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Chapter 3

Gender, Power and Self in Adolescents’ Dating Relationships
Preface to Chapter Three

The study presented in this chapter began with the notion of using focus groups to gather teenagers’ views about heterosexual relationships as the first step toward developing a questionnaire on the same topic. This was an important and fundamental stage in the research process for a number of reasons. First, I was out of touch with teenagers, having not had the pleasure of raising any of my own and having left my own teen years behind some considerable time ago. Second, I considered it was important to ground the research in the perspective of New Zealand teenagers, rather than draw on overseas studies. Third, and related to the second point, it seemed questionable to import adult measures, such as the widely used Conflict Tactics Scale, not only because such measures fail to investigate meaning, motivation and consequences but also for reasons of age appropriateness (see Jackson, *in press*, and Chapter One).

My earliest focus groups were conducted with student peer counsellors. It was during these initial sessions that I perceived that this data could provide valuable information about the social context of teen dating violence in addition to serving as a basis for the questionnaire. I had already planned to undertake a qualitative study, interviewing students recruited from the questionnaire research who had experienced violence in relationships with partners. I now decided to develop the focus groups into a separate study as well. The goal here was to learn about the issues confronting teenagers in their heterosexual relationships, in particular the nature of the pressures they faced and the hurtful experiences they encountered. There were no hypotheses for this study; it was approached with an open mind as to what might emerge from it. My reading of the literature prior to gathering the data was of a general nature and related primarily to dating violence. As the study progressed, however, a symbiotic relationship developed between the literature and the analysis. In other words, the data suggested new avenues to pursue in the literature, while the literature opened new doors for the process of analysis. As a consequence of this process, the study broadened its focus to include the social construction of self (identity) and gender, which emerged from the data as inseparable from relationship violence issues.
The research process is perhaps not mirrored in the organisation of this chapter, which opens with the literature that had in fact followed the data collection rather than preceded it. This review of the literature is followed by a description of the methodology, analysis and discussion of the data, and concludes with implications of the material for prevention of violence in teenagers' heterosexual relationships.
Gender, Power and Self in Adolescents’ Dating Relationships

The centrality of gendered identities in the talk of students who took part in the group interview study led to reading the literature about theories of identity, social constructionism and gender. This review presents, in much condensed form, the key aspects of the literature pertaining to these three theoretical domains.

Theories of Self (identity)

There are different perspectives within the psychological and sociological literature regarding the process of becoming oneself. Traditional psychological theories generally view the self (identity) as constituted early in life and continuing relatively unchanged into adulthood (see Cote, 1996). Developmental psychology pinpoints adolescence as the critical period for identity formation. This concept of identity cuts across race, class and ethnicity. Identity is construed as something inherent and the process of becoming self as intrinsic. The characteristics of self or personality are considered to be accessible through tests that measure inherent attributes. Psychological theories of identity have been strongly influenced by the work of Erikson (1963), who proposed that identity has three dimensions. These are continuity over time, behaviour and character repertoires, and recognised roles in the community. Failure of these dimensions to come together would, Erikson suggested, result in an identity crisis. The notion of crises that underline developmental stage theories suggests that identity is not a straightforward process, that tension and conflict underlies the process.

A greater emphasis on the dynamic process of developing self can be found in psychoanalytic theory. The common ground in the psychoanalytic school resides in the notion of conflict between the unconscious and conscious (the ego and the id), and for males, between separation from the mother and identification with the father (see Connell, 1995). Freud later developed the notion of a ‘superego’ which he came to perceive as the way that a culture obtained mastery over individual desire. Psychoanalytic explanations of identity depart from other psychological theories in the notion of self as conflicted and split, rather than coherent
and unitary. Although some recognition is given to the social context of identity in a limited way by both theoretical schools, they present primarily essentialist versions of self (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996).

Both the psychological and psychoanalytic theories of identity minimise the social context of identity. The development of social identity theory gave recognition to this limitation with its focus on identity through membership of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Constructed within a psychological theoretical framework, social identity theory addresses intergroup behaviour from the perspective of group members. Hence this approach addresses how people interpret their social worlds. In contrast to the psychological theories discussed previously, social identity theory incorporates a dynamic element, postulating that people may seek to change their social identities if they perceive their existing identity to be inadequate. The theory does not make clear, however, what motivates individuals toward a particular strategy for change. Although it makes reference to ideology as a source of peoples' perceptions of what social identities are legitimate, the theory does not make this explicit.

Departing from the psychological and psychoanalytic, sociological frameworks depict identity as something that is formed through interaction with others and in relation to cultural institutions and social structures. Rather than fixing identity formation in adolescence, sociological approaches view identity as a lifetime project. Cote (1996) neatly summarises the sociological perspective as, "... society steers identity formation while individuals attempt to navigate the passage (p. 133)." Spanning sociological and psychological approaches in what might be termed a 'sociological social psychological' approach are social constructionist perspectives of identity (Wetherell & Maybin, 1994). Although there are varying positions within social constructionism the common thread is the understanding that the cultural (meanings, social practices), social (structures, interactions) and historical context are inscribed in the construction of self (see Burr, 1995). The self is depicted as socially constructed and fluid, in that it changes across time and across different social contexts (Gergen, 1991; Gergen, 1985).

This fluidity is a key aspect of the social constructionist perspective: the self is described as 'distributed' and relational changing to fit different relational settings or social contexts (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996), Hence there is no one ‘true self’, but multiple selves. This
notion of multiplicity creates a picture of chaos and disorder, but Wetherell and Maybin argue that these multiple identities must show some consistency. They suggest that new identities co-exist with the old and that these new identities are plausible in light of what has gone before. Foucault (1986) in his later works conceived of identity as fluid and able to be broken down or transgressed at many points but he proposed that exploration of the self always took place within the space of a coherent identity. He considered closure of identity to be arbitrary but necessary in order for a person to act effectively.

From the view that identities or selves are formed in interaction with others and with the culture it follows that language is held by social constructionists to be central to identity. Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1995) define language as, “an interactive activity mediating linguistic and sociocultural knowledge and constituting a site for the construction of identities and subjectivities” (p. 3). Language not only describes the world, but constructs it. Similarly, Wetherell and Maybin (1996) describe language, talk and discourse as the ‘raw materials’ for the construction of self. It is the tool by which people make sense of the world and understand themselves. Furthermore, it is the major way in which people interpret, create and present images of self to others in social interactions. Language, then, is not viewed as a neutral tool of communication but as a dynamic and integral means by which people both constitute self, world and other (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). Several writers take issue with the notion that the self is entirely constituted in language or discourse (e.g., Connell, 1987; Hollway, 1995). Connell, for example, in his discussion of gender and identity, ventures that such an approach serves to minimise, reducing gender to a subject position, a performance or a metaphor.

The social construction of self is characterised by tension, conflict and negotiation, all of which give agency to the person (e.g., Wetherell & Maybin, 1996). Identities are viewed as struggled over and accomplished in social practice rather than ascribed or achieved. This dynamic view is evident in Edley and Wetherall’s (1996) depiction of people as both the products and the producers of their social and cultural worlds. This view of self as dynamic underlines the Foucauldian concept of the ‘technologies of the self’ which can be described as the practices and techniques that people use to actively shape their identities. Foucault (1986) depicted the self as genealogical in the sense that it is always in the process of
beginning again. A different approach to accounting for agency of the individual is the incorporation of psychoanalytic theory within a social constructionist framework (e.g., Hollway; 1995 Walkerdine, 1990). Hollway, for example, draws on the concept of investment to explain why people might position themselves within a particular discourse.

Both traditional psychological and social theories of identity have limitations. It is as deterministic to view people as empty vessels filled by their social world as it is to see them as pre-filled vessels that overflow along a set path. What seems to be the most useful framework for understanding identity is one that not only incorporates the very significant social and cultural world but also accounts for the active role of the individual in the process of constructing identity. Hence perspectives that emphasise practices (see Connell, 1987), that is, the interactive dynamic of the social and the personal, have much to offer. The concept of identity as something that is struggled over also captures the active role of the individual. Examples abound in everyday practice of the way in which people present themselves differently across different social contexts. Whether these are considered multiple identities or not is perhaps immaterial. The important point is that identity is not some essence that is finally achieved in adolescence, but something that changes across the entire lifetime.

**Social construction of gender**

The polarity of views evident in the preceding discussion about theories of identity is brought into sharp focus when gender is incorporated. The essentialist theories suggest that gender is inherent, promulgating the idea that differences between the sexes are natural. This means that ‘feminine’ qualities such as passivity and gentleness reflect a biological predetermination for women to be that way. Similarly, masculine qualities of aggression and competitiveness are viewed as genetically endowed to ensure survival of the species (see Connell, 1995). The flaws in such theories tend to be exposed in cross-cultural studies that show variation in concepts and practices of masculinity and femininity. Thus substantive arguments can be made for the social construction of gender. Several writers (e.g., Bartky, 1990; Connell, 1995; Walkerdine, 1990) describe gender as enacted, constructed in interaction, rather than something that is assigned. As Bartky (1990) states “we are born male or female, not
masculine or feminine” (p. 65). Biology assigns the sex, but the social and cultural context defines masculinity and femininity. Further, they are set up as polarities; masculinity and femininity exist only in opposition to one another (Connell, 1995).

A clear demonstration of how gender is constructed in a social, historical and cultural context is contained in the literature that focuses on the body as the basis of gendered identity. Much of this literature has been influenced by the work of Foucault (1979), who conceptualised the body as culturally, not biologically, defined and as constructed in dominant discourses rather than in ideology. Foucault conceived of the body as the practical means of social control, a conceptualisation reflected in his term “docile bodies”. He argued that the disciplining of bodies (social control) emanated largely from institutions such as schools and prisons. Examples of the social control of women’s bodies abound throughout history and across cultures; the tight corseting of the 19th century which prevented women from working outside the home (Bordo 1989), the Chinese practice binding of girls’ feet and Moslem dress codes are examples. Although Foucault has been criticised by feminists for his failure to address the gendered nature of bodies, his work on how power, control and oppression are exerted through the body has been acknowledged as influential in feminist literature (see McNay, 1992). Such an analysis of power is a prerequisite to understanding the construction of gender and, therefore, gendered identities.

Historically the body has been used to construct arguments about ‘natural’ differences between the sexes, which by intent and effect served to privilege males and oppress women (e.g., Bartky, 1990; Weedon, 1987). Bordo (1989) describes the body as a metaphor for culture, commenting that “the discipline and normalisation of the female body is perhaps the only gender oppression that exercises itself across age, race, class and sexual orientation” (p. 133). In the 19th century women were denied education on the basis that this would interfere with their reproductive abilities, a means of effectively barring them from the public sphere outside the home. Science (e.g., Darwin’s theory of evolution) strengthened arguments of natural difference with suggestions that women’s brains are smaller, thereby limiting their intellectual abilities and justifying their suitability for reproduction and domesticity. These are just droplets in the ocean of examples of how the body has been used to construct in social practice a femininity that is in the social interests of maintaining the subordination of
women. They illustrate how biological difference has been used to naturalise and legitimise women’s inferiority and oppression (McNay, 1992).

Connell (1987) observes that the vested interest in maintaining natural differences between the sexes can be seen in the exaggeration of difference. He gives the example of ‘obsessive’ sex-typing of clothing and adornment to emphasise differences between the sexes. Other examples are in the “disciplining” of the female body in the pursuit toward the cultural ideal in modern Western societies that equate youth, flawless skin and slenderness with beauty (Bartky, 1990). Women make up their faces to conceal flaws, buy creams to make their skin more youthful, diet relentlessly to achieve the perfect shape, exercise daily to fight flab. The practices required to create the body perfect convey a powerful message of inferiority to women. Bartky suggests that the changes required to transform the body are so extensive that women who pursue the task are destined to fail and subsequently experience shame about their failure. Bordo (1989) suggests that the rapid rise of anorexia in the western world over the last 15 years is testament to the pursuit of the perfect body, albeit taken to an extreme.

Just as learning to be ‘feminine’ draws heavily on the way in which the female body is constructed through discourse, the male body, too, has much significance for learning to become masculine. In his book Masculinities, Connell (1995) discusses the centrality of men’s bodies in relation to the construction of masculinity. He suggests that whereas the idealised female body lacks power in its slightness and feminisation, the power of men is naturalised through the ideal male body; it takes up more physical space, it is muscular in feel and texture, tough, strong. Connell (1987) aptly draws the relationship between patriarchal power and the physical image of masculinity in the following excerpt: “to sustain a patriarchal power on the large scale requires a construction of a hypermasculine ideal of toughness and dominance……the physical image of masculinity this produces is grotesquely unlike the actual physique of most men” (p. 80). Unlike the diffuse way in which female bodies are disciplined, cutting across everyday practices, disciplining of the male body to construct a metaphor of male power seems limited to men in sporting activities. Indeed, Connell (1995, 1987) suggests that masculinity is significantly defined by sport, which he suggests offers a showcase for men’s bodies as participants or observers.
Gender and power

If gender is constructed in discourses and practices then wider social structures also construct the power differential within masculine and feminine identities. Gender inequality lies at the heart of feminist theories, which seek to explain the power differential. Liberal feminists perceive that inequities reflect legal structures that give rights to men, not women. Hence liberal feminists believe that equality between the sexes is made possible through implementing laws that assign men and women equal rights. The suffragettes were a good example of liberal feminism in action. Marxist and social feminists depict the gender power differential in parallel to the class system created under capitalism. Writers such as Epstein (1988) proposed the existence of a ‘sex class’ approximating the working class, the ruling class being men. Radical feminists view the power differential as housed in patriarchy, the power held by men through social structures and practices. In sum, these feminist theories as a whole argue that privilege, power and resource allocation resides with white men (Worrell, 1996).

Connell (1987) argues that, Marxist, socialist, liberal or categorical (based on broad categories such as male, female) frameworks, within which these feminist theories fall, are flawed by the omission of ‘practice’, which he describes as the intersection of the personal and the social. In his work, Gender and Power, Connell (1987) develops a theory of gender that incorporates the structural and historical constructions of gender together with how these are transformed in practice. It is a dynamic theory in the sense that he views power as both constructed and contested, construes structures (i.e., labour market, power, cathexis) as both objects and conditions of practice and depicts people as bringing about change through social practice. The emphasis Connell places on practice in his theoretical work is echoed by a number of feminist writers. Walkerdine (1990), for example, argues that social practice produces truths and identities that define femininity. Bordo (1989) is critical of the loss of a focus on practice or praxis in the work of feminists. While she endorses the work on cultural interpretations of the body she argues that the work may mislead or be obscure without reference to body practices. Bartky (1990) also focuses on the practices involved in disciplining the female body. Connell’s theory of gender appears to be particularly useful, combining as it does the best features of earlier feminist theories, social constructionist
perspectives and dynamic elements (practices) that incorporate tensions, differences and change.

At the heart of his theory, Connell (1987) identifies the division of labour, the structure of power and the structure of cathexis (sexuality) as the major elements of a gender order (power relations between the sexes and definitions of masculinity and femininity that are historically constructed). Within the labour structure the gender order is seen in types of work (e.g., predominantly male armed forces, predominantly female teachers, nurses), positions of power (e.g., upper echelons in universities male dominated) and the salary structure (e.g., New Zealand women, on average, earn two thirds as much as men). The sexual division of labour is also evident in the home, with housework being performed primarily by women, regardless of whether they are in paid employment or whether their partners are unemployed (Connell, 1987). Cultural discourses that position women as dependent, nurturant and kind are reflected in the labour market. That women do not need to earn as much as men because the household is dependent on his salary, not hers, is one example of how the discourse of female dependency translates to a patriarchal labour market. Another example relates to gendering of the types of work undertaken: women as teachers and nurses fulfil constructions of women as nurturant.

However, as a number of writers point out (e.g., Connell, 1987; Edley & Wetherell, 1996; Kimmel, 1997; Wilcott & Griffin, 1997) not all men hold positions of power in the labour market or within other social structures. The exceptions to male power are often used to ‘prove’ that the social order is not patriarchal, that women do have equality with men. The woman corporate manager, prime minister, professor or the woman who ‘wears the pants’ in the home, for example, are commonly cited in everyday life as evidence that the opportunity is there for the taking and that power does not reside with men. Connell points out that what exists at the structural level does not necessarily reflect what occurs at an individual level and, accordingly, “local victories” do not overthrow the patriarchy. Hence, women corporate managers continue to be fearful of walking alone at night and newspaper headlines of rape remind them of their vulnerable social position. Indeed, violence can be construed as a means of defending the patriarchy, a means of maintaining the social order in which men have supremacy over women. There is ample evidence of this in the violence targeted against
women in every social milieu, whether it be sexual harassment on the street or in the workplace or physical violence in the home. Connell makes the interesting observation that violence is the indicator of an imperfect system, of its lack of legitimacy.

‘Hegemonic masculinity’

How then does the power hierarchy translate to feminine and masculine identities? The translation can most clearly be seen in the notion of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which is commonly referred to in the burgeoning literature on masculinity (e.g., Connell, 1995; Edley & Wetherall, 1996; Hearn, 1996; Kimmel, 1997). The key aspect of hegemonic masculinity is the ascendancy of a particular type of masculinity that subordinates all other masculine alternatives. It is a masculinity underlined by men’s power; not only power over women but also power over other men. There are several faces of hegemonic masculinity. First, it is characterised by strength, success, mastery and control. Violence resides in such masculinity. Kimmel (1997) suggests that, “violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood-the willingness to fight, the desire to fight” (p. 234). Second, hegemonic masculinity is competitive. The accumulation of wealth, body muscle, and ‘boys toys’ (e.g., yachts, cars) provide measures of masculinity. Women are drawn into the competition stakes as well. Kimmel describes them as the, “currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale” (p. 232). The insecurity that competitiveness can produce is illustrated by the results of a survey cited by Kimmel which found that women’s greatest fear was that of being raped, whereas men’s greatest fear was that of being laughed at. These results convey a great deal about the respective social positions of men and women. The third aspect of hegemonic masculinity is its homophobic nature. Connell (1995) draws on psychoanalytic theory in his exploration of this construction of masculinity, theorising that men’s fear of the feminine is rooted in the conflict of a boy’s need to reject his mother while fearing the necessary identification with his father. In the flight from the feminine, the masculine becomes exaggerated. Sexual conquests become a way of proving masculinity under the watchful eye of other men.

Many men would read such a description of hegemonic masculinity and dispute it. As Kimmel (1997) points out, few men can actually meet the cultural prescription of hegemonic
masculinity. Connell (1995), too, argues that cultural ideals of masculinity do not need to conform with how men actually are. Hence, rather than feeling powerful, most men feel powerless and believe that they should have more power (Connell, 1996; Edley & Wetherall, 1996). Given that it is men that have power over other men, and that alternative masculinities are subordinated and marginalised, this can readily be understood. Although the number of men who practice hegemonic masculinity may be small, Connell suggests that most men collaborate in maintaining it because they benefit from the subordination of women and marginalised groups such as men of non white origin or gays. He cites prestige, wealth, higher wages, the right to command and state power as examples of these benefits.

‘Emphasised femininity’

Connell (1995) argues that there is no parallel of hegemonic masculinity in constructions of femininity simply because women as a group do not have a dominant position in social life. He suggests that while hegemony arms men with the psychological and material weapons to defend it, it disarms women, positioning them as dependent and fearful. The inverse of all the features of hegemonic masculinity can be seen in cultural constructions of femininity that reflect submission or compliance, coined by Connell an ‘emphasised femininity’. Emphasised femininity embodies the typical traditional construction of femininity which positions women as nurturant, selfless and dependent. Compliance with traditional constructions can be seen from the boardroom to the bedroom. Women dominate the care-giving professions, are noticeably absent in the hierarchy of corporations, take responsibility for childcare and are silent about sexual desire. The media actively promotes and markets this traditional construction of femininity.

Walkerdine’s (1990) work provides a good example of how images constructed in the media impact on the ‘truths and identities’ available to young girls. She shows how schoolgirl ‘fictions’ presented in comics engage young girls in a way that reproduces the fiction in their daily lives. The heroines of these comics are paragons of virtue and selflessness, they are nice, kind and helpful despite being the victims of cruelty. Walkerdine describes these passive constructions of femininity as “impossible fictions”, producing considerable conflict for girls as they struggle to reconcile their “badness” with the image of being “good”.

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Embodiment of the “impossible fiction” is demonstrated in the research with gifted girls cited by Worrell (1996), in which the girls were concerned about hurting others with their achievements and placed more importance on being modest and beautiful than on their achievements.

Resistance, the alternative to compliance, is difficult given practices that suppress alternative femininities. The annihilation of witches in the 19th century is a good example of the suppression of alternatives. Currently, women who choose not to marry, choose not to have children, choose to be lesbian or work as prostitutes are largely hidden from social view or actively marginalised. Some might argue that the emergence of a new ‘macho’ woman, epitomised by the increasingly popular Lucy Lawless as Xena, Warrior Woman, represents a new alternative. Xena is every inch the curvaceous woman but demonstrates her immense physical prowess in her battles with men. In the world off-screen, however, writers such as Bartky (1990) and Bordo (1989) underline the problems of trying to impose a macho masculinity onto traditional femininity. According to Bordo, the most tragic consequences of the conflict can be seen in anorexia. Starvation produces a masculine form (void of feminine curves) in the pursuit of cultural constructions of the perfect female body. Like Bordo, Burman (1995) also comments on a trend to present images of women as masculine, but more like boys than men. The duality gives no power to women, the images set up in such a way as to be a parody or to convey defeat rather than success.

Summary and implications for dating violence

To summarise and conclude, the argument that masculinity and femininity are socially and culturally constructed is a compelling one. Masculine and feminine identities do not exist in isolation from the social context, but are formed and transformed in the interactions between people at all levels; individual, cultural or social. Although agency resides with individuals, who decide which identities to wear and when to wear them, the way in which gendered identities have been interwoven into social structures decreases the viability of alternatives. This is epitomised in how the body has been used not only to define masculinity and femininity but also as a tool of women’s oppression and men’s domination. Power and gendered identities cannot be divorced from one another. Recognising the hegemonic
structure in which men have power and women are dominated makes sense of 'tough' masculinity and 'soft', nurturant femininity. These constructions of femininity and masculinity maintain the power structure. Further, the hegemonic structure illuminates the role of violence as a necessary tool, a means of defending the social order, as well as it being an integral part of proving manhood.

Of particular relevance to the study presented in this chapter are what the implications of these social constructions of gender might be for violence in heterosexual relationships. Connell's (1987) analysis clearly underlines the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and violence. At the interpersonal level this may engender the use of violence to reinforce a male partner's power and control within a relationship. Lack of perceived power in other social domains (e.g., lack of wealth and the 'toys' it buys, or no authority in the workforce) may inflate the need to be king of the castle at home. The findings of Adams, Towns and Gavey, (1994), for example, indicated the relevance of a rhetoric around notions of authority in the home for men's violence toward their women partners. In contrast the disempowered position of women, sets them up to be targets of violence in relationships with men. This has implications for women remaining in violent relationships as well. In Walkerdine's (1990) analysis of girls' comics, the heroines are long suffering, enduring cruelty and abuse with kindness and goodness. The belief that love will conquer all, that men will eventually stop being violent if given enough love, has been commonly reported among women in violent relationships (e.g., Graham, Rawlings, & Rigsby, 1994).

The social construction of masculinities, femininities and the relationship of these with violence in dating relationships underlines the research study described in this chapter, in which groups of high school students were interviewed about heterosexual relationship issues. Although this research did not set out with an agenda focused on masculine and feminine identities, it did develop within a broad social constructionist framework. This underlined the ways in which the material gathered in the research interviews would be viewed. First, the material would be seen not as an objective 'truth' or the reality of teenagers' relationships, but as stories constructed in the students' talk and drawn from wider cultural discourses about heterosexual relationships and about being male or female within these relationships. Similarly, the material would not be considered indicative of inherent
attitudes but viewed as students’ understandings of cultural and historical constructions of their social worlds. Second, inconsistencies, tensions and dilemmas would be expected rather than consistency or uniformity. Finally, and importantly, was that the talk itself would be viewed as the central focus of the research. Rather than language being seen as a tool of expression, it would be seen as the means by which students actively constructed their relational worlds.

Method

The Research Process

The research process has been alluded to in the preface to this chapter. The key point to revisit and expand upon here is the approach to the research. Considerable time was spent consulting with staff in schools, guidance counsellors, parents, and peer counsellors before embarking on the group interviews. The aim of this consultation was to develop a feel for working with teenagers and to identify issues and concerns from the perspective of those who were involved with them. From this initial groundwork, ideas emerged about how the groups could be constituted. The students consulted were adamant that the groups should be gender split, as they considered that boys would probably try to impress girls in mixed groups and that girls would be less open in the presence of boys. This was not the case for the ethnic construction of groups as, interestingly, students were more likely to perceive cultural splits as, in their words, “racist”.

The gender of the group facilitator was another issue raised in consultation with students. Boys generally thought it would be easier to talk to a woman about relationship issues, while both girls and boys considered the most important factor would be the person’s ability to relate to teenagers. On the basis of these consultations, I decided to facilitate all the groups myself. I began the sessions by talking openly about my limited experience in talking with teenagers and the lengthy time lapsed since my own teenage years. I used humour to engage students in the subject of heterosexual relationships and as a way of ‘breaking the ice’. I approached the groups from the standpoint of a curious outsider looking in and this was reflected in the way in which my questions flowed from what the students said. In the
feedback time at the end of sessions, students uniformly expressed their enjoyment of participating in the session and their wish that they could have the opportunity to talk about girlfriend-boyfriend issues in such groups as part of their school programme.

The Group Interviews

The Schools: Six high schools in the Auckland area agreed to be involved with the focus group research project. These schools were selected to ensure a cross section of socio-economic backgrounds among students. This process was aided by use of the Department of Education Socio-Economic Indicator (1994) which was developed by the Department to give every school in New Zealand a socio-economic ranking in order to target educational funding. The majority of the schools selected had a non-tolerance of violence ethos and a demonstrated commitment to violence prevention programmes. Within each school, a key liaison person for the research (in some cases a teacher, in others senior management or guidance counsellors) provided a sixth form English class with written information about the research (see Appendix F). Volunteers gave their names to the research liaison person. Group interviews were arranged as soon as there were sufficient numbers for one male and one female group in each school.

The Groups: All of the students involved in the group interviews were aged between 16 and 18 years. Consistent with the student consultations, males and females participated in separate focus groups that were culturally mixed. Group size ranged from four to 14 students, with an average of eight students in each group. There were 12 discussion groups altogether, involving a total of 101 students. Groups were of two hours duration and took place in school time. Each school did the utmost to provide a private, informal and comfortable setting. Students were assured of the confidentiality of their talk and were asked to maintain confidentiality about what other students had said in the group.

To enhance informality, the group discussions were loosely structured, with questions moving from the general to the specific (see Appendix G). The topics included relationship expectations, pressures in relationships, and the ways in which partners hurt each other. Although there were key probe questions addressing the topics, much of the questioning involved clarification and extension of material put forward by the students. Key aspects of
facilitating the groups were encouraging all students to speak (using non-verbal cues and directly addressing a student), preventing domination of the group by one member, and drawing out various views. Students were not required to talk about personal experiences. Sessions were audiotaped with the consent of students and later transcribed (see Appendix H). All students were given written summaries of the main themes emerging from the group discussions once the initial analysis had been completed (see Appendix I). They were also invited to contact the researcher if there was anything in the summary they wished to question, if they wanted their data withdrawn or if they wished to discuss issues in the summary further. None of these occurred.

Impressions of Group Dynamics: Several points need to be made about observations of the groups as a context for the analysis. In the largest group (14 girls), a number of girls did not have the opportunity to talk very much, although in the feedback at the end of the interview these girls had valued the opportunity to be in the group and listen to what others had to say. In the smallest group (4 boys) agreement was high and three of the boys did most of the talking. The impression gained within the interviews that it took a great deal more questioning to encourage the boys to talk was confirmed in the interview transcripts. Levels of disagreement in all groups was generally low, despite a lead in to the discussions about there being no ‘right or wrong’ responses and the importance of expressing views that might be different to someone else. Students in the groups knew one another, but they were not friends, which precluded the explanation that agreement occurred because of friendship. Alternative explanations could have been students were unsure about one another and were unwilling to stand out in the group, that they attempted to provide what they thought the researcher wanted to hear, or that there is indeed uniformity of opinion. One final consideration for the group material overall is the influence of the researcher’s gender, in particular among the groups of boys. On the one hand, boys may have toned down their talk but, on the other hand it did seem at times in some groups that they indulged in exaggeration either to see what effect this would have or to ‘go one better’ than another speaker in the group.
Process of Analysis

The process of deciding what form the analysis of the research would take was guided by the social constructionist framework of the study. Although, as Burr (1995) points out, various types of qualitative analyses can be used within a social constructionist perspective, most discourse analysis approaches (see Potter & Wetherell, 1987) do align sympathetically with most social constructionist perspectives. The centrality of language as a cultural medium, for example, is common to both. However, just as there are different approaches within social constructionism, so too are there different approaches to discourse analysis. There are broadly two schools within discourse analysis, a post-structuralist approach drawn from the work of Foucault (e.g. Gavey, 1990; Hollway, 1989) and what is termed the ethnomethodological or conversation analysis approach (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998).

Edley and Wetherell (1997) talk about these as ‘top-down’ (post-structuralist) and ‘bottom-up’ (conversation analysis) approaches. The ‘top-down’ approach is characterised by a focus on power, ideological practice and social process. The text is used to provide concrete examples of an abstract discourse, located not within the text but identified in a social, historical and political context. Analysts using this approach are likely to refer to subject positions, interpretative repertoires and cultural narratives. This approach tends to position people as products of their social world. The ‘bottom up’ approach, on the other hand, is focused on the text, with the analysis proceeding from the “concrete contextualised performances of language “(Burr, 1995, p. 176) to the wider cultural discourse. The analogy of a patchwork quilt has been used to describe this approach (Wetherall and Potter, 1992), depicting how all the fragments of talk are pieced together and reworked to create an interpretative repertoire. The emphasis of the ‘bottom-up’ approach is on the way people actively construct their social worlds through their talk, as producers of discourse as opposed to products of it.

The limited utility of the polarity of these two approaches to discourse analysis is underlined by Wetherell (1997), who argues that it is time to create a discourse psychology that draws eclectically on both styles. This echoes of Derrida’s (1978) argument for a both/and model instead of the relativism of an either/or model. Incorporating both styles, as Wetherell (1998)
notes, allows us to examine the ways in which people are both produced by and producers of discourse.

An important issue for whichever approach to analysis might be used is reflexivity, which is widely discussed in the context of qualitative research generally (e.g., Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992) and in the discourse analysis literature specifically (e.g., Burman & Parker, 1993; Gill, 1995; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Although reflexivity is variously described in the literature, the common thread is the accountability of researchers in making explicit their position (values) in relation to the research material and being clear about their role in the research. Most often in research the researcher is the assumed expert and as such a power imbalance exists between the researcher and the participants. Reflexivity makes this power relationship explicit and engages the researcher in the process of trying to find more egalitarian ways of conducting and interpreting research. Within discourse analysis, reflexivity poses a particular problem given that the researcher's account of the material is itself socially constructed. Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue, however, that as long as the researcher acknowledges this factor then the most practical way of dealing with the issue is simply to get on with the research. Some discourse analysts have addressed the issue of reflexivity by highlighting their own texts and processes of constructing their own accounts (e.g., Ashmore, 1989), although Gill (1995) argues that such approaches do not necessarily challenge the authority of the writer. She suggests that discourse analysts should strive for accountability by explaining and justifying the basis for their interpretation of texts. That is, being as public as possible in methodology and analysis to assist transparency.

In the current study, Wetherall's (1998) call for a more eclectic approach to discourse analysis was heeded, primarily because such an approach acknowledges that people construct their social worlds as much as they are constructed by them. Hence, the analysis drew from the talk of the students as well as from wider social practices and ideology regarding heterosexual relationships, power and violence. Given the pragmatic goals of the study, issues of grammar, rhetoric and the like were not part of the analysis. Rather the emphasis was on a more global view of students' shared explanations, descriptions and interpretations, the identification of what cultural discourses they were drawing on and the different positions available to them within these discourses. Hence, common themes (interpretative repertoires)
were expected to be evident as a shared understanding, underpinning much of the students’ talk. But the analysis was also aimed at the identification of conflict and inconsistency, based on the view that constructions are not a straight-forward matter, but are typified by struggle and dilemma (Wetherell, 1998). It is important to acknowledge that the analysis undertaken represents a particular reading of the material and that this reading is not perceived as the only interpretation that could be made. The interpretation is contextualised within the knowledge that as both interviewer and participant I influenced the construction of the transcript material. It is also important to note that the interpretation of data was set within a feminist framework. In brief, this means that my interpretation of data was influenced by the view that power in our society resides in the hands of white middle class men and that women, in contrast, are disempowered.

The process of analysis began with multiple readings of the interview transcripts. From these readings a number of broad thematic categories were drawn out in each group transcript. These broad categories linked closely with the interview topics. The material was subsequently collapsed across all the groups into the thematic categories. In the next step, the thematically organised material was subjected to more detailed readings to identify recurrent discursive patterns (cultural narratives) in the students’ accounts. Colour coding was used to denote the different patterns. In the third and final stage of the analysis links were made between the patterns in the student’s accounts and wider cultural discourse and ideology.

Analysis

Analysis of the material revealed several recurrent patterns in the students’ talk. Although the interview questions had not been designed with the purpose of identifying constructions of masculine and feminine identities, this was the overarching theme within their talk about heterosexual relationships. The following analysis presents the particular constructions of masculinity and femininity that threaded through the talk of the high school boys and girls and the links that emerged between these identities and violence in dating relationships. Although socio-economic status and ethnicity data is provided with each text extract, this is contextual information and not intended for the purpose of making comparisons.
Hegemonic masculinity ('tough guy')

Masculinity as physical and emotional toughness emerged as an overriding and unified theme in the talk of both girls and boys. These constructions of masculinity mirrored, without distortion, Connell (1995) and Kimmel's (1997) depictions of hegemonic and homophobic masculinity. An example of the ways in which the boys constructed masculinity as emotionally 'tough' is shown in the following extracts.

**Extract 1: Pakeha boys, high SES school**

Sue  And what about the other way around, what kinds of boys might end up in relationships where they're emotionally or physically hurt?

Bevan  I think they - he probably wouldn't often let it be showing that he'd been emotionally hurt for fear of not looking tough or......

Sue  This looking tough thing where, where does that come from?

Piers  I think sort of in our genes isn't it, it's been like that probably for ever it's just the image that people see, being tough.

**Extract 2: Boys, mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school**

Toby  Boys are brought up different from girls, that's a fact. They say try to be a man and not show your feelings. Be hard.

Glen  Girls are more affectionate towards each other. You don't see guys walking along with their arms around each other or giving each other hugs or something like that if they're upset (laughter).

Sue  If that did happen what sort of reactions would there be?

Greg  If two guys are hugging you think they're homo if two girls, you think they're good friends.

Sue  What do you think about the situation where you're brought up to not show your feelings?

Greg  It isn't that you're brought up not to show your feelings, but guys get more ashamed more easier when they talk feelings.

In both of these extracts the construction of masculinity as emotional toughness resounds with a determinism that is biological on the one hand and sociological on the other. Piers' suggestion that emotional toughness is in the "genes" reflects the 'natural' discourse of gender differentiation perpetuated in the scientific discourses of the 19th century. It has the tone of 'received wisdom', something he has heard rather than his opinion. In Extract 2, emotional toughness is constructed as socially determined, as when Toby instructs us of the "fact" that "boys are brought up different to girls" and Greg referred to the shame of expressing feelings. Toby reproduces a community voice with his comment "They say try to
be a man and not show your feelings. Be hard.” This is a very accurate translation of the ‘no sissy stuff’ and the ‘sturdy oak’ types of masculinity suggested by Brannon (1976). The notion that showing feelings is feminine and that to show feelings therefore incurs the risk of being labelled homosexual is voiced by Greg, whose words echo of both Kimmel’s (1997) depiction of homophobic masculinity and Brannon’s typology ‘no sissy stuff’. Both extracts are linguistically congruent with such ideology; no expression of emotional feeling, avoidance of personal pronouns (“he”, “you”) and laughter as tacit support (Glen’s talk about boys not walking around with their arms around each other).

The dilemma for the male who wants to express his softer ‘feminine’ emotions but knows that to do so may position him as ‘homosexual’ or unmanly finds some resolution in seeking out girls or girlfriends to share his problems or upsets with. This practice was commonly talked about among the different groups of boys. In Extract 3 Andy talks about why there is a preference for talking with girls about personal issues.

**Extract 3: Pakeha boys, high SES school**

Andy Sometimes its easier to talk to girls about what's going on, especially if you know you can trust them and they won't go around and gossip. It's really good to be able to go and talk heart to heart with someone who is not a guy. Someone that can be a little more compassionate than what guys have been stereotyped to be.

Sue Right. So I guess the question I have from that is why is it more difficult to kind of talk heart to heart with a guy?

Paul Girls are really understanding most of the time and guys sometimes think 'oh so what' and 'it doesn't seem to affect me in any of that way, so I don't really want to know about it' and some guys on the other hand, they really care and they help you out but, dunno, girls are usually more willing to listen most of the time.

Andy Yeah, it's quite hard to talk to guys sometimes. When your mates are around at night and stuff like that, you can talk to them about it then, you know when the guys are having a good time together then that's the time that I find that I can talk to my mates pretty easily but I never talk to my mates, hardly ever, on the phone, only on the weekends, which um we all do, but the girls um understand. Yeah, like the girls kind of want to listen, you know they want to know what's happening with your mates sort of thing, especially your girlfriend. So yeah, but not if you really-though if your mates not like, he's a bit down you know and you talk to him about it, but its kinda hard cos guys really keep to themselves and don't like to let their mates know that they're in trouble (Jon “True”) or there's something's aggravating them or something's wrong um probably be an example if your mate's parents split up. My mate's parents did split up a couple of years ago and you know you find it hard to talk to them cos you know that they get really down sometimes and get upset when something happens and you want to talk to them but its just hard because they
don't want to talk to you because they're proud and you, they don't want to let their mates know that there's something wrong with you. You can't really say it's not a macho thing because it is and guys do talk to their girlfriends about that because they're close, so that's, you just think that, but you're right, it's hard to talk to your mate.

The social deterministic theme emerges again here, this time in Andy’s comment about the way “guys” have been stereotyped as lacking in compassion, although he acknowledges that there are some guys who “care”. He explains how difficult it is to talk to mates because they “keep to themselves and don’t like to let their mates know they’re in trouble”. This seems to be about not wishing to lose face in the eyes of another male (“they’re proud”), a stance that links back to ‘flight from the feminine’ (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997) and the construction of masculinity as competitive (Kimmel). Talking to girls is much easier because, a qualified “most of the time”, they are “compassionate”, “understanding” and they “want to listen”.

Hence, Andy neatly positions girls within traditional constructions of nurturant femininity, depicted in Connell’s ‘emphasised femininity’ and in Walkerdine’s (1990) ‘schoolgirl fictions’, that prescribe kindness and helpfulness as essential feminine attributes.

Alongside the construction of an emotionally tough masculinity, boys, with considerable uniformity, also talked about a physically tough masculinity. What differed in their talk of physical toughness, however, was a distancing from it, positioning the physically tough boys as ‘other’. Joel illustrates this with his comment in Extract 4 “which is thick as shit” but a more common indication of distancing was the use of the word “they”. In Extract 4 the boys’ talk occurred in the context of jealousy and spreading rumours in relationships with girlfriends.

**Extract 4: Pakeha boys, middle to high SES school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sue</th>
<th>So how do people deal with that (spreading rumours)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chas</td>
<td>Probably try to deny it or start something up themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Well guys will probably knock them out or something at the same time. If it’s with guys it might end up in a fight, usually it does, or in some kind of confrontation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel</td>
<td>Yeah. Guys will try to prove their manlihood as such and try to physically beat the other guy up which is thick as shit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>Talking over a thing like that is not so common either.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Yea its not cool to talk it out. You have to be a man you know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>What does it mean 'to be a man'?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nick: Just stand up for yourself. (laughs)

Stuart: Stereotype. Tough and big.

Sue: Is that the stereotype you’re talking about?

Nick: I mean it’s all the stuff- smash (shows punch).

Ben: It just depends on the person again really and who you hang out with.

Nick: There’s a lot of talk sometimes and no action.

Ben: Mostly it’s all show (Nick: Smash) like just the way they hold themselves. Like they’ll hold themselves and just try to be physically just trying to be domin-, domineering, dominating, like the way they just hold themselves in public or if they’re trying to staunch you out they’ll just generally go about doing that. (Nick: Just try to look real tough) You can either try to staunch them out or you just ignore it, but if you try to staunch them out it normally comes into a conflict.

Nick: It’s either one on one or as many mates as possible.

The theme of masculinity as emotional toughness continues with Ben’s comment that it’s not “cool” to talk it out, “you have to be a man though”. Moreover, being a man as illustrated in this text is about being “tough” and “big” and the proof of manliness is therefore the ability to physically put down other males. Nick and Stuart reproduce the community voices, slogan-like, of what constitutes masculinity. The masculine image is highly consistent with what Connell (1987) refers to as ‘the hyper-masculine ideal’, a super toughness required to sustain global patriarchal power. Settling issues is done with fists not words, although Nick suggests that sometimes there’s a lot of talk about hitting someone without it necessarily eventuating. Ben elaborates on Nick’s comment, advising that guys can look tough by holding themselves in a way physically that looks “dominating”, which may be sufficient to put down the opposition. This links with Kimmel’s (1997) comment that it is the willingness to fight and the desire to fight that underlines hegemonic masculinity. To engage in actual combat is not necessary.

Paradoxically these “staunching out” techniques used by the “tough guys” are also one of the mechanisms by which the non “tough guys” deal with them. This can ultimately lead to non “tough guys” being drawn into physical combat. Yet what appears as paradoxical may be a means for the boys to maintain their masculinity. By distancing themselves from the tough guys, the boys preclude themselves from being considered “a man” but by “staunching out” the tough guys they reclaim their manliness and the ensuing conflict has not been wrought by
them but by the tough guys who initiated it. This can be construed as “standing up for yourself”, which Nick offers as a meaning of being “a man”.

For some of the boys, the use of alcohol seemed to be intertwined with these emotionally and physically tough constructions of masculinity. Alcohol, or more particularly being able to consume large quantities of alcohol links with the demonstration of a macho masculinity. While some of the boys talked of alcohol as a measure of manliness, others talked about the use of alcohol as a way of dealing with their feelings. This solution maintains compatibility with the “hard” man, more so than letting the mates or girlfriend see emotions that might be interpreted as weakness.

To summarise, there are three key ideas about the masculinities constructed in the talk of the boys in their respective groups up to this point. First, is the idea that masculinity is about emotional and physical toughness. Second, is the notion that the ‘tough’ man is genetically, biologically and socially pre-determined in a way that obliterates choice. The capacity to drink as much alcohol as possible intertwines with the ‘tough’ construct of masculinity. The third key idea is that being tough is both rejected and aspired to. Rejection brings a fear of emasculation, including being seen by other boys as a “homo”. But at the same time to be a “staunch” tough guy breaches the non violence codes of the schools attended by these boys. The resolution to this dilemma is tenuous. Looking tough without proving it physically, fighting only in self-defence, and allowing only girls to see their ‘soft’ side are ways of maintaining their manhood.

**Hegemonic masculinity and relationship violence**

In the preceding discussion the talk of boys has been in relation to the perceived requirements of them if they are to be considered “manly”. In the next section the way in which the ‘tough guy’ layers on to relationships with girlfriends is mapped. A unified theme in the talk of boys in all groups was the unacceptability of using physical violence against girls, set alongside the relative acceptance of using physical violence against any male who did so. Defence of a girl, then, can now be added as a further resolution of the dilemma raised for boys by the
physical tough guy. In Extracts 5 and 6, the boys talk about using violence against males who are violent to girlfriends.

**Extract 5: Boys of mixed ethnicity, low SES school**

Sue Where does that kind of a code come from? It seems quite strong that it’s not okay, it’s not accepted for guys to hit girls, where does it come from?

Joey Values, your own personal values.

Rangi If you like heard of a guy and a girl you knew and this guy hit this girl, you know, its like some guy hitting your mother or something, even if you really aren’t that close to the two people it gets you a bit worked up and stuff and a lot of guys our age when they hit a girl or something they wouldn’t get away with it, other guys (indistinct) and stuff.

Sue What would other guys do?

Fabian They’d stand up for the girl and go smash the guy.

Tom So its pretty cowardly to hit a girl. If you do, most of them are quite bad. Most guys have got more muscle than girls, they’re just not used to handling hits and all that so its really, I dunno; it’s not fair.

**Extract 6: Pakeha boys, high SES school**

Andy If a guy started hitting a girl around at this stage…

Marcus That’s disgraceful.

Paul And all the guy’s mates would get on his back and say ‘what’s the story’.

Marcus If your mate hit his girlfriend then you’d get up (Cameron: Get into him) and say ‘what are you doing’ ‘you just don’t do that’. You’ve really got no reason to, I mean everyone has their arguments but quite rightly at this age, if anyone hit their girlfriend they’d be in trouble.

Paul It’s just sort of unwritten rules about mates. You don’t do certain things. It’s never been written down and you’ve never been told not to do it, but it’s just one of those things you don’t do.

Sue Kind of a code.

Paul Yeah, morals eh.

In Extract 5 Tom talks about the physical inferiority of girls (boys have got more muscle) which makes physical violence “not fair” for the girls, who are physically weaker. This exemplifies a construction of gender around ‘natural’ differences between the sexes and the polarity of gender construction. This construction positions girls as weaker and in need of
protection, requiring males to “stand up” for them, consistent with the position of women under hegemonic masculinity. For the Pakeha boys in Extract 6 the reaction to the male who has hit a girlfriend seems to be more verbal (“say what are you doing, what’s the story”) although Cameron’s “get into him” could be physical violence. Paul gives voice to a moral code, “unwritten rules” among mates that males do not hit females. Although the boys’ talk is disapproving of males hitting girlfriends, it is “at this stage” and “at this age”, suggesting the possibility that it might be acceptable in adulthood. The code, however, does not mean that violence is not used against partners as a number of studies have shown that violent men espouse non acceptance of violence to women but legitimate its use in practice (e.g., Adams et al., 1994).

While the moral code constructs females as the victims of unfair male violence, some of the boys talked about males as victims, not of girls’ violence per se but of their reports about violence. In Extract 7 boys discuss the unfairness of girls or women reporting abuse which had been unintentional or provoked. This comes from a section in the interview in which they talked about “guys going for gold”, letting out all their anger and frustration verbally and risking a “couple of bruises” from a girlfriend because of it not being acceptable to hit girls.

**Extract 7: Boys of mixed ethnicity, low to middle SES school**

Hemi And there's more pressure of guys not hitting girls now that - like if you hit a girl - like I know this guy that just hit a girl and then he was expelled. She told some teacher and she said it was assault or something - abuse - and he didn't really mean anything by it and he couldn't say anything to save himself. I reckon it you know sucks.

Al Yeah, society is pretty stuffed really.

Cory Because movies and that they just focus on the guy beating up wife and all that.

Sio Oh no, there was- in the programme that lady who kept beating up her husband and it still got turned around on him though.

The talk of Sio, Al, Cory and Hemi shifts responsibility for violence from the male who used the violence to the female who reported it. In Hemi’s story of the girl who had been hit by her boyfriend, Hemi suggests it was misunderstood (“he didn’t really mean anything by it”), and that the boy could not get his side of the story heard. The boy who did the hitting is constructed as the victim in the story and the unfairness of his treatment reflected in Hemi’s comment that it “sucks” and Al’s comment that “society is pretty stuffed really”. Sio adds a story that affirms the notion that males are being victimised by females, first through direct
assault and second through being blamed for the assault. The boys’ talk suggests the possibility of a backlash as girls begin to assume some power of their own, breaking the silence that allows maintenance of a patriarchal social order.

In summary, a physically tough masculinity finds legitimacy in defence of a girl or punishing another male for violence toward a girlfriend. Despite a moral code that assigns disgrace to violence perpetrated by boys against girls, girls who blow the whistle on violence may be seen as victimising a boy, particularly when their own actions are seen as implicated in his use of violence.

**Protector and possessor**

A physically tough masculinity aligns itself sympathetically with a construction of the male as a protector of females. Greater physical strength provides the means of protection. The need to protect girls was voiced in several of the boys’ groups, sometimes expressed as protection, at other times talked about as security. An example of this protection theme is illustrated by the boys’ talk in Extracts 8 to 10. In the first and third extracts the boys had been talking about what they thought girls wanted in a relationship. In the second, the context was talk about situations that they thought made girls vulnerable to rape, one of which was being drunk then walking home from a party alone.

**Extract 8: Pakeha boys, high SES school**

Marcus Some girls want a bit of security - that could be a reason why fourth and fifth formers go out with older guys - like they feel secure when they're around the older guy. They think that he can protect them and he probably can.

Sue Protect them from what?

Marcus Just whatever, say um-

Paul Just be there for them.

Marcus Yeah just be there for them if something happens. That's also probably true.

**Extract 9: Pakeha boys, high SES school**

Marcus I've seen guys walk their girlfriend home and then come back to the party after they've walked their girlfriends home. That's quite common in some groups.

Andy Especially in this day and age - you've got to do that really.

Marcus Yeah, (pause) protect her.
Implicit in the boys’ talk about protecting girls, illustrated in these three extracts, is the positioning of girls as weak and vulnerable, as in their earlier talk about defending girls whose boyfriends were physically abusing them. The older the male, the greater his ability to protect (“and he probably can”); perhaps because of greater physical strength, perhaps because of his greater experience. There is, however, vagueness about what the girls need protection from. Marcus says “just whatever” and adds the idea “if something happens”. A clue to what the protection might actually relate to comes from Tom in Extract 16 when, after insistent questioning to clarify what the meaning of making girlfriends feel secure is, he says “just being harassed by the guys.” The protection, then, is from other guys and what they might do to a girl if she is walking home alone after a party or “just whatever”. In this talk, other guys are positioned as the threat, the danger. In the girls’ groups the idea that they sought security or protection from boyfriends was not expressed at all. This suggests that the boys’ perception that girls need protection is more to do with their constructions of femininity (as weak and vulnerable for example) than any expressed need of girls. Yet in the public arena (i.e., violence from strangers) boys may be equally as vulnerable to violence from males as girls are. A recent New Zealand study, for example, found that the assault rate for young men was 1.8. times higher than for young women, most of which was perpetrated by males (Langley, Martin & Nada-Raja, 1997).

The notion of possession is to some degree implicit in protection. Warding off other guys can be read as valiant and noble but it can equally be read as competitive and controlling, imparting the message ‘hands off, she’s mine’. Indeed, tough guy masculinity, protection, possession and jealousy seem to intertwine in the context of boyfriend/girlfriend
relationships, as illustrated by the boys’ talk in the following extract. They had been discussing what they knew about abusive behaviours.

**Extract 11: Pakeha boys, middle to upper SES school**

Sue       What about jealousy?
Chas      Oh yeah, it’s a big thing, some guys will just go thump first.
Ben       Like aahm this guy - he took it to the extreme - but he was under the influence of alcohol. Him and his girlfriend went to a takeaway shop and us guys were looking at his girlfriend’s um dress and so he just went over and said ‘what are you fucking looking at?’ - and just knocked him out cold (laughter) - and the girl was really offended at what he did. And ah, it wasn’t really on what he did of course. It’s never on to physically abuse someone else but um that’s how jealous he got. He took it to the extreme that he knocked someone out for looking at his girl.

Chas      For looking at his girlfriend.
Joel      That happens a lot
Ben       And it makes the guy feel good for a little while - I mean it gives him a boost of ego or I dunno.
Stuart    But some females like that as well.
Ben       Yea some females would think that’s cool.
Chas      They like to think the guys will fight over them.

In this text several strands of the tough guy masculinity discussed previously converge. The drinking man, the protector and the physically tough guy find expression in the jealousy of having a girlfriend looked at by other guys (“looking at his girl”). The tension between acceptance and rejection of violence seen in earlier examples of the boys’ talk is once again evident. Although Ben says “it’s never on to physically abuse someone else” this is accompanied by the word “but” which serves as a disclaimer. Ben relates the feeling of offence that the violence instilled in the girlfriend in the story, but others in the group speculate about the positives for “some females” (making her feel good because he fought for her and making her feel secure), as they had done previously in a discussion of male to female violence (Extract 5). As long as violence is excused, minimised or seen as rewarding as evident in the boys’ talk then it can be justified. Research with battering men has shown that their use of violence is heavily laden with justification (e.g., Adams et al., 1994).
How the girls construed such protection, possessiveness and jealousy was generally at odds with the boys’ constructions. Uniformly in their talk, possessiveness related to a boyfriend’s control and domination. A recurrent connected theme was the double standard as in a boyfriend doing as he pleased but not allowing his girlfriend to do the same. These ideas are explored by some of the girls in the following extract. In the discussion preceding the extract, the girls had talked about what boys wanted in relationships and several girls had talked about how some boyfriends wanted to control their girlfriends.

Extract 12: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school

Angela Its like you're their pet or something.
Zoe Doll, often.
Sara They talk down to you and stuff like guys like that.
Carla Well I don't.
Gemma I've seen it happen to other people (Sara: Yeah) but I've never had it happen to me.
Jenni No. Yeah.
Angela Its like guys that say 'you can't go out but I can go out' you know.
Alice Does that actually happen?
Angela Oh yeah, seriously it does (several girls: it does), like say a guy will- (Jenni: That's crazy) This happened to me. I went away on New Year's and I was told not to talk to any guys or anything (several girls make groaning noises) and I found out - I happened to spend my New Year's at the pub as it was so you can't avoid people there whereas he went to Pauanui and we know about all the little 13 year old girls down there but I know for a fact that he would have been talking to them because that's the kind of guy he was but I wasn't allowed.

Jenni Talking to them? Cos there's nothing wrong with talking.
Angela Well doing more than talking. Being really (demonstrates) .And I gave a guy a New Year's kiss and it got back through someone else to him and he went absolutely ballistic.
Sara That's the time to leave eh.
Angela Well it broke up like a month later anyway and he keeps constantly blaming it on that anyway but like its alright for them to do one thing but you're not allowed to do it.
Lilly My sister's got this friend who she is going out with this guy and he is totally like that - he gets really pissed off if she ever speaks to a guy and he is like the flirt - he basically goes out and he's all over her friends and if she does anything like that he beats her.

The power dynamics of relationships with boyfriends are captured in Zoe’s description of girlfriends as “dolls” and Angela’s suggestion that it’s like being their “pet”. The notion of subordination and objectification suggested by these images is continued by Sara’s talk about how boyfriends “talk down” to girlfriends. Alice’s expression of doubt about boyfriends who
tell girlfriends what they can and cannot do ("does that happen?") is quickly suppressed and the existence of dominating boyfriends subsequently illustrated by Angela’s story of a personal experience. Angela’s story presents the double standard, although she is working from various assumptions not only about her boyfriend but also about 13 year old girls who holiday in Pauanui (a holiday resort). Further illustration of the double standard emerges in Lilly’s story of her sister’s friend for whom talking with guys brings the punishment of physical violence inflicted by her jealous boyfriend.

However, in the talk of boys and girls, jealousy and possessiveness were not confined to an interest in someone else of the opposite sex. Friends too were potential sources of jealousy. Girls uniformly talked about boys stopping them from seeing their friends and, to a lesser degree, boys talked about their mates resenting time spent away from them with a girlfriend. Examples of this talk appear in the following two extracts. At this point in the discussion, the girls in the first extract had been asked to recap on what the group had talked about regarding ways boyfriends hurt girlfriends. In the second extract, the girls had been talking about what they thought boys expected in relationships.

**Extract 13: Polynesian girls, low to middle SES school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Havilla</th>
<th>Double standards.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Tell me more about that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havilla</td>
<td>He can do something and if we do what he did then he doesn't like it. And you go 'oh but you did'; 'it's different'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kili</td>
<td>'I'm a man'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ioli</td>
<td>He does it, you dream. (laughter) ( Interruption occurs) It's exactly what she was saying about it's alright for a the guy to do it but when it comes to us girls it's a big no-no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>What kinds of things?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havilla</td>
<td>Drinking, getting drunk. It's alright for the guy but not the girl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Going out with your girlfriends- you can't do that, you gotta go out with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sala</td>
<td>Cheating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUSE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ioli</td>
<td>Or it's like stopping a girl from seeing her friends but its alright for the guy to see his friends. It's like 'oh yea, why can't I see my friends' and the guys are going 'no no' (laughter)and going all mental.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kili</td>
<td>They go all mental.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Extract 14: Pakeha girls, high SES school

Katrina Most guys don't really want you to do anything without them sort of thing they have to be there at all times (Emma: Yeah, yeah!) claustrophobic all the time..... you can't go out with your friends it's...

Emma They won't let you go out with your friends.

Katrina ‘Why aren't I invited’ sort of thing?

Emma Yeah but then when they feel claustrophobic they'll say

Katrina Yeah, give me my space!

Emma Look I want to see my friends okay! (Gemma: space yeah) it's okay for you to be with the guys but when I want to see my friends you won't let me.

Desiree And they get offended as well if you do try and say that and like....

Emma ‘So don’t you like me any more, don’t you love (emphasised) me anymore?’

Niki ‘Don’t you like me anymore you know?’

Katrina They're so demanding

The double standard theme weaves through the talk of both the girls' groups. In the first extract the double standard is both general, as expressed by Havilla, and specific as when Ioli talks about how a boyfriend can spend time with his mates but a girlfriend cannot spend time with her friends. Katrina and Emma in the second extract describe how a boyfriend claims his "space" from a girlfriend but becomes plaintive if she wants to do the same. This possessiveness isolates her and creates a situation conducive to violence of any form, physical, emotional or sexual.

Male possessiveness, however, seems not to be confined to girlfriends’ friends but incorporates mates as well, as illustrated by this next extract. The boys had been talking about the situation where “guys have put the call out- boys’ night, we’re going out on the piss”.

Extract 15: Pakeha boys, high SES school

Marcus Guys friends put a lot more pressure on you to do stuff than the girls do because boys are boys and that's a very, very common thing. Guys will just say 'no tonight we're not'. Guys get really angry when they haven't got a girlfriend and their boyfriend does have a girlfriend and he hangs out with them too much. Guys get very protective and just say 'na' they get really angry. Sometimes the way we talk to the guy's girlfriend say 'you're being an idiot - you're taking him away from us' - you can't do that’ and that's very very common.

Sue So it happens more that way around than with girls?

Marcus Yea definitely. Guys are very protective of their mates. They see their mates you know kinda getting willed and dominated by a girl, they don't like it.
Paul: They think 'its only your girlfriend' we’re your mates, why don’t you come with us?

Marcus: We were here first sort of thing.

Simon: Yeah.

The talk in this extract raises interesting issues about power dynamics in male relationships. Although the boys talk about being “willed and dominated” by girls, they are “willed and dominated” by their mates. Their talk constructs a girlfriend’s position as subordinate: she is an “idiot” for taking him away from his mates and she is, after all, “only” his girlfriend. Collectively the mates attempt to “will and dominate” the girlfriend to stop her “taking him away from us”, completing her subordination relative to them. A power hierarchy is evident here: male over male, male over female.

To summarise, protection and possession intertwine with control and domination in casting the male protector masculinity. In turn, all of these link back to the construction of masculinity as physically tough. There is a certain permissiveness in using physical violence if one male (the competition) shows interest in another male’s girlfriend. The cost to a girlfriend of being “protected” is also to be owned or controlled as in being told who she can see, where she can go or who she can talk to. Isolation from her friends seems to have no parallel in her boyfriend’s world in which mates assume precedence, and her place is secondary to theirs. A girlfriend, then, is very much positioned as the ‘other’.

The sexual ‘stud’

Up to this point the struggle with manhood has centred on the various strands of toughness. As Kimmel (1997), Connell (1995) and others have argued, much of the push toward hegemonic masculinity stems from the need to disprove femininity. Sexual relationships, therefore, provide a proving ground for boys to dispel any association with femininity or homosexuality. The sexual behaviour of teenage boys was much talked about in both the boys and girls groups and the phrase “studs” was uniformly applied to describe the sexual behaviour of boys. Two main themes emerged from this talk. The first of these themes was biological determinism, which positioned boys as hormonally driven to absolutely need sex. This theme is illustrated by the following two extracts, taken from a point in the discussion at which boys had been talking about how boys generally wanted sex in a relationship with a
girlfriend. The first extract follows directly on from talk about the need for boys to be sexually responsible by using condoms to prevent pregnancy.

Extract 16: Boys of mixed ethnicity, low to middle SES school

Sue How likely is it that you think about all that stuff at the time that you're doing it?
Tim You don't.
Al No, just go for it.
Cory Emotions take over.
Sio Yeah.
Jared Hormones take over (laughter).
Sue Hormones take over.
Al Yea become something else.

Extract 17: Pakeha boys, middle to high SES school

Sue So, do guys talk quite a lot about sex?
Chas Yep.
Ben Hell yeah.
Stuart A lot. A lot. (laughter through above)
Ben I'm sure girls do as well.
Chas But not usually around...
Nick Get into it while you're young.
Joel A guy's sexual peak is at 18 so normally their desires are quite wild (laughs).
Sue So are you saying its something biological?
Joel Well when you're a teenager you've got a lot of hormones flow through you and you generally want to get it on with chicks (laughter).

The “stuff” in the question that opens the first extract refers to the previous talk about using protection and being “responsible” about having sex. So having just talked about the need to be responsible and think about the consequences of sex, the boys in the first extract now tell of the unlikelihood of such responsibility because their “hormones” take over along with their “emotions”. The second extract is drawn from the heart of a discussion about sexual expectations and sexual pressures. Joel seems to be drawing on a “common scientific knowledge” about the sexual performance of males with his comment that a “guy’s sexual peak is at age 18” and uses this to explain the “wild desires” of teenage males. He expands this further, when asked if he’s talking about something that is biological, with the hormonal
theory talked about by Jared in the previous extract. The hormonal theory allows an
abdications of responsibility that has considerable implications not only for safe sex (as in
Extract 16) but also for sexual coercion as will be seen in a later discussion of relational
issues. The wider discourse picked up in this talk by the boys seems to be that of the sexually
driven male, a discourse identified in Hollway's (1989) work.

The second main theme woven through talk about sex was what could be called social
determinism. The familiarity of both this theme and biological determinism traces back to the
talk on masculinity as 'toughness' (being a hard man), through which social and biological
determinism were similarly threaded. The two key facets of social determinism discussed
across all the male groups were the wider societal pressure that created an expectation for
males to be sexually active and the pressure from male peers. These facets are illustrated in
the next extract taken from discussion among the same group of boys as in the previous
extract. The discussion was in the context of the pressures that teenagers faced in their
romantic relationships.

 Extract 18: Pakeha boys, middle to high SES school

Ben    Yea that thing about having sex is a big one.
Sue    Where does that pressure about having sex come from?
Chas   Everywhere.
Sue    How do they do that?
Ben    Because they always think it always looks cool you know on T.V. and what have you.
Stuart Yea its all over magazines. Its everywhere. Its the biggest, you know. Everyone knows
        about it.
Ben    I mean it's been around since time of man really. Its just a lot more accepted now than
        what it used to be – it's like tattoos and all that. It's a lot more socially acceptable. Like
gays and that. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with gays but.
Sue    How do mates put pressure on?
Stuart Competition.
Nick    'Don't be a wuss mate'.
Joel    'Come on mate, get in there'.

In this talk, the boys give the impression that the pressure to be sexual is pervasive and
unavoidable. They do not present this as problematic, rather it echoes of the naturalist
discourse as in Ben’s comment “since time of man really”, in Stuart’s “it’s everywhere” and in Ben’s “it’s a lot more socially acceptable”. The sexual prescription is reinforced within their own age group, as mates add to the pressure to sexually perform. The number of girls slept with serves as an indicator of masculinity (Stuart identifies “competition” as a source of peer pressure) and non indulgence in heterosexual sex risks being labelled a “wuss”, the name for an effeminate or homosexual male. These constructions link to the descriptions of masculinity as homophobic and competitive in Kimmel’s (1997) work, whose notion of women as “currency” in the masculinity proving ground is particularly relevant here.

Striving to accomplish masculinity through heterosexuality is seen not only in the talk about sex but also in the more general talk about the ways in which girls are seen by boys. In the tradition of James Bond, boys commonly talked about having attractive girlfriends and although it was not explicitly stated, the status they derived from this in the masculinity stakes was implicit. An example of this follows in the next extract taken from discussion among the boys about pressures in relationships with girlfriends.

*Extract 19: Pakeha boys, high SES school*

Marcus There's also the pressure to go out with a really good looking girl. Because if you go out with a girl who thinks really nice and has a nice personality, like I said before, not much to look at, there's a pressure from - people think 'what do you go out with her for' - 'she's not much to look at'.

Simon Yeah pressure from friends.

Andy That's definitely right.

Sue Where do you think that pressure comes from?

Marcus Talking about looks. If your mates have lots of girlfriends and on the other hand if you've had good looking girlfriends in the past that are really nice then you've kind of got that standard to - you think you've got that standard to keep up. The saying goes - lower your standards and up your average - that sounds quite crude but that's what some of the guys talk about. It is definitely a pressure.

The “people” Marcus talks about are male, as he clarifies later. A girl with a “nice personality” will not win a male status in the eyes of his mates. Marcus describes the notion of “standard” in which a high standard equates with “good looking girlfriends”. Alternatively, a male can choose a less attractive girlfriend and “up his average”, which was established later in the discussion as meaning sexually. Hence, the teenage male cannot lose. His
masculinity is enhanced by his ability to attract a good looking girlfriend but if he settles for less, his masculinity can be established by his sexual conquests.

Many of the problems in the dating relationships of teenagers arise from compulsory heterosexual masculinity. Girls commonly reported a boyfriend’s cheating as the worst that could happen to them in a relationship and they described some of the devastating effects on their self-worth and emotional well-being. Yet the naturalness of male sexual desire and the need to prove masculinity through heterosexual performance set the scene for cheating as a normal, natural male behaviour. At the same time, it can create pressures for a girlfriend. Examples talked about by girls were feeling guilty about not meeting a boyfriend’s sexual needs, and worrying that he would move on to someone else if they did not agree to have sex. Both boys and girls widely talked about the direct forms of sexual pressure used by boyfriends, which included harassment, emotional threat or physical force. Examples of the coercion used by boyfriends, drawn from the context of discussion about the pressure on boys to be sexually active, are presented in the next extract.

Extract 20: Boys of mixed ethnicity, low SES school

Sue What are some of the ways that girls could be pressured into having sex when they didn’t really want it?
Tom If you’re at home alone. You start kissing and then do it and if she said ‘no’ you ask ‘why?—come on.’
Sue What other sorts of situations?
Tom Just tell them that you’ll put a condom on.
Sue How does that work? Does that sort of—
Tom Yeah, like it reassures them that we are gonna be safe and that nothing will actually happen. The risk is still there to get pregnant but not as much.
Sue What are some other ways?
Fabian Saying like if you really love me you will.
Tom Yeah.
Sue Do you think that happens much?
Joey Yeah.
Tom I don’t know. Some boys will do it.
Mark No, I wouldn’t do it (laughter).
Sue What did you just say—I missed it.
There was a tentative quality in the boys’ discussion about coercive sex, with Mark distancing himself (“I wouldn’t do it”), Tom stating that not many guys would do that and Tom commenting that “some boys will do it”. Setting aside these differences, Tom’s comment, “if she says no, you ask why?-come on”, indicates that a girlfriend’s non-compliance is questioned, not accepted. He then describes the production of a condom as “reassuring them that we are gonna be safe”, thereby eliminating fear of pregnancy as a reason to not have sex. Such manoeuvres suggest little room for a girlfriend’s wishes or desires. Fabian identifies the role of love in sexual coercion, in which a boyfriend challenges his girlfriend to prove her love by having sex with him. The notion that sex is an expected part of the relationship is picked up in Fabian’s later comment that girls may feel they “have to do it because it’s part of the relationship”.

In sum, the boys’ talk suggests that heterosexual sex is a crucial measure of masculinity. Just as physical strength is the “natural” endowment of masculinity, testosterone coursing through the teenage male’s body leaves him with little choice but to pursue heterosexual sex and satiate the sexual need it imposes upon him. Such notions are compounded by social messages and peer pressures. Being asexual or homosexual are not options in this construction of masculinity. Indeed, the best way a boy can escape from effeminate definition is through indulgence in heterosexual sex and/or by having an attractive girlfriend at his side. Pushing the sexual boundaries may be seen as a ‘natural’ part of masculine heterosexuality, increasing the risk of sexually coercive behaviour.

Constructions of femininity: Self as body (“trophy”)

Gilligan (1982) argues that girls’ development follows a distinct, different pattern to that of boys. Unlike the developmental trends for boys, Gilligan’s work shows that the pattern for girls incorporates their relational world. In reading and re-reading the transcripts for the
discussions of boys and girls this key difference became increasingly evident. For the boys it was possible to obtain a sense of the masculine identities from which they could choose or not to try on and wear. This was substantially less clear in the talk of the girls for whom identities were relational, and for whom there was no clear sense of self. Whereas biological and social determinism underlined much of the boys’ constructions of masculinity, these themes were relatively absent in girls’ constructions of femininity. Rather the themes for girls’ constructions of femininity flowed from talk about their bodies, exemplifying the work of Bordo (1989) and Bartky (1990).

Girls uniformly talked about female bodies. Their talk traced three main themes. The first of these themes was the status for males in having girlfriends who were “cool babes”, meaning attractive, slim and gorgeous. This theme was touched on in the earlier discussion of male heterosexuality (Extract 19). The following excerpts illustrate the notion of girls’ bodies as prized trophies if they meet the culturally desirable attributes of beauty. The comments were made in the context of a discussion about male expectations in a relationship.

Extract 21a: Girls of mixed ethnicity, low SES school

Jess  Sometimes the guys expect the girls just to be the one that looks pretty and stands by their side.
Abby  You’ve got to look like a trophy.

Extract 21b: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school

Olivia  I think appearance because I think they like to know that they can go around and they have this beautiful woman on their arm and its kind of ‘look at me guys’ type of thing.
Jenni  A trophy.

The “trophy” is a depersonalised position for a girl to occupy, her value defined by the attractiveness of her body. Abby implies this is an imperative when she says “you’ve got to look like a trophy. The “trophy” also positions girls as possessions, prizes to compete for and to be won. This echoes again of the depiction of women as currency in the male competition stakes (Kimmel, 1997). Related to the idea of the trophy, girls commonly talked about their bodies as objects of male gaze. The following extract, drawn from a broader discussion on girls’ insecurities about their bodies, provides one example of this talk.
**Extract 22: Pakeha girls, high SES school**

Desiree I went to the movies on the other night and I was sitting with a guy and we were like sitting there and like Derek was there, he was going my god she’s so nice, she’s so nice, oh wow wow and I’m sitting there going aahhhhhaaa (laughter) shit!

Emma (indistinct) compete with cool.

Desiree I know my god I just felt so bad!

Emma ‘I’ll go to the gym now!’

Desiree I know, ‘I’ve got to go see ya’ (laughter).

Katrina They don’t even need to say anything like they can walk past a poster and sort of go (shows ogling) (chorus of “yeah”).

Emma Or like a girl will walk past when you’re driving along and they’ll like (demonstrates being eyed up and down) and you’re going ‘excuse me’!

Awareness of the male gaze on female bodies enters these girls’ everyday lives and reminds them of how they must discipline their bodies (e.g., go to the gym) to enhance their value in the sexual market place. Desiree captures what it was like for her to be at the movies with a male friend in raptures over the physical attributes of a female actor, but it is also on the street in the forms of ogling at posters or boyfriends who ogle girls walking along the street. This sets girls up in competition (“compete with cool” as Emma says) with not only the supermodel images but also with one another (as in Emma’s story of a boyfriend eyeing up girls in the street). Walkerdine (1990) comments on this positioning of girls in competition with one another in the context of the pressure on girls to win their ‘prince’.

Cultural ideals that present women’s bodies as fat free and flawless, drawn so clearly in Wolf’s (1990) work *The Beauty Myth*, create problems for the majority of women and girls who do not conform with such ideals. In the second of the themes related to body, girls were unified in the view that the tamed, controlled bodies presented to them in the media produced considerable insecurity and unhappiness. The following extract provides an illustration of this.

**Extract 23: Girls of mixed ethnicity, low SES school**

Sue You mentioned this insecurity that girls have. How does that come about - why do you think some girls feel so insecure?

Hana I think it’s looks. Most of it’s looks.
Jess Because you see on all the T.V. programmes, all the magazines, all these really beautiful girls with amazing figures and that's what the guys look at so you kind of get the feeling well maybe that's what they want so everybody wants to look like that.

Tracey But when you've got someone who like really loves you, they don't really care about (Jess: what you look like) yeah, and they'll tell you the other things that they love and that sort of gives you self confidence and you think you know there is something good about yourself, because you can like you know before you have a boyfriend you think oh I'm ugly how can I have a boyfriend 'ohhhhh' and then they come along and they tell you other things that they see in you and it makes you feel really......

Hana But the looks are first.
Viki Well, if you're ugly they can't say 'oh you're so beautiful'.
Jess Not if they know you as a friend first though.
Hana Yeah.
Tracey Yeah
Hana Then looks don't count.
Viki Maybe.
Sue So that insecurity mainly comes from what you've said, from-
Jess Just about every girl is insecure about the way they look and their weight.
Leigh I've never met someone who's totally satisfied.

Jess talks about how images of the “perfect” body create an expectation among girls about how they should look, strengthened by the observation that this seems to be what guys want. Tracey, however, takes a contrary view that a boyfriend can make a girl feel attractive and good about herself. Viki and Hana are less convinced, their comments suggest that looks are what attracts a boyfriend and he cannot say his girlfriend is attractive if she is “ugly”. Certainly the talk of the boys in Extract 19 is more consistent with their view than what Tracey suggests. Girls’ insecurity about their bodies is summed up by Jess’s generalisation that all girls are “insecure about the way they look and their weight” and Leigh’s comment that she has never met anyone who is totally satisfied with the way they look. Several feminist writers (e.g., Bartky, 1990; Bordo; 1989 Orbach, 1978) highlight the insecurity produced by the impossibility of cultural beauty ideals.

The insecurity expressed by so many of the girls in their talk is reinforced by the abuse that centres on their bodies. In this, the third theme related to the body, girls uniformly talked of how boyfriends put them down using some feature of their appearance. They described feeling confused about this, not knowing whether he was just joking or whether they were
just being over sensitive. An illustration of the insecurity arising from jibes about their bodies appears in Extract 24. There was a great deal of laughter throughout this part of the discussion. In part this related to the girls ridiculing boys’ comments but the laughter may also have served the purpose of easing the tension between constructing the negative comments as hurtful and constructing them as a joke.

Extract 24: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school

Gemma I think there’s this type of putting down - they don’t mean to do it. I know people who just naturally joke around with their friends and joking they’re just kind of putting the odd little negative comment and they may say a couple of things and they mean absolutely nothing by it but I think that sort of hurts the most.

Carla Yea, guys don’t realise how (Jenni: inadvertently) sensitive teenage girls are about their bodies you know.

Angela I know. It’s so true.

Carla They might make comments like- oh god you’ve got a big arse or something and you’re so self conscious about your arse that, ‘oh my god.’.... or your arse is too small or something (laughter).

Jenni And then every time you walk in front of him from then on- (laughter and lot of girls talking at once).

Carla Just little things like that, you know, they might think they’re joking or they might think they’re subtly trying to get something across - you should be going to the gym more often or something you know, but to a teenage girl that could be the difference between killing themselves, (Jenni: or bulimia and anorexia) exactly, exactly you know.

Terri Yeah and then you get the whole situation of like ‘I think we should go to the gym’ - ‘what you’re saying ‘I’m fat’ ‘no I’m not saying you’re fat, I’m just saying that if you don’t like your body, you should work on it ‘what’s wrong with my body’, and you get into this whole massive thing and like girls can twist things around but also guys can be just wickedly insensitive of how offended girls are-

Carla Why aren’t your tits as big as your sisters? You know it’s like...

Terri ‘Oh no!’.

Angela Or you go into their bedroom and they’ve got like these playboy posters around. (laughter, and a lot of girls talking at once).

Zoe I feel inferior! (laughter).

A marked feature of this discussion is the girls’ acceptance of an “oversensitive” explanation that effectively excuses boys’ hurtful comments about their bodies. Gemma talks about “naturally joking around, meaning absolutely nothing”, and Carla offers the “sensitive teenager” explanation. She also talks about the potentially devastating impact of these “little” jokes in the development of suicidal thoughts, to which Jenni adds eating disorders, but Carla frames this in a way that supports the sensitive teenager theory. The only indication of male
responsibility comes in Terri's talk of "wickedly insensitive" guys, but even this is paired with "girls can twist things". Comparison with other girls' bodies ("why aren't your tits as big as your sisters?") positions girls as adversaries and reinforces the sense of insecurity about themselves. However the girls construct it, put downs about their bodies are a form of violence, a means of "defending the patriarchy", to use Connell's (1987) expression.

To summarise, the talk of the girls suggests that their bodies are a source of anguish. Failure to meet a culturally prescribed ideal produces insecurity and inadequacy. Meeting it depersonalises a girl, positioning her as a boyfriend's trophy or decorative attachment. There is an acute awareness that boys gaze upon their bodies. Feelings of inadequacy are escalated by comments made by boys about a girl's body. However, the comments tend to be construed as the girl's problem rather than inappropriate or abusive behaviour on the part of the boys who made them. Girls are positioned in competition with one another through comparisons made between their bodies and those of other girls and icons of culturally prescribed beauty.

An insecure self

The discussion up to this point has addressed the insecurity girls experience as a consequence of what Bordo (1989) coins the cultural text stamped on the female body. Girls worry about whether they are pretty enough, good enough or slim enough. Such insecurity permeates relationships with boyfriends. Two key themes about insecurity in relationships drawn from the girls' talk were self-blame and "fake self". In the first of these themes, self-blame, girls commonly talked about the way girls looked to themselves as the cause of problems, questioning what was wrong with them. An extract that illustrates the theme of self-blame follows, in which girls talked about the impact of a boyfriend's cheating (meaning anything from kissing to sex).

**Extract 25: Girls of mixed ethnicity, low SES school**

Sue   So what is the affect of this on a girl then, what does it do to her, cheating?
Kara  Bums her out.
Hana  You think you're not good enough.
Jess You start - if you break up, you start kind of thinking 'well what have I done wrong?' and start blaming yourself and nit picking at things that might be wrong with you and you try to fix it.

Leigh I had a friend that tried to kill herself.

Sue Yeah?

Jess It gets pretty bad when a girl is getting pretty emotional. Some girls go on mass diets and stuff like that trying to make themselves look more beautiful so he might want her back.

Kara A lot of girls do that.

Leigh I'm thankful I'm not one.

In this extract, boyfriends bear no responsibility for their actions, not even that they had racing hormones that could not be properly controlled. Rather, girls look to themselves to understand a boyfriend’s infidelity and turn in particular to their bodies for explanation. So as Jess says, “maybe if she makes herself more beautiful he might want her back”. A “mass diet” is one solution, suicide another. Leigh counts herself lucky that she has not succumbed to such desperate solutions. These girls’ accounts echo Bordo’s (1989) words “Through these disciplines we continue to memorise on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, insufficiency, of never being good enough.” (p. 14). The disciplines to which she refers are diet, dress and makeup. In looking for further explanations as to why girls blame themselves, a desire to hold on to romantic love is one possibility. If the problem resides with them, then the cheating is not because a boyfriend no longer loves them.

In order to “try to fix” what is wrong with self so that a boyfriend remains interested, a girl reinvents herself. This constituted the second thematic strand in the girls’ talk. In the next extract, Melissa talks about production of a “fake self” brought about by girls trying to change themselves into someone who is “good enough”. Kris’s comments echo the self-blame theme again, the questioning by girls as to what is wrong with them. These comments were in the context of the group’s talk about the effects of emotional violence.

**Extract 26: Pakeha girls, high SES school**

Sue What are some of the other sorts of emotional effects?

Kris If a guy cheats on you its the emotional thing of like 'okay I'm obviously not good enough - what's wrong with me'.

Melissa And then you could try and change that part of you so 'oh well it must have been this' and you can just make yourself really fake.
The notion of putting on a "false self" also emerged from girls' discussions about the importance of getting on with a boyfriend's mates. In the earlier discussion of masculinity (page 121), boys raised the powerful influence of mates, an influence that extended to the acceptance of a boy's girlfriend. The next extract is taken from a discussion among a group of Pakeha girls and it occurred in the context of what they thought was important to boys in a relationship.

Extract 27: Pakeha girls, high SES school

Emma It's got a lot to do with what the friends think as well, like you've got to meet the friends like....
Sue You mean that you've got to meet the guy's friends?
Emma Oh yeah! (laughter) and you’ve got to get on with them.
Niki I didn’t get on with my ex boyfriends.
Emma But that note the 'ex' though (laughter).
Niki Yeah I know it's the 'ex' (laughter).
Sue So what happens if you don’t, if you don’t get on with his friends?
Jade It makes it harder.
Tiffany It can work.
Emma Oh yeah.
Niki Oh but you can put up a cover, like you can be like, 'oh hi - I really do like you' (laughter).
Desiree But that's starting on the whole wrong path totally (indistinct).
Jade It only appears like that, then it's sort of (indistinct) isn't it? (laughter and several girls talking).
Sue What, what would make it worthwhile to do that though?
Niki To please your boyfriend.
Emma If you really liked him.
Niki If you really liked him.
Emma If you really think it's worth it I s'pose.
Desiree Oohhhhh (in frustration) (laughter).
Sue You disagree?
Desiree Yeah, totally, I think that's just so wrong I mean if the guy that you really like is gonna be that petty and that ridiculous then you've gotta take a look a hard look, you know, is that how what you want, you know, I mean maybe ..I'm only young it's not like we're gonna to get married (laughter) (Niki: who wants to?). Yeah well you know I mean just I don't think it's that that important in life at the moment.
This discussion brings out the way in which girls take on the responsibility for making the relationship work. Getting on with a boyfriend’s mates is imperative—“you’ve got to get on with them”, as Emma says. So, if she does not like her boyfriend’s mates, a girlfriend adopts a “cover”, akin to the “false self”, that makes it look as if she does like them. When Niki talks about not getting on with her ex-boyfriend’s mates, the girls’ jest suggests that the “ex” status might be because this was the case. This implies that the choice for girls is to feign affection or lose the relationship with a boyfriend. Desiree, however, is very clear that pretending to like a boyfriend’s mates is not an option and that if a boyfriend is so easily swayed by his mates then he is not worth bothering about. Not all the girls are so convinced. Emma and Niki suggest that really liking a boyfriend or thinking he was worth it, or really wanting to please him would be reasons for pretending to like a boyfriend’s mates. This highlights another key aspect of girls’ relationships with boyfriends that links with girls’ socialisation. This is the construction of femininity as nurturant, supportive, and pleasing others. Girls please others in order to be liked. The “false self” then fits snugly within a traditional construction of femininity that is oriented toward selflessness. Walkerdine (1990) captures this with her comment related to heroines of schoolgirl fiction: “girls can therefore move mountains as long as they do it for others” (p. 96).

In summary, there are three main points about the insecurity that girls experience as a consequence of measuring themselves against cultural ideals of physical attractiveness. First, a boyfriend’s interest in other girls is read as failure to meet the perfect standard. Second, girls assign blame to themselves then struggle to correct the flaws in a way that produces a ‘false self’. Third, socialisation practices that construct femininity as selfless and nurturant play a significant part in girls’ self blame and attempts to reinvent themselves in a way to please boyfriends.

Dependent self

At the heart of attempts to change their bodies, to pretend feelings that are not there lies romance. To be slimmer or prettier staves off the threatened loss of a boyfriend or wins him back and to be liked by his mates increases the chances of staying with a boyfriend. Not all girls expressed the view that girls needed boyfriends. Some commented on the positives such
as being free to do what they wanted. However, girls generally agreed that it was difficult to be without a boyfriend when all of their friends were in relationships. As one girl put it, there was “pressure to be in a relationship with a nice stable guy” and another girl commented “pressure to be in a relationship, to not be a reject”. This next section of the discussion takes up the intertwining themes of love, dependency and insecurity within the context of relationship with boyfriends. Hence, it restates earlier themes but sets them within a discourse of romantic love. In the first of the extracts to illustrate these themes, the girls have been talking about what makes girls stay in a relationship where they’ve been emotionally abused.

**Extract 28: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school**

Sue Why do you think they stay?

Zoe I think a lot of people like the situation of being with somebody. Being in a couple than not being. So they’d rather stay in that than be single or move on from that if someone else came along.

Terri Yeah, I think heaps of people do that.

Zoe I’ve got a friend and for the past three years since her first boyfriend she’s never not been with someone - she’s gone from one relationship, she’s sort of had one plus another with little bits in between she’s gone back to.

Terri I was reading about it in this book - they call it a passive dependent but I think, its like that song ‘Pricilla - Don’t turn around now’ ‘cos you’re not welcome any more and it goes 'I'm not that chained up little person still in love with you' and she's like emancipated herself and stuff. That's really good.

Zoe suggests that girls become very comfortable in a relationship and that the security of being with somebody is a better prospect of being with nobody or even moving on into a new relationship. Terri, however, challenges the “passive dependence”, enjoying the message of a song about a woman who freed herself (emancipated) from her relationship. The opportunity to talk about the independence of girls following on from Terri’s comment was not taken up by others in the group. Girls commonly talked about the link between dependency and girls’ insecurity about themselves, as illustrated by the next two extracts. In both extracts, the girls had been talking about why girls stayed in relationships despite being treated badly.

**Extract 29: Pacific Island girls, low to middle SES school**

Kiri Some girls absolutely need a guy all the time. Like she's just broken up with one relationship and she comes to another one.

Havilla Jumps to another one (joking and laughing among the girls).
Sue Where do you think that desperate - or perhaps not so desperate- but where do you think that neediness for a boyfriend comes from?

Ioli I think it just comes right down to the situation because they think you know that their partner is like good for them. They think that they can't get anyone else because they're too I dunno, probably ugly or too shy or too insecure about something and they think that the partner that they're with, that's real abusive, is the only thing that they've got going for themselves. But they're just not giving themselves a chance to go out and explore the possibilities of other guys that will treat them right.

Nina Also like a girl that I know, she's in a relationship and she doesn't want to get out of it cos she just likes him so much. She sees past all the bad stuff. She sees a lot of the good side and only that, she doesn't want to get out, she just likes him so much.

Extract 30: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school

Terri There's two totally different reasons. One reason is the girl's an egotist and she likes the challenge and as soon as the guy likes her she doesn't want him anymore and I know lots of girls like that and stuff who just like the challenge of it, like its a big ego thing. Or the other is the total other extreme where they're so unsure about themselves, they're so insecure about themselves that they stay with this person who they think cares about them and they can't let go of them because they're just totally dependent on them, they're totally in love with them and they feel like its all they've got.

Lilly Yea, if you're going out with this guy and he's there and you're going out and you're in love but he's going on 'you're useless' and things like that and like totally crushing your self esteem, you're going to feel like I'm such a dick and I've got no one, no one's going to love me and I'll stay with this guy because at least I've got him now and I've got this guy who loves me and no one else would love me because I'm such a dick because he keeps telling me I'm such a dick, but I've got him and he is here and he loves me.You're not going to go 'I'm going to break up with you and find someone else' because he's told you so many times that you're just a dick and you've got no-one that does love you.

The earlier theme of inadequacy, of not feeling good about oneself is revisited in these texts, but this time in the context of neediness and dependency. In the first extract, Ioli talks specifically about an abusive boyfriend: but it is not fear that keeps the girlfriend with him, but her own sense of deficiency (“ugly, shy, insecure”). Any boyfriend is better than no boyfriend. Terri also takes up the idea of insecurity and how this creates a girl’s dependency on a boyfriend. Although insecurity also features in Lilly’s comments, the perspective differs in that the insecurity is created by emotional abuse from a boyfriend. Abuse keeps a girl in the relationship through fear that there will be nobody else to love her if she leaves. Nina, in extract one, relates the story of someone she knows whose love for her boyfriend masks his abuse of her. In popular romance fiction, love conquers all. The girl in Nina’s story and girls in many other stories like it may hold onto this as a reason for staying in destructive relationships.
It was not only within abusive or destructive relationships that girls described the link between insecurity, love, and dependency. In the next extract, Angela talks about the interplay in the context of a sexual relationship.

**Extract 31: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school**

Angela Guys I think still mentally pressure girls and like there's all the old lines like 'if you loved me you would' and all this stuff and you just think - like you learnt all this in like third form and you think oh well I can get out of that, but when you really really really care about a guy and he sits there and goes 'like what's wrong with it' you know - 'its a perfectly natural thing to do' - oh if you're not going to do this well I'll go out and find some other girl, 'there's some girl that wants to', and you're sitting there thinking this isn't right, this guy can't care about me if he does this, but you just don't want to lose them. It just messes with your mind alot.

Knowing about the “old lines” fails to help in a situation of romantic love. Love and sex are fused, therefore sex is a “perfectly natural” part of a love relationship. As a girl in one of the groups put it, “it’s called making love isn’t it?” In Angela’s example the threat of losing a boyfriend to another girl adds to the pressure. Even though a girl knows her boyfriend’s coercive tactics are not “right” she is torn by the prospect of losing him. Hence, as Angela puts it, “it just messes with your mind a lot”. Girls are placed in a difficult dilemma. They must either submit to the coercion and ‘prove’ their love or resist it and risk the loss of a boyfriend with all the emotional upheaval that such a separation may bring. Angela’s talk so clearly echoes the romantic discourse in which women want and men reject (Wetherell, 1995).

“Sluts” and “angels”

Girls’ bodies are stamped with sexualised meaning (Bordo, 1989). Comments made by boys to girls about sexualised images on posters, at the movies or on the street were just one of the ways identified by girls that made it very clear to them that their bodies convey sexual meaning. Girls’ feelings of inadequacy were commonly centred on parts of the body that have sexually loaded meaning so that they worried about whether their “tits” were big enough, or whether their “arse” was too big or too small. However, while girls’ bodies are imbued with sexual meaning, girls receive conflicting messages about themselves as sexual beings. On the one hand they are barraged in magazines like Dolly or Girlfriend with the idea that they ought to be having sex but if they do become actively sexual, they risk being
labelled a “slut”. Girls and boys’ groups uniformly talked about this dichotomy, particularly the sexual double standard that encouraged boys to be sexual but disapproved of girls engaging in multiple sexual relationships. Examples of this talk are given in the following two extracts. In the first extract girls had been asked about the ways in which boyfriends and girlfriends hurt each other. In response to this they talked about the situation of ‘falling’ for the best friend and the different perceptions of this for boys compared with girls. The girls’ talk in the second extract occurred during a discussion of the different sexual expectations of boys and girls.

Extract 32: Pacific Island girls, low to middle SES school

Sue  So she gets called a slag and a slut - what happens if it’s the guy that’s doing the flirting?
Nina  He’s a stud (several agree, saying “yeah”).
Havilla  Staunch.
Sala  Oh sometimes ‘you sleaze’, especially… (several girls talking at once).
Ioli  But the guys are studs.
Kiri  It’s the first time they’ve done it and stuff- it’s like, God!
Havilla  The girls label guys like them ‘a bastard’ (laughs).
Ioli  Sleaze ball.
Havilla  ‘You keep away from me’.
Sue  But amongst guys is it amongst guys then that—
Maree  It’s studly among guys and it’s slutty amongst girls.
Ioli  Shucks yeah.

Extract 33: Girls of mixed ethnicity, low SES school

Sue  Why do you think you’ve got that dual thing where it’s okay for a guy but not okay for a girl?
Hana  Its not normal for girls to want sex. (Kara: eehh!!). It’s just the way it’s been.
Kara  Girls are little petite angels, la de da, and and guys are macho—“yeah man”, you know.
Abby  We’re just little born goody goods. Supposed to be like that.
Maree  Its not lady -like.

Such positioning places girls in a no win situation. They can deny their sexuality in order to conform with expectations of angelic purity. Alternatively they can allow themselves to be sexual and risk being labelled as a “slut”. These dichotomous positions contribute to confusion in a sexual situation. Consistent with the “angels” identity, girls are the gatekeepers.
of male sexuality (Bateman, 1991). He initiates the sexual moves and she defines how far he can go. Her sexuality is a reactive one, defined by his needs rather than hers. This is what Fine (1988) refers to as the silencing of girls’ sexual desire. The gatekeeping position is demonstrated in the next extract, taken from a discussion about sexual relationships.

Extract 34: Pakeha girls, high SES school

Sue  What are some of the ways that some guys put pressure on girls in a relationship to have sex?
Megan  If you love me.
Ginny  Just make them move - like you could be in a situation where (“you’re on a bed”) and things are happening on a bed and then they start going further you know - like they start pushing and you think ’do I say yes’
Melissa  And you say ’no’ and they they go ’oh but if you love me you’d let me’.
Kris  And when they’re making those - they don’t even say ’are you ready’.
Jade  Its hard to get them to stop.
Kris  And its hard for you to think ’okay how far is this going to go - is this going to keep progressing’.
Hayley  Like you don’t want to say stop too soon because you might be - like its moved into this but you don’t want to lead him into thinking that everything is going to happen but you don’t want to sort of - you don’t want to say stop but you don’t want him to think that he’s get around you.
Kris  Yeah, because often you don’t know exactly where its leading you know. He just keeps going and its like - is this going-

Jade, Kris and Hayley all underline the monitoring that goes on in a girl’s head when she is sexually involved with a boyfriend. It is as if they walk a fine line between the virgin and the whore, illustrated by Hayley’s comment “you don’t want to lead him into thinking that everything is going to happen” and later “you don’t want him to think he’s getting around you”. The problem, it seems, is knowing when to close the gate, to say they do not want it to go any further. Melissa and Kris, however, suggest that even when they try to limit a boyfriend’s sexual activities, their wishes can fall on deaf ears. One solution is to acquiesce, as talked about by girls in the following extract. At this point in the discussion the girls had been talking about sexual pressuring.

Extract 35: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school

Angela  Its kind of like now we’re all suppose to be modern 90’s girls but I think some of us have parts of ourselves which still have that kind of same old feeling like sometimes you don’t feel that
its really your place to say no or something - like that's really extreme, but sometimes you can
find yourself in a situation where its just like it will be easier if I go along with it, so I don't
really care either way (laughter).

Jenni   Its true it can be like that (laughter).
Zoe     Yeah, and it's kinda like oh this won't take that long ra ra ra (laughter).
Angela You sort of think you'll do that at the time. You just think its easier and simpler at the time
and you don't have to have like an argument with them but later on you do feel like a whore
or something.
Sara    Yeah.
Olivia  You do.
Jenni   Violated.

Angela’s talk captures the conflict for girls. A modern 90’s girl is supposed to be confident,
assertive and independent but she cannot shake off the subservient position she holds that
abrogates her rights and needs to those of males. Subservience or acquiescence puts an end to
the conflict, making it “easier and simpler at the time” but it then produces feelings of
violation and positions a girl as a “whore”. In constructing themselves as “whores”, however,
they avoid perceiving the unwanted sex as rape or even as unwanted.

The question that the talk described to this point raises, is whether the positions of slut and
angel leave construct girls sexuality entirely or whether other constructions exist. The talk of
some of the girls did suggest an alternative sexuality existed that was driven by their own
needs on the one hand, but also one that was couched in terms of romance. These two aspects
are illustrated in the following extract, the opening to a discussion about sexual pressuring.

**Extract 36: Girls of mixed ethnicity, middle to high SES school**

Sue     What are some of the ways in which girls are sexually pressured or put in a situation where
they end up having sex when they don't really want to?

Shelley Well from what I see in the media any kind of *Girlfriend* mag a lot is that they kind of
separate love and sex a lot and so even magazines just like (*Lisa:Girlfriend, Dolly*) and to
me that causes quite a lot of unhappiness and expectations. If I could explain that a lot
more clearly I would, but I'll pass on.

Rachel I don't know. I'd say people who are alcoholics and they drink too much and they end up
fighting and at first its just physical violence but it ends up sexual violence because the guy
maybe thinks that's one way to dominate and I don't know, it's all very weird and I just
think its sick but, I dunno, girls these days seem to be like no morals left in society really,
like chastity has kind of gone out the window sort of thing. I don't know, sex seems to be
just one of those things these days it’s not really that special any more.
Olivia I think it can be. I think that there is definitely a distinction between making love and having sex and often having sex is just something you need to do you know. If you feel like having sex you have sex whatever, but there's a huge distinction between making love and having sex. There's times when you know (Sara: making love is special) yeah making love is special.

Carla Having sex is just like, you know, having fun you know (laughter and several girls talking at once).

Lilly Its like if you have sex then later on you go oh yea we had sex but when you make love you go 'oh wasn't that beautiful'.

Olivia Yeah you hold that moment.

Jenni You don't go wow, sex!.

Olivia Well you do, you say that's great sex and that's just part of life and then there's making love which is a bit more special.

Several ideas were expressed by the girls in this extract. One is the immorality of girls, talked about by Shelley, which was not a common theme in any of the groups. The second idea, which had more common support, was the notion of sex as being special. From this came the distinction between “sex” and “making love”, the former being about need or fun, but the latter being “special”. Connecting this with the earlier talk about sexuality, the sex for fun or need would align with the “slut” position, while the more special “making love” would fit with the position of “angel”. The talk of the special kind of sex fits within the romantic discourse in which “women are supposed to do romance in relationships and men are supposed to do the sex” (Wetherell, p.133, 1995). Certainly the talk of boys and girls in most groups positioned girls as the ones who wanted the romance in a relationship.

In summary, sexuality presents a myriad of conflicts and dilemmas for girls. Construction of the “good girl/bad girl” dichotomy mitigates against control of their own sexuality. Indeed the girls’ accounts paint a picture of sexuality that is largely dominated by male need and initiation. The cost of acquiescence is high, pushing a girl from virginal gatekeeper to violated whore. Although girls did construct a sexuality suggestive of their own needs, there was again a dichotomous split between sex for fun on the one hand and sex as special love making on the other.
Summary and Conclusion

Analysis of the material gathered in the group interview study used a broad brush approach as opposed to a more finely detailed approach. Put another way, the analysis was of the "blunt" variety, not the "sharp" variety, consistent with the goal of drawing out generalised patterns and themes (McCreanor, 1995). This analysis has drawn out the similarity in the talk of students across different schools of different socio-economic ranking. The groups were not culturally split so ethnic differences did not emerge from this analysis. A valuable follow-up to this study could be an exploration of teenage heterosexual relationships among students of different ethnic groups (e.g., Maori, Pacific Island, Asian) undertaken by researchers of the appropriate ethnicity.

The significance of masculine and feminine identities in the context of heterosexual relationships was highlighted in this study. In particular, this significance was underlined by the emergence of identities from questions about relationships rather than from questions designed to elicit constructions of gender identity. The construction of gendered identities in the students' talk drew heavily on some of the prevailing discourses about gender in their wider social worlds. Such discourses tend to constitute the 'common sense' view. For the boys, the discourse of naturalness was repeatedly reworked in their talk. Hence, being 'macho', as in physical toughness, resided in genetic predetermination or natural physical differences presumed to always exist. Emotional toughness, on the other hand, was seen as socially determined through child rearing practices. The discourse of naturalness is enormously problematic from several different perspectives. First, it subsumes possibility for change, locking these boys and others like them into the idea that what is genetic or established at an early age cannot be undone. Second, related to this, it limits choice. Third, it creates particular difficulties for effeminate or homosexual boys who must, by exclusion, be 'unnatural'. Fourth, naturalness can be used to justify and excuse violence. These problems are of course part of the wider implications of hegemonic masculinity.

The second major discourse reworked in the talk of the boys, and also widely referred to by the girls, was the sexually driven male discourse (Hollway, 1989). This discourse relates to the idea that males are biologically programmed to need sex, a need that must be satiated.
While giving *carte blanche* to males to demand sex to meet this biological need, Burr (1995) points out the way in which this discourse also positions women as potential triggers of the sex drive. As such, the door is open to assign blame to women who are raped (she provoked it). The male sex drive discourse also engages the notion of women as gatekeepers, responsible for managing and controlling the rampant sexual urges of a male partner. Fine (1988) calls this the sexuality as victimisation discourse, which requires that girls say no, do not encourage and put brakes on a boy’s sexuality. For boys in this study, the male sex drive discourse created two possible positions or identities. They could be a ‘stud’ or a ‘wuss’, a choice of being considered ‘manly’ or being considered effeminate. This discourse imposed limited positions for girls as well. As gatekeepers they could be “angels”, but matching the sexual drive of males positioned them as “sluts”.

Two major discourses interwove through the talk of girls in the study. The body discourse occupied a central place, positioning girls who met the cultural beauty ideal as ‘trophies’, prizes that boys competed for, and those who did not as inadequate. Feelings of inadequacy were widely expressed, emanating from constant comparison (self and boyfriends) with the beauty ideal and never feeling equal to it. Their talk echoed repeatedly of the work of Bordo (1989) and Bartky (1990). The second key discourse on which the girls drew was the female nurturance discourse, a discourse that captures the submission and compliance of women within traditional constructions of femininity. One of the ways in which the girls gave voice to the nurturant discourse was in their description of how girls tried to please boyfriends, trying to get on with his mates and presenting themselves how they thought their boyfriends wanted them to be. Having sex because it was what a boyfriend wanted was another expression of the nurturant discourse, putting his needs first. The need to have a boyfriend, to not be a “reject” as one girl put it, epitomised the nurturant discourse and again reflected the sense of insecurity that seemed to pervade girls’ sense of self.

A patriarchal discourse cut across the talk of both girls and boys. For boys, this was the talk about needing to protect girls, the greater importance of mates, using girls for status and punching out males who showed interest in a girlfriend. This talk positioned girls as second-best, weak, dependent and as property. The patriarchal discourse was reworked in the girls’ talk about boyfriends who were possessive, the double standards that gave him rights but
ignored hers, derogatory remarks made about girls’ bodies and the priority of his needs over hers.

The emergence of these discourses, or interpretive repertoires, in the talk of these high school students painted a somewhat depressing picture. Where were the discourses of the new age man, or the emancipated woman? The straightforward summary of the discourses and the positions available to girls and boys within them may have created the impression that these were blindly accepted as ‘just the way it is’ and incontestable. This was not the case. Abhorrence of violence co-existed with using it under particular circumstances, being emotionally hard co-existed with sharing feelings with a girlfriend, being a “modern 90’s girl” co-existed with being submissive, being dependent co-existed with being independent. Such contradictions posed dilemmas for the students. For example, the need to be physically tough to prove manhood was set in opposition to the school code of non-violence and a resolution for some of the boys was to use “staunching out” techniques (looking tough) that stopped short of actual violence.

Each of the discourses that emerged in this study has a direct implication for violence in teenagers’ heterosexual relationships. Of these, the patriarchal discourse is perhaps overarching, within which other discourses are embedded. The notion of male ownership, raised in the protector/possessor identity, gives license to abuse girlfriends. In the words of one girl who participated in the study, “it’s like you’re their property to use and abuse”. Although the boys in this study condemned the use of physical violence against girlfriends, justifications threaded through their accounts of boys who used such violence. Within a hegemonic construction of masculinity as physically tough, it follows that violence will be construed as a legitimate and justifiable tool. In addition to the risks of physical or emotional violence created by “tough guy” constructions of masculinity, the sexually driven male discourse also places girlfriends in a potentially vulnerable position, particularly in combination with a nurturant femininity discourse. As long as both boys and girls believe a male must have sex (because of his hormones), boys will continue to push for sex as a ‘natural’ right and girls will continue to feel guilty if they fail to meet the need. This enhances the chances of girls sexually acquiescing against their wishes, especially if they fear that they will lose a boyfriend if they resist. The insecurity of girls, stemming from the body discourse,
plays a very significant part in girls’ playing down abuse from boyfriends, which increases the chances of them staying in violent relationships. Instead of placing responsibility for violence with boyfriends, girls focus on themselves, looking to their deficiencies in explanation or blaming their over-sensitivity. Staying with a violent boyfriend may be seen as a better option than being a “reject”.

What then are the implications of these findings for prevention and intervention to promote non-violent heterosexual dating relationships among high school students? First, there are some specific areas identified in this study that could be absorbed into relationship education programmes. Education about what constitutes violence is one area. Girls and boys need to know that put downs, being treated as property, and sexual harassment are forms of violence. Boys need to accept responsibility for the violence they perpetrate and girls need to understand that they are not responsible for such violence. Programmes need to promote girls’ independence and confidence through exposure of what Wolf (1990) calls “the beauty myth”. Negotiating the sexual grounds of a relationship is another area for girls and boys to examine. Rather than a ‘say no’ approach, girls would benefit from learning about their own sexual needs and be guided by these instead of adopting a reactive sexuality, driven by a boyfriend’s wants. Boys might be relieved if sexual competitiveness became a non-issue, although more global structural social changes might be a pre-requisite for this to occur.

Although students have most likely been exposed to the issue of gender equality, how this translates to practices in heterosexual relationships needs to be addressed. The problem of boys treating girls as possessions, trying to control who they see and where they go, for example, highlights the need to put egalitarianism on the agenda for relationship education.

Widening the education lens, the focus needs to move beyond the relationship level to the wider social structures that produce and maintain inequity. Students could be offered courses akin to women’s studies and men’s studies as a starting point. However, programmes need to encompass more than raising levels of awareness, drawing out the conflicts and tensions that social constructions of gender present and assisting students to work out resolutions. Walkerdine (1990) argues that programmes that simply offer alternatives to traditional constructions, without addressing the conflict that alternative constructions may present, are
likely to miss the mark for many girls. Her comments would undoubtedly extend to boys as well.

The task of breaking down hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, to coin Connell’s terms (1996), appears daunting. Finding ways of encouraging alternative masculinities and femininities to emerge is a challenge. Schools represent a mini-culture and self-contained social world and therefore present an opportunity to deconstruct these limiting gender constructions. On a cautionary note, however, schools may be doing a great deal to maintain emphasised femininity and hegemonic masculinity. Certainly, Walkerdine (1990) argues that schools play a significant role in creating ‘impossible’ constructions of femininity for girls. In the face of such indications, it is helpful to remember that, as in this study, some schools have very active policies to encourage diversity and alternatives. Such schools would be very open to Connell’s (1995) arguments for a school curriculum that, firstly, adopts multiple sources of content (i.e., multicultural, gender inclusive) and that, secondly, turns hegemonic masculinity on its head through being organised around the interests of those marginalised by hegemony (i.e., girls, non-white ethnic groups, gay students). However, the willingness of many schools to implement such approaches is likely to be problematic when the school structures themselves are strongly based on the gender order that places men as principals and women in subordinate positions. Further, schools are often under pressure from parent groups to concentrate on academic subjects and not the ‘liberal’ elements that might challenge students to think about important social issues. Connell says of his proposals, “interest is likely to be high, even if support is not” (p. 240). Interest is, at least, a starting point.