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“It’s a masculinity sort of thing”:  
Young men talk about the rules of  
(hetero)romantic relationships

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# ABSTRACT

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This thesis argues that a hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work within young men's lives enables them to talk about being boyfriends in ways that oppress young women. In analysing young men's talk about being boyfriends, the thesis endeavours to unlock further knowledge of how (hetero)romantic relationships become such prevalent sites of male oppression. This analysis also reveals precarious moments in how young men make sense of these oppressions. Examining these moments within young men's talk could contribute insights about how to prevent women being subordinated within these relationships.

To undertake this investigation, I conducted individual interviews and focus groups with 22 young men from a rural high school in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I used the popular teen-hit film *Twilight* – which depicts a boyfriend of high school age who oppresses his girlfriend in a number of overt and subtle ways – as a springboard for young men to discuss what they think boyfriends are entitled to do within relationships with young women. When analysing their talk, I combined a structural understanding of “gender hegemony” (Schippers, 2007, p. 86) – a gender order that privileges hegemonic masculinity over a range of *femininities* (Schippers, 2007) – with a feminist Bourdieusian (Adkins, 2004) consideration of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’.

I used this framework to understand (hetero)romantic relationships as a field, with structural (hegemonic) conditions that young men internalise through developing habitus. Young men's talk about (hetero)romance aligns with versions of hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007) that expel ‘contaminating’ performances of femininities. As a result, young men talk derisively about boyfriends *and* girlfriends who they think break these rules. However, these derisive understandings of (hetero)romance are not entirely coherent, indicating that in young men's talk, femininities are not inevitably contaminating. Young men's talk is also not necessarily grounded in their lived experiences of (hetero)romance. Instead, they rely on guesswork in ways that signal their oppressive dispositions towards being boyfriends may be unstable. I argue that these moments of instability could be junctures where young men adopt more “ethical” (see Carmody, 2009, p. 51; Carmody & Ovenden, 2013, p. 795; Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122) attitudes towards being boyfriends.

# DEDICATION

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This thesis is dedicated, with love, to Christina Pusztay,

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This thesis has been eight years in the making and as such, a number of people along the way have been integral to the completion of this project. The first person I would like to acknowledge is my husband, Matt. Matt, simply, this thesis would not have been achievable without you. Thank you so much for being an at-home dad, making it easier for me to complete this project. I know this has been a sacrifice for you, and has been challenging at times. Thank you for being genuinely interested in my work and fiercely supportive of my passion for violence against women prevention. I love how you proudly wore your white ribbon to the building site day-in, day-out, speaking up loudly when colleagues asked you what the white ribbon meant. You really are a wonderful role model for our son and daughter.

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# CONTENTS

“It’s a masculinity sort of thing”:	0
Young men talk about the rules of (hetero)romantic relationships	0
ABSTRACT	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
CHAPTER 1	1
An introduction	1
Defining oppressive practice	2
Educational programmes addressing unhealthy relationships	6
Researching young men’s oppressive dispositions towards (hetero)romance	8
Introducing Edward Cullen	10
Structure of the thesis	12
CHAPTER 2	15
Theoretically speaking	15
Connell, gender and hegemony	16
From hegemonic masculinity to gender hegemony	17
The hegemonic ordering of gendered identities	20
Contaminating the hegemonic order of gendered identities	23
Bourdieu, habitus and fields	25
Mimesis, ambivalence and accounting for change	31

In conclusion.....	36
CHAPTER 3 .....	37
Young men, male oppression and (hetero)romance: A literature review .....	37
Essentialising masculinities .....	38
Towards a feminist sociology of masculinity .....	40
Considering male homosocial desire .....	44
Taking into account ‘masculinity challenges’ .....	49
Contemplating a critical discursive psychology of masculinity .....	50
In conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER 4 .....	57
A feminist in the ‘field’ .....	57
Self-reflexive statement .....	58
Research Methodology .....	61
Consideration of ethical issues.....	67
Recruitment and participants .....	69
Methods.....	73
Challenges in the field .....	76
Data analysis .....	84
In conclusion.....	85
CHAPTER 5 .....	86
“‘He protects her a lot’”: Romance, paternalism and being a ‘good’ boyfriend .....	86



Young men being legitimately romantic.....	87
Young men being ‘good’ boyfriends .....	97
Mixed feelings about (hetero)romance .....	106
In conclusion.....	109
CHAPTER 6 .....	111
“‘It depends on how much you hurt him’”: Honour, shame and violence .....	111
Territory marking.....	112
A code of (dis)honour .....	116
Fist-fighting and (rural) masculine bodies .....	122
Ambivalence towards the code of honour .....	125
In conclusion.....	129
CHAPTER 7 .....	131
“‘It’s called being a dog’”: Homosociality and the expelling of femininity .....	131
Breaking the rules of homosociality .....	132
Deviant young men and “the girls”.....	143
Disrupting pariah-talk .....	146
In conclusion.....	150
CHAPTER 8 .....	152
In Conclusion.....	152
Oppressive dispositions and the rules of (hetero)romantic relationships .....	152
Where to from here? Practical suggestions.....	161

Limitations .....	165
Final thoughts.....	166
APPENDICES .....	167
APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET .....	168
APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	172
APPENDIX 3: TEACHER CONSENT FORM .....	175
REFERENCES .....	178

# CHAPTER 1

## An introduction

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Aotearoa/New Zealand has the highest reported rate of men using physical or sexual violence towards their (hetero)romantic partners in the Western world (Leask, 2016). It has been found that 33 per cent of Aotearoa/New Zealand women will experience some form of physical or sexual violence from a (hetero)romantic partner. In the first quarter of 2016 alone, 1,767 women experienced these forms of violence from a boyfriend or spouse (Leask, 2016). This percentage increases to 55 per cent when men's use of psychological coercion (for example, threats, verbal abuse, attempts to isolate women from friends and family) is factored (Leask, 2016). These statistics suggest that (hetero)romantic relationships in Aotearoa/New Zealand are sites where men are able to use a range of oppressive strategies to control and dominate their female partners.

Whilst there is a well-established body of feminist scholarship that examines adult men's use of violence and control towards their (hetero)romantic partners (see Chapter 3, page 37), less is known about how young men<sup>1</sup>, in their teenage years, make sense of these forms of male oppression (see Chapter 3 for a review of this body of work). This cohort, however, matters. Young men of this age are likely to be working out *how* to be boyfriends and ultimately intimate life partners. I therefore began this project wanting to find out how they make sense of (hetero)romantic intimacy at these early stages of their "relationship careers" (Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 6), and whether an entitlement to oppress young women is *already* part of these sense makings. As Carmody and Ovenden, (2013, p. 796) adds, teaching young men "skills in ethical relating" to young women during moments of intimacy could be the key to violence prevention. Gathering these insights from a group of young men who are arguably at a transitional stage of life – moving from being teenagers to adults – *may* unlock more understanding of why adult

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<sup>1</sup> The term "young men" is used widely throughout feminist and critical masculinities scholarship (see Chapter 3). However, it is an ambiguous term that can signal any age group from 13-25 years old. For my research, "young men" are secondary school-aged, and specifically Year 12 students aged 16 years.

(hetero)romantic relationships are so prevalent as sites where men are able to be violent and controlling towards women.

These rationales shaped my research question: How do young men's dispositions towards being boyfriends give support to male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships? Overarching this inquiry is a feminist interest in how dispositions exposed through talk are shaped and enabled by a gender order that privileges hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007; see Chapter 2 for a detailed account of these theoretical terms) – an ascendant position that only men are able to take up, and which enables the domination and oppression of all feminine (male and female) gendered identities within the social world.

### Defining oppressive practice

Central to these feminist research goals is theme that runs throughout this thesis – *oppression*. In general terms “oppression refers to structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group” (Young, 2004, p. 40). The particular group at the heart of my research is women who are oppressed by *men* who they are involved with romantically. Women's oppression by men – what I will commonly refer to as *male oppression* – has long been a focus of feminist scholarship. As Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994, p. 28) argued over 20 years ago, the purpose of feminism is “to understand women's oppression in order that we might end it”. However as Young (2004) explains, oppression is not a homogenised experience. Instead there are a range of specific structural “conditions” (Young, 2004, p. 39) that work to oppress certain groups in certain ways.

One way that women in (hetero)romantic relationships are oppressed is through “a systematic and unreciprocated transfer of power from women to men” (Young, 2004, p. 47). This type of exploitation can manifest in women being expected to take on gendered roles that *serve* men:

...in which [women's] energies and power are expended, often unnoticed and unacknowledged, usually to benefit men by releasing them for more important and creative work, enhancing their status or the environment around them, or providing them with sexual or emotional service (Young, 2004, p. 44).

Women are often exploited within their (hetero)romantic relationships by an enduring expectation that they are responsible for domestic tasks: preparing meals, cleaning, caring for

children and other family members. These domestic responsibilities, in turn, work to position women as subservient to men (Young, 2004).

Women are also oppressed within their (hetero)romantic relationships by being positioned as the Other: a paradoxical condition where one “experience[s] how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as Other” (Young, 2004, p. 54). When the dominant group is founded on a white, middle class, heterosexual version of masculinity – that privileges men who are physically strong, assertive, and sexually dominant – women become *defined* stereotypically as the opposite – weak, passive, vulnerable, subservient (Schippers, 2007). These stereotypes tend to align with essentialist expectations that women are predisposed to take on roles that are different to men. For example, women are more emotional because of their hormonal physiology and therefore more suited to nurturing-type domestic duties like childcare and caregiving. In turn, stereotypes that mark women as *different* to men also render them invisible. For example, as (hetero)romantic partners, women are often *excluded* from certain male domains. The popular phrase “Bros before Hos” – an expression used by men to signal that male friends must be prioritised over girlfriends – not only positions the Other (“Hos”) as different from men (“Bros”) but the Other as excluded from or rendered invisible in certain male-male activities (see Towns & Scott, 2008; 2009).

Women, in their roles as (hetero)romantic partners, are also oppressed by the “social practice” of men’s violence (Young, 2004, p. 57). Stark’s (2007) theorizing of violence, or what he terms coercive control, is particularly useful in defining how women become oppressed within their (hetero)romantic relationship with men (see also Elizabeth, 2015, p. 26 for a discussion on “oppressive intimacy”). As Stark (2012, p. 3; 2007) explains, what “entrap[s]” women within oppressive relationships with men is not only physical and psychological violence, but also a range of practices used on a daily basis to “isolate, degrade, exploit and control”. Stark (2007, p. 381) argues that these practices can be “subtle, but the most common, like taking women’s money, regulating their time, dress, mobility, or right to communicate freely, are not”. Often these practices strip women of agency, leaving them “powerless” (Young, 2004, p. 52) within their relationships with men.

As Young (2004) adds, the oppressive nature of men’s violence needs to be considered beyond the acts of individual men. It requires a more complex understanding of violence as “possible and even expected” because of the “social context” that surrounds such practices (Young, 2004,

p. 57). The gendered nature of oppressions that exploit and Other women enables violent strategies to persist. As Stark (2012, p. 8) argues,

coercive control is “gendered” because it is used to secure male privilege and its regime of domination/subordination is constructed around the enforcement of gender stereotypes. “Domination” here refers to both the power/privilege exerted through coercive control in individual relationships and to the political power created when men as a group use their oppressive tactics to reinforce persistent sexual inequalities in the larger society.

Therefore, violence as a social practice not only oppresses women who directly experience it, but works effectively to oppress women as a social group: “in the daily knowledge shared by all members of oppressed groups that they are *liable* to violation, solely on account of their group identity” (Young, 2004, p. 57).

For this current study, my interest in male oppression and (hetero)romantic relationships is two-fold. I spoke with young men about being boyfriends to find out what *oppressive* dispositions towards being boyfriends would surface from their talk. I also spoke with young men to ascertain what *types* of male oppression they would think boyfriends should be entitled to carry out within these relationships, for example, boyfriends controlling who their girlfriends can interact with socially. It is at this point however, where an important distinction needs to be made.

‘Practice’ is a term that is integral to the conceptual underpinnings of this thesis. In particular, I am indebted to the work of Lisa Adkins’ (2004). For Adkins (2004, p. 206), it is within the “heart” of practice – or mimesis – where the potential to interrupt gendered norms takes place in the form of *ambivalence* (see Chapter 2, pages 31-36 for detail). As one of the central feminist endeavours of this study is to theorise the possibilities of *change*, I need to be precise about which *types of practices* I was able to observe and analyse from my fieldwork, and how I witnessed ambivalence taking place. Therefore, the main *object of my inquiry* – the ‘practice’ I was able to gather, observe and analyse – surfaced from young men’s talk in the form of their *oppressive*, or *unethical* dispositions towards being boyfriends; what I will also refer to often within this thesis as their *sense-makings* and *understandings*. It is therefore within the mimetic *dispositions* held by young men (and exposed through their talk) where I found a range of ambivalences and therefore possibilities where young men could be supported to take on more ethical dispositions about (hetero)romance.

Certainly, within their talk, young men referred to many oppressive *practices* like boyfriends *being* possessive of their girlfriends. I will refer to these often throughout my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7). However, for clarity I will not refer to these as ‘practices’ as I did not witness any of these *in action* (my data was limited to the talk I gathered from our focus groups and interviews). For this reason, I will discuss these as ‘rules’ or ‘entitlements (see page 31 for further discussion).

In order to ascertain what young men’s dispositions about being boyfriends look like and whether an entitlement to oppress young women is already part of these understandings, I ran focus groups and individual interviews with 23 young men – all aged 16 years – from a rural secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The decision to engage in fieldwork with young men only was purposeful, albeit controversial. Feminist research has traditionally been carried out by women researchers researching women (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994). Gathering data from men could be seen therefore, as privileging their voices over women’s. However, as Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994, p. 33) penned over two decades ago, feminist research *on men* is important:

Feminist research focuses on how women’s lives are constrained by the actions of men individually and collectively and the strategies girls and women find to resist, challenge and subvert. Studying women’s lives as a feminist means that male dominance, masculinity and men are always part of the research. Women’s accounts cannot provide us with everything we need to know, since we (individually or collectively) do not necessarily ‘know’ either the extent or the content of the deliberate strategies men and male-dominated institutions use to maintain their power, nor how the response we encounter as professional are connected to theoretical discourse and/or institutional/national policies.

I therefore see researching young men as a key feminist pursuit. To this end, I have chosen to speak with young men (aged 16 years), as they transition into adulthood, to ascertain how they *understand* the “deliberate strategies men and male-dominated institutions use to maintain their power” (Kelly, Burton, Regan, 1994, p. 33).

To guide the discussions I had with young men, we viewed a popular teen movie, *Twilight*, which depicts a boyfriend – Edward Cullen – who treats his love interest in a range of oppressive ways. I chose the film *Twilight* purposefully. As I will detail shortly (see page 10-12), Edward is never physically or sexually violent towards his love interest (Bella Swan), but

instead adopts a range of less overt methods of control (from paternalism to possessiveness) that ensure his dominance within the relationship. In starting this project, I imagined that when asked, young men would say that explicit acts of sexual and physical violence by a boyfriend are unacceptable. What I did not know was how young men would react to other ways that boyfriends are able to oppress their girlfriends that do not involve overt physical or sexual violence. Talking with young men about *Twilight*, and specifically the gendered performances of Edward Cullen, enabled me to gather deeper insights into how they made sense of being boyfriends and, in particular, what they felt boyfriends should be entitled to do within (hetero)romantic relationships.

### Educational programmes addressing unhealthy relationships

Physical, sexual and psychological violence within young people's (hetero)romantic relationships has been addressed by a range of groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Currently, there are a number of school-based programmes that target both young men and young women, aged 13-18, to raise awareness about what constitutes a healthy relationship. The programme *Loves-me-not* was developed, under the auspices of the Sophie Elliott Foundation, in response to Clayton Weatherston's 2008 murder of his ex-girlfriend, 22 year-old Sophie Elliott. The *Loves-me-not* programme sets out to educate young people about violence within (hetero)romantic relationships and was successfully piloted in nine schools across the country in 2013. It is now available to all schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand and is aimed at Year 12 and 13 students, aged 16-18 years (Sophie Elliott Foundation, 2016).

The programme *Mates and Dates* is another school-based initiative developed in response to a high profile sexual violence case that came to light in November 2013 (Accident Compensation Commission, 2014). 'The Roastbusters', a self-named group of secondary school-aged young men, used social media to boast about having sex with intoxicated, non-consenting young women, many of who were under the legal age to have sex.<sup>2</sup> *Mates and Dates* (funded by Accident Compensation Commission, 2014) aims to:

provide young people with tools (such as knowledge and skills) to establish and maintain healthy relationships; change social norms relating to respect, negotiation, and consent in relationships; teach ethical bystander and intervening skills where

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<sup>2</sup> In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the legal age for sexual consent is 16 years.



risk of violence is identified; provide young people with help-seeking skills for themselves and their friends if they are experiencing or causing sexual or dating violence; encourage schools to confirm the components which support a whole school approach, and/or adopt a whole school approach to preventing sexual and dating violence amongst young people” ( Duncan & Kingi, 2015, p. 1)

The programme was piloted in eight schools throughout the country and is now available to all secondary schools (Years 9-13, ages 12-18) in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Family Planning, a non-profit organisation providing sexual health services across Aotearoa/New Zealand, has developed a range of school-based programmes to work with young people about what healthy relationships look like (for example, *Te Piritahi Exploring Relationships*). There are also a number of community-based programmes that target young people. Charitable organisations Kidpower, Teenpower, Fullpower and People First New Zealand have developed programmes that work with young people with learning and intellectual disabilities on how to deal with violence within (hetero)romantic relationships (Wilson, 2012). Specific programmes targeting young Māori people – *E Tu Whanau* – and young Pasifika people – *Pasefika Proud* – are also available (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2016).

Alongside these initiatives, there is also provision within the Aotearoa/New Zealand secondary-school curriculum for young people to engage with what healthy romantic relationships look like. Within the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area<sup>3</sup> of the curriculum, students can explore what relationship violence is (from violence in romantic relationships to bullying at school), with specific emphasis on the role that social media plays in the prevention of violence amongst young people. There is also scope for sexuality education where “young people learn about themselves, and develop knowledge and skills that will help them to interact in positive, respectful and supportive ways with others” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6). Across these various parts of the HPE learning area, young people are encouraged to critically discuss what constitutes a positive and non-subordinating (hetero)romantic relationship (see Ministry of Education, 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> The *New Zealand Curriculum* is the cornerstone of New Zealand’s national primary to secondary school education programme. It is designed to “set the direction...and provide guidance” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6) for schools to develop their own specific curriculum tailored to their community of students.

These various school-based and community initiatives provide important platforms *specifically for young men* to confront the damaging effects of using physical, sexual and psychological violence towards young women. As with the above educational programmes, I chose to locate my fieldwork within a secondary school for a number of reasons. Pragmatically, schools are ideal locations to access groups of young people and are often equipped with spaces where research can take place (for example, classrooms). In Chapter 4 (see page 70), I outline how I went about recruiting a school to take part in my fieldwork. Aside from practical reasons, locating my research within a school was also fitting because of recent revelations that schools are sites where male homosocial groups – like the Roastbusters – form and carry out oppressive strategies that subordinate *and endanger* young women. In addition, because schools are already sites where initiatives aimed at addressing healthy relationships take place, students are likely to be accustomed to the types of discussions I wanted to have.

### Researching young men’s oppressive dispositions towards (hetero)romance

In terms of academic scholarship, there is a small but growing body of work that has looked into some of the complex ways that young men make use of and endorse oppressive boyfriend practices (for example, Allen, 2007; Canaan, 1991; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Doull, O’Liffe, Knight & Shoveller, 2013; Flood, 2008; Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Klein, 2006a; Korobov, 2009a; 2009b; 2011; McCarry 2009; McCarry, 2010; Messerschmidt, 1999; Sundaram, 2013; Totten, 2003; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009; see Chapter 3 for more detail). However, still more needs to be known about *why* and *how* young men make sense of gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships in ways that give support to boyfriends being oppressive towards their girlfriends. The following paragraphs outline the types of contributions my research hopes to make.

To ascertain *why* and *how* young men take on these sense-makings, I combine an understanding of “gender hegemony” (Schippers, 2007, p. 86) with a feminist Bourdieusian (Adkins, 2004) account of mimesis and change. By adopting Schippers’ understanding of gender hegemony I employ a structural understanding of gendered power that moves away from a fixation on normative or hegemonic masculinities common in current scholarship. Instead my focus is on how the hegemonic scaffolding of gender relations organises masculinities *and femininities* in complex and often subtle ways (Schippers, 2007) that in turn influence how some young men take on dispositions about being boyfriends that are oppressive.

By adding a feminist Bourdieusian focus (Adkins, 2004; see Chapter 2 for a detailed account of Adkins' framework), I attend to how these influences of structural power are embedded within young men's dispositions that surface through their talk about (hetero)romantic relationships. A range of scholars have looked at the notion of sexual fields as "social arenas in which sexuality becomes an autonomous dimension of pairing" (Illouz, 2012, p. 242; see also Green, 2014; Hennen, 2014; Johnson & Lawler, 2005; McNay, 2000; Powell, 2008). Even though these studies draw on intimate dispositions that agents can take up within these fields, they tend to focus on sexual encounters and negotiations amongst *adults*. My research departs from these studies by exploring what (*hetero*)romance looks like as a field. In particular, I interrogate how young men's talk provides clues about how they make sense of this field as they develop habitus. It is within moments of young men's talk that I hope to glean insight into how structural power that scaffolds the field of (hetero)romantic relationships is already part of how young men make sense of being boyfriends. Specifically, I want to isolate the ways in which they understand *masculine* boyfriends to have certain rights and entitlements.

My hope is that these conceptual elements will *contribute to* current scholarship (Allen, 2007; Canaan, 1991; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Doull, O'Liffe, Knight & Shoveller, 2013; Flood, 2008; Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Klein, 2006a; Korobov, 2009a, 2009b; McCarry 2009; McCarry, 2010; Messerschmidt, 1999; Sundaram, 2013; Totten, 2003; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009; see Chapter 3 for more detail) by *adding more pieces to the puzzle* of why and how young men make sense of being boyfriends in ways that endorse male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships (see Chapter 3 for a detailed account of these existing studies and how my research is positioned within them). By adopting Adkins' (2004) work around ambivalence – as a state of internal flux – I also endeavour to show how young men's dispositions that endorse male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships can be ambivalent, and thus potentially open to change (see Chapter 2, for a detailed account of this conceptual outlook). To this end, I will suggest (see Chapter 8) how age-appropriate education programmes could be designed to work with these ambivalences that young men hold with the aim of supporting them to think in "ethical" ways (see Carmody, 2009, p. 51; Carmody & Oviden, 2013, p. 795; Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122) about being boyfriends.

## Introducing Edward Cullen

The popular teen film, *Twilight*, was used in this research project to anchor my discussions with young men. *Twilight* is the first instalment in a four-part ‘saga’, released first in book form for the young adult market and later adapted into a five-part film epic by movie-giant Summit Entertainment. Both the books and screen adaptations experienced enormous global success (Silver, 2010). Across the entire *Twilight Saga*, over 100 million books were sold (Petersen, 2012) and the films grossed over 300 billion dollars in global box office profits. In 2008, *Twilight*’s author, Stephanie Meyer was named by *Time Magazine* as one of the world’s “most influential people” (Silver, 2010, p. 121).

Before conducting focus groups and individual interviews, I showed participants the first film in the *Twilight Saga* (called *Twilight*) (see Chapter 4, page 73). For practical reasons, I designed fieldwork around the film version of *Twilight* rather than the book form. It would have been risky relying on all participants to have read the book in preparation for the focus groups and interviews. Therefore, requiring participants to instead view a film in one sitting was more realistic and time-efficient.

Acknowledging that films like *Twilight* are dominant sites of oppressive pedagogy – as places where people learn about the world around them – is crucial (Buckingham, 2003; Giroux, 2005). *Twilight* is a story that on the surface appears to be about falling in love for the first time. Edward and Bella’s relationship starts to evolve early in the film. When Edward meets Bella his initial reaction to her seems to be one of repulsion. Through a series of events Edward’s repulsion unfolds as a feeling of deep, almost uncontainable desire for Bella. This is where themes surrounding (hetero)romantic intimacy and oppression evolve. Edward is a vampire and his desire for Bella, the mortal human, is twofold: he desires to kill her (by drinking her blood), yet also strongly desires her romantically (a feeling that Bella reciprocates). Edward and Bella’s love is quickly established as irrevocable: forever and irreversible.

Even though this draws on the happily-ever-after narrative of many popular romance texts (Radway, 1993; Roach, 2010), it is complicated because of Edward’s character. He is cast as a contemporary version of Prince Charming (Murphy, 2011) – he is muscular, attractive, and seemingly devoted to Bella. Yet he is also a violent ‘monster’ who strongly desires to kill Bella and drink her blood. These themes have implications for how gendered power and the potential

for gendered violence is promoted to *Twilight's* audience. Wood (2001) argues specifically that the fairy-tale fantasy of finding your Prince can lead to an exoneration of male violence within (hetero)romantic relationships. As she explains, the man-as-Prince is seen as “more good than bad”, and his violent behaviour is not seen as “the real” him (Wood, 2001, p. 251-252).

Because of this depiction, Edward's character takes on a problematic dualism (Towns & Adams, 2000). Whilst he has some seemingly positive boyfriend qualities, he proclaims to Bella “I'm the world's best predator”. Even when they declare their unconditional love for one another, the risk of Edward hurting Bella is “never completely vanquished” (Bailie, 2011, p. 146). This complex depiction of a boyfriend presents the reader/viewer with many conflicting notions of gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships. A ‘good’ boyfriend is devoted, romantic, protective and selfless, yet also able to be physically violent within his (hetero)romantic relationships.

Edward's treatment of Bella is also heavily based on a form of paternalism. Edward is cast as a chivalrous hero who protects his heroine (Mukherjea, 2011). This is a dominant part of Edward's character and his protectiveness of Bella is presented as proof of his love for her (Wilson, 2011). This is illustrated in two ways. Firstly, Bella's childlike innocence and inexperience is illuminated by Edward's paternalistic treatment of her (Mukherjea, 2011). This leads, secondly, to “the dynamic in their relationship of perpetual rescuer and rescued” (Silver, 2010, p. 125). One of Edward's most prominent acts of rescue is when he stops an out-of-control van from careening into Bella. As the film progresses, these paternal behaviours morph into possessiveness. Not only does Edward want to protect Bella from harm, he also starts to dictate where Bella is allowed to go and with whom she is allowed to associate.

*Twilight* therefore has a range of complex themes (for other feminist commentaries on *Twilight* see Bailie, 2011; Bealer, 2011; Donnelly, 2011; Groper, 2011; Happel, 2010; Miller, 2009; Mukherjea, 2011; Murphy, 2011; Petersen, 2012; Summers, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Torkelson, 2011; Wilson, 2011) that represent young people's (hetero)romantic relationships as marked by control, possessiveness and danger yet underscored by unbridled passion and irrevocable love. To date, only one other study has sought the opinions of young men on *Twilight*. Click, Miller, Behm-Morawitz and Aubrey (2015) conducted a qualitative study with 42 male fans of *Twilight*. They sought to find out why young men become fans of these more “feminine media forms” (p. 1) and what these fans think of the film's story and its characteristics. My research takes a different approach. I am not interested in fandom (none of my participants identified

themselves publicly as fans) but instead saw an opportunity to use this film to initiate talk with young men about their views on gendered roles within (hetero)romantic relationships, especially their understandings of what boyfriends should be entitled to do within their (hetero)romantic relationships. I will refer to these entitlements throughout this thesis also as *rules* that govern important fields (Bourdieu, 1990; see Chapter 2) within young men's lives.

## Structure of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I present my conceptual framework. I combine the work of Mimi Schippers (2007), Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), Lisa Adkins (2004) and Judith Butler (1990; 1996) to analyse *why* and *how* young men make sense of being boyfriends in ways that endorse male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. This combination of conceptual tools provides ways to interrogate the hegemonic scaffolding of gender relations that organises the field of (hetero)romance (and other related fields of interaction) as well as the taking up of this hegemonic order by young men, in the form of oppressive dispositions about (hetero)romance. This framework also enables me to look critically at how young men's internalisation of this order could be dismantled.

Chapter 3 reviews extant literature that specifically explores the ways that young men adopt oppressive strategies within their (hetero)romantic relationships, *as well as* young men's views about the many oppressive strategies men are able to use with these relationships. I suggest how my conceptual framework (see Chapter 2) might contribute to a reshaping of discussions within this field of scholarship, by emphasising the working of gender hegemony, fields of (hetero)romantic interaction and the internal possibilities of change.

Chapter 4 outlines the qualitative methods I used – focus groups and interviews – as well as the methodological threads foundational to my inquiry. I chose feminist qualitative methodology, critical studies on men and masculinities and critical youth studies because they are methodologies well-suited to exploring how young men make sense of gendered roles within (hetero)romantic relationships.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 analyse how young men make sense of being boyfriends and in what ways they give their endorsement to male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. These chapters also critically examine what this says about *how* hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter 2) is able to dominate and oppress other male and female femininities. In Chapter 5, I examine

how young men make sense of (hetero)romance, with a specific focus on how they understand subtle ways that boyfriends can oppress their girlfriends via the use of paternalism. I interrogate how paternalism, which is often regarded as seemingly innocuous, is promoted by young men as a marker of a *good* boyfriend even though it is actually oppressive. I also chart how young men's talk about paternalism blurs into endorsements of boyfriends being possessive.

Chapter 6 looks specifically at how young men talk about what boyfriends should be entitled to do within their relationships with young women. Feeling entitled to control and be possessive of girlfriends are themes which connect to a broader discussion of the ways young men endorse what I will term as 'territory marking' – fighting other young men over young women. I liken this form of violent peer discipline to modern day dueling and offer suggestions as to how the ascendant position of hegemonic masculinity enables young men to privilege and endorse this form of possessiveness. I argue that young men's understanding of territory-marking is also a product of their fear of being associated with femininity and therefore shamed by their peers. Towards the end of this chapter I look at the precariousness of how young men make sense of ownership-type behaviours like territory marking and what this may say about the potential to disrupt dispositions held by young men that endorse the subordination of women.

In Chapter 7 I take this analysis further, to examine how young men expel contaminating versions of femininity from their gendered identities in a variety of ways that support men's use of oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. Talking derisively about young women who "whip" their boyfriends is one way young men are able to promote male dominance within (hetero)romantic relationships. Another, is through using labels like "pussy" and "her dog" to feminise and shame male peers who *become* "whipped". These moments of expelling femininity<sup>4</sup> however, are not entirely stable. Subsequently, I also explore how young men can engage in contradictory talk that could dismantle the gender order that enables these types of narratives to perpetuate over time.

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<sup>4</sup> I first read the phrase 'expelling femininity' in Haywood and Mac An Ghail's (2003) book - *Men and Masculinities*. Haywood and Mac An Ghail (2003) explain how young men, in schools, manage their masculinity by participating in compulsory heterosexuality, misogyny and homophobia: "what emerged as of particular salience was the way in which heterosexual male students were involved in a double relationship, of traducing the 'other', including women and gays (external relations), at the same time as *expelling femininity* and homosexuality from within themselves (internal relations)" (p. 77-78, *my emphasis*). For my research I have adopted this term – 'expelling femininity' more specifically with reference to Schippers' (2007, p. 86) work around 'gender hegemony'.

In the final chapter, I make recommendations for how young men's understandings of (hetero)romantic relationships that are oppressive towards women *could* be disrupted through new forms of targeted school-based initiatives. I argue that these initiatives could shift young men's thinking so that they view being boyfriends in more "ethical" (see Carmody, 2009, p. 51; Carmody & Oviden, 2013, p. 795; Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122) ways, with an ultimate goal of them taking these new dispositions into their future, adult relationships with women.



# CHAPTER 2

## Theoretically speaking

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The purpose of this chapter is to plot the conceptual framework that informs the analytical discussion of this thesis. Principally, my doctoral work is a feminist project (see Adkins, 2004; Schippers, 2007) interested in exploring how young men's oppressive dispositions towards being boyfriends are enabled by what I call the *hegemonic ordering of gendered identities*. Here, I am purposely referring to the workings of "gender hegemony" as elucidated by Mimi Schippers (2007, p. 86). Gender hegemony, according to Schippers (2007), operates through "a hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity" (p. 92) that "places men's dominance over women at the center" (p. 86) of gender relations.

For my research, I have specifically set out to ascertain how this hegemonic gender order – which I will discuss in this chapter as integral to shaping *gendered identities* – plays out within young men's talk about (hetero)romance and being boyfriends. I want to determine how this hegemonic order enables them to speak about *being* boyfriends in ways that are predominantly oppressive to young women. In saying this however, I also want to uncover any precarious moments in their talk that expose the potential fragility of this order. I am especially interested in these precarious moments as they provide insights into my ultimate endeavour, which is to ascertain how men's (hetero)romantic practices that subordinate women could be destabilised.

Throughout this thesis, I will analyse how young men's dispositions about male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships emerge from their talk as moments of gendered practice (Yancey Martin, 2003). Within these moments, I am interested in analysing *how* they talk about (hetero)romantic relationships, and in particular, the talk they engage in to endorse what they think boyfriends *should* be entitled to do. Lisa Adkins' (2004) conceptual work on practice and identity transformation is particularly useful in providing ways to analyse these forms of gendered practice. Not only does Adkins (2004) explicate a comprehensive definition of practice by mobilising a feminist Bourdieusian outlook, she also carefully weaves this understanding into a sophisticated critique of the possibilities *and limits* of what she terms "gender detraditionalisation" (Adkins, 2004, p. 191). For my research, Adkins' (2004)

understanding of gendered practice opens up analytical space for looking at the more subtle reaches of the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities that I found within young men's talk about being boyfriends. Adkins' (2004, p. 206) conceptual work also enables me to recognise that there are limits to the reaches of hegemony; ambivalence can surface within young men's talk, signalling moments when their oppressive dispositions about being boyfriends *could* be interrupted.

### Connell, gender and hegemony

My research is interested in the hegemonic workings of gender and how this plays out in young men's talk about (hetero)romance and being boyfriends. Research on gendered identities and practices, with an anchoring in hegemony, has been popularly associated with the works of Raewyn Connell. Connell (1987; 1992; 1995; 2005) is renowned for introducing the premise of hegemonic masculinity, and developing its theoretical framework from the late 1980s to current day. One of her most notable contributions is her theorising of *plural* masculinities, which are not to be thought of as objects or character types, but instead as "configurations of practice" (Connell, 2005, p. 44; see also Connell, 1992; 1995). They are ordered within a hierarchical system where the exalted configuration of practice – hegemonic masculinity – "embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Connell argues that this system is paradoxical: even though hegemonic practices are the most sought after by men, they are almost impossible to embody.

In turn, Connell (2005) argues that hegemonic masculinity exists in *relation* to a number of other configurations of masculine practices. Complicit masculinities refers to those masculine practices that are seen to support the hegemonic version of masculinity, yet are more achievable for boys and men to embody. As Connell maintains, by enacting practices that are complicit with hegemonic masculinity, men are rewarded with a patriarchal dividend that they can 'cash-in' to secure their masculine status. Subordinate masculinities, in contrast, are the *least* sought after configuration of masculine practices within this gendered system because they are permeated with feminine and homosexual attributes. These attributes are disparaged by this system in order to contain their threat to the stability of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, marginalised masculinities categorise masculine practices that intersect with marginalised class and ethnic identities. These practices are promoted when they benefit the stabilisation of

hegemonic masculinity and disparaged when they threaten the primacy of hegemonic masculinity. For example, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Māori and Pasifika rugby players (for example, Jonah Lomu) are revered by sports media and rugby fans for their embodied athleticism on the rugby field that enables them to play the game successfully. Yet Māori and Pasifika men are also persecuted as deviant through the media's over-representation of Māori and Pasifika within crime news stories (Hokowhitu, 2013).

Connell's framework has been taken up by a significant number of scholars (in relation to research around young men see: Allen, 2005, 2007; Barnes, 2011; Campbell, 2000; Campbell & Mayerfield Bell, 2000; Gilmartin, 2007; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Light, 2007; Messerschmidt, 2000; Park, 2000; Pringle & Hickey, 2010; Redman, 2001; Stoudt, 2006; Swain, 2003; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013). Recent critics (Francis, 2010; Halberstam 1998; Paechter, 2006a, 2006b, 2012; Schippers, 2007) have argued that Connell's framework is premised on a form of gender essentialism that conflates masculinity with male bodies and femininity with female bodies. These scholars argue that a more nuanced account of gendered identities is needed, and have introduced terminology like male/masculine femininities and female/feminine masculinities to academic discourse.

These critiques of Connell (Francis, 2010; Halberstam 1998; Paechter, 2006a, 2006b, 2012; Schippers, 2007) have influenced the conceptual direction of my research. Whilst I am interested in how young men's talk is able to endorse oppressive ways of being boyfriends (like controlling girlfriends) *because* current arrangements of hegemonic masculinity privilege these masculine performances of (hetero)romance, I am also interested in how they talk about other young men, who fail to perform these hegemonic practices, as feminine (see Chapters 5 to 7). In turn, I want to investigate how young men talk about young women who they feel perform masculinity as girlfriends. A framework that can provide ways of working through this complex relationship between masculinities and femininities is needed for my research. For this reason, I have turned to the work of Mimi Schippers (2007).

### [From hegemonic masculinity to gender hegemony](#)

Of the recent critiques surrounding Connell's gender essentialism, Mimi Schippers' (2007) conceptual work is innovative in questioning, more rigorously than other scholars (see Paechter, 2006a, 2006b, 2012; Francis, 2010), the taking up of femininities by male bodies and the taking up of masculinities by female bodies. In her approach, she outlines the conditions

placed on what is privileged as masculinity and what is denigrated as femininity. Terms like “masculine girls” (Paechter, 2012, p. 232), “masculine women” (Paechter, 2006, p. 261) or “female masculinity” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 1), adopted by critics of Connell (for example Francis, 2010; Halberstam 1998; Paechter, 2006a, 2006b, 2012), do not capture this system of privilege and denigration. Schippers’ (2007, p. 92) sophisticated account of gender hegemony interrogates the “embodiment of masculine and feminine characteristics by individuals”, providing new ways to question how young men’s oppressive dispositions about being boyfriends are shaped by this complex hegemonic gender order as well as how their talk may be a product of this order.

Even though Schippers (2007, p. 86) maintains that Connell’s (2005) “conceptualisation” of hegemonic masculinity has been “invaluable” to gender scholarship, she argues that a “theory of gender hegemony” provides a more critical platform for exploring gender. For Schippers, an understanding of gender hegemony shifts scholarship away from a fixation with hegemonic masculinity to a more nuanced focus on the hegemonic scaffolding through which masculinities and femininities are organised. This scaffolding represents the structural conditions for “relationships between men and woman as ‘naturally’ and inevitably a relationship of dominance and submission” (Schippers, 2007, p. 91). For example, this scaffolding is predicated on women being physically vulnerable and men being physically strong, which naturalises male domination as part of gendered relations in society. By emphasising these operations of gender hegemony that “place men’s dominance over women at the center” (Schippers, 2007, p. 86), Schippers not only exposes the privileging of masculinity in society but brings femininity back into critical discussions about gender.

At the core of Schippers’ (2007) articulation of gender hegemony is her emphasis on the relationship of *difference*. While she acknowledges that Connell (2005) does discuss difference, she follows Judith Butler’s lead by placing “the relationship of difference more centrally” (Schippers, 2007, p. 90) in conceptualising gender. Within this understanding, difference – and its relational complementarity – is principally marked by ‘heterosexual desire’:

For Butler, heterosexual desire, as a defining feature for both women and men, is what binds the masculine and feminine in a binary, hierarchical relationship. In contemporary Western societies, heterosexual desire is defined as an erotic attachment to difference, and as such, it does the hegemonic work of fusing

masculinity and femininity together as complementary opposites (Schippers, 2007, p. 90).

While Schippers (2007) recognises that the content of both masculinity and femininity is more complex than *just* hetero-desire, she (2007, p. 90) maintains that hetero-desire provides the “ontological essence” of a complementary relationship based on difference. However, Schippers (2007, p. 90) warns that this alone does not “constitute hegemony” and stresses that hegemonic operations require a relationship of “ascendancy and dominance”. Schippers (2007, p. 90) notes that the naturalisation in Western societies of the “physically dominant”/penetrator masculine sexuality “in relation to femininity” underpins this relationship.

Therefore, at the centre of Schippers’ (2007) framework is an understanding that men’s privilege sits at the core of how gender hegemony orders gendered identities. Her stance is illustrated in how she works with the terms “man”, “woman” and “masculinity”, “femininity”. In order to build her analysis, Schippers (2007, p. 90) argues that it is the “quality content” of what is symbolically referred to as “man” and “woman” that needs examination. As she (2007, p. 94) asserts, it is the “relationship articulated through the quality content of femininity and masculinity that is the central feature of gender hegemony”. For example, qualities like physical strength and assertiveness are associated with masculinity, which in turn associates femininity with qualities like being vulnerable and passive.

This emphasis on relational quality content forms Schippers’ (2007) main critique of Connell. She disagrees with Connell’s view that one can speak of masculinity and femininity as social practices as this infers that masculine practices are only performed by male bodies, and feminine practices by female bodies. Instead Schippers (2007, p. 92) argues that masculinity and femininity need to be conceptualised as the “contextually and culturally specific set of meanings for what women and men are and should be”, which in turn makes social practice “the mechanism by which those meanings come to shape, influence and transforms social structure”. Therefore, qualities for what women and men *should be*, become the core of the “hegemonic significance of masculinity and femininity” (Schippers, 2007, p. 90).

With this line of thought, men and women can embody masculine or feminine characteristics where “regardless of one’s sex category, the possession of erotic desire for the feminine object is constructed as masculine and being the object of masculine desire is feminine” (Schippers, 2007, p. 90). However, key to Schippers’ argument is that certain bodies will embody

*legitimate* gendered identities, whilst others will not. This suggests, for example, that boyfriends' performances of (hetero)romance can be both masculine *and* feminine but that their masculine performances will be privileged and promoted by those around them while their more feminine performances will likely be stigmatised as illegitimate and deviant.

Schippers' (2007) conceptual mapping of how masculinity and femininity relate to male and female bodies provides my research with a foundation for exploring how the qualities associated with masculinity *and femininity* shape how young men make sense of being boyfriends. I will first establish from young men's talk what they think boyfriends should be entitled to do within their (hetero)romantic relationships with women and in particular, how they articulate *difference, complementarity, ascendancy and dominance* when speaking about these entitlements. Then, I will reflect on the possible rewards young men receive when they endorse these legitimate and therefore *masculine* ways of dominating girlfriends. In doing so, I will also ascertain how young men speak about those who fail to carry out these masculine ways of being boyfriends. Here, I will analyse how these failings are framed as *feminine* and therefore illegitimate ways for boyfriends to act in their (hetero)romantic relationships.

### The hegemonic ordering of gendered identities

Schippers (2007, p. 85) develops her argument by reconsidering hegemonic masculinity through the lens of "recovering the feminine Other". In doing so, she introduces a collection of relational configurations – hegemonic femininity, pariah femininities and male femininities – to explain her position. Schippers (2007, p. 94) redefines the various "configurations of masculinity and femininity" to *critically question* how men and women embody gendered identities. As I will soon outline, this emphasis on the relational configuration of gendered identities has served as the springboard for my development of a phrase I use throughout my research – the *hegemonic ordering of gendered identities*. I use this phrase to denote how identities are not only shaped by gender hegemony, but are also assigned a place within this gender order.

By incorporating an attention to difference, complementarity, ascendancy and dominance, Schippers (2007, p. 94) argues that hegemonic masculinity can be considered "the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women". As Schippers (2007) explains, hegemonic masculinity includes

various qualities like men embodying physical strength, being authoritative, and able to be violent in conflict-based situations.

I want to ascertain the qualities of hegemonic masculinity present in young men's dispositions about *how* to be boyfriends. In turn, I want to also consider how the dominant positioning of hegemonic masculinity enables them to vocalise these dispositions. These moments will allow me to glean how young men think boyfriends *should* act – actions which produce and sustain male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. I also want to look specifically at how their talk that endorses oppressive ways of being boyfriends allows them to enact current arrangements of hegemonic masculinity. My principal use of focus groups adds to this inquiry by showcasing how public talk amongst young men about (hetero)romance is profoundly involved in and influenced by the drive to appear hegemonically masculine in front of other young men.

By examining young men's talk I also want to ascertain how they think young women *should* act as girlfriends. Schippers' (2007) controversial yet significant definition of hegemonic femininity is meaningful for analysing these moments of young men's talk. Again, her attention to difference, complementarity, ascendancy and dominance comes into play as she (2007, p. 94) defines hegemonic femininity as the qualities “defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women”. These qualities include physical weakness, defencelessness, passivity and being unable to use violence effectively in conflict-based situations. With specific reference to (hetero)romantic relationships, these qualities work to naturalise women's roles as being submissive to men and “compliant” (Schippers, 2007, p. 90).

Schippers' (2007) theoretical work around hegemonic femininity is courageous in light of the argument that there cannot be such a configuration in relation to hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), femininity as subordinate within the system of hegemonic masculinity cannot take on a hegemonic status. Schippers (2007, p. 94), however, provides a convincing rationale:

Although the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity is one of ascendancy for the masculine and for men, there is, I argue, an ascendancy of hegemonic femininity over other femininities to serve the interests of the gender order and male domination.

Femininity is hegemonic when it serves the ascendant order of hegemonic masculinity. In turn, the hegemonic function of this version of femininity regulates other femininities that threaten this ascendant order, for example femininities performed by female bodies that appear masculine and feminine practices that are enacted by male bodies. Hegemonic femininity provides my research with a unique conceptual platform for analysing what these qualities, when embodied by girlfriends, *look like* to young men and what this says about the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work in young people's lives today. This concept also enables me to analyse those qualities in a girlfriend that young men articulate as *undesirable*, because they fail to conform to the hegemonic version of how to be "womanly" (Schippers, 2007, p. 93) and therefore threaten the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity.

While Schippers (2007) does not conflate masculine practices with men and feminine practices with women, she explicitly states that the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity is restricted to *certain* bodies. As she (2007, p. 94) maintains,

If hegemonic gender relations depend on the symbolic construction of desire for the feminine object, physical strength, and authority as the characteristics that differentiate men from women *and* define and legitimate their superiority and social dominance over women, then these characteristics must remain unavailable to women.

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore assigned the exclusive rights to qualities *when embodied by men* that establish and legitimate men's dominance over women. This definition replaces the need for a theory of complicit masculinities (Connell, 2005). Instead of an emphasis on an aspirational hegemonic masculinity that is unattainable, Schippers' hegemonic masculinity reads more as an everyday achievement. In turn, hegemonic femininity is given exclusive rights to the qualities that *when embodied by women* "establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 94). Within my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7) I will locate what these qualities of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity at work within (hetero)romantic relationships look like to young men and what impact these qualities may have on how young men make sense of and endorse boyfriends being oppressive towards their girlfriends.



Certainly, boyfriends and girlfriends can perform gender within their (hetero)romantic relationships that look very different from hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity.<sup>5</sup> For my research, I want to ascertain through young men's talk, what these performances might look like and how this may impact young people's gendered identities. Schippers (2007, p. 96) argues that "it is cultural insurance for male dominance that anybody who enacts or embodies hegemonic qualities that do not align with their gender category is stigmatized as problematic and feminine". For example, when boyfriends are not authoritative within their (hetero)romantic relationships they may be seen by other young men and women to be weak and submissive. This suggests that women who enact characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and men who enact characteristics of hegemonic femininity are likely to be stigmatised in some way.

### Contaminating the hegemonic order of gendered identities

With specific reference to legitimacy, Schippers (2007, p. 96) carefully argues that femininity "is always and already inferior and undesirable when compared to masculinity", which therefore positions masculinity as "always superior" and never to be "conflated with something undesirable". With this understanding, legitimate – and therefore hegemonic – ways for men to act can *also* be succinctly labelled "masculine". As Schippers (2007, p. 96, *my emphasis*) adds, "This means that there are no *masculine* characteristics that are stigmatized as contaminating or as subordinate". This is prefaced by Schippers' argument around illegitimacy. When women attempt to act in similar ways to 'masculine' men, they are not constituted as masculine and therefore legitimate, but rather as threatening gender hegemony. Because of this, these become defined as enactments of pariah femininity and cast as illegitimate as a result. Similarly, when men appear effeminate, they are not – as Connell (2005) would suggest – enacting a subordinate masculinity, but rather stigmatised as *feminine* because of the threat these feminine performances pose to the workings of the hegemonic order that genders identities.

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<sup>5</sup> Schippers' (2007) framework does briefly articulate that not all "features of femininity and masculinity...are central to forming and legitimating a hierarchical relationship between men and women" (p. 97). These gendered performances, as a result, are "neither particularly feminizing nor stigmatizing" (p. 97) which can be useful when speaking of gendered performances that do not feed into the operations of gender hegemony. For the purpose of my research however, I am most interested in those performances of gender that do feed directly into the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities.

Schippers (2007) argues that when women's gendered performances are not characteristic of hegemonic femininity they embody socially defined versions of *pariah femininities*. Within the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities, men are idealised for possessing qualities like being sexually assertive, desiring the "feminine Other" (Schippers, 2007, p. 86) and being authoritative. Yet, when women possess these qualities they are often labelled "slut", "lesbian"/"dyke" and "bitch". These derogatory labels are used to restrict access to these masculine qualities because of the threat their display by females poses to the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. It is here that Schippers (2007, p. 95) argues *against* labels like "subordinate femininities". Pariah characteristics are not so much about women embodying inferior qualities, as about women "contaminating the relationship between masculinity and femininity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 95) through their enactment of masculinity and their embodiment of masculine qualities. Within my research, I want to locate moments in young men's talk when the pariah-girlfriend is referenced (see Chapter 7) and then analyse how their pariah-talk works to contain these parts of young women's gendered identities in order to secure the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity.

*Male femininities*, like pariah femininities, are other gendered configurations that Schippers (2007) argues are heavily stigmatised within the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. Yet, Schippers (2007, p. 96) is careful to move away from an overly simplistic view of male femininities, as men doing femininity, to a more focused account of male femininities as "the characteristics and practices that are culturally ascribed to women, do the cultural work of situating the feminine in a complementary, hierarchical relationship with the masculine and are embodied by men". Male femininities are thus performances of hegemonic femininity but enacted by males, for example, being compliant, defenceless and physically weak. In similar ways to pariah femininities, these embodiments of hegemonic femininities by male bodies are "culturally defined as contaminating" (Schippers, 2007, p. 96), as they threaten the scaffolding that places hegemonic masculinity as dominant. Like pariah femininities, then, male femininities do not adhere to the principles of difference, complementarity, ascendancy and dominance that work to privilege hegemonic masculinity within the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. For my research, I want to interrogate the ways and reasons why young men's talk stigmatises other young men who are perceived as *taking on* hegemonic feminine qualities within their (hetero)romantic relationships. I also will consider how their own talk may be shaped by a fear of being associated with male femininity.

Schippers' (2007) conceptual work around pariah femininities and male femininities also speaks directly to the constitution of hegemonic femininity. Unlike pariah femininities and male femininities, hegemonic femininity, although a feminised arrangement, is *not* cast as undesirable when embodied by women. This is because it is *complementary to* hegemonic masculinity and contributes to the “cultural insurance for male dominance” (Schippers, 2007, p. 96). Pariah femininities and male femininities, on the other hand, are subordinate to hegemonic femininity and cast as undesirable and contaminating to gender hegemony because they threaten the ascendant position of hegemonic masculinity. For example, when men show a sexual desire for other men, the “assumed naturalized, complementary desire between men and women” is unsettled (Schippers, 2007, p. 96). These definitions enable me to examine young men's talk for clues as to how *they* make sense of these gendered performances, and especially how these understandings shape their views and ability to talk about (hetero)romance.

### Bourdieu, habitus and fields

My research takes the position that gendered identities are hegemonically ordered within and through practice. However, until now, I have been unable to explicate the intricacies<sup>6</sup> of what practice is using Schippers' (2007) framework alone. I propose that Lisa Adkins' (2002, 2004) work provides the conceptual basis for achieving this goal. Adkins' conceptual understanding of practice is unique. Whilst she mobilises a feminist Bourdieusian framework to define what practice is, she works it back into a sophisticated critique of Bourdieu's theory of mimesis to tease out the more subtle reaches *and limits* of gender in people's lives. Her conceptual approach enables me to explore these subtle reaches of the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities present within the gendered practice of young men's dispositions that endorse boyfriends being oppressive towards their girlfriends, whilst also acknowledging the possibilities of dismantling the gendered norms that inform these dispositions.

Adkins' (2004) work sits alongside other feminist scholars who have been drawn to Bourdieu's theoretical framework as a way to talk about the relationship between gender and power (LaBerge, 1995; Lovell, 2000; McCall, 1992; McLeod, 2005; McNay, 1999; Moi, 1991;

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<sup>6</sup> Schippers (2007, p. 92) briefly defines 'practice' within her framework, as “the *mechanism* by which masculinities and femininities, as part of a vast network of gender meanings, come to organize social life” (*emphasis in original*).

Skeggs, 2004). Adkins' (2004) conceptual work, however, is unique. She (2004, p. 207) argues that Bourdieu's principal shortcoming is that:

He has to abandon his understanding of practice and resort to a more problematic sociological understanding of action (as conscious, cognitive and disembodied involving a system of concepts, perceptions, values and beliefs) when he wants to talk about social transformation.

Adkins therefore remains indebted to Bourdieu's understanding of practice, whilst providing a convincing critique of how he works with the concepts of *habitus* and *field*. Adkins (2004) remedies these conceptual inconsistencies around habitus and field by innovatively returning to Bourdieu's notion of practice. In doing so, she provides her readers with *new* ways to work with habitus and field that account for possibilities of "gender detraditionalisation" (Adkins, 2004, p. 191).

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a French philosopher whose conceptual contributions around objective power, identity construction and social practice are renowned (Fowler, 1997). Bourdieu's social theory is celebrated for providing an innovative bridge between objectivist and subjectivist theory, which he achieved principally by introducing the concepts of habitus and field to social theory (see Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As Adkins (2004, p. 193) explains, "Bourdieu understands the social world to comprise of differentiating, but overlapping fields of action" that he often likens to "games" (for an example, see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98), which are "patterned system[s] of objective forces... which impose on all the objects and agents who enter it" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 17).

A particular field that I interrogate in my research is the field of (hetero)romantic relationships. Specifically, I am interested in how young men make sense of this field and I seek to garner this knowledge through analysing young men's talk. Only a few studies have examined these intimate relationships as fields (Powell, 2008; see also Illouz, 2012 for a fleeting reference to the erotic field). To date, there are no empirical studies that have explored *young people's* engagement with (hetero)romantic fields. My research endeavours to do this work. Conceptualising these relationships as fields provides me with ways of examining young men's talk for clues as to the structural components that organise these sites and enable male oppression (see Chapters 5 to 7) to be carried out. In more general terms however, (hetero)romantic relationships play a significant role in social life, especially by perpetuating

gendered roles based on male dominance and female subservience. Examining young men's talk about (hetero)romance may shed light on how young men move throughout this field into adulthood, in turn stabilising how these gendered roles often play out within intimate partnerships.

Bourdieu also speaks of a "field of power": a "chiasmatic structure" that is "not situated on the same level as other fields", yet "encompasses them in part" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). I argue that this complements my conceptual work around the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, this hegemonic order provides a scaffolding which forms a "hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 94). It is therefore complementary to argue that this hegemonic scaffolding works as a field of power that encompasses various fields that young men make sense of and interact with including (hetero)romantic relationships. In my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7), I will evaluate how the hegemonic order of gendered identities, as a type of "chiasmatic structure" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18), enables young men to talk in ways that endorse male oppression within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships.

Fields are also defined as sites of struggle (Grenfell, 2004) over what Bourdieu calls 'capital'. Capital in Bourdieusian terms is any "resource that is the object of struggle within fields and which functions as a social relation of power" (Coles, 2009, p. 36). As Webb et al. (2002, p. 23) explain, "the amount of power a person has within a field depends on that person's position within the field and the amount of capital she or he possesses". I see a complementarity between Bourdieu's understanding of *capital* and Schippers' (2007) usage of the term *quality content*. Both signal resources that when embodied by certain actors, give them status. In order to make my analysis (see Chapters 5 to 7) succinct however, I will forego labelling capital within my evaluation of the data gathered. Instead, in keeping with my earlier examination of Schippers' (2007) work, I will speak about these resources as *hegemonic qualities* that young men feel enable boyfriends to access positions of masculine status (within given fields).

The structuring effects of fields can be further explained by Bourdieu's unique theorisation of 'habitus'. Habitus is the subjective realm of Bourdieu's theory. It points to the internalisation of objective structures (fields) that enter "into people's bodies and become[s] their identity" (Joas & Knob, 2011, p. 24). Bourdieu (1984, p. 466) maintains that habitus "instils a sense of place" within individuals, working as "a system of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53) that exist in "dynamic relations" to fields (Messner, 2000, p. 459).

Habitus creates an “internal law” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54) from which individuals act out life, that in turn work to constitute their gendered identities. As Webb et al. (2002) explain, “We are disposed towards certain attitudes, values or ways of behaving because of the influence exerted by our cultural trajectories” (p. 38). Habitus therefore becomes “the totality of generated dispositions acquired through practical experiences in the field” (Moi, 1991, p. 1021), which marks certain dispositions as possible (or what I termed earlier as “legitimate”) and others as impossible (or “illegitimate”).

Bourdieu (1990) argues that habitus is both generating and generative. On the one hand, habitus internalises the objective conditions of fields, *generating* “all the reasonable, common sense behaviours (and only those) which are possible within the limits of these regularities and which are likely to be sanctioned” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 55). On the other hand, Bourdieu argues that habitus is *generative*: “...not a uniformly imposed and fixed way of being, but a generative structure, formed in a dynamic relationship with the field” (McLeod, 2005, p. 13). Therefore, each field “generates its own specific habitus” (Moi, 1991, p. 1021) that is made up of a system of dispositions. Yet the habitus forms part of the field, in that “it endows [the field] with meaning, with ‘sense and value’” (McNay, 1999, p. 100). For Bourdieu, this means that for a field to function effectively, “there must be stakes, and people ready to play the game” and importantly, people “equipped with the habitus which enables them to know and recognise the immanent laws of the game, the stakes and so on” (Bourdieu in Moi, 1991, p. 1021). These know-hows tend to be pre-reflexive – having what Bourdieu often calls a “*feel for the game*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128) – that enables people to move throughout various fields in their social world.

In light of these various features, Bourdieu considers habitus to be a “socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 126) where individuals “are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 107). Here, he (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) explains this relationship between the social and subjectivity:

Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside agents. And when habitus encounters a social world, of which it is a product, it is like a “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted.

It has therefore been argued (Adkins, 2002; 2004; Lovell, 2000; McNay, 1999) that Bourdieu's notion of habitus – a subjectivity that incorporates “the social into the corporeal” (McNay, 1999, p. 99) – remedies more voluntaristic versions of subjectivity. For example, while the Foucauldian subject is produced in each new ‘discursive act’ (Davies, 1990), the subject within Bourdieu's notion of habitus has a durability that “produces enduring (although not entirely fixed) orientations to action” (Adkins, 2004, p. 193).

Bourdieu, however, has been criticised for how he understands gender within his conceptualisation of subjectivity. On the whole, feminist scholars have argued that Bourdieu's understanding of gender is overly simplistic and over-emphasises “a durability to gender norms” (McLeod, 2005, p. 21), showing the influence of his time researching in Kabyle – a highly traditional society distant from Western societies. As McNay (1999, p. 107) argues, he “significantly under-estimates the ambiguities and dissonances that exist in the way that men and women occupy masculine and feminine positions”. This is echoed by a number of feminists (Adkins, 2004; LaBerge, 1995; Lovell, 2000; McCall, 1992; McLeod, 2005; McNay, 1999; Moi, 1991; Skeggs, 2004) who have reworked Bourdieu's notion of habitus to account for “the complex process of construction of (multiple) gender identities” (Laberge, 1995, p. 144; see also McCall, 1992).

It is through this area of Bourdieu's conceptual work that I can make more sense of how young men are able *take up* masculine speaking positions that openly endorse oppressive ways for boyfriends to act. In other words, I am interested in how young men's “*feel for the game*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128) of (hetero)romance shapes their dispositions about being boyfriends. This approach also enables me to build on Schippers' (2007) contributions. While her conceptual work allows me to look at how the hegemonic structure that orders gender influences how young men *think* about gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships, habitus allows me to extend this to analyse their talk for clues to how their gendered identities are in *development*. Because of this understanding I will use the term “*gendered identity*” exclusively throughout my research instead of the much used “gender identity” which is more suggestive of a static identity.

Even though “individuals occupying similar positions within a field are likely to be endowed with a similar habitus” (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003, p. 441), it is too simplistic to argue that they share *identical* habitus (Moi, 1991). As Moi (1991, p. 1022, *emphasis in original, my emphasis added*) explains:

In the very act of engaging in battle, they mutually and silently demonstrate their recognition of the rules of the game. It does not follow, as far as I can see, that they will all play the game *in the same way*. The different positions of different players in the field will require different strategies. To the extent that different agents have different social backgrounds...their habitus cannot be identical.

Understanding this conceptual distinction is important for my research. I am interested in analysing the similar understandings that young men share about what boyfriends should be entitled to do within their (hetero)romantic relationships with women. Specifically, I want to ascertain in my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7) which of these understandings point to their endorsement of male oppression and how the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities enables young men to hold such dispositions and then vocalise them through talk. I am also interested to explore any moments in young men's talk that point to differences between their individual habitus. In particular, I want to determine if these incongruences signal fragilities in how the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities enables young men to take on unethical dispositions about being boyfriends.

Integral to Bourdieu's theorisation of habitus is his understanding of practice; as he explains, habitus is always "constituted in moments of practice" (Webb, 2002, p. 38). For Bourdieu, practice has many forms including "competencies, know-how, dispositions, perceptions" (Adkins, 2004, p. 194). In keeping with his theorising of habitus, Bourdieu's understanding is that practices "operate below the level of consciousness and language through a 'feel for the game'" (Adkins, 2004, p. 194). Bourdieu's treatment of practice, Adkins (2004) explains, is complex and layered, signalling his interest in the unconscious and pre-reflexive elements of practice, which involves "the ability to function effectively within a given field, an ability which cannot necessarily be articulated as conscious knowledge: knowing how rather than knowing that" (Lovell, 2000, p. 12). As Yancey Martin (2003) adds, "I agree with Bourdieu that practice is rarely guided by reflection...practices are done quickly; they are directional and temporal. People routinely shoot from the hip, act rashly, and speak without thinking" (p. 356). This approach to defining practice is, Adkins (2004) argues, robust and convincing because it honours the more nuanced understanding of practice as pre-reflexively taken up by agents.

I position my own work within this framework of Bourdieusian practice theory. It is here that I find Yancey Martin's (2003) explanations of gendered practice versus practicing gender helpful in defining what practice *looks like* within my own research. The data I have to work



with is located within young men's talk, which in turn is mostly situated within a male-to-male group setting. From this talk I hope to capture evidence of gendered practices – “activities that are available” to young men (Yancey Martin, 2003, p, 354) that speak to how their habitus is constituted. However, within my research, I need to articulate clearly that these practices are in the form of dispositions exposed when young men talk. As outlined in Chapter 1, I did not see young men engage in *actual* boyfriend ‘practices’, but what I did witness was their sense makings of how to be boyfriends and what they think boyfriends should be entitled to do within (hetero)romantic relationships with women. Therefore, when I speak of and analyse ‘practice’ within this thesis, it is specifically the dispositions embedded in talk that will be the focus. Of course I will also speak of many references in young men's talk that can be defined as ‘practices’ – for example, the practice of paternalism – but for clarity, I will not speak of these as ‘practice’ as my methodology did not enable me to see these things *in action*. Instead I saw young men talking, and within their dialogues with me and their peers, dispositions – as practice – emerged.

Therefore, in keeping with Yancey Martin's (Yancey Martin, 2003, p, 354) definition of gendered practices, “the activities available” to young men in my study that I gathered and analysed were vocalisations of their dispositions. My analysis also hopes to capture young men practicing gender in a group setting. As Yancey Martin (2003) explains, practicing gender is the act itself, “the doing, displaying, asserting, narrating, performing, mobilizing, manoeuvring” (p. 354). I aim to capture moments when young men within a group setting *perform* (see Butler, 1990) masculinities (and femininities: Schippers, 2007) by talking about (hetero)romance and being boyfriends. I understand these performances of gender to be carried out pre-reflexively, following Adkins' (2004, p. 194) position that “for the most part players will not be aware of the constitutive role of their actions in terms of the field of action in which they operate” (p. 194; see also Yancey Martin, 2001). In turn, these performances have a constitutive role in how their habitus or the “feel for the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128) of (hetero)romance is cultivated.

### Mimesis, ambivalence and accounting for change

It is at this point – as I think through the possibilities for social change – Adkins' (2004) critical engagement with Bourdieu's work presents significant conceptual advances for my research. Like other feminists (see McLeod, 2005; McNay, 1999), Adkins (2004) argues that Bourdieu's

theorising of habitus and field presents a problematic dualism when it comes to accounting for social transformation. Even though Bourdieu acknowledges that habitus can be *generative*, Adkins (2004, p. 206) claims that Bourdieu nonetheless “assumes a mimetic relation between field and habitus”, where the habitus will always “adapt to the field” (p. 207). According to Adkins, this position is most problematic when Bourdieu attempts to then account for social transformation. Adkins (2004, p. 196) explains how Bourdieu rests on an unconvincing theory of critical reflexivity – what he often terms as an “awakening of consciousness” (for example, see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133) – that is at odds with his more rigorous work around pre-reflexive practice.

In order to account for social transformation Adkins (2004, p. 207) asserts that Bourdieu has to “abandon his understanding of practice and resort to a more problematic sociological understanding of action”. For Bourdieu, reflexivity is a “transforming practice” which “enables us to escape such delusions by uncovering the social at the heart of the individual, the impersonal beneath the intimate, the universal buried deep within the most particular” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 44). In this way, reflexivity is not “an objective, cognitive reflection on structure”, but an “uncovering” of the “unthought” of our practical sense (Adkins, 2004, p. 194) that he likens to an “awakening”.

It is here that Bourdieu’s treatment of habitus and field resurfaces. On the whole, Bourdieu argues that the habitus submits to the field and in this way, he maintains, the incorporation of norms and thus mimesis “work” (Adkins, 2004, p. 207). To speak of change, Bourdieu must therefore break away from his theory of practice, as pre-reflexive and pre-cognitive, to account for moments when norms can be challenged by individuals within the social world (Adkins, 2004). This, Adkins (2004) argues, is too stark a contradiction and results from Bourdieu’s determinist view of habitus being incompatible with his privileging of reflexivity.

From here, Adkins’ amendment is robust and convincing, providing my research with an innovative way to account for how young men’s privileging of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships could be disrupted. As Adkins (2004, p. 206) explains, scholars (see McNay, 1999) who have attempted to correct this inconsistency in Bourdieu’s theory have tended to turn to “a stronger account of social change”. Adkins (2004) disagrees with this pursuit and instead engages with a Butlerian understanding of mimesis, whilst detaching from Bourdieu’s notion of reflexivity as a transforming practice. She replaces Bourdieu’s account of social change with an understanding of gender detraditionalisation *as located within the pre-*

reflexive realm of practice. In doing this, Adkins (2004, p. 206) returns innovatively to Bourdieu's theory of practice, connecting it with a logic of ambivalence as located within "the very heart of mimesis".

To begin, Adkins (2004, p. 204) argues that we need to move away from examining reflexivity as connected to "a thinking consciousness". Instead she argues, with specific reference to gender, reflexivity needs to be seen as more habituated, as more a part of everyday practices: "In separating out critical reflexivity from more habituated form of action, such analyses may be greatly underestimating the ways in which reflexivity is part of everyday habit and hence overestimating the possibilities for gender detraditionalisation in late modernity" (Adkins, 2004, p. 204).

Adkins maintains therefore that reflexivity is not necessarily the "awakening of consciousness" that Bourdieu proclaims. Her evaluation takes a deeper overview and argues that "reflexive practices may be said to be so habituated that they are part of the very norms, rules and expectations that govern gender in late modernity, even as they may ostensibly appear to challenge these very notions" (p. 204). In this way, she (2002, 2004) claims that reflexivity resulting in 'gender detraditionalisation' has been *over-estimated* by scholars (like McNay, 1999) and instead argues that a more complex interpretation of critical reflexivity is needed.

For Adkins (2004, p. 203), reflexivity is actually "tied into new arrangements of gender" that are more likely to rework existing power relations. This has significance for my research: I want to be able to fully interrogate young men's talk and *not* just take it on face-value. For example, if there are moments when young men *appear* to be critical of certain acts of male oppression or appear to resist another's endorsements of such oppressions, I want to be able to question whether these moments really do represent an interruption of the hegemonic ordering of gender or whether these moments are in fact more subtle and rehabilitated forms of male oppression (see Chapters 5 to 7).

By abandoning Bourdieu's idea that critical reflexivity brings about change, Adkins engages with Butler's (1996) critique of Bourdieu to account for the different ways in which 'gender detraditionalisation' *could* come about. Butler (1996, p. 35) argues that a key downfall in Bourdieu's conceptual work is his argument that "practical mimeticism for the most part *works*". As Butler (1996, p. 34) maintains:

This mutually formative relation between habitus and field however, is occluded by the dramatic trope that figures their relation as an ‘encounter’ or epistemological ‘event’. This staging of the relation presumes that the habitus must be adjusted by the field and that an external relation between them will be traversed through the action by which the habitus submits to the rules of the field, thus becoming refashioned in order to become “congruent” or “compatible”.

Further, Butler (1996, p. 34) argues, Bourdieu’s attempt to bridge the subjectivist/objectivist divide falls short as it “runs the risk of enshrining the social field as an inalterable positivity”, which ultimately cancels out the possibility of the field being fashioned by the habitus. This ensures that “the question of ambivalence at the core of practical mimeticism...is left unaddressed” (Butler, 1996, p. 35). According to Butler, it is at the core of mimesis where ambivalences play important roles in potentially interrupting hegemonically gendered norms.

Gender is, in Butlerian terms, “an endless repetition of itself, a compulsive production or mimicry of its impossible” (Bell, 1996, p. 89). Gender in this case “is a norm that can never be fully internalised, [gendered roles are] phantasmatic, impossible to embody” (Butler, 1990, p. 179). In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler again stresses that “the addressee never quite inhabits the ideal/s s/he is compelled to approximate” (p. 231). Therefore, for Butler, mimesis is dynamic and precarious. This conceptual direction will enable me to look for precarious moments within the dispositions exposed within young men’s talk and to work with these moments as possible breaks within young men’s internalising of the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. Within my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7) I hope to empirically present these moments in ways that point to the possibilities of interrupting this hegemonic order as it plays out in young men’s understandings of being boyfriends.

For Adkins (2004), this understanding of mimesis provides a more plausible way to speak of the possibilities of interrupting gendered norms. It is within this understanding of mimesis that she (2004) returns to Bourdieu’s theory of practice. Adkins therefore reinvigorates Bourdieu’s ontology to argue that it is within the *internal* taking up of gendered norms by individuals, as part of the cultivation of their habitus that moments of instability – through ambivalence – arise. Adkins relies on Bourdieu’s notion of practice as pre-reflexive and unconscious to illustrate *how* these norms are taken up by individuals. This process is based on what Adkins (2004, p. 206) calls a “logic of iteration” (p. 206) whereby the taking up of norms becomes a product of temporal performances, always adapting and accommodating to the moment. This

logic, she (2004, p. 206) argues, “explains both how and why possibilities of instability, ambivalence and interruptability are at the core of mimesis and ambivalence”.

Adkins (2004) then asserts that because norms are never fully incorporated (thus making the ideal unattainable), ambivalence is at the very core of mimesis (as pre-reflexive) and creates possibilities for “gender detraditionalisation” (Adkins, 2004, p. 191). In this way, change is not conceptualised as external, but rather “internal to the operation of norms themselves” (Adkins, 2004, p. 206). Adkins (2004, p. 207) gives the example of Bhabha’s 1994 study of colonised subjects in British colonies who did not simply learn to adapt and mimic the norms of the colonial power, but instead took up these norms in more “ambiguous” and ambivalent ways.

In relation to the dispositions young men hold about being boyfriends, this is a valuable conceptual tool. By looking at how young men talk about how they think boyfriends *should* be able to act, there is a possibility of locating important moments of contradiction – what Jackson and Salisbury (1996, p. 107) call the “cracks and fissures” with their internal grapplings with masculinity. Here, I wish to locate ambivalences at the very “heart” (Adkins, 2004, p. 206) of young men’s dispositions, that point to a movement away from their validations of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. Within my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7), I will endeavour to locate these internal moments – however subtle they may be – within young men’s talk, to suggest where the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities that make their oppressive dispositions possible *could* be disrupted through avenues like targeted prevention programmes (see Chapter 8)

Overall, my empirical work with young men (as presented in my data chapters) hopes to benefit from this conceptual work by Adkins (2004, p. 206) by locating moments of instabilities in young men’s dispositions embedded in their talk that could speak to this internal and precarious engagement within “the operation of [gendered] norms themselves”. This analysis however, still enables me to work with conceptual tools like habitus and field within my research. Habitus and field are useful in locating how young men internalise and grapple with objective structures in their lives. Throughout each of my data chapters I will reflect on young men’s habitus as comprising “system[s] of durable, transposable dispositions” which give them a “*feel for the game*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128). (Hetero)romantic relationships will be the main field of inquiry, operating, I will argue, as objective sites of power that young men internalise. However, by connecting with Adkins’ (2004) critique, I will understand the relationship between young men’s habitus and their engagement with the field of

(hetero)romantic relationships to be marked more by a precariousness between gender and mimesis rather than Bourdieu's less robust evaluation that the incorporation of norms "work[s]" (Adkins, 2004, p. 207).

## In conclusion

With this weaving together of scholarship by Schippers (2007), Adkins (2002; 2004) and Bourdieu (1990; 1992), I offer a conceptual framework that allows me to expose the ways the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities plays out in young men's talk about being boyfriends. This work aims to explore how young men's gendered identities are constituted within habitus, a "socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 126) that is *in development* as young men interact within various fields of interaction in their lives. By adopting Adkins (2004) theory of ambivalence however, I aim to expose how young men's talk holds clues for how this constitution is not fixed but instead inherently unstable, signalling moments when young men's thinking that endorses male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships could be destabilised. Therefore, instead of seeing young men's habitus as simply submissive to fields, I hope to offer a more complex understanding of how young men's taking up of oppressive understandings of (hetero)romance can be precarious and open to change.

# CHAPTER 3

## Young men, male oppression and (hetero)romance: A literature review

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The documentation and analysis of men's use of oppression towards their (hetero)romantic partners has a long tradition within feminist scholarship. This work has exposed the gendered nature of men's violence within these relationships and how male "oppressive intimacy" (Elizabeth, 2015, p. 26) is embroiled in coercive controlling strategies (for example, isolating partners from friends and family) that subordinate women (for example, Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Enander, 2010; Hearn, 1998; Heberle, 1996; McCarry, 2009; Pagelow, 1981; Schechter, 1982; Stark, 2007; Towns & Adams, 2001; Wood, 2001; Yllo, 1988). As well as exposing these forms of gendered violence and control, feminist scholarship has uncovered how women are often blamed for provoking men's use of violence (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Meyer, 2015; O'Neill, 2000). All of these studies, spanning 40 years, have been pivotal in bringing gender, and in particular normative versions of masculinity, to the forefront of debates around men's ability to use violence and control within their (hetero)romantic relationships with women.

Literature concerning *younger*<sup>7</sup> men and these forms of male oppression has been slower to emerge, but is now an established, albeit smaller, body of work. This literature reveals that normative versions of masculinity are also at the centre of the gendered nature of oppressions exercised by adult men within their (hetero)romantic relationships. Overall, these studies have tended to generate two sets of findings. One set accounts for *why* and *how* young men are oppressive within their (hetero)romantic relationships with young women (for example, Allen, 2007; Flood, 2008; Gilmartin, 2007; Korobov, 2009a; 2009b; 2011; Totten, 2003). The other set of findings looks more indirectly at how young men make sense of and *endorse* male

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<sup>7</sup> Young men within these studies range in ages from secondary-school age to 25 years.

oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships (for example, Doull, Oliffe, Knight, Shoveller, 2013; Flood, 2008; McCarry, 2009; Sundaram, 2013).

From these studies, different bodies of knowledge have emerged that show the interrelation between these forms of gendered oppression and young men's understandings and performances of oppressive versions of masculinity. Whilst the extant literature acknowledges that normative versions of masculinity enable men to subordinate women, they differ significantly in their understanding of what normative masculinities actually are. In this chapter I will analyse how different understandings of normative masculinities produce different insights into how and why young men are able to use and endorse certain oppressive strategies towards women within (hetero)romantic relationships. As part of this discussion I will also critically examine the limitations of these different bodies of knowledge, which relate to how normative masculinity is understood. My aim is to offer a number of ways that my own work could both extend and potentially reshape current thinking. I will argue that there is a fixation on masculinities in the extant literature, which misses opportunities to more critically examine the role femininities – performed by both men and women – play in how young men make sense of male oppression with (hetero)romantic relationships. I will also argue that a Bourdieusian approach to understanding gendered power in (hetero)romantic relationships might add new dimensions to how the relationship between young men's subjectivity, objective power and male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships are understood.

### Essentialising masculinities

There have been many studies conducted over the last two decades that ignore the role normative versions of masculinity play in perpetuating male oppression within young people's (hetero)romantic relationships (some recent examples are: Foshee, Benefield, McNaughton Reyes, Eastman, Vivolo-Kantor, Basile, Ennett, Faris, 2016; Halpern-Meekin, Manning, Banker, Kaestle & Allen, 2010; Thompson & O'Sullivan, 2012). Instead, these studies rely on positivist understandings of gender that fixate on biological and psychological differences between men and women to explain what *dating violence* is and the rates by which it is perpetuated amongst young people (for example, Foshee, Benefield, McNaughton Reyes, Ennett, Faris, Cahng, Hussong & Suchindran, 2013; Halpern-Meekin, et al., 2010). Quantitative methodologies are favoured, with an emphasis on surveys and questionnaires (for example, Giordano, Soto, Manning, & Longmore, 2010; Taylor, Stein, Mumford, Woods,



2013; Zweig, Dank, Yahner, Lachman, 2013) that ask *respondents* what types of oppression they have experienced or implemented without room for them to comment on their own gendered response to these oppressions. These studies lack in-depth gendered analyses of how masculinity shapes and is shaped by these acts of *dating violence* (for example, Giordano et al., 2010).

There have also been a number of recent sex-role studies that define what power looks like in (hetero)romantic relationships. As Connell (2005) articulates, sex-role studies assume men and women fall into two separate groupings: men take on male sex roles; females take on female sex roles. Within the field of social-psychology, scholars have examined sex roles with specific focus on men's use of benevolent paternalism and women's experiences of these protective behaviours (Chapleau, Oswald & Russell, 2007; Cikara, Lee, Fiske & Glick, 2009; Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner & Zhu, 1997; Moya, Glick, Exposito, de Lemus & Hart, 2007; Sarlet, Dumont, Delacollette & Dardenne, 2012). By focusing on sex roles however, these studies present an overly simplistic description of what male (hetero)romantic oppression (in the form of benevolent paternalism) is, how it is practiced and to what effect. What is lacking in this body of work is in-depth, sustained analyses of how oppressive treatments of women, like men using benevolent paternalism, within (hetero)romantic relationships are shaped by gendered systems of power that privilege normative versions of masculinity.

This understanding of a normative "standard" of masculinity has been pivotal to critiquing these essentialist and superficial treatments of gender (Connell, 2005, p. 70). As Connell (2005, 69-70, *emphasis in original*) argues:

If we spoke only of differences between men as a bloc and women as a bloc, we would not need the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' at all. We could speak of 'men's' and 'women's', 'male' and 'female'. The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' point beyond categorical sex difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender. *Normative* definitions recognize these differences and offer a standard: masculinity is what men ought to be based on.

By understanding masculinity as normative, scholarship has been able to explore these more ontologically rich questions about how young men's taking up and support of normative versions of masculinity enable male oppression to be perpetuated within (hetero)romantic relationships.

## Towards a feminist sociology of masculinity<sup>s</sup>

The most well-known theory of normative masculinity is Connell's (1987; 1992; 1995; 2005) conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity. As outlined in Chapter 2 (page 16), Connell's feminist sociological framework was ground-breaking in introducing the notion of plural masculinities into scholarly discussions about gender. Instead of men engaging in masculine practices, Connell argues that *various* masculine practices that exist within four relational configurations of masculinities – hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, marginalised masculinity and subordinated masculinity – are available for men to take up. Hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of masculine practices that boys and men most *want* to emulate, and is therefore normative (based on qualities such as toughness, embodied strength and courageousness). Paradoxically, and central to Connell's model, hegemonic masculinity is largely unattainable by most men.

This understanding of hegemonic masculinity has been taken up by a range of scholars to explain why young men (and women) endorse male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships (Doull, Oliffe, Knight & Shoveller, 2013; McCarry, 2009; McCarry 2010; McCarry & Lombard, 2016; Sundaram, 2013), and how young men take up these forms of oppression within their (hetero)romantic relationships with young women (Gilmartin, 2007).

This literature argues that oppressive strategies used by men within (hetero)romantic relationships (like violence and control) *become* normalised and thus accepted within society because they adhere to the main principles of hegemonic masculinity: the cornerstone being that “men [must] have more power than women” (McCarry, 2009, p. 341). For example, even though young people can give cursory acknowledgment that men's use of physical violence towards their (hetero)romantic partners is wrong, they tend to have prevailing “homogenised views” (McCarry, 2009; p. 343) that these treatments of women are both normal and acceptable for a variety of reasons (McCarry, 2009, 2010; Sundaram, 2013). Firstly, boyfriends being violent and controlling is accepted because men are considered naturally predisposed to violence and aggression (McCarry, 2009, 2010; Sundaram, 2013). Secondly, men's violence towards women is common, therefore men are able to “get away with it” (McCarry, 2009, p. 337). Finally, men are more physically and emotionally powerful than women making it logical

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<sup>s</sup> Attributed to Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 335

that *they* subvert their female partners, not the other way round. This latter view, in turn, constructs women's oppression of men as abnormal and unacceptable (McCarry, 2009).

While these studies speak to “currently accepted” (Connell, 2005, p. 77) versions of hegemonic masculinity (predicated on men being dominant, aggressive and physically strong), there is also commentary on the subtle workings of complicit masculinity. Because hegemonic masculinity is largely unattainable, Connell (2005) proposes that a larger configuration of complicit practices are available for men to take up. For example, being a rugby fan (complicit), instead of trying to become an All Black<sup>9</sup> (arguably a hegemonic practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand). These complicit practices are enticing for men because of the “patriarchal dividend” they earn as a result (Connell, 2005, p. 79). This dividend encompasses “the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women...without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy” (Connell, 2005, p. 79). It is suggested when young men *endorse* male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships, they show their complicity with hegemonic masculinity, and receive a patriarchal dividend in return. For example, Gilmartin (2007) found that young men distance themselves from showing any romantic investment in their girlfriends when talking with their male peers. These distancing strategies are complicit practices that subordinate young women by positioning them as *not important enough* to prioritise (this notion will be expanded in relation to homosocial desire discussed shortly).

The main contribution of this body of knowledge has been connecting young men's (and women's) ubiquitous understandings of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships to hegemonic gender relations that promote male dominance. Women are therefore subordinated by these hegemonic arrangements because men's use of oppression – for example, boyfriends' use of physical violence – are constructed as normal, acceptable and ‘just something’ men do. The hegemonic normalisation of oppressive versions of masculinity also subordinates men who are cast as abnormal when they fail to adopt or endorse these violent and coercive behaviours.

This work however, can be seen as limited because of its overly-simplistic claims about young men's engagement with hegemonic masculinity that fail to penetrate the more complex and contradictory ways that young men grapple with hegemonic notions of masculinity. As such,

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<sup>9</sup> The All Blacks are Aotearoa/New Zealand's national rugby team

a number of studies have looked at subtle ways young men make sense of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships through their understanding of hegemonic masculinity. For example, while young men can endorse hegemonic masculinity by understanding that these forms of male oppression are predicated on men having power over women, they can also position themselves as *not being like those men* (Doull, Oliffe, Knight & Shoveller, 2013). This finding suggests that young men *can* have an “agentic capacity to resist or align with patriarchal expectations about their sexual relationship behaviour” (Doull et al., 2013, p. 335), which replicates what Schippers’ (2002, p. 337) calls “gender manoeuvring”: “Gender manoeuvring refers to individual action or patterns of action developed by a group that manipulate the relationships between masculinity and femininity in ways that impact the larger process of gender structuration”. By viewing young men’s understandings of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships as manoeuvrable, the complexities of what “patriarchal expectations” (Doull et al., 2013, p. 335) look like to young men can be captured. For example, Doull et al. (2013, p. 335) found that young men, through talk, disassociate themselves from men who perpetuate “adverse stereotypical characterisations of power”. These moments of disassociation signal how young men can *float* between endorsing hegemonic masculinity and resisting it, providing a deeper understanding of how contradictions can form in what oppressive versions of masculinity look like to young men.

There are other contradictory ways that young people, in general, grapple with hegemonic notions of masculinity and men’s oppressive treatment of (hetero)romantic partners. Even though young men (*and women*) normalise various forms of male oppression within these relationships by citing hegemonic versions of masculinity based on male aggression, control and dominance, they can simultaneously bypass the notion of hegemonic masculinity by arguing that women cause men to be violent. These ‘victim-blaming’ narratives mostly deal with provocation. Young people have cited the following: “she must have done something wrong”, “he’s been offended”, (Sundaram, 2013, p. 898); “she’s probably done something to hurt him” (Sundaram, 2013, p. 900); “some things do happen on occasion where the woman isn’t really living up to what she is meant to (McCarry, 2009, p. 339) and “depending on how much she has worn him down through annoying him wearing whatever she is wearing, is going to determine the outcome” (McCarry, 2009, p. 340). These narratives successfully exonerate men’s use of violence *and* the part hegemonic masculinity plays in enabling this violence to be used within (hetero)romantic relationships.

Other studies have employed the idea of a hegemonic or hybridised “bloc” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 337) to account for the seemingly *non-hegemonic* ways that young men can take up and endorse forms of male oppression found in (hetero)romantic relationships, like violence and control of women. “Hegemonic bloc” is a term coined by Demetriou (2001, p. 337) in his critique of Connell’s framework. He argues that hegemonic versions of masculinity do not simply consist of ‘dominant’ practices. Instead, “hegemonic blocs” form and appropriate inferior qualities from, what he terms, “subordinated masculinities” (he speaks at length to ‘gay masculinities’) that can be “pragmatically useful and constructive for the project of domination at a particular historical moment” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 345).

For example, in contradiction to claims that young men support hegemonic masculinity by making “romance unimportant” (Gilmartin, 2007, p. 537), Demetriou’s (2001, p. 337) *hegemonic bloc* has been used to explain *how* and *why* young men do invest in their girlfriends, but in complex ways that enable them to elevate their masculine status and subordinate their girlfriends. In this way, young men are able to take on “softer, more sensitive expressions of male sexual subjectivity” (Allen, 2007, p. 147) that enable them to publically appear invested and as ‘good’ boyfriends. However, this feminine appropriation has limits: young men can appear romantically invested as long as it “does not pose a significant disruption to the operation of hegemonic masculinity” (Allen, 2007, p. 149). One way to safeguard this is to ensure that their ways of being romantic are still “infused with” (Allen, 2007, p. 147) hegemonic qualities of an “active male...sexuality” (Allen, 2007, p. 147). Using Demetriou’s critique of hegemonic masculinity provides a more nuanced analysis of *how* young men are able to appear non-hegemonic, whilst subtly stabilising powerful positions within their (hetero)romantic relationships with young women.

These studies (Allen, 2007; Doull et al., 2013; McCarry, 2009; Sundaram, 2013) extend Connell’s thinking by adding new, more subtle dimensions to how men’s oppressive treatment of their (hetero)romantic partners is understood. While I too am interested in how more subtle and complex hegemonic versions of masculinity shape young men’s thinking about how to be boyfriends, the aforementioned studies share a fixation on *masculinities*. There is acknowledgement that young men can take on feminine qualities within their performances as boyfriends (Allen, 2007; Doull et al., 2013), *and* that young men can talk favourably about girlfriends who take on some transgressive performances of femininity (Doull et al., 2013). However, these authors missed the opportunity to explore, more fully, how the social

denigration of femininities shapes the way young men make sense of being boyfriends. By attending to an understanding of gender hegemony (see Chapter 2; Schippers, 2007, p. 86), a more in-depth analysis can take place of how certain male and pariah/female femininities – that threaten hegemonic masculinity – inform how and why young men are able to endorse and use oppressive strategies within their (hetero)romantic relationships. This distinction pays attention to *why* femininities continue to endure subordination, denigration and oppression within this hegemonic order that genders identities (see Chapter 2).

Adding a feminist Bourdieusian (see Chapter 2; Adkins, 2004) focus to this consideration of gender hegemony enables femininities to be analysed further. I understand (hetero)romantic relationships as objective structures – or fields – that are laden with various rules that young men then internalise as they start to make sense of being boyfriends. These rules, I argue (see Chapter 2), are informed by gender hegemony, or what I call the *hegemonic ordering of gendered identities*. Therefore, when men break these rules, they are stigmatised *because* they are performing certain versions of femininity that are transgressive because of the threat they pose to the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity. By taking this stance, my research is able to interrogate how the fear of being associated with femininity shapes how young men talk about being boyfriends in ways that are oppressive to young women. This approach directly exposes how the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity is made possible when young men engage in talk about young women that is oppressive

This conceptual approach then enables me to *reconsider* what hegemonic masculinity looks like within young men’s thinking about being boyfriends, and in particular *how* it is defined by the complex relationships it has with a number of descendant versions of (male, pariah and hegemonic) femininities.

### Considering male homosocial desire

Another way normative masculinities are defined in the extant literature is through analysing male homosociality. There is *some* suggestion (Redman, 2001) that certain young men, as they transition into adulthood, actually sever ties with their homosocial mates to privilege their romantic relationships with young women. Redman (2001, p. 194) argues that young middle-class men in the latter years of high school can develop a “middle-class professional habitus” that privileges individualism over male peer group loyalties, making the more adult pursuit of a committed and long-term romantic relationship desirable. Generally, however, the tenets

from other studies refute this position, arguing instead that young men's homosocial ties strongly promote male-male peer group loyalty and the denigration and subordination of young women (Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2008; 2013a; Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009).

Homosociality is more than just male-male friendships and bonding. Rather, it promotes oppressive versions of masculinity because of its structural characteristics. As Sedgwick (1985, p. 1) famously argued, there is a significant erotic aspect that speaks to the complex interactions *within* homosociality, placing homosocial desire as core to any analysis of homosociality:

Homosocial desire to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. "Homosocial"...describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual" and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from homosexual. In fact, it is applied in such activities as "male bonding" which may, in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw homosociality back into the orbit of "desire" of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of this continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for man, in our society, is radically disrupted....I do not mean to discuss genital homosexual desire at the root of other forms of male homosociality – but rather a strategy for making generalizations about and marking historical differences in the structure of men's relations with other men.

Sedgwick uses the term "desire" instead of less controversial words, such as love, to not only mark an emotion, but a structure that can take many forms. This form of desire is pertinent to my research question: not only do I want to find out how young men make sense of (hetero)romantic relationships, I also want to ascertain how prevalent the 'pull' of homosociality – or homosocial desire – is in *how* young men make sense of being boyfriends and how they in turn vocalise these dispositions.

Whilst some studies have argued that this structure of desire can be predicated on nonhegemonic gendered performances like young men showing each other intimacy, both emotionally (Arxer, 2011) and physically (Hammeren & Johannson, 2014), literature that specifically explores the connection between homosociality and oppressive boyfriend practices has found this structure to *resemble* versions of hegemonic masculinity (Bird, 1996; Kraack, 1999). For example, homosociality is imbued with characteristics like competitiveness,

objectifying women as sexual objects, homophobia and being emotionally detached (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2008).

Firstly, young men's homosociality breeds misogyny by promoting the "primacy of male-male relations" (Flood, 2008, p. 344) that encourages boyfriends to deprioritise their girlfriends. Colloquial terms like "mates before dates" and "bros before hos" encapsulate this homosocial requirement for male-male loyalty, and in turn, persecute homosocial members who break this rule by appearing *too* invested in their girlfriends (Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009). These young men are often labelled "whipped" by their homosocial friends.

Secondly, homosociality encourages young men to view young women as sexual objects (Flood, 2008; see also Barker, 2007). Sexual objectification takes many forms within homosocial interactions. In one way, homosociality is often predicated on sexist banter, which positions young women as the target of jokes and derisive talk. In another way, homosociality breeds "male peer intragroup competition over sexual experiences, surveillance of each other's sexual activities, and encouragement of their pursuit" (Flood, 2008, p. 345). For example, young men are encouraged to tell "sexual stories" (Flood, 2008, p. 353) that not only relay intimate details about the encounter, but are told in ways that *objectify* young women's bodies.

This type of sexual storytelling can also brandish young women with "slut" labels (Flood, 2008; 2013a). For example, Flood (2013a, p. 100) found that young men categorise women into two groups: as "clean" or "unclean". Young men talk about their relationships with "clean" women, whom they discuss positively as "nice-girls": "'normal', 'healthy', 'clean-cut', 'attractive' or 'beautiful'" (Flood, 2013a, p. 101). However, they counter these discussions with pejorative talk about "unclean" (Flood, 2013a, p. 100) women, whom they describe as "unattractive", "promiscuous" and "diseased" with sexually transmitted infections (Flood, 2013a, p. 102). The inference here is that these young women are "sluts" or "slags" (Flood, 2013a, p. 102). These findings shed light on how young women are positioned as transgressive by young men who inhabit "homosocial masculine environments" (Flood<sup>10</sup>, 2013a, p. 103). Young women who are the target of these highly derisive sexual story-tellings are significantly subordinated within these moments of young men's talk.

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<sup>10</sup> Flood (2013a) gathered talk from young men within a military university in Australia



Thirdly, homosociality perpetuates men's use of oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships by ensuring group secrecy. It is now well documented that homosocial networks often require young men to remain silent if someone in the group is being violent or coercive towards a girlfriend (DeKeseredy, 2015; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Towns & Terry, 2014). This silence takes two forms: not only are young men required to lie to the authorities if questioned about their friend's use of violence, but they also tend to be prohibited from stopping mates *being* violent. As Dekeseredy and Schwartz (1993, p. 404) explain, this homosocial rule "tells violent men their actions are not wrong".

These publically regulated<sup>11</sup> performances of oppressive masculinity can be very different from how young men talk about (hetero)romance in more private settings (McCarry, 2009; Richardson, 2010; Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso, Striepe, 2004). When asked privately about their views on sex, having girlfriends, and being boyfriends, young men often tell a very different story devoid of homosocial bravado, derision of women and a compulsion for sexual conquest. For example, some young men feel pressure to have sex and then publically talk about it. Here, their private anxieties – like the fear of contracting sexually transmitted disease, and worry about their sexual performance – are muted by pressure from their homosocial peers to publically act in certain ways (Richardson, 2010). I am interested to ascertain how young men's more private talk about (hetero)romance (for instance, within the individual interviews) differs from their more public talk within the focus group discussions, to see specifically how their allegiance to hegemonic masculinity may differ between the two contexts of talk.

The literature that focuses on homosociality is distinct from the bodies of work already discussed in this chapter. Its focus is on the public nature of homosociality that forms "narrow conception[s] of masculinity" (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 1993, p. 403) *within particular group contexts*. There is an opportunity, however, to differently interpret the effect homosociality has on *how* young men form oppressive dispositions about being boyfriends.

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<sup>11</sup> Research within secondary schools has documented how, when together, young men talk disparagingly about young women in general (Huuki & Manninen, 2010; Barnes, 2011; 2012; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996; Swain, 2003). These studies empirically show how young men often retreat to insults that cast young women as overly emotional and weak as a way to maintain masculine status amongst their male peers. These findings further substantiate the understanding that normative masculinities rely on homosocial talk that not only disparages young women as girlfriends, but as peers/classmates. This talk is public, and as a result can prevent young men from voicing their resistance to this type of talk when around their homosocial peers (Barnes, 2011)

For example, by understanding young men's homosocial relationships as a field (like the field of (hetero)romantic relationships) informed by the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities, the privileging of hegemonic masculinity *and* the transgressive treatment of certain *male and female* femininities can be exposed as directly shaping the rules of homosociality that *require* young men to be seen to endorse and engage in certain forms of male oppression within the field of (hetero)romance. I will consider how these endorsements of homosocial rules develop within young men's habitus – as they build a sense of the world around them – and how these rules, in turn, shape the ways young men are able to talk about being boyfriends.

Even though there are studies documenting and analysing young men's derisive talk about transgressive young women (for example, Flood, 2008; 2013a), I argue that a specific focus on the transgressive status of *pariah femininities* – socially defined positions assigned to women who embody hegemonically masculine qualities (Schipper, 2007; Chapter 2) – could show how the labels young men assign to women (for example, “slut”) are used to contain women's *masculine* enactments. As Schipper (2007) suggests, women enacting versions of masculinity pose a significant threat to the hegemonic order of gendered identities. A number of studies have engaged with Schipper's notion of *pariah femininities* to explore how women are denigrated within the system of gender hegemony (Backstrom, 2013; Barlow & Lynes, 2015; Carr and Hanks, 2013; Finley, 2010; Geisler, 2014; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Stone & Gorga, 2014). None of these studies, however, have used Schipper's framework to interpret how young men talk about their girlfriends. This gap in the literature provides an opportunity to analyse how young men use *pariah*-talk as part of their homosocial interactions and in what ways this stabilises the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity in their lives.

I am also interested in how *male femininities* - socially defined positions assigned to men who embody hegemonically feminine qualities (Schipper, 2007; Chapter 2) – are evoked in young men's talk about male peers who do *not* follow the rules of homosocial loyalty. For instance, being “whipped” is a common term used within popular discourse to describe a man who appears to be controlled by his (hetero)romantic partner. By focusing on the contaminating effect of male femininities, these terms can be interrogated for what they say about femininity's position within the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities, instead of simply analysing them as failed enactments of masculinity. This distinction brings femininities into analytical focus by considering how the denigration of femininities re-stabilises the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity.

## Taking into account ‘masculinity challenges’

Certain oppressive versions of masculinities have also been defined as normative because of their compensatory qualities. The idea of a *compensatory masculinity* has a long epistemological history. In the early twentieth century, Alfred Adler (translation 2009) introduced his psychoanalytical theory – masculine protest. It was the first to equate men being aggressive with their inability to live up to the dominant version of masculinity at the time. Since then, a range of contemporary scholars have explored what these protests may look like in men’s lives (for example, Connell, 2005; Messerschmidt, 1999; 2000). The overwhelming finding from this work is that shame from *not being masculine enough* drives these compensatory practices, which involve men using physical or sexual violence.

Messerschmidt (2000, p. 298) argues that for young men, these “masculinity challenges” are significantly associated with their bodies and their peer group: “Masculinity challenges arise from interactional threats and insults from peers and from situationally defined masculine expectations that are not achievable. Both, in various ways, proclaim the boy subordinate in contextually defined masculine terms” (Messerschmidt, 2000, p. 298). Young men who *feel* that their bodies are seen by others as not strong, desirable or dominant enough can ‘overcome’ these challenges by carrying out “contextually ‘appropriate’ masculine practices” (Messerschmidt, 1999, p. 214) to alleviate their sense of subordination.

For example, studies by Messerschmidt (1999) and Totten (2003) document how young men with feminine bodies (weak, unmuscular, short) mitigate feelings of degradation and shame by violently targeting those more subordinate than them (Messerschmidt, 1999; Totten, 2003). Female peers often fall into this category, making them the target of violence, which in turn enables young men to feel *significant* (see Gilligan, 2003, p. 1157) or masculine again. Research into school shootings (Consalvo, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Klein, 2006a; 2006b) in the United States also highlights how young men use violence to mitigate shame. By engaging with Bourdieu’s notion of capital, Klein (2006a) explores how school shooters typically lack masculine capital – for example muscular, sport-skilled bodies termed the “jocks”. Shooters therefore tend to be unpopular, are often gay-baited by more popular students and are seen by young women as undesirable. As Klein explains, gun violence becomes a form of cultural capital that enables these young men to acquire a powerful position within their school. Victims are often the popular male students who gay-baited them as well as the young women who rejected them (for more general literature on adult men’s general use of violence

to mitigate feelings of shame, see Gilligan, 2003; for a case study on an adult man's use of violence towards his girlfriend as a reaction to feelings of "humiliated fury", see Websdale, 2010, p. 338).

By understanding certain masculine performances of oppression as shame-based, other more traditional boyfriend performances can be more deeply scrutinised. For example, it has also been documented that young men engage in peer violence to mark their "territory" (Canaan, 1991, p. 120); that is, they fight male peers over who *gets* the girlfriend (Canaan, 1991; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). On the surface, violence in these instances appears to be used to elevate one's status, and aligns with hegemonic masculine qualities of being in control and having ownership over women (Canaan, 1991; McCarry, 2009; Sundaram, 2013). But on deeper inspection, these incidences of territory-marking also speak to mitigating shame. Losing 'possession' of a girlfriend to another man can be emasculating (see Canaan, 1991 for discussion on "soft" versus "hard" young men), as it defies the hegemonic rule that requires men to be in control of women. Therefore, engaging in peer-violence may help young men mitigate this threat of being exposed as enacting versions of *male femininity* (Schippers, 2007).

In this thesis, I propose, there is an opportunity to move beyond seeing shame as a product of masculinity that has been challenged (Messerschmidt, 2000) in some way. If shame is instead seen as feminised, it can be redefined as a contaminant within the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities (Schippers, 2007). My research endeavours to do this work by examining how young men make sense of *feminised shame* – induced by being socially defined as feminine – and to what lengths they will go, to mitigate being shamed *in this way*. Not only do I want to ascertain what these mitigating strategies look like in young men's minds – and in how they talk about (hetero)romance – but also how young women are subordinated in the process.

### Contemplating a critical discursive psychology of masculinity

A number of studies have undertaken a feminist post-structural analysis of the complex and contradictory discursive construction of masculinity, and the way young men are able to subordinate young women. Post-structural epistemology differs from those approaches more aligned with hegemonic masculinity because of its emphasis on discourse and 'the subject'. As Weedon (1997) explains, the subject and subjectivity are integral components of any post structural analysis, which sees the subject produced in "two different senses" (p. 80). In one

sense, discourse produces subjects: individuals take up subject positions and attributes defined by the “knowledge which the discourse produces” (p. 80). In another sense, discourse also produces a place where subjects can reside. This place is where individuals can make the ‘most’ sense of the world around them and themselves, which in turn builds their sense of self, or what post-structuralists’ refer to as subjectivity. One of most distinctive aspects of post-structural theory is that this discursive production of the subject starts afresh with each new “discursive act” (Davies, 1990, see p. 48).

The discursive construction of traditional versions of masculinity is discussed in post-structural literature as constituted in “certain practices of control and certain discourses associated with being cool and being ‘the man’ which privilege men’s dominance of women and men’s denigration and disparaging of women” (Towns & Scott, 2009, p. 135). For example, Towns and Scott (2008, 2009) found that a “culture of cool” discourse informed both young men’s “realities” and “the ways that their realities were constructed” (2009, p. 20). This discourse produces a *macho* subject (Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 91), or “the Man in the Relationship” (Towns & Scott, 2009, p. 99), who has access to a range of entitlements. For instance, the “Man” makes the decisions within the relationship and controls his girlfriend’s movements and interactions (in turn, the “Man” must never become “whipped” or controlled by girlfriends). The “Man” within this discursive structure must also embody physical strength (with specific focus on muscularity) and have sex frequently. This emphasis on having sex also discursively positions the “hot chick” (Towns & Scott, 2009, p. 63) who is both *his* “bitch” and *his* “ho” (Towns & Scott, 2009, p. 15). *His* “bitch” refers to a young woman who is used as a “trophy” (Towns & Scott, 2009, p. 99), to elevate the “Man’s” masculine status; *his* ‘ho’ is a young woman who is a sex object; available to have sex with the “Man” at any time.

The post-structural field of discursive psychology (Wetherell & Edley, 1999) has shifted from discussing traditional discourses of masculinity to explore the more subtle and contradictory ways that seemingly un-‘Man’ly discourses of masculinity can become hegemonic. This shift occurred to take account of the complex ways masculinity is understood and enacted within men’s psyches. This framework directly critiques Connell’s theorising of hegemonic masculinity, arguing that a significant limitation is that “hegemonic masculinity is presented as an aspirational goal rather than a lived reality for ordinary men” (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 337). According to discursive psychology, focusing on an unattainable hegemonic masculinity fails to account for what masculinity looks like for men on a day-to-day basis, and

*how* hegemonic masculinity impacts on men's psyches. As Wetherell and Edley (1999, p. 337) question, "How do men conform to an ideal and turn themselves into complicit or resistance types, without anyone ever managing to exactly embody that ideal?"

To remedy these ambiguities in Connell's work, Wetherell and Edley (1999) developed a critical discursive psychology of masculinity. This approach takes into account the role "discursive practices play in the constitution of subjectivity" (p. 337), as well as an ethnomethodological understanding of *how* men position themselves as speaking subjects within "imaginary positions" related to "conventional notions of the masculine" (p. 335). Not only are "heroic" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 340) positions available to men (which tend to mirror the traditional, normative standards of hegemonic masculinity), but men can also elevate their masculine status amongst their male peers by positioning themselves as both "ordinary" (an "everyman", Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 344) and "rebellious" (an unconventional-man, Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 347).

It appears that young men can position themselves as an 'ordinary-man' to effectively mitigate being positioned as vulnerable by a girlfriend's insubordination (Korobov, 2009a, 2009b, 2011). For example, young women who are not sexually receptive to men, not young men's "emotional caretakers", or dependent on their boyfriends at social gatherings threaten to position young men as weak, undesirable and compliant (Korobov, 2011, p. 51). Korobov (2011) argues that women's insubordinations, or what he terms as "resistance[s] to emphasized femininity" (p. 2011, p. 51), positions young men as vulnerable: an insubordinate girlfriend is not submissive to her boyfriend, thus positioning the boyfriend as weak and compliant. However, young men are able to manage these vulnerabilities by talking about themselves to their male peers as an 'ordinary-man' who 'got caught up with' a young woman who was a "self-centred" (Korobov, 2011, p. 61) or "crazy-bitch" (Korobov, 2009b, p.103). By talking about women in this way, young men are also able to *elevate* their own masculine status in front of their peers (Korobov, 2009a; 2009b; 2011). This strategy is effective: it not only excuses the insubordination (for example, foiling his sexual advances) as *her* fault, but positions *him* as having no part to play in how the insubordination affected the relationship. This neutral position makes him appear 'ordinary' or an 'everyman' to his male peers.

Young men also talk about themselves in self-deprecating ways to manage these threats to masculine status. Especially when young men's sexual advances are rejected by young woman, Korobov (2009b, p. 107) found that young men call themselves "lazy" seducers – evoking a

‘boys will be boys’/‘everyman’ trope – to explain to their friends why young women reject their romantic or sexual advances. This ‘boys will be boys’/‘ordinary-man’ discourse enables young men to avoid feeling the shame of being rejected by positioning themselves as “nonchalant” (Korobov, 2009b, p. 103). This strategy is misogynistic because it enables young men to *deprioritise* their relationships with young women.

This argument has similarities to those that adopt Demetriou’s (2001, p. 337) understanding of a “hegemonic bloc” to explain how seemingly nonhegemonic performances of masculinity can be adopted by young men in the pursuit of being romantic (Allen, 2007). However, the use of the ‘ordinary-man’ trope takes this analysis further, arguing it “achieves hegemony” specifically by practicing “self-depreciation” and “nonchalance” (Korobov, 2009b, p. 112).

Another useful feature of these studies is their focus on the role femininities play in *how* young men are able to oppress young women whom they are involved with romantically. This aligns closely with my own research directions. However, by adopting Connell’s notions of emphasised femininity – “[as] a range of traditional femininity norms that encouraged women to accommodate men’s desires for sex, attractive female bodies, power, and control” (Korobov, 2011, p. 52) the more subtle nuances at play *within* the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity are left unexplored. By considering Schippers’ (2007) conceptual work around gender hegemony, the function of different versions of femininity can be explicated more fully, so that femininity is not simply cast as either traditional (emphasised) or resistant. Hegemonic femininity can be interrogated for how it serves the ascendant order of hegemonic masculinity by, in turn, regulating all other femininities (male and pariah) that threaten this ascendant order. In my research I want to ascertain what this hegemonic version of femininity looks like to young men and how their understanding of this gendered identity forms their views about how girlfriends should act (and, in turn, what the complementary and ascendant hegemonically masculine boyfriend looks like to young men).

I also want to find out how and why young men talk about their (ex)girlfriends in derisive ways, not because these young women are simply carrying out resistant gendered enactments, but because their performances threaten to *contaminate* the hegemonic order of gender. Korobov (2011) *does* articulate that young women’s resistances to traditional (or emphasised) femininity appear to threaten hegemonic masculinity. However, I want to more explicitly interrogate how this threat is more to do with young women being assigned pariah statuses because they are performing roles as girlfriends in hegemonically *masculine* ways. This contradiction – that

girlfriends are stigmatised for being masculine, but boyfriends are praised for the same performances – allows for a deeper analysis of how and why femininities are so prevalently subordinated within the hegemonic order of gendered identities.

Returning to the post-structural discursive features of the studies just discussed (Towns & Scott, 2008; 2009; Korobov, 2009a, 2009b, 2011), their unique strength resides in their understanding of discourse: namely, how male oppression is made possible because of the multiple and contradictory subject positions available for young men to take up within discursive structures. The discursive positioning of the ‘ordinary-man’ is especially useful in understanding the finer workings of power. As Korobov (2009a, p. 293) argues, not only does this discursive position “perpetuate a hetero-patriarchal system in which men have more freedom to fail romantically and thus have “more power”, it also forms part of a “misogynistic backlash against women’s increasing autonomy and power”.

Despite these conceptual strengths, there are opportunities to think differently about subjectivity and power when explaining how young men make sense of and endorse the use of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. Adkins’ reworking of Bourdieusian theory (see Chapter 2; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Adkins, 2004) offers a way to potentially reshape this type of research. Instead of understanding subjectivity in post-structural terms as starting afresh with each new “discursive act” (Davies, 1990, see p. 48), a Bourdieusian approach to subjectivity is more grounded in the social. As discussed in Chapter 2 (page 27-28), through habitus the social is “incorporated” into the corporeal (McNay, 1999, p. 99), which produces a subject that is more enduring and durable than the more voluntaristic versions of post-structural subjectivity. However, by taking on Adkins’ (2004) reworking of habitus as a gendered subjectivity *marked by ambivalence*, young men’s gendered identities can be seen as not only grounded in their day-to-day interaction with fields that develop over time, but also as open to chaos where contradiction marks how they “occupy or identify with [gendered] norms” (Adkins, 2004, p. 206).

My research therefore hopes to extend current scholarship about how young men make sense male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships by exploring what young men’s habitus looks like via their talk – to enable comment on their sense of gendered identity as having a foundation – whilst also examining this talk for moments of flux where contradiction or indecision reside. I endeavour to recommend *how* ambivalent moments in young men’s talk –



marked by these contradictions and inconsistencies – signal places where their oppressive dispositions towards being boyfriends could be destabilised and overturned.

This approach enables me to ask certain questions throughout this thesis. For example, if young men talk about possessiveness of girlfriends as an entitlement, in what ways does ambivalence mark this talk, and how could these subtle breaks with gendered norms shape actual practical measures for supporting young men to think about being boyfriends in more “ethical” (see Carmody, 2009, p. 51; Carmody & Ovenden, 2013, p. 795; Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122) ways? Are there inconsistencies in the way that young men specifically engage in *pariah*-talk about girlfriends, and how can these ambivalences be used to help young men become more “ethical boyfriends” (Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122)? Are there subtle moments in young men’s talk about being masculine boyfriends where bravado is replaced by unsureness about what masculinity looks like? How could these moments be used to help young men think more ethically about (hetero)romance?

## In conclusion

This literature review has explored how normative versions of masculinity have been understood by scholars in explaining why and how young men are able to use and endorse forms of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. Some of these explanations analysed how traditional versions of masculinity (like being physically strong, assertive, controlling) shape how and why male oppression is perpetuated within (hetero)romantic relationships (for example, Canaan, 1991; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2008; 2013a; Gilmartin, 2007; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; McCarry, 2009; 2010; Sundaram, 2013; Towns & Scott, 2008; 2009). Some studies approached this in more subtle ways, for example, by proposing that young men’s understandings of oppression are maneuverable (part hegemonic, part resistance – Doull et al., 2013), or hybridised (part hegemonic, part nonhegemonic – Allen, 2007). Other studies however, yielded quite *surprising* results. For example, young men can still subordinate young women even when they themselves have been rejected or humiliated by women in their romantic pursuits (Korobov, 2009a; 2009b, 2011).

Existing explanations shed light on *why* and *how* young men’s use and endorsement of these forms of oppression is ubiquitous. In moving forward however, I argue that a fixation on masculinities has limited many of these arguments. Instead, I propose that an interrogation of male, pariah and hegemonic femininities, considered alongside hegemonic masculinity, may

offer different ways of understanding how young men make sense of gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships (Schippers, 2007). I also propose that gathering and analysing young men's talk about being boyfriends may give access to their oppressive dispositions about (hetero)romance and that these moments not only constitute a developing and somewhat grounded gendered identity, *yet* also have the potential to expose ambivalences that *may* bring new understandings of how the oppression of women within (hetero)romance relationships is prevalent *yet also* open to the possibility of change.

# CHAPTER 4

## A feminist in the ‘field’

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This chapter outlines the methodological directions of my research and the methods employed during my fieldwork. My research investigates how young men make sense of being boyfriends in ways that endorse men’s use of oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. I specifically examine how these dispositions, or sense-makings, are enabled by the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities (see Chapter 2), with an ultimate commitment to uncovering ways in which this order could be disrupted.

With the above aims in mind, I employed a feminist methodological approach (Devault & Gross, 2012; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Laliberte & Schurr, 2015; Orrico, 2014; Presser, 2005; Skelton, 1998; Soyer, 2013), along with a critical studies on men and masculinities methodology (see Hearn, 2013; Pini & Pease, 2013). There are two key reasons why I chose these methodological paths. One, I am a feminist researcher, which means I understand the social world to be governed by a hegemonic gender order (see Chapter 2; Schippers, 2007) that privileges men’s hegemonic performances of masculinity, whilst subordinating girls/women and femininity. Two, this research is an unequivocally gendered interrogation: the focus is young men’s *gendered* endorsements of male *gendered* oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. Because of my focus on young men, I am also informed by a critical youth studies methodology (Kehily, 2015; Kehily & Nayak, 2014). This methodology is suitable in guiding my research away from an ‘adult-centric’ focus, to one that listens to what young people have to say (Kehily, 2015; Nayak & Kehily, 2014; Renold, 2014).

My chosen qualitative methods – semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews – complement these methodological frameworks. Focus groups and interviews have a long tradition of being used by feminists researching women because of their ability to capture “the personal and emotional” (Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 1) dimensions of lived experience that many masculinist approaches (for example, quantitative methods based on finding ‘valid’ data) fail

to do. Pini and Pease (2013) argue that focus groups and interviews are also appropriate for researching men's lives because they provide a platform for men to speak about their gendered lived experiences. By incorporating a critical youth studies approach to the mix, such semi-structured methods give young men an opportunity to talk about being boyfriends, without the researcher having complete control over the structure of these discussions. These methods however also give *me* an opportunity to work with qualitative data that is rich for interpretation. With my feminist 'hat' on, I aim to use this data to uncover the complexities of how young men talk about being boyfriends and (hetero)romance and how the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities shapes the way young men make sense of and are able to talk about such things. In my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7), I will pay particular attention to the *public* performances of masculinity (and femininity) that surfaced during the focus groups, as young men talked in front of one another about gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships.

This chapter maps these various methodological threads (feminist, critical studies on men and masculinity, and critical youth studies) and the methods used (focus groups and interviews) whilst also outlining the specifics of my fieldwork design and implementation. In doing so, this discussion will set the scene for *how* and *why* I gathered the data I did and provide background for my analysis in the following data chapters.

This chapter will also plot my attempts to produce a piece of "quality" qualitative research (Tracy, 2010, p. 837). Even though qualitative research, by its anti-positivist nature, should not *have to* adhere to a rigid set of prescriptions, it should be carried out with a broad criteria that ensures the work is ethical, valuable and rigorous (Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010, p. 837) outlines what she calls "big tent" criteria for conducting "excellent qualitative research" (p. 840). Throughout this chapter I will speak to how my own work engages with these criteria. For example, I will outline in this chapter why my chosen methods and methodologies are appropriate to my research topic – creating "meaningful coherence" (Tracy, 2010, p. 848) and "rigor" (Tracy, 2010, p. 841) – and were carried out in an "ethical" way (Tracy, 2010, p. 846). I will also provide a rationale for how my own self-reflexive positioning gives "sincerity" to my research with young men (Tracy, 2010, p. 841).

### Self-reflexive statement

As the previous two chapters have outlined, my position as a feminist has heavily influenced the direction of my conceptual thinking. I have mobilised Schippers' (2007) work around

‘gender hegemony’ to locate my research within an understanding that gendered identities are hegemonically ordered in ways that scaffold the relationship between masculinity and femininity as one based on complementarity, dominance and ascendancy. In addition, I have mobilised Adkins’ (2004) understanding of habitus and mimesis in order to show how this hegemonic scaffolding could be dismantled. However, my position as a researcher is more complex than these conceptual choices. As I will define shortly in more detail, my self-reflexive awareness as a feminist researcher enables me to consider the many aspects of myself that have influenced and impacted on the crafting of my project (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Demographically I am a 35 year-old female. I am ‘straight’ and have been married for thirteen years to my first significant boyfriend. My husband and I have two children together: a daughter aged seven and a son aged four. I am a university lecturer and a doctoral candidate. My feminist allegiance developed across significant moments in my own life. I was brought up in an egalitarian household, where my father and mother shared all domestic duties. Cooking, cleaning and childcare were equally distributed between them. My sister and I have often commented that our father is a feminist. As such, my sister and I were told by both our parents from an early age that we could *become* anything that we wanted. Because of this encouragement we have both taken up ambitious career paths (my sister is a medical doctor and I am a researcher and university lecturer). I was also captivated during my undergraduate and post-graduate studies by feminist theory because of the richness it provided in interrogating patriarchal power structures in society (see Cheyne, O’Brien & Belgrave, 2000; Scott, 2003). During my post-graduate work I became especially interested in the impacts of gendered social policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand and how women can become disadvantaged within neo-liberal states (see Rudd, 2003).

Being a feminist also inspired my vocational interest in prevention of violence against women. In my final year of undergraduate study I was given the opportunity to co-ordinate a public awareness programme for a small independent<sup>12</sup> women’s refuge in West Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. The realisation that this would be a vocational direction for me was instant. I was drawn to the work that refuge does for women and children and I was moved (and still am) by the countless stories of women’s experiences of violence I heard during this work placement. This experience inspired me to embark on a Master of Arts through which I

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<sup>12</sup> In Aotearoa/New Zealand women’s refuges are either part of the National Collective of Independent Women’s refuges, or are autonomous. The latter are referred to as ‘independent’.

completed an in-depth analysis of public awareness campaigns in Aotearoa/New Zealand directed towards ‘domestic violence’ prevention (Batistich, 2004). I also became involved with another independent women’s refuge in Auckland, and was eventually elected chairperson of their Board of Trustees. This work directed the focus of my current research. I was concerned that “domestic violence” services (and legislation) were geared towards adult women, potentially leaving younger women – who live with their parents but in a (hetero)romantic relationship with violent boyfriends – out of focus. This spurred my interest in researching young people’s (hetero)romantic relationships.

Locating my research within a rural setting was also a reflexive decision. My family and I have lived on a ‘farmlet’ (one hectare of land) in a small rural farming community in Aotearoa/New Zealand for the last six years. Our daughter (aged seven) attends a rural area<sup>13</sup> school. Our son is four and goes to the local rural pre-school. Growing up rurally, my children will likely become romantically involved with their rural peers when they grow older. For this reason, I have a vested interest in paying attention to how rural young people assign meaning to (hetero)romance. I also believe I have an awareness of what living rurally *looks like* for young people: I am active in my daughter’s rural area school (that caters for students from Year 1-13) and as such, I care about how rural young people *experience* life.

Living within a rural community, I have also noticed that gendered roles appear more definitive than in urban areas. For example, farming is the predominant work-practice in my community. Farming tends to position men as doing manual farm work (fixing fences, milking cows, driving tractors and using heavy machinery) and women as “farmers’ wives” who take on more subservient roles (childcare, cooking, cleaning). These arrangements dichotomise gendered roles in the home, which are then observed by the children who grow up in these households. There is however, a lack of research that looks at how these gendered demarcations impact rural people’s (hetero)romantic relationships (see Little, 2003; 2007; Luft, Jenkins & Cameron, 2012; Morris & Fuller, 1999). Even though my research lacks a comparative urban cohort, it does intend to make suggestions about how rurality may impact how young men make sense of being boyfriends.

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<sup>13</sup> Area schools are located in rural regions and offer primary and secondary schooling for all children and young people who live in the zone’s geographical limits.

## Research Methodology

Due to my focus on how young men make sense of the gendered nature of (hetero)romance, my methodological approaches draw on feminist qualitative research (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Enguix, 2015; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Laiberte & Schurr, 2015; Orrico, 2014), critical youth studies (Kehily, 2015; Nayak & Kehily, 2014; Renold, 2014) and critical studies of men and masculinities (Hearn, 2013; Flood, 2013b; Pini & Pease, 2013). This section will introduce each of these methodologies and briefly indicate how they are appropriate for answering my thesis question, and how they influenced the gathering of data. The later discussions about my research methods and the challenges I faced undertaking this work will build on these discussions by attending closely to specific issues around researcher/participant power relations and feminists researching (young) men that arose from my fieldwork.

### *Feminist methodologies*

There is no single feminist methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Rather, there is a rich terrain of feminist methodologies born out of the feminist academic tradition spanning from the 1970s onwards. These methodologies surfaced within academia as a way to counteract “androcentric bias”, which privileged positivist paradigms “based on logic and empiricism” and seeking “objective truth” (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 8). For feminist scholars, this masculinist tradition of scientific inquiry ignored the complexities around what was largely unobservable, including power, identity, agency, experience and representation. As well as bringing gender to the forefront of academic discussions, feminist researchers campaigned for a new post-positivist approach that stepped away from scientific empiricism, moving instead towards qualitative methods of inquiry (DeVault & Gross, 2012). This approach enables feminist researchers to provide opportunities for other voices to surface in an environment freed from an objective pursuit for truth (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

As Hesse-Biber (2012, p. 4) contends, “feminist research is mindful of hierarchies of power and authority in the research process”, which has in turn established an “ethics of care” (Allan, 2012, p. 99) within feminist research. This ethic should not be misunderstood: it does not imply that feminist researchers need to take on caring or ‘nurturing’ roles in their fieldwork. Instead, it requires feminist researchers to pay special attention to “how power is handled in the relationship between the researcher and the researched” (Allan, 2012, p. 99). Whereas the masculinist tradition of research positions the researcher as ‘all-knowing’ and intellectually

superior to the research subject, the “best feminist analysis...insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter” (Harding, 1987, p. 9). This has led feminist researchers to articulate their own positionality *within* the research process, allowing feminist researchers to “recognize, examine and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice” (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 17). With this awareness, feminist researchers are also able to define more clearly the epistemological stance that drives the formation of research questions, fieldwork design and the interpretation of data.

In my self-reflexive statement (see page 58), I positioned myself as a feminist who is passionate about prevention of violence against women. This positioning enables me to acknowledge that my research is “partial, situated and subjective” (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 9) because of what I privilege as knowledge; that is, my epistemology. My research epistemology is most closely associated with standpoint feminism. As an epistemology, standpoint feminism “call[s] attention to women’s lived experiences of oppression as the starting point for building knowledge” (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 11). As discussed in Chapter 1, women’s experiences of male oppression within their (hetero)romantic relationships drove the direction of my research. I started this project wanting to understand more about *why* men are violent towards their (hetero)romantic partners, and *how* this violence could be prevented. This direction is a product of my feminist politics and has been reinforced by my work within women’s refuge organisations. I have seen first-hand the oppressive effects violent partners have on women’s lived experiences. Not only are women physically injured: but by coming to refuge they are displaced from their homes and communities. They are anxious about their own and their children’s safety and likely to be financially vulnerable (especially if their partner was the family’s breadwinner). These women’s experiences solidified my *standpoint* - what I came to know: that men are the predominant perpetrators of these types of oppressions and that women are the ones who predominantly experience them. This standpoint has also solidified the feminist intention of my research: emancipating women from oppression, which as Hesse-Biber (2012, p. 12) explains “is congruent with feminists’ emphasis on social change and social justice”.

Whilst these types of self-reflexive articulations may bring to light researcher bias and subjectivity, Harding (1992, p. 437) argues that they in fact develop a “strong objectivity”. In recognising that “knowledge and truth are partial, situated, subjective, power imbued and



relational” (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 9), the “objectivity of the research” actually increases, and so decreases the masculinist tendency towards “‘objectivism’ which hides this kind of evidence from the public” (Harding, 1987, p. 9). To this end, my research does have bias (Allan, 2012). However, by considering my own self-reflexive position I am able to account for where this bias comes from and how my findings *should* be interpreted. As outlined, I carry a range of assumptions about the gendered nature of oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships, which in turn suggests how I have interpreted the talk I gathered from young men. These interpretations *are* feminist and thus are guided by the assumptions I already hold about gender in the social world.

Another way that feminist researchers uphold this “ethics of care” is by privileging “emotionality” over “exploitation” (Allan, 2012, p. 99). Potential conflicts that could arise within the research process need to be considered and measures put in place for how best to deal with them. One effective way to counteract exploitation is to ensure participants have certain rights within the research process. For example, in the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 1), I outlined that participants could read and edit the transcripts from our individual interviews, which ensured them an active role in the data gathering process. I also assured them that they could leave at any point during the focus groups. Further, I obtained their teacher’s assurance (see Appendix 3) that no student would be disadvantaged if he chose not to participate in my research.

I also endeavoured to uphold this “ethics of care” (Allan, 2012, p. 99) by choosing to run *open and semi-structured* focus groups and interviews. These methods are adopted by feminist qualitative researchers (see DeVault & Gross, 2012) because they enable participants to have certain amounts of agency within the research process. For example, loosely structuring the questions that would guide our focus group discussions gave young men room to tell their experiences and not feel too bound by my feminist agenda. Because of this structure, participants were able to take our conversations in directions that interested and mattered to them.

Even though this self-reflexive awareness aims to address the complexities involved in gathering data, it also presents feminists with a range of challenges around *how* to interpret data whilst being situated within it. As my earlier self-reflexive statement indicates, my feminist allegiances were present from the very initial stages of this project. They shaped my research question, as well as how I designed my fieldwork. Being reflexive about this

positioning has enabled me to account for my own gendered role in the research process. As I will detail throughout the “Challenges in the Field” (see page 76) section below, this positioning also shaped how I tackled researcher complicity versus neutrality around controversial issues (Enguix, 2015), and how I documented findings in ways that were meaningful, transparent and ethical (Motha, 2009).

### *Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities*

By focusing on how young men make *gendered* sense of (hetero)romance, my research is also informed by critical studies of men and masculinities methodologies. This field of research is established but still relatively young in terms of sociological methodologies. It originates from the “ethnographic moment” in masculinity studies during the 1980s (Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 1) that saw researchers use qualitative methods like observations, life-stories, focus groups and interviewing to gather data about men’s lives. These studies borrowed from “feminist theories, perspectives, methodologies and epistemologies” (Skelton, 1998, p. 220), which established them as markedly different from “new men’s studies” (see Brod, 1987) – a research tradition stemming from the 1970s (Connell, 2005), and influenced by the Men’s Liberation Movement, that was tasked to present a men’s version of women’s studies, “characterised by omissions or distortions of fundamental elements of feminism” (Skelton, 1998, p. 220). Critical studies on men and masculinities (for example, Connell, 2005; Flood, 2008, 2013; Hearn, 1998; 2013; Messerschmidt, 2000) have therefore become renowned for interrogating the gendered nature of society, with a focus on how the dominance of masculinity and male privilege underpins social relations.

My chosen methods – focus groups and interviews *with young men* – align with a critical studies on men and masculinities approach. They give young men an opportunity to speak about what (hetero)romantic relationships mean to them, whilst at the same time allowing me to critically interrogate *how* male privilege can form these understandings. A critical studies on men and masculinities focus on male privilege is also compatible with my ultimate goal: bettering the lives of women by finding ways to dislodge the hegemonic order that enables and supports male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships.

As a feminist however, my choice to speak only with young men has left my research open to contestation because I chose *not* to speak with young women. By talking only with young men, my research *could* be seen to privilege men’s voices and silence women’s. I argue that my

decision (see also Chapter 1, page 5) to talk only with young men was unequivocally feminist. I understand that research and popular discourse about men's violence towards women can be very victim-focused. For example, an emphasis on empowering women to leave a violent partner is often the focus of violence prevention. This has a tendency to ignore those who carry-out violence. Because I understand men to be privileged as the predominant 'doers' of this gendered form of violence, I sought out (young) men only in order to get *to the heart* of why this gendered oppression is so prevalent today.

Critical studies on men and masculinities have not been without controversy (Hearn, 2013; Pini & Pease, 2013). For example, unlike feminist scholarship, critical studies on men and masculinities have not enjoyed the same rigorous "discussions" about what methods for fieldwork are appropriate, to ensure power relations are acknowledged and managed throughout the research process (Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 1). To counteract this limitation, Hearn (2013) urges critical studies on men and masculinities to adopt feminist methodological considerations when undertaking research with men. These considerations enable "questions of epistemology, location, ethics, reflexivity, relations between researcher and researched, and emotions in research" (Hearn, 2013, p. 26) to be considered; questions which Hearn argues are pertinent to the study of men.

Another key challenge concerns the gender/sex of the researcher (Pini & Pease, 2013). For men researching other men, self-reflexivity is crucial in monitoring the "impact of gender sameness" (Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 8) on how interviews are facilitated and data is interpreted. For example, Pini and Pease (2013, p. 8-9) argue that male researchers "need to be reflexive about the ways in which hegemonic forms of masculinity play out in the research process between themselves and the participants". For women researching men, the gendered experience of researching men is likely to be different. As Presser (2005, p. 2071) states, "gender dynamics are clearer when research" is undertaken by an "outsider" (woman researcher). Bucerius (2013, p. 1) agrees, arguing that "insiders" researching participants of a similar demographic may be liable to overlooking the complexities of dynamics because of their familiarities.

These arguments should not imply that being a woman made my research with young men somehow easy. I personally faced a number of issues when researching young men, because as a woman I was entering a "male-dominated setting" (Orrico, 2014, p. 473). For example, a large part of my time at Te Ika a Maui was spent alone in classrooms with groups of young men, or in one-on-one interviews. This setting made me vulnerable to any heterosexisms that

prevailed in this context, for example young men using sexist slurs. As I will cover in more detail shortly (see section: “Challenges in the Field”, page 76), these vulnerabilities within my own fieldwork were a challenge that I had to constantly manage (Bott, 2010; Bucerius, 2013; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015; Soyer, 2013).

### *Critical Youth Studies*

As well as being dedicated to feminist endeavours, my research focus has also been shaped by my intention to give young people a voice through my scholarship. This signals my commitment to critical youth studies methodologies (Kehily, 2015; Nayak & Kehily, 2014; Renold, 2014). I am invested in studying young people because traditionally they have been excluded from sociological research, which has in turn created an adult-centric bias to knowledge gathering (Renold, 2014). For example, there is a much larger body of work that explores adult men’s use of violence and control within (hetero)romantic relationships, compared to the collection that examines how young men make sense of and implement this type of oppression (see Chapter 3, page 37). By choosing to speak with young men, I have the opportunity to find out what meanings they assign to these oppressive forms *at their stage in life* without me assuming *how* they think.

My allegiance to critical youth studies also influenced my research methods. For example, my use of the film *Twilight* in my fieldwork was designed to facilitate *inclusive* discussions with young men about (hetero)romantic relationships. My participants did not need to have prior knowledge or experience to take part in our discussions. Even if they *had not* engaged in (hetero)romance, they could still share their views within the focus groups and interviews. I purposefully chose a film that my participants would recognise and that portrayed characters of a similar age. As with Nayak and Kehily’s (2014) use of representational images of “chavs” to facilitate discussions with young “chav” mums about their identities, my use of *Twilight* – and in particular its depiction of Edward Cullen – sought to offer my participants a meaningful platform to discuss their own views on how boyfriends should and should not act.

With specific regard to interviews, Heath, Brooks, Cleaver and Ireland (2009, p. 79) comment:

Given the marginalization of young people’s voices within society, the interview can be a powerful tool for – quite literally – giving voice to their experiences and concerns. This is important in a world where the meanings of young people's

attitudes and actions are all too often either assumed or based on adult interpretations.

My individual interviews aimed to give young men a private platform to speak about their experiences and worldviews about (hetero)romance – which one could argue is a sensitive topic because the stakes are high if young men ‘get it wrong’ and look foolish in front of their male peers. The focus groups, although providing young men with a platform to speak, were more problematic. Because of their public nature, young men could potentially be humiliated if they said the *wrong* thing in front of their peers (to be discussed shortly: see “Challenges in the Field”, page 76).

### Consideration of ethical issues

Whenever research involves human participants, a range of ethical issues need careful consideration *before* data gathering commences, in order to safeguard the “welfare, privacy, safety, health and personal, social and cultural sensitivities of participants” (University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC), 2013, p. 4). To uphold these ethical considerations within my own research, I put specific measures in place to ensure the young men in my study were granted autonomy, anonymity and, where possible, confidentiality when participating in my fieldwork. These measures are integral in maintaining an “ethics of care” (Allan, 2012, p. 99) throughout the research process (see page 63 of this Chapter for previous discussions on this ethical requirement)

Participant autonomy is an important principle in maintaining participant agency throughout the research process:

The principle of autonomy requires that research participants’ capacity for self-determination is treated with respect. Participants should freely consent to their participation in the research study and their consent should be informed by relevant information provided by the researchers” (UAHPEC, 2013, p. 7).

Autonomy is especially pertinent to feminist and critical youth studies methodologies as they recognise the importance of giving the more vulnerable – in my case, young people (see page 66 for discussion about this vulnerability) – autonomy in matters that affect them. I designed my fieldwork in ways that would uphold the autonomy of all my participants, by guaranteeing that taking part was voluntary and informed. To ensure this autonomy, I gained the teacher’s

assurance (via the Teacher's Consent Form: see Appendix 3) that students' grades would not be affected if they chose not to participate in my research. I also purposely recruited 16-year-old young men so that they would not need their parents' consent to take part. Bypassing parental consent is an important way that young people can enhance their "capacity for self-determination" (UAHPEC, 2013, p. 7). In addition to these measures, I also provided young men with a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 1) that detailed the nature of my study, the research process and their rights whilst participating.

Even though it was unlikely that my research would be harmful to my participants, talking about (hetero)romantic love *could* have brought up negative emotional feelings like anxiety, anger, shame and embarrassment. I therefore put in place *extra* mechanisms to enhance their autonomy and protect their welfare, should they feel adverse effects from taking part. I followed the UAHPEC's stipulations, by first providing participants avenues to seek counselling (the School Counsellor or Youthline)<sup>14</sup>. I also informed my participants that they could edit the transcripts, withdraw any data or ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off at any stage during the individual interviews. Because of the public nature of the focus groups, I could not provide participants with the same opportunities, but assured them they could withdraw their participation at any point in the focus group proceedings.

Another way that I protected the welfare of my participants was to ensure, where possible<sup>15</sup>, their anonymity. Ensuring anonymity means that "those who read the published results of the research cannot not identify it as belonging to any particular respondent" (UAHPEC, 2013, p. 16). Anonymity is important because it enables participants to feel safe in sharing and contributing as they wish, without fear of derision from those outside of the research project. This is especially pertinent to critical youth studies work: anonymity ensures that young people can contribute without adults (their teachers or parents) reprimanding them for what they have said.

As outlined in their Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 1), I put in place four measures to ensure the anonymity of my participants. I changed participants' names into pseudonyms, making sure that the pseudonyms did not relate in any way to their real name (for

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<sup>14</sup> Youthline is a New Zealand phone counselling service for young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand

<sup>15</sup> I outlined in their Participant Information Sheet that if they disclosed any illegal activity or information that someone's health or safety was in jeopardy that I would break anonymity and inform the school/authorities.

example, I ensured that their real name and their pseudonym did not start with the same letter). I changed the School's name to a pseudonym so that my research would not expose where my participants originated from. I changed all names of people my participants discussed to pseudonyms, as well as the names of teachers I interacted with. I also ensured that all information identifying the participants would be stored in secure locked locations, either in my office or my primary supervisor's office, and would be destroyed after six years.

Safeguarding confidentiality – meaning information shared amongst parties 'is held' (see UAHPEC, 2013) in confidence – was more problematic. Because all information shared during the focus groups and individual interviews was data that I wanted to be able to use and report on, I could not ensure confidentiality. Instead, I promised my participants that through an anonymising process, their views and contributions could not be attributed to them. I did however, put in place measures to ensure confidentiality amongst focus groups participants. Ethically, conducting focus groups can be risky, in that a group member could tell a third party what someone in their focus group talked about. In order to mitigate against this happening, I ensured all participants signed, as part of their consent, an agreement that they would not disclose anything discussed in the focus groups to others.

Privileging autonomy, anonymity and confidentiality complements the mandate of feminist, critical studies on men and masculinities, and critical youth studies methodologies. These methodologies (as discussed) are committed to ensuring researchers are cognizant of any power struggles that may occur within the research process by “minimizing” and managing adverse effects participants may experience from these power relations (UAHPEC, 2013, p. 10). This is complex terrain. As already discussed, the ethics at the core of these methodologies can bring about challenges for women researchers (to be discussed shortly: see “Challenges in the Field”, page 76).

## Recruitment and participants

From the early stages of my doctoral studies, I wanted to find out how oppressive understandings about gendered roles develop in the beginning stages of young men's (hetero)romantic relationships. This stage in life is important as young men are likely working out how to be boyfriends and ultimately intimate life partners. My goal has always been to find ways to change such understandings *as they begin to form*. This endeavour echoes Towns and Scott's (2008, p. 6) argument that it is important to engage with young people when they are

in the early stages of their romantic “relationship careers” (see also Carmody & Ovenden, 2013).

These are formative years in young men’s lives when unhealthy dispositions towards romantic relationships can surface. In order to do this research, I would have ideally talked with *even* younger men – say, 13 or 14 year-olds – to get to the heart of how they start to make sense of being boyfriends, and the gendered roles they begin to take on within these relationships. However, I did not want parental control to stymy my project or hamper my participants’ autonomy. As already mentioned, under the UAHPEC (2013, p. 28) guidelines, participants who are 16 years and over do not require parental consent. For this reason I tailored my fieldwork to 16 year-old young men, as they were the *youngest* participants I could recruit without needing parental permission.

I chose to recruit a school because of its access to young people (see Chapter 1, page 7-8, for more detail). I specifically chose a *rural* school for two key reasons (as mentioned, page 57-60): one, I have a vested interest in how young people grow up in rural areas, as I am a parent of children growing up rurally; and two, there are only a few studies that have looked at young people living rurally (Hiller, Harrison & Bowditch, 1999; Keddie, 2007; Lee & MacDonald, 2009; Morris & Fuller, 1999; Luft, Jenkins & Cameron, 2012) and there are *no* detailed analyses of young men and (hetero)romance within rural communities<sup>16</sup>. This lack of research adds value to projects that seek out rural young men’s views about (hetero)romantic love.

### *Recruiting a rural school*

As it turned out however, recruiting a rural school was not an easy endeavour. I started to devise a list of possible schools that I would approach to take part in my fieldwork. I only needed one school to accept my invitation, and a minimum of 20 male students to participate. I chose a catchment of rural public schools (all were co-educational) that were within a two-hour drive of my own rural residence; a total of eight. I then telephoned each school’s administration office and asked what the best form of communication would be for contacting the Principal. All advised that email was best. Being optimistic that a school would accept my invitation, I emailed only two schools to start with (the closest geographically to me). Both, however,

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<sup>16</sup> Note that Hillier et al.’s (1999) study was on young people’s sexual practices in rural areas. They did *very* briefly discuss young men’s public expressions of (hetero)romance as bound up in traditional notions of masculinity, which were significantly different from their private expressions of (hetero)romantic love.



declined my invitation citing a lack of resources and time as factors. I then decided to email the rest of the schools (totalling six) on my list. The Principal from one school on this list contacted me. He was interested in my project and was committed to finding a teacher who would take on the project. Unfortunately, he was unable to secure a teacher's participation. Again, workload and a lack of resources were factors.

After this setback, I re-sent emails to the five schools that had not replied to my initial invitation. This strategy led to one school accepting my invitation. The Principal from Te Ika a Maui High School contacted me to inform me that his school would take part, and invited me to liaise directly with the school's Guidance Counsellor – Mrs A – who organised a place within the school's curriculum for me to work with my participants.

Te Ika a Maui High School is located within a rural township<sup>17</sup> with a population of around 7,000. The township is geographically small (in comparison to Aotearoa/New Zealand's larger urban cities), and centres around a single main street. Peripheral to the township are well-established dairy and sheep farms. The school itself is a public co-educational school for Year 9-13 students. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, public schools<sup>18</sup> are funded by the New Zealand Government, with parents making a voluntary donation to the school in lieu of school fees. The term co-educational means that both male and female students attend the school. Years 9 (aged approximately 12–13) to 13 (aged approximately 17–18) are classed as 'high school' in Aotearoa/New Zealand and mark the final five years of secondary school education.

### *Recruiting young men*

I initially met with a class of 28, Year 12 male students. This made up half of the school's Year 12 male cohort. The other male students were on a different timetable that did not suit my fieldwork demands. This initial meeting lasted around 20 minutes. Mrs A introduced me to the students and then I introduced myself and my research. I gave each student a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 1) and a Consent Form (see Appendix 2), carefully reading out the information in each. In order to maximise their autonomy, I invited them to take the documentation away with them to consider whether they would like to participate. I did not

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<sup>17</sup> In Aotearoa/New Zealand, a 'rural' town is officially categorised as a geographical location of 1000 or more people outside of the main cities (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000). Rural towns in New Zealand also tend to be categorised as having "very little in the way of infrastructure and few services" (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000, p. 437).

<sup>18</sup> As opposed to integrated and private schools which require parents to pay more substantial school fees

want them to feel pressured to take part in front of myself and Mrs A. Within two weeks, I had gained 22 consents. All participants were 16 years old.

As the following table outlines, all 22 young men participated in one of three focus groups, with four also choosing to participate in one-to-one interviews. I have signposted a range of identity markers which become foci within my data chapters (see Chapters 5 to 7).

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Focus group (FG)	Individual interview (II)	Identity markers of significance
Kliment	16	Pakeha <sup>19</sup>	FG1		
Levi	16	Pakeha	FG1	II3	Anxious; seen in the group as feminine; self-labelled <i>townie</i>
Ivan	16	Pakeha	FG1		
Roman	16	Māori	FG1		
Dominik	16	Pakeha	FG1		
Hubert	16	Pakeha	FG1		
Jakov	16	Pakeha	FG1		
Kirill	16	Pakeha	FG1		
David	16	Pakeha	FG2	II4	Most masculine in FG2: Leader (L); self-labelled <i>townie</i>
Cheslav	16	Pakeha	FG2		
Sergei	16	Pakeha	FG2		“Class clown”; supporter of David
Rurik	16	Pakeha	FG2		
Jozo	16	Pakeha	FG2		
Toma	16	Pakeha	FG2		
Josip	16	Pakeha	FG2		
Demetri	16	Pakeha	FG3		
Nicolai	16	Pakeha	FG3	II1	Self-labelled <i>townie</i>
Alek	16	Pakeha	FG3		Most masculine in FG3: Leader (L)
Konrad	16	Pakeha	FG3		
Jov	16	Pakeha	FG3		
Leo	16	Pakeha/from South Africa	FG3		
Luce	16	Pakeha	FG3	II2	Self-labelled <i>townie</i>

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<sup>19</sup> Pakeha is a term specific to Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is an ethnicity marker that literally means Non-Māori. I use it here to describe ‘white’ New Zealand young men

## Methods

### *Young men watching Twilight*

The first stage of my fieldwork involved watching the film *Twilight* with my 22 participants. Mrs A organised two back-to-back class periods so that I could show the entire film (96 minutes) in one sitting. As already mentioned (see page 66), showing my participants a film as a way to initiate discussions about (hetero)romance was purposeful. I wanted to provide my participants with a meaningful medium they could relate to, and that could help foster their voice. This method has been used successfully in other studies (Nayak & Kehily, 2014). In addition to this, the film provided young men with a reference point that enabled them to take part in our discussions regardless of whether they had previous (hetero)romantic experiences.

### *Focus groups*

As already discussed in this chapter (see page 57-58), focus groups and interviews have a long tradition within my chosen methodologies (critical youth studies, feminist and critical studies on men and masculinities) because they provide opportunities for people, who do not normally have the chance, to speak about their worldviews. As well as providing a platform for people to speak, focus group and interviews also provide the researcher with rich qualitative data to interpret. In following feminist and critical studies on men and masculinities methodologies, I understand the data I collected to be infused with male privilege, which I aim to expose in my data chapters (Chapters 5 to 7).

I returned to Te Ika a Maui High School a week after showing *Twilight* to commence the focus groups. Focus groups are popular within qualitative research because they provide opportunities for participant interaction (Gibbs, 2012; Robinson, 2012). As Robinson (2012, p. 402) remarks, “focus group data are qualitatively different data than interview data...as focus group data are co-produced by the dynamic interaction between the researcher (moderator) and the participants, and between the participants themselves”. I was interested in how young men’s public performances of gender (both masculinities and femininities) would surface as they talked together about being boyfriends and (hetero)romance. I also wanted to expose the hegemonic scaffolding within these performances that promotes male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships.

As per my ethics approval granted by the UAHPEC, I invited the young men participating in my research to choose which focus group they would attend. This was an important step in ensuring that they felt comfortable speaking within their groups, and was designed to enhance their voice within our discussions. Renold (2014, p. 23) argues that this is especially critical when working with young people, in order to “destablise the adult-centrism” that can embed itself in the research process. As she argues, allowing young people to choose which focus group they attend is one way that confidence in participating can be fostered. Mrs A was again integral to this process, as she helped to organise the 22 students into three even groups of their choice (the first group had eight participants, and the second and third groups had seven each).

In total, I ran three focus groups: one group per week. Each group lasted one class period (approximately 50 minutes) and was carried out in one of the school’s classrooms. I designed the focus group discussions to be *open and semi-structured*. This meant that I prepared 10 broad questions that guided these group discussions, but left room for my participants to take the conversation in directions of their choosing. Providing participants with this freedom and agency during the research process makes open and semi-structured focus groups a “favored” practice amongst feminist qualitative researchers (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 209).

My initial questions were *not* related to (hetero)romance. Instead, I asked each group what their favourite part of the film was, and which character they liked most, as a way to help them transition from the previous activity of watching the film to the current activity – the group discussion. These questions were also designed to ease young men into the focus groups, without addressing the more sensitive topics around (hetero)romance from the start.

After we talked generally about the film, I asked more tailored questions relating to my research question. The opening questions I asked were broad in nature and about the representations of (hetero)romantic love within *Twilight*: Do you think Edward and Bella were in love? When do you think Bella started to fall in love with Edward? When do you think Edward started to fall in love with Bella? What other things throughout the film do Edward and Bella do that show they are in-love? Conversely, what makes you think that Edward and Bella are *not* in love? Under each of these broad questions, I also had sub-questions to further interrogate either their experience of watching the film (for example: Did you enjoy the scene when they first ‘fall in love’? If Edward and Bella are *not* in love, what feelings are they expressing for one another?), or their views on (hetero)romantic love within their own lives (for example: Do you think men

and women fall in love differently? What are the good parts of ‘being in love’? What are the bad things about ‘being in love’?).

I also had a specific section within my questions that enabled participants to talk specifically about *being* (hetero)romantic. Again, I started by connecting this to the film: What scene in the film do you think was the most romantic? My more specific sub-questions then enabled me to interrogate their views of men in general being (hetero)romantic: What does “romantic” mean? Is it good for a guy to be romantic? Describe some ways that guys would be romantic? Is it ‘cool’ for a guy to be romantic? These questions were designed to penetrate young men’s understandings of how boyfriends can and should behave in (hetero)romantic relationships.

After these questions, I then concentrated more specifically on Edward’s performances as a boyfriend. These questions were more directed at my research question, as I wanted to find out if my participants supported Edward’s treatment of Bella (see Chapter 1, page 10-12). I had two broad questions: Do you think Edward is a good boyfriend? If yes, in what ways? If no, in what ways? Do you think teenage girls would like to have a boyfriend like Edward? If yes, why? If no, why? These broad questions also enabled me to veer into more specific questions about my participants’ views of (hetero)romance: What do good boyfriends do? What do bad boyfriends do?

Each focus group was audio-recorded and I then transcribed each group recording in full. I made sure to arrive at the classroom early each week in order to rearrange its layout so that we could all sit on chairs in a small circle, with one small desk in the middle where the audio-recorder was positioned. This layout was designed to break down power dynamics between me (the adult) and them (the students). On the whiteboard I wrote my name, as well as a few key ‘ground-rules’ for the focus group. The rules stipulated that no one should interrupt anyone speaking, that everyone must respect each other’s opinions and that anything said in the focus group was to remain confidential.

As the students arrived I endeavoured to make them feel relaxed, hoping to further destabilise any ‘adult-centrism’ my research may have promoted. I did this principally by engaging in casual banter: “Hi, how are you...take a seat...how’s class been today?”. I also invited them all to call me by my first name, as a departure from the formal way students are required to address teachers within secondary schools. In Aotearoa/New Zealand teachers are addressed as Mrs...or Ms...or Miss...or Mr..., which creates hierarchies between them and their

students. By inviting my participants to call me by my first name, I aimed to minimise the power distance that could have surfaced within our interaction.

### *Individual interviews*

I invited all focus group participants to take part in a one-on-one interview with me. As with the focus groups, each individual interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed in full. I chose to speak individually with the young men for two reasons. First, I wanted the opportunity to tease out some of the themes discussed in the focus groups that related directly to their talk about being boyfriends and male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. Two, I wanted to provide young men with a more private environment for them to talk about (hetero)romance in ways they may not have felt comfortable doing in the focus groups.

As it turned out, only four young men agreed to take part in these interviews. Because of the small number, I was able to conduct all four interviews on the same day. Mrs A organised the four young men to be released from class for their time with me. These interviews were approximately 20–25 minutes long and were conducted in empty classrooms within the school. Because only four young men took part in these one-on-one interviews, I was not able to draw any significant insights from their public talk, in comparison with their more private talk with me. What these interviews did provide however, was an opportunity to delve deeper into their understandings of what boyfriends should be entitled to do (see Chapters 5 to 7). I was also able to talk more generally about living in the rural township of Te Ika a Maui (see Chapter 6), which I did not have time to do in the focus groups.

### *Challenges in the field*

Choosing to talk only with young men within a high school environment was not without its challenges. This section will reflect on some of the difficulties I faced during my fieldwork at Te Ika a Maui High School, and consider the impact these difficulties could have had on the data I gathered and how it was interpreted.

#### *Being an ‘outsider’*

As a woman, researching young men was not an easy task to undertake (see Bucerius, 2013; Orrico, 2014; Presser, 2005; Skelton, 1998). Orrico (2014) speaks to the challenges women face when gathering data from “male-dominated settings” (Orrico, 2014, p. 473). She describes

a prevailing sense that female researchers should “downplay” (p. 475) their gendered identities within their fieldwork, which perpetuates the responsibility of female researchers to appear “genderless” (p. 475). This has prompted many feminist researchers to question how to dress and act during fieldwork, in order to minimise a sense of their “bodies being on display” and to “manage vulnerabilities” of unwanted sexualised attention from their male participants (Soyer, 2013, p. 461).

This resonates with some of my anxieties about going *into the field*. From the onset, I was concerned about being the only female in a “male-dominated setting” (Orrico, 2014, p. 473) – a classroom with young men. Before my fieldwork began I found it difficult to articulate *why* I was feeling apprehensive. However, as I began working with these young men I started to gain a better self-reflexive sense of where this anxiety was coming from (Bott, 2010). By going into the classroom alone with these young men, I – like other female researchers going ‘into the field’ – was an “outsider” due to my position within my own research (Bucerius, 2013, p. 1; see also Bott, 2010; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015; Soyer, 2013). Not only was I female and of a markedly different generation from my participants, I was also acutely aware that I was not from within the insular institution of their school.

Because of being an “outsider” (Bucerius, 2013, p. 1), I felt compelled to come across as genderless and desexualised (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Soyer, 2013). I was fixated on making sure that my conduct (how I talked with the young men and my dress) was appropriate. At some reflexive level, I was apprehensive of being seen as a relatively young female *wanting* to talk with younger men about (hetero)romance. One way that I endeavoured to de-gender myself, was by dressing very conservatively, with minimal skin showing. Like other female researchers, this was done in an effort to “ease the tension by trying to efface signs of my femininity” (Bucerius, 2013, p. 16).

My apprehension also presented itself when Mrs A was organising a room for me to conduct my individual interviews. She advised that I could use her office, which she said would be quiet and private. I had been to her office. It was a room off a room, down a quiet hallway in one of the school buildings. I immediately declined and asked instead for a classroom. She immediately asked “why” and I answered simply, that I would feel more comfortable in a classroom. This was however, my attempt to manage *risk* as a woman researcher. I felt uncomfortable being in a secluded location with a Year 12 male student because I did not want it misconstrued as inappropriate, especially in light of the subject matter of my research.

Sixteen year-old young men can also embody strength that could be used to physically hurt a smaller woman, like myself. Because of this, I felt apprehensive about being in a secluded location with my participants. This reflexive decision is echoed throughout feminist scholarship about researching men. Feminist scholars explicitly advise women researchers to manage the research context in order to maintain personal safety (Bott, 2010; Orrico, 2014; Soyer, 2013), especially when “sensitive topics” like sex and sexuality are being discussed (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011, p. 365). Gailey and Prohaska (2011) speak to the difficulties they faced within their own feminist research on men’s sexuality, from male participants either misinterpreting their questions as ‘flirting’, or responding to research questions with sexist rhetoric. On the basis of these experiences, they urge fellow female researchers to purposefully try and mitigate these vulnerabilities by dressing conservatively and choosing safe locations for doing research with men.

I was also mindful that my own feminism needed to be managed within these focus groups (see Soyer, 2013). As Hesse-Biber (2012) notes, being a self-reflexive researcher involves “paying attention to the specific ways in which our own agendas affect the research” (p. 17; see also Laiberte & Schurr, 2015). As such, I chose to not *fully* articulate my feminist agenda to my participants, as it may have been *misconstrued*. There is still a populist view in society that feminism equates to “man-hating” and I did not want my participants to interpret my politics in ways that could have stymied our discussions. Being aware of my own position as a feminist researcher *and* the potential incompatibilities with how young men understand feminism, I decided to ‘park’ many of my politics during these focus groups (see Orrice, 2014; Soyer, 2013).

However, I still wanted to uphold my feminist ethics throughout my fieldwork. I did not want to encourage or be complicit in any misogynisms or sexism that may have surfaced during the focus groups and interviews (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011). For this reason, I set boundaries (Bucerius, 2013) within the focus groups and individual interviews. For example, there were a number of sexist jokes made by the young men during the focus groups. I showed disapproval in a number of ways. At times I ignored the comments and jokes in an effort to *not acknowledge* them. At other times I confronted the young men. One participant in my second focus group, Sergei, made continual sexist jokes and misogynistic comments (see Chapter 5 for more detail). This is a typical example of one of his remarks:

Christina:                   A nice girlfriend, what does she do?



Sergei (FG2<sub>20</sub>): Cooks food

Christina: Cooks you food? Are you serious or are you having a joke?

Sergei (FG2): [laughing] Nah, I'm serious

Even though Sergei responded to me with another retort (“Nah, I’m serious”), I suggest that my questioning him did work in some ways to challenge his banter. Firstly, his peers stopped laughing after I challenged him. This is significant: my challenging him may have been read by the others as signalling that this was not acceptable banter. Secondly, after I challenged him, and he responded with “Nah, I’m serious”, he abandoned this line of talk. Again, this could be read as him understanding that this was unacceptable banter.

Bucerius (2013, p. 1) argues however, that being an “outsider”, with specific focus on women researching men, can be advantageous within the process of data gathering. In one sense, being an ‘outsider’ can foster a more solid starting point for facilitating “in-depth understanding of a group” (Bucerius, 2013, p. 3). Bott (2010, p. 159) also argues that “good data” can arise from research situations where “the group opinions and discourses jar with one’s own political ideology”. Further, being an ‘insider’ researching participants of similar demographics and political outlooks can lead to researchers overlooking the complexities of dynamics within their own fieldwork, *because* of their familiarity with their participants (Bucerius, 2013; Flood, 2013b; Pini & Pease, 2013).

These challenges emphasise how this research project was conducted within a specific social setting. I was a relatively young woman researcher going into a classroom of Year 12 young men. Therefore, the questions I asked and the discussions that were generated not *only* pertained to my research questions, but also reflected – on another level – the interaction I was having with my participants. As discussed, whilst Sergei’s sexist remarks give insight into how he makes sense of women’s roles in (hetero)romantic relationships, they may also speak to how he was interacting with me. As I will discuss in Chapter 5 (see page 95), his remarks *may* have been a moment of masculine rebellion aimed at me, a relatively young woman in an authority role within a classroom setting.

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 4, page 72 for table explaining abbreviations

### *Decentering the adult*

In somewhat of a contradiction, I was also mindful of minimising the effects of my participants feeling subordinated because I was an adult (see Renold, 2014). Power within the research process is not a one-way fixed dynamic. Instead, power relations between researcher and participant are “multi-dimensional and fluid” (Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 8). As Allen (2005) asserts, schools are already “agencies of cultural reproduction”, where “power is infused through schooling practices” (p. 500) that tend to subjugate student agency. It was important that my fieldwork attempted to re-balance this dynamic and give young men a platform from which to speak within this site. As discussed, the open and semi-structured nature of my focus groups was designed to enhance these young men’s agentic voice throughout our discussions (Heath et al., 2009; Renold, 2014). I also put practical measures in place to ethically protect my participants’ agency. For example, within their Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 1), I carefully outlined their rights to ask any questions, raise any concerns and withdraw from the fieldwork at any time.

At other times I openly *showed my age* as a way to seek knowledge from the young men. This enabled them to take an expert-status (Kehily, 2015) in their own lives, again shifting the balance from the authority usually assigned to adults in society:

- Christina: Do you still use terms like girlfriend, boyfriend? Ivan, yes. Hubert, yes
- Kirill (FG1): Mrs
- Christina: Mrs? Ok, when...how do you, do you distinguish between a girl that you are just hanging out with and a girl that you are really serious about? And are there different ways of talking about that? So if they, say there’s just a girl in the class, you guys aren’t boyfriend and girlfriend but you’re quite, you know, you do stuff together, what would she be?
- Ivan (FG1): Friendzone
- Christina: What was that Ivan?
- Ivan (FG1): The Friendzone
- Christina: The Friendzone. Do you have to get to a stage where she becomes your girlfriend? And what do you, how so you sort that out? Ivan?
- Ivan (FG1): I s’pose you can’t just go and pick them off the side of the street but (clicks fingers), “You’re my girlfriend”, but
- Hubert (FG1): Mrs

- Christina: Ok, so you've been hanging out with a girl and you haven't formally called her your girlfriend. What needs to happen in order for her to become your girlfriend? Hubert?
- Hubert (FG1): Either one of you needs to ask the other person out.
- Christina: Hmm, so you still have to ask them out?
- Ivan (FG1): Mmm
- Christina: And then if they say yes does that, ok, they're your girlfriend?
- Ivan (FG1): Yep

Within this narrative I elicited their expert knowledge about 'the dating game'. I used cues like "Do you still..." as a way to encourage their authoritative voice about how (hetero)romantic relationship evolve. They were then able to impart their knowledge about asking a girl out, the "friendzone" and the labelling of girlfriends as "Mrs". From my observations of this part of the first focus group, I noticed that the young men became quite animated when they were telling their experiences of 'going out' with young women. This suggests that for young men, being asked questions that require *their* expertise can be rewarding as it gives them a sense of authority that adults can learn from.

#### *From focus groups to individual interviews*

Because part of my intention in using focus groups was to gather public performances of masculinity – via talk – I risked silencing young men who did not want to speak-up for fear of derision. Throughout my data chapters, I attend to these potential silences within my analysis. Overall, however, I found it relatively easy to elicit talk within the focus groups (however, some participants tended to dominate the discussion, see Chapter 6). In contrast, I found the individual interviews more challenging in terms of eliciting talk. Apart from my one-on-one interview with David (see page 91 for detailed description of David), whom I quickly identified as the leader during the second focus group due to his gregariousness and many attributes linking him to hegemonic masculinity (see Schippers, 2007), the other four individual interviews were filled with a range of "interactional problems" (Roulston, 2014, p. 277).

The main problem I experienced was the young men not elaborating on the questions I asked and giving "minimal responses" (Roulston, 2014, p. 277). The transcripts of these interviews indicate countless moments when our talk was laboured. Here are two typical patterns of talk that I experienced in these interviews:

- Christina: Ok, so, so you said about going to the gym as well, so, so what, what do guys do that, that you think makes themselves really masculine?
- Nicolai (III<sub>21</sub>): I dunno, just lift weights and stuff
- Christina: So strength is really important
- Nicolai (III<sub>1</sub>): Yeah, I guess
- Christina: Ok, ok, um or is it similar to the rugby thing? Is it not really a big deal here?
- Nicolai (III<sub>1</sub>): [long pause] Aw people look up to people if, who get bigger in the gym kinda in Te Ika a Maui
- Christina: Ok, what do girls think about muscly guys?
- Nicolai (III<sub>1</sub>): Ah, I dunno, they like it I guess
- Christina: Ok, ok so so do you have, like, is there like a popular group of boys in year 12 and 13?
- Nicolai (III<sub>1</sub>): Yep
- Christina: And, what, are they the muscly guys and the rugby players
- Nicolai: (III<sub>1</sub>): Aw, to be honest in our year all the rugby players, I guess, the bigger guys are the smart ones as well
- Christina: Ok, so they've got everything
- Nicolai (III<sub>1</sub>): Aw, kind of, I dunno

Even though there were moments in this extract where Nicolai raised insights that were interesting for me to analyse in terms of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity he promoted (“the bigger guys are the smart ones as well”), there was a lack of elaboration. In my interview with Levi (II<sub>3</sub>), I experienced similar “interactional problems” (Roulston, 2014, p. 277):

- Christina: Ok, ok, um so what would a guy do that would be seen as girly or feminine that he might get ribbed for or mocked for?
- Levi (II<sub>3</sub>): Um I dunno, hanging out with girls
- Christina: Yeah, ok, so what would that be about
- Levi (II<sub>3</sub>): Um (long pause)
- Christina: So you're talking about maybe him seeming a bit 'gay'

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21 See Chapter 4, page 72 for table explaining abbreviations

Levi (II3):               Yep

Christina:                Ok, so um so what, what might his behaviour be like? What makes him appear that way?

Levi (II3):               I dunno, cos he's camp

Christina:                Ok, ok, ok, with the hands and everything and they hang out with girls? Why

Levi (II3):               (long pause)...I don't know

Christina:                So, you reckon they wouldn't get along with the guys

Levi (II3):               Yep

Christina:                Ok, um so they, so they've um really only got one option which is to hang out with the girls

Levi (II3):               Yeah

Christina:                Ok, um what else apart from the 'gay' thing, what else would guys do that would get them mocked for being 'a girl'. What kind of behaviours or stuff like that

Levi (II3):               Um, I don't know, being overly obsessive with their hair and that

Christina:                Ok, so being too vain

Levi (II3):               Yeah

Christina:                Do you need to be a little aware of how you look though for a guy?

Levi (II3):               I s'pose

Christina:                And so when does it become too much?

Levi (II3):               Um, I don't know, when you just over do it

Again, Levi raised some very interesting notions of gendered performances but I was unable to get him to delve deeper into this. This conversation was also laden with “disfluences” (see Roulston, 2014, p. 277), where Levi took long pauses (5–10 seconds in length) and then still answered with either an “I dunno” or “Yeah”.

On reflection, I can now see that I contributed to this type of talk. I was ill-prepared for these interactional problems. Had I anticipated them, I could have thought of more creative ways to elicit talk. For example, a range of qualitative researchers have incorporated the use of images and scenarios to prompt discussion within their interviews with young people (Allen, 2007; Nayak & Kehily, 2014). I could have prepared some images of young men's embodiment of

hegemonic masculinity, as well as male femininities, to ‘get the conversation’ flowing. I could also have incorporated scenarios that my interviewees may have encountered within the school, again to stimulate talk. As Kumsa, Chambon, Yan and Maiter (2015, p. 429) reflect, participatory qualitative research often comes up against these types of limits, or what they call “messy processes”, which mark missed opportunities where researchers *could* have been more creative in their methodological approaches to gathering data.

## Data analysis

My next task was to look for meaningful connections within and across my participants’ transcribed talk. I chose a *thematic analysis* method that utilised both deductive and inductive means of analysing raw data (Berg, 2007). Thematic analysis is a sub-category of content analysis, which involves a “careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings” (Berg, 2007, p. 304). Thematic analysis draws themes from raw data in two ways: deductive themes are those that the researcher locates *before* the raw data is collected and analysed (Berg, 2007). For example, before I completed my fieldwork, I *knew* that I wanted to look out for certain themes, for example, how young men would speak about Edward Cullen’s protective treatment of Bella. However, I relied more so on an inductive process that enabled me to let the data speak for itself (Berg, 2007). For example, I was not aware at the beginning of my fieldwork that young men would fixate on pariah femininities (see Chapter 7). As Berg (2007) outlines, “in order to present the perceptions of others in the *most forthright manner*, a greater reliance on induction is necessary” (*emphasis added* p. 312).

I located themes from my raw data (the transcriptions from the focus groups and individual interviews) by creating pen on paper webs of connected ideas that I found within young men’s talk about how they thought boyfriends should and should not be able to act. Specifically, I was looking for *any* moments when young men’s talk endorsed male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships. Three core themes surfaced, that I then analysed further by assigning simple codes (eg. BP: benevolent paternalism, see Chapter 5; TM: territory marking, see Chapter 7; PF: pariah femininities, see Chapter 7) to specific points in the transcripts. Once I located these, I added them to my web-like notes to build a more *complex* diagram of the data to concentrate on in my data chapters.

In crafting these chapters, I had to decide *how* I (as a feminist researcher) would present these to the reader. These discussions (see Chapters 5 to 7) do not pretend to present an objective or ‘real’ account of what these young men talked about with me. Instead the data I gathered were contingent on the social setting of this particular research project. For example, as I discussed previously in this chapter, I was a relatively young female researcher talking to 16 year-old young men in a classroom setting. My gender therefore played a part in the dialogues we had. Likewise, my use of focus groups brought a public element to our conversations – this may have worked to silence young men, whilst at the same time causing other participants speak in ways they would not in other more private settings. Kehily (2015, p. 692) suggests that data generated within these types of research projects be considered as “moments” brought about by the context surrounding them. This is a useful understanding that enabled me to analyse young men’s gendered performances as complex and at times contradictory in the following chapters, rather than simplistically assuming them to be concrete and ‘real’ accounts of how they understand being boyfriends

## In conclusion

This chapter has presented a detailed account of *how* I went about my fieldwork and data gathering and *why* I chose such methods. I hope this chapter has illustrated that qualitative methods, like focus groups and interviews, can be fraught with challenges, but also valuable in terms of the opportunities they provide for people to talk about their lives and their views of the world around them. My position as a feminist within a male-dominated environment was a marked challenge for me. In many ways I was an “outsider” (Bucerius, 2013, p. 1) within my own research. There were times when I had to manage my own anxieties about being in this position within a room filled with young men. In other ways, however, my ‘outsider’ status created an environment where rich research findings surfaced. From spending time with these young men, I gathered many moments of their talk that presented *their* ‘social realities’ (Hesse-Biber, 2012). These moments enabled me to interrogate the complexities, subtleties and at times contradictions embedded within how young men make sense of being boyfriends in ways that support male oppression. The following chapters will now present these analytical discussions.

# CHAPTER 5

## “He protects her a lot”: Romance, paternalism and being a ‘good’ boyfriend

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Before I embarked on my fieldwork for this project, a (male) friend of mine asked me what my doctoral thesis was about. I explained broadly that I was going to speak with young men about how they made sense of romantic love and being a ‘good’ boyfriend. His response was: “I can tell you now that they will have nothing to say about this. You’ll be lucky if you get anything out of them at all”. I was not surprised by my friend’s attitude. Within populist rhetoric, romantic love has long been associated with femininity, and young men largely seen to ‘have only one thing on their mind’ – sex. In this chapter, I will show how this understanding is limited by presenting an analysis of how young men talked at length about (hetero)romantic love and how they thought a ‘good’ boyfriend *should* act. I am particularly interested in moments when their ideas about how to be ‘good’ boyfriends coincide with their endorsement of boyfriends being entitled to be oppressive within their (hetero)romantic relationships with women.

Within young men’s talk, a range of dispositions surfaced that equated being a ‘good’ boyfriend with paternalism. This specific finding was drawn from my participants’ discussion of the film *Twilight*. Notably, it was their complex, at times contradictory appraisals of Edward Cullen’s (the story’s vampire lead) paternalistic treatment of *Twilight*’s heroine – Bella Swan – that form a significant part of this chapter’s interrogation of how male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships is enabled by the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. In this chapter, I examine how young men’s endorsements of boyfriends being paternalistic within (hetero)romantic relationships work to stabilise this hegemonic order. I do not assume however, that these understandings are inherently stable. I also show moments of ambivalence in young men’s talk about being ‘good’ boyfriends that *could* provide possibilities for



destabilising the hegemonic scaffolding of gender relations that appears to govern young men's understandings of the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) of (hetero)romance.

### Young men being legitimately romantic

(Hetero)romance has been long examined by feminist scholars. This has yielded a rich literature that critiques heteronormative structures (for example, marriage as an institutional representation of heteronormativity), as well as examining gendered performances of (hetero)romantic love (see Jackson, 1993; 2006; Kimport, 2012; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Towns & Adams, 2001; Ward & Schneider, 2009; Wolkomir, 2009). Jackson's (1993) pioneering piece is still meaningful today in the ways it explores the different gendered performances men and women bring to (hetero)romantic relationships. Jackson compares the depths of women's emotional literacy in being romantic to men's more superficial emotional investment in (hetero)romantic love. She argues that men lack the same emotional literacy that women display. Yet this conclusion neglects a more complex interrogation of how men *do* invest in being romantic. The young men in my research *were* invested in being (hetero)romantic. However, it was also clear that there were limits on how they could be *legitimately* (hetero)romantic whilst still securing their status as masculine.

Young men being (hetero)romantic has a robust yet small representation within current literature (Allen, 2007; Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Redman, 2001; Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso & Striepe, 2004). These studies speak to the ways young men take up certain (hetero)romantic practices as a way to stabilise their masculine status. Allen (2007) engages with Demetriou's (2001) theorising of a hegemonic bloc to look at how young men benefit from carrying out (hetero)romantic practices that have previously been considered feminine, and are now appropriated in ways that "do not pose a significant disruption to the operation of hegemonic masculinity" (p. 149). Allen (2007, p. 146), nevertheless, cautions that young men can be "too romantic". This occurs when young men are seen to express (hetero)romance in overly feminised ways, signalling there is a right amount of romance that young men can express that will safeguard their masculine status.

I hope to extend these studies on young men being romantic by elucidating how young men define and understand the limits around how to be legitimately romantic that speak to their endorsement of boyfriends being able to oppress women they are involved with romantically.

As outlined in Chapter 2 (see page 23), “legitimacy” is an important concept within my research. Men’s gendered performances are seen as legitimate when they take on the qualities or characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Because masculinity is “always superior” and never “conflated with something undesirable” (Schippers, 2007, p. 96), I will also speak of boyfriend performances that are legitimate for men to carry out simply, as *masculine*. When young men are seen to embody ways of being boyfriends that threaten the workings of gender hegemony within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships, I will speak of these as enactments of *feminitities* and therefore illegitimate.

The young men in my study had a significant amount to say about *how to* be romantic. One of my initial questions to each focus group was: *Is it cool for a guy to be romantic?* In accordance with other research around this topic (see Redman, 2001; Allen, 2007), there was agreement within each focus group that being romantic was considered ‘cool’. Embedded in young men’s responses was a consensus that certain ways of being (hetero)romantic were seen as legitimate and masculine, making others illegitimate and therefore definitively feminine (see Chapter 2).

There was a range of ways that young men talked about how to be romantic. Some drew on popular and traditional conventions of romantic expressions. These understanding of how to be romantic are likely to be pre-reflexive, a “knowing how rather than knowing that” (Lovell, 2000, p. 12) that enables young men to speak publically about (hetero)romance. Their suggestions included going out for a ‘nice’ dinner (with additions like candlelight, and young men paying for the meal), cooking a ‘nice’ meal and gifting chocolates and flowers. These were readily reported in each focus group as acceptable ways for young men to be romantic.

Young men also spoke of being selfless and chivalrous as legitimate ways of being romantic towards a young woman they wanted to impress. Suggestions of these kinds of romantic gestures were given across all three focus groups:

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Sergei (FG22): | Get them their books out of their cupboard  |
| Kirill (FG1):  | Take her to a movie, a romantic movie even if you didn’t want to but just ‘cos she wants to |
| Jakov (FG1):   | Take her somewhere where she really wants to go   |

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22 See Chapter 4, page 72 for table outlining abbreviation meanings

Toma (FG2):                   Take her on dates and ah do stuff like, do fun stuff you know, stuff that she wants to do

The most chivalrous suggestion that carried with it the starkest treatment of conventional gendered roles was given by Demetri (FG3):

Demetri (FG3):               A romantic movie of their choice, they can choose the movie but you still pay.

This endorsement of chivalry – letting young women *choose* the movie, coupled with young men paying for all expenses on the date – speaks explicitly to traditional expectations around how young men think they *should* conduct themselves as boyfriends. Chivalrous boyfriends not only appear to play by the rules of (hetero)romance by being seen as selfless, but also as taking up conventional gendered norms of providing for young women.

Research on rurality and gendered identities indicates that *adult* men and women who live rurally are more likely to take on these traditional notions of gendered roles within (hetero)romantic couplings (Little, 2003, 2007). What is missing<sup>23</sup> from scholarship is how rural young men feel towards these performances of (hetero)romance. The more conventional ways of being (hetero)romantic endorsed throughout my participants' talk seem congruent with Little's (2007) proposition, which suggests *rural* workings of gender hegemony may influence young men's (hetero)romantic relationships in similar ways to their adult male counterparts. In keeping with Schippers' (2007) proposal, these workings – which place masculinity as hierarchically dominant and ascendant to femininity – provide the 'hegemonic scaffolding' for men to be positioned as dominant over women within (hetero)romantic relationships.

Whilst young men's talk endorsed conventional ways of being romantic, there were also moments when they indicated that boyfriends can be "too romantic" (Allen, 2007, p. 149), leading to ridicule and being marked as feminine by their peers. This was eloquently captured in my one-on-one interview with Year 12 student, Nicolai (II.1<sup>24</sup>). I asked him if he had ever seen a friend do anything romantic that he thought was humorous. Nicolai hinted one of his friends had engaged in the practice of love-letter writing:

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<sup>23</sup> There are a small number of studies on young women in rural areas and their (hetero)romantic relationships (see Morris & Fuller, 1999; Luft, Jenkins & Cameron, 2012)

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 4, page 72 for table outlining abbreviation meanings

Nicolai (III): Maybe like drawing like her pictures and stuff and like her name in fancy writing

Christina: Yeah

Nicolai (III): Yeah, my mate did that

Christina: Ok

Nicolai (III): Laughed at him a little bit...

Later Nicolai remarked on the following:

Nicolai (III): He mainly got so much grief off me cos he took two hours to do it all

Arguably, Nicolai gave his friend “so much grief” because of the type of investment his friend made in being (hetero)romantic. Undertaking “fancy” letter writing coupled with the time commitment given to such a task is more likely associated with feminine girlfriend behaviour. In terms of the hegemonic scaffolding that organises the field of (hetero)romantic relationships, Nicolai sees his friend’s *feminine* romantic gestures as *breaking the rules* of (hetero)romance because they are associated with a version of male femininity that threatens the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity. Nicolai’s claim that he found this funny further substantiates this point. To designate enactments of male femininity (Schippers, 2007; see Chapter 2) as humorous helps to contain them from threatening the legitimacy of masculinity within significant fields of action young men participate in, like the field of (hetero)romantic relationships.

This example supports Allen’s (2007) assertion that there are limits to how much (hetero)romance young men can express, whilst still being seen as masculine. Young men see gifting flowers, chocolates, being chivalrous, and going out on dates to restaurants and movies as legitimate and therefore masculine performances of (hetero)romance. More feminine enactments of romance – as seen in Nicolai’s friend’s attempt at love-letter writing – are not. Nicolai’s narrative also speaks to the difference in young men’s public expressions of romance versus their more private attempts at being romantic. Young men’s private versus public managing of how to be boyfriends resonates with Richardson’s (2010) research: young men’s public bravado regarding heterosexual relationships is often very different from the private anxieties they may grapple with when deciding ‘how’ to be romantic.

There was a brief yet significant contestation between two participants regarding the suggestions made within focus groups about how to be legitimately romantic. These contestations were significant because they were made by the two young men – David and

Alek – whom I identified as peer leaders. I categorised them as leaders because they embodied a significant number of qualities of hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter 2; Schippers, 2007), setting them apart from the other group members.

David emerged as the leader of focus group two. He presented as a tall, athletic and conventionally handsome young man who was also in Te Ika a Maui's first XV rugby<sup>25</sup> team. Alek, who emerged as the leader of focus group three<sup>26</sup>, was similarly tall, athletic, handsome and had been in the first XV rugby team the previous year. He was also, as one of my individual interviewees commented, destined to be head boy and was the top scholar of Year 12. David and Alek not only embodied a significant range of hegemonic qualities, but also displayed their leader-status in *how* they spoke during the focus groups. I will return to David and Alek's responses throughout the next two data chapters. Their contributions marked important moments (Kehily, 2015) during the collective talk of young men when hegemonic masculinity took form.

Both David and Alek critiqued their peers' more traditional suggestions about how to be romantic and instead positioned themselves as having a more nuanced romantic "cultural repertoire" (Redman, 2001, p. 186). In doing so, they marked their romantic 'know-how' as superior to that of their peers, indicating that they "played the game [of (hetero)romance] differently" (Moi, 1991, p. 1022) and in more successful ways. This highlights a subtle difference in their embodiment of habitus (Moi, 1991; see Chapter 2 page 29-30) that set them apart from others in the group.

David (FG2; L27) exclaimed: "Just be unique and stuff like that. Don't just go, ah, we're gonna go to the movies and then go to dinner. Actually put some thought into what you're doing". This remark by David was not contested by any of the other young men. Alek (FG3; L) similarly critiqued the conventional responses from those in his focus group, arguing instead that he knew how to 'do' romance better: "Ask them out on the beach...in the sunset...without people". He also proudly stated, "I asked Helena out on the beach, I aced it". With this remark he positioned his expression of romance as 'successful' and located himself as an authority on

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<sup>25</sup> Rugby is the most popular winter sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Players within a school's First XV team are often regarded as 'successful' young men

<sup>26</sup> There was no clear leader that emerged from focus group one

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 4, page 72 for table outlining abbreviation meanings

the matter, which no one in the group contested. These two examples support Redman's (2001) observations of young men and romance: "The act of speaking from a particular position of power can be said to confer recognition on or withhold it from others" (p. 189). It is ironic that even though Alek appeared to be speaking from a "position of power", his use of a beach setting as a location for a unique and successful romantic gesture is not particularly original within the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand<sup>28</sup>.

Both Alek's and David's position within their groups enabled them to speak with authority and as such their views were not challenged publically by others. Their privileged position was made clearer when another young man, Levi (FG1), suggested that he would watch the sunset with his girlfriend as a way of 'being romantic'. This suggestion was very similar to Alek's<sup>29</sup>, however, unlike Alek's, Levi's was met with ridicule from the others in his focus group. It was not clear to me what prompted this reaction until I later spoke with Nicolai in his individual interview, when he shed light on Levi's position within the school:

Nicolai (III1): People don't really get mocked for being feminine or, or like, I don't know, it's like people, there's one guy [Levi] and you, and you like move your hand and he just flinches

Christina: Ok,

Nicolai (III1): And so everyone like thinks he's a little girl

Christina: Ok,

Nicolai (III1): And stuff but like you know, not really, I dunno

Christina: So he's really jittery, anxious?

Nicolai (III1): Yeah, just scared of everyone

Christina: Ok

Nicolai (III1): But yeah like there's not really any of too much, guys don't really get bullied, I guess here, I dunno

Nicolai claimed here that Levi's displays of anxiety are policed by his peers and labelled *feminine*: "Everyone thinks he's a little girl". In this case, Levi can be seen to embody a form

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<sup>28</sup> In Aotearoa/New Zealand, because of its geographical shape (its two main islands are characteristically long and thin) beaches are typically accessible to a significant amount of the population.

<sup>29</sup> Note that Levi and Alek were in different focus groups

of male femininity, marked by qualities of weakness and vulnerability. This empirically extends Schippers' (2007) explanation that the qualities of hegemonic femininity (weakness and vulnerability), when embodied by young men, are seen to threaten the hegemonic order of gender relations and are thus stigmatised as deviant. Levi's displays of anxiety, although only one quality of male femininity (see Schippers, 2007), made him a target of derision *because* of the threat his feminine embodiment presented to the hegemonic order of gendered identities. For Alek, however, I suggest that his position and status within the focus group allowed him to speak without ridicule about a similar way of being romantic because his embodiment of gender posed no threat to the hegemonic order.

My findings concur with those of Allen (2007). There appears to be a *right amount* of romance that can protect and even elevate a young man's masculine status. In addition, my findings show young men's views on how to be romantic can be ridiculed and seen as feminine, indicating that young men can be "too romantic" (Allen, 2007, p. 149). As an extension of Allen's (2007, p. 149) work, my findings suggest that young men can be feminised for breaking the rules and being "too romantic"; not because of the romantic gestures they engage in, but due to their standing within the hegemonic order of gender in their lives. Even though Alek and Levi appeared to share similar dispositions about how to be romantic, they appeared to "play the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 34) of (hetero)romance differently from their peers' perspective. Alek was successfully masculine and therefore did not pose a threat to the hegemonic order. Because of this, I argue, his romantic suggestions were supported by the group as nuanced, original and therefore legitimate. In contrast, Levi's understanding of how to be (hetero)romantic was a threat to the hegemonic order at work in these young men's lives because of his prior performances of femininity. As a result, his romantic suggestions needed to be *contained* and thus were treated by others in the group as laughable and ridiculous.

Another way the young men spoke about being romantic shed light on the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities operating in their lives. There was a significant amount of what would be popularly termed "sexist" comments towards young women accompanying young men's talk. Here are a few examples embedded within suggestions for how to be romantic. Sergei (FG2) contributed that "if you were living together, you could occasionally wash the dishes maybe", and Cheslav (FG1) said he would "cook her dinner once a year". When asked what constitutes a 'good' boyfriend, Toma (FG1) suggested that he "reminds her when to clear the dishes", whilst Sergei (FG2) said, in an effort to be humorous, "not beat her up" (accompanied

by laughter). On the whole, these forms of ‘traditional sexism’ about a woman’s subordinate position in the household were met with laughter. When I challenged a number of them about whether this was a serious answer, they all replied “Yes”, in a similarly jocular manner.

Sexist talk, especially when used in a jocular way, plays a role in the hegemonic formation of gendered identities. With specific attention to young men in secondary school, there is a well-established body of literature that looks at how humour (often in the form of feminine and homosexual slurs) can help young men (re)assert their masculine identities amongst their male peers, as well as excuse their more feminine performances (Allen, 2005; Barnes, 2012; Huuki, Manninen, Sunnari, 2010; Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Pascoe, 2005; Warwick & Aggleton, 2014). Kehily and Nayak (1997, p. 69) argue that “humour plays a significant part in consolidating male peer group culture...offering a sphere for conveying masculine identities”. Even though my research did not interrogate the school as a site where humour is used in these ways, my findings do concur that sexist humour is used to consolidate a male group culture. Humour is also used as a way for young men, when together, to engage in oppressive talk that subordinates women. Furthermore, their talk also endorsed male oppression specifically within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships: *she* (the girlfriend) must ‘serve’ *him* (the boyfriend) in ways exemplified by doing dishes and cooking meals.

As discussed in Chapter 4 (see page 78), feminist researchers have commented on the challenges they have faced when interviewing men who engage in sexist talk (see Gailey & Prohaska, 2011). Feminist scholars advise female researchers to put in place measures to counteract the possibilities of sexism, *should* they arise in their fieldwork (Bott, 2010; Orrico, 2014; Soyer, 2013), especially when research concerns “sensitive topics” (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011, p. 365). My talking with young men about (hetero)romance could be considered a sensitive topic that lent itself to sexist talk being initiated by male participants. My line of questioning – for example, about what qualities a ‘good’ girlfriend possesses – opened the door for these remarks (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion about how I managed these occurrences within the focus groups).

Most notably, it was Sergei’s incessant use of feminine slurs towards young women that stood out for me. I have already discussed Sergei’s repetitive sexist talk in Chapter 4. I return to it now to elucidate what it may say about young men’s *public* grapplings with masculinity and being romantic. Accompanying his earlier comment that being nice to your girlfriend means that you “don’t beat her up”, he contributed a range of other slurs. When I asked the group



what qualities they thought a ‘good’ girlfriend should possess, he replied: “squats” (a form of exercise where you repeatedly ‘squat’ down to strengthen your thigh muscles), and then later, “cooks food”. When I asked the group how they would be romantic towards a young woman that they liked, Sergei said: “If you were living together you could occasionally wash the dishes maybe”. It appeared that he used these objectifying slurs in ways that allowed him to evade sharing in front of the group his *more personal* views on being romantic. Even though (hetero)romance can be seen as having a legitimate place within masculine performances, there is still a risk of *getting it wrong* in front of your peers and being ridiculed as a result (see Allen, 2007). Sergei’s constant use of sexist banter could be read as providing him a way to take part in the discussions safely. It gained him a degree of masculine notoriety that was displayed in his peers’ support through laughing at his comments.

Sergei’s sexist talk also appeared to derive from a disposition that endorsed the subordination of girlfriends – arguably a product of the hegemonic order of gendered identities embedded within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships. As his comments indicated, a young man is seen as ‘nice’ to his girlfriend if he ‘spares her’ from being physically assaulted, a ‘good’ girlfriend maintains an ‘acceptable’ body image and cooks for her boyfriend, and young women should perform the majority of household chores.

Further, it seems that sexist talk plays a key role in how young men’s habitus operate. The findings illuminate two types of game-play achieved through the use of sexist language. As already touched on, Sergei’s sexist retorts appeared to “play the game” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 34) of (hetero)romance by endorsing girlfriends being placed in subservient roles. However, there may have been another game at stake within this interaction with Sergei. As discussed in Chapter 4 (see page 79), these sexist comments may have been a product of masculine rebellion aimed at me, a relatively young female researcher who was in a proxy authority role within a classroom setting.

To extend this discussion further, his peers’ laughter publically supported Sergei’s feminine slurs, which in turn created a shared habitus (Moi, 1991) amongst the young men in the group. Their laughter showed their public support for how he ‘played the game’ of (hetero)romance, which in this case was using sexist humour to answer questions about (hetero)romance in ways that subordinate women and femininity. If Sergei was displaying a masculine rebellion towards me, then their laughter also worked to support his insubordination, furthering their shared habitus within the context of the focus group.

Although Sergei's comments were largely greeted by supportive laughter from the group, David (the group's leader) played somewhat of a disciplinary role, reprimanding many of Sergei's comments as "sexist". David's reactions offer new empirical insights into the performance of hegemonic masculinity amongst young men within group settings and support Schippers' (2007) conceptual work around 'legitimacy' (see Chapter 2). The group's appreciation of Sergei's slurs (via laughter) could be argued as proof that Sergei's strategy secured his masculine status publicly amongst other young men. Yet, he was also publicly reprimanded on a number of occasions by David, whose chastising was *also* not met with any contestation from the group. It appears, in this context, that young men's dispositions that endorse girlfriends being subservient can be publicly renounced as illegitimate by those young men who do not pose a threat to the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. David strongly represented hegemonic masculinity within the group as a whole, giving empirical weight to Schippers (2007, p. 98) discussions around "masculine insurance". This 'insurance' explains *why* he was able to speak out against heterosexist talk without being stigmatised. Others, however, with less masculine standing in the group *needed* to support Sergei's talk in order for their masculine status to be left unquestioned.

There are other ways of interpreting David's comments. His speaking out could be seen as moments of critical reflexivity – an *awakening of the consciousness* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; McNay, 1999) – which propelled him to renounce his friend's use of feminine slurs towards young women. This reading is optimistic that young men *do* and *can* stand up against sexist claims that position girlfriends as subservient. Yet, Adkins (2004) cautions against this Bourdieusian argument (see Chapter 2), maintaining instead that these moments of (seeming) critical reflexivity tend not to be as transforming as others may think (see McNay, 1999). Adkins argues that these moments speak instead to other habituated forms of gender. David's reprimanding could therefore be interpreted as him taking on an already habituated paternalist role by standing up for young women. In doing so, David could be seen as rendering young women incapable of standing up for themselves.

David's reprimanding of Sergei as sexist could also be read as a popular, habituated post-feminist response that refashions the oppressive hegemonic scaffolding of gender relations by feigning belief that gender relations *are* equitable. McRobbie (2004) argues that post-feminism superficially promotes girls/women as equals amongst boys/men, making the renouncement of sexism a popular pursuit. But, as McRobbie (2004, p. 255) warns, these post-feminist narratives

not only work against *actual* gender equity, but restabilise masculinity's dominance by denying the *need* for feminism in society:

Post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasises that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force.

In this way, David's renouncement of Sergei's sexism could in turn problematically position women as pseudo-equals to men, denying the continued sexism women *do* face within contemporary society. These two interpretations – that David was either being paternalistic or entering into post-feminist rhetoric – empirically extend Adkins' (2004) argument that reflexivity (as seen in David's comments) is not the transforming practice that other scholars (like McNay, 1999; see Chapter 2) have suggested.

### Young men being 'good' boyfriends

As well as discussing how to be romantic, young men also spent a significant amount of time talking about how to be a 'good' boyfriend. When I asked what the qualities of a 'good' boyfriend were, I received a range of outwardly positive responses, including being loyal, caring and respecting their girlfriend's opinion. I also received concerning replies, as illustrated in Sergei's jocular and deliberately provocative comment that a 'good' boyfriend refrains from "beating up" his girlfriend. Apart from these comments, one particular answer dominated our discussions. The young men repeatedly discussed a 'good' boyfriend as one who *protects* his girlfriend. It was at this point in our discussions that they engaged significantly with the film *Twilight*, and principally with its lead vampire/hero, Edward Cullen. Throughout this section I will analyse how their engagement with Edward's paternalistic character reinforces the hegemonic scaffolding that enables them to endorse boyfriends being oppressive (see Chapter 1, page 10-12) towards their girlfriends. As discussed in Chapter 3 (page 39), an in-depth critical feminist examination of benevolent paternalism does not feature strongly within existing scholarship. My findings seek to rectify this by providing a detailed feminist critique of how young men promote the use of benevolent paternalism when talking about (hetero)romance.

In both the book and film adaptation, *Twilight* (see Chapter 1, page 10-12 for a detailed synopsis) tells the story of a vampire (Edward Cullen) and his human love interest (Bella

Swan). As discussed in Chapter 1, there are concerning themes surrounding Edward's control of Bella, which illuminate the complex and oppressive workings of paternalism. In one way, Edward performs a version of benevolent paternalism displayed in how he 'watches over' Bella, protecting her from danger. In another way however, Edward's paternalism bridges into possessiveness, highlighted in the ways that he stalks Bella without her knowing and controls her movements. Feminist scholars (see Bailie, 2011; Bealer, 2011; Donnelly, 2011; Groper, 2011; Happel, 2010; Miller, 2009; Mukherjea, 2011; Murphy, 2011; Petersen, 2012; Summers, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Torkelson, 2011; Wilson, 2011) have voiced concern over Edward's oppressive treatment of Bella and their relationship overall, in which Bella is very much the subordinate.

Within my own research, young men were not fans per se of *Twilight*. However, most had already seen the film prior to our watching it together. In contrast to Click and others' (2015) study about male fans of *Twilight* (see Chapter 1), my participants had a more complex reaction to Edward's paternalism. Firstly, and in keeping with Click et al.'s findings, they enthusiastically praised Edward's benevolent paternalism toward Bella (see Groper, 2011 and Mukerjea, 2011 for discussions about Edward's benevolent nature):

Sergei (FG2):                Yeah protects her from any harm, would do anything for her

Ivan (FG1):                He protects her a lot

Jakov (FG1):                Yeah cos he protects her and stuff

Konrad (FG3):                Showing that he would put himself in danger for her

Within these brief narratives is explicit praise for Edward's *ability* to protect Bella. Young men specifically linked this to Edward's muscularity and physical capabilities. Across all three focus groups, a favourite scene in the film was when Edward "ripped off James' head": James was another vampire who wanted to kill Bella. Edward's retaliation against James saved Bella's life. Another favourite scene was when Edward saved Bella from a violent situation involving a group of men. David remarked on Edward's "mad driving skills" as he entered this particular scene driving incredibly fast in order to get to Bella quickly. Shifting from the film to reflect on their own lives, each focus group indicated that protecting one's girlfriend – a key feature of benevolent paternalism – was a masculine practice that they felt 'good' boyfriends should demonstrate.

A feature of Edward's protective and paternalistic treatment of Bella that also gained support across the focus groups was the restraint he showed in *not* killing Bella. These displays of restraint were praised by a number of the young men who saw this as evidence that Edward loved Bella. I asked the first focus group what they thought Edward did that showed them that he loved Bella. The discussion turned to one particular scene when Bella had been bitten by another vampire and Edward was tasked to 'suck' the venom from her wound in order to save her life. This had a significant degree of risk as Edward's thirst for Bella's blood was potentially uncontrollable. If he could not stop 'sucking' once the venom was cleared then he would 'suck' all of her blood, killing her. However, if he did not attempt to suck the venom from Bella then she would begin transitioning painfully into a vampire. Edward did not want Bella to transform into a vampire as he felt that vampires had no soul, and did not want Bella to lose hers. As this scene unfolds, Edward does 'suck' the venom from Bella's wound and *almost* loses 'control', but he eventually manages to stop 'sucking'. The young men drew on this display of restraint to talk about Edward's love for Bella:

Roman (FG1):           He stopped from killing her, so he was like sucking her blood and everything and he stopped. He forced himself to stop

Christina:             Ok, so even though he felt violent towards her, he showed 'will power'?

Kirill (FG1):          Restraint

Christina:             Restraint...ah, Kliment?

Kliment (FG1):       Well he didn't turn her into a vampire cos he knows it's not the greatest life

In this example, Roman, Kirill and Kliment associated men restraining from violence towards their female partners as a display of love.

Hubert, also from focus group one, provided further insights into Edward's general displays of restraint, praising this as part of his paternalistic treatment of Bella. There is one scene when Edward actively tries to avoid being around Bella. Hubert offered this interpretation of why Edward was acting in this manner:

Hubert (FG1):        Cos he hadn't fully learnt yet, hadn't fully learnt how to control himself, for the will power, for like biting her and whatever

Christina:             So he, so in a way ...was that his way of kind of protecting her?

Hubert (FG1):        Yeah

Christina:             To keep her at arms-length?

Hubert (FG1):               Cos he still hadn't quite gained...control.

Both of these interpretations – Edward's restraint as a marker of love *and* his paternalistic protection of Bella – raise questions about the dispositions young men hold towards gendered roles within (hetero)romantic relationships. Young men's engagement with these two scenes from the film suggests in the first instance that they equated masculinity with a *natural* and inevitable tendency towards violence and aggression. Showing restraint is therefore a response to this natural predisposition of being male. To take this further however, young men also interpreted restraint as displays of (hetero)romantic love and paternalism, and therefore a legitimate way of being a 'good' boyfriend.

Within these interpretations are significant clues as to how young men believe they *should* perform masculinity within (hetero)romantic relationships that are new to scholarship. Only a handful of studies have sought to find out young men's *views* on gendered violence within (hetero)romantic relationships (see Chapter 3; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996; McCarry, 2009, 2010; McCarry & Lombard, 2016; Sundaram, 2013, 2016; Towns & Scott, 2009). Nowhere in these studies have young men talked about restraint as a marker of love. It is perhaps my use of the film *Twilight* – depicting a boyfriend showing restraint – that enabled this disposition, which is likely pre-reflexive, to surface effortlessly within their talk.

That young men evoked this understanding to explain *why* Edward was a good boyfriend is concerning. Towns and Adams (2001) argue that men who are violent often take on 'dual' identities. In the case of *Twilight*, Edward "splits" (Towns and Adams, 2000, p. 566) between being Bella's exceptional Prince Charming (see Murphy, 2011), whose intense love for her is enduring and forever, and the most violent and possessive 'person' Bella has ever met. His displays of restraint further feed into his dualism. He is violently desirous of Bella, but shows an inordinate amount of restraint because of his love for her. Feminist scholarship has argued for four decades that this dangerous love dynamic – marked by possessive, violent yet exceptional and intense love – is a critical risk marker for men in violent (hetero)romantic relationships (see Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Sev'er, 2002; Towns & Adams, 2001). However, the young men in my study praised this part of Edward's treatment of Bella.

These findings also empirically extend Schippers' (2007, p. 90) conceptual work around hegemonic masculinity, by signaling a range of "quality contents" of hegemonic masculinity currently in place within young men's dispositions towards gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships. Here, hegemonic masculinity is categorised on the one hand by men being

‘naturally’ aggressive and violent, whilst on the other having degrees of control and will-power within their gendered performances as boyfriends. This latter quality *could* on the surface be considered a positive attribute, but is problematic when considering how young men grapple with the hegemonic order of gendered identities and the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) of (hetero)romance that this order promotes. If young men endorse boyfriends who display paternalism in the form of control and will-power, then they will likely endorse girlfriends who complement this masculine performance. By engaging with Schippers’ (2007) definition of hegemonic femininity (see Chapter 2), girlfriends can gain acceptance within the working of gender hegemony by following these rules of (hetero)romance – being vulnerable and dependent on their boyfriends’ ability to be protective and self-controlled. Their physical safety can be read here as dependent on their boyfriends, who are in turn praised for showing restraint from being violent.

Young men’s understanding of this relationship between femininity and masculinity is further complicated by their dispositions surrounding provocation. Provocation narratives are misogynistic and work well to hinder the movement to prevent violence against women. A few of my participants argued that Bella, knowing that Edward was a vampire, provoked his violent tendencies. One pivotal and emotionally-charged scene involves Bella trying to persuade Edward to confess to being a vampire. Hubert spoke to this repeatedly, with reference again to Edward showing restraint:

Hubert (FG1):                    When they were up at the back of the school, up the mountain and she um she believed that he would show restraint and she kept egging him on...he was trying to get away and she was egging him on.

And later:

Hubert (FG1)                    Yes, cos he, after she was egging him on he, was, finally learnt that he could show restraint against her.

Hubert clearly saw Bella as provoking Edward. Alek, the leader from the third focus group, similarly critiqued Bella’s pursuit of Edward, arguing that she had “lost all reasoning” by deciding to start a relationship with him. Therefore, Alek and Hubert both felt that Bella was to blame for the potentially dangerous situation that *could* have unfolded.

These findings resonate with findings of existing studies (McCarry, 2009, 2010; McCarry & Lombard, 2014; Sundaram, 2013; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009): that young men (and women) often explain women’s provocation as causing men to be violent. Of these studies, only Towns

and Scott's (2008) work looked in depth<sup>30</sup> at how young men engage with themes of provocation when in a male to male group context. My empirical evidence is valuable because it adds to this study, confirming that young men do *think* this way.

I also hope to add further depth to this argument by engaging with Schippers' (2007; see Chapter 2) work around *pariah femininities*. Hubert and Alek positioned Bella's performance as provoking and irrational. By being 'provocative' and 'irrational', young women cease to play by the rules of (hetero)romance; she is no longer vulnerable and passive in relation to her boyfriend and, instead, is seen as aggressive and headstrong. When embodied by men these qualities are seen as characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, but when embodied by women they are seen as contaminating the hegemonic order of gendered identities (Schippers, 2007). As Schippers argues, these are typical characteristics of the contaminating female. Young women are seen as pariah when they embody qualities that challenge "the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity" (p. 95). My findings suggest that the denigration of the 'pariah' is a disposition embedded within young men's talk that in turn endorses boyfriends being able to subordinate their girlfriends. A young man is *able* to command authority and control within his (hetero)romantic relationship (for example as the benevolent protector) *when* his girlfriend is vulnerable and compliant. However, his ability to be oppressive is threatened when his girlfriend is headstrong and aggressive. The hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships needs these pariah qualities in women to be contained. Framing women as provoking violence is one way to achieve this.

In an interesting contradiction, young men were also significantly vocal about Edward's more "creepy" attributes. These comments arose from a broader discussion in each focus group about the more negative qualities that boyfriends can possess. I received a range of encouraging suggestions: young men only being interested in sex and 'one night stands'; young men being violent towards their girlfriends; young men cheating on their girlfriends; and young men controlling their girlfriends in ways that isolate them from their friends and restrict their

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<sup>30</sup> Sundaram's (2013) study looked briefly at provocation as a *gendered* response. She concluded that young women more openly engaged in provocation narratives than young men, however this was not accompanied with a thorough analysis of data.



movements. The young men also readily and repeatedly engaged with “It’s not ok”<sup>31</sup> rhetoric in talking about their disdain for men’s physical violence towards women.

Young men across all three focus groups talked about what they saw as Edward’s more harmful performances as Bella’s boyfriend. Namely, they drew on the ways he restricted Bella’s movements and his “creepy” behaviours, such as entering her bedroom at night and watching her sleep without her knowing:

- Christina:                    So tell me again, what are the bad things about being protective? Hubert?
- Hubert (FG1):              Because like the girl or woman might not be able to do what she wants
- Christina:                    Cool
- Hubert (FG1):              She could be talking to an old friend or something and he could get over-protective and just push him out of the way and stuff like that
- Christina:                    And that happens in the film of course, as that happens with Jacob, um, Levi?
- Levi (FG1):                 She would feel it’s a bit creepy that he’s constantly following her and watching over her and that
- Ivan (FG1):                 Like every person needs their own space, like if an overprotective, they are always around you watching everything you do, that’s a bit weird

In another focus group, a similar discussion developed:

- Christina:                    OK, so protective means a little bit controlling, yeah?
- Sergei (FG2):              Yeah jealous
- Christina                     David?
- David (FG2):                Yeah sorta like clingy, it’s just like having to watch over them all the time, you don’t really, you give them, um what’s the, what’s the
- Sergei (FG2):              Impression?
- David (FG2):                The impression you don’t trust them

It appears from these narratives that young men do understand some negative impacts of coercive control (Stark, 2007; see Chapter 1). They were able to express that it *would* be seen

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<sup>31</sup> ‘It’s not ok’ is a public awareness multi-media campaign in New Zealand that piloted in 2007 and is still being implemented in 2016. It is designed to raise awareness that family violence is “not ok”. One of the main features of the campaign is its showcasing of men saying that family violence is “not ok” (see: areyouok.org)

as controlling to not let their girlfriends engage in these dialogues with other young men. In this way, a boyfriend's jealousy was seen in a negative light.

I would like to give specific analytical focus to David's use of the word "clingy" because of what it suggests about young men's dispositions towards being boyfriends that has not been covered before in existing literature. On the surface this talk indicates that young men saw types of control and jealousy as negative for boyfriends to engage in. Adams' (2012) compelling critique of men's homosocial talk about their (hetero)romantic partners exposed how men's violence against and control of known women was often presented as acceptable within mates' banter with one another. However, there were limits: Adams found men viewed the more severe intimate partner violence as something that 'bad' men do. I hope to extend this argument, however, by providing a different evaluation of what may be at-play within comments like David's, that position oppressive controlling boyfriends as deviant. Using Schippers' (2007) framework (see Chapter 2), labelling a young man "clingy" implies that he is engaging in performances of male femininities. A "clingy" boyfriend, in this sense, is seen as being overly invested and dependent on his girlfriend. Alek and Demetri, from the third focus group, also talked of a young man who was controlling and jealous as "clingy". Alek gave the example of a boyfriend who would "draw her [his girlfriend] away from her friends". Intriguingly, Alek also described these kinds of performances by Edward as being a "pussy".

"Pussy" is a label that when used to describe a man, signals his engagement in feminised gendered enactments. It is interesting then that Alek used this word to label a young man's controlling behaviour. Acts of male aggression and possessiveness within (hetero)romantic relationships, as argued within Stark's (2007) conceptualisation of coercive control, have been exposed as gendered *masculine* acts of control that limit women's ability to live autonomously. However, from Demetri, Alek and David's talk, a disposition surfaced that feminised these acts of control. Because of Alek and David's masculine status within their groups, I argue (as I have before) that their contributions speak meaningfully to the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities in young men's lives. Young men who are seen by their peers to control their girlfriends *too much* and are jealous about their interactions with other young men are engaging in versions of male femininities. Here, young men interpreted control as a weakness that makes boyfriends dependent on their girlfriends. As Schippers (2007) maintains, male femininities are seen to threaten hegemonic masculinity's legitimate position within the social world. With my empirical findings, I suggest that being "clingy" and a "pussy", in the ways that Alek and

David described, signal their disdain for boyfriends who *lose control*, because it breaks the rules of the hegemonic scaffolding of gender relations within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships. In other words, men who oppress their girlfriends via the “social practice” (Young, 2004, p. 57) of control are seen in these instances as deviant, because this behaviour threatens the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity.

However, there were subtle moments when some of the young men held contradictory dispositions that indicated boyfriends *should* have a right to control whom their girlfriend talked to during social settings. These findings resonate with the small body of feminist literature that has explored young men’s feelings of entitlement within their (hetero)romantic relationships (see Chapter 3; Canaan, 1991; Doull, Oliffe, Knight & Shoveller, 2013; Flood, 2008; Sundaram, 2013; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009). The following exchange occurred between David and I:

- David (FG2): Ah, when like they’re at a party or something and a guy’s hitting on her, that, yeah, when it’s like in the act or whatever [Sergei mimes a punch into his palm]
- Christina: Ok, and you would get, you would get some kind of, like would you start off by talking to the guy or would you go straight in with a punch?
- David (FG2): Well, it’d be, it’s be dependent on what he was doing. If he’s just like talking to her or whatever and you know it’s like not friendly talk then it’d be you know “step-off” but if it’s like making out then you just go in and smack him.

Within David’s talk is an endorsement of young men controlling their girlfriends in social situations.

During my individual interview with David, I attempted to seek clarification about these entitlements that give boyfriends an ability to control their girlfriends. He remarked that it was very much a “grey area” which was complicated by feelings of jealousy:

- David (II4): Yeah, yeah like, its sorta a grey area because of how, you know, obviously you two are going to be friends to start with and you’re gonna start dating then you know, you’re, it’s possible it’s gonna happen again and you sorta like worried about that or whatever
- Christina: Ok
- David (II4): Even though you should, you shouldn’t really, be but then it’s still a possibility

In my individual talk with Nicolai, I tried to further inquire about this “grey area” of masculinity:

Christina: So, when is it good to be protective of your girlfriend? When is it healthy?

Nicolai (III): Um, I don't know, like um, last time I said like if another guy touches her, is yeah, being a wierdo creep

Christina: So, she doesn't like what he's doing?

Nicolai (III): Or you don't really like, well.... [pause]

Christina: Ok, so maybe he's doing something that she is kinda ok with but you don't like it

Nicolai (III): yeah

These moments of talk extend current studies (see Chapter 3; Barker, 2005; Canaan, 1991; Doull, Oliffe, Knight & Shoveller, 2013; Flood, 2008; Sundaram, 2013; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009) by offering insights into the complex and contradictory *layering* of dispositions that young men take up (via habitus) when talking about the rules of (hetero)romance. On the one hand, being protective and paternal towards one's girlfriend is seen by young men as a rule for how to be a 'good' or hegemonic boyfriend. Their understanding of this game-play however, subtly fuses with more malevolent hegemonic rules that enable boyfriends to control their girlfriend's movements and interactions with other young men. On the other hand, they also interpreted controlling one's girlfriend as *breaking* the rules of the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work within this field. These ambivalent sense-makings appear to sit at the heart of how young men grapple with what boyfriends should be entitled to do within their (hetero)romantic relationships with women.

### Mixed feelings about (hetero)romance

Throughout this chapter, I have documented the varying ways young men talked about (hetero)romance, being a 'good' boyfriend and entitlement. Dispositions embedded within their talk, however, were not entirely consistent or coherent. On the contrary, there were key moments when they spoke ambivalently about how they thought boyfriends *should* act. Even though existing studies have looked at the instabilities present within the way young men make sense of masculinity and being boyfriends (on young men and romance see Allen, 2007; Forrest, 2010; Tolman, et al., 2004; on young men feeling entitled to control their girlfriends, see Canaan, 1991; Flood, 2008; Sundaram, 2013; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009), my findings

aim to explore the precariousness of these sense-makings in a different way. By empirically extending Adkins' (2004) conceptual work, I hope to contribute new knowledge about how ambivalence within the internal taking-up of these dispositions could signal possibilities for disrupting the hegemonic scaffolding that enables these oppressive understandings to take form.

As I documented in Chapter 2, my conceptual framework departs from a Bourdieusian understanding that mimesis works (Adkins, 2004; Butler, 1996). Instead, I am indebted to Adkins' (2004) reworking of Bourdieu's social theory which takes a more Butlerian understanding of mimesis, to look at how the practicing (see Chapter 2; Yancey Martin, 2003) or performing of gendered norms can be precarious. The performances of gendered norms that I am able to work with are in the form of dispositions located within the act of young men *talking*.

On the whole, young men's talk was filled with endorsements that positioned boyfriends as ascendant to and dominant over women and femininity. For example, young men drew on traditional and conventional notions of how to be (hetero)romantic, which I connected to a hegemonic order that surfaced within their public performances of masculinity enacted through talk within the focus groups. Within these groups, young men also engaged with derisive talk that took the form of feminine slurs towards the young women in their lives, thus feeding directly into the oppressive positioning of masculinity as superior to femininity. Alongside this, their beliefs that 'good' boyfriends are paternalistic also signalled their privileging of the hegemonic scaffolding that places women in dependent roles to the men with whom they are romantically involved. Young women's femininities were continually subordinated within these young men's accounts. Young women were often talked about in sexist ways and disparaged as provoking violence, and it was continually implied that they *should* be vulnerable and dependent within their relationships with young men. In summary, these moments of talk pointed to young men's endorsement of a set of rules of (hetero)romance that subordinate women and femininity.

Embedded within these young men's contributions however, were subtle yet important contradictory dispositions that signalled a degree of ambivalence within how they understood the hegemonic rules within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships. There was a significant "grey area" around young men's understanding of legitimate control over their female romantic partners. Even though there were many moments in their talk about control that signalled a

clear belief that a ‘good’ boyfriend not only protects his girlfriend but has claims to be possessive over her, there were also moments when they outwardly chastised young men as “pussies” who were seen as controlling.

One of these moments was captured in Alek’s and David’s labelling of young men’s controlling practices as being “clingy” and a “pussy”. These labels position boyfriends’ use of control – namely around jealousy and the restricting of whom their girlfriends can interact with socially – as embodiments of male femininities, which appear to strip boyfriends of masculine status. This directly contradicted David and Nicolai’s later claims that young men *do* have a right to control their girlfriends and be jealous (signalling here that these performances are embodiments of hegemonic masculinity – see Schippers, 2007). This renouncing of control as a quality of hegemonic masculinity, marked a precarious moment in young men’s incorporation of gendered norms into their identities. In other words, within these divergent moments of talk, young men appeared to ‘float’ between a range of dispositions as they made sense of hegemonic masculinity. This incongruence signals moments of ambivalence where young men do not fully incorporate the gendered norms of hegemonic masculinity, which in turn signals a possible way in which the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities could be interrupted (Adkins, 2004).

This incongruity could also be explained by examining young men’s engagement with habitus, which is a new focus not covered in existing literature. As I will analyse in more detail within the next chapter, these young men *may* not have been speaking from *any* practical experience. Rather, they could have been accessing parts of their habitus – through internalising the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) of (hetero)romance – that may have been products of *guesswork*. This guesswork enables young men to *publically* secure their masculine identities *through talk* without having had any practical experience. Because of this, the formation of guesswork within young men’s dispositions towards (hetero)romance could be seen as a more fragile way for young men to grapple with *how* to be masculine before any practical mastery has been *set in stone*.

Another ambivalence that captured these more precarious parts of young men’s habitus, was seen in Nicolai’s brief and private exchange with me about Alek, the leader from focus group three. As I have discussed, Alek was clearly successful in his performance and embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, which enabled him to speak as an authority on matters to do with both being romantic and being a good boyfriend. It is because of this that I found it analytically

significant when, during our one-to-one interview, Nicolai hesitated after I asked if Alek was well-liked by the student body. After a pause he said simply, “I guess...but...everybody knows he’s good at everything”. This insight by Nicolai suggested an unevenness existing between Alek’s position within the group and how others, more privately through *their own* habitus, viewed his performances of masculinity. Nicolai’s subtle comments about Alek speaks to these inconsistencies, empirically extending Adkins’ (2004; see Chapter 2) conceptual work: Nicolai’s ambivalence towards Alek’s status, present in this moment, indicates that the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work in how young men make sense of the world around them can be fragile and open to contestation.

## In conclusion

In my analysis of young men’s talk about being ‘good’ boyfriends, a number of complex and at times contradictory layers of dispositions surfaced which appeared as products of young men internalising the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) that govern (hetero)romantic relationships. One way that young men were seen to be playing by the rules, specifically within the focus groups, was by engaging in derisive sexist talk about young women. Another prominent form of game-play was praising boyfriends who are paternalistic. Not only are boyfriends seen as masculine when they are protective of their girlfriends, but also when they are in control or the dominant agent within the relationship. Specifically, young men supported boyfriends who restrain from using physical violence towards girlfriends. This finding suggests that young men hold dispositions that equate ‘being in love’ with restraining from violence, which in turn indicates that young men see boyfriends as naturally and inevitably capable of violence. Following this reasoning, young men seem to understand (hetero)romantic relationships as marked with the potential for male violence to occur, which in turn positions women as always dependent on men yet at the same time acutely vulnerable to them.

There were also moments when young men engaged in derisive talk that indicated they held a range of oppressive dispositions about feminine boyfriends and pariah girlfriends. Feminine boyfriends appear to threaten the ascendancy of masculinity in two ways. First, they engage in certain practices that threaten the ascendancy of masculinity within (hetero)romantic relations, such as being too “clingy” and emotionally dependent on young women. Within these scenarios, boyfriends can be *too* oppressive. Feminine boyfriends are also targeted with

derision *because* of the threat their feminine embodiment has on the hegemonic order of gendered identities. In this case, instead of being ridiculed for the romantic gestures they endorse, young men face derision because of their feminine positioning within the group. Pariah girlfriends also fail to “play the game” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 34) properly. One example mobilised in this chapter was the girlfriend who is seen to provoke violence. If hegemonic masculinity is based on men showing will-power, control and restraint, then an agent who is seen to provoke a man in ways that would make him lose control, will-power and restraint needs containing.

These various layers of dispositions in young men’s talk appear informed by the hegemonic order of gendered identities that privilege boyfriends who use the *right amount* of oppression within their (hetero)romantic relationships. I argue specifically that these dispositions that surface from young men’s talk suggests that they largely engage in a shared habitus (Moi, 1991) with one another. These shared understandings however, are not inherently stable and can be marked by “grey areas”, or inconsistencies in how young men make sense of being boyfriends. For example, young men displayed ambivalence when supporting the right of boyfriends to use control, yet denigrated boyfriends who show *too much* control. In the following chapter, I will engage more with young men’s understanding of control within (hetero)romantic relationships, focusing on the rights they claim to have regarding the physical disciplining of male peers who appear to encroach on their ‘territory’.



# CHAPTER 6

## “It depends on how much you hurt him”: Honour, shame and violence

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In the last chapter, I examined how young men’s support of benevolent paternalism also included moments when they spoke of the right for boyfriends to police their girlfriends’ social interactions. In these moments (Kehily, 2015) of talk, the obligation to protect started to merge with boyfriends controlling their girlfriends. This disposition towards of control however, did not *only* extend to the subordination of young women as girlfriends. Young men also articulated that boyfriends were required to violently discipline male peers who were seen to be interacting with their girlfriends in ways they deemed inappropriate. This chapter concerns young men’s dispositions towards this disciplinary and regulatory requirement between male peers, and will argue that it endorses a form of *territory marking* that is bound up in what I will come to discuss as a *code of honour*.

This argument offers new insights into existing scholarship (see Chapter 3; Canaan, 1991; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Sundaram, 2013). I argue that young men’s endorsement of this code of honour is a product of the rules that govern the field of (hetero)romantic relationships, *as well as* rules within other fields of interaction where young men regularly interact with one another. I will argue that this talk harbours a range of dispositions that are deeply embedded within young men’s habitus, which enables them to make sense of how boyfriends can safeguard their masculine identities in two key ways. Firstly, it is evident that this code allows boyfriends to manage and minimise feelings of shame that can result from a male peer ‘making moves’ on their territory (i.e. their girlfriend). It is also evident that this code is a *requirement* of hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter 2; Schippers, 2007). Boyfriends who refuse violence risk being shamed by their peers for not being *masculine*, resulting in their gendered identities being *feminised* by their peers.

Young men's understandings of this code however, are not inherently static. Instead, their dispositions embedded within this code of honour can be precarious and appears to be more a product of young men's *guesswork* than knowledge gained through practical mastery. As part of this line of argument I will examine how engaging in guesswork enables young men to publically secure their masculine identities *through talk*, but is precarious. Because of this, I will suggest how these forms of guesswork could signal ways to interrupt the hegemonic order of gendered identities that perpetuates young men's endorsements of the subordination of young women in (hetero)romantic relationships.

### Territory marking

A small body of scholarship has sought to understand why and how young men fight their male peers over young women whom they are involved with romantically (Canaan, 1991; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Sundaram, 2013). This practice involves fighting other young men over girlfriends as "territory" (Canaan, 1991, p. 119; Flood, 2008, p. 346); as objects to be fought over "by males and for males only" (Canaan, 1991, p. 119<sup>32</sup>; see also Sundaram, 2013, p. 123). Violence is used by young men to elevate status, which aligns with hegemonic masculine qualities of being in control and having ownership over women (Canaan, 1991; McCarry, 2009; Sundaram, 2013). Violence, in these circumstances, is *also* a way for young men to 'save face' (see Canaan, 1991) if their masculine status as boyfriend is being jeopardised by a male peer's attempts to seduce their girlfriend. As Sundaram (2013, p. 123) found, these fights occur when young men's "status and identity are uncertain". Kenway and Fitzclarence's (1997, p. 122) now outdated study found secondary schools to be sites of territory marking because of the propensity for "intense male to male competition for dominance" (p. 122) to occur, particularly within the more informal setting of the school grounds.

Young men fighting each other "over young women" (Flood, 2008, p. 346) – *territory marking* – arose during my discussions with young men within the second focus group. Specifically, it was the banter between two young men, David and Sergei, which illuminated this form of game-play in most detail. As mentioned in Chapter 5, David presented as the leader of this group, enjoying a distinctly successful masculine status amongst the other young men. He was not only athletic and on the first XV rugby team, but also muscular and conventionally

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<sup>32</sup> Canaan (1991) also found that territory fights took on an additional, more literal meaning: these fights often targeted young men who started dating young women from outside their own geographical territories.

handsome. He spoke confidently and with seeming authority on a range of topics, with no one else in the group contesting his ideas. Sergei appeared to be a close friend of David's and their banter dominated much of this particular focus group. Unlike David, Sergei presented more as the "class clown". He made constant 'smart' remarks, many of them sexist (as documented in Chapter 5), that allowed him to evade having to talk more seriously about the topic of (hetero)romantic love and being a 'good' boyfriend. Sergei however, played an important role with regard to securing and maintaining David's leader-status, by being predominantly complicit in and affirming of what David said. The following section of dialogue illustrates this role of Sergei's. It also illustrates how David and Sergei tended to dominate group discussions. At this point during our discussion, I had asked the group what they thought were some negatives of 'being in love':

David (FG2; L): Um, it may be a one-sided thing, you may love them but they have no feelings for you

Christina: Ok

Sergei (FG2): Player

Christina: So that can be quite painful, ok

David (FG2; L): Yeah, I mean especially with like guys, doing like the one-night stand

Sergei (FG2): Hmmmm

David (FG2; L): Like, the girls might have more feelings than what the guys does or whatever

Christina: Yep

David (FG2; L): Or the guys just sleeps with the chick

Sergei (FG2): Hmmmm

Christina: And, do you reckon that happens a lot?

David (FG2; L): Yep

Sergei (FG2): Yeah

David (FG2; L): I'd say so

Christina: Do you think it happens the other way round and the girl does that?

Sergei (FG2): No

David (FG2; L): Yeah definitely

Christina: So you think it's a bit of both?

David (FG2; L): It would be more the guy

Sergei's contributions here affirmed David's statements, signalling his agreement and support of David's comments. These contributions also assisted in elevating and maintaining David's position as an authority on the matters discussed.

When David introduced the notion of young men fighting each other (see Flood, 2008, p. 346), again Sergei's complicity helped secure the legitimacy (see Chapter 5, page 91) of David's comments. Our dialogue began with talk about how to deal with 'breaking-up' with a girlfriend:

Christina: So what happens, what, what happens in a break-up or have you experienced a break up, or what's bad about it?

Sergei (FG2): Not a serious breakup, but I dunno, hurts, hurts a little bit

Christina: Hmm

Sergei (FG2): And yeah

Christina: And how as guys, how are you guys taught to express that hurt?

Sergei (FG2): Just toughen up

Christina: Ok

David (FG2; L): Beat stuff up

Christina: Beat stuff up?

David (FG2; L): Yep, beat people up

Christina: Beat people up?

David (FG2; L): Well you know, like the, we had like, ah, or if like a girlfriend cheats or whatever, then it's like sorta, like a, expected of the man to go out and beat the other guy up, yeah

Sergei (FG2): Yeah

Christina: Ok.....

David (FG2; L): So it's like, it's a masculinity sort of thing

Sergei (FG2): Hmm.

David's talk highlighted his endorsement of violence – “to go out and beat the other guy up” – which appeared in this narrative to be a requirement of performing hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter two; Schippers, 2007) within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships.

David further explained the legitimacy of this form of violence as he talked about the ways that Edward treated Bella in *Twilight*. Generally, the discussion in David's focus group was critical of Edward's intense and “creepy” (see Chapter 5) fixation on Bella and emphasised instead, that young women would prefer a more “laid-back” boyfriend. David then attempted to clarify when a boyfriend's healthy behaviour tips into unhealthy and more problematic behaviours:

David (FG2; L): Well it depends on what like, if he's like, if, if it's just like protecting her and all that sorta stuff, not actually to do with the relationship side of things, then that's fine. But if it's like, ah, protecting her like from other guys then that's sorta like not good

It is the latter part of David's response that is most crucial for this discussion. David states that “protecting her from other guys” is “not good”. He is being critical of boyfriends who, through controlling intentions (as seen in Edward's performance), limit whom their girlfriends talk to.

However, David then extended this narrative with a significant contradiction to his earlier claim, illustrating another scenario when being protective of one's girlfriend would be seen as acceptable:

David (FG2; L): Ah, when like they're at a party or something and a guy's hitting on her, that, yeah, when it's like in the act or whatever [Sergei mimes a punch]

Christina: Ok, ok, and you would get, you would have some kind of, like would you start off by talking to the guy or would you go straight in with a punch?

David (FG2; L): Well, it'd be, it'd be dependent on what he was doing. If he's just like talking to her or whatever and you know it's like not friendly talk then it'd be you know 'step off', but if it's like making out then you just go in and smack him. Yeah

Christina: If they were making out?

David (FG2; L): If they were making out you'd just go and smack the guy in the head.

Christina: Now this is really interesting. So, she is consenting to make out with this guy but it's still, it's still a, it's still good to do something about it?

Sergei (FG2): Mmmm

David (FG2; L): Yeah

Christina: Ok

David (FG2; L): Cos like the dude, the dude is consenting to it as well. He knows that you're going out with her so, he's gonna get knocked out

Here, David interprets being protective as synonymous with *the right* to be possessive of one's girlfriend, which directly contradicts his earlier claims that were critical of young men who displayed this type of control. This finding is significant in light of Towns and Scott's (2008, 2009) compelling commentary on young men's possessiveness of their girlfriends, from the viewpoint of women (aged 18-25) and men (aged 18-25) in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Both women and men in their studies spoke directly to a culture of ownership, where boyfriends feel entitled to control where their girlfriends go and whom they interact with. Towns and Scott (2008; 2009) describe these as entitlement and surveillance practices. In their (2009, p. 13) studies they articulate that "early" indicators for men's violence within (hetero)romantic relationships are young men's use of controlling behaviour, possessiveness and jealousy as they become boyfriends.

My findings add to Towns and Scott's (2008; 2009) by providing 'another piece of the puzzle'. It appears that *younger* men (aged 16) make sense of this culture of ownership by endorsing boyfriends controlling their girlfriend's social interactions with other young men. However, in an extension of Town and Scott's (2008; 2009) analysis, it appears that young men's endorsements *goes further* than these authors reported. There appears to be a requirement for boyfriends to be violent towards male peers as a way to mark their territory (their girlfriends; see Canaan, 1991; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Sundaram, 2013), which is bound up within a specific 'code of honour' governing various fields of interactions in young men's lives.

### A code of (dis)honour

Men fighting each other over honour is not a new phenomenon and has long been considered a marker of masculinity. Historian Robert Nye (1994, p. 14) goes as far to argue that "honour was invented to sustain order in a patriarchal and violent world, but it has ended by perpetuating both violence and patriarchy in ours". Nye's research looks specifically at the historical practice of men's dueling which is embedded in codes of honour. Even though his focus is on Europe during modernity, I argue his analysis is pertinent to my research because it can shed further light on how young men's experiences of shame and honour become intertwined with a masculine requirement to fight male peers.

Historically, the duel has enjoyed a number of manifestations (LaVaque-Manty, 2006; Nye, 1994; Shoemaker, 2002). Amongst aristocracy in Europe and North America during the eighteenth century, men dueled as a way to assert their masculinity (LaVaque-Manty, 2006; Nye, 1994). As Connell (2005) explains, “willingness to face an opponent in a potentially lethal one-to-one combat was a key test of gentry masculinity, and it was affronts to honour that provoked such confrontations” (p. 190). With the rise of modernity, and diminishing aristocracy, the duel became a bourgeois practice. Looking specifically at ‘the duel’ in modern France, Nye states that this antiquated practice was adopted by bourgeois men of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as one way for them to secure honour. Unlike its pre-modern form, dueling during this modern time period became a more organised and “symbolic definition of masculinity through violence” (Connell, 2005, p. 192). Young men were trained in the art of sword-fighting, becoming professional duel “masters” and being inducted into the code of honour of this new form of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005, p. 192).

As Nye (1994) explains, masculinity within bourgeois societies at this time was predicated on shame and honour. A man’s honour became focused on his embodiment of a “set of normative sexual characteristics and desires that reflected the strategies of bourgeois social reproduction” (Nye, 1994, p. 9). Because of these normative expectations, a man who was not married, or who desired other men, “dishonored himself and brought shame to his family” (Nye, 1994, p. 9). This process of shaming provided a way to regulate “the relations between the sexes, families, and clans; to distribute prestige (and therefore status) among them; and finally, to promote cohesion in the whole society through the ‘shaming’ of individuals who have forfeited their honor” Nye, 1994, (p. 9). However, as Nye (1994, p. 13) explains, “the problem of honor is that it was never secure, required constant reaffirmation, and was always open to challenge”. With reference to dueling, this brutal and violent practice not only provided a way for men to gain honour (by winning), but also laid the foundation for men to be shamed if they lost. Therefore, the ability of a man’s body to not only fight, but to fight better than his opponent, became a clear marker of hegemonic masculinity at this time. As Nye laments, “a man was in greatest danger of dishonoring himself at the very moment he most expressly affirmed his honor” (Nye 1994, p. 13).

Other scholars have made connections between the process of shaming and men’s use of violence. As Gilligan (2003, p. 1151-1152) maintains, based on his work with violent men within the prison system in the United States, when men experience being shamed, they feel

“disrespected”. This in turn leads men to feel “insignificant” and “unimportant” (Gilligan, 2003, p. 1157). Men feel insignificant within a gendered order that privileges hegemonic masculinity when they are feminised and thus cast as deviant. Violence, Gilligan argues, becomes a way for men to feel ‘significant’ again and restore their position within this hegemonic order. Websdale (2010, p. 338) adds to this argument, stating that men often use violence as a way to release feelings of “humiliated fury”. This process, he argues, is “profoundly gendered” (p. 414) because humiliation is fundamentally feminising for men. The example of ‘school shootings’ in the United States further illustrates Gilligan’s (2003) and Websdale’s (2010) arguments. Young men who have been shamed via gay-baiting for example, have been known to use extreme forms of violence as an attempt to *become* significant and thus masculine in front of their peers (see Consalvo, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Klein, 2006a; 2006b).

I offer another dimension to this body of work (Consalvo, 2003; Gilligan, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Klein, 2006a; 2006b; Nye, 1994; Websdale, 2010) by exploring how *young* men make sense of shame and violence when discussing (hetero)romantic relationships. Young men talk about a code of honour – a set of rules that require boyfriends use violence towards *other young men* as a way to mark territory and minimise the effects of *being feminised* (Schippers, 2007). I argue that young men’s talk indicates that they internalise this code, which sets the rules that govern territory marking and boyfriend possessiveness within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships. Endorsements of this code within young men’s talk in this study can be seen as their *taking up* of gendered dispositions, predicated on shame and honour, from this field. I also suggest that the structural scaffolding that orders gendered identities sits at the centre of this game-play they speak of. Not only are boyfriends who display hegemonic masculinity placed as dominant over *feminised* male peers by this code, but young women are subordinated and stripped of agency as objects to be fought over.

From the example provided of David’s talk (see page 115), there emerge two possible ways for boyfriends to mark their territory and mitigate shame within this code of honour. The first is evidenced in David’s description of a verbal warning he would give to another young man who is seen to be talking inappropriately with his girlfriend. David stated that he would tell the other young man to “step-off”. This choice of words is particularly meaningful in terms of how young men not only see their role as boyfriends, but also how they regard their girlfriends as subordinate. It infers that young women are tangible objects, able to be “stepped-off”, that



young men can then *deal with* amongst themselves. I argue that this talk highlights how David makes sense of hegemonic femininity. Women are seen to be obeying the hegemonic order when they are passive because of the complementary work passivity does in maintaining hegemonic masculinity's dominant and ascendant position within this gendered order.

David's talk about verbal warnings also illustrates his endorsement of a boyfriend's 'right' to police his girlfriend's social interactions. This finding was further highlighted when I asked the group whether the young woman in this situation was consenting to these interactions with the 'other guy'. I wanted to ascertain whether the group perceived the other young man as hassling or harassing her. David stated clearly that in the scenario the young woman would be consenting. During one of the individual interviews, Nicolai (who was not part of David's focus group) also offered similar sentiments to David: that young men had the right to police their girlfriend's interactions with other young men, even if it was clear that their girlfriend was consenting to this interaction. In this way, young women can be seen as subordinate within their roles as girlfriends, as young men are able to police whom they decide to interact with. These findings empirically extend Schippers' (2007) conceptual framework around gendered identities, to illustrate what hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity *look like* within young men's worlds. In these scenarios young men's talk indicated that hegemonic masculinity is characterised by an entitlement to be dominant over and police women, whereas hegemonic femininity is characterised by passivity and subservience to men.

The second way young men talked about territory marking goes beyond their endorsement of verbal warnings, to dispositions that support using physical violence to discipline male peers. Nye's (1994) analysis of men's struggles with honour and shame are meaningful for my research at this juncture. As such I hope to make a new theoretical connection between the historical practice of dueling and the violent code of honour that young men in my study spoke about. It appears the processes that both honour and shame contemporary young men work in similar ways to that described by Nye (1994). As David articulated, if another young man is "making out" with your girlfriend, "you'd just go and smack the guy in the head". Here, the rules that govern the field of (hetero)romantic relationships can be seen in the dispositions embedded within David's talk: masculine boyfriends are in control of their girlfriends. Connecting to the historical practice of dueling, I argue that this code enables a boyfriend to use fighting as a way to bring honour back into a young man's gendered identity, so that his masculine status *as a boyfriend* can be re-secured.

This type of fighting also appears to draw on rules that govern various other fields where young men publically interact with male peers. David's narrative made reference to two such sites. He made very brief mention of young people's social gatherings (for example, parties) as sites where this form of violence could take place. He also mentioned in more detail the school grounds as a field where these territorialising practices could occur.

- Christina:                    Would you do it in the school grounds?
- David (FG2; L):            Yeah
- Sergei (FG2):             Well yeah
- David (FG2; L):            Yeah definitely
- Sergei (FG2):             If it's in the moment so
- David (FG2; L):            Yeah
- Sergei (FG2):             Then, you'd just be so angry
- Josip (FG2):               Especially if like you saw them together, like you just came round the corner and you'd hear about they'd been like sleeping together or whatever, you saw them together and you come round the corner you'd like
- David (FG2; L):            Yeah, yeah

Within this narrative, David agrees that the school is a site where these fights may likely occur.

The school appeared to be a significant site within the lives of young men in my study. This school was located within a small farming community. Nicolai, in the third focus group, shared how the reality of living in a rural township meant that the school was the main *source* of potential girlfriends: "It seems to be like in Te Ika a Maui High School you almost share girlfriends, exes...It just seems, people swap half the time". For my participants, the school was also the place where the majority of young men in the township gathered on a regular basis. This is illustrated in David's comment about being "in the moment" and seeing "them together". In this way, David's talk indicated that the school grounds can be a key location (or field) where young men and women are *seen* as romantically "together", as well as a key location for young men to publically, and "in the moment", use violence as a way to mitigate the shame of having a male peer invade their 'territory'.

Dispositions around shame also played a significant role in young men's talk about the maintenance of this code. The young men in my study did not discuss the consequence of them

losing a fight; the code they spoke of focused on them *initiating* the fight. Along these lines, it became apparent that there was a risk of being *further* shamed and thus dishonoured if young men chose *not* to fight the ‘other guy’ (see Canaan, 1991; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Sundaram, 2013). As Sergei stated, choosing *not* to fight in this scenario would result in young men being labelled as a “pussy” in front of their peers. He explained that “it’s kinda like just appearance or what the public think of you, if you don’t do anything then you’re just gonna be, I dunno, looked down upon by other guys, they’d just do that to you”. I argue that this is likely because *not* fighting threatens the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity that promotes young men initiating these types of fights as a part of the hegemonic scaffolding of gender relations.

By engaging with a feminist Bourdieusian analysis (Adkins, 2004), as well as Schippers’ (2007) work on male femininities (see Chapter 2), I hope to offer additional insights about the *threat* of being labelled a “pussy”. For young men, being labelled a “pussy” will likely induce feelings of shame because of the associations it has with current arrangements of male femininities (see Chapter 2; Schippers, 2007). “Pussy” is slang for vagina. As a word, it holds strong connotations with something that is feminine and passive, that is penetrable. If a man is called a “pussy” it can be assumed that he is being perceived as feminine and figuratively penetrable: subservient, passive, compliant. These feminine qualities *when embodied by men* contradict and in turn threaten those qualities that characterise hegemonic masculinity: the ability to penetrate, dominate and control. Because of its denigrating effects, labelling a man a “pussy” works effectively to *contain* the feminine from contaminating the ascendancy of masculinity within this gendered order.

Depending on the more intricate parts of young men’s habitus, it is likely that embodying “pussy” would bring about a “disrupted habitus” (Gilbert, Farrand & Lankshear, 2011, p. 360) because of the shaming work it performs amongst groups of young men. Disrupted habitus is explained as:

...periods of which habitus falls out of alignment with the fields in which they operate, creating a situation in which the ‘belief in the game’ (illusio) is temporarily suspended and doxic assumptions are raised to the level of discourse where they can be contested (Crossley, 2003, p. 44).

Participants understood that young men who refused to fight would be labelled “pussy” because they ‘played the game’ differently from what was expected of them. This game-play that young men talked of, located within the field of young people’s (hetero)romantic relationships, and

in various fields where young men interact with one another (for example, at social gatherings or within the school grounds), sets rules about being masculine. A boyfriend's status as masculine is likely threatened when he refuses to mark his territory, and his masculine status amongst his peers is endangered when he refuses to fight "in the moment".

### Fist-fighting and (rural) masculine bodies

The code of honour young men spoke of was largely predicated on fist-fighting. Even though participants articulated that only a verbal warning is warranted for more minor social indiscretions, they stressed that a young man can legitimately "smack the guy in the head" if the 'other guy' is being physically intimate with his girlfriend. Within the narrative on page 115, Sergei mimed a punch with his fist into the palm of his other hand, referencing a "smack" as a closed fist punch. Later dialogue between David and Sergei uncovered their understanding of the more intricate rules regarding the *amount* of violence to use when fighting another young man over a young woman. Here, more severe violence becomes legitimated in young men's talk:

David (FG2; L):           It's like, it, it depends on how much you hurt him, cos like, kissing your girlfriend would only really warrant like a couple of punches

Sergei (FG2):            Yeah, yeah just one punch

David (FG2; L):           Like if you found out he was sleeping with your girlfriend multiple times then that would be a,

Sergei (FG2):            Full on bash

David (FG2; L):           Yeah, that'd be.

This narrative illuminates the intricate workings of legitimacy within young men's dispositions towards gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships. Within their talk, a kiss warrants one or two closed fist punches, no more, but "sleeping" with one's girlfriend deserves a "full on bash". These rules however, shed light on a precarious part of young men's understanding of hegemonic masculinity. As they highlight, if a boyfriend gets the rules wrong the stakes could be high, possibly resulting in a disrupted habitus (Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 360), emerging as his game-play "falls out of alignment" (see Crossley, 2003, p. 44) with the expectations of the code. As young men explain, these failed moments of game-play present additional ways that boyfriends can be publically positioned as feminine and shamed by being labelled a "pussy" by their male peers. For example, following David's logic, you will likely be ridiculed if your

violent response is seen as ‘not enough’. If you only punch the ‘other guy’ once for sleeping with your girlfriend – instead of initiating a “full on bash” – you could be reprimanded by your peers for being a “pussy”.

Following this line of thought, instigating a “full on bash” in response to another young man kissing one’s girlfriend could also be deemed illegitimate, but for very different reasons. In Chapter 5, I documented how young men’s talk endorsed labelling as “pussies” male peers who were seen to be overly-controlling as boyfriends. I suggested this was because being overly-controlling of one’s girlfriend connoted being overly *dependent* on her. With regard to young men’s talk about territory marking, it appears that extreme displays of violence towards the ‘other guy’ would go against the code of honour, signalling a boyfriend being too invested *and thus dependent* on his girlfriend. Echoing analysis from Chapter 5, these boyfriend performances may be positioned as versions of male femininities because they threaten the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work within key fields of interaction in young men’s lives.

Regardless of the intricacies of these rules, fist-fighting – in some form or another – appeared to be the prominent way that the young men in my study *understood* territory-marking to take form within this code of honour. Even though this form of fighting is markedly different from ancient duels, where swords were primarily used (see LaVaque-Manty, 2006), embodied muscularity and skill are still paramount in these modern-day territorialising duels that young men describe. Within focus group two, David and Sergei talked about the expectation that young men be willing and able to fist-fight. Amongst participants in the third focus group, bodily strength was also discussed at some length. Alek succinctly summed up what his peers were inferring about the importance of muscularity: “You don’t want to be the runt”. Others in the focus group agreed.

This type of “muscular morality” (see Mangan, 2012, p. 10) evidenced in young men’s talk also surfaced during the individual interviews, where muscularity was connected to their rural location. What emerged from these one-on-one discussions is that young men from Te Ika a Maui High School are classified as either “townies” or “farmers”. “Townies” live in the township, on properties arranged in a suburban-like way with a single dwelling on a small amount of land. “Farmers” live outside of the town’s limit, on rural properties that often accommodate working dairy (cows) or sheep farms.

From young men's talk it is clear that being a "townie"<sup>33</sup> is markedly different from being a "farmer". During our individual interview, David offered a "townies" perspective of this difference:

David (II.4; L): Ah, its basically like, if you live in town then I dunno, what are some of the stereotypes? I dunno like the, there's sorta have like people in town, sorta like jokingly say that the people who live on farms are you know like hicks or whatever, and you know that sorta thing and like the farmers always joke around saying the people who live in town are you know all weak and you know and you can't do anything and are all technology reliant and that sorta stuff

In this description, young men classed as "farmers" appear to have more claims to hegemonic masculinity than the "townies", suggesting that "farmers" embody a more seemingly natural muscularity due to their bodies doing daily chores and helping out on the farm. The disadvantage of "farmers" embodying this status is that they risk being labelled "hicks" by the "townies". Hick-labelling can therefore be seen as a way for "townies" to manage their own anxieties about not being 'man enough', by ridiculing those who enjoy a more masculine status within the school.

During his individual interview, Levi added to this by commenting that "sometimes like the guys who live in town, ah, don't always like getting, like their hands dirty or something like that". This talk is further evidence that "farmers" embody hegemonic masculinity effortlessly, which in turn means that the "townies" have to *work* for the same muscularity. In all my individual interviews, each young man stated that "townies" regularly go to the gym to 'workout'. David suggested that it was *expected* of "townies":

David (II.4; L): I think it's like ah, coming into the age where you know, people start going to the gym. I think it's about 16, it's about when people go to the gym by themselves or whatever, you know

Nicolai also suggested that "people look up to people if, who get bigger in the gym". This gym-going suggests a disciplined element at work within the "townie" habitus. From young men's talk it appears that "townies" go to the gym as a way to manage their masculine status, both within the school and their rural environment. The aim here is for "townies" to match the embodied muscularity of the "farmers", in ways that help to position themselves within current arrangements of hegemonic masculinity. Another advantage of "townies" going to the gym,

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<sup>33</sup> I conducted four individual interviews, and all four identified with being a "townie".

that young men articulated, is that they can shed feminine parts of their ‘townie’ identity, whilst also being exempt from labels like “hick”. Going to the gym therefore seemed to be a win-win for “townies” in this particular rural community.

These findings have similarities with existing studies on rural masculinities. “True farmers” in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Liepins, 2000, p. 611) and “real farmers” in Australia (Caldwell, 2007, p. 27) have been examined by scholars as epitomes of masculinity. These men are markedly masculine because they appear tough and strong (see Caldwell, 2007; Liepins, 2000). Rurality has also been discussed by a number of scholars as promoting the bodily requirements of *adult* men in conventional ways (Bryant, 2006; Bye, 2009; Caldwell, 2007; Campbell & Mayerfield Bell, 2000; Liepins, 2000; Little, 2007; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013). In this social context, male bodies are seen as legitimate when they take on traditional masculine tasks like heavy lifting, physical labour and working machinery. Even though I did not conduct a comparative study of young men from urban centres in Aotearoa/New Zealand, my findings appear to support this extant literature as clearly having the right kind of masculine body matters to these young men<sup>34</sup>. In this way, young men appear to hold dispositions that indicate their development of a *rural habitus* that influences how they are able to talk about the world around them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Adkins, 2004). To take this further, if a rural habitus is at play within young men’s internal engagement with the world around them, then it is likely that they will not only perceive male peers who choose not to initiate a fight over honour – or are unable to fight with the correct force or skill required to win a fight – as failing to be masculine but also as failing to embody a *rural masculinity*.

### Ambivalence towards the code of honour

So far, this chapter has linked young men’s dispositions towards being boyfriends and their talk that endorses using violence against other young men to mitigate shame and secure masculine status. Their talk displays an understanding of violence as part of a code of honour, which I argue is embedded within young men’s habitus that promotes both the subordination of girlfriends, and the denigration of men who are seen to embody male femininity. In summary, it appears that these understandings in turn illuminate what hegemonic masculinity looks like to young men. To be masculine means to fight for one’s honour, which is profoundly

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<sup>34</sup> See Keddie, 2007 for an account of a 12 year-old rural boy who had similar bodily aspirations.

oppressive to young women – and to young men who are feminised in the process. Often however, there are “cracks and fissures” (Jackson & Salisbury, 1997, p. 107) within young men’s understanding of masculinity that signal the possibilities of disrupting these hegemonic dispositions (Adkins, 2004). The following discussion turns to moments of ambivalence within young men’s dispositions that surfaced within their talk about the territorialising of young women, and what this might say about the possibility of disrupting the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work in how young men make sense of the world around them.

Although David, with Sergei’s complicit responses, dominated the conversation about young men’s violence, one of the other young men suggested a problem with this violent code. Josip contested the do-ability of such violence:

Josip (FG2):                    There’s kinda two sides to it cos if you like jumped in there and you just started laying into him, you’d like, you’d get in like heaps of trouble with like the Deputy Principal, possibly parents

Sergei (FG2):                Police

Josip (FG2):                The guy you hit up, their parents and the whole chain.

Josip’s brief contribution succinctly contests David’s narrative by speaking to the impracticalities of disciplining male peers in this way, mainly because of the serious institutional consequences of being caught fighting. Here, it is evident that young men may hold contradictory dispositions that being violent in this way may *not* be worth it, presenting a significantly ambivalent response to what David had so strongly purported.

Within Josip’s contribution is another indication of the shakiness of this code. He says, “*If* you like jumped in there...you’d get in heaps of trouble”. The “if you” part of his sentence exposes the hypothetical nature of David and Sergei’s overarching narrative, suggesting that no one in this focus group had ever acted out this form of violence, nor had it performed on them. This suggests that the code of honour outlined by David and Sergei is more a product of young men’s *guesswork* than knowledge they have gained through practical mastery. Therefore, young men’s pre-reflexive understandings (see Adkins, 2004) of and dispositions towards this code of honour appear to be driving their talk, rather than their actual experience of enacting this type of violence.



Large areas of David and Sergei's talk appeared to indicate they were working out the scenario as they spoke, rather than speaking *conclusively* about the matter. The following dialogue between Sergei and David about the intentions of the 'other guy' illustrates this point:

David (FG2; L): Like the dude, the dude is consenting to it as well. He knows that you're going out with her so, he's gonna get knocked

Sergei (FG2): It depends though if it's a stranger, if it's a stranger cos then, they're not gonna go up to you and ask if you, if that's your girlfriend

David (FG2; L): Mmmmmm

Sergei (FG2): Mmmmmm

This dialogue reveals a degree of *making the rules up as you go along*. I suggest that this represents the hypothetical being processed by young men via talk. In a similar way, the following moments of discussion shed light on yet another level of guesswork:

Christina: Would you do it in the school grounds?

David (FG2; L): Yeah

Christina: David, yeah?

Sergei (FG2): Well yeah

David (FG2; L): Yeah definitely

Sergei (FG2): If it's in the moment so

David (FG2; L): Yeah

Sergei (FG2): Then, you'd just be so angry

Josip (FG2): Especially if like you saw them together, like you just came round the corner and you'd hear about they'd been like sleeping together or whatever, you saw them together and you come round the corner you'd like

David (FG2; L): Yeah, yeah

This moment may be a further indication that no-one in this focus group had actually initiated such an act. This evidence is embedded in Sergei's talk: "*If it's in the moment*"..."*you'd just be so angry*". Josip continues this line of the hypothetical, stating "*If you saw them together...you'd like...*".

It could be argued that their hypothesising – and lack of concrete answers – was a strategy to conceal their active participation in such violent acts, to ensure I would not tell their teacher

and get them in trouble with the school. The lack of concrete examples could also be read as a way to conceal their shame in not using this legitimate form of violence when such a scenario had presented itself in their own lives. The former is more *unlikely* in light of the excessive level of bravado in the group. The latter is more likely in terms of how David, Sergei and Josip labelled such practices as “pussy” and “weak”. To know conclusively, however, is impossible as I did not actively press them for concrete examples. Instead, I let our talk be dominated by hypotheticals. This tactic allowed them to develop their dialogue with one another as they wished, meaning that I did not overly control the direction of the narratives. Importantly, the level of guesswork that surfaced within their talk spoke to the embeddedness of a pre-reflexive inclination (Adkins, 2004) – how these young men made sense of being masculine – rather than actual practices they had engaged in.

These findings have the potential to offer new insights about how young men make sense of how they *think* a boyfriend *should* act. In particular, it was their contradictory contributions that not only exposed important moments of ambivalence in terms of their willingness to be violent (as exposed by Josip), but also a level of guesswork within their understandings of hegemonic masculinity. It is within these moments that the “cracks and fissures” (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p. 107) within current arrangements of gender hegemony (Schippers, 2007) can be detected. Due to his position in the group, I argue that David’s uncertainties perhaps give the most insight in terms of highlighting these “cracks and fissures” (Jackson & Salisbury, 1997, p. 107), as he was the one in the group who appeared to most embody hegemonic masculinity. My research hopes to extend existing literature (in particular Canaan, 1991; Flood, 2008; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997) by arguing that young men’s talk about this ‘code of honour’ appeared not to be based on any practical mastery. Instead, I argue young men engage with this code of honour at a pre-reflexive level of guesswork – as a way of practicing hegemonic masculinity that enables young men to *publically* secure their masculine identities in front of their peers, without any direct experience of what they are talking about. The presence of this guesswork within their talk suggests that these young men are still making sense of the world around them as they grapple with a range of internal and pre-reflexive dispositions.

By empirically extending Adkins (2004) conceptual work, I argue that locating these moments of *guesswork* in young men’s dispositions could also signal rich moments for “gender detraditionalisation” (Adkins, 2004, p. 191) to be mobilised, as it is at the ‘internal’ “operations

of norms themselves” that the interruptibility of hegemony *could* take place (Adkins, 2004, p. 206; see Chapter 2). If programmes (implemented for example within schools) could work with young men’s more presumptive *understandings* of these rules of shaming and honouring, I then argue that these dispositions that ultimately oppress and subordinate women could *more easily* be thwarted and replaced with healthier, more “ethical” (see Carmody, 2009, p. 51; Carmody & Ovenden, 2013, p. 795; Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122) ways for young men to practice (hetero)romance (see Chapter 8 for more detail).

## In conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that one way young men make sense of being boyfriends is bound up in a modern day code of honour, predicated on being violent (mainly through fist-fighting) towards male peers as a way to mark one’s territory (their girlfriends). Young men’s talk of this code appears to be a product of the rules that govern various fields of interaction in young men’s lives: fields that dictate *how* to be masculine boyfriends and also how to assert masculinity publically. This code appears to be not only predicated on young men being honoured in front of their peers, but also on young men mitigating shame in front of their peers. This suggests that shaming is intricately woven into young men’s dispositions towards being boyfriends. In turn, being violent appears central to these dispositions and understood as a requirement for securing masculine identities in front of other young men.

I have also suggested that rurality and, in particular, the notion of the rural male body may influence young men’s desire to endorse this code through talk. The participants’ talk provided evidence of how young men support the hegemonic scaffolding that enables territory marking to be iterated, which is decidedly oppressive to women. It objectifies and subordinates women within their (hetero)romantic relationships as well as stigmatising men who do not adhere to the rules of the fight.

This chapter has also suggested young men’s talk is not necessarily grounded in practical experience. The presence of this guesswork within young men’s talk suggests they are still making sense of their gendered worlds through more precarious dispositions. I have suggested that their use of guesswork when talking about these ways of managing being boyfriends signals rich moments where gender hegemony working within the lives of young men could be detraditionalised, that in turn could interrupt patterns of domination and submission that subordinate young women within their romantic relationships with young men. The next

chapter will explore more intensely the homosocial relationships amongst young men and the impact these have on the subordination of young women, and feminine identities more generally.

# CHAPTER 7

“It’s called being a dog”:

## Homosociality and the expelling of femininity

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So far, this thesis has examined how young men make sense of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships and what this implies about the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities within their lives. This chapter continues this theme by looking at how young men talk about being homosocial “mates” (see Park, 2000, p. 445) in ways that are subordinating towards women as girlfriends. The young men in my study gave many indications that being a ‘good’ homosocial mate was important and that their male friends were to be prioritised over girlfriends. Talk of *expelling femininity*<sup>35</sup> therefore, arose as an important way for them to manage their masculine identities and, as seen in Chapter 6, was likely driven by a need to avoid being shamed – and therefore feminised (see Schippers, 2007) by other young men. These moments revealed dispositions towards two forms of femininity – embodied in dominant girlfriends and in submissive boyfriends – that could potentially contaminate their gendered identities. These reactions to femininity appear embedded in young men’s habitus, influencing how they make sense of the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) of being boyfriends *and* homosocial mates.

Schippers’ (2007) theoretical work around pariah femininities (see Chapter 2, page 24) is germane here. This chapter hopes to empirically extend this part of Schippers’ framework by looking specifically at how young men in my study engaged in *pariah*-talk. This talk surfaced

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<sup>35</sup> I first read the phrase ‘expelling femininity’ in Haywood and Mac An Ghail’s (2003) book – *Men and Masculinities*. Haywood and Mac An Ghail (2003) explain how young men, in schools, manage their masculinity by participating in compulsory heterosexuality, misogyny and homophobia: “What emerged as of particular salience was the way in which heterosexual male students were involved in a double relationship, of traducing the ‘other’, including women and gays (external relations), at the same time as *expelling femininity* and homosexuality from within themselves (internal relations)” (p. 77-78, *my emphasis*). For my research I have adopted this term – ‘expelling femininity’ more specifically with reference to Schippers’ (2007, p. 86) work around ‘gender hegemony’.

when young men discussed the undesirability of being “whipped” by young women whom they perceived as displaying an aggressive and controlling version of femininity. In these instances, boyfriends were seen to be controlled by their girlfriends, resulting in them being feminised and shamed by their male peers for embodying versions of male femininity (Schippers, 2007). Young men’s talk also indicated that “whipped” boyfriends break homosocial rules by prioritising their girlfriends over their homosocial mates. Throughout this chapter I argue, the practice of pariah-talk *and* talk that prioritises homosocial mates exposes a range of oppressive dispositions held by young men that have significant subordinating effects for young women.

Young men’s talk, however, also presented a range of ambivalences that appeared to contradict their narratives that privileged homosociality and expelled femininity. These contradictory dispositions are meaningful because of the opportunities they present in disrupting the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities at work within young men’s sense-makings of homosocial and (hetero)romantic interactions. This chapter will point to what these ambivalent moments may look like and in what ways they could prevent the subordination of young women.

### Breaking the rules of homosociality

There is a significant body of literature that identifies what male homosociality looks like in the social world (see Chapter 3; Arxer, 2011; Barker, 2007; Bird, 1996; Dekeseredy, 2014; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2003; Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Hammeren & Johannson, 2014; Kraack, 1999; Sedgwick, 1985; Towns & Scott, 2008; 2009; Towns & Terry, 2014). A smaller subset has examined the impact young men’s homosociality has on their treatment of their girlfriends (for example, Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2008; 2013a; Korobov, 2009a; 2009b; 2011). These studies canvas a range of ways that young men privilege their male friends in ways that oppress their girlfriends. For example: men speak disparagingly about their girlfriends, and young women in general, when together with their male friends (Barker, 2005; Flood, 2008; 2013a; Korobov, 2009a, 2009b, 2011); young men give preferential treatment to their male friends over their girlfriends (Flood, 2008; Towns & Scott, 2008); young men speak disparagingly about young women who are seen to control their boyfriends and in turn speak disparagingly about men who *let* this happen (Flood, 2008; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009); and men’s homosocial bonds prohibit them from speaking out about their male friends’ use of violence against known women (Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993).

Dispositions that privilege homosociality surfaced in this study when young men discussed the influence male friends had over *how* they performed being boyfriends. In particular, young men spoke of the undesirability of being “whipped” (see Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 99; Flood, 2008, p. 345) by girlfriends, or as they phrased it, “being her dog”. Even though all three focus groups mentioned being “whipped”, these themes were *most* explicit during focus group three. Within this group, the importance of homosociality over romantic intimacy was first illuminated when I asked what they thought “makes a good boyfriend”. Demetri’s answer was: “Um, like an even hanging out time with them and your friends”. The following dialogue then surfaced:

Demetri (FG3):           You don’t want to completely lose all your friends

Christina:                A balance? [Alek makes a whipping sound]

Christina:                Ok, so guys getting ‘whipped’? Is it still called that?

Alek (FG3; L):           Sure is Miss, called being a dog

Christina:                It’s called being a dog

Alek (FG3; L):           The dog

Christina:                The dog?

Alek (FG3; L):           Her dog

Demetri immediately evoked narratives of homosociality when I asked the group what constitutes a ‘good’ boyfriend. Interacting with one’s male friends is seen here to be central to how one performs being boyfriend. In other words, spending time with girlfriends is deemed acceptable as long as it does not interfere with spending time with male friends. As the narrative developed, it became clear that young men can get this very wrong: being “her dog” – or being “on the leash”- as Demetri later added – is imbued with a series of denigrating implications.

Young men who take up these “dog” positions are talked about pejoratively as submissive to their girlfriends. Being a “dog” therefore goes against the tenets of hegemonic masculinity within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships, because masculine boyfriends within this field are *required* to be dominant and authoritative over their girlfriends (see Korobov, 2011). The “leash” imagery adds to the denigrated status of young men who fail to meet these requirements; it suggests that their girlfriends have control over, or ownership of, them. In this way, being “on the leash” directly threatens the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity

(Schippers, 2007) because it evokes qualities associated with hegemonic femininity. When these qualities are embodied by men, they are denigrated within the hegemonic order and socially identified as versions of male femininity. I argue, that young men's "dog"-talk, speaks directly to the ways in which hegemonic masculinity informs their dispositions about the world around them. Importantly, "dog"-talk suggests that young men *think* that boyfriends *should* be dominant over and controlling of their girlfriends.

Further, "dog"-talk is also evidence of how young men make sense of and potentially participate within the field of male homosociality. From their talk, it appears that boyfriends are required to be dominant in their (hetero)romantic relationships *as well as* loyal to their male friends, making the rules of this field complex. Homosociality is commonly associated with "male friendship, male bonding and fraternity orders" (Hammaren & Johansson, 2014, p. 1), and has often been defined as "the nonsexual attractions held by men (and women) for members of their own sex" (Bird, 1996, p. 121). The most fundamental rule of homosociality is that male-to-male relationships should have primacy over male-to-female relationships. This rule is broken when young men become "whipped" – or "dogs" – as they are no longer seen to prioritise these homosocial bonds (Flood, 2008). From young men's talk, it is apparent that breaking these rules by prioritising girlfriends, demonstrates a lack of loyalty to the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities that casts masculinity as ascendant over femininity. Boyfriends in these scenarios will likely develop a "disrupted habitus" (see Chapter 6, page 121; Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 360) and be assigned pejorative and shaming labels like being "whipped" as a way for the hegemonic order of gendered identities to *contain* these undesirable performances.

Participants in this study displayed this understanding of homosocial relationships by implying that being "whipped" is a highly depreciative insult (see Flood, 2008; Towns & Scott, 2009), one that appears primarily issued *by other young men*. The ways men are sanctioned by other men are illuminated in the dialogue below in a discussion of what 'being in love' looks like. Alek, the group's leader, contributed the following:

Christina:                      Within your own peer group, do you see people who claim that they are in love but really its probably something else

[Alek makes a whip sound]

Christina:                      So that's Alek...going back to the whole whipped thing aye?

Alek (FG3; L):                It doesn't look very lovable when you're whipped



Christina: Ok

Alek (FG3; L): It looks pathetic really

Christina: Ok, so what happens when a guy is whipped?

Alek (FG3; L): We don't see him anymore

Alek's evoking of "we" in "*we* don't see him anymore" implies young men collectively engage in a shared habitus (Moi, 1991), where they internalise the governing rules of homosociality into a set of dispositions that promote and adhere to this field. In this sense, loyalty to one's mates *must* come before loyalty towards one's girlfriend. This rule, highlighted by Alek, oppresses young women because of their denigrated status within this rhetoric. "We" also implies the male friendship group is the surveilling party in this scenario. The "him" in Alek's talk marks a boyfriend who breaks the rules of both the field of male homosociality *and* the field of (hetero)romantic relationships that promote men's control over and subordination of their girlfriends.

Alek goes on to explain these breaches would be labelled "pathetic" as a result. For a young man to be labelled "pathetic" by his male peers implies he is understood as feeble and weak. These are qualities that, when embodied by a man, are associated with 'male femininity' and threaten the ascendant "relationship between masculinity and femininity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 95). Because of this, feminising and shaming labels – like "pathetic" – help to contain these male feminine performances and prevent them from contaminating the hegemonic order at play within these various fields of interaction. Controlling girlfriends and deprioritising girlfriends are therefore promoted in homosocial groups because they support the hegemonic scaffolding that privileges men's embodiment of masculinity over women and femininities.

This word choice – "pathetic" – also reveals young men's dispositions towards *how* young women should perform femininity. Within the current gendered system, femininity is regarded as legitimate when it is embodied by women in ways that do not threaten the "hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 94; see also Korobov, 2011). Accordingly, a woman who is seen to position a man as compliant and controllable would *not* be adhering to the hegemonic order of gender. I empirically extend Schippers' (2007) work, by arguing that young men labelling a male peer "pathetic" is in fact a multi-directional feminine slur used to sanction both young men who become "whipped", as well as young women who "whip". As already mentioned, young men who are labelled as

“whipped” are clearly being defined as performing versions of male femininity. For young women who “whip”, the slur is one that positions them as a *pariah*.

Schippers’ conceptualisation of the *pariah* has been taken up by a number of scholars to discuss how women’s performances of gender can be seen as contaminating to the hegemonic order of gendered identities (for example, Backstrom, 2013; Barlow & Lynes, 2015; Carr and Hanks, 2013; Finley, 2010; Geisler, 2014; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Stone & Gorga, 2014). The participants’ talk evoked the *pariah* most strongly when referring to girlfriends who “whip” as the “bitch”. Here, the “bitch” takes on features of hegemonic masculinity – namely aggressiveness, assertiveness, control – yet when embodied by women, these qualities are denigrated as characteristics of *pariah* femininities. These versions of femininity are not just subordinate; they are seen to contaminate the system of hegemonic masculinity. Schippers (2007, p. 95) argues that *pariah*-labels engulf women with “master statuses”: “the possession of any one of these characteristics is assumed to contaminate the individual, so by having the one characteristic an individual becomes a kind of person”. In this way, young women will likely experience persecution and powerlessness when young men label them with these “bitch”-inferred insults. The *pariah*-talk gathered from young men can be seen as an effective device when used to contain the threat of the *pariah*-girlfriend. In turn, it supports the hegemonic order that enables boyfriends to enjoy dominant status within their (hetero)romantic relationships.

Young men’s derision towards the “bitch” was also discussed in other ways throughout focus group three. We were talking about balancing seeing mates and spending time with girlfriends, when Alek contributed the following: “And, just cos this one time you decide not to hang with her, you get your willy chopped off”. Alek’s talk directly positions the girlfriend in this scenario as a *pariah*. Here, the ‘bitch’ is evoked again through Alek’s (figurative) inference that she is violent and unreasonable, and thus has the potential to threaten masculinity in the ultimate way – by castration. The result of the *pariah*’s figurative act – “get[ting] your willy chopped off” – would then successfully shame the boyfriend as feminine because of his, now, inability to sexually penetrate women (Schippers, 2007). This figurative inability then conjures up other qualities of male femininity, like weakness, vulnerability and compliance. From Alek’s talk, it is apparent that he makes sense of these boyfriend qualities as also a threat to the gendered order within significant fields of interaction like male homosociality and (hetero)romantic relationships.

Demetri similarly argued that when a guy is “whipped”, he ends up spending all of his money on his girlfriend:

Christina:                   What else does a guy do when he’s whipped?

Demetri (FG3):           Becomes broke.

Christina:                   Spending all his money on her?

Demetri (FG3):           Yeah.

Demetri’s brief narrative infers that a young woman who controls her boyfriend’s money emasculates him by stripping him of resources (of which money is just one) that establish him as dominant within the relationship. As Connell (2005, p. 82) outlines, “men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige, and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend”. Within her analysis Connell explains how men’s average incomes – a “material dividend” – tend to be larger than their female counterparts, which in turn can be seen to contribute to the relationship of dominance between men/masculinity and women/femininity. A girlfriend who spends “all” of her boyfriend’s money takes this dividend away from him, casting him as weak and vulnerable. Again, men being weak and vulnerable breaks the rules of male homosociality, which promote loyalty to male-male relationships and the subordination of women. Embedded in young men’s talk is a recognition of this, which in turn endorses boyfriends who are dominant within their (hetero)romantic relationships with young women as providers and controllers of resources.

There are however other possible meanings within Demetri’s narrative. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how gift-giving and gestures, like paying for dinner, were commonly discussed by young men as ‘good’ ways to do (hetero)romance. These acts of (hetero)romance were discussed as positioning boyfriends as dominant providers within their (hetero)romantic relationships, whilst positioning girlfriends as submissive recipients. In Demetri’s narrative, however, a contradiction appears: young men become “whipped” and therefore shamed and feminised *because* they spend “all” of their money on their girlfriends. Girlfriends in these scenarios are interpreted as pariahs who feminise their boyfriends and in turn threaten the ascendancy of masculinity within the hegemonic order that governs both the rules of (hetero)romance *and* male homosociality. This more resentful take is very different from how young men in Chapter 5 set up the dominant provider/boyfriend as hegemonically masculine.

Other moments during young men's discussion shed light on why they think boyfriends *become* "whipped". I asked focus group three how a young woman would go about 'whipping' her boyfriend. One of young men whispered to his mate (just loud enough so I could hear) – that all she had to do was "suck his dick". Alek then responded more loudly: "Give him something guys can't". Within this talk young men position young women in complex and contradictory ways. Key to homosociality is the primacy of "male-to-male relations" over male-to-female relationships (Flood, 2008, p. 334). This requires men to privilege other men's company over women's, which is in itself a form of misogyny because it deprioritises young women. However, when a young woman's sexual accessibility is on offer, young men become more likely to break the rules of this homosocial field. This could signal another way young men are cast as weak and easily swayed by their sexual desires, which implies that young women can gain control within their (hetero)romantic relationships by being sexually available. Because of this swaying power it becomes clearer why a young woman who wields this influence would be talked about pejoratively by young men. By being in-control she threatens the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity.

Another reading of these utterances by young men is that they hold dispositions that young women are simply objects that can satisfy young men's sexual desires. This reading speaks to Flood's (2008, p. 346) proposition that homosociality tends to solely promote women as sexual "feats" to be conquered. By speaking about young women as sexual objects, young men endorse the hegemonic rules that govern male homosociality, as well as the rules that enable boyfriends to enjoy a dominant status within their (hetero)romantic relationships.

Alek, however, was the only participant in my study who focused on *other* pariah femininities. Of the 22 young men that I spoke to throughout this study, Alek appeared to embody the most hegemonic masculine identity, thus elevating his status considerably within current arrangements of hegemonic masculinity. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, Alek was an elite sportsman within the school. He was muscular, conventionally handsome, successful in his studies and a future contender for head boy. He also spoke with authority when he told the group how he performed (hetero)romance, proclaiming that he aced 'asking out' Helena (his girlfriend) on the beach at sunset (see Chapter 5). I argue that because Alek successfully embodied hegemonic masculinity, he was able to speak from a privileged position. This embodiment made his talk particularly meaningful because it likely represents current tenets of hegemonic masculinity at work in young men's lives.

One way that Alek positioned young women as pariahs was by referring to them as irrational (see Barnes, 2011; Korobov, 2009a; 2009b). The first of these utterances occurred when the group was discussing how complicated young women can be, which is a popular discourse young men often engage with (for example, Korobov, 2011). Alek, however, took this further, arguing that he could not ascertain “what their reasoning is”. This utterance appeared to signal Alek’s disposition that women are irrational in their thinking, a thought he later crystalised when we discussed Bella, *Twilight’s* heroine, and her relationship with the Edward Cullen. Alek argued, “So she’s lost all reasoning”, and then later reaffirmed his position when our discussion turned to women who have relationships with dangerous men:

Alek (FG3; L):           It’s again the females losing reason

Christina:               Ok....

Alek (FG3; L):           So yeah, temporarily not having any logic to it, to their thoughts

This narrative cements Alek’s position as superior to women because of his claim to have logic and reason, but also reveals his belief that women “temporarily” lose logic. This talk therefore points to another characteristic of pariah femininity that Alek is able to evoke, which is predicated on women being non-compliant to men. The irrational woman does not complement the rational man. In fact, her irrationality is seen to oppose, or go against *his* rational logic, which can therefore be seen as a pariah characteristic *when embodied by a woman*. For Alek, a woman is irrational when he cannot understand her and when he perceives her making an ill-judgement. In these cases, a young woman is deemed irrational if she – in any way – confounds a man, or is seen as *non-compliant*. Continuing this line of thinking, if a man was to express himself in a similar way, it would likely be seen differently. Instead of confusing others, he may be seen to be thinking critically, or be a new authority on a matter; instead of others seeing his decisions as ill-judgements, he may be seen to be taking risks.

Alek also made repeated reference to other versions of pariah femininity throughout this focus group, illuminating his support for the subordination of young women. With regard to *Twilight’s* lead heroine, Bella, Alek made two separate but connected statements about why Bella was romantically and sexually attracted to the story’s vampire lead. The first statement was made when the young men were talking about what parts of the film they found “creepy” (as mentioned in Chapter 5, many of my respondents showed disdain for the way Edward stalked Bella and watched her sleep without her knowing). During the dialogue about what

they found “creepy”, Alek contributed: “The fact that she’s down to<sup>36</sup> engage in intercourse with something that isn’t human”. Whilst the others laughed at Alek’s comment, they did not expand on it in any significant way. Later in our conversations, we were talking about whether or not Bella should have been more afraid of Edward at the start of the film. Alek stated that he thought that Bella should have feared Edward more, adding: “She watched him tear trees out of the ground and she was still willing to have intercourse with him”.

These two examples demonstrate the ease with which some young men talk about women as sexually deviant, or “sluts”. Women<sup>37</sup> who are positioned as “sluts” – both within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships and within the field of male homosocial relationships – endure a problematic position (Attwood, 2007; Charteris, Gregory & Masters, 2016; Flood, 2008; 2013a; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, Livingstone, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2012; Summit, Kalmuss, DeAtley & Levack, 2016; Tanenbaum, 1999). Scholars have examined the practice of “slut-shaming” (Ringrose, et al., 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2012), narratives used by both men and women to stigmatise women’s sexual practices that are seen to be immoral. With specific focus on young men’s talk of “sluts”, Flood (2013a, p. 100: see Chapter 3, page 46) found they tend speak of young women as either “clean” or “unclean”. The latter label imbues women with qualities like being “ugly”, “promiscuous” and “diseased”, and positions them as a “slut” or “slag” (Flood, 2013a, p. 102-3). These labels are highly pejorative and subordinating for women.

Recent activist movements, like “Slutwalk” (see Ringrose & Renold, 2012), have enabled women to reclaim the label “slut” as a way to resist being objectified and subordinated by men. However, Flood (2013a) argues that the sexual double standard “in which women’s but not men’s sexual behaviour is policed and disciplined” (p. 95) is still prevalent within “contemporary heterosexual sexual and intimate relations” (p. 105; see Chapter 3, page 46, for more detail). Further, Ringrose and Renold (2012, p. 338) argue that a “schizoid entanglement” has emerged, which requires young women to stand up to female oppression by resisting labels

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<sup>36</sup> By “down to” he means that she gives ‘consent to’.

<sup>37</sup> See Flood (2013a) for a discussion around the emergence of the “male-slut”: a sexual position often discussed with derision by women to describe a promiscuous young man. Even though Flood argues that this indicates that men can be pejoratively labelled for their sexual activities, “unlike women, men who are sexually active *still have* available to them the positive label “stud” while women do not” (p. 101, *emphasis added*).

like “slut”, yet also be aware of issues surrounding the “sexual risk and protection of themselves and others.

Even though Alek *could* have been commenting paternally that Bella was in danger during these scenes in the movie, I am more convinced, because of Alek’s tendency towards pariah-narratives, that his intention was to “slut-shame” (Ringrose & Renold, 2012; Ringrose et al., 2013) Bella as “willing” to have sex *even though* it was both dangerous<sup>38</sup> and deviant (wanting to have sex with something that “isn’t human”). This reading suggests that Alek saw Bella as enacting a version of erotic masochism (see Taylor, 2011). By engaging Schippers’ (2007) framework, I suggest that he also saw Bella as possessing *masculine* qualities like sexual rapaciousness. Sexual rapaciousness, when embodied by men, is a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity and exalted. When embodied by women however, this masculine quality is seen as a threat to the hegemonic scaffolding of gender relations, which in turn leads to the pejorative pariah positioning of young women who take on these qualities as “sluts”. With regard to my research question, Alek’s derisive talk can therefore be seen to contain dispositions that endorse the hegemonic order that enables boyfriends to be sexually and intimately dominant over their girlfriends, by persecuting young women who threaten this ascendant order with damaging “slut”-type talk.

Alek’s position within the focus group also makes his fixation on these pariah feminine characteristics significant. His public and disparaging talk (see Barnes, 2011; Korobov 2009a; 2009b) about young women’s gendered identities suggests that he perceived himself as a rational and logical young man. In addition, I suggest that it is his habitus – his successful internalisation of and therefore position within various fields – that granted him authority to speak about young women in this way. In terms of his status within the focus group, he was positioned as successfully embodying hegemonic masculinity. I argue that his ability to speak so vocally about young woman in this way came from his privileged position within the hegemonic order of gendered identities at work within these young men’s lives. I also argue that Alek’s derisive talk about women endorsed the hegemonic order that enables young men to subordinate and thus oppress their girlfriends. Young men are able to enjoy this largely

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<sup>38</sup> Bella’s erotic masochistic desires have been the topic of numerous feminist critiques of *Twilight*, but this is outside the scope of this project (see Taylor; 2011)

uncontested position of dominance *because* of the persecution young women face if they try to threaten this ascendancy with masculine practices like non-compliance.

It is also important to note that even though Alek was predominantly speaking alone, his comments about young women “being down to have sex” and “irrational” were *mostly* left unchallenged by his focus group peers. As I mention shortly (see page 147), there was one brief comment made by a group member that appeared to challenge him, but mostly Alek’s comments were not contested. Empirical studies (Adams, 2012; Dekeseredy, 2015; Flood, 2003; Towns & Terry, 2014) have established the effect homosociality has on keeping adult men silent about their male friends’ misogyny. By remaining silent the group gave legitimacy to Alek’s dispositions about the pariah and in turn secured any threat to this ascendancy, like young women who strive *not* to be compliant. Remaining silent may also be related to young men safeguarding themselves from being feminised and shamed for *speaking out* against hegemonic masculinity in public. From this angle, their silence appears motivated more by not wanting to risk contesting him as the leader of the group, rather than necessarily being motivated by an agreement with what he was saying.

Rurality may also be an important variable in young men’s silences. These young men belonged to a small-knit rural community where the likelihood of everyone knowing everybody would be much higher than in urban centers. As some suggest (Dekeseredy, 2015), male-male bonds within rural communities like Te Ika a Maui can carry rules about men *not* speaking out about other men’s oppressive practices towards women. This dynamic occurs by-in-large because these communities tend to be more isolated and smaller in population than urban areas, which can foster more intense peer-networking amongst men (Dekeseredy, 2015). For the young men in this study, speaking against a popular peer’s endorsement of the oppression of young women may have targeted them as disloyal to their homosocial networks, risking significant derision.

Regardless of these motivations, the fact that other group members remained silent and therefore complicit in Alek’s misogyny signals homosocial game-play within male-male groups. I suggest that this type of game-play can be seen as a shared habitus (Moi, 1991) at work within groups of young men, where silence is a way to *support* the hegemonic order that promotes the subordination of young women within (hetero)romantic relationships. To not conform and speak out against a peer’s derisive talk could lead young men to experience a



disrupted habitus (Crossley, 2003, p. 44; Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 360), which would likely see them feminised and shamed publically by their male friends.

### Deviant young men and “the girls”

Up until now, I have reflected on how the rules of homosociality appear to govern young men’s dispositions towards how boyfriends *should* act whilst privileging male friends. I would like to briefly comment on how the rules of homosociality can also be broken by young men who engage in homosexual practices. I will also argue how framing homosexuality *in this way* works to further endorse the chiasmatic hegemonic order that enables men to be dominant in their relationships with women.

In Chapter 5, I discussed how Levi, a member of focus group one, had been described by Nikolai (during our individual interview) as “a little girl”. Nikolai used this label because Levi publically displayed anxiety at school. Dispositions supporting the hegemonic order of gendered identities is markedly clear in Nikolai’s brief utterance. A man who acts like a “little girl” is seen to display not only femininity, but a childlike femininity. This label signifies qualities of intense vulnerability and dependency, in stark contrast to the dominant and headstrong qualities of manly men (Schippers, 2007). There were other instances – during two of my individual interviews – when another feminised male student from Te Ika a Maui High School was discussed. These discussions developed as I asked these two participants how they thought feminine men acted:

- Christina:                   What kind of things, would you, or you know, a guy do that would make him look not masculine, like would make him look like ‘a girl’ or feminine?
- Nikolai (II1):               [long pause] um
- Christina:                   Where he might get mocked or something like that
- Nikolai (II1):               Aw, there is, there was one guy who hangs out with all girls
- Christina:                   Ok
- Nikolai (II1):               Now he’s a, he’s going to do hairdressing and stuff
- Christina:                   Ok, so maybe there are rumours that he’s homosexual?
- Nikolai (II1):               Yeah
- Christina:                   Ok, what, how does he get mocked, like is it just by what people say or

Nikolai (II1):                Yeah, I guess and I dunno, he kinda wears girly clothes and does his hair, like it's long, you know

The object of ridicule within Nikolai's account is a young man who embodies the qualities of hegemonic femininity in a range of ways: he desires men *and* he engages in feminine practices like hairdressing and wearing "girly clothes". These qualities, when embodied by young women, are seen as normal and do important work to stabilise the hegemonic scaffolding that places hegemonic femininity as descendant to hegemonic masculinity. When embodied by a young man however, these become socially defined practices of male femininity (Schippers, 2007)

With regard to the field of (hetero)romantic relationships, this student clearly embodies a "disrupted habitus" (Crossley, 2003, p. 44; Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 360). He has likely been, or will likely in the future be, someone's boyfriend, but his desire is "an erotic attachment" to the same (men) *not* "to difference" (women) (Schippers, 2007, p. 90). In this way, his homosexual practices "fall out of alignment" (Crossley, 2003, p. 44) with the rules of this field. Young men who are successfully positioned within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships practice normalised sexuality by embodying a (hetero)desire to "difference" (Schippers, 2007, p. 90). Excluding young men who are seen to break these compulsory heterosexuality rules in turn helps to cement heterosexuality as the norm to follow.

In terms of the field of male homosociality, this student also appears to break the rules in fundamental ways. He does not prioritise male-male friendships and instead "hangs with the girls". Within Nikolai's talk this privileging of girl-friendships is portrayed as abnormal and therefore deviant. I would presume however, from the way Nikolai talked about this student, that even if he wanted to, this student would not be able to enter into homosocial relationships with other male students because of his homosexual and feminine status within the school. Therefore, the field of male homosociality excludes him outright. Yet within Nikolai's talk (II1), there were subtle implications that he *chose* to "hang out with all girls". I suggest instead that he "hang[ed] with the girls" because it was within these spaces that he felt safe and unjudged.

It is interesting that Levi, although the target of feminine insults himself, *also* commented on this student during our individual interview. Levi was able to talk derisively about another young man's girlish behaviours, yet (perhaps unknowingly) practiced similar behaviours himself. My interview with Levi (II3) was not as effortless and dynamic as with Nikolai. Levi

appeared intensely uncomfortable talking with me and I fell into a pattern of over-asking questions which lent themselves to closed answers. Even so, our conversation did bring some additional insights about the male student in question:

- Christina: Ok, ok, um so what would a guy do that would be seen as girly or feminine that he might get ribbed for or mocked for
- Levi (II3): Um I dunno, hanging out with girls
- Christina: yeah, ok, so what would that be about
- Levi (II3): Um [long pause]
- Christina: So you're talking about maybe him seeming a bit 'gay'
- Levi (II3): Yep
- Christina: Ok, so um so what what might his behaviour be like? What makes him appear that way?
- Levi (II3): I dunno, [long pause] cos he's camp
- Christina: Ok, ok, ok, with the hands and everything and they hang out with girls? Why
- Levi (II3): I don't know
- Christina: So, you reckon they wouldn't get along with the guys
- Levi (II3): Yep
- Christina: Ok, um so they, so they've um really only got one option which is to hang out with the girls
- Levi (II3): Yeah

Like Nikolai, Levi evoked similar examples and language (again this male student is seen to be “hanging out with girls”) to describe this case of male femininity. These familiarities suggest this male student – and his sexuality – was well-known by other students. However, in contrast to Nikolai's talk, Levi hinted (albeit in a laboured manner) that this male student *was* in fact excluded from male-male homosocial networks within the school, which confirmed my suspicions that hanging with the girls was not his choice alone.

What is also germane in Levi (II3) and Nikolai's (II1) contributions is their positioning of “girls” as commensurate with the most deviant male student at Te Ika a Maui High School. This suggests that young women *share* a denigrated status alongside the male student in question. The ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity at work within these young men's lives is

again apparent in their talk. Not only are male femininities stigmatised, but so too are young women generally. However, in this case “girls” are not being denigrated because they are seen as pariahs, but simply because they are “girls”. In terms of my research question, positioning young women in this way – as inferior and as “girls” (implying childlike qualities) – is in keeping with young men’s talk that positioned girlfriends as inferior to their boyfriends (see Chapter 5 and 6).

To conclude this section, I return to the rural setting of my fieldwork to ascertain how a *rural habitus* could be at work within young men’s talk. In Chapter 6, I discussed the proposition that the young men from my research may have developed a rural habitus as part of their privileging of a muscular and violent form of hegemonic masculinity. I would like to suggest that a rural habitus may also be at work within young men’s dispositions that privilege homosocial relationships. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, empirical studies have exposed the ‘pull’ of adult male-male homosociality in rural communities. Homosocial bonds amongst adult men are strongly upheld in rural areas, where traditional views of masculinity are promoted (DeKeseredy, 2015; Peter, Mayerfeld Bell & Bauer, 2000). Intense ‘ol’ boy networks’, made up of a smaller number of men in more isolated settings, influence this ‘pull’ (DeKeseredy, 2015). The current findings suggest that younger men within a rural community in Aotearoa/New Zealand are also bound by strong pressures to “play the game” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 34) of *rural* homosociality. This is evidenced in Nikolai and Levi’s talk about a particular male student. There is likely a conservatism being upheld in this rural community that, when placed alongside the isolated and tight-knit nature of the area, makes *public* displays of homosexual identities both aberrant and intensely deviant. It seems the ascendant status of hegemonic masculinity within this rural community is easily stabilised when young men talk about homosexuality and “hanging with the girls” in such derisive ways. I suggest that this provides another piece of the puzzle in understanding why the young men in my study were enabled to talk about being boyfriends in such oppressing ways.

### Disrupting pariah-talk

This privileging of the hegemonic order of gendered identities however, is not seamless. As such, ambivalences (Adkins, 2004) can surface within young men’s internalising of this chiasmatic system. Using Jackson and Salisbury’s (1996, p. 107) words, these “cracks and fissures” can emerge when young men talk about gendered roles within (hetero)romantic

relationships. The aim of this section is to capture these moments of talk when young men were practicing gender in ways that could be disrupted.

The first moment of ambivalence surfaced when Alek was denigrating Bella as a sexual deviant. After Alek commented that Bella “was still willing to have intercourse with him”, Nikolai replied: “There seems to be a common factor here, Alek, that you’re talking about this stuff”. Although on the surface Nikolai’s comment to Alek sounded playful – almost like a gentle ribbing between friends – other readings suggest a destabilisation of hegemonic masculinity. Alek’s comments were likely intended as pejorative statements about young women’s sexuality, which the literature suggests is commonplace within men’s homosocial talk (see Flood, 2008; Korobov, 2009a; 2009b; 2011). Yet Nikolai challenged Alek’s fixation on Bella wanting to have “intercourse” with Edward. Although said in a casual manner, it signalled to Alek *and* to the group that perhaps Alek’s talk was out-of-place.

This contestation suggests that young men’s pre-reflexive understandings of “slut” narratives are not necessarily coherent, so much so that Nicolai was able to publically speak out *against* such “slut”-talk from a peer who embodied a high masculine status within the group. These readings of Nikolai’s comment, however, are only suggestions at this point. As Adkins (2004) warns, we should not be too quick to label these as definitive moments that destabilise gendered norms. Instead, I am more inclined to see these moments as a reworking of the hegemonic gender order within late modernity (Adkins, 2002; 2004). For example, Nikolai comments could have stemmed from a paternalistic narrative (as discussed in Chapter 5) of trying to defend a young woman’s honour.

However, another part of their talk about young women might also be seen as ambivalence, or when “cracks and fissures” (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p. 107) appeared. Even though these young men emphasised their aversion to men being “whipped”, they also spoke at length about the good parts of being in a (hetero)romantic relationship, indicating they can hold contradictory dispositions about (hetero)romance and male homosociality. As outlined earlier, the young men (particularly from focus group three) I talked with were intensely vocal about the code of homosociality and their disdain for pariah femininities. However, within other parts of our conversation they talked warmly of the benefits of ‘being in love’. Here, the following dialogue emerged:

Christina:                   What do you think are the good parts of being in love with a girl? What are some really good parts, from a guy’s perspective? Leo?

Leo (FG3): Having someone to spend your few, dunno how long you go with, spend it with.

Christina: Mmm

Nikolai (FG3): Spare time.

Christina: Nikolai, spare time. What do you mean by that?

Nikolai (FG3): Aw.....

Christina: Alek?

Alek (FG3; L): To have someone to focus your efforts on or something rather than floating around, doing nothing.

Christina: Ok, Leo?

Leo (FG3): Someone to think of, you know.

Later they shared the following good parts of ‘being in love’:

Alek (FG3; L): Something to look forward to, if you haven’t got a lot else

Christina: Ok, Leo.

Leo (FG3): Your mood, your moods would probably change and you would actually look forward to something over the weekend with the girl or during the week you might experience just, ‘oh well, I’m seeing her this weekend so I can just as well do everything this week.

Christina: Cool.

Leo (FG3): And get through it.

Alek (FG3; L): I can second that.

In my second focus group, these were some suggestions offered by the young men:

Sergei (FG2): You can, you can tell them about your secrets and have someone to talk to.

Christina: Ok, what are some of the, what would be some of the other potential good things of being in love? Toma?

Toma (FG2): You share a connection with them, so its, you know, you can get like along with them really well.

Within these moments of talk, young men can be seen to be practicing gender (Yancey Martin, 2003; see Chapter 2, page 30-31) in ambivalent ways. Instead of speaking derisively about girlfriends who demand too much of their time, young men speak fondly of having a romantic

partner. Even though studies have found similar talk from young men extolling the virtues of romantic intimacy (for example Allen, 2007; Redman, 2001), my focus is different. I am interested in the ambivalences that surface when young men talk about ‘being in love’, because of what these say about the precariousness of hegemonic structures like male-male homosociality *and* the pre-reflexive nature of how people practice gender. These brief moments, when young men hold dispositions that do not give male-male bonds primacy, mark important contradictions which suggest that young men do not “fully occupy” (Adkins, 2004, p. 206) homosocial norms at an internal or pre-reflexive level. In these instances, young men seem to challenge the rules of homosociality by privileging their relationships with young women, which sits in stark contrast to the parts of their talk where the pariah is so easily evoked.

Importantly, it is within these ambivalent moments (Adkins, 2004) where the hegemonic order that genders identities *could* be interrupted. My findings suggest that it is at these ambivalent junctures in young men’s talk that the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) of homosociality are not being internalised (as dispositions) through their habitus. Instead, young men appear to easily transition into quite contradictory talk which *publically* positions them as vulnerable and needing companionship from young women. These public admissions, which are likely pre-reflexive – spoken in haste and without in-depth critical thought (see Yancey Martin, 2003) – are decidedly non-hegemonic, and arguably feminine. These findings offer a new way of viewing the ‘pull’ of young men’s homosociality (Barker, 2005; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2008; Korobov, 2009a; 2009b; 2011; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009). I argue that this intersection is where prevention programmes could work in fostering critical discussion with young men about what a healthy (hetero)romantic relationship looks like (see Chapter 8 for more detail).

Notably, these moments of ambivalence were also located within Alek’s contributions about the benefits of being in a romantic relationship. He too agreed that there were positives to ‘being in love’, yet earlier in our discussions he was the most vocal in expelling femininities from homosocial bonds. This contradiction suggests an incongruence specific to how Alek was practicing gender within this male-male group context. This is meaningful because of the status he enjoyed within the group. If a successfully masculine young man can show signs of ambivalence, where his taking up of gendered norms at the internal level of practice (Bourdieu, 1992) appears at odds with the tenets of various significant fields of interaction that privilege

hegemonic masculinity, then one could argue that the very core of this ascendant position of hegemonic masculinity is precarious.

These ambivalences can also be usefully explained by empirically extending Butler's arguments surrounding mimesis. Butler argues that "heterosexuality offers subject positions (ideals) which can only be taken up (mimed) by the subject through a process of repressions or renunciation" (Bell, 1999, p. 89). In this way, femininity and homosexuality become central to how men mime heterosexual identities, producing "the idea of homosexuality whilst simultaneously disallowing its articulation as an identity" (Bell, 1999, p. 91). Here, the abject (unviable) and gender norms (viable) are "created at the very same moment" (Bell, 1999, p. 91), which opens up the possibility for change (the unviable becoming viable) where ambivalence is understood "to be at the very heart of mimesis" (Adkins, 2004, p. 206). This may explain why young men so easily, and in contradictory ways, transitioned from talk that positioned them as hegemonically masculine (viable), to talk that exposed them as vulnerable and dependent (unviable). Again, this indicates that "subjects never fully occupy norms" and it is through these "cracks and fissures" (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p. 107) that moments of disruption could emerge.

## In conclusion

This chapter has looked at young men's dispositions about being "whipped" and pariah femininities. These dispositions, situated within their talk, appear to be a product of the 'pull' of homosociality that compels young men to expel the male feminine (being whipped) from their own gendered identities and the pariah feminine (the whip-per) from their lives. This 'pull' has significant implications for how young men understand *how to be* boyfriends and homosocial mates simultaneously. Here, the rules of homosociality appear to form young men's shared habitus (Moi, 1991), compelling them to speak of privileging their male-male bonds over their (hetero)romantic ones. Playing by the rules matters, as breaking them appears to lead young men to be feminised and shamed by male peers. To mitigate against this, young men not only show solidarity with their male friends, but in turn engage in pariah-talk that denigrates young women. These revelations show other ways in which young men's talk supports the hegemonic order that enables boyfriends to be oppressive towards their girlfriends.

Within this chapter, I showcased Alek's pariah-talk. Because he displayed a markedly successful masculine identity, I suggest that his talk about young women being "down to have



sex” (sluts) and “irrational” speaks to the more concerning ways in which hegemonic masculinity promotes the subordination of young women. However, not even Alek’s talk was inherently stable. Throughout my discussions with young men, I gathered moments when they (including Alek) showcased contradictory dispositions that privileged their (hetero)romantic relationships with young women. They talked about the benefits of companionship and intimacy which marked significant ambivalences when compared to their pariah-talk. It is in these moments that the rules governing the fields of (hetero)romantic relationships and male homosociality *could* be captured. In the following chapter I will present a discussion of how these interruptions could be fostered.

# CHAPTER 8

## In Conclusion

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Research concerned with furthering scholarship about *how* young men make sense of what boyfriends should be entitled to do within their (hetero)romantic relationships matters for a number of reasons. Domestic violence statistics (see Leask, 2016) show that (hetero)romantic relationships – especially in Aotearoa/New Zealand – are prevalent sites where men are able to use a range of oppressive strategies to control and dominate their female partners. Finding out how young men make sense of these types of oppressions may give better insight into how men *become* oppressive from an earlier age. Speaking to *young* men about being boyfriends is also important because they are likely at a stage of life where they are working out *how* to be boyfriends. Finding out if their thinking already supports various forms of male oppression that can subordinate girlfriends is therefore imperative.

Currently, scholarship has garnered a range of insights into how young men make sense of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships, and how they are able to be oppressive within these partnerships with young women (Allen, 2007; Canaan, 1991; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1994; Doull, O’Liffe, Knight & Shoveller, 2013; Flood, 2008; 2013a; Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Klein, 2006a; Korobov, 2009a; 2009b; 2011; McCarry 2009; 2010; Messerschmidt, 1999; Sundaram, 2013; Totten, 2003; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009; see Chapter 3 for full discussion). However, there are still many opportunities to tease out how young men’s understandings of masculinity *and femininity* shape their views on male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships.

### Oppressive dispositions and the rules of (hetero)romantic relationships

In speaking with young men in this study, I found their talk harboured a range of unethical dispositions about *how* to be boyfriends that objectified, subordinated and deprioritised young women. I argue that these dispositions are a product of their internalising the hegemonic rules that govern key fields of interaction that they move through – namely the fields of

(hetero)romantic relationships and male homosociality. These rules appear to draw significantly on a hegemonic order that genders identities in young men's lives.

### *Paternalism*

One way that young men showed their support of male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships was by talking in ways that endorsed the masculine practice of paternalism (see Chapter 5). Their talk suggested strongly that a benevolent version of paternalism is at work within how young men make sense of the gendered norms involved in being boyfriends. In this way, paternalism surfaced from their talk as a rule for how to be (hetero)romantic. These understandings of paternalism however, are complex with a number of elements involved in what young men's dispositions towards paternalism looks like. In one way, young men praised boyfriends, like Edward Cullen, who keep a protective eye on their girlfriends. This finding empirically extends Schippers' (2007) conceptual framework by illustrating that young men view being a protective boyfriend as a quality of hegemonic masculinity. This understanding, in turn, has ramifications for how young women are *expected* to act as girlfriends. If hegemonic masculinity is bound by this type of protectionism, then the complementary yet subordinated characteristics of hegemonic femininity dictate that young women be vulnerable and dependent on their boyfriends.

In turn, these expectations may also contribute to the undermining of young women who choose to be independent and strong-willed in their (hetero)romantic relationships with young men. In other words, not needing men's protection may be seen as breaking the rules that govern (hetero)romantic relationships and may imbue young women with pariah feminine identities (Schippers, 2007). Likewise, young men who are not seen to be protective of their girlfriends may also be stigmatised within this field for not being masculine 'enough' boyfriends, and feminised as a result.

While drawing on Edward Cullen's boyfriend performances within *Twilight*, young men also argued that restraining from being violent towards your girlfriend is another expression of paternal love, again bound up in hegemonic masculinity. Young men's fixation on restraint, as part of what 'good' boyfriends do, is concerning because of the subordinating work it does in oppressing young women further within the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. For example, to exalt boyfriends who are potentially dangerous but 'restrain' from being violent positions their girlfriends as vulnerable and dependent on them, which then become the

expected *hegemonic* qualities of a ‘good’ feminine girlfriend. This expectation continually places young women in subordinate roles within the field of (hetero)romantic relationships.

### *Territory marking*

Young men’s talk about being paternal also held moments when their dispositions towards paternalism became more about possessiveness and a right to protect, than an obligation. In these moments, young men’s support of possessiveness pointed to the existence of another set of rules for how to act as boyfriends – what I discussed as a code of honour (see Chapter 6). In particular, this code appeared to give young men the right as boyfriends to surveil their girlfriends’ social interactions with others, especially other young men. Young men described a complex process that is subject to a variety of sub-rules. As they explained, a verbal warning would be given to any male peer seen to be talking inappropriately with one’s girlfriend. Even in its verbal form, this strongly positioned a boyfriend’s right to be possessive of his girlfriend. However, if a male peer was seen to be physically intimate with one’s girlfriend, the rules changed. In these circumstances, young men were required to initiate a fist-fight with the ‘other guy’ as a way to mark territory and re-instate honour (masculine status).

Scholarship on territory marking is significantly limited and mostly obsolete (Canaan, 1991; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Sundaram, 2013). For instance, Sundaram’s (2013, p. 897) study only briefly mentions this practice and Canaan (1991) and Kenway & Fitzclarence’s (1997) work is two decades old. The current findings provide a contemporary analysis of how young men make sense of territory marking, and what this says about the support young men give to those who exert this type of control over their girlfriends. The code implicated in young men’s talk about territory marking in the current study appears duel-like and works to minimise the shame young men likely experience when their hegemonic possessor-boyfriend status is in jeopardy. This finding empirically extends Schippers’ (2007) work on male femininities by suggesting that this rule concerning peer violence is a way to minimise the effects of being seen as a failed and therefore *feminine* boyfriend. Young men’s talk of territory marking, therefore, showed their support for the use of violence as a marker of hegemonic masculinity and their endorsement of young women’s objectification as “things” to be fought over.

Young men’s talk about this code however, was not entirely coherent. As I talked with young men, the practice of territory marking appeared a product of them improvising as they talked publically with one another. I will come back to this finding shortly when I talk about

ambivalence, but it suggests that there is a precariousness in how young men's dispositions towards being boyfriends take form, and that these dispositions may not have solid foundations in their lived experiences. I have likened this instead, to a form of *guesswork* that helps young men to talk with one another to secure masculine status in groups. Regardless of its improvised qualities, this talk of a code of honour which outlines the inner workings of territory marking – even in its improvised form – is nonetheless a product of the rules that govern the field of (hetero)romantic relationships that support boyfriends being controlling and oppressive towards girlfriends (see Chapter 6).

I have also argued these rules young men spoke of may be a product of a *rural habitus* that privileges a muscular “farmer” body which is able to fight other young men effectively in these situations (see Chapter 6). In accordance with existing scholarship (Bryant, 2006; Bye, 2009; Caldwell, 2007; Campbell & Mayerfield Bell, 2000; Liepens, 2000; Little, 2007; Longhurst & Wilson, 1999; Peter, Mayerfield Bell, Jarnagin & Bauer, 2000; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013), this finding suggests that young men perceive male bodies to be legitimate when they *are able* to take on traditional masculine tasks like heavy lifting and physical labour. The “townies” admissions of going to the gym as a way for them to have “farmer” bodies indicate that having the right kind of masculine body mattered to these young men. Therefore, a rural masculinity may be at work in young men's thinking, which develops via a *rural habitus* that shapes how they make sense of the gendered world around them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Adkins, 2004). I argue that this likely has implications for the kind of boyfriend young men think they *should* be: that is, a boyfriend who is able to fight other young men over young women, in turn legitimising their right to be possessive over their girlfriends.

### *Feminine boyfriends*

Certain boyfriend performances were cast by young men in this study as decidedly feminine and shaming. Levi was a participant who embodied a version of male femininity and was seen by his peers as weak and vulnerable, Nicolai referred to Levi as “a little girl” because he displayed anxiety (see Chapter 5). Because of this positioning his ideas on how to be romantic were ridiculed, even though the romantic gestures he suggested were very similar to those made by Alek, the *most* hegemonically masculine member of the group. Here, the divergent ways that young men can “play the game” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 34) of (hetero)romance became apparent. This ridiculing however, was not because Levi's suggestion was “too romantic” (as existing scholarship has argued: see Allen, 2007, p. 146; Forrest, 2010; Redman, 2001; Tolman,

Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso & Striepe, 2004). Levi's understanding of how to be (hetero)romantic threatened the hegemonic order within these young men's lives *because* his prior performances of femininity made his romantic suggestions illegitimate as well. Because of this, his ideas needed to be *contained* and thus were treated by others in the group as laughable and ridiculous.

Another more surprising version of male femininity emerged within young men's talk. Men's control and dominance within (hetero)romantic relationships has long been a marker of masculinity (see Stark, 2003; Towns & Adams, 2008, 2009). Yet in two focus groups, being an overly controlling boyfriend was considered a "clingy" and "pussy" practice (see Chapter 5). The groups' respective leaders, David (FG2) and Alek (FG3), were particularly vocal, which suggests that these dispositions have a dominant position amongst groups of young men. Even though scholarship has indicated similar findings – Adams (2012) found that men criticised peers who used severe violence towards a (hetero)romantic partner – my analysis is different. In extending Schippers' (2007) work on male femininities, "clingy" or "pussy" boyfriends are denigrated because they are perceived as feminine. These boyfriends break the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) because they appear vulnerable. They are overly invested, obsessed and therefore dependent on their girlfriends, which goes against the hegemonic masculine qualities of what a boyfriend should be like: autonomous, independent and, as I have added from my own findings, having will-power and restraint (all of which still oppress girlfriends by placing them in subordinate roles within the relationship).

On the one hand, these connotations between something undesirable (men being feminine) and oppressive ways of being boyfriends could provide opportunities to engage young men in discussions about the negative impacts of male control over women. On the other hand, conflating obsession, jealousy and possessiveness with something that is feminine is decidedly pejorative *for femininities*, strengthening the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity as always "conflated" with something that is "superior" (see Schippers, 2007, p. 96). This resonates with young men's dialogue about one male student at Te Ika a Maui High School who "hangs with all the girls" (see Chapter 7). This student was discussed in individual interviews as deviant because he was associated with homosexuality and therefore femininity. The femininity embodied by this student was discussed with derision. Further, based on what Levi and Nicolai said, the girls he "hung" with shared a similar deviant status because they were the only ones who would 'have him' in their friendship group. This provides another dimension to what

young men's dispositions towards gender look like. Through their talk, "the girls" are not only denigrated when they are seen as pariahs; they are denigrated simply *because* they are "girls". This understanding is not surprising though, as it is in keeping with a large amount of young men's talk that positioned girlfriends as inferior to boyfriends.

### *Homosocial loyalty and pariah girlfriends*

Another disposition that surfaced from our focus group discussions was that a 'good' boyfriend is first and foremost loyal to his mates (see Chapter 7). In extending Schippers' (2007) work, these opinions indicate that the 'pull' of homosociality is largely dictated by the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities. This order dictates the following rule: Male forms of masculinity prevalent within homosocial interactions must take primacy (see Chapter 3; Arxer, 2011; Barker, 2007; Bird, 1996; DeKeseredy, 2014; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2008; Forrest, 2010; Gilmartin, 2007; Hammeren & Johannson, 2014; Kraack, 1999; Sedgwick, 1985; Towns & Scott, 2008; 2009; Towns & Terry, 2014). Privileging homosocial relationships shaped how young men understood being boyfriends in ways that deprioritised girlfriends: a decidedly oppressive rule that positions young women within young men's talk as insignificant in comparison to the homosocial group.

As part of young men's collective talk about homosociality, there was an overwhelming theme surrounding the undesirability of boyfriends being "whipped" (see Chapter 7). Other studies have reported similar findings (see Flood, 2008; Towns & Scott, 2009). However, my findings speak more extensively about the 'pull' of homosociality amongst school-aged young men and how this forms dispositions that shape their talk about *pariah femininities*. This current study empirically extends Schippers' (2007) innovative use of this concept by showcasing how young men engage in pariah-talk when discussing gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships.

Young men's talk displayed a strong desire to expel femininity from their own gendered identities, which influenced how they talked about feminine boyfriends (see Chapter 7). Being a "dog" or "pathetic" were insults used to label young men who were seen to be "whipped" by their girlfriends. Similarly to their previous use of the term "pussy" to denote a boyfriend who was overly dependent on his girlfriend (or "clingy" – see Chapter 5), "dog" and "pathetic" were derogatory terms used to refer to boyfriends seen as being feminine. Young men being feminine disrupts and threatens the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity. Derisive labels like "dog"

and “pathetic” work effectively to contain these feminine practices because they stigmatise and shame young men for breaking the ‘rules’ of (hetero)romance – where boyfriends *must* be dominant – and also the rules of male homosociality – where loyalty to male friends is paramount.

Young men’s talk also exposed oppressive dispositions toward girlfriends who embodied *pariah femininities* (see Chapter 7). They talked disparagingly about young (pariah) women who “whip” young men, focusing mainly on the “bitch”-pariah to explain the emasculating effect these young women have on young men’s masculine status. By controlling their boyfriend, the pariah girlfriend metaphorically castrates him, stripping him of his masculine dominance. Like the “pussy” boyfriend who controls his girlfriend by being “clingy” (like being overly jealous and obsessive), the pariah girlfriend is relegated to a deviant status in similar ways. She too is seen to threaten the ascendant order of hegemonic masculinity, but her performance is different from male femininities; she displays hegemonic masculine qualities, but is female. She therefore needs to be *contained*. “Bitch”-labelling is one way to achieve this. I also maintain that young men’s investments in a *rural habitus* may have made their talk more inclined to promote male homosocial loyalty. Research (see Dekeseredy, 2015) has shown that men living rurally exhibit more intense homosocial loyalty because they live in more isolated and close-knit communities. My research extends this work to suggest that *young* men living rurally may also experience homosociality *in this way* because of their geographical location.

In summary, from young men’s talk it seems that a (hegemonically) masculine boyfriend *needs* a girlfriend who embodies the complementary qualities of hegemonic femininity; that is, someone who is positioned as his inferior and naturally subordinate.

Alongside being “whipped”, young men also evoked notions of pariah girlfriends in their talk about women provoking men’s violence. This talk was in particular reference to Bella Swan (see Chapter 5), whose expressions of love towards Edward Cullen were largely seen as problematic by young men. In focus group one, there was specific attention on how Bella provoked Edward’s violent side – but he then ‘admirably’ showed restraint. Studies have reported young people’s use of provocation to explain why men can be violent towards their (hetero)romantic partners (see McCarry, 2010; Sundaram, 2013; Towns & Scott, 2008, 2009). My research contributes to this body of work by examining how school-aged young men, when in a male-male group setting, talk in ways that endorse male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships via the use of provocation and victim-framing narratives. I argue



that young men appear able to use this talk to secure their masculine status in front of other young men, by denigrating as pariahs young women who provoke men to be violent.

Talk about pariah girlfriends also surfaced in focus group three, but this time it was solely Alek's (the leader) contributions that 'stood out' (see Chapter 7). He talked specifically of young women/girlfriends being irrational and of young women/girlfriends being sexually deviant. I suggested in Chapter 7 that Alek's utterances, in particular, were a product of his habitus – perhaps more pronounced because of rurality – which he had developed through embodying muscularity, being conventionally handsome and being desired by young women. His ability to vocalise his dispositions by talking derisively about young women likely came from his privileged position within the hegemonic order of gendered identities at work within these young men's lives. This talk oppresses young women. When young women show agency with regard to their sexuality, or contest young men's rationality, they are persecuted with damaging labels – like “slut” and “irrational” – *because* of their non-compliance. I argue that being non-complaint *in these ways* reflects hegemonically masculine qualities, yet when embodied by women is seen as a contaminant to the hegemonic gender order, and thus they are relegated to pariah status. What made Alek's talk 'stand-out' was that his peers were markedly silent during his pariah-talk. These findings contribute to existing studies (Adams; 2012; Dekeseredy, 2015; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993) to confirm that young men experience homosocial pressures to not verbally contest their mates' misogynistic dispositions. In addition, I argue that contesting a male peer who is seen to successfully contribute to the hegemonic ordering of gender identities, may jeopardise one's own placement in this order.

### *Moments of ambivalence*

From these findings, I conclude there are a number of ways that young men take up unethical dispositions towards being boyfriends that support the subordinating, oppressing and deprioritising of young women within (hetero)romantic relationships. These dispositions suggest a hegemonic scaffolding at work that orders gendered identities in young men's lives. However, these are not entirely coherent. There were times when a more “fuzzy” logic (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 23) of what it means to be a boyfriend emerged in their talk. In extending Adkins' (2004) work, this ‘fuzziness’ presented itself as ambivalence which I conceptualise throughout my research as moments when the internal taking up of gendered norms can be interrupted.

Because I did not observe young men being boyfriends (for example, I did not see them with their girlfriends, or marking territory or being homosocial in the school grounds), it is their talking – as them performing gender (see Yancey Martin, 2003) – I gathered, and which hold clues as to *how* the hegemonic order that genders identities could be destabilised.

When young men talked about what makes a ‘good’ boyfriend, moments of ambivalence – or ‘fuzziness’ emerged. ‘Good’ boyfriends were obligated to protect and not be seen as “clingy” (controlling). Yet, ‘good’ boyfriends also had rights to be possessive of their girlfriends and *could* be controlling – and potentially violent – if provoked by their girlfriends (for example, if she “egged” him on, see Chapter 5). These incongruent moments of talk represented a “grey area” in how they made sense of the rules of (hetero)romance and, in particular, the requirements for masculinity this field produced. This finding suggests that the oppressive understandings young men hold about how to be boyfriends are unstable at the internal taking up of these norms. This instability signals a *way in* to support young men to be more “ethical” (see Carmody, 2009, p. 51; Carmody & Ovenden, 2013, p. 795; Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122).

Another ‘fuzziness’ embedded in young men’s talk about being boyfriends surfaced in their discussions about the code of honour and fighting male peers to mark one’s territory (see Chapter 6). From analysing their talk, it became apparent this code was actually a product of guesswork. Their tendency towards guesswork was crystallised through their “if...” utterances, and also when one of the young men questioned the potential consequences of fighting a male peer *at school*. This suggested that none of the young men had *actually* performed these violent acts to mark their territory, yet they were still able to talk about territory marking by evoking guesswork. Their talk *was* the performance because they did not have the *practical mastery of enacting violence in order to mark their territory* to draw on. This *type of talk* was therefore a way for young men to *publically* secure their masculine identities in front of their peers. This signalled that young men are still making sense of how to be boyfriends *before practical mastery is achieved* within this field. As such, it points to important moments within their early “relationship careers” (Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 6), when the interruptability of oppressive dispositions toward being boyfriends could occur.

There was also significant contradiction in how young men talked about the undesirability of being “whipped” (see Chapter 7). Even though pariah-talk was dominant within the focus groups, there were moments where participants openly expressed the ‘good’ parts of being in love. Within these moments, young men shared the benefits of being emotionally supported by

their girlfriends, which I likened to them being dependent (or “whipped”) on young women. This stark contradiction signals another moment when young men’s internalisation of the rules of homosociality – their dispositions as evidenced in their talk – is malleable and potentially open to change. Another explanation is that this could have resulted from the unviable becoming viable within their talk. According to Butler, the abject (unviable) and gender norms (viable) are “created at the very same moment” (Bell, 1999, p. 91). This can create subtle moments when what is deemed illegitimate (the pariah girlfriend), becomes legitimate (the supportive girlfriend). I suggest that this could be taking place in the formation of young men’s dispositions that surface through their talk and also speaks to how hegemonic structures that denigrate the pariah (and subordinate women) could be disrupted.

Finally, there were also significant moments when Alek – the leader of focus group three and an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity within the group – was discussed by his peers in ways that indicated their ambivalence about his status. In Chapter 7, I spoke particularly of Nicolai’s ambivalent talk about Alek. In his individual interview, Nicolai was indifferent about Alek’s achievements and suggested that everyone knew Alek was good at everything. His ambivalence implied that although Alek was successfully masculine within the school, some of his peers were indifferent to his successes. These moments of indifference are potentially significant because they signal a way that young men’s dispositions towards hegemonic masculinity can be contradictory, which highlights another way that the ascendant order of hegemonic masculinity that enables male oppression is precarious and changeable.

### Where to from here? Practical suggestions

What might be done with these moments of ambivalence? As I have argued, it is in these moments that rich possibilities reside for changing young men’s unethical dispositions towards being boyfriends. I will conclude this thesis by presenting two recommendations for *how* to pragmatically start working with young men’s ambivalent dispositions in ways that may destabilise their understandings of (hetero)romance that oppress young women.

First and foremost, involving young men in efforts (see Flood, 2011) to prevent their own oppressive dispositions and acts is key. This recommendation complements a range of important scholarship that has already drawn this conclusion. Flood (2003, 2011, 2013b) has been especially vocal in this regard, publishing a range of articles promoting the involvement of men in violence prevention programmes. This is echoed in a current discussion by Carlson,

Casey, Edleson, Tolman, Walsh and Kimball (2015) about the global push for men and boys to be involved in violence prevention strategies. Even though the young men in my study made no admissions of being violent towards their girlfriends, I argue that Flood (2003, 2011, 2013) and Carlson et al.'s (2015) support of involving men in violence prevention complements my recommendation to involve young men in programmes that aim to cultivate more “ethical boyfriend” (Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122) dispositions. With specific regard to the prevention of sexual violence, Carmody and Ovenden (2013, p. 796; see also Carmody, 2009) concur that teaching young men about “ethical relating” to young women during moments of intimacy is key.

I argue that the school is a logical and practical site for these discussions to take place. Schools provide easy access to groups of young men, as well as spaces where programmes can be facilitated. Schools are also sites where young men group together regularly, making them ideal locations to target *groups* of young men (I will return to this emphasis on the group shortly). As discussed in Chapter 1, this approach is not new. In Aotearoa/New Zealand there are a number of school-based (e.g. Relationship Education in the HPE Curriculum; *Mates and Dates, Loves me Not*) initiatives designed to both spread awareness of, and facilitate young men to critically reflect on, how male oppression within (hetero)romantic relationships subordinates women. These programmes also promote ways for young people to have ‘healthy’ romantic relationships<sup>39</sup>, by enabling them to critically reflect on what these relationships should and should not look like.

My specific recommendations argue that an initiative be developed that works both with young men’s *specific* oppressive understandings of how to be boyfriends, as well as young men’s *specific* ambivalences (see Adkins, 2004). I was particularly intrigued by ambivalences present in young men’s use of guesswork. It was apparent that, at times, young men were not talking from practical experience. I argue that working with these moments of young men’s guesswork could also be key to disrupting young men’s dispositions towards being oppressive boyfriends, *before* these inclinations *become* embedded in acts of oppression. It is therefore especially pertinent that facilitators have discussions with the young men they are working with *and then*

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<sup>39</sup> Towns and Scott (2008, 2009) made similar recommendations for school-aged young people to be taught “critical cultural studies” (2008, p. 118) within the NZ curriculum where they can critically reflect on the ‘contemporary culture’ that surrounds them, feeding heteronormative messages about how to be boyfriend and girlfriends.

specifically tailor content to them. This approach may require a degree of improvisation, so that facilitators ‘get to know’ the young men that are working with in order to uncover what oppressive dispositions about being boyfriends they are *already* inclined towards, and then locate moments in their talk where specific ambivalences surface that can be worked with.

Involving men in prevention strategies is key because it moves discourse away from victim-framing women as needing to adopt more positive behaviours to prevent being in unhealthy relationships. Instead it goes to the source of the problem: boys and men. With specific focus on men’s violence toward women, Carmody (2009, p. 75, *my emphasis*) discusses how moving beyond targeting at-risk women is key to “constructively developing ways to challenge dominant masculinity practices *by actively engaging men* in programs and challenging cultural acceptance of male violence”. In addition to this, involving men in these prevention programmes is vital because of the well-established argument within existing scholarship that men support other men’s violence and control of women (Adams, 2012; Carmody, 2009; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1993; Flood, 2002-2003; Towns & Terry, 2014). Carmody (2009, p. 139) speaks about the benefits of men becoming “ethical bystanders”, who will speak out if they see a male peer being sexually violent or coercive towards young women. Involving men *together* in breaking down these “violence-supporting attitudes” (p. 26) is therefore an important part of prevention strategies. Dekeseredy’s (2015) work on rural men’s support of men’s violence is another compelling rationale for involving rural *young* men in these types of prevention strategies.

This feeds into my second main recommendation for destabilising young men’s understandings of (hetero)romance that subordinate women. A dominant theme throughout my analyses is that being in a male-male homosocial group matters when it comes to how young men talk about and make sense of being boyfriends. The homosocial group could therefore also play a key part in disrupting this oppressive thinking.

Australian scholars Keddie (2003) and Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, 2004) have argued that initiatives designed to address young men’s ‘at risk’ behaviours need to adopt what they refer to as a peer-group pedagogical approach. Hickey and Fitzclarence (2004) concentrate specifically on young men’s (sexual and physical) violence towards young women and young men’s risk-taking behaviours (for example, driving dangerously when together with mates). Using these examples, Hickey and Fitzclarence (2004, p. 58) argue that there is a “collective

power” within young men’s school-based peer groups which makes certain ‘at risk’ practices desirable for young men to participate in *when together*.

Even though they stress that this should not be read as an exoneration of individual young men’s violent and hazardous practices as *just a* product of peer group culture, they strongly propose that schools adopt a *peer-group pedagogical approach* to break down this “culture of entitlement” (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 58). A key benefit of adopting a peer-group pedagogy is that it limits contradictions presented to young men through school-based initiatives that *try to* persuade them to “not be like their peers” (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2004, 71). Adopting a peer-group pedagogy shifts attention away from the individual as having a “disproportionate sense of agency for the choices and decisions they make” (Hickey and Fitzclarence, 2004, p. 60), and instead places the spotlight on how the peer group functions to (re)stabilise hegemonic ways for young men to be masculine.

Keddie (2003) also talks about violence prevention initiatives being peer-group focused. Even though she speaks specifically to ways of disrupting dominant masculinities in primary school settings, I argue that her recommendations are meaningful for programmes directed towards older young men. She (2003, p. 97) argues that prevention and intervention strategies need to work directly with peer groups in an effort to deconstruct the ‘pull’ of peer group conformity, and to engage with students about the “potent and often destructive nature of peer group relations”.

This has significance for my own research. I have shown throughout this thesis that the ‘pull’ of homosocial conformity impacts on young men’s oppressive dispositions towards being boyfriends. In particular, it appears to perpetuate the support of certain “rules of the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) like territory marking and possessiveness, and fuels pariah-talk about girlfriends and derisive talk about feminine boyfriends. Not only do homosocial groups police how young men act as boyfriends, but young men in turn feel this ‘pull’ of homosociality in how they think boyfriends should act. Initiatives that engage homosocial peer-groups in disrupting these peer-promoted ways of being oppressive boyfriends are an important endeavour.

As an extension of Keddie (2003), and Hickey and Fitzclarence’s (2004) suggestions, I argue that ambivalences *within* homosocial groups’ collective understandings (in my case, of how to be boyfriends) be *engaged* with. Again, this suggests that facilitators improvise to a certain

extent with their groups to find out what their collective dispositions towards how to be boyfriends are. Further research would need to focus on what this improvisation looks like in practice.

## Limitations

One significant limitation of my study was my *disengagement* with young women. As I outlined earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 1, page 5; see Chapter 4, page 64-65), I had specific feminist intentions in only speaking to young men. However, in *not* speaking with young women I cannot gauge how they would feel about the oppressive boyfriend practices that young men supported. For example, I was critical of paternalism, but would young women see this as negative, as I did, or rather as romantic, flattering and the marker of a good boyfriend? Future research could replicate this study, including its use of *Twilight*, to engage with young women about their views on what makes a good boyfriend.

Another limitation of my study was that I did not include an urban comparative sample in my fieldwork. This would have been particularly useful in making more concrete conclusions about the working of a rural habitus and a rural version of hegemonic masculinity. Again, this is a possibility for future research. I could also have undertaken more ethnographic fieldwork. There were opportunities for observing young men in the school-grounds, as they socialised with young women and their male peers that could have garnered extra insights into the talk I gathered. For example, I could have observed what homosociality looks like *in practice*, and what boyfriend practices look like in the school grounds.

Finally, my fieldwork was located within a very homogenous rural community. Te Ika a Maui High School was embedded within a predominantly pakeha<sup>40</sup> and wealthy farming community. Because of this, there was a homogeneity within my focus groups. Finding out how class and ethnicity can influence young men's dispositions about being boyfriends is an important endeavour, but unfortunately this was unable to be explored within my fieldwork. Future research could take this limitation on board and design fieldwork around more heterogeneous communities of young men in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

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<sup>40</sup> Pakeha is a term specific to Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is an ethnicity marker that literally means Non-Māori. I use it here to describe 'white' New Zealand people

## Final thoughts

This thesis has presented my findings from talking with young men about their understandings of being boyfriends that are oppressive, and how the hegemonic ordering of gendered identities shapes these understandings. Young people's (hetero)romantic relationships are sites where some young men exert control and oppress young women. Therefore, finding out how young men make sense of being boyfriends provides clues for how best to deal with this problem and make these relationships better sites for young people to 'ethically relate' (Carmody & Ovenden, 2013, p. 796) with one another. My research hopes to contribute to this important endeavour. Throughout this thesis I captured many moments when young men made sense of boyfriends in ways that promoted possessiveness and paternal control of young women. I also documented times when young men talked about young women in derogatory ways and deprioritised them as girlfriends. The way forward is to use these insights to have conversations with young men which support them to take on more "ethical" (see Carmody, 2009, p. 51; Carmody & Ovenden, 2013, p. 795; Towns & Scott, 2008, p. 122) understandings of the gendered roles in (hetero)romantic relationships.



# APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



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## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### Participant

Project Title: Narratives of love: How young men understand (hetero)romantic love, power and masculinities

Researcher: Christina Vogels (PhD candidate)

Supervisor: Associate Professor Louisa Allen

### Researcher introduction

My name is Christina Vogels and I am a doctoral candidate from the Faculty of Education, at the University of Auckland.

### Project description and invitation

My doctoral project is about how young people understand romantic love. In particular I am interested in talking with young men who are 16 years and older about this. To date, there has been very little research conducted from this angle. I am also interested in 'living rural' and how this forms one's opinions about the world around them. This is why I am inviting \_\_\_\_\_ and specifically your \_\_\_\_\_ class to participate in my project. Because of the focus of my project, I am only inviting the young men in your class to take part. Therefore I would like to personally invite you to participate in this study.

### Project Procedures

If you agree to take part in this project, you will be invited to view a feature length film – *Twilight* – at school, during class time with your class mates. Please note that *Twilight* is rated M. This means that it is unrestricted but is classed as "suitable for mature audiences 16 years and over". This rating is because it has 'supernatural themes and violence'. After viewing the film, you will be invited to participate in a focus group – the focus groups will be small in size (approximately 10 students in each) and you can choose who you would like to be in a group with. The focus groups will likely occur around 1-2 weeks after you view the film. After the focus groups are complete, you can choose to have an individual interview with me about your views on the film. These individual interviews will most probably occur within 1-2 weeks of the focus groups. I am estimating that your contribution to this project will be at the most four-five hours:

- Viewing the film *Twilight* will take 1hour45mins
- The focus group session will take 1-2 periods
- An individual interview with me will take 1 period

Please note that whilst you are watching the film, I will be video-recording you and your classmates and similarly during the focus groups and interviews I will be audio-recording our discussions. I will only record participants who give me their consent to be recorded. During the viewing of *Twilight*, I will also be taking

notes as part of my observations. These recordings and note-takings are an essential part of my data-gathering.

You have the right to edit the transcripts from any individual interview you have with me. Similarly, you have the right to withdraw any data from your individual interview with me. You can contact me via the email address below if you would like to edit your transcript or withdraw any of your contributions from the individual interview. Any editing or withdrawing of data needs to be completed by July 31<sup>st</sup> 2014. You also have the right during the individual interviews to request the audio-recorder be turned off at any time. However, please note that you will not be able to edit the transcripts from the focus group discussions. This is because any alteration or removal of information could affect the contributions of the rest. Please also note that whilst in the focus groups you cannot request the audio-recorder be turned off but you can refuse to answer certain questions and you can also leave the room at any time. This means that you can withdraw your participation in the focus groups at any time but you cannot withdraw information that you have contributed up to that point.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and you can also choose to only participate in parts of my project if you prefer. If you choose to only take part in some (or none) of the stages of this project, an alternative exercise(s) will be organised for you to complete in a quiet area of the school while the project is being undertaken. Due to the design of this project, however, you must view the film in order to contribute to the other stages of this project. I have also sought assurance from the Principal and your teacher that your decision to either participate in this project or not will not affect your grades.

It is important to note that because my project is about romantic love, there is the potential that this could 'bring up' sensitive subjects for you that could cause discomfort. If this occurs, I will refer you to the School Counsellor, or if you prefer Youthline, who will be able to help you with any distress related to this project. As per protocol, I will also notify the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee within 15 working days if this occurs. Please note that this protocol also applies if the film itself causes any distress.

Once my analysis of this research is completed, I will make my findings available to you. Please contact me via email (see below details) after the project is completed if you would like a copy of this report. I will also offer to deliver a presentation of my findings, after my research is completed for all participants who would like to attend. Additionally, if you have any questions relating to this project, please contact me (see contact details below).

#### **Data storage/retention/destruction/future use**

During this project, with your written consent, you will be video-recorded (watching *Twilight*) and audio-recorded (during the focus group and individual interview). The video files will be seen and reviewed only by my principal supervisor (Louisa Allen) and myself, and I will use this data to draw observational insights from how you and your classmates watch the film. The audio-recordings will all be transcribed. I, along with my transcriber and my primary supervisor (Louisa Allen), will be the only people who will hear and review this raw data. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement which means that he/she is not allowed to disclose any information from this raw data to another person or organisation. The transcriber will also code all participants with a pseudonym so that everyone's identity remains confidential. The other people who will know this code will be my principal supervisor (Louisa Allen) and me. As mentioned, I will also be taking written notes of the participants as they watch *Twilight*. These raw notes will only be viewed by me and my primary supervisor (Louisa Allen). All raw data (tapes and notes) will be stored in a secure locked cabinet located at the University of Auckland's Epsom campus. All transcriptions of the audio files will be stored in a secure locked cabinet located at the AUT University Sir Paul Reeves Building (my place of work). All raw data will either be digitally deleted after 6 years (audio and video-recordings) or shredded (written observation notes).

Data collected from this project will be used in my PhD thesis, publications, seminars/conference presentations and my own teaching resources.

#### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

I will take every measure to ensure that your identity remains confidential to those who read any published results of this research project. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed during any focus group

sessions. This is because all those involved in the focus groups will be able to see and hear your contributions to the discussions. However, on everyone's consent forms I will ask all participants to agree to not disclose anything discussed in the focus group to others. All published/presented results will use pseudonyms meaning that your name will not be used in the publication/presentation of any results, but if I refer to your comments I will use a false name to ensure your confidentiality is protected. I will also not disclose the School's name in any published/presented results of this research nor will I use the real names of any landmarks or friends/family names discussed in the focus groups and individual interviews.

Please note, that if you reveal any information that indicates the life or health of any person may be at serious risk, then I have a moral and legal obligation to breach confidentiality and report that risk to the appropriate authorities and appropriate others. Likewise, if you reveal any information about illegal activities, then I too have a moral and legal obligation to breach confidentiality and report that risk to the appropriate authorities and appropriate others.

### **Contact Details and Approval Wording**

#### Researcher:

Christina Vogels (doctoral candidate)  
Critical Studies in Education – Faculty of Education, University of Auckland  
[christina.vogels@gmail.com](mailto:christina.vogels@gmail.com)  
021416206.

#### Primary Supervisor

Associate Professor Louisa Allen  
Critical Studies in Education – Faculty of Education, University of Auckland  
[le.allen@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:le.allen@auckland.ac.nz)  
09 6238899 x 85140

#### Head of School

Dr Airini  
Critical Studies in Education – Faculty of Education, University of Auckland  
[airini@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:airini@auckland.ac.nz)  
09 6238899 x 48826

Chair contact details: —For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: [humanethics@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@auckland.ac.nz)||

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON ..... for (3) years, Reference Number ...../.....

## APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



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Auckland 1150, New Zealand

## CONSENT FORM

Participant aged 16 years or older

### THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Project Title: Narratives of love: How young men understand (hetero)romantic love, power and masculinities

Researcher: Christina Vogels (PhD candidate)

Supervisor: Associate Professor Louisa Allen

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I am 16 years or older.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that this choice will not affect my grades in any way.
- I agree / do not agree to view the film *Twilight* as part of this project.
- I understand that if I am not participating in either all or some of this project, that alternative activities will be organised for me to complete in a quiet area of the school.

***If you consent to viewing the film, please fill in the rest of this form:***

- I agree to voluntarily take part in the following aspects of this project:
  - Focus group
  - One-on-one interview with the researcher

None of the above

I agree / do not agree to be audio-recorded.

I agree / do not agree to be observed and video-recorded while watching the film *Twilight*.

I understand that I can edit the transcripts from my individual interview with Christina Vogels up to July 31<sup>st</sup> 2014.

I understand that I am free to withdraw any data from my individual interview with Christina Vogels up to July 31<sup>st</sup> 2014.

I understand that I can request the audio-recorder be turned off at any point during my individual interview with Christina Vogels.

I understand that I cannot edit the transcripts from the focus groups and that I cannot request the audio-recorder be turned off during the focus groups.

I understand that I can leave the room at any time during the focus groups and refuse to answer certain questions during the focus groups

I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the focus groups at any point but I cannot withdraw information that I have contributed up to the point of withdrawing.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the focus group to other people.

I understand that my participation in this project may take up to 4-5 hours of class time.

I understand that pseudonyms will be used in the place of any real names mentioned in the focus groups and individual interviews (eg. the school's name, names of participants, names of landmarks, and the names of any other people mentioned).

I understand that if I reveal any information that indicates the life or health of any person may be at serious risk, then Christina Vogels has a moral and legal obligation to breach confidentiality and report that risk to the appropriate authorities and appropriate others.

I understand that if I reveal any information about illegal activities, then Christina Vogels has a moral and legal obligation to breach confidentiality and report that risk to the appropriate authorities and appropriate others.

I understand that data from this project will be used in Christina Vogels's PhD thesis, related publications, seminars, conference presentations and teaching resources.

I understand that a third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement will transcribe the audio-recordings.

I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which it will be destroyed.

I understand that I can email Christina Vogels if I would like a report of the findings from this project.

I understand that if I experience any distress from the project then I will be advised to contact the School Counsellor or Youthline.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ APPROVED BY

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON .....FOR (3) YEARS REFERENCE NUMBER ..../....



## APPENDIX 3: TEACHER CONSENT FORM



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## CONSENT FORM

Teacher

### THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Project Title: Narratives of love: How young men understand (hetero)romantic love, power and masculinities

Researcher: Christina Vogels (PhD candidate)

Supervisor: Associate Professor Louisa Allen

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree / do not agree to my class taking part in this research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that this choice will not affect my employment status in any way.

I agree / do not agree to \_\_\_\_\_ students being audio-recorded with their written consent.

I agree / do not agree to \_\_\_\_\_ students being observed and video-recorded with their written consent.

I understand that this project (and all its parts) is voluntary for all students who are invited to take part.

- I understand that participants can edit the transcripts from their individual interview with Christina Vogels up to July 31<sup>st</sup> 2014.
- I understand that participants are free to withdraw any data from their individual interview with Christina Vogels up to July 31<sup>st</sup> 2014.
- I understand that participants can request the audio-recorder be turned off at any point during their individual interview with Christina Vogels.
- I understand that participants cannot edit the transcripts from the focus groups and that they cannot request the audio-recorder be turned off during the focus groups.
- I understand that participants can leave the room at any time during the focus groups and refuse to answer certain questions during the focus groups
- I understand that participants can withdraw their participation from the focus groups at any point but they cannot withdraw information that they have contributed up to the point of withdrawing.
- I will ensure that any student's choice to participate or not in this project will not affect their grades in any way.
- I will support alternative activities being given to students who do not participate in parts or all of this project and that a quiet area of the school will be provided for these purposes.
- I understand that students' participation in this project may take up to 4-5 hours of class time.
- I understand that pseudonyms will be used in the place of any real names mentioned in the focus groups and individual interviews (eg. the school's name, names of participants, names of landmarks, and the names of any other people mentioned).
- I understand that if any student reveals information that indicates the life or health of any person may be at serious risk, then Christina Vogels has a moral and legal obligation to breach confidentiality and report that risk to the appropriate authorities and appropriate others.
- I understand that if any student reveals information about illegal activities, then Christina Vogels has a moral and legal obligation to breach confidentiality and report that risk to the appropriate authorities and appropriate others.
- I understand that data from this project will be used in Christina Vogels's PhD thesis, related publications, seminars, conference presentations and teaching resources.
- I understand that a third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement will transcribe the audio-recordings.
- I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which it will be destroyed.
- I understand that Christina Vogels will prepare a report for the School on the findings of this research as well as offer to present her findings to any staff interested in this project.
- I understand that if any of the participants experience distress from the project then they will be advised to speak to the School Counsellor and/or Youthline.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON  
 .....FOR (3) YEARS REFERENCE NUMBER .......

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