her?
- Rachel: Through a friend.
- Michael: Through a friend, okay so family have been good.
- Rachel: Yes.
- Michael: Have they always been good?
- Rachel: Yes. My mum can sometimes be really bitchy but otherwise she's good.
- Michael: Okay and how do they demonstrate their goodness? What are you forming that judgment based on?

Rachel: Um my parents let my girlfriend stay the weekend or they let me go out and see her um she will come on a Friday and spend time with my family when I'm at school.

Michael: They are really accepting of her staying at your house?

Rachel: Yep.

Michael: And so you still live at home?

Rachel: I live at my dad's.

Michael: You live at your dad's okay and brothers and sisters?

Rachel: I have two half brothers and a half sister.

Michael: And they're okay?

Rachel: Yep. My brothers love her and my sister... she hasn't exactly got an opinion (she's a baby).

*We talked about her girlfriend further:*

Michael: Okay and how did they get to be okay with the girlfriend, and is it important that they're okay with the girlfriend?

Rachel: Very important because she lives so far away I would never be able to see her.

Michael: Oh okay so it is very important.

Rachel: Yep.

Michael: Is that unusual for parents to be like that or...?

Rachel: No with my friends who are gay or bi their parents are accepting of it as far as I know but my parents are just very understanding because they just are.

Michael: They just are all right so, so they've always been understanding, how long have they had to be understanding, when did you "come out" to them?

Rachel: I was bi for like 2 and a half years and I told my mum straight out.

Michael: Okay so you say you were bi for 2 and a half years.

Rachel: Yep so when I was 13.

Michael: So when you were 13, yep you identified as bi for 2 and a half years at 13 and then you changed?

Rachel: Yeah I just sort of had a sudden, I sort of started disliking guys and I don't know... I still had them as friends but...

Michael: So in terms of identifying as gay it's not like you were confused, not like with your bisexuality, that you were working towards being gay, but rather that you felt that you were definitely attracted to both sexes um and that that changed at some point and became focused on women or young girls?

Rachel: Yep.

Michael: Okay so you told your mum or your dad or both?

Rachel: I told my mum and then my dad found out somehow, he won't tell me how but he did.

Michael: She probably told him.

Rachel: Oh they're not that very close, they don't usually talk...

- Michael: But he did find out somehow.
- Rachel: Like I knew they wouldn't care, that my dad and his partner wouldn't care it's just uncomfortable telling them.
- Michael: So you weren't anticipating a negative reaction, it's just a difficult conversation to have.
- Rachel: Yeah.
- Michael: Is there anything that you can remember that, made you feel that you wanted to "come out" to your parents - what made you decide?
- Rachel: To tell my mum I just felt that she had the need to know.
- Michael: Okay and so you told her.
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: And when did you come to that decision yourself?
- Rachel: About a couple of months before I told her.
- Michael: A couple of months okay and then you told her. What do you think was going on that led you to that decision?
- Rachel: We're always talking so... Mum always thought it was a stage and that I'd grow out of but she's learned to accept that it's not going to happen.
- Michael: So, and her response when you told her was like...?
- Rachel: She was very positive about it, she was just like yeah. "It's probably a stage that you're going through and you'll probably grow out of it" but she's over that now.
- Michael: Okay so it sounds like they've been good, your family?
- Rachel: Yep. It's been great.

*We then discussed friends:*

- Rachel: Friends, I've got a few gay friends as well.
- Michael: So you have gay friends.
- Rachel: "X" he's awesome.
- Michael: So he's...
- Rachel: Gay yeah.
- Rachel: And one of my close friends is bi and a lot of my friends are gay or bi come to think of it.
- Michael: So how did you meet them?
- Rachel: Just through school and parties and friend's houses and...
- Michael: So you've...
- Rachel: And I met some on the internet.
- Michael: On the internet so that's quite a new experience I think for young people who identify as not straight, historically that experience would not have been possible. Is it helpful to meet other gay people?
- Rachel: It's great having gay friends.
- Michael: So why is it great?

- Rachel: Because you can like I don't know like... I don't know, you can just like, we have the same sort of experiences so we talk about it.
- Michael: So similar experiences?
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: Do you have any straight friends?
- Rachel: Yeah.
- Michael: Do you find that you talk about different things with your gay friends than with your straight friends?
- Rachel: Not really because all my friends are very accepting like they know I'm gay and if they didn't like me then they wouldn't be friends with me but when I meet new people I tell them straight up that I'm gay and they can either accept me or yeah.
- Michael: Okay so...
- Rachel: I'm very, very open about it.
- Michael: And very assertive too. Do you think you have to be assertive as a gay person?
- Rachel: Not particularly I just find it helps that people know so it doesn't come up in conversation and they get freaked out, I just think it's better if people know straight up.
- Michael: So do you think it would be the same for straight people?
- Rachel: I've had straight people in the past who have found out that I'm gay and been freaked out, like girlfriends.
- Michael: In the past you have yeah?
- Rachel: Yeah like one of my girlfriends she found out I was gay and got freaked out and stopped talking to me as much and then she learnt to accept that you know I'm not going to "hit on her" and it was all good and yeah so.
- Michael: So to avoid dealing with someone who reacts badly six months down the track just...
- Rachel: Just tell them straight up yeah. And usually they're like "who cares" and it's all good.
- Michael: Okay.
- Rachel: I've had it pretty easy compared to most of my friends.

*We then talked about things that Rachel had observed:*

- Michael: Okay so what have you seen...?
- Rachel: Like my best friend gets chased home from work and he gets bashed on a regular basis like he doesn't like walking down the street unless he's with a big group of people.
- Michael: So where, that's here?
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: And so why do you think that happens to him?
- Rachel: He wears lots of makeup.
- Michael: Okay.
- Rachel: You can tell that he's gay, he's very open about it too.

- Michael: So this young guy is gay though and he gets a hard time?  
Rachel: Yep.  
Michael: And has that impacted on you, you say you don't get a hard time and he does?  
Rachel: Generally the people that like pick on him and stuff I'm friends with like I'm friends with them because I like everyone so he's okay when he walks down the street with me because I'm friends with people and they'd cop it (if they bullied him).  
Michael: So why would they not pick on you?  
Rachel: Because I'm female, they think it's all right for girls but for guys it's just wrong.  
Michael: And these are guys that are picking on him?  
Rachel: Yeah.  
Michael: Okay so um are you aware of any girls that have been picked on?  
Rachel: I was bashed about a month ago.  
Michael: Oh okay.  
Rachel: But that's the first time that's ever happened.  
Michael: So how?  
Rachel: Me and my friends were drinking and stuff and we were just walking down the street here.  
Michael: So this is just down the main street?  
Rachel: And one of my friends was with her girlfriend. Yep and people started picking on us and I'm like "go away" and they just...  
Michael: So what did that involve?  
Rachel: They started bashing into one of my friends and his head was bashing into the pole and stuff, it was fairly massive and there were girls swinging too, and there were guys holding me back so I couldn't get to my friends.  
Michael: How old were these people?  
Rachel: About 17, 18.  
Michael: So what did you do after that?  
Rachel: We went to the police.  
Michael: And what did the police say?  
Rachel: They took our statements down and stuff, took the details and they took down what they looked like that what had happened but I don't think they found them because they never got back to us.  
Michael: But they did act and take your complaint seriously?  
Rachel: Yep.  
Michael: So you didn't feel that you couldn't go to the police?  
Rachel: No.  
Michael: Because that hasn't always been the case. So why did you feel comfortable going to the police?  
Rachel: The police were going past and somebody stopped them.  
Michael: Has it happened to you before that sort of thing or...?  
Rachel: Na.

Michael: No, so that was a one off?  
 Rachel: Yep.  
 Michael: So hopefully it won't happen again.  
 Rachel: We usually have guys with us - we didn't have guys with us, it just happened that I was with three of my friends who were all girls so yeah we were vulnerable. I just have to make sure I don't put myself in that sort of situation.  
 Michael: And the same sex sort of thing would have...  
 Rachel: Aggravated them.  
 Michael: So you don't think it would have happened if you had just been there with other women you know other girls?  
 Rachel: No I would be vulnerable then too.

*We then turned to school:*

Michael: Oh okay, any sort of negative experiences at school because it sounds pretty (different there)?  
 Rachel: At my old school they used to call me "faggot" but I'd just tell them to "piss off" but yeah.  
 Michael: Yeah so...  
 Rachel: I thought it was funny, I used to laugh at it.  
 Michael: So that was at the junior school?  
 Rachel: I used to go to a different school and I moved there.  
 Michael: You moved schools, was that because of sexuality or...?  
 Rachel: No I just didn't like the school.  
 Michael: Yep okay but the mood at the school is good?  
 Rachel: Yeah it's great.

*We moved back to discussing friends:*

Michael: You said that you've got a lot of, well quite a few gay and lesbian friends, and you began to talk about how you met them, so could you talk a little bit about that because there would have been a time when you didn't know any gay or lesbian people...  
 Rachel: Not really.  
 Michael: Oh okay.  
 Rachel: I've got cousins and stuff who are gay ---  
 Michael: Are they your age?  
 Rachel: 17, 18.  
 Michael: Okay so a year or two older.  
 Rachel: My cousins.  
 Michael: And they've been around you constantly, so you've had a bit of exposure?  
 Rachel: Yeah.  
 Michael: Oh okay but with your own friends, how did you meet your first independent gay friend?

- Rachel: At school.
- Michael: And how did that happen?
- Rachel: I just sort of talk to everyone and I just happened to talk to a gay person.
- Michael: So it was a she, and she “came out” to you in a conversation or...?
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: Okay...
- Rachel: She’s a very open person.
- Michael: Okay and was that a good, positive...?
- Rachel: And I knew she was gay by the way she looks kind of thing.
- Michael: So how meaning...?
- Rachel: Just kind of like the way she dresses and acts and talks and it’s just, you can just tell with her.
- Michael: So put words to that, you can just tell.
- Rachel: I don’t know she’s just very open, like really open about her sexuality. Yeah it was like she was extremely specific about it because she walks like a man and talks like a man and dresses like a man and she had a girlfriend at the time who was there.
- Michael: So she had a girlfriend who was another student at the school?
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: Okay so, so how did school deal with the fact that she had a girlfriend, how old was she, this other person?
- Rachel: About 15.
- Michael: So was that an issue that she had a girlfriend at the school or...?
- Rachel: Like they weren’t allowed to show major public affection like they had to hug and stuff, the school didn’t appreciate them doing much more than that.
- Michael: And was that the same for straight people?
- Rachel: No. If they kissed they’d get heaps of attention and it just wasn’t worth it, it was like “Ha Ha the lesbians are kissing”...
- Michael: Okay, so you’ve met quite a few gay and lesbian people through school, you also said through the internet. So how did you meet them on the internet?
- Rachel: MySpace.
- Michael: Okay and do you have a MySpace page?
- Rachel: Yeah.
- Michael: Okay and other people, so basically you would sort of advertise for friends through MySpace virtually.
- Rachel: People would just add me because they’d seen me down the street, like people see me and my friends and so they add me.
- Michael: And so on your MySpace profile do you have information about sexuality?
- Rachel: Yeah it says I’m gay and that I’ve got a girlfriend.
- Michael: Okay and you’ve met people through that?
- Rachel: Yep.
- Michael: And has that been positive meeting those people?



Rachel: Yep.  
 Michael: And are they people around here?  
 Rachel: And from the city and...  
 Michael: Okay and have you met them?  
 Rachel: Yep.  
 Michael: Like met them in a real...?  
 Rachel: Yep I go to the city every couple of weekends and meet people.  
 Michael: And that's been good?  
 Rachel: Yep.  
 Michael: There haven't been any problems with that?  
 Rachel: I've never had anybody, nobody...  
 Michael: I'm just sort of interested in safety like if you were going into the city would you tell someone...?  
 Rachel: My girlfriend is with me when I'm in the city, I generally take my girlfriend with me, she's always with me so.  
 Michael: And people would know where you are going?  
 Rachel: And I know, I've got heaps of friends in the city so I meet generally their friends and talk to them so.

*We then moved back to school:*

Michael: Okay so can we talk about school, generally what are your thoughts about school as someone who identifies as gay?  
 Rachel: At school I've had no negative feedback about being gay, it's been really good.  
 Michael: Okay so um, so how do you get positive feedback about being gay?  
 Rachel: Well at my old school they would call me "faggot". Yeah but I don't have anybody saying that to me and my girlfriend comes up to school and we can hold hands and nobody...  
 Michael: And that's okay?  
 Rachel: Yep.  
 Michael: And that's different to your old school?  
 Rachel: They don't even take a second look at us so it's good.  
 Michael: At the other school is that a 7 to 10 of the 11 and 12 that you're in...?  
 Rachel: No, it was a completely different school.  
 Michael: Completely different school okay. Do you think that was because you were in Year 9 or 10 or whatever...?  
 Rachel: I was there at the beginning of this year.  
 Michael: Oh okay so what is the difference? Do you think it's just a fluke or do you think there's something about the school that means that people are more accepting?  
 Rachel: At my old school like we had a uniform there and I don't know everyone just, because it's like the closest you can get to a private school without actually going to a private school like there were costs so people were generally very particular about everything,

while here we wear casual clothes and we can show our personality and people have piercings and wacko hair and I don't know everyone....

Michael: And you think that has an impact on how people are about difference generally?

Rachel: Yeah I reckon.

Michael: So that's a good point.

Rachel: At the other school there were the popular people, they just looked down on me because I was gay and I dressed weird and...

Michael: And what sort of form would that take, looking down, how did you know they were looking down at you?

Rachel: They'd just grease me off when I went past or I'd hear people talking about me.

Michael: So greasing you off, what does greasing you off mean?

Rachel: They'd just look me up and down like I was scum it just wasn't very nice.

*The conversation shifted to teachers and subject content:*

Michael: What do you think makes for a good experience in school being gay or lesbian?

Rachel: Where the teachers respect you.

Michael: And how do they show that?

Rachel: Just treat you like everyone else in the classroom.

Michael: Now how don't they do that?

Rachel: By, I don't know, the teachers at the old school just generally focused on the like the people who worked lots and they just forget about everyone else sort of...

Michael: What about, can you remember times in your schooling when you heard about gay and lesbian issues?

Rachel: Not particularly.

Michael: So there was an absence. Is that something that annoys you or...?

Rachel: I guess it can be a bit annoying but it's never really affected me.

*We talked about recreation:*

Michael: So recreation, what do you like to do?

Rachel: Just go to like gigs and go see my girlfriend and I'll go to the city and see friends just the stuff that normal teenagers do.

Michael: So and does that revolve around this area or do you travel around to other places too?

Rachel: Yeah a bit of both.

Michael: So do you think that's had a bit of an impact on how you um work through this space as a queer young person?

Rachel: Not really no, I don't know.

*We then talked about the best thing about being gay:*

- Michael: I just wanted to know Rachel what the best thing about being gay is?
- Rachel: Gay people are generally more understanding and they respect your feelings and yeah guys can tend to be pretty they go straight out and tell their friends and they don't respect your privacy so yeah.
- Michael: So girls are better partners?
- Rachel: Yeah they can be pretty bitchy but it's generally quite good.
- Michael: Okay so that's one positive thing about being gay. Are there any others, apart from partners are there any other sort of things about being gay that's good?
- Rachel: Like all my friends we're all pretty close, I've met some really close friends because of who I am, they are understanding with most things so...



## Jacob

- Michael: Um, just a sense of who you are and how you identify in terms of age?
- Jacob: I'm 16.
- Michael: Male?
- Jacob: I like boys.
- Michael: Okay so you like boys, do you use a label...?
- Jacob: Not really.
- Michael: No, okay, so you're attracted to guys?
- Jacob: Yeah.
- Michael: Okay and in terms of ethnicity? ---
- Jacob: Australian.
- Jacob: My parents are Australian, there's Irish and English and German and all sorts of crap.
- Michael: Um class?
- Jacob: Like lower class and upper class?
- Michael: Yeah.
- Jacob: Um I don't know, I have a house and a family, my dad works and my step mum is a stay at home mum.

*We then turn to talk about school:*

- Michael: Just broadly about the school, you're enrolled in.
- Jacob: I was, I left at the start of the term.

Michael: Yes and we can talk about that, and so you're 16 and you left?  
 Jacob: Yep.  
 Michael: And so how big was the school?  
 Jacob: About 1000 people.  
 Michael: And it was a state school or private school?  
 Jacob: A public school.  
 Michael: And a co-ed?  
 Jacob: Yeah, is that when there are boys and girls?  
 Michael: Boys and girls yep. Okay on the list down here you can see there I've got a number of different areas, school, family, culture, recreation, friends, queer youth support group and really anything else. We can discuss these in any order that you want, we don't have to discuss any of them, you might pick one, you might want to do them all.

*Jacob started the conversation by taking about school:*

Jacob: Okay how about we start with school.  
 Michael: Okay.  
 Jacob: Okay so I left school at the start of this term because I was, I did really badly, I failed pretty much everything.  
 Michael: This is in Year?  
 Jacob: 11.  
 Jacob: Yep, the only thing I passed was Maths, so I left because they kind of asked me to leave and I didn't want to be there, so now I work pretty much all the time and I'm doing a hospitality course. Did you want to know why I left?...So I failed pretty much everything, I just wasn't focused, I just didn't really give a crap, about school, about anything really. I was just all over the place kind of thing.  
 Michael: So can you give me any examples of how you were all over the place?  
 Jacob: Well I didn't really care about anything or really try, like....  
 Michael: So there was nothing there that was really interesting or...?  
 Jacob: Yeah I just kind of failed it all.  
 Michael: Okay so has leaving school been a good...?  
 Jacob: Um, it's been good and bad.  
 Michael: Um, in what sense?  
 Jacob: Um I don't know, it's good because I don't have to be at school but it's bad because I know I'm not going to get an education and employers are going to look at that and go "oh he dropped out of school, so he's a dead shit", but I suppose I can always go back.  
 Michael: So you sort of said that you could go back, would you think about going back?  
 Jacob: Mmm...  
 Michael: So when would you be looking at that maybe?

- Jacob: For next year.  
 Michael: Would you go to the same school or a different one?  
 Jacob: No.  
 Michael: So why, is there a reason why you wouldn't go to the same school?  
 Jacob: Probably because I'd be bored with it and it would be the same and I would get back into the same habit. Yeah I thought maybe a fresh start would be good.

*We then talked about school and sexuality:*

- Michael: Okay, now in relation to school, school and sexuality, as a guy who likes guys could you speak to that?  
 Jacob: I had it pretty easy compared to some of the other people I know who get bashed and beaten and sworn at and spat on and stuff. Most people are okay with it, like I get some people who say shit and stuff but that's about as bad as it gets. But it was worse before I was "out" because people were like "oh you're a faggot" and blah, blah, blah and I was but then I didn't care if people knew.  
 Michael: So you said there that you sort of had it easy or you had it good, compared to other people?  
 Jacob: Yep.  
 Michael: So maybe can you talk about that a little bit more. What do you mean by that?  
 Jacob: I meant I've had friends who have left school because of bullying and the crap they get from other people, like they get bashed and spat on, they'd get called names and they get hate mail and emails and SMS's and phone calls and stuff. Um I don't know they'd just send mean and hurtful things. Especially with the girls I think, I don't know, maybe that's just a sexist comment but they kind of...  
 Michael: The girls who identify as lesbian...?  
 Jacob: Yeah...They get at them.  
 Michael: So you've witnessed harassment of other young people... How frequently would you have seen that sort of stuff?  
 Jacob: Probably not too often, but I haven't been around, and when I say I haven't been around I haven't been around gay people because I don't know I was kind of scared or something, I don't know a couple of times here and there.  
 Michael: Do you have any feelings about when that was most likely to happen?  
 Jacob: When they were alone, when they were in groups maybe, I don't know.  
 Michael: When they were in groups, what do you mean by...?  
 Jacob: When they were with bad people in groups.  
 Michael: Oh okay.  
 Jacob: Not with gay people.

- Michael: So people are more likely to bully other people when they are with other people?
- Jacob: Yep.
- Michael: Why do you think they would do that?
- Jacob: Because they have someone to fall back on.

*The conversation then turned to “coming out”:*

- Michael: And at the school you were at you said something about it was better, you were saying it was better once you “came out”, when did you “come out” at school?
- Jacob: Um in Year 9, at the end of Year 9.
- Michael: Okay Year 9 and how did that happen?
- Jacob: I was with a friend and I kind of told her.
- Michael: Did you intend to tell her or...?
- Jacob: Yeah kind of.
- Michael: You wanted to?
- Jacob: Yeah.
- Michael: So why, why did you want to tell her?
- Jacob: Because I wanted to be me.
- Michael: And what do you mean by that?
- Jacob: I wanted to express the feelings that I had without, without I just wanted to express things.
- Michael: How long have you had those feelings?
- Jacob: A long time.
- Jacob: I can’t remember exactly.
- Michael: Like would you have had those feelings when you were 8?
- Jacob: Probably not. Probably 13ish.
- Michael: Yeah so sometime at the start of high school?

*Later the conversation moved to a consideration of “coming out”:*

- Jacob: Yep.
- Michael: You were saying it was better after you “came out” than before you “came out”.
- Jacob: Yep. I don’t know if that was because of it or whether because people just matured and they got over stupid little things.
- Michael: Oh alright I get your point. Do you think that is something that does happen in school, that when they go along through secondary school, that their attitudes get better?
- Jacob: Yep, generally. Sometimes they can get worse or stay the same.
- Michael: Yeah, it’s hard to generalise, but generally they seem to get better.

*We talked about how Jacob felt about same-sex attraction:*

- Michael: You worked out that you were attracted to other guys.



Jacob: Yep.  
 Michael: How did you feel about that?  
 Jacob: Well I didn't like it because you're not supposed to like it because you're supposed to grow up and get married and have a house with a white picket fence and two children and a dog and crap.  
 Michael: Alright so you weren't that thrilled about it?  
 Jacob: No.  
 Michael: And are you thrilled about it now?  
 Jacob: Not overly thrilled but I can live with it.  
 Michael: Your position's changed on that now?  
 Jacob: Yeah.  
 Michael: The time before you "came out", what was that like?  
 Jacob: In like what?  
 Michael: Just generally?  
 Jacob: It was okay...  
 Michael: Mmm.  
 Jacob: It was okay, it depended who I was with because there were people I got along with and people I didn't get along with, as with everybody but um yeah generally there would be a big group of guys, arseholes and then my friends I wanted to be with ---  
 Michael: So the arsehole guys, how would characterise those and what characterises your friends...?

*Jacob then began to talk about being bullied:*

Jacob: Well my friends didn't taunt me and abuse me and stuff, but with the others I'd just get picked on in class and in Sport and stuff because I'm not a very sporty person.  
 Michael: Was the picking on you linked with sexuality or...?  
 Jacob: Yes.  
 Michael: So people picked you as a guy who might identify or be attracted to other guys?  
 Jacob: I suppose.  
 Michael: Was it name calling or was it physical or...?  
 Jacob: Both sort of.  
 Michael: And how did you feel...?  
 Jacob: It makes you feel like crap.  
 Michael: Yep and so what did you do um to deal with the fact that you felt like crap?  
 Jacob: Just keep on keeping on, I just put up with it until it stopped.  
 Michael: What made it stop?  
 Jacob: I don't know, it just stopped.  
 Michael: Did you do anything to make it stop?  
 Jacob: No.  
 Michael: And you never spoke to anyone, did you speak to teachers about that?

- Jacob: No.  
Michael: Did teachers see that happening?  
Jacob: I suppose so, yeah.  
Michael: Did anyone ever do anything about that or...?  
Jacob: Um, not that I can remember.  
Michael: Did you want them to do anything about it?  
Jacob: Yeah because I was unhappy obviously.  
Michael: Um so you would have liked that to stop?  
Jacob: Yep.  
Michael: So what was it maybe that was stopping you from asking for assistance in relation to that?  
Jacob: Fear of bullies.  
Michael: Okay so fear that it would become worse if you dobbed them in.  
Jacob: Yeah.

*We continued talking about school – specifically about Sex-Ed:*

- Michael: Any other things about school that stand out?  
Jacob: Um I didn't become a favourite with the Principal.  
Michael: In what way?  
Jacob: Well I was talking to the school nurse once and I said that we should have more homosexually stuff in Sex-Ed and she said that her and a couple of other teachers had been trying to get it but the Principal wouldn't allow it because he said he had no gay students in his school.  
Michael: Okay so, so you felt Sex-Ed particularly should have some gay content in it?  
Jacob: Yep. Because all you got was gay people are boys having sex with boys. It's just about the sex and that's it.  
Michael: Why do you think it's important to get more information?  
Jacob: To show that not all gay people are just sex crazy people and that we can have emotions and relationships and feelings that normal people can have.  
Michael: So you would like information about more than "nuts and bolts" sex, information about the emotions or power or any of that sort of stuff, no discussion of that. Did they do that in relation to heterosexuality?  
Jacob: Um yeah.  
Michael: Okay so um, so you would have liked more Sex-Ed?  
Jacob: Not more Sex-Ed, just more homo Sex-Ed.  
Michael: So a more inclusive sexuality.  
Jacob: Because we had Sex-Ed all the time.  
Michael: Yeah but nothing about gay stuff.  
Jacob: Yeah. When I say there was nothing, there was more of it towards the time I "came out".

*Jacob then talked about where he got information from:*

- Michael: Where have you got information?
- Jacob: From friends and from just random people spreading rumours and you know places.
- Michael: So what places?
- Jacob: Those places.
- Michael: Okay so from friends and rumours and stuff.
- Jacob: You pick up what you hear and what you see.
- Michael: Alright so...
- Jacob: Well not so much what you see.
- Michael: Do you feel that that information is reliable?
- Jacob: Not always.
- Michael: No so what sort of information would you like, what do you think you need to know that you haven't been told?
- Jacob: I don't know because if I don't know it then I don't know I need to know it.
- Michael: But are there things that you would think you need?
- Jacob: Mmm.
- Michael: There's certain information that you need to keep yourself safe and if something happens like you get an STI or something you need to know that you can go to the doctor's and get that fixed and that it's no big deal and a lot of gay young people don't get that information...
- Jacob: You kind of get it but not directed towards homosexual...
- Michael: No...
- Jacob: Like if you get Chlamydia go here, not if you get Chlamydia from someone of the same sex go there, that kind of thing and then you go to the doctor and it's all good, not that I've done it but I if I did I suppose it would be awkward saying I slept with some guy and got some disease, I don't know.
- Michael: Well I used to work in a sexual health centre, The Action Centre at Family Planning Victoria, and young people used to come in all the time and so having worked there, I wasn't a GP type doctor I'm a different sort of doctor but, doctors are so busy and they know young people have sex and they know um, that one of the things that can happen to you, as well as having a good time, is that you can pick up an STI every now and again so yeah they wouldn't judge you if you went in there, they'd want you to get some penicillin or whatever so you don't give it to someone else. Um, um but it is embarrassing to go in there and have to say those things. So information about sex and sexuality you say you would like it to be a bit more open and have a bit more access to that stuff.
- Jacob: Yeah.
- Michael: Alright.

Jacob: And if you do mention it, like if you're having a discussion and you mentioned it everyone would be like oh kind of taunting and shit.

Michael: So attitude, did you see that happening in class?

Jacob: Yep.

*We then turned to talk about "family":*

Jacob: Family. I told my dad, maybe the start of this year or maybe last year. He was a bit cut and he didn't talk to me for a couple of days, like he talked to me but it was awkward, not for me but for him yeah um when I told him he was pretty upset.

Michael: So upset angry upset or upset just tearful and upset?

Jacob: Mmmm...

Michael: Did he say that or how do you...?

Jacob: No, he was like "oh okay", and then he was like "that's okay" but then he was like, "You don't want to get a sex change do you?" And I was like "no" and he said "good" and then um yeah we haven't really talked about it much, there was this one time that was awkward for me because I stayed out one night and I didn't do anything and when I got home and I said I was out with a guy he was like "Was it good?" ...It's just you don't want to talk to your parents about that.

Michael: Well it's sort of okay that he...he didn't say "Get out of the house", you know so and how long ago was that?

Jacob: A couple of months, no not a couple of months maybe the start of this year...

Michael: So this year some time. Okay so does he seem to be getting better around you now or...?

Jacob: I don't know, he doesn't like it, he'll never like it, he's a big macho type but he'll learn to live with it.

Michael: (laugh) Yeah so your mother...?

Jacob: My biological mother died, my step mother yelled at me because I didn't tell her that I was gay and then she yelled at me because I should have known that she wouldn't have cared like you know and she said that she was cool with that she knew and that my (biological) mum knew when I was four.

Michael: So how did you feel when she said that your biological mother knew when you were four?

Jacob: Um I don't know. Because she died just when I was four, and she wrote all this crap down, I shouldn't say that, she wrote all this stuff down, thoughts and stuff and apparently she knew that I was gay.

Michael: So um, so your step mother sounds like she's being okay?

Jacob: Yeah, she's good.

Michael: So um do you reckon she's done any work on your father or...?

Jacob: Maybe, she told him to get over it, but yeah I don't know.  
 Michael: You have brothers and sisters?  
 Jacob: Yeah two little brothers.  
 Michael: Because um...  
 Jacob: Yeah back to her, because when my dad told her, because I didn't tell her she just looked at him as if to say "well der, as if you didn't know." But yeah I have a 6 and a 4, 5 year old, they don't know.  
 Michael: I mean your step mum might think they may not understand or...  
 Jacob: Yeah, my step mum wants to tell them but she doesn't want to tell them because they're young.  
 Michael: Do you want to tell them?  
 Jacob: Yeah but not now.  
 Michael: Do you feel you have to tell them?  
 Jacob: No, I don't have to tell anybody.

*We then talked about being "out":*

Michael: How "out" are you?  
 Jacob: "Out" enough. If you ask me I live in denial, unless I knew you were going to beat me kind of thing. Like I went to work the other day and one of my co-workers, I said something and she said, "Jacob are you gay?". And I laughed and said, "Yeah, why not, I'd do anything for you." And then she was like, "Ha I knew it" and yeah it was pretty funny, we just giggled and... So yeah, I'm "out".  
 Michael: So in terms of life is it better to be "out" or worse to be "out"?  
 Jacob: I think I'm kind of indifferent about the "outness". I feel like I can be myself but yeah it's just like being not myself.  
 Michael: So what do you mean by that?  
 Jacob: I'm not sure, it's been a long day, I'm sorry.  
 Michael: No that's alright.

*Back to family:*

Jacob: I'm scared to tell my grandmother because she's a crazy religious woman.  
 Michael: So maybe we'll talk about religion then?  
 Jacob: Mmm.  
 Michael: You're worried to tell your grandmother because she's religious?...  
 Jacob: She's old and she won't understand and if she does understand then she'll want to know every little itty gritty detail...  
 Michael: And you don't want to...  
 Jacob: No ---  
 Michael: Yeah so your grandmother is someone you just don't want to have that conversation with?  
 Jacob: No, she'll try and fix me with the Bible.  
 Michael: So what's your response to that?

- Jacob: Don't tell her.  
Michael: What would you do if she did try and fix you with her Bible?  
Jacob: I'd tell her to shove the Bible where the sun don't shine.  
Michael: Ok...  
Jacob: You can't fix me...yeah I know religious people are okay but not when you know they try and be all high and mighty and...and stuff, if that makes sense.  
Michael: Oh it does.

*We then returned to a discussion about culture:*

- Michael: I mean you've mentioned that um there are some guys at school that you wouldn't hang around with, we also talked about young lesbian women and you described your dad as a macho man.  
Jacob: He's not overly macho, he just thinks he's macho if that makes sense.  
Michael: Yeah.  
Jacob: Good...drink beer kind of...I don't know.  
Michael: He's sort of "very straight".  
Jacob: He is exactly.  
Michael: Right and does he know any gay people?  
Jacob: Well he knows his brother and I think his brother's gay but he's married, I don't know. I'm just trying to think he probably knows a couple because I know my step mum has some friends...  
Michael: Who are gay?  
Jacob: Yeah so he probably knows them, I don't know.  
Michael: And are they, people that come around to your house, to your step mum's...?  
Jacob: I don't know, I'm not generally home during the day so I don't know who comes and goes because of school and work.

*We then moved back to talking about the guys at school:*

- Michael: Okay so maybe just some things about gender and those guys at school perhaps.  
Jacob: Could you ask a question as opposed to giving me a blank slate?  
Michael: What are your feelings about them?  
Jacob: Um they're really, really butch manly drinking, smoking "men want-to-be's", you know what I mean?  
Michael: Yeah.  
Jacob: We call them "Westies", I don't know if you use that term where you come from?  
Michael: So, so "men want-to be's" is a good term, "Westies" all right.  
Jacob: And they think that they're top shit.  
Michael: And than means drinking and smoking...?  
Jacob: Yep.

Michael: And what other sorts of things would be consistent with that?  
 Jacob: Sex, lots of sex I think, I don't know I'm not one of them myself. Um yeah and then just yeah, and then I remember when I was younger everyone was together and then we separated into our little cliques and there's the nerds and the geeks and the smoking "Westies" and I think everybody started off the same and then we just like broke off and rubbed off on each other and became forgotten bits and pieces.

*We then talked about other gay students:*

Michael: Where do guys who are attracted to other guys fit? Do you know any guys, I mean obviously you do from here but did you know any other guys, any guys from school who were attracted to other guys?  
 Jacob: I knew a couple.  
 Michael: And did you hang around with them?  
 Jacob: No.  
 Michael: Were they the same year as you or generally different?  
 Jacob: Yeah they were generally older.  
 Michael: Yeah. And so you didn't really hang around with them?  
 Jacob: Na.  
 Michael: So how do you feel about those guys, those "Westies"?  
 Jacob: I try to avoid them at all costs, I used to be scared of them.

*We then went back to religion:*

Michael: Yeah oh okay so um now what about religion. You said that religious people are okay as long as they don't judge is that what you are saying?  
 Jacob: Yeah I...about religious people because they're all different and you can have your stereotypical Bible flailing or the big black guy with the microphone saying "Praise the lord." And I got, I was sitting at a bus stop one day and a Japanese guy came and sat next to me and started reading the Bible and crying and hugging me and that kind of stuff, it was pretty scary but it's kind of because some could be like "Oh you freak freakin' whatever" but some might be good.  
 Michael: So it's pretty hard to generalise.  
 Jacob: Yeah.  
 Jacob: I have friends who are religious and gay friends who are religious.  
 Michael: And so how, so you're not religious though?  
 Jacob: No I'm not. I've been to church touched Jesus' feet and stuff but...  
 Michael: So what religion were you a part of?  
 Jacob: Catholic, Christian maybe, church of something.

*We then turned to discuss recreation and friends and the peer youth support group:*

- Jacob: I spend my spare time with my friends from the peer youth support group.
- Michael: Yeah um...
- Jacob: Yeah so I suppose there are a few people I've met here that are really close friends. Somebody who if I saw on the street...I also hang out with friends from school, straight people from school. Um like and we eat pizza, have slumber parties and stuff. I'm not sure what you want me to say?
- Michael: Do the um, do the friends that you've got from school meet the friends that you've got from the queer support group?
- Jacob: Yeah.
- Michael: Okay so they're mixed in?
- Jacob: Yeah.
- Michael: How important was the queer youth support group in meeting those friends?
- Jacob: It was good because then I knew I wasn't alone.
- Michael: So when did you, how long have you been coming here for?
- Jacob: Um I've been a member officially for a year but I've only been coming since the start of this year.
- Michael: So maybe we'll talk about just briefly, how did you come to find out about...?
- Jacob: Through the nurse.
- Michael: A nurse
- Jacob: At school, with the counselling woman but she scared me because she was always happy, always happy and overly happy and so I talked to the school nurse who is really cool and she's like a real person, if that makes sense, like she'll tell the truth and how it is and um anyway she told me about the group and um yeah so...
- Jacob: And then I came along for a couple of times and then I didn't come for the next couple of weeks because they were all big and loud and gay so I came here but not regularly but now it's like religion, does that make sense?
- Michael: Yeah.
- Jacob: Yeah.
- Michael: So they scared you because they were big and gay, what's that?
- Jacob: It's just I'm intimidated by new people and this is awkward for me and they were everywhere, a new setting, new people, it was awkward... So I had to ease myself into it kind of thing.
- Michael: It was something that you had to get used to?
- Jacob: Yeah, yeah, not that it was an uncomfortable environment, I'm just awkward around people.
- Michael: So the nurse gave you the phone number and you spoke to the worker on the phone?



Jacob: Yeah.

Michael: How did you get through the door?

Jacob: I agreed to meet her and then, she just wanted to make sure I wasn't an 80 year old pedophile kind of...

Michael: Yep she wanted to see who you were...

Jacob: And then I got to come along.

Michael: So did you go along with her after meeting her or did she just say come...?

Jacob: Yeah we met here...

Michael: Oh okay.

Jacob: And she went okay cool and so I got to go and I had to sign some confidentiality stuff.

Michael: Yep...

Jacob: Yep and then I was a member.

Michael: Yep and so how did you feel going along to that group?

Jacob: Originally it was good but awkward and if people asked me where I was I'd say, "Oh you know here and there". But now if somebody asks I say: "I'm just going to go hang out with some gay people."

Michael: So is it something you look forward to going to?

Jacob: Yeah.

Michael: What do you think is the most positive thing people get out of coming to groups like this?

Jacob: Probably knowing that you're not alone, that um, just the fact that you can meet new people and do things, like we go out for cake and pizza, we go to movies.

*I asked Jacob what the best thing about being gay was:*

Michael: What's the best thing about being a guy who likes other guys?

Jacob: I don't know...no um, I don't know, I could name...um it makes you feel good.

Michael: So it makes you feel good?

Jacob: Yeah I suppose, I don't know.

Michael: Alright, no that's fine so it's a good question to finish up on.

Jacob: It's a good question.



## Anne

- Michael: Okay so this is an interview with Anne. Thanks for agreeing to participate.
- Anne: No problem.
- Michael: So we might just start can you give me some background?
- Anne: Um I'm 18 and I'm female obviously and um sexual orientation?
- Michael: Sexual orientation yes.
- Anne: Well I identify as a lesbian but I don't really like labels.
- Michael: And in terms of class, what would you say are you middle class, working class...?
- Anne: Working class I would say.
- Michael: Ethnicity?
- Anne: Just Caucasian. Yeah I've got some Irish, English, French maybe.
- Michael: Okay and you're just completing school at the moment so you're in VCE?
- Anne: Yes.

*Anne chose to begin the conversation by talking about school:*

- Anne: Yep it's a Catholic girl's school so I think for a lot of queer youth going to A - *a very religious* and B - *all of the same gender school* is a little bit harder than going to a co-ed school or a state school because you have all of this um, "It's wrong" kind of thing going on and from a Christian perspective, a lot of Christians believe that

homosexuality isn't natural or whatever so you do have difficulties and because I go to a girl's school it was always a bit hard because people think that girl's schools *turn* you gay or whatever.

Michael: So it's a Catholic school, a single sex school and how many students are roughly in the school?

Anne: Um a bit under 1000.

Michael: And it goes from Year 7 through to Year 12? So in relation to school itself from the perspective of someone who identifies as lesbian... What are your thoughts about school?

Anne: In terms of how I feel in the community or...?

Michael: Yes, yes.

Anne: Um yeah comfortable. My school's pretty supportive, there are a number of teachers through my school, like I ran into one at a gay bar so you know I had support from my teachers within my Year level and by the time you get to know them everyone's pretty open um but I think in the younger Year levels it's less easy to identify as queer and feel comfortable about it and feel safe. Not that you feel that you're in danger but...

Michael: Personally safe.

Anne: Personally yeah, you do get a bit scared of people finding out but that's just an age thing I think as well.

*We continued on this theme:*

Anne: Yeah well I think it's an age thing primarily and like coming to terms with sexuality... I guess the immaturity of other people and you can't really approach teachers like you get to know teachers pretty well in VCE and you can feel comfortable just talking to them when you're having troubles or whatever but I know when you're younger it's a bit harder.

*Anne then spoke about an incident when a student spoke back to a teacher:*

Michael: Okay so why do you think it's important, to get support from teachers?

Anne: Yeah I think because teachers are in a position of authority they can influence how other students feel and also they can act as role models and my Religion teacher is quite homophobic and would make comments in class, like even this year about it and um I was actually surprised that a lot of the students got very angry and spoke back, like the straight students.

Michael: Like what sort of comments would, you mean there?

Anne: Oh she said that homosexual love isn't real love it's just infatuation and it's not valid and they can't get married because it's unnatural and um because they can't, because homosexuals can't have children they shouldn't get married.

- Michael: And how did that come up in the conversation, did she introduce it or, by the way is it a she or a he?
- Anne: A she, no we were just talking about, we did "Ethics", that was our topic for the year and I don't actually know how it came up, I guess we were talking about sex before marriage and then it just progressed.
- Michael: It tied in with that.
- Anne: Yeah and one of my best friends is, um she says she's straight but she's... she's very outspoken about things like that so she got into the argument with the teacher who then said the comments. It's not like she got up and said "Now we are learning that homosexuality is wrong" ...
- Michael: So that was in Religion, in Religion class?
- Anne: Yep.
- Michael: Um how did you feel when you heard that and how did you feel when other students responded to that and did you respond yourself?
- Anne: Yeah I didn't (respond), I just sat there looking at my sheet of paper because um I don't like getting involved in the sort of politics of it and actually usually I'm not bothered by things like that because if you get annoyed and upset about things like that you're going to have to face stuff like that your whole life so I don't, there's not really much point, but that particular class did upset me and I sat there through the whole class and when I got outside I saw my best friend and when I opened my mouth to tell her about it because I was like so outraged that I just started crying. That is not something that would upset me to that extent, but it was good because a lot of other students and in fact since then we've had like whole year level discussions about homosexuality because they had a priest come and speak to us and they started arguing with him too so I was quite happy.
- Michael: So when the priest came...?
- Anne: I wasn't there, I missed it, there was all this controversy going on and I missed it, I was wagging RE so...
- Michael: So this was a talk on homosexuality or it just became...?
- Anne: It just became about that and I just think my Year level is just very outspoken, a lot of them support gay rights which is actually very fortunate for me so I never had to raise anything myself but yeah.

*We talked about how active the student body have been in speaking back to homophobic comments:*

- Michael: So we'll talk about the Priest in a minute but you actually said something there that I found interesting, opposition to homophobic sentiments is often coming from the student body...Have

you encountered other teachers at the school that would be pro gay and lesbian... (and what is the student response to that?)

Anne: Yeah definitely. I was in contact with the Social Justice Coordinator who is straight but extremely, very, very open and, like she asked me if I was gay because it came up in conversation and um she was great and one of my teachers is gay and I bumped into her at a gay bar and we both freaked out and then we realised that it was okay so yeah she was fantastic support and yeah there were a lot of teachers that were accepting and open and um yeah but then there were the odd few that...

*Anne then discussed what she'd heard had happened when a visiting priest had made some comments that were not pro sexual diversity:*

Anne: I think someone, my school captain, actually brought up the issue of gay marriage.

Michael: And this was within Ethics?

Anne: Yeah this was general Ethics, he came to talk about the Catholic point of view and apparently half the Year level got into an arguing match with him about it so yeah it's good to know there is that support. I can't say that I would have been that sort of outspoken to a priest but he was actually the Bishop or a Bishop.

Michael: Oh okay so he was higher up the ladder...

Anne: Yeah he was quite up high.

Michael: Okay and so students argued with him.

Anne: Yeah and teachers actually argued against the student's points as well, they got involved, a couple of them.

Michael: Oh okay so teachers supported the position of the Bishop.

Anne: Yeah.

*We then talked about other queer students:*

Michael: Do you know any other gay or lesbian students in your school?

Anne: No I don't, like in my Year level or um, I don't know any. Um yeah and there are a couple of students who may have questioned but not openly and in other Year levels I don't know because basically throughout my whole high school thing I've never really known another full "out" person.

Michael: Are you "out" at school?

Anne: Yeah I mean I didn't "come out" formally but I would say everyone in my Year level would know and maybe a couple of students in other Year levels just because you know it gets out, you know someone's like "Oh Anne, I mean...Anne and her girlfriend are coming to the party", you know stuff like that and I guess it comes out yeah but I haven't formally.

Michael: So you've had a partner?

Anne: Yep.

Michael: So even with knowledge around having a partner you're yet to meet, apart from teachers who have been at those clubs you're yet to meet other people um, um?

Anne: Yep.

*We returned to discuss the impact that students speaking back at the Bishop had on Anne:*

Michael: You talked before about how in the classroom situation the students responded powerfully to the Bishop, while the teachers sort of seemed to be siding with him. What sort of impact do you think being in that sort of space might have had on you, or hearing about it had on you?

Anne: Yeah I mean because he was a priest or whatever he was like I respect that the Catholic church has very strong views on a lot of things and that's their, that's their, it's not their choice, it's their belief, it's their faith, I have no problem with that, I understand that they have to preach that or whatever. It was more the teachers arguing with the students that would have annoyed me but really not that much and hearing about it, it was sort of more funny to hear that students were answering back.

Michael: So why would the teacher's response annoy you? What would be annoying about that?

Anne: Well not annoying just I feel that teachers shouldn't teach their own personal views, I think they should, especially in a subject like Ethics they should have to teach all points of view and they shouldn't say, like my Religion teacher often said, "This is true", she didn't say, "This is how the church feels", so that's the only thing that I have a problem with is people not being objective about things.

Michael: And not taking on multiple views.

Anne: Yeah exactly.

*We then turned to discuss "being out" at school:*

Michael: Have you always been "out" at school?

Anne: I sort of, in primary school I started to know but I didn't really know what it meant and in early high school, in Year 7 and 8 I certainly had crushes on girls you know but I didn't really, I didn't really think "Okay this is who I am, it's not just a phase", I didn't really think that until about Year 9, and I was at a different school, I moved schools for a year and someone "outed" me and that was kind of hard but by the time I moved back to this school I just, my close friends knew and that was all I needed, and they were very supportive...

- Michael: How did the "outing" happen?
- Anne: Oh she was just insecure and um she just told people.
- Michael: So she had seen you around and...?
- Anne: Oh no I told her, she was a very close friend of mine and then um I don't know why she felt that she had to tell people but she did. And that was probably a turning point for me because I realised it wasn't the end of the world that people found out so yeah when I moved back to my school and it eventually got out, I panicked every now and again I thought, "Oh I don't want that person to know" but in the end I think...
- Michael: I think it's interesting what you said there about that that sort of gossip and that you were afraid that people would find out. How did you feel though when they found out, before you...?
- Anne: "Came out" myself?
- Michael: Yeah.
- Anne: Really scared, I don't know why um I think because I was worried that they would be uncomfortable around me, particularly at a girl's school and I wouldn't want them to read too far into stuff like I still wanted to be able to hug my friends and not have them think, "Oh my god is she coming onto me", that was probably my biggest fear and also just discrimination.

*We then talked about "Support Groups":*

- Michael: Is there anywhere at the school you're at currently, that you could find out about support groups, or do you feel like you need support groups?
- Anne: Yeah I don't think my school environment isn't very, it doesn't lend itself to showing support like students tell you where to go for support, it isn't discriminated against it just isn't acknowledged.
- Michael: So it's invisible in some ways?
- Anne: Yeah and the school counsellor that I've been to see she does have leaflets, the "one in ten" and um "youth law for queer youth" but they're not advertised and they're in amongst a whole lot of others. But the school counsellor tried to convince me that I wasn't gay so she's not particularly um useful.
- Michael: So what happened there when you talked to the counsellor?
- Anne: Well I went there because my school forced me to do counselling and...
- Michael: What do you mean forced you to do that?
- Anne: Oh I was just going through a rough time and then they sort of...
- Michael: So not in connection to sexuality, it's not that they said oh...?
- Anne: No, no, no, nothing like that.
- Michael: Okay.



- Anne: Um and yeah and I think I just mentioned it in passing, I said something like "My girlfriend" and she said, "What?", because this is an unrelated conversation and she's like "What do you mean my girlfriend?" and I said, "Um yeah I have a girlfriend". And at the time I wasn't really sure of my sexuality so I said, "Oh yeah I just go out with girls you know it's all right". And she's like "Oh well it's just a phase". And I'm like, "Oh well maybe" and she's like, "Don't worry you're not, you know". She just wasn't very...
- Michael: So you weren't validated.
- Anne: Yeah validated.
- Michael: So support was a bit of a worry, there were no posters, none of that sort of stuff...?
- Anne: No, well actually there might have been a "one in ten" poster.
- Michael: A "one in ten" poster okay.
- Anne: I think that might have been up there on the wall.

*We talked about "subject content":*

- Michael: Can you think of any times when you thought there should have been queer content covered and there wasn't or?...
- Anne: Yeah, Health and HD definitely, Sex Education doesn't have, well I don't know about other schools but ours certainly doesn't have any same sex information.
- Michael: Now why would you see that as a problem?
- Anne: Because there are so many queer youth that aren't going to be learning, like it's just assuming that everyone is straight and yes it's great to be providing healthy options and teaching safe sex for heterosexuals, yeah but um yeah you do need that knowledge...
- Michael: And what would you like to see happen there?
- Anne: I think it should be covered just as much as you know, what the options are for females and the risks, particularly for females you don't hear about the risks and males yeah protection and all that.
- Michael: That should be included in there. What about in Sex Ed about types of relationships and power issues and talk more broadly about STI's and...?
- Anne: Yeah it's all assumed that you're heterosexual, at my school anyway, it was always explained your boyfriend, your husband, this and not your partner. Yeah and with stuff like family violence it was always man, woman.
- Michael: And again what would you like to see happen there?
- Anne: Even just an acknowledgment that there are different relationships that are valid and that exist and fair enough in a Catholic school they don't have to say this is valid but they can at least say if you're in this situation, they should at least...

- Michael: Identify that some students are going to be identifying as same sex attracted. Okay so are there any other subjects where you think there could have been...?
- Anne: I can't think of any, I'm sure I've sat in class and thought hum...
- Michael: Do you remember times in other subjects when it was?
- Anne: I don't think it's really touched on, it's not really discriminated against it's just ignored. I think the only times when you encounter negative, like straightforward negative things is when you're talking to the older teachers and they don't even think ...
- Michael: So it would be unconscious, they would just say it without thinking.

*Anne then discussed the importance of training teachers around this:*

- Anne: I guess just teaching people to be aware that they are addressing, because people these days wouldn't accidentally say something racist, just let that slip because of the stigma against it but there isn't, there really is no stigma against homophobia. So I guess just teaching them to be aware that the person they're addressing might be...
- Michael: I think what you're saying there is really good.
- Anne: Yeah, people should tell you off if you said something you shouldn't say.
- Michael: "America's Next Model", I don't know if you were watching that but a white woman from Texas was being racist and I don't know if it was unconscious in her case but people were drawing her attention to it and she was saying, "Well I don't care if you're offended I'm just going to", but I think what you're saying is that those unconscious attitudes or ways of acting can change over time with education and we need to have education around sexuality the way we do around race.
- Anne: Yeah and we need to because it is hurtful, if you are exposed to that.
- Michael: And the reason is because it's hurtful.

*We then talked about Bullying and the "Social Justice Day" that Anne had been involved with:*

- Anne: Yeah well in terms of bullying I haven't really experienced it, maybe a few dumb comments from students you know but I know at other schools like my girlfriend in Year 7 got severely bullied because they found out that she was gay. Um so it does happen and I have a lot of guy friends that have experienced it, like gay males. Myself not personally but in terms of speaking out against it we run this day every year (a discussion day) and I touched on, because we had to organise the activities for the day

we touched on things like poverty, on homelessness, drug use, disability, all those things. And my best friend had won a public speaking competition that year and she did homophobia and she got up and spoke in front of the entire school and it was so good, I didn't have to do anything, I could talk about an issue without it being me personally and so yeah she got up and addressed the whole school...

Michael: And who is this?

Anne: My best friend "Rose".

Michael: Okay so Rose got up and did this and she's a student at the school?

Anne: Yes. And she got up with a rainbow belt...Um yeah so she got up with a rainbow belt and she's mainly straight um yeah she got up as a straight person talking about homophobia.

Michael: So that was quite a powerful thing.

Anne: Yeah it was. So was the Principal's rebuttal but anyway.

Michael: So the Principal, what did the Principal say?

Anne: He said it was okay for her to get up and speak, because she wasn't promoting homosexuality she was saying that um homophobia is wrong, and um he got up at the end of the day, and we had really positive feedback, people from other Year levels coming and saying... And a teacher that I know is gay that has never told me that she is and the teachers and everything, said, "that this is the best *Social Justice Discussion Day* I've had since I've been at this school" and like lots of congratulations to my best friend for saying stuff like that and then at the end of the day when he got up and addressed the school he started saying well it's unnatural, it's like, same sex activity is animalistic, like comparing it to animals and...

Michael: So the Principal stood up and said this after that presentation?

Anne: Yeah like in the afternoon and said that we accept these people but we don't accept their acts. And I was sitting there the whole time and I was actually, I was in the lighting box with two other gay teachers and um we're all just sitting there going, "Oh my god" and fair enough from the Catholic point of view he had to say we don't believe in it but he phrased it very, very badly and we got lots of angry teachers and lots of angry students coming up afterwards from his remarks.

Michael: And so which points of view would have held sway on that day?

Anne: Well the thing is Rose got up and said you should accept these people and he got up and said the complete opposite and he proved her points so I think hers was a lot stronger.

*We then talked about family:*

Anne: I guess family I haven't spoken about. I don't really have much to say. Both my parents "know" and they've known for about 2 years

now. My mother has taken until about 4 months ago to start actually acknowledging that I was gay, it was, "When you marry a man", this and that or any topic of conversation about homosexuality she'd just shut it off. She wasn't like "Get out of my house" but definitely, she was in denial.

Michael: She didn't want to go there.

Anne: Extreme denial. My dad was fine, straight away and like we're really close and he doesn't care you know.

Michael: Now actually while you say this, one of the issues in this project was, because I was interviewing people under the age of 18 and I know you're 18 but when you were 16 um, if you'd had to ask your mum permission to participate in this project would you have done that and would your mum have given you permission?

Anne: If I'd "come out" to her?

Michael: Yeah, if you'd already "come out".

Anne: If I'd come out to her yes, I would have asked her permission and she would have given it but she would have been just like "Oh god" you know.

Michael: Do you think it's important that young people have the opportunity to tell their stories in spaces like this?

Anne: Yeah I think it is because our experiences, you know we need to be able to identify as a community where the deficits are and the support and I think the only way to do that is to take it straight from the source.

*We returned to discussing "family" and it got complex:*

Michael: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Anne: Um I have 2 step brothers but they're young, and I have a 2 year old sister.

Michael: Okay so do they have an idea, (that you identify as gay?)

Anne: Yes, their father is gay um...

Michael: Oh okay, alright.

Anne: Because they're my dad's girlfriend's kids, my dad's partners kids yeah. And their dad is actually gay and they have sort of been around it for quite a while and they don't care, I think they're a bit young to really get it.

Michael: So within your extended family, I'm trying to pick up the links here. So your father's ex partner...?

Anne: No my father's partner, female partner.

Michael: Who is your mother?

Anne: No my step mum, yeah her ex husband, their father is gay.

Michael: Okay so your step mother was in a relationship with a partner who is gay?

Anne: Who since has...

Michael: Identified as gay and your step brothers are from that...

- Anne: Sorry it's very, very confusing.
- Michael: Alright so and this is the mother that you've been talking about?
- Anne: No.
- Michael: Oh your biological mother.
- Anne: My biological mother is in denial. I told my step mum and my dad...
- Michael: So how was your step mum, was she okay?
- Anne: Yeah she was great; I told them at the same time, they were together. I just walked it, I had been going to see my girlfriend, it was a long distance relationship and I had just said see my friend and then when we started officially going out I just sat on the edge of the bed and said, "You know that person yeah she's my girlfriend", and they were just like...

*We discussed the impact of homophobic comments on young people with queer parents:*

- Michael: There are gay parents out there and young people who have got gay parents and what you've been talking about...if your brothers, your step brothers went to your school, and they can't go to your school because they're boys – but, if they went to that school and they were raised as the children of a gay father what impact do you think the comments of the Principal, would have...?
- Anne: It probably would have hurt them because, because they're younger. I know if I was in Year 7 and I was still coming to terms with it for myself I would have been very frightened and scared after hearing those comments and I guess if it's someone you love after hearing those comments like that I'm sure you'd been very upset.
- Michael: That's a whole different dimension to what we're talking about but I think it's important to include in here because there are a number of people who might not be identifying as queer themselves but you know have family members who are or parents who are and homophobic comments can impact quite immediately on them so the sweep of people that we're talking about, extends in lots of different directions and...
- Anne: Yeah the best friend that I spoke about before who'd wrote the speech, she wrote that because she'd seen her experiences of caring about me.
- Michael: Your experiences.
- Anne: Yeah and it does effect other people, she gets very upset if people are homophobic like just as upset as if she was gay.
- Michael: So I think that is an interesting effect, you know "bystander" effects... But what you're saying is this anger, vicarious anger, outrage about, "How dare they say this about her you know she's a friend of mine" so... How do you feel, you said that you feel it's quite an empowering thing her standing up there because you didn't have to do it yourself.

Anne: Yeah.

Michael: And I guess one of the key learnings from that, what do you think one of the key learnings from that might be?

Anne: I think because I was in a position, like I probably wouldn't have done that, I would have been happy to do it myself and cop whatever, you know or get praise or get criticism or whatever but because I was in a position of leadership I didn't want people to be intimidated by me which is why I didn't feel comfortable doing it myself.

Michael: You didn't want to be seen to be pushing your own barrow?

Anne: Exactly and also I just wanted people to be able to come up to me, I always get younger people coming up, and when you're younger you don't want to hang around people who are gay just in case they think you're gay so I didn't want to label myself in front of the whole school as gay even though I think pretty much everyone knows anyway but um yeah that's why I, when she said she wanted to do the speech I said fantastic because it was something that I wanted to get across without having to do it myself but yeah a lot of people would probably be reluctant to do it themselves.

*We talked about the Queer Youth Support Group and specifically about a Queer Under 18 disco called "Minus 18" that is run by young people for young people:*

Michael: I'd be interested in hearing about the queer support group.

Anne: ...it's basically, dance parties, sometimes movies, you know stuff like that for same sex attracted youth and their friends, they accept everybody.

Michael: So GLBTI friends can come too, so it's open?

Anne: Yeah we accept everybody and it's really good for those youth to be able to bring friends who are straight um to you know get involved in the community and to have the support of their friends and the gay community. And we have up to 500 come to our events. They are very, very popular because they are the only, under age events in the country of that nature and in the past I used to go, when I was under age I used to go to them.

Michael: So when did you start going to them?

Anne: Um probably when I was about 15 or 16 and they were fantastic because I was like still exploring my sexuality and it was good to find that I wasn't the only one and there was support out there and fun things to do and particularly then you met people and there was a real sense of friendship, like you only saw each other at events but it was such a strong bond and you'd go out afterwards and it was a real community feel and yeah that was really good.

Michael: And it's like a lunch time afternoon disco thing isn't it?  
 Anne: Oh they were 4pm to 10pm.  
 Michael: It been going a while now...  
 Anne: Yeah, 9 years.  
 Michael: And they really are, they would have to be the most successful gay and lesbian young person thing that's in Victoria, they really are incredibly successful and they have been going for a long, long time.

*We talked about the benefits young people get from attending such functions:*

Anne: You can meet people in similar experiences, like it can be hard, like most young people want relationships, like to meet people and it can be hard to meet other gay people that's a big element, I know a lot of people go to form relationships but meeting friends, I guess meeting friends and forming that network and knowing that you're not the only one.

*We then talked about the best thing about identifying as queer or lesbian:*

Michael: I've been asking people if they can think about the best thing about being queer or lesbian or whatever, so what would you say there?

Anne: Um I don't know because for me it's not the biggest part of my life, like it doesn't fill my identity...

Michael: It's just a part of it.

Anne: It's just a small part of it but I guess the fact, the community, the gay community is very unique, you always know somebody at events, we're a very close knit bunch and I guess you know, I guess that would be it and people have their pride and their sense of community and I've noticed that gay people will stand up for other gay people even if they don't know them so yeah I guess it's that.

Michael: Okay and one other thing that I'd like to ask you, as a "Social Justice" person is there anything you want to say?

Anne: Okay basically what I would like to see is discrimination of any type like racial, sexual, anything like that, that, well I guess I have special invested interest in homophobia, I would like to see it just, it become normal instead of being different, instead of feeling scared, scared of who you are, scared of anything, I would just like to be able to see it as just another way of being, just another part of our diverse world you know another element.

Michael: And if you had one strategy or a broad suggestion or a group of strategies what would it be?

Anne: I think just education I think um parents can have, you know you're not born homophobic, you're not born racist, you learn it

ANNE

so I think counteracting that through schools, I think that's really important.



## Peter

Peter: Um I'm 16 and I'm a bit queer, which is fun and I go to a private school which is excessively expensive and for the most part is very open and accepting and I know the Counsellor and I know the Principal and through various incidents that have happened they know me and how I've responded to it all...

Michael: Okay so, so you used the word "queer" to define yourself...?

Peter: A homosexual male.

### *Peter described school:*

Michael: School...can you describe it for me ---

Peter: It's a Church school but there's only like 20 minutes of religion a week and usually that's very...and I don't know it's very academic based, they like to have people who are smart go there and they seem to make it very difficult for people who aren't to stay at the school, they just request them to leave...and I board there so I get to live with other boys which is living hell because I hate them and yeah that's the school.

Michael: Yeah in terms of boarding, we'll talk about the school in a little bit more detail as we go um what Year level were you in at the school?

Peter: I'm in 11.

Michael: Year 11.

Peter: Soon to be finishing.  
Michael: Okay um, and it's 7 to 12?  
Peter: Ah no, it starts at prep.  
Michael: Prep to 12.

*We started talking about school:*

Peter: My school is very open and accepting about it (gayness) which is why I stay there and don't go to "x". I "came out" in Year 9 when I was 14 um and for school we had to do this thing where my class had to live together at a camp and ah it makes it sound like "Survivor" but it's really not. So I had to work with 6 other boys and they knew then...

Michael: Do you have teachers at the camp as well?

Peter: And when I came back from the the camp and I had to start boarding because my family were interstate (the family had moved) and the boarding house was a bit of an anomaly because they all are completely touching each other every minute. They adore touching each other but won't admit it and looking at each other and they do everything, everything...they're "gay" but they're "not", in quotation marks they're "not" and they like to make it difficult for me.

Michael: We might come back to the boarding house in a second but with the camp you said you "came out" in Year 9...

Peter: Before then.

Michael: Before you went on that camp, but maybe we should talk a little bit about that. So how long did it take you to decide to "come out" and first of all who did you "come out" to?

Peter: Everyone...Except...

Michael: And have you always been "out"? When did you start thinking you might be gay?

Peter: I never thought of myself as gay until about Year 8ish but I remember I knew what adult sex was and I remember thinking wow, I'm supposed to have sex with a girl but I'd much prefer to have sex with a guy and I remember thinking that *Indiana Jones* was very attractive...That's partly my sister's fault because she always said how "hot" Harrison Ford was so...I didn't even know, somehow, when I was thinking about it, like I didn't really know the mechanics of it, I mean I knew where babies come from and I knew you had to have sex for it but um I honestly didn't know about anal sex and all that stuff but I remember thinking if I'm with a girl I can have anal sex with her and I can get a blow job from her but never give a blow job to anybody but I always thought that one day I would do that.

Michael: Okay.

- Peter: Even though I was 8. Um and then as I got older it just seemed to be “vag”, penis, penis is better.
- Michael: So your view of sex was pretty adventurous?
- Peter: Yeah um...
- Michael: Sex isn't something that scares you?
- Peter: Um I don't want, because I've had sex I didn't want it to be “just” sex I preferred to have emotion attached to it and it hasn't always had emotion attached to it. When I was younger I didn't understand what that meant and as I got older I started to think, and while I was sexually attracted to men I was also romantically attracted to men as well.
- Michael: So you could identify as you got older emotional attachment as well. All right so when did you start to recognise that you thought that you felt different?

*We then moved onto a conversation about Primary School:*

- Peter: Um since prep and I actually had to leave my primary school because it got so bad and that's when I went to the school that I'm at now.
- Michael: So what actually happened in primary school?
- Peter: They just called me names like “girl” and “queer”, and I didn't know what they actually meant by “queer” and “gay” and stuff but eventually I sort of picked it up and I was like “Oh right”.
- Michael: So what would that have been based on?
- Peter: I really only had girl friends, I didn't play any sport, I didn't, the games that we played were very creative and things that were very theatrical and kind of “queenie” and um I didn't hang around with boys very much, I didn't like the boys and they saw this and they were like, then you must be a girl.
- Michael: I'm sort of interested in that...So how old were you?
- Peter: It started in prep.
- Michael: Alright.
- Peter: And in prep there was a Year 4 kid who was being a dickhead to me and there were 2 guys in Year 6 who beat the crap out of him for me, it was good.
- Michael: So you, you had to leave the school?
- Peter: Yeah in Year 4. It sort of just got to the point where it was just like stop, so I went to a different school and it wasn't bad at that school but at the new school that I went to it was just like I was the kid on the outside for a couple of years and then I started making cartoons so I could hang around with guys and when I started going to the senior school which was Year 7 to now I've gotten friends from different schools and all kinds of friends and my counsellor likes to say all the time, my school counsellor likes to say that I'm the only one in the school who has genuine

attachments to people in every Year level and who just can be with anyone, so to speak, comfortable.

Michael: So that ability to be with different people, can I hear your thoughts on that?

Peter: I don't know, I've never thought about it, it's just like I don't judge people, I don't really give a crap what they're like I yeah um I don't enter into any bitch fights about people.

*We then returned to a discussion about secondary school:*

Michael: So is secondary school better than primary school?

Peter: Oh god yes. I wouldn't go back to primary school for 40 million dollars.

Michael: So primary school was much, much worse than secondary?

Peter: I don't have fond memories of primary school.

Michael: No so most of your memories would be to do with bullying?

Peter: Yep.

Michael: Now I don't want to take you back to difficult memories but...

Peter: I don't have any good memories, they're all...

Michael: So what, I mean what sort of things were difficult in primary school?

Peter: Oh just teasing and stuff. I never got beaten up or anything like that but they just used to say really horrible things to me and ostracise me and they used to talk to the girls a lot and the girls would be like, "yuck I don't want to touch him, he's gross" and all this stuff because, and yeah.

Michael: So the boys would talk to the girls?

Peter: Yeah and say he's weird and queer and stuff yeah and it was a Catholic school so I don't know if that had anything to do with it but it might of.

*We then talked about the boarding house:*

Michael: And how many people are in the boarding house?

Peter: About 150 - there are two separate houses for males and females.

Michael: Okay and you were saying before that, do the others in the boarding house know that you identify as gay?

Peter: Yeah, they pretty much guessed it.

Michael: And what's your experience in the boarding house been like?

Peter: Um, mixed I guess, some times have been better than other times. To start with, because since I had already been a student at the school they all knew me so it wasn't like when a completely new kid comes to the boarding house, they were just like "Oh yes X's in here now" and so they never went out of their way to be nice to me or make me feel comfortable and stuff because it was like "Oh he's been here forever so he'll know how to do it" and all that stuff

and I hadn't really got into the gay thing until the middle of the year when it became more obvious those Year 12's they used to say things like "If we came into your room at night would you give us a blow job" and stuff.

Michael: So, how old were you when they did that?

Peter: I would have been 15, they would have been 18, 17.

Michael: So how did you feel about that?

Peter: It really wasn't an issue for me and towards the end of the year I had this massive crush on this one guy and he used to ask me for *it* and I used to get all bothered by it but also the Year 12's have communal showers, the other year levels don't but the Year 12's do so my parent's were going to make me move up to "x" for good and they (the students) said, "You can't be going to leave the boarding house without having a communal shower" so I ended up having a communal shower with the three guys I had the "hots" for and every single boy in the boarding house came in to talk to the other boys but it was really just to see me, to see me in the shower and after that there was rumours spread around that I like tried to "jack off" in the showers and stuff but um I didn't and um so that was that and they liked to ask me a lot of questions in detail about my sex life and my personal life and I...Another student started to give me a lot of crap because my "production sense" has gotten a bit more outrageous of late and people will just say "Oh why do you walk that way or why do you do this?", blah, blah, blah, so it got to the point where I beat the crap out of him, it was the only fight I'd ever been in, in my life, I came out without a scratch on me, yeah and then, now the y've figured out just to stay away from me and I stay away from them, it's all good.

Michael: So you're "out" in the boarding house and what you're describing is that the guys are trying to put you in situations that are sexual like the shower thing, just to see what happens, so how do you feel about that? You were saying that when you were in the shower everyone came through the shower, what were the other guys doing?

Peter: In the shower?

Michael: Yeah.

Peter: They were just laughing because um those three boys were really, really tight friends like when they graduated they were absolutely sobbing their eyes out because they didn't want to leave each other and according to rumour they had done stuff together and so I was just like "whatever" and they were just being like good footy boys and when the others came through they were just like "hey you and you", blah, blah, blah but I think that's just something they do in communal showers, everybody just comes to see how they measure up.

Michael: Would you say that you've been bullied in there?

Peter: From this one kid yes, he...he was a nightmare, he wanted to make it as uncomfortable for me as possible like once he went into my room and searched through my stuff and they happened to find where I keep my condoms and he opened 2 or 3 of them and left them on my computer which was on the desk so I had condoms on my computer and stuff and he said things, every time he saw me he'd say something and then after I'd beat him up he stopped saying things. But boys pretty much ignored me unless I speak to them and say "Oh how was your weekend?" and blah, blah, blah and they all pretty much love me.

*We then talked about how Peter got on with girls:*

Michael: So you get on better with girls.

Peter: Oh much better.

Michael: So why do you reckon that is?

Peter: Oh the ones that I get along with, I don't know there's something about them, there's something similar like when I was on the island in we used to go for walks in the forest and stuff which was actually against the rules but we did it anyway and there are other girls who like to watch "Buffy" like I do or whatever, this show or that show, they like to do this or do that...

Michael: So similar interests. What do the other guys think about that?

Peter: Some of the guys I have become friends with, because I do have friends in the boarding house, they're just like "Oh he's popular with girls, girls like him, whatever". One of them just today was saying "Don't steal my girlfriend" because she was like hanging out with me all day today and he's like "Don't steal my girlfriend." I wasn't planning on stealing his girlfriend.

Michael: Alright so the boarding house sort of sounds like an interesting space.

*The conversation then returned to broader aspects of school:*

Michael: Alright were there any other aspects of school?

Peter: There's a boy in Year 12 recently who keeps on going dickhead to me, he went to my original primary school when I was there and we ended up going to the same school together and he's always saying something stupid to me like a little while ago he said, he was trying to mock me, pretending to be me, and then eventually it got to the point where they beat me up in the school café, like genuinely beat me up and I'm like "um, yeah" the school instantly is like "we're going to do this kid and we're going to show that if he does anything like that again, regardless of when he won't be able to sit his exams" and they'll kick him out. Um there was also an incident involving the internet where somehow searched for

the school there would be things that came up on my MySpace profile for some reason because I have my school's name in my MySpace profile and people would get that when they searched for the school and one of the harder member's of the faculty thought that was inappropriate and they requested, they wanted me to take the school's name out of the profile because that reflects badly on the school and the school council, the actual Head of the school said, "Why should he?"

Michael: So what did you say on MySpace?

Peter: Oh nothing just that my school is this school and...

Michael: And I'm gay.

Peter: And it had a lot of queer content and the pictures were viewed as gay and the school, some people in the school were just like and people are actually reading that about the school and saying so I didn't have to do anything.

Michael: So it stays there.

Peter: It's still there.

*We then talked a little about subject content:*

Michael: Anything in relation to subject content or anything like that?

Peter: In "x" there's a sticker and they made it obvious that they were talking about sex more than heterosexual sex and there was one class where we talked about how it would feel to be in a situation, how would you react in a situation if you were going to have sex with a person and you didn't have a condom what would you do, blah, blah, blah, and what if you saw two guys holding hands walking down the street and that and what if you saw 2 guys kissing and the school made it clear that they thought it was okay, they're not discriminatory in any way and the amount of kids that said "Yes, I would be upset about it, be put off" was pretty much in the minority.

Michael: If you could use one word or one phrase to describe your general school experience.

Peter: Um... I don't know um "accepting" or something like that.

Michael: So it wasn't a disaster.

Peter: No, "disaster" wouldn't be the word. The boarding house can be painful at times, that's usually once a month that I have any bad experiences and day school is awesome because the teacher's are cool and the kids are cool, and stuff.

*We then shifted to talk about family:*

Peter: Um I told my parent's last year, I told my sister, I'm assuming my brother does know because he and my sister talk about everything.

Michael: Are they older or younger?

Peter: Older.

Michael: Yeah.

Peter: I haven't specifically said it to him but I'm pretty sure he knows. They were all fine with it, they were all cool or whatever and um when I told my dad he sort of thought that maybe I identified with it because people have called me that since I was in prep and it was just a phase and maybe it was peer pressure and stuff and I was like "No", and eventually he got the idea and was like okay.

Michael: So he's been fine?

Peter: Yeah, he can be more objective now because, as soon as we went to "x" when I went to school, I said, "I didn't have any friends" and he was like, "Oh go make friends as much as you can, but don't go down to the beach and see if anybody talks to you or something" but I didn't talk to anybody because I tried last year and they were like oh yeah.

Michael: Okay.

Peter: There is pretty much, fifty metres away from my apartment is the gay "beat" but I don't go there because it's gross and stinky.

Michael: Oh.

Peter: It's near a toilet and it smells revolting....

Michael: So you would know about stuff like that?

Peter: Yeah.

Michael: How aware are other gay guys (your age) of that sort of stuff?

Peter: I think well they are all pretty knowledgeable about it, they would have ideas but I think the ones I know would all know about it, the ones about in the town.

Michael: Would young guys in the town, would they see it as something they would have a connection to or would they see it as for older gay guys, or that's from a different time?

Peter: When they found out where they were I was thinking, "Oh maybe I'll try them" but I decided "No, that's not what teens are supposed to do" and I think most teens know that, however there are some who will um...

Michael: Who will go there?

Peter: Yeah, just because they want sex, regardless of who it's with, and I do not, and it's just sort of like, "Okay if that's what you want to do" but I'm not going to do it.

Michael: So your father was sort of saying don't go down to the beach and he was saying the beach is a bit of a beat.

Peter: I try and think of it as a positive thing as much as I can, like he doesn't want me to be taken advantage of or anything but at the same time when he said that, because he doesn't do it anymore, it was still sort of like he's still trying to push more towards girls in bikinis and stuff after I told him and like and I'm like, "Dad, I prefer the guy standing next to her."



Michael: And are you comfortable saying that to him?  
 Peter: I did, because with my dad you need to say it 32 times.

*We continued talking:*

Michael: So you're quite strong so do you feel that impacts on the way you construct your sexuality or the way that you are?  
 Peter: I never thought of it as a bad thing, except the kids at school harassing me but my parents always said that if that's who I was then that was fine.  
 Michael: So they always said that from early on. Did they have gay friends?  
 Peter: Some people that my dad works with are. Um I don't know who they are but just after I had "come out" we had a dinner party with a bunch of our friends or whatever and they were talking about how awesome gay people are and stuff and it was this mid-50's quite Christian person saying how much he loves going to the local gay bar in "x" because "they're all so fun and awesome" and stuff. All the people around me said that it didn't matter...it was okay to be that ---.

*We continued talking about the attitudes of other people and the conversation moved to questions of religion:*

Michael: It doesn't seem that you're lying awake at night worrying about the other people.  
 Peter: Most people are Catholic who are there (at school)...I went through a phase where I was very much against religion and I wouldn't say I have gone back to religion now but.  
 Michael: So was religion an important part of who you were?  
 Peter: Not really but because that was what I was taught since I was 7.  
 Michael: But you grew up in a religious house?  
 Peter: We used to go to church every Sunday and stuff but my parents were like, "Nah, I can't be bothered taking him to church on Sundays" and so it was just like neh.  
 Michael: Yeah so it was not the most important thing?  
 Peter: No...Religion dictates who people can have sex with and things but in the grand scheme of things it's completely irrelevant.  
 Michael: So why in the grand scheme of things is it completely irrelevant?  
 Peter: Because you can't help it. There are just some things that you can't avoid like death, taxes and wanting to have sex with people, and who those people are really doesn't matter.  
 Michael: So you don't accept the power of religion to define, this is right and that's wrong.

*We discussed the queer youth group:*

- Michael: Do you have anything you want to say about the queer youth group?
- Peter: Nothing really no...because it's just that I've only been going a few months but it's really opened my eyes and my social circle because I would only meet new people who were middle class-ish, upper class, somewhat intelligent people but now I have sort of seen how the other side lives and um like my last boyfriend was somewhat "below his means," independent, not living with his parents, um not in school, going to TAFE. So he sort of made me understand that there's more to life than just going to school.
- Michael: So it's been good in terms of broadening your outlook. Um how did you find out about the group here?
- Peter: I met one of the guys who goes to it at a friend's birthday party and one day I was actually in a play in a school and when I got off stage I got a text message saying, "Come to the gay youth group" so I did.
- Michael: So because you are "out and about", you are in a position to be able to find out about this sort of stuff. What was it like coming to the group?
- Peter: It was a bit sort of awkward because I had to miss out on the first meeting. Because some people had done some bad stuff so...
- Michael: Oh yeah.
- Peter: Yeah um and I'm afraid that I have to go.
- Michael: One final question that I like to finish with, what would be the best thing about being um gay or queer?
- Peter: People are so much "funner" but I don't know like I love my straight friends to death but queers and lesbians are fun because we're more open and we can talk about all kinds of stuff that you wouldn't otherwise talk about and I get to do so much more because Australia in my opinion has a culture where if you're gay and Australian well you've got lots to do.
- Michael: A quick example of what sort of fun things gays and lesbians do?
- Peter: I don't know but we've got youth groups and, I've never actually been able to be in one but there's a parade and there's a festival coming up next year and all kinds of stuff.

## Sarah

- Michael: Okay Sarah the first thing we need to find out is how old you are.  
Sarah: Um I'm 16.  
Michael: What gender are you?  
Sarah: Female.  
Michael: How you identify in terms of ethnicity, do you know what that means?  
Sarah: Um background.  
Michael: Background, what's your ethnic background?  
Sarah: Vietnamese.  
Michael: Um in terms of money and class are you poor, in the middle or rich?  
Sarah: In the middle.  
Michael: In the middle. Um, any other things that you'd like to say to describe yourself?  
Sarah: Um I'm a lesbian.  
Michael: Okay so you identify as lesbian?  
Sarah: Yeah.  
Michael: School?  
Sarah: I go to a co-ed Catholic school. And for the first three years like from Year 7 to Year 9 I was mostly with girls in the classroom, but until Year 10 I get to be with the boys but they're still not in the classroom. And then it gets to Year 11 and 12 when the classes are mixed together. About 1500 students.

Michael: So it's a big school.

*We then moved into discussing aspects of Sarah's life. Sarah started talking about school:*

Michael: Which one would you like to start talking about first?

Sarah: Um let's go with this order.

Michael: Okay so as a young person who identifies as lesbian what do you want to say about school?

Sarah: Well I don't really like school and um people at my school they're alright but some are not used to gay and lesbian people.

Michael: They're not used to gay and lesbian people?

Sarah: Yeah.

Michael: So what do you mean by that?

Sarah: Like when I "came out" to a few people they're like, "Are you serious?" or "Are you joking?" and then they're like, "that's not true" yeah, yeah.

Michael: So, okay so when did you "come out" to other people?

Sarah: I "came out" to my close friends at about this time last year.

Michael: So you were in Year 9 when you "came out"?

Sarah: Yeah and they kind of rejected my confession. My friend refused to see me as a lesbian.

Michael: As a lesbian.

Sarah: I prefer the word gay. And um my friends wanted to get me a boyfriend and I was like, "I don't like boys so why should I get a boyfriend", yeah.

Michael: So when you said your friends rejected you, were they rejecting you as a person or the idea that you were a lesbian?

Sarah: The idea that I was a lesbian.

Michael: So they still hung around with you...

Sarah: Yep.

Michael: So why do you think they did that and how did that feel for you?

Sarah: Um they probably think it's not normal and yeah because they don't know anyone who is like that so yeah.

*We then discussed "normal" and the invisibility of gay and lesbian people at school:*

Michael: Okay so they don't think it's normal. Where do you think they would get that idea from, why would they think that?

Sarah: Um society, or probably the school or like people and the stereotypes.

Michael: So you mentioned society, the school and stereotyping and that they don't really know anyone. So, I suppose because we're talking about school, is there anything at school that you're aware of?

Sarah: Because it's a Catholic school so they focus on marriage between a man and a woman, yeah.

- Michael: Have you ever heard them say anything bad about gay and lesbian people?
- Sarah: Not really.
- Michael: No so...?
- Sarah: But it's never mentioned.
- Michael: And how do you feel as a result of that?
- Sarah: Um I felt a bit disappointed because they were my friends and I thought they would understand but in a way I do understand how they felt.
- Michael: So how do you understand?
- Sarah: Well um I put myself in their position and um like I think that if I was them I would probably find it hard to accept that I have a gay friend yeah.

*We then talked about absences:*

- Michael: Okay so you said around school that there were absences...how do you feel about those absences? Like where do you think gay and lesbian things should be talked about in school? Where would you like to hear about them or should you hear about them?
- Sarah: Um in your class, like when they talk it's always referring to a man and a woman as being a couple and um... it would be good if the class also would think about that there are gays and lesbians.
- Michael: Can you give me some examples in terms of classes, subjects where you didn't hear about gay and lesbian people but you think you should have?
- Sarah: Um there is in Religion class there is just one day, just one day out of the whole year, this year the class was working on sexuality and once the teacher pulled it into the conversation. It was just one worksheet but I was away from my class but I heard about it and I saw the worksheet and I thought that it wasn't enough because it was just a worksheet and you just filled it in, they didn't really discuss it.
- Michael: They didn't discuss it.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: Okay. Was the worksheet positive or negative or neutral?
- Sarah: Neutral.
- Michael: Neutral, okay. So there was just one day of that that you can remember.
- Sarah: Yep.
- Michael: And how do you feel about the fact that there's only one day of it?
- Sarah: It's not enough.
- Michael: So does that make you angry or upset or anything...?
- Sarah: Um just a bit unhappy that's all.
- Michael: So um and you can't remember any other times in class...?

- Sarah: Um there is Religion class last year too, yeah in a work book there was one sheet about um bisexual, lesbian and masturbation. It was just in one small paragraph and that's all and I didn't think many people bothered reading it.
- Michael: Not many people even saw it?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: Oh okay so, so you don't feel very included in the subject content, would that be fair to say?
- Sarah: Yeah.

*We then talked about the impact of these absences:*

- Michael: Do you think that has an impact on how you feel about being at school?
- Sarah: In a way.
- Michael: In a way how, how?
- Sarah: Um...
- Michael: I know it's hard to explain but is that a bad thing or a good thing would you say?
- Sarah: Both I guess.
- Michael: How is it a good thing if it's both?
- Sarah: No, I change it's a bad thing.
- Michael: Yeah I suppose, I would agree it's mainly a bad thing. Is there anything else you want to say about subject content? Can you remember any time when it has come up in class when you've been in class, because you were saying before that there was a work-sheet but you weren't there on that day, maybe the year before when it was in that book...?
- Sarah: There was a time this year when after class I went up to my Religion teacher and asked him what does the Bible say about homosexuality and homosexuals. And um he said that he will research it and see what the Bible says and after a few weeks I asked him again and he said that I did explain it in class once but you were away so yeah it was covered when I was away.
- Michael: So he didn't answer your question?
- Sarah: He did but he discussed it with the class.
- Michael: But not with you?
- Sarah: Yeah because he, he did want to explain it to me but he also wants to include the class.
- Michael: Did he ever give that explanation?
- Sarah: Yeah he did.
- Michael: What did he say?
- Sarah: He said that it was not sin, to god it's not a sin, it's just that gay marriage the Catholic church doesn't support it.

*We then talked about religion:*

- Michael: Do you see yourself as religious as Catholic?  
 Sarah: I'm Catholic but I don't really believe in god.  
 Michael: So you're a Catholic but you don't really believe in god?  
 Sarah: I'm a Catholic because of my parents.  
 Michael: Okay so your parents have got a Catholic background and have sent you to a Catholic school.  
 Sarah: Yeah.  
 Michael: What are your thoughts about religion? Was there a time when you felt that you were religious or...?  
 Sarah: Like when I was small I used to go to church with my parents but as I get older and I understand more um I think that what's the point of worshipping someone when you can just move on with life. And I thought that because there's a lot of religions, what happens if you worship god and he is not true and Buddha is true, what will happen or like that yeah.  
 Michael: So you were unsure whether the god, the Catholic god was the true god um and you thought okay I'm going to...  
 Sarah: I just thought about sticking with the science and true facts and that.  
 Michael: So you're more inclined to believe in science and more factual stuff, rather than stuff that you can't prove...  
 Sarah: And that I can't see myself.  
 Michael: So you're not going to believe something that someone says to you just because they say it.  
 Sarah: Yeah.

*We talked about the Enlightenment for a while and I then asked Sarah if she felt any anger towards Religion:*

- Michael: You don't seem to be angry about religion or anything like that, you don't feel any anger towards it...?  
 Sarah: No.  
 Michael: It's just something that you've moved on from.  
 Sarah: Yeah.

*We then moved onto discuss "friends":*

- Michael: You mentioned that you "came out" to some friends at school. What's that experience been like? Can you talk about whether "coming out" to your friends was a good thing to do or a bad thing to do?  
 Sarah: It was good thing even though they refused and denied it.  
 Michael: Why has it been positive? Can you talk about that?  
 Sarah: Because um... because it's been a good experience.  
 Michael: And why has it been a good experience?

- Sarah: Because my friends didn't over react or anything, they just um didn't understand or didn't have the knowledge about gay people yeah.
- Michael: So you feel that they're slowly coming around to accepting that idea?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: And that, they've accepted you for who you are and that's a positive thing. Are you able to talk about things like girls that you would find attractive (in front of them)?
- Sarah: Um yeah.
- Michael: So you can do that sort of stuff?
- Sarah: Now yeah.
- Michael: Does that feel good to be able to do that sort of stuff?
- Sarah: Yeah I feel more like who I am, more open yeah.
- Michael: Are there any things that you wouldn't talk with them about?
- Sarah: I'm really open with everyone so I tell my friends everything.
- Michael: Are any of those friends gay or lesbian themselves?
- Sarah: At that time or now?
- Michael: Well both I suppose really, at the time you told them?
- Sarah: At the time um one, well I'm not sure about one but they seemed all straight and they said they are all straight but one acted like a bisexual because she likes to like touch girls and that.
- Michael: So how does a bisexual act?
- Sarah: Um well she's interested in guys and had boyfriends and all that and she was like the girl in our group who had had the most boyfriends but then at school she like touched the girls and hugged them and that.
- Michael: So you question whether she's...
- Sarah: Yep.
- Michael: You seemed to be say that when you first "came out" no one was gay or lesbian but then that's changed?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: So what's happened, are there now people you know that are gay and lesbian?
- Sarah: What in my group or...?
- Michael: Yeah in your group or in your Year level at the school.
- Sarah: Well after a while, after one year now one of my friends in my group about a month ago at my birthday party she said, she was very open and she said to everyone in the room that she was not straight yeah. Yeah like she said "Everyone in the room they're all not straight" and that's why she was open about it and um she said, "I think I'm bisexual because of Sarah" yeah because we are close friends and we see each other as brothers instead of sisters, we see ourselves as brothers and I'm fine with that, her liking me and that's why she's bi and yeah...



- Michael: So one of your friends feels that she is bi because she's had contact with you...?
- Sarah: Yeah because I was really open with my sexuality for this one year, yeah.

*We then talked about the phrase "we see each other as brothers instead of sisters":*

- Michael: You think of yourself as brothers, not as sisters, can you talk about those two things?
- Sarah: Like um because I "came out" last year I had the whole holidays to kind of think about it so at the start of the year I kind of start at a new campus at school where there are boys and um I had, like last year I had long hair and I had a bit of a change this year.
- Michael: So you cut your hair?
- Sarah: Yeah I cut my hair shorter I had new glasses, like newish style that was a bit different and then I started "coming out" to everyone, like slowly because I just wanted them to know.
- Michael: So how did you do that, how did you "come out" to everyone slowly, what did you do?
- Sarah: Um I hear them talk about how I'm a tomboy or how I'm always having a conversation about gay or lesbian people yeah.
- Michael: Now you were also saying that this girl that you know at school that you see yourselves as brothers not sisters, so can you talk about that a little bit. And also about haircuts.
- Sarah: Um well we've always been close friends and I've been a tomboy all my life.
- Michael: So what's a tomboy?
- Sarah: Um well you're a girl and you act, you have male characteristics.
- Michael: So what would be a male characteristic?
- Sarah: Um like you do what um boys or males would do and you act the way they are but yeah.
- Michael: But you're not a boy.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: So can you give me an example of something like that?
- Sarah: Well when I was small I liked to climb trees and that. I didn't like Barbie dolls, I liked to play with swords and guns.
- Michael: Swords and guns.
- Sarah: I like to wear shorts and not dress and this has been since I was 3.
- Michael: So can you remember that in primary school?
- Sarah: Yes it has been from since I was really small until now.
- Michael: So what did that mean for you in primary school?
- Sarah: Um, it's just being who I am.
- Michael: Do you think that's had an impact on your school experience or your experience more broadly?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: How?

Sarah: Well because I act like a tomboy and now with my hair everyone can see that well some can see that I'm gay and that.

*We then talked about "haircuts":*

Michael: I might describe your hair cut, you've got pretty groovy hair, it's spikey, shortish, razored, a sort of unusual hair cut - so your hair cut sounds like it's really important and your glasses, you've got square glasses with black rims, contemporary frames. So why was it important for you to cut your hair? Because you said you had a different hair cut last year, was it longer or shorter?

Sarah: It was longer, it was quite long.

Michael: Is this more of a "lesbian" hair cut than the one you had before?

Sarah: No.

Michael: No okay so this is more...

Sarah: Of a male hair cut.

Michael: A male hair cut you've described it as.

Sarah: Yep.

Michael: Okay um why is it a male hair cut?

Sarah: Um well with the teenagers these days, the males of course they will have spikey hair but um well with the Asian style they keep their hair a bit long but it's still a bit spikey.

Michael: So is it EMO, it's not really is it, it's sort of like an Asian punk?

Sarah: No.

Michael: No, it's just spikey...

Sarah: Just think about the colour...

Michael: It's a bit retro, it actually reminds me of the early eighties to tell you the truth, but you would see this as a boys hair cut.

Sarah: Yes.

*We then moved onto briefly discuss gender identification:*

Michael: Okay so do you see yourself as, you've described yourself as female, you don't see yourself, do you see yourself as a boy or...?

Sarah: Um I wish I could be a boy.

Michael: So you would wish that you could be a boy.

Sarah: Yep.

Michael: Okay so do you want to talk about that at all or?

Sarah: Um yeah.

Michael: Okay so what does that mean "you wish you could be a boy"?

Sarah: Um well with the society now, I know the female is taking over but I still think the male gets more advantage in every way and it is better to be a male and also my friends like... she said that if you're a male you don't have to go through labour and you don't have to get pregnant and all that.

Michael: So there are certain advantages males get in the culture.

- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: But I suppose I'm talking about, I would say well Beckham, you know the soccer player has a lot of money and he plays soccer for a living and flies around the world. It would be nice to be him for a week, but that doesn't mean I really want to be him... like when you say men have got certain advantages and you say "I would like to be a boy or a man" I hear those as two different statements you know one is about saying "I would like to access the privileges men have", but the other is saying "I feel like a man"... So with you, from what you've said so far it's more the privileges that...
- Sarah: I feel I'm a boy too.
- Michael: Okay so you feel like a boy as well.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: So do you want to talk about that?
- Sarah: I don't think there's anything to talk about.
- Michael: No, so that's just a feeling that you have. That's not a feeling that upsets you?
- Sarah: No.
- Michael: That's a feeling that you're comfortable with?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: Okay and is that a feeling that you have started to explore in terms of transgender...?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: Okay so would you describe yourself as someone who...
- Sarah: A cross dressing.
- Michael: Okay so you're cross dressing but you're not just playing with clothing though, you're dressing in a way that feels more in tune with who you are. Is that... So it's not about playing with clothing like a drag queen or something like that?
- Sarah: No.
- Michael: It's not about that, it's about, even though drag queens feel like being drag queens, for you this is something that you feel you need to dress like.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: And would you describe yourself as a transperson or as someone who's thinking? ...Do you know about transgender people?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: Is that a way that you identify with or you don't identify with or...?
- Sarah: Not yet.
- Michael: No, but it's something that's just bubbling away a bit.
- Sarah: Yeah.

*I asked Sarah who she spent time with at school:*

- Michael: I was just going to ask you around where you said before, do you hang around with guys as well as girls or do you hang around more with girls?
- Sarah: I hang around more with girls.
- Michael: Is there a reason for that or is that just the way it's happened?
- Sarah: I just, yeah I just socialise with the girls more.
- Michael: You just prefer their company?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: Okay um did you in primary school play boys games?
- Sarah: Um I like soccer.
- Michael: And did that cause you any sort of problems or...?
- Sarah: Um my dad said that soccer is a boy's game and I shouldn't play it, yeah.
- Michael: So you wanted to play soccer for a team?
- Sarah: Yeah when I was small.
- Michael: Right, how old were you?
- Sarah: Um probably some time at the end of like primary school.
- Michael: Grade 5 or something.
- Sarah: 6, yeah.
- Michael: So your dad said you shouldn't play soccer, did he say "don't do that" or did he say you know...?
- Sarah: He said I shouldn't.
- Michael: He said you shouldn't but he didn't forbid you from doing it?
- Sarah: No and also the Thaikwondo or Karate.
- Michael: So you want to do Karate?
- Sarah: Yeah because I thought it was a good benefit to start when you're young. With my dad he said it's a waste of time, it's better to get a tutor for school help.
- Michael: Oh so to get help with your school work.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: What do you feel, do you feel that that was the real reason though, why your father did this, do you think he was worried it was a bit too boyish or...?
- Sarah: Um no.
- Michael: He just wanted you to study.

*We then discussed "family":*

- Michael: Okay is there anything you want to say about your family? Actually I'd be interesting to hear about you being Vietnamese and lesbian, is there anything you want to say about that?
- Sarah: I have two gay guy cousins.
- Michael: Oh okay.
- Sarah: One is 19 and I think the other one is 22.
- Michael: Are they from the same family?
- Sarah: No.

- Michael: So how do you know that they're gay?
- Sarah: They're all on my dad's side.
- Michael: So with these two gay cousins, how do you know that they're gay, have they told you or...?
- Sarah: Well they moved from Vietnam... and I didn't know until my parents talked about it or my other cousin talked about them.
- Michael: So when they talk about them what do they say?
- Sarah: It's always about my cousin and their parents or how um they disapprove of it.
- Michael: So they disapprove of it, they don't like it. So do they give any reasons or do they just say they don't like it?
- Sarah: Um not really.
- Michael: So how, what's your relationship with your parents in relation to identifying as a lesbian? Are you "out" to your parents?
- Sarah: Yep.
- Michael: Okay so when did you "come out" to them?
- Sarah: In September I think.
- Michael: This year?
- Sarah: Yep.
- Michael: And what made you decide to do that? And what did it feel like, is it better to be "out" than "in"?
- Sarah: I broke up with my girlfriend...
- Michael: Oh okay.
- Sarah: And then I was unhappy at home and my mum told me off for not being happy and I couldn't tell her why yeah and then there was a day when I went over to a friend's house and my, she kept telling me off for not being happy and asked are you unhappy at home. And I asked if I could stay over at a friend's house and my parents never let me sleep over and I say letting me sleep over at a friend's house is just the same or it's better than when I run away and sleep at a friend's house. Yeah and then my mum asked like "Why do you like to sleep over at a friend's house?" and I said "because I don't want to see you." She's like "Why don't you want to see me?" "Because you keep yelling at me." And she said, "it's because you're always not happy and grumpy and that." And then I said "that um like there's something I'm not happy about but I just can't tell you" and then um it was kind of like a pressure and so then I told her.
- Michael: So it's like a "coming out" in an unexpected way.
- Sarah: Unexpected.
- Michael: Do you feel it's better to have told? Did your mother then tell your father?
- Sarah: Yeah when he came home.
- Michael: Oh okay. And what was their reaction?
- Sarah: They said "just act normal".
- Michael: Like did they say that to you or...?

Sarah: They didn't say it but, my mum kept asking "Why do I like girls?" and I just asked her "Why do you like dad?" it's just the same thing, yeah... And like liking girls and liking boys there really is no difference, that's why I asked her why do you like dad, yeah.

*I then asked about the effects of "coming out":*

Michael: So, and that was in September so it's not a long time ago really... do you feel they're coming around to the idea or...?

Sarah: Um well um... they want to take me to the doctor so I can get more um female hormone I don't know what it's called.

Michael: Alright so what would, how do you feel about that?

Sarah: I think they're crazy.

Michael: So you're not going to go to the doctor?

Sarah: Um yeah I said "There's nothing wrong with me, why do I have to go to the doctor?" and my dad said "It's just so you can fit in with society." And I said "I am fitting in with society" because...

Michael: So apart from telling you that you're not normal and wanting to take you to the doctors they haven't kicked you out of home and they haven't...

Sarah: No.

Michael: And have things really changed in any other way, do you...

Sarah: They are used to it.

Michael: They are getting used to it.

Sarah: They are used to it and um my mum knows that I have a girlfriend and also another two persons that I am seeing and my parents are fine with me taking my partner home, yeah.

Michael: So you have a girlfriend?

Sarah: Yes.

Michael: And you can bring her home to the house?

Sarah: Yes.

Michael: And your parents have met her?

Sarah: Not really.

Michael: So they haven't met her but they know that she comes back to the house and...

Sarah: They didn't really see, it was like about 2am.

Michael: So it was late.

Sarah: Yeah, she didn't want to go home and I said to my parents "Can I just take a friend home because something happened with her?" and then later on I said, "Yeah that was my girlfriend."

Michael: And what did they say when you said that was your girlfriend?

Sarah: They didn't say anything.

Michael: They just said okay.

*We then talked about being "out" to parents:*

- Michael: Is it better to be “out” to your parents... like it was an accident that you “came out” wasn’t it, so is it a good thing that that happened or a bad thing?
- Sarah: It’s a good thing like they’re nice, they’re nice to me more which is really scary.
- Michael: So since you’ve “come out” your parents have become nice to you.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: So how are they being nice to you, what are they doing?
- Sarah: Um...
- Michael: Apart from saying that they’re going to take you to the doctor, but they haven’t got you there so...
- Sarah: They did.
- Michael: Oh they did so what happened at the doctor?
- Sarah: My mum took me to the doctor once and I thought it was for her because she was sick. She took me into the Doctor and then I knew that...
- Michael: It was about you.
- Sarah: That it was about me because she left the room and the Doctor was a female and she was Vietnamese but her English is quite good and she’s like Sarah, “Your mum is worried about you and your sexuality” and I said “Yeah I know about it, I understand what you are going to say to me” and um then like my mum doesn’t fully understand and she thinks there’s something wrong and that’s why she took me to the Doctor so the Doctor can help me or something but like the Doctor she understands and she said I have three female patients and they are currently doing a “FTM.”
- Michael: Female to male transition...
- Sarah: So after hearing that I was like “Oh that’s so cool” and I know that she understands so yeah.
- Michael: Okay so that’s good so you’ve got a Doctor who works with transgender people and who’s very supportive and in fact your mother took you to that doctor so that was a nice accident that happened.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: So do you think she might have known that this Doctor was very positive about sexuality?
- Sarah: Um I don’t...
- Michael: No so you think it was an accident.
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: That you were just lucky that that happened.

*We then moved onto talk about gay and lesbian people at school:*

- Michael: One thing I would like to know is do you know any other gay and lesbian people at school?

- Sarah: Yes I do.
- Michael: You know the bisexual girl who's in your friendship group, do you know any other... How many girls would not be straight at the school?
- Sarah: Like my school?
- Michael: Yeah.
- Sarah: Like in my Year level?
- Michael: Yeah.
- Sarah: Okay um probably about 3.
- Michael: 3 yeah.
- Sarah: Or 2 I think.
- Michael: 2 or 3.
- Michael: Would you like there to be more gay and lesbian people at your school, would that make it better or...?
- Sarah: Yeah. There's also like 4 or 5 in Year 9 and they're girls.
- Michael: Yes and you know for sure that they're lesbian?
- Sarah: Yeah because they came looking for me.
- Michael: So where do you meet them, they came looking for you, you're "out" at school?
- Sarah: Yeah. Because they are in Year 9 it's a different campus, yeah I think they've seen me a few times like after school or around school um because of my hair and I asked one of the girls "How did you find me?" and she said "Oh well I saw you after school and that and I went oh she looks gay" so I thought yeah that's my main point, my main purpose of dressing like this.
- Michael: Dressing like this so that you stand out.
- Sarah: Yeah.

*We talked about the Queer Youth Support Group:*

- Michael: Alright so the queer youth support group is that a good place to...?
- Sarah: I've always wanted to go but I never get the chance to.
- Michael: You haven't been there?
- Sarah: No, because the other times um I forget about it or I don't have time for it.
- Michael: Okay so you've only been a few times but it's nice knowing it's there?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Michael: Was it a good experience when you went?
- Sarah: Yeah but I expected there to be more people and more people of my age.
- Michael: It was very small and it's up to 25?
- Sarah: Yeah and I was the youngest when I went there and the second youngest was someone like 18 and the rest was older.
- Michael: Yeah so they were a bit old for you that group.



Sarah: Yeah.

*We finished talking by considering “the best thing about being a lesbian”:*

Sarah: Um I get to be who I am and... I get to be with who I want to be.

Michael: So you get to be who you want to be?

Sarah: Yeah.

Michael: Are there any other things about...?

Sarah: Not really.



## Ashley

- Ashley: I'm 15, I'm male, I'm Caucasian.  
Michael: Would you have an Italian background or a Greek background or...?  
Ashley: Um, ah I believe, I believe my dad's family descended from Scotland but not any directly that I'm aware of.  
Michael: What would you say in relation to class?  
Ashley: Oh um, I've never really thought about it probably I'm middle class.  
Michael: Okay middle class.  
Ashley: Yep.  
Michael: And in terms of sexuality?  
Ashley: I'm gay.

### *We talked about school:*

- Michael: Okay. So we might talk about your school.  
Ashley: I'm in Year 9.  
Michael: Year 9 and is it a single sex or co-ed school?  
Ashley: It's a co-ed school.  
Michael: Co-ed school and about how many students roughly are there?  
Ashley: Um well the school is divided into two campuses, there's about 400, 500 at my junior campus which is year 7 to 9 and I think about um...About 1000.

- Michael: So it's a big school and you're in Year 9, government or private school?
- Ashley: Government.
- Michael: How would you describe where you are?
- Ashley: You mean where I live?
- Michael: Yeah without mentioning the name of the place.
- Ashley: Well I live in an unheard of town. Out in the country. It's about half an hour away from the central town and um, um I guess rural.

*Ashley started the conversation by focusing on school and being "out" at school:*

- Ashley: Um in terms of social and other relationships with other people in my year, I "came out" about a year ago, it will probably be my one year anniversary next week. It started out as everyone, it was, it was kind of a, kind of a, well shock is not really the word but a word close to that word, and some people realised that they already knew and things but yeah it's a very, it's a very accepting school and like even most of the teachers know and they're very accepting so there's just about 97% of my year and it's very accepting in terms of subjects. I'm doing English, Maths and RE, which are, okay and PE which are compulsory in my year and my chosen subjects would be French, Drama and ah, and that would be about it.
- Michael: Okay so you were saying there that you "came out" about a year ago in school. Can you talk a little bit about what it was like at school before you "came out" maybe and how did that happen?
- Ashley: Well um I guess before I "came out" which would be Year 7 and about half of Year 8, um I kind of looked around at the older students and like I've done for the rest of my life and I tried to steer myself around to like girls and think about a relationship with a girl but at the same time I was also recognising which boys were good looking. And of course these days everyone uses the word "gay" very freely and to divert people's attentions from me I used to say other people were gay and everything and because at that age I was, I was sexually attracted to males, I had to pretend that when people talked about this (about being attracted to the opposite sex) that I had to be really enthusiastic when really I wasn't and it was very, it was very oppressive and um, um...
- Michael: So, you mean when other guys would be talking about girls?
- Ashley: Yeah.
- Michael: Yep, and you would go along with that, and you found that not much fun?
- Ashley: Not much fun at all.
- Michael: No, so you say you felt attracted to other guys - when did you first recognise that?

- Ashley: I've kind of known all my life since I can remember. Like in Grade 2, in probably Prep to Grade 2 I wanted, you know I wanted other boys to come over to my house and you know visits and everything and I was much more friendlier with girls, I hung out with, girls.
- Michael: In primary school.
- Ashley: Yeah well you know at that age everyone was just like "You've got girl germs" and everything but it was probably, it was probably in Grade 5 when, when I um, when I had a certain dream that really brought my attention to it and I didn't know it at the time, I didn't recognise it at the time that I had a crush on a Grade 6 boy and so that was all very confusing. So then there were 3 more years of pushing that to the back of my mind and saying I'll worry about it later, just pretending it doesn't exist but it was in Year 8 that I realised I was mature and smart enough to um, to deal with it and I basically sat down and had a long talk with myself and realised that at that time, I'm bisexual but that lasted for about a month when I realised that I was both romantically and sexually attracted to males.
- Michael: Okay you've said a lot there. So maybe we can sort of work backwards through more of that. You said you were romantically and sexually attracted to males, so what do you mean by that?
- Ashley: Well when I was bi, I was romantically attracted to girls and sexually attracted to guys but um because at that time I hadn't thought about an actual relationship with a male but um now um you know... and I just sat myself down and said "Would I rather have a relationship with a guy or a girl?" and I came to that conclusion.
- Michael: Okay so did you talk to anyone else about that because you used that phrase "I sat myself down"... did you run this by anyone else?
- Ashley: Um not really, it was a very solitary experience. But I voiced my concerns to people about things that were going on.
- Michael: So you did talk to people?
- Ashley: Yeah but that was after I had the long talk with myself. And that was when I "came out" to them (as bi) and of course I had to "come out" to them all over again, um to tell them I was gay.
- Michael: Okay so initially you came out as bi and then you came out as gay later on.
- Ashley: Yeah.

*The conversation then shifted to primary school:*

- Michael: Can you talk about hanging around with girls, because when I asked you about gayness and what was it like before you "came out" you went way back to Grade 1 and Grade 2 and prep from

memory and you mentioned hanging around with the girls a little bit.

Ashley: From what I can remember. I can't actually remember that much, 8 years ago. I just got along much better with the girls. All the boys wanted to play sport and everything and that wasn't my thing at all um so yeah I think I just, from what I can remember I just got along with the girls better.

Michael: Did any of the other kids react to you playing with the girls and not the boys?

Ashley: Not that I can remember.

Michael: So that was a positive experience or negative experience playing with the girls?

Ashley: It was pretty positive I think.

Michael: Okay and Grade 5, you said you had a dream and that was a bit of a wake up call, you don't have to tell me the content of the dream or anything but that was when you first formed the impression that you might be gay?

Ashley: Yep.

Michael: Okay so but how did you feel at that time when that happened?

Ashley: I think it just, I think the dream just stuck in my head for a few weeks and it actually involved people that I knew, I can't really remember how I dealt with it but I didn't tell anyone about it or I didn't really think about it.

Michael: Was it a worrying dream or more revealing?

Ashley: Yeah I think it was both, it kind of told me to wake up to what you are but at that time I wasn't mature enough to comprehend it.

*We then returned to discuss "coming out":*

Michael: You started "coming out" to people, so how did that happen?

Ashley: Well all through Year 7 when it was all sort of starting to bubble to the surface I used to think to myself you know they won't accept me, they'd accept me no matter what, if I was blind, if I was retarded, if I was poor or anything but not me being gay, they wouldn't accept that and I got that impression from how they use the word so freely like "that's so gay" and blah, blah, blah and, after I did "come out" they've all been very, very supportive, well not all of them, about 3 percent of the school, of the year, are almost homophobic but I've gotten a lot of support when I've "come out" to friends, to family, to extended family and family friends and everything and even some teachers and everything so I wasn't afraid of "coming out", I was very "out" and proud of who I was.

- Michael: You said you sat down and had a conversation with yourself and decided you were going to do this, is there anything special that happened that preceded that decision?
- Ashley: Um like I said, my memory is very bad but um, I'm not really sure um I think it was because all the, all the intimidation from the Year 9's who are now the Year 10's at the senior campus and I was still at the junior campus, I think because their intimidation was out of the way and um...
- Michael: So this was at the start of Year 9 or at the end of Year 8?
- Ashley: At the end of Year 8, in the middle.
- Michael: Are the Year 9's gone then or are they still at school or...?
- Ashley: When I was in Year 7, because the junior campus goes from Year 7 to 9, when I was in Year 7 the Year 9's were very big from that perspective and of course when I was in Year 8 they were in Year 10 and had gone to the other campus.
- Michael: Okay so in "coming out" for you, not being around older kids was an advantage.

*We then discussed whether there were any benefits to being "out" or "in":*

- Michael: So um is it better to be "out" or better to be "in" for a young gay person and why?
- Ashley: I'm much better to be "out", much, much better because we don't have to hold back, we don't have to, I like it in a way because I've always liked being different, not conforming and everything and I think being gay really sets it in stone that I'm different and it really makes me stand out as kind of a token or something.
- Michael: And that's something you like?
- Ashley: Yeah, that's something I like happening.
- Michael: Why do you like that?
- Ashley: Because I get along with girls better and sometimes I like helping girls with fashion or their hair or anything, their relationship problems and also because um you really, when people learn that you're gay it really defines who they are when they react to it because I've found that people who I thought would be homophobic have been very accepting and visa versa so it really like um, it doesn't make you cynical but it really prepares you for people changing or for things not working out the way you're expecting to and things like that.
- Michael: So you have to be quite resilient in terms of people's reactions and you've learnt that you can't always take people at face value and that's been a valuable learning experience by the sound of it.

*We then returned to discuss school experiences from the perspective of being "out":*

- Ashley: Um I think um it's really um improved my high school years not having to hide who I am to anyone or from myself and you know not having to get with girls just to, because everyone wants me to. But yes it's definitely had a positive impact on my, um on my school experience.
- Michael: So that's "coming out"?
- Ashley: Yeah.
- Michael: What about when you look at your school experience as a gay young person is there anything you would comment on generally?
- Ashley: Well I noticed last year in Health when I did Health Sex Ed which is a course I did and it was only about heterosexual sex education and that was a few months before I "came out" but um yes that proved very little help. Um, um I think a few teachers work on discrimination in class, like when they hear someone say "You're so gay" or "That's queer" they say "Don't use that type of language you know because there are and have been gay people at the school" and...
- Michael: And that's a good response?
- Ashley: Yeah and um, um a friend of mine who is a lesbian she took her partner who is a girl as well (to the school debutante ball) and there wasn't any objection to it and I found that very surprising.
- Michael: And when was that?
- Ashley: That would have been last year?
- Michael: Did it make the local papers? So the school deb ball had a same sex couple...And the parents, were there any mumblings amongst parents about that or that you are aware of?
- Ashley: I don't know much about it just that she took her partner.

*We then returned to the content of Sex-Ed classes:*

- Michael: All right so, so you mentioned Sex Ed how there was no gay content in there. What sort of content would you have liked in there? What do you feel you're lacking information on and where have you gone to get the information that you've got?
- Ashley: Um what I would like to see in the class um, probably the emphasis of the use of condoms in the use of all sexual experiences. I'm not really sure what else because I know it would put them in a very difficult position you know dealing with the gigglings and everything and all the looks.
- Michael: Can you think of a way they could get around some of the sensitivity?
- Ashley: Um I'm not really sure how they could get around it. Because in Year 8 and Year 9 in my school you get to, you get to pick your own topics and you get to choose individual units that you're going to do in that topic, maybe for Health or whatever course houses Sex Ed maybe you could put in a course or something that



would suggest an alternative to heterosexual sex or that (covers) other sexual practices.

Michael: That's a good idea actually. Okay um so where do you get information that's been useful to you as a young gay guy about sex, about safe sex and about "doing it"?

Ashley: Um well um, well because I go to a gay youth group which has people up to 25 years of age um sometimes I ask them in confidence questions about that and they answer very maturely and everything and sometimes I ask my gay friends who have had sex about it and um sometimes I get my information from the internet and um yeah...

Michael: So peers, older peers and the internet, that would be...?

Ashley: Yep.

Michael: And you trust the information that you get from them?

Ashley: Um yep.

Michael: Okay so what about a GP, would you ask information from a GP or a teacher or...?

Ashley: I probably wouldn't ask a teacher because I just wouldn't ask a teacher any of that kind of stuff. I'm not sure from a GP because I've found with peers it's much more personal and much more, and they're more sensitive and um and I kind of wouldn't be so keen on going to a GP.

*We then turned to discuss support:*

Michael: Okay so you said that you've had lots of support from peers, teachers and family so maybe we can talk about that now, what do you mean by that?

Ashley: Um with students, with people in my Year, the way they have shown their support is when they see a small percentage of students picking on me they'd stand up for me or like casually ask me questions like, like people say you know, people talk about their girlfriends they'll say, "How's your boyfriend?" you know they don't treat it as like a different thing and um, um I had one of my friends went so far as to make himself a t-shirt with a rainbow on it that said "*not gay but supportive*" and wore it around for casual clothes day so yeah.

Michael: And what do you think has generated that sort of support? Do you think it's just those students or...?

Ashley: Well I know there are some students in my Year that have brothers or sisters that are gay or lesbian or they have had other friends before me that are gay or lesbian and I don't know maybe just the positive influence that um other gays are getting in the media and in the press these days um yeah I think it's a very accepting generation.

- Michael: So how many people at your school would have gay or lesbian or bi brothers or sisters, or relatives or something?
- Ashley: Um I only know about 3 or 4 people and they're very um they're very accepting and I'm sure there are other people...
- Michael: Any gay parents or lesbian parents?
- Ashley: Um I think I heard a rumour that one boy has lesbian parents but you know...
- Michael: That's a rumour. Okay so um and on that do you know any other gay or lesbian people at your school in your Year group?
- Ashley: There is one boy in my Year who is bisexual. There are two girls that are bisexual, there is a lesbian, I know there is a bisexual girl in Year ten but other than that no one else that's "come out", no one else that has confirmed.
- Michael: Okay, so support from teachers and family, how has that played out?
- Ashley: Oh of course I didn't go up to my teachers and say "I'm gay", it came out through projects, like for example in Drama I pretended to be a lawyer who was defending someone who was discriminated against because of their sexuality and my teacher asked me about that and she kind of got the hint and yes she was very supportive, it didn't change how she interacted with me or anything. There was my Maths teacher, one day when we were in class in the computer room and I was on my email and my signature is "Death to homophobes" which he misread as death to homosexuals and he said "I'll get that off you now, I'll have nothing like that in my class," and when I actually told him what it said he said "Well obviously the homophobes are the ones with the problem but um maybe not on the email you know." Um um I think there have been a few instances of homophobia with my teachers. There is one guy who I know is homophobic out right. I was in Metal and I was hanging around with the Year 9 girls last year and he came in the classroom and my friend said, "Do you have any issues with gay or lesbian people?" And he goes, "You don't want to know what my opinion of gay and lesbian people is." And she goes and she kind of "outed" me and said "Well he's gay." And I just smiled and he sort of went humph and then sort of backed off so you know that was a bit, didn't restore my faith in the teachers. And most recently when someone was harassing me in Drama called me a "poofa" and a "faggot" and everything I told my Drama teacher and he passed it onto the boys house leader who was also my SoSE teacher saying that so and so was giving me a hard time about my sexuality and I think ever since then it has kind of changed how he's talked to me and how he's looked at me and everything. Then again that might just be me being paranoid but um, but um yeah.

Michael: Okay so but by and large it sounds like teachers have been pretty good.

Ashley: Yeah.

*We then discussed family:*

Michael: Now with family, and again you don't have to answer any of these questions, but what has your experience with family been like?

Ashley: It was actually very, very un-bumpy "coming out" to my parents. I, mean mum enrolled me in the youth group before "coming out" to her.

Michael: Oh...

Ashley: So she obviously knew. And when she picked me up and when she dropped me off we didn't say anything about it, I didn't want to talk to her about it because you know I was afraid of "coming out" to her.

Michael: So she brought you to the youth group?

Ashley: Yeah.

Michael: So how did that happen, did she drop you here?

Ashley: She just said, because at the time I was getting bullied, she said um I spoke to the counsellor lady who turned out to be the youth worker.

Michael: Okay so your mum came down here ah really just to get you general counselling?

Ashley: Yeah and she was actually here when the youth worker was admitting me to the group. She was saying "Are you LGBT?" and because mum was in the room I said "No" but when mum left the room I said "You know what, I'm bi", because at that stage I was bi um but when I um officially "came out" to mum um it was February this year when a boy at my school bashed me because I was gay and of course the teachers saw it and admitted me to the sick bay and then mum was called down from work to pick me up and to see if I was all right you know and she was furious that I'd gotten beaten up and when she asked the question, "Why did he beat you up?" I thought ah oh of the past 6 or 8 months of me trying to tell her I said "Well this is what I've been trying to tell you for the past few months" and then and then she cut across and said "You're gay, I know." And I thought that could have gone a bit more gracefully and ever since then I've sort of harboured anger and resentment towards her, you know she couldn't spare me 5 more seconds to at least get it out myself, she had to be so impatient to cut across and you know all I can think about it now it still brings back those feelings.

Michael: So with that guy, when you were bullied by that guy was that an ongoing thing or was that just a one off thing?

- Ashley: It was kind of an ongoing thing. It was about once or twice a week he used to walk past and call me like a “faggot” or a “poof” or something.
- Michael: And was that in the playground or...?
- Ashley: Yep, just outside.
- Michael: And what did you do in response to that?
- Ashley: I usually just ignored it but one day we got into this big confrontation and it eventually got physical, (long pause) I’d rather not reminisce about that particular one.
- Michael: No that’s fine so apart from him, peers have been good, he would not be a representative of peers?
- Ashley: No.

*We then turned to talk about the queer youth support group:*

- Michael: The queer youth support group what would you like to say about that?
- Ashley: Um, well the youth worker and the other co-workers are very supportive and patient and they’re willing to go out of their way to help us with problems or anything um but I think honestly about the youth group I’d have preferred to be not introduced in the first place because people that come here are very isolating, they have their little groups, they talk amongst themselves, they don’t try and include me in anything and um, and you know I try and convince myself this is the best you’re going to get as a gay person but now I don’t really come here to see them, I just really come here as an excuse to not go straight home or to go down to central square or something.
- Michael: So if, if, as a young person if you didn’t come here to youth group though where, because it’s a rural area, where would you go, is there anywhere else that you could go?
- Ashley: No not really.
- Michael: No, this would be it so it’s better that the youth group is here than not here?
- Ashley: Yeah pretty much, it’s just the people.
- Michael: I guess this is quite an unusual youth group because there are a lot of people that come here so I suppose on one hand that’s great but on the other with few people it’s very hard for cliques to develop so that’s a new problem for queer youth groups actually. Look thanks very much for that.

## Kira

Michael: Kira, um just some background information about you so how old you are, gender, um class position and so on.

Kira: Okay well I'm female and I'm 17 years old and I'll be 18 soon. Um I belong to the middle to upper class I suppose you would say, um I've got quite a lot of money, everything I could want, that sort of thing.

Michael: Yep, yep and in terms of ethnicity, how do you...?

Kira: Anglo-Saxon.

Michael: Anglo-Saxon so English?

Kira: Yeah sort of Scottish, English sort of background so very white skin and we all burn and we never tan ---

Michael: So from the UK...

Kira: That's where my ancestors are from but they're all from Australia and they've been in Australia for a really long time so...

*We then talked about sexual orientation and how Kira felt that because of societal pressure she needed to stay open to the idea of dating guys:*

Michael: Okay so in terms of your sexual identity how would you describe your sexual orientation, how do you identify?

Kira: Well I identify as lesbian, I suppose but um, yeah I do I identify as lesbian.

Michael: Okay...

- Kira: I just don't totally discount guys at all because you know you kind of have to force yourself to if you're going to live in society, like I reckon you've got to force yourself in a way to like guys just for, even for just appearances sake.
- Michael: Okay so you were saying that you identify as lesbian but you're not totally closed off to the idea of guys.
- Kira: No I'm not completely closed off like I kind of have to I think, like in an ideal world I probably wouldn't go for guys, I think well actually in an ideal world it wouldn't matter and you'd just go for anybody but um I think that you kind of have to, like when everyone around you, when all your friends are into guys you kind of have to force yourself to do you know whatever you have to do so for necessities sake I'm not completely closed off to guys but I like girls more.
- Michael: So does that mean that you're not attracted to guys at all or, are you attracted...?
- Kira: I don't know, I don't know what you'd call it, I don't know. Like I'm not attracted to guys like I think that girls are actually attractive like I think they're actually "hot" and like if there is a "hot" guy that everyone says is "hot" and is supposedly "hot" like I know he's "hot" because he's "hot" but I'm not actually attracted to him but maybe I am because I can recognise the fact that he's actually attractive but I'm not actually attracted to him.
- Michael: So it's more like an aesthetic thing?
- Kira: Maybe.
- Michael: Like you can see that this guy's beautiful or good looking or...
- Kira: Yeah I can see that the guy is attractive...
- Michael: But there's no sort of um, um...
- Kira: I'm not like sexually attracted... Well sometimes, sometimes I'm like yeah I could kiss that guy, I could "make out" with him or I could go out with that guy or whatever um but I don't know like, but I don't actually choose to, like I would choose to if I could actually go out with a guy I probably would choose that as opposed to going out with a girl just because you know of the culture that we live in but I want a girlfriend, I don't particularly want a boyfriend but I want a boyfriend... maybe because that's easier.
- Michael: No that makes sense.
- Kira: Yeah, it's convoluted I suppose but you know like I wish I could really like guys and I guess in a way I could make myself really like guys but I would just be really, really bored.
- Michael: And it wouldn't feel authentic?
- Kira: Probably, I would just be forcing myself, it wouldn't like come naturally. So like I can like, no I'm into girls, I'm attracted to girls, I'm kidding myself, I'm not attracted to guys really. I can recognise a "hot" guy when he walks by but I'm not I don't want

to “make out” with him; ...(or) want to have sex with him or whatever. If a “hot” girl walks by I’m like yep.

Kira: ...I don’t really want to be with a guy.

*At this point the battery went flat, 10 minutes later we realised this and recapped the conversation. We began talking about Kira’s lesbian parents:*

Michael: Kira, we were talking about your family, and we were talking about the fact that you have two lesbian mothers.

Kira: Yep.

Michael: So can you recap?

Kira: Okay.

Michael: Yeah.

Kira: I have two lesbian parents, “x” is my biological mother, “y” is my non-biological mother. They were together and they decided to have me and when I was about 4 they split up and so I had to move between 2 different houses and so um that was really annoying and it really sucked having dual parents more than it sucked having lesbian parents. Um and so recently, at the end of last year we all decided to move into 1 big house though, they’ve got like two apartments on top of each other and so “x” lives in her own house and “y” lives downstairs and I move between them.

Michael: Okay we talked about how, as someone who identifies as a lesbian, just how growing up in a family like that might have an impact on you... like do you think it made it easier or harder to identify as a lesbian or so forth?

Kira: I mean it’s easier to identify as a lesbian if your parents are lesbians I mean you don’t have to “come out”, you don’t have to have the whole big thing and there was, and they’re going to be proud of the fact that you are a lesbian rather than ashamed. But it doesn’t make it easier to be a lesbian because you still live in the world; you can’t live in a bubble world in perfect lesbian happiness.

*The conversation then recapped regarding themes related to school:*

Kira: And I was talking about school as well.

Michael: Yeah you were talking about school and you were saying school had been um, um that you’d had a girlfriend last year and that had meant that you had “come out” to various people. Could you re-talk about that a little bit?

Kira: Yep well um I had a girlfriend and that sort of forced me to “come out” to friends which was good, like I felt like it was about time anyway and so when I had a girlfriend I felt sort of more validated anyway so I thought if they hate me then I’ve already got a girlfriend but I didn’t have the girlfriend for that long, it was sort of a

short relationship but it was good that I had one because it made me “come out” to some people but like the main thing that made me, was that I was on television on a show about um “lesbian marriage, gay marriage in Australia”. I was the example of a well adjusted teenager who has lesbian parents.

Michael: And we were talking about whether having lesbian parents has had any impact on your schooling at all, because you were saying you’ve been at this school from...

Kira: Pre-prep to Year 12.

Michael: Yeah has having lesbian parents had any impact on your school experience?

Kira: Yeah well in junior school it was a bit, like I wasn’t the most popular kid. I was kind of a bit bullied, that kind of thing um.

Michael: In connection with...?

Kira: Um sometimes I think more than other girls would have been. And I remember older girls like, they have a buddy system at school and my older buddy like asking me about it, but like thinking it was like fascinating but like weird and so I used to make up, like make up the fact that I had a dad and I knew him it was just that he was always away on business or something. Like I made that up when I was like little you know to like fit in and um yeah so I did have to like hide the fact that I had lesbian parents and that I could possibly be a lesbian, not that you think about that when you’re little but um...

Michael: So what was the motivation behind wanting to hide that fact?

Kira: I didn’t want to be picked on, I didn’t want to be thought of as a weirdo, like I was already not like hugely popular and um I’ve never been particularly popular but now, like now I’m like the well liked girl in my level so everyone talks to me and the people who don’t talk to me are bitches and nobody likes them either. So I’m like a pretty rounded out person.

*We talked about being “liked” and gossip:*

Michael: So is it important to be liked, is being liked...?

Kira: Yes sure, particularly at an all girls school. Girls are like nasty bitches (laugh).

Michael: In what ways, how...?

Kira: Girls will like gossip about anything and if you’re not like cool kind of I suppose they take a really... like in lower Year levels you didn’t want to be gay, like that would just be so like, like you would just be talked about behind your back, you would be you know, you wouldn’t be picked on because being picked on is a little bit immature but you would be like gossiped about and um if you “came out” at an all girls school soon everybody would know you were gay and the entire school.



- Michael: And you'd be basing that on your school and...?
- Kira: Yeah on my school and even other "all girls" schools because there were 2 girls at my school who were in Year 12 who were lesbians and they were like together in Year 12.
- Michael: Yes.
- Kira: And when they walked around together people would like look away to whisper to their friends "Oh my god it's them look at them, did you see them, oh my god", like it was the most fascinating thing and they would always hear this hushed muttering whenever they walked in but like to me they were like heroes and I like sent them an email over the school email system saying like thank you so much for doing this like for once in my life I have felt like there is actually someone else who exists in my school who might be gay.... and in a way I want to do that for other people, I want to "come out" so girls in younger Year levels, (know they're not alone).
- Michael: So but your experience is interesting because your family is so open around sexuality and so forth but it sounds like school isn't that same sort of space, so it's interesting to hear about those two other women who were in Year 12 when you were in Year 9 or whatever it was.
- Kira: Um it must have been in, maybe Year 9 or Year 8.
- Michael: Yeah, yeah and so the experience of seeing them whispered about that would have influenced you about whether you would have...
- Kira: Yeah it made me um, it made me excited, like it made me excited that there was someone else who was gay in my school and it was also cool because like I'm really into Drama, like I'm a "drama freak" and the Year 12 girl in question was into Drama so it made me feel even more happy about it and she had actually gone, she had actually been at my school for a really long time and I remember her from junior school, I used to play with her when I was in junior school, she was in Year 6 when I was in Year 4 or something.
- Michael: So she was, the girl who was a visible lesbian was someone that you admired and, and...
- Kira: Yeah, yeah I really admired her and stuff except I would gossip with the girls about her and I would be like, "Oh there she is", but it was different for me because I was like "Oh wow look at that girl she's so awesome" while they were like, "Oh my god look at that girl."
- Michael: So your, so you would have been saying "Oh she's fantastic."
- Kira: Well not to them but in my head I was like, "Wow this is, like I feel like could the school change now, could I get the chance to finally "come out" now, like could I have that opportunity" but um it didn't change anything.

*We then discussed English classes. Kira made some interesting points about how identifying as lesbian might impact on her experiences in class; and on her results:*

Michael: Before you were talking about your English class and you were talking about identity and belonging.

Kira: Well in English at the moment our theme for the year is "identity and belonging" and it's something that you have to look at in like different books and stuff so that's our theme. And it's really annoying that "identity and belonging" is um, is the topic because they can ask you to really share a lot about yourself and our English teacher is asking us to share a lot about ourselves which well I don't think in English class you should, like I'm a very open person and I will share a lot about myself and when no one else wants to talk I will be the one who puts their hand up and talks so I'm not worried about that but I can't "come out" at my school so for me like, I was saying before if you're lesbian or gay your identity is your sexuality whereas if you're straight your identity isn't your sexuality it's your whatever, whoever you are as a person so like if I...

Michael: Can you give me an example of that?

Kira: Like when asked about what's your identity, my identity is a lesbian, I'm a lesbian like everything I do revolves around being a lesbian.

Michael: You're not a basketball player.

Kira: I'm not a basketball player yeah like I could say my identity is being a "Drama person", I love doing Drama, I love movies, I love TV shows like that's my identity but it's not because I'm a lesbian and my identity is being a lesbian. Um so...I actually feel that my identity is being a lesbian like when you become a part of the lesbian community that's your identity, that's who you are, your identity is being a lesbian and so all the things that I'm interested in revolve around the fact that I'm a lesbian, all the TV shows I like, all the music I like, all the things that are to do with me are about me being a lesbian so that's my identity and I can't really talk about that in a class which forces us in order to get an "A" to talk about our own identity.

Michael: So can you give me an example of an assignment?

Kira: Oh well one assignment is we have to make this diary, this journal and we have to like stick in articles and brainstorm ideas about "identity and belonging" and it has to be about us and um so I've been able to slip things in that would say, "Oh I might be something other than straight" but I haven't done, like I haven't actually, so I think there's probably one thing on one page, I haven't done that much yet because I haven't had that many classes it's only the beginning of the year but um like one picture I

have is like a woman and she's standing at a window and she's got her hand up to the window and the reflection on the other side is a man's reflection but in the same pose so it looks like her reflection but it's actually a man's. It was a representation of something a bit queer so I put that in there but I can't say, like it's really frustrating that I can't say all this stuff, like I can't say that I am a lesbian, that that's my identity and it's "identity and belonging" and my feeling of belonging is a belonging to the lesbian community and my family and stuff.

Michael: So this is interesting, and it's very common too but often people don't talk about it the way you've talked about it which is really clear, so what you're really saying there is that in relation to assignments where there is personal expression components you feel that identifying as a lesbian is a constraint, now correct me if I'm wrong but the teacher wouldn't have said to you, you can't write about being a lesbian in this diary...

Kira: No, they probably want me to, like they want you to be honest and they want you to say what you are, so they'd probably say well if you're a lesbian put that in there like...

Michael: But that's something that you wouldn't feel comfortable...

Kira: No because I can't like, like I can't be "out" at school (laugh).

*We then talked about what schools could do to deal with this sort of situation:*

Michael: So what do you think the school could do to make people feel more comfortable...?

Kira: Okay one thing they could do is like hire a gay teacher. They could um make it really clear that they're gay friendly but because my school is religious they can't, like they couldn't do that but if they were going to do something they could make it clear to everyone that it's okay to "come out".

Michael: So what's your, with the religious stuff, what's your understanding around why they can't?

Kira: Because they're still Christians, I don't like blame them for being, like you can't blame them. Yeah but they can be gay friendly and stuff but they can't be seen as anyway promoting the gay lifestyle so um they wouldn't be able to, like a thing that would help would be to like encourage girls to "come out" and join like a gay group on campus or something... So that would like, that would help but except because my school is religious, like it's actually a religious school they can't do that.

*We then returned to discuss subject content:*

- Michael: So can you think of an example of an assignment that you've done where you reckon gay or lesbian perspectives would have made it more engaging or relevant to you?
- Kira: Well what I'm doing now in "identity and belonging" is a perfect example. Like in the past things have been hard like in junior school when you have to do your family tree, like what am I going to put down? So I had to make up...
- Michael: So you had to do your family tree in junior school...?
- Kira: I had to make up that I had a dad and I had to leave "y" off the thing and you know that's really hard for a little girl to do.
- Michael: Did your teachers know, were they aware...?
- Kira: Yeah the teachers knew that I had lesbian parents, my parents made it clear...
- Michael: So how did you feel? Remember you don't have to answer any of these questions...
- Kira: Yes.
- Michael: Okay so the family tree, like you can remember doing that and...?
- Kira: Yeah I can remember doing it. I remember in "IT" we had to make a PowerPoint presentation about our family and like who our grandparents were and stuff and I just had to make shit up.
- Michael: Did you feel that was a terrible experience...?
- Kira: Well it wasn't a very happy one. I would have really loved to have been able to have my actual family tree because it's always fun to look at where do I come from, what is my family tree but the way the family tree is structured it doesn't work with a family like mine, it's a different tree so...

*We then finished with "the best thing about identifying as lesbian?" and an advocacy question:*

- Michael: From your position as a young person who's in a school what could be done?
- Kira: What do I think could be done?
- Michael: What could be done, you know one or two key things, and the last thing or the final thing is: What's the best thing about identifying as a lesbian?
- Kira: Well what could be done is those things I said before like having, encouraging, like I don't know if I'm the only lesbian in my entire school. I go to an "all girls" school, of course I'm not but I feel absolutely and completely alone. Like there's no one to talk to except to the school counsellor which is "retarded" because no one goes to the school counsellor um so if it was like, you know encouraged to "come out" if you were gay, I mean you wouldn't want to force anyone to "come out" but um encourage them to I suppose just to be open to that and know that they wouldn't be

gossiped about, even though they would be because you can't really fix it unless you fix the world.

Michael: So practically, one thing you, one objective you'd like to have is to create more links between people?

Kira: Yeah. I would like, like even if it's an underground network of lesbians at my school, which my school just doesn't have.

Michael: So what could you do to make that happen?

Kira: I don't know.

Michael: Well not so much you but the school?

Kira: Set up like a social group in the school, I know it happens in a lot of schools where um there are groups that like meet with queer people.

Michael: So some sort of group. So given that you would have to "out" yourself.

Kira: You need someone else like a teacher, it almost needs like outside intervention from outside the school so you have to have this you know you don't get a choice because I know a lot of places wouldn't choose to have that and my school obviously hasn't.

Michael: So there needs to be a policy that directs that at a system level or at a school level.

Kira: Yep. Like there needs to be a place like where diversity can be accepted and like at school there has to be a gay/straight alliance within the school, something like that.

Michael: Now the best thing about identifying as a lesbian?

Kira: Um the best thing, well I mean I like the feeling I get when I see a "hot" girl (laugh) I suppose that's not the best thing about being a lesbian it's just the best thing about you know, if I was straight I would say that about guys but I love my lesbian TV shows, I love them. That is my life, I love it, I love everything about it, I love talking about it, I love watching it, I love all that stuff. I love getting pictures of it, I love to spend hours and hours re-watching and re-watching, memorising like I love it so much because it's like a representation of me in like the wider world, in society and it's like everything, all of the lesbian TV shows that I watch show everything I want to be, everything that I want to stop, everything that I want to perpetuate, everything that I admire so it's just like, and it's like better than my life, it's better than my life, it's worse than my life, it's like everything I want so that's why I'm so obsessed with it and I have to find it in every place and I'm like looking into the past and trying to find old movies and there's hope for the future that there's going to be more of them and that's what makes me want to be a film maker so that I can represent more lesbians on TV and show more teenagers that you're not alone in the entire world.

Michael: So I suppose it gives you...

KIRA

Kira: A purpose... And I have to show other people that they're not alone as well, you know other teenage girls and that's what I want to do with my life pretty much. There you go.

Michael: That's a good point to finish on, so what I'll do is I'll click this off.

## Part 3





## Afterword

I hope that you've enjoyed reading the stories of the young people who so generously offered to share them. As I stated at the outset of this workbook my intention, in bringing these together has not been to draw out key themes or to engage in some similar type of analysis at this point. My intention has been to document the stories of Queer Young People and to briefly outline some of the reasons that I believe that "reading aloud" is an effective change methodology.

I would hope that interested practitioners (particularly teachers and youth workers) might read (aloud) some of these case studies with their co-workers in small groups and that subsequently this might suggest where they might work to make change across the environments that they have influence in. Without wanting to run an advertisement here I am also very interested in being approached by interested parties to act as a critical friend in this regard or to facilitate training that draws on this workbook (I can be contacted at RMIT – [michael.crowhurst@rmit.edu.au](mailto:michael.crowhurst@rmit.edu.au)).

While I have indicated that I don't want to draw out key themes or engage in analysis of the stories here I am planning to follow this resource with a small series of articles that pick up on key themes. I would welcome other writers using these materials to this end as well - feel free to use the material here to generate articles. I also have a more ambitious project in mind (drawing on ideas from Gloria Latham and my own desire to do some web based research) where I will tap into young peoples, teachers and youth workers responses to these case studies via the web.

Finally I will also be writing a small series of essays on “dialogue” designed to accompany and build on the work of this collection of conversations. The small series of essays will focus on how classroom teachers might use dialogue to support their students to identify as “socially just subjects”.

If the stories/case studies in this workbook are meant to achieve anything my biggest hope is that they generate dialogue - because it is via dialogue, dialogue with text, others and self, that change happens. The “reading aloud” methodology is a technology that aims to do just this.

I’d like to finish by thanking the Reference Group - for providing me with support and a sense of structure, Victorian Youth Workers for providing me with access to young people, and most importantly the Queer Young People who offered to participate.

## References

- Barthes, R 1990 [1973], *The Pleasure of the Text*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Britzman, DP 1998, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects Towards a Psycho-analytic Inquiry of Learning*, State University of New York Press, New York Albany.
- Butler, J 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York and London.
- 1997, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, New York and London.
- Connell, RW 1987, *Gender and Power*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK.
- 1993, *Schools and Social Justice, Our Schools/Our Selves* Education Foundation, Toronto.
- Context <<http://home.vicnet.net.au/-context/welcome.html>>.
- Crowhurst, M 1993, 'The Impact of Hegemonic Masculinity on the Identity Formation of Gay Secondary Students. ' University of Melbourne
- 1999, 'Are you Gay/Sir?' *Melbourne Studies in Education*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 89-103.
- 2001, *Working through tension : a response to the concerns of lesbian, gay and bisexual secondary school students*. (PhD thesis), Australian Youth Research Centre, Dept. Education Policy and Management, Melbourne University. <http://eprints.unimelb.edu.au/archive/00000384/>

- 2004, *Conversations with Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Secondary School Students: A Sexual Diversity Training Kit for School Communities*, Self Published, <<http://eprints.unimelb.edu.au/archive/00000488/>>.
- Crowhurst, M & Emslie, M (compilers) 2000, *Young People and Sexualities: experiences, perspectives and service provision: papers from a community conference exploring issues affecting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered young people*, October 1998, The Youth Research Centre, Faculty of Educations, University of Melbourne., Parkville, Melbourne.
- Crowhurst, M & Emslie, M (eds) 2003, *Doing New Work: Materials for Queer Teachers and Youth Workers*, Australian Youth Research Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- Curran, G 2003, *Young Queers Getting Together: Moving Beyond Isolation and Loneliness*. (PhD Thesis), Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne., Melbourne.
- Davies, B 1993, *Shards of Glass: Children reading & writing beyond gendered identities*, Allen and Unwin, NSW.
- Dempsey, D 2000, *Enough is Enough: A Report on the Discrimination and Abuse Experienced by Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals and Transgender People in Victoria.*, Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby., Fitzroy.
- Donelan, K 2002, 'Engaging with the Other: Drama, and Intercultural Education.' *Melbourne Studies in Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 26-38.
- Epstein, D, O'Flynn, S & Telford, D 2003, *Silenced Sexualities in Schools and Universities.*, Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent.
- Foucault, M 1990, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1 An Introduction*, Penguin, Ringwood Victoria.
- Freire, P 1999, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York.
- Frere, M, Jukes, J & Crowhurst, M 2001, *Our Town: working with same-sex attracted yong people in rural settings.*, VicHealth, Carlton, Victoria.
- Gee, JP 2003, *What Video Games Have To Teach Us About Learning And Literacy.*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- 2005, *Why Video Games Are Good For Your Soul: Pleasure and Learning*, Common Ground, [www.theLearner.com](http://www.theLearner.com).
- Harbeck, K (ed.) 1992, *Coming Out of the Classroom Closet: gay and lesbian students, teachers and curricula*, Hawthorn Press New York.
- Hillier, L, Turner, A & Mitchell, A 2005, *Writing Themselves In Again: 6 Years On A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Wellbeing of Same-Sex Attracted Young People*, Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, Melbourne.
- Hillier, L, Dempsey, D, Harrison, L, Beale, L, Matthews, L & Rosenthal, D 1998, *Writing Themselves In: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Wellbeing of Same-Sex Attracted Young People*,

- Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, Melbourne.
- Jaynes, G 2000, 'Young Gay and Proud: 20 Years On.' in M Crowhurst & M Emslie (eds), *Young People and Sexualities: Papers from a community conference*, October 1998, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne. , Melbourne pp. 7-14.
- Johnson, TW & Reed RF (eds) 2008, *Philosophical Documents in Education*, Third Edition, Pearson, Sydney.
- Martino, W & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M 2005, *Being Normal is the Only Way to be*, UNSW Press., Sydney.
- N.S.W. Attorney General's Department 2007, *You shouldn't have to hide to be safe*, N.S.W. Attorney General's Department, <[http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/cpd/ll\\_cpd.nsf/pages/CPD\\_glbtpublications](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/cpd/ll_cpd.nsf/pages/CPD_glbtpublications)>.
- Pallotta-Chiarolli, M 1996, 'A Rainbow in my Heart': Interweaving Ethnicity and Sexuality Studies ', in L Laskey & C Beavis (eds), *Schooling & Sexualities* Deakin Centre for Education and Change, Geelong pp. 69-82.
- Rasmussen, ML 2006, *Becoming Subjects: Sexualities and Secondary Schooling*, Routledge, New York, London.
- Riessman, K 2008, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. , Sage California
- Sojourner Where Words Prevail - Details viewed 7th April 2008 <<http://www.wherewordsprevail.com/>>.
- Weeks, J 1991 [1986], *Sexuality*, Ellis Horwood and Tavistock, Suffolk.
- Wyn, J & White, R 1997, *Rethinking Youth*, Allen and Unwin, N.S.W.

## (notes)

'Context' stopped meeting in 2002

See ARCSHS at La Trobe University for reports and references:

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/>

See RMIT University's Queer Allies for references:

[http://space.dsc.rmit.edu.au/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://space.dsc.rmit.edu.au/index.php/Main_Page)

See Rainbow Network for Victorian Queer Youth Support Services:

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rainbow/>



School settings are not always experienced as safe or welcoming places if you identify as a Queer Young Person. Making available the stories of Queer Young People, and asking people to read these aloud, is a very strategic way to generate change.

This workbook aims to make a contribution to the expansion of this cultures acceptance and acknowledgment of sexual and gender diversity because the wellbeing of Queer Young People, of all young people, is always compromised in settings that are not fully affirming of sexual and gender diversity.

This workbook is designed to be used as a professional development resource by teachers, youth workers and others who work with young people.



ISBN 978-1-86335-615-2

