DEFINING MOMENTS IN MEN’S LIVES:
A STUDY OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES

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DEAKIN UNIVERSITY CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis entitled ‘Defining Moments in Men’s Lives: A Study of Personal Narratives’

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given. I also certify that any material in the thesis that has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any other university or institution is identified in the text.

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ABSTRACT:

Defining Moments in Men’s Lives: A Study of Personal Narratives

This study explores the defining moments in six men’s lives. The empirical dimension of the research is built around the personal narratives these men tell of their lives across a series of four interviews. The central research theme is the notion of the defining moment as a key element in the processes of establishing how men understand and interpret the events and incidents that have shaped their lives. In the context of this study, the defining moment is seen as the moment or period in time when an individual gives definition to a specific event or experience, as a transition point with (potentially) life-altering consequences. Some of the thematic structures presented include relationships with significant adults (parents, teachers), masculinity, self-harm, schooling, mental illness, isolation, loneliness, stress and relationships with peers.

In my pursuit of a methodology that could accommodate the aims of this study, I explored the process of meaning through the qualitative paradigm. Drawing on the principles of qualitative research, as applied through narrative inquiry, I deployed a semi-structured interview format to collect the lived experiences of participants. By privileging the stories that individuals tell of their experiences, the narrative method recognises that data are inexorably located in the contextual and contingent. The experiences and narratives that are presented in this thesis are built around the authentic voices of participants.

The study presents a warrant for working with men’s defining moments to disrupt, alter and redefine their attitudes and behaviours in order to improve their lives. Based on the insights gleaned through this study, I argue that there are defining times/points in people’s lives where their experiences can be life altering. When these experiences involve uncertainty, anxiety, stress and other pernicious effects, their longer-term consequences can be devastating. The study confirms existing research, that men are reluctant to seek help or reveal their insecurities during such times, therefore making them particularly vulnerable to defining moments.
The conclusion of this thesis establishes some broad recommendations pertaining to working effectively with men and their defining moments. I focus particular attention on the place of schooling and education in helping individuals recognise and respond to the early symptoms of what is potentially a life-altering experience. Schools and, by association, teachers need to be actively and strategically involved in this process. To this end, I argue the need for targeted interventions that are both sensitive and timely. In their engagements with young males, parents, teachers, coaches and mentors need to be particularly attuned to their silent screams for help.
Chapter One: Introducing the Defining Moment

1.1 Introduction

“Why did unflappable Jeff Barger Kill himself?” was the headline in The Melbourne Age on Monday 18th of August 2003. The day before Jeff took his own life he appeared to be a high standing, well liked and admired primary school principal. His wife had to search, on reflection, for the clues that should have told her that something was wrong. Now, she, like many of Jeff’s family and friends, carry the guilt of not seeing the signs that their husband, father and friend was simply not coping. At the funeral, Peter Welsh, a long time football friend of Jeff’s, read a eulogy of Jeff’s propensity to deal with things himself. While Welsh conceded that it was part of what made Jeff so special, it was also the very thing that undid him. Welsh explained that sometimes people have got to lead and sometimes they’ve got to lean, and that the trick is to know the difference. Jeff, he said sadly, was committed to always leading from the front, doing the hard work and making everyone else’s path as easy as he could. Welsh explained:

Teachers, principals, managers and parents alike need to keep a proper balance between lifting and leaning – between the urge to do more for your people and the need to recharge … the world is divided into those who lift and those who lean. Barge was one of those who lifted all his life, giving generously of his time, love, knowledge and skill. It was his greatest strength, but also his Achilles heel. (Waldon and Davies, 2003 p. 18)

Jeff’s suicide was a defining moment in the lives of many people. For Jeff himself it was the point at which he revealed he could no more achieve the expectations he had of himself. Leaving aside his state of mind at the time of his death, Jeff Barger had clearly arrived at a point at which he felt totally helpless and that the best solution was to end his life. He was not living on the streets as a loner, strung out on drugs or psychotically unstable. For all intents and purposes, Jeff Barger was a hard working, well-respected family man surrounded by people who loved and admired him. For the people who interacted and cared for him on a daily basis, as well as grieving his loss, they are left to wonder whether they missed the signs of
his calling out for their help. Indeed, the day Jeff Barger decided to take his own life was a defining moment in many people’s lives.

1.2 The Notion of the Defining Moment

The notion of the defining moment materialised when I read an article in *The Hill*, the Western Maryland College Alumni News, in the winter of 1996. In the article Fred Eckhardt (1996), Alumni Association President at the time, reflects on the College’s successful management of a forty-million-dollar building campaign. In the article he reminisces about how easy it could have been for the project to fail had it not been for a number of timely events, actions and decisions. Here, Eckhardt recounts a number of defining moments when the progress of the project lay in the balance. One of the key words in his description of these defining moments is ‘potential’. On finding themselves in what seemed at the time to be helpless predicaments there was a potential for things to go bad. What saved the day was some sort of critical, strategic decision, and a bit of good old fashioned luck! In celebrating its success, Eckhardt was very mindful that the project, had it been poorly managed, could quite easily have been a resounding failure.

At the time I was employed as a drug and alcohol counsellor with the Geelong Community Health Services. Some of my counselling clients were confronted with very difficult circumstances in their lives, and needed support and direction to work their way through them. Some had wives who had walked out on them, or were threatening to, some had gambling problems, while others were battling drug and alcohol problems. Each of them had reached a certain point in their lives where they needed help. For some there was a great deal of reluctance toward offers of support and help, whereas others were eager to access support in a last ditch effort to salvage their lives and the relationships they deeply valued. In all different ways, almost all of us face particular moments in our lives where events and actions (and inactions) that take place have the potential to seriously impact our previous trajectory. Many of the moments occur because of some kind of crisis. Moos (1976), from his work on the impact of crisis on psychological growth, explains:

> A crisis is a relatively short period of disequilibrium in which a person tries to work out new ways of handling a problem through sources of...
strength in himself and in his environment. His new level of functioning may be more or less healthy than his pre-crisis pattern. Every crisis presents both an opportunity for psychological growth and a danger of psychological deterioration. During the crisis a person is more susceptible to influence by others than during periods of stable functioning. Thus, a relatively minor intervention may drastically change the ultimate outcome. Therefore, crises present an unusual opportunity to positively influence coping ability and mental health. The successful mastery of life crises can constitute an important growth experience (p. 1).

The disequilibrium described by Moos could also be caused by pleasure, e.g. winning lotto. To this end, a defining moment, whether it is considered positive or negative, is fundamentally about a period or event that has the potential to alter the direction of a person’s life. Most defining moments are thrust upon us. They may have been creeping up on us for some time, but hitherto we have not really noticed their presence, nor predicted their severity. The potential is there to impact our lives in some way – and we are forced to respond, albeit badly. As a counsellor, I came to realise that most of my clients were either experiencing defining moments, or suffering the effects of not being able to manage a defining moment in their lives. I formed the view that the earlier we could get to these men the more likely we would be to influence their lives. Indeed, a small intervention at a critical stage in a person’s life can be a powerful thing. Over many years of teaching and being a men’s counsellor, I have became convinced that it isn’t about what sort of support we need to give males who find themselves in crisis, but the point of time at which we can give it to them.

Sometimes when we reflect back on aspects in our lives, we realise that certain things happened that actually had consequences, or implications that had significant effects beyond their enactment. These can be good; these can be bad – and everything in-between. Sometimes it can be about something that went surprisingly well for us and we thrived as a result of it. For some men this can be the arrival of their child(ren) or obtaining positions of respect and responsibility. For others it can be a time of sudden loss, rejection or abuse. In any of these
contexts, the defining moment can be seen as an event or period in time where one’s experiences are life-altering.

The notion of the defining moment has become a useful tool for me and lends itself to a fascinating study. Over the years I have become increasingly interested in using defining moments as a way of examining and exploring events that shape the different trajectories of men’s lives. While my research focus will be on men, the insights and implications generated from the study of defining moments will not be restricted to males. Put simply, this is not just a study for ‘blokes’, but for all those who share relations as parents, lovers, family members, friends, acquaintances or cohabitants. Further to this, it will have particular relevance to those involved in educating and nurturing males, including mothers and fathers, teachers, coaches, school administrators, counsellors and mentors.

In the context of this study, defining moments present as a window for insight into how men experience and respond to certain changes and challenges that they incur in their lives. Understanding what sorts of events and circumstances provoke particular defining moments has the potential to inform and shape our intervention strategies. It presents an opportunity to better understand the distribution of support resources in terms of maximising the time at which an individual may be optimally receptive to new ideas, strategies and understandings. This research seeks to investigate the circumstances that give rise to nodes of crisis or change in one’s life, and the perceptions and actions that take place before, during and after such experiences.

1.3 A Focus on Men’s Lives

Males, it seems, respond to a crisis in particular ways (Edgar, 1997). While no two males will do and feel precisely the same thing, it is widely understood that males have a general disposition for not sharing their problems, not showing weakness and masking their emotions (Gurian, 1998; Pollack, 1998; Kimmel, 2004). Throughout the literature men are depicted as preferring non-verbal modes of expressing their emotions. They’re renowned for being different to women on the grounds that they do not handle emotional content well. In coping with issues, men, it seems, like to present as being able to handle problems decisively and
independently. Within the hyper-masculine framework, asking for help is seen as a sign of weakness (Gray, 1992; Farrell, 1993). If we take the line that males don’t verbalise as much and don’t show their emotions because they deal in very traditional masculinity that still pervades (Barry, 1995; Faludi, 1999), then it’s reasonable to assume that defining moments probably hit them harder because they have fewer developed interpersonal resources to work with. Real men don’t call out for help! (Biddulph, 1994; Faludi, 1999).

For the past twenty years I have been a counsellor concentrating on personal and relationship issues, marital and family problems, drug and alcohol problems, sexual dysfunction, relaxation and stress management, self-esteem and personal development. Much of my work has been specialising in men’s issues. Building on my experiences as a primary and secondary classroom teacher, school counsellor, principal and university lecturer, I have become increasingly concerned with men’s issues, and the ways they respond to challenges and changes in their lives. In particular, I have been interested in how males work through the stages of acknowledging they have a problem, wanting to better understand the problem and then taking the responsibility for the problem (Cooper & Baker, 1996). Central to my thinking has been the part that education and schooling play in helping prepare young males for dealing with the changes and challenges that confront and await them.

Schools are obviously one of the key socialization sites for many young people. Eisner (1991) tells us that the problems besetting schools “are addressed by policy makers who have little first-hand knowledge about them. As a result, we are offered ‘solutions’ to those problems that do not work” (p. 22). More recently, Slade (2002) has argued that teachers do not listen to what boys are saying about their education. In his report about boys and their education Slade argues:

Most boys see themselves to be stuck with an unsuitable, out of date and culturally inconsistent learning environment that they cannot change. By the middle of Year 9, their school experience has firmly established a negative and necessary association between formal learning and what they understand as an institutionalized, unpleasant
waste of time, dealing mostly with matters having no obvious relevance to their lives and their perceived needs and interests (p. x).

There appear to be particular attributes that predispose males to not respond well to times of instability or crisis in their lives. Such times can produce extremely high points of vulnerability and result in poor decision-making (Gurian, 1998; Pollack, 1998). We need to better understand how males think, feel and act during moments of crisis or change in their lives. These insights could be invaluable in trying to work effectively with them during such phases in their lives. As humans, we all encounter events or instances in our lives that could become defining moments. In moments of crisis the well-resourced (socially, emotionally and interpersonally) are going to be much better able to reconcile and move on from them relatively unscarred, and often wiser for the next one (Saunders, 1997). Others, with fewer resources at their disposal, are more likely to fall foul of the uncertainties and ambiguities that present during such times.

In my own theorising about the human endeavour, I believe that people have opportunities to make choices and act in different ways. To this end, I favour an agential view of human action within which individuals have the potential to assert at some agency within the circumstances of their lives. From this standpoint I progress this project in the view that people can affect what happens to them during the defining moments in their lives. They have the capacity to question their circumstances and take some responsibility for their place within them. From there, what they desperately need are some basic practical and intellectual resources from which they can plan some course of action. Unfortunately, for many males, the practical and intellectual resources presented to them within the traditional construct of being a ‘real’ man are proving very limited, even divisive. For many males, it is the lack of adequate resources for dealing with the issues they face that renders them most vulnerable to the difficult circumstances they confront in their lives.

Of course it is not a case of simply explaining to males that they ‘have it wrong’. Some aspects of identity and personality are simply not open to rational inspection. While maintaining a strong sense of optimism toward human agency, Fay (1987) reminds us of the limits to rational change:
Humans are not only active beings, but they are also embodied, traditional, historical and embedded creatures; as a result their reason is limited in its capacity to unravel the mysteries of human identity and to make the difficult choices with which humans are inevitably faced; and their will to change is circumscribed in all sorts of ways (p. 9).

Change can be very difficult for some individuals. Fay tells us:

Human beings are forever set within particular traditions which, in being appropriated, partially define their identity. They, of course, are not passive sponges in this process: they affirm some of their inheritance and they reject other parts of it; they cultivate and they transmute; they embrace, they recombine in novel ways, they create. But all of their activity always involves the appropriation of materials given to them by their tradition; it is what is meant by saying that humans are traditional beings (p. 164).

Here, Fay warns us against just assuming that once we have understand something we can necessarily alter it. Furnishing this very point, Ellsworth (1989) pointed out that understanding you are a marginalised poor, black female can be anything but empowering. People are constrained by their traditions and histories in terms of cultures, societies, communities, families and so on that they’ve grown up in (Hickey, 1997). While I aspire to the emancipatory ideal that people are capable of rational self-change, I find Fay’s recognition of a range of embedded, traditional, embodied, historical forces limits its application. Like Ellsworth, Fay recognises that a range of forces act to impede the extent to which rational self-clarity is achievable.

1.4 The Aim and Focus of the Study
The central research theme is the notion of the defining moment as a key element in the processes of establishing the attributes for how men understand and respond to particular situations/incidents in their lives. The overall aim of the study is to explore the experiences of adult males at times where their life paths had been
altered/unsettled and how they have responded to these. The focus of this work is to research the experiences of six men, and describe the processes of change(s) that occur during and after their defining moments. It is about narratives, new conversations, openness, honesty and generally sharing stories, emotions and experiences.

As an educator, it is satisfying and rewarding when individuals can admit to themselves that they have a problem. It is only then that the work can begin in a positive, constructive way. Through advanced empathy and reflective listening, it is often possible to help the person gain insight into the genuine issues they are concerned about. Hickey and Boyer (2002) indicate that one of the problems seems to be around teachers who have not been attuned or attentive to the needs of males. Here, we explain:

Teachers need to be listening and watching for the signs that reveal that a person is struggling for connection. They need to be vigilant in ensuring that they do not contribute to a child’s sense of disconnection in any way (p. 19).

As a counsellor/therapist/educator, I would want to find the whole concept of creativity being developed by the person - that ‘Ah hah! I’ve found it’ feeling – the discovery. For example, I want to do the same thing for the person who may be using drugs, to find out when he is ready to say: ‘Ah hah! I’ve found it! I don’t need this stuff any more.’ When a person can make this affirmation, he’s ready to overcome his drug or behaviour problem. We can call this their defining moment - that period in time when they say: ‘That’s enough! I’m going to do something about it - now. It’s time for a change.’ This is usually precipitated by some kind of experience or crisis that gives meaning to those sorts of ‘Ah hah’! exclamations. When the crisis occurs it is usually hurling one toward change, hopefully for the better. Is it a voluntary choice or is one forced to make changes? External forces may precipitate change, but there clearly has to be a degree of readiness. This action or reaction doesn’t occur in this pattern for all men. Defining moments have the potential to be destructive or the potential to be very informative. One of the responses to a defining moment is to look inside yourself – there’s a potential to look inside yourself – and actually redefine, but it’s not in everybody. Some males
have difficulty doing this. It’s up to us as educators, parents, counsellors and anyone involved in working with males to be aware of what’s happening in men’s lives, and to be able to give the necessary support and direction so that they might assert influence and control over their own life experiences.

If men can realize that resources are available to them when they need them most and recognize that accessing these resources doesn’t condemn them in any way, then they can begin to circumvent some of these issues. They need to be more willing to exercise their agency, and recognize what sort of help is being offered and how to access it with their dignity in tact.

1.5 Organisation of the Study

Chapter two provides a review of the literature. It overviews the knowledge base relevant to defining moments, previous work done around defining moments and how defining moments articulate with the contemporary practices of masculinity.

Chapter three discusses the methods and procedures utilized in this research and the methodological compositions that inform them. Employing the qualitative paradigm, the methodology is based on the principles of narrative inquiry and drawn on methods that predominate around interviews. Data collection techniques revolve around a series of individual interviews with participants. Following this is an introduction of each of the participants and the basis of their recruitment to the study.

Chapter four focuses on the presentation of the narratives of six adult males (ages 32–55): Andrew Bosley, Barry Chalmers, Colin Darvell, Frank Garber, Karl Linnell and Mark Newton (all pseudonyms). It explores the notion of the defining moment as the key element in the processes of interpreting their respective life experiences and trajectories, and how they respond to them. This chapter explores how these men reflect on their lives and what they interpret to be the defining moments in them. The experiences and narratives that are presented are contingency-shaped and must be seen in the context of each individual’s lived ‘reality’.
Chapter five proffers the evaluation of data, analyses and interpretation of the narratives and examines various themes that emerge among the participants. These themes include relationships with significant adults (parents, teachers), aggression and self harm, masculinity, education and school performance, mental illness, isolation, relationship with peers and social pressures, loneliness and stress.

Chapter six concludes with findings of the research and implications. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion about the need to focus on *timely* interventions, and to show that all people can play a greater role in recognising and supporting the vulnerable males through their defining moments.
Chapter Two: Researching Defining Moments

2.1 Introduction

There is a burgeoning literature that projects contemporary masculinity as being in a state of uncertainty or instability, even crisis. Foremost here are concerns about the shortcomings associated with the maintenance of a masculine hegemony built on the traditional values of hardness, stoicism and camaraderie. Concerns about the over-representation of males in statistics associated with suicide, physical violence, risk-taking, death by misadventure and substance abuse (ABS, 2000) suggest that the strategies developed within the traditional masculinity do not serve them in contemporary society. In fact, there is a strong argument that men have not reconstructed and the traditional versions of masculinity are actually part of the problem (Mackay, 1993). Having to be strong, not showing weakness and not showing emotions are all part of the quandary of contemporary masculinity (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Hawkes, 2001). It’s these very traditional characteristics of masculinity that are part of the problem (Connell, 1995). Using the descriptor ‘old men’, Mackay (1993) argues that traditional forms of masculinity have not kept pace with the contemporary demands of society, particularly ‘new women’.

The women’s movement, which gathered momentum in the 1960’s and 1970’s, has produced major changes for women across Western industrialised nations. It seems, though, that men haven’t changed that much. Unfortunately, traditional versions of masculinity appear to be deeply institutionalised within the inveterate practices of family, school, sport and military. These institutions continue to resource some males to deal with issues while they suppress their capacity to adapt to the new expectations and opportunities that have been put in front of them.

One of the issues levelled at contemporary males is that they haven’t been able to reinvent themselves. Sheehy (1998) claims that males continue to live by the traditional definitions of masculinity that suppress their capacity to adapt to new demands and expectations that are being put before them.

It is time men recognize that their gender-punitive roles and rules are virtually impossible to live up to in the contemporary world. Trying to
do so only limits their otherwise exhilarating possibilities for custom-designing a happier middle life (p. 58).

In this chapter I will begin by describing why males emerge as a social group that demand attention. Using a range of categories, I will establish that males are indeed facing some sort of crisis in regards to building and sustaining relationships, partaking in activities that are violent and risky and understanding their new role in the knowledge economy - no longer the labour economy (Lyotard, 1984; Giddens, 1991). Recurring themes in the literature will be discussed in terms of masculinity being described as ‘in crises’. Prominent here are relationships with parents and other significant adults, relationships with peers, education and school performance. Following these sections are intervention practices, the problematic of change and a discussion about the value of utilising defining moments in counselling males.

2.2 A Contemporary Crisis in Masculinity

There is a substantial body of literature that tells us that with the postmodern destabilizing of traditional patriarchal institutions such as family, church, workplace and school (administration), men are undergoing some sort of identity crises. Pitcher and Poland (1992) define a crisis as “an important and seemingly unsolvable problem with which those involved feel unable to cope” (p. 10). Interestingly, however, what one person considers a crisis may not be for another. Some of contemporary men’s broad issues include relationships (Cooper & Baker, 1996; Fernandez-Balboa, 2000; Thompson, 2000; Tacey, 2003), masculine identities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Edgar, 1997; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; West, 2002; Kimmel, 2004) and the changing nature of employment (Tacey, 1997; Webb, 1998; Faludi, 1999; Weis & Fine, 2000). The women’s movement of the past thirty or forty years has redefined what is available to a woman – women can have families and still maintain employment. There’s more access and opportunities for the new generation of women (Faludi, 1999). Men, however, haven’t reconstructed much during that time. Coupled with the information revolution that began in the later phase of the twentieth century, there is good reason to think that the discourses and practices of traditional masculinity have been irreconcilably destabilised. The so-called crisis in masculinity is evidenced in the ways males are struggling to adapt
to sharing their family lives with reconstructed women who can assert their own needs and desires (Arndt, 1995; Kimmel, 2004). Further, men have wrestled with the transition from manual to mental labour and the unsettling of their traditional role as ‘breadwinner’ (Faludi, 1999; Mills, 2001).

Gender redefinitions within traditional family and work practices have clearly thrust a great many men into new territories and unsettled old ones (Kimmel, 2004). Unlike any time before, men now have to share public spaces with women. That said, it is extremely important to acknowledge that gender equality is far from established. Indeed, evidence of a powerful ongoing patriarchy can be observed for women across many aspects of society. They are still grossly under-represented at the top of business, sport, wealth, government and numerous other social strata. Further to this, many women still live in fear of violence and aggression at the hands of their male counterparts (Arndt, 1995).

Part of the problem that’s emerging is understanding gender in contemporary times as it shifts from being a biological category to be viewed much more as a social category. In contemporary gender research, Connell (2002) introduces the debates on the politics of gender and the ‘new terminology’ defining it. He places significance on gender relations – the gendered practices intertwined within political, social, economic and environmental systems:

Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object, we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. ‘Masculinity’, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (p. 71).

Rejecting gender as a strictly biological category, Connell describes gender as “the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes” (p. 10). To this end he argues:
… gender concerns the way human society deals with human bodies, and the many consequences of that ‘dealing’ in our personal lives and our collective fate [and] gender arrangements are reproduced socially (not biologically) by the power of structures to constrain individual actions, so they often appear unchanging (p. 10).

From a philosophical standpoint, Connell explains that contemporary gender arrangements are not ‘natural’ or ‘fixed’. From an educational, developmental or therapeutic vantage point, just as gendered identities are constructed, so too can they be deconstructed and reconstructed.

While social data that project maleness as a broad category of risk, it is during adolescence that boys appear to be at even greater risk of increasing harm and/or social disconnection (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). Indeed, adolescent boys are significantly more likely than adolescent girls to die before the age of eighteen, not just from violent causes but, also, from accidents and misadventure. This pattern is reinforced by Edwards (2002) in the Australian Social Trends report that accidents by misadventure were by far the most common cause of death for teenage males, and the most common cause of accidental death was motor vehicle accidents. In 2000, accidents accounted for 50 per cent of deaths among younger male teenagers (aged 13-16 years) and 51 per cent of deaths among older male teenagers (aged 17-19 years). Teenage males aged 15-19 years are victims of assault (other than sexual assault) at the rate of 1,731 per 100,000. Teenage males were also more likely to be victims of robbery, at the rate of 548 per 100,000 (p. 59).

Perhaps it is this social profile that has brought most legitimacy to the so-called ‘crisis in masculinity’. Driving home this message, Gurian (1998) expands on the troubled plight of adolescent males, adding that adolescent boys are four times more likely than adolescent girls to be diagnosed as emotionally disturbed; the majority of adolescent alcoholics and drug addicts are male; adolescent males are four times more likely than adolescent females to commit suicide; steroid use among adolescent boys is now on par with their use of cocaine in the United States (p. 13). It is clear here that young males are as emotionally vulnerable as they are physically vulnerable. Boys have breakdowns; boys are in mental institutions. Boys
don’t cry out for emotional support very much (Webb, 1998). In fact, boys are taught not to cry. Hakanson (1995) argues:

Our society, in general, views crying as a sign of weakness in character. Being a ‘cry baby’ or ‘sook’ is subtly derogative. This all implies that crying should be suppressed, and if expressed, then only in private with no one else around. Our views on crying reveal our repression, and encourage it. This vicious circle, through generation after generation, can be broken if we only allow our children and ourselves the freedom of full emotional expression without judgment (p. 49).

Men are struggling, it seems, with the new demands and expectations being placed on them in the contemporary social landscape. Regardless of who leads it, there is clearly a burgeoning demand for some degree of male reconstruction. A range of commentators is saying that dominant notions of successful masculinity are too rigid and limiting in the contemporary social landscape. Hickey and Fitzclarence (1999) state, “prominent in the induction processes of young males are thought to be the messages gleaned through the cultural stories that saturate mass media, schools, sport, peer groups and the family” (p. 51). They point to the complex nature of masculinity within the so-called post-modern turn. What emerges from their discussion is recognition of the competing and contradictory messages that young males may be receiving about their masculine identity within an expanding web of local and global communication networks. Hickey and Fitzclarence question the extent to which males can satisfactorily seek wisdom and solitude in traditional notions of masculinity. They recognise sport as a dominant vector in the continued celebration of maleness as tough, resilient and dependable. At a time when males are being challenged to share public and private spaces with their female counterparts, the discourses and practices of sport, they argue, continue to support a culture of gender segregation. Along with the military, sport is still a dominant vector for defining contemporary masculinity in Australia.

Positioning boys as the new victims of a social turn (that has been too consciously female), West (2002) argues that adolescent boys are disadvantaged because their behavioural dispositions are not being recognised or nurtured in ways they once
were. Believing boys are the victims of social neglect, he claims “there isn’t nearly enough targeted research being done to pinpoint boys’ difficulties” (p. 15). It has been suggested that adolescent boys are particularly confused as to what are the respected codes of masculinity. Young males have a very traditional version in front of them, but they know it’s not their script for contemporary living. They know they have different expectations, but when they opt to draw on them they’re confronted with traditional versions of masculinity which often provide counter-messages. Webb (1998) recognises this dilemma and believes that many males “struggle with the question of whether they should follow the approved codes of masculinity, or strike out in some truly independent direction of being” (p. 219).

It has been suggested by Hawkes (2001) that a new definition of maleness needs to be developed. He argues:

… a boy can have some characteristics which are traditionally seen as female without entirely losing his masculinity. The psychologists call this ‘androgyny’. It does not necessarily mean that gender swapping is either advocated or advanced as acceptable boy behaviour. It does mean that boys may still be considered male even if they do not fit the ‘blokey’ macho image. A broader definition of acceptable maleness is proposed, not a denial of maleness (p. 304).

To emphasise the male qualities that are considered ‘socially acceptable’, Pollack (1998) suggests that parents teach their sons “a clear healthy message about masculinity … to fulfil society’s confusing expectations about masculinity, you can provide clarity by discussing the qualities you admire” (p. 108). Pollack believes young males have too little emotional support and are not able to express their feelings. He explains when boys feel ashamed of their vulnerability, they “mask their emotions and ultimately their true selves. This unnecessary disconnection – from family and then from self – causes many boys to feel alone, helpless and fearful” (p. xxii). Biddulph (1994) agrees one of the problems faced by males involves the free expression of feelings. To do this, males have had to overcome isolation and their enemies are “loneliness, compulsive competition and lifelong emotional timidity” (p. 4). He argues:
Men’s enemies are often on the inside – in the walls we put up around our own hearts. The inner changes will have to come first before we can heal the world. Coming out from behind these walls (slowly, carefully) will mean that men can change and grow – to our own benefit and to the great benefit of women and children (p. 4).

Pollack goes further to say that society places young males in “a ‘gender straitjacket’ … judging the behaviour of boys against outmoded ideas about masculinity and about what it takes for a boy to become a man” (p. xxii).

Wilson (1990) claims that men are reluctant to ask for help with their personal problems because they consider it a sign of weakness. He continues his argument:

One of the main social by-products of men’s learned inability to ask for help, and their reliance almost exclusively upon women to provide emotional fulfilment for them, is that of domestic violence perpetrated by men against women and children (p. 138).

This reluctance on the part of men to seek help is not only to their own detriment, but also to the detriment of others. It becomes emotional baggage. Many men especially refuse to get help in matters relating to their health. Cuthbertson and Callaghan (2003) admit that “many more men would be alive today if they had only listened to their bodies, bothered to get their ailments seen to, or developed routines for regular check-ups” (p. 1). On the lighter side of the male’s healthy lifestyle issue, the comedian Bill Cosby (2004) in his latest book, *I Am What I Ate ... And I’m Frightened!!!*, shares his humourous insights on staying well: “Don’t go to the doctor. Just ignore everything until one day your eyeballs roll up under your eyebrows, your body slumps forward and you wake up in traffic in the back of a large, strange vehicle” (p. 11)

One institution that has changed a great deal in recent times is the way work and labour practices have changed. Milburn (2001) reports that the unemployment rate of Australian men has surpassed that of women for the first time since the 1980’s, according to a Smith Family national report. She argues that “the killer blow to male employment trends has been the demise of the manufacturing industry … and
the difficulties men are facing in adapting to new economy jobs in the services sector” (p. 3).

Buckingham (2000) believes the troubles many boys are experiencing have become extremely serious. She states:

It is shameful that scores of thousands of youths do not work when there is in fact work aplenty to be done in this rich and dynamic society. The reasons for this are familiar to economists, politicians, businessmen, trade union leaders, and to anybody else who gives the economics of the labour market, and this subject in particular, some thought. Yet, the situation has persisted for many years and progress has been unsatisfactorily slow (p. 79).

The environment that has been created for young males can be hostile and unsympathetic in some cases, and yet still well in front of females. Mills (2001) asserts that males’ concepts of work signify manhood and thus integral to their masculine identity. He states, “Men’s traditional work practices have a foundation in class, and work sites have served as places where issues of men’s domination of other men are often played out” (p. 32). Townsend (1994) argues that the work ethic is still very central to males and is:

… a voice of conscience rather than a stated social imperative. The voice says you’re not really a man unless you’re working, that your worth is somehow less, that it is your fault. It is a voice that work defines you, makes you what you are, gives you a place in society, makes you a contributor (p. 190).

Other institutions that have changed a great deal in recent years are family and education. West (2002) argues that the institutions of family and education need to be critically examined in order to better serve the needs of maturing males. For many boys their detachment from their parents has produced a disturbed, unhappy home life that has contributed to their physical and mental health problems, and other issues (Biddulph, 1994). Gurian (1998) recommends rites and rituals [sports traditions, family traditions, etc.] as ways to keep the young male close to his
family. He believes a boy’s rituals enhance life; however, during the middle teens a boy might pull away from his family “in order to become a man, [and] we often let him disappear from family life. This is a grave mistake” (p. 140).

It is not all doom and gloom, however, in contemporary times and there are opportunities opening up to males. A number of commentators show optimism to indicate that there is some movement and boys can rid themselves of some of the traditional constraints. Cooper and Baker (1996) take an optimistic view when they argue that the contemporary male has the “unique opportunity to take off the real-man mask and explore different - and potentially more enjoyable - ways of being male” (p. 19). They explain:

That doesn’t mean that we can’t be strong, independent and even aggressive any more; it’s just that we don’t have to be like that all the time. We can still be fiery on the football pitch and protective of our family, but also intimate with our partners and vulnerable with our friends. We can begin to respond with flexibility and freshness to every situation and, instead of being stuck behind one rigid mask, we can start to explore and express the full complexity of our being (p. 19).

The process of change or masculine re-alignment, however, should not be seen as a straightforward one. Connell (1998) believes:

We may recognize that bringing gender to full awareness is resisted because it is frightening, even dangerous. For one cannot know (his italics) one’s gender practice, in the sense of reflective self-investigation, without becoming aware that it could be otherwise, that other paths were possible (p. iv).

Tacey (1997) favours a dual vision that embraces men’s ‘inner' and ‘outer’ lives, and examines ways in which men can achieve increased social, political and psycho-spiritual liberation” (p. 10). He advocates that “the secret is to lead masculinity onward to new, post-patriarchal definitions, and the best ones to conduct this development are the feminine men, the gays, and the misfits who were never in the first place beneficiaries of the patriarchal dividend” (p. 200). The
challenge here, it seems, is to give such voices legitimacy. Sport and the military are exemplified in the background of the dominant masculine. Indeed, male sporting bodies are frequently crashing into each other. The gatekeepers may see this as a threat to their own masculinity.

Following the women’s liberation movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s, women were seen to redefine what options were available to them and their place in society, and were starting to map out their alternative identities. It seems that men are now confronted with a similar set of challenges, yet many men are unaware of their opportunities for reconstruction while others simply don’t know where to begin, or are unable to organize themselves. Saunders (1997) believes that men:

… need to develop their own story, the myth of being male and all that it entails. Men’s roles within society have radically changed and if this has not disoriented males as a gender, I’d be very surprised … They want the same rights and choices that women have been calling for over the past thirty years (p. 21).

There is, however, a view in the literature that tells us such claims can be misleading. Tacey (1997) describes the paradox of men’s power and men’s pain and “the tension between power and pain is what constitutes full psychological health in a post-patriarchal world” (p. 14). Because of women’s emancipation, men have been challenged in their control of institutions, including sexuality and family.

For some males peer group relationships can be devastating, and can unsettle their masculine identity and the way they fit in with the dominant peer groups. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) argue there is a strong anti-schooling culture among a large number of boys. At a school level, Thorne (1993) encourages cooperative relations between boys and girls in order to obtain the ‘same rights’ that both genders request, require and demand. Thorne suggests students think critically about ways to transcend social divisions and inequalities:

1. In grouping students, use criteria other than gender or race.
2. Affirm and reinforce the values of cooperation among all kids regardless of social categories.
3. Whenever possible, organize students into small, heterogeneous and cooperative work groups.
4. Facilitate kids’ access to all activities.
5. Actively intervene to challenge the dynamics of stereotyping and power (pp. 163–167).

In this next section I will look at some aspects of social life that seem to be contributing to the existence of crisis in males’ lives. A number of recurring themes resonate with the literature around males’ struggles within contemporary society. Central to these are the support networks they draw on including their family and their friends. Peer group relations are seen to be an important factor and are often underrated (Hickey & Keddie, 2004). Recognising the breadth of impact the contemporary struggle to reconstruct traditional masculinity is having across all aspects of society, I will focus on this issue in the context of education and school performance.

**2.3 Parents and Other Significant Adults**

Passage through adolescence seems to be easier for boys living in a home with love, and being able to rely on their family relationships to cope and draw strength (McKay & Fanning, 1992; Hart, 1993). Pollack (1998) explains that the family can offer a boy “succour from a world that’s rough and create a niche where he may express his most vulnerable and warm feelings in the open, without fear of ridicule” (p. 175). It is possible, as argued by Pollack, for the adolescent boy who knows he is part of a loving family, that he will have emotional security, and allow him to assertively say no to drugs and alcohol, and acknowledge lower involvement in violence. He also argues that when an adolescent boy is surrounded by good family relationships, he is able to extend them on to his own relationships. Hart (1993) encourages parents and other significant adults to help promote high self-esteem:

… so that their children resist dependencies and addictions, are enthusiastic about life (and school), make friends easily, trust
themselves, are self-directed, are cooperative and follow reasonable rules, take pride in their achievements, are basically happy individuals and are an asset to society and to the world (p. 5).

Grose (1999) argues that it is the responsibility of parents and other significant adults to give children ‘tools for life’. This, he explains, includes building optimism in children, developing a sense of competency, helping to develop emotional literacy, and positive values and qualities. Indeed, Grose extends the development of these tools to be not only the responsibility of parents and other adults but, also, the community’s responsibility – sports coaches, guide leaders, grandparents, relatives and neighbours. He submits to a long held view that young males are socialised into their masculinity by their adult mentors and role models. Adults, therefore, need to provide males with resources to be able to deal with their problems, to be able to respond in appropriate ways, to be able to get along with people and to be able to build active relationships. Significant adults need to find ways to expedite their responsibilities to young males.

Some contemporary commentators, including Biddulph (1994), Edgar (1997) and Slade (2002), argue that one key arena of a male’s life revolves around the father-son relationship. They claim when a male understands his father and respects him, he is able to get on with his own life and feel comfortable with his own sexuality. They believe that once a male accepts and appreciates his own sexuality, he is better equipped to establish a successful relationship with his partner and his children; also, he is able to give and receive emotional support from other males.

According to young people, the most important role a father can play is to teach his children how to live life. Fuller (2002), in his survey of young people and their needs, found 22.7% agreed that the second most important role for a father is to care, followed by “just being there (20%), love (13.3%), discipline (10.7%) and security (10.7%)” (p. 78). His survey also included what makes a good relationship with father: “talking (37.3%), loving (21.3%), trusting (21.3%), respect (18.7), friendship (18.7), understanding (16%) and guidance (8%)” (p. 60).

Edgar (1997) believes it is important for fathers of young males to have a good relationship with their sons. Building a solid father-son bond is essential in not only
strengthening their relationship, but important for the entire family. This relationship is seen as one of the crucial social resources available to boys for the provision of ongoing mentoring. Jorm (1996) says:

… fathers not only have the ability to harm or enhance their children’s emotional stability but can protect them from other influences which are likely to have a negative effect. For example, in a family where the mother suffers from depression, the father can help to buffer adverse effects on the children … adolescent children who had good communication and little conflict with their father were protected from the ill effects of having a depressed mother (p. 232).

Edgar (1997) suggests that men definitely love their children and would die for them if necessary. In fact, he tells us that men are dying for their children “often through overwork and a lack of balance in their lives, but the kids don’t always notice and many fathers feel unappreciated” (p. 240). The choice is between breadwinner/provider versus friend/mentor. There are men who don’t feel close to their children because they’re doing other things. Chapman and Rutherford (1988) explain:

It is difficult for men to break with an instrumentality [that of work] that has come to dominate so much of life. It is as if men are often not available in relationships, their thoughts constantly drifting off. Real life and real work exist elsewhere, so that it can be hard for men to put their energies into relationships. Often we arrive home too exhausted, drained and used up. Our best energies have been used up at work and we rarely hold ourselves back so that we have something to give when we get back (p. 48).

Perhaps a boy’s relationships with his father twenty or thirty years ago was somewhat distant and he didn’t expect any emotional output from his father (Wilson, 1990). That is historically how it was. The demands of traditional masculinity versus the contemporary one are in conflict. Bly (1990) also presents an old version of masculinity where the father remained emotionally detached from his family, and there was no close relationship between father and son. Now the
father is expected to deal with his son’s emotional demands. Grose (2000) argues, “anecdotal evidence suggests that men are more active in the caring role than their fathers ever were” (p. 34). For example, Miedzian (1992) talks about fathers raising non-violent sons:

… a loving, supportive father who is not afraid to show tenderness, empathy, and tears, who, together with his wife, does not condone violence and does not try to mould his son into the traits of the masculine mystique, is most likely to have a son who will not use unnecessary violence. For such a boy, the separation from the ‘feminine’ emotions is less sharp, for he can identify with his father and still retain some empathic, loving qualities (p. 84).

Interestingly, Thompson (2000) suggests that the grandson-grandfather relationship can be as strong as the son-father relationship (p. 50). In some cases, grandfathers have been granted custody in the Courts of their grandchildren.

It is important that fathers get involved with their sons at a very early age. “The primary school years usually offer the best opportunities for fathers to help or teach their kids,” according to Grose (1999, p. 3). He explains that children are at an age when “they are developing a sense of competence, so they are ready and willing to engage in a host of activities. And they want to learn from their parents” (p. 3). He encourages fathers to take the initiative to pass on their skills, knowledge and values. Grose cautions, though, that dads should not make it a formal lesson, just enjoy it. Unfortunately, some men lack these very skills and attributes because of emotional incapacities. This is part of the problematic of parenting.

Boys are strongly affected by their fathers and exert a cogent influence over them. Kimmel (2004) comments that in the United States seventy per cent of all youths “in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes. This bodes especially ill for young boys because without a father, we are told, these young boys will grow up without a secure foundation in their manhood” (p. 143). West (2002) is firmly of the belief that fathers can work very purposefully and strategically to make their influence a very positive one. In showing their sons the way to manhood, West recommends that fathers:
Think about what you most wanted to do with your dad when you were fifteen or sixteen. Do it with your son. Talk with a friend or your partner about this. Don’t put off your fathering for more important (?) (his question mark) things. Your son can’t love you for the things you didn’t get around to doing (p. 37).

Another way to improve the relationship between parent and son is through sport, although sport is also an issue for the school because it’s part of the curriculum. It is also the responsibility of all significant adults, not just fathers and/or mothers. West (2002) explains how parents can encourage sport within the family:

Play sport with your son as best you can. Boys like mum to do this as well as dad … Be positive about sport. Don’t tell your son all the masculine non-sense like ‘Be a man’ or ‘Don’t be a wuss’ … If you have talent in sport, share it. Share your enthusiasm. Boys love being around mum and dad when they are excited. Take your son out and have fun with him (p. 157).

West (2002) cautions that some boys lose interest in school and school sports if there is too much emphasis on the masculine identity, or if school sports cater to those boys who are naturally gifted with skills and muscles. It becomes the responsibility of the school and the home to encourage sport at the level where the boy is.

A son’s relationship with his mother is also very important. Mothers should be encouraged to teach skills of empathy, the ability to seek help when needed and to be able to freely express their emotions. Pollack (1998) argues that skills a mother can give to her son to succeed in relationships include “skills of connecting (empathy, negotiation and compromise) instead of competitiveness; the ability to be dependent and vulnerable and to share one’s troubles, instead of the ability to keep a stiff upper lip and handle pain alone “ (p. 98).

Research indicates that males who develop satisfactory emotional attributes live healthier lives, both physically and psychologically, than those who do not. Pollack
(1998) believes mothers can help their sons “to be more emotionally expressive, feel more confident about himself and reveal his complete personality with more courage and honesty (p. 112). He argues, also, that mothers can show their sons how to merge new ‘sensitive’ qualities “with some of the traditional qualities celebrated as typically ‘masculine’” (p. 112). Pollack (1998) believes it’s not mothers who are crippling boys’ masculinity: “It’s society’s myths about manhood that are preventing boys from being seen and trained as whole human beings, men who can work effectively and live in close relationships with other people” (p. 98).

Gurian (1998) points out one of the tensions of mother-son relationships is that mothers need to be aware of autonomy development in their sons. He explains that mothers and sons need help in figuring how to accomplish the natural separation that has to occur for both to move on in their lives. Mothers and sons need to continue this emotional development in bonding with mothers and other females, “especially in a culture in which adolescents do not bond enough with fathers and other men, sons can separate from mothers without a safe psychological world to move into” (pp. 107–108). Some of Gurian’s suggestions for mothers in this separation include: Make it a passage that involves the entire family; be constantly available to nurture the son’s vulnerability; and read as much as possible because reading helps develop emotional vocabulary. Because a boy needs his mother’s love, Gurian adds:

The more verbal and conscious you make the mother-son separation process, the more you will love your boy, help him continue his emotional development, build trust in him for both you and himself in his process of change, and help him journey toward autonomy in a way that will feel, once he’s a man, like his mother blessed him with not only life itself and care of that life, but also the bloom of mankind (p. 109).

Druck (1985) cautions, however, that men keep secrets about relationships with their own mothers:

Men do not often discuss their unresolved feelings about their mothers. While they play a key part in their relationships with other women,
these emotions are often hidden away out of our awareness. Men’s deepest feelings toward their mothers remain some of the best-kept secrets, even from themselves. Yet a large part of what men expect from women, and of themselves as men, dates back to their childhood experiences with their mothers (p. 167).

“Express your love and empathy openly and generously to your son,” Pollack (1998) recommends to parents:

Tell your boy that you love him as often as you like. Give him hugs. Tell him you’re proud of him and that you care about him. Stay involved in his emotional life. Seek opportunities to connect with him for moments of playful closeness and emotional sharing. If he asks to let him alone, give him the space he needs, but let him know that you love him very much and that when he’s ready to spend time together, you’ll be up for it. You cannot “spoil” your son with too much love or attention. You will not make him “girl-like” or “feminine” by maintaining a close relationship. There’s simply no such thing as too much love! (p. 50).

In our contemporary times there are conflicting notions of what comprises a family unit. There are families with both mother and father living together, but this is becoming increasingly less stereotypical. There are one-parent families with either the mother or the father living at home in primary care of children, although it’s predominately the mother. Lonsdale (2003), using the Australian Institute of Family Studies as her source, defines the family as “two or more people, one of whom is at least 15 years old, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who usually reside in the same household” (p. 9).

Although Kimmel (2004) writes about the American family, much of it applies to contemporary Australian:

The “traditional” family, a normative ideal when it was first invented, has never been the reality for all American families. And it
is even less so today. It represents the last outpost of traditional
gender relations – gender differences created through gender
inequality – that are being challenged in every observable arena.
Families are gendered institutions; they represent gender differences
and gender inequalities among adults and children alike. Families
raise children as gendered actors, and remind parents to perform
appropriate gender behaviors. It is no wonder, then, that each
specific aspect of family life – marriage, child rearing, housework,
divorce – expresses the differences and the inequalities of gender (p.
127).

Holmes, Hughes and Julian (2003) argue that the nuclear family norm in Australia
now includes numerous diverse family forms because of internal and external
pressures over the past fifty years. They explain:

The external pressures emerge from changes in the economy, and in
discourses about ‘the’ family. These lead to shifts in social attitudes
and ultimately to shifts in individuals themselves. Men, women and
children have changed their perceptions of and attitudes towards their
lives and the ways in which these lives interact with their wider
communities. These are the internal pressures that have led to the
profound and radical transformation in the expression, content and
meaning of familial and sexual relationships we are currently
witnessing (p. 306).

In fact, Watters (2004) has introduced the ‘new family’. Clohesy reports that
according to American writer Ethan Watters good friends are the new family and
are “an absolute essential for young people in their 20’s and 30’s” (p. 10). Watters,
(2004) author of *Urban Tribes: Are Friends the New Family?*, “examines the social
consequences of the trend towards marriage later in life” (p. 10).

Some children are now raised within same-sex relationships. There can be different
kinds of arrangements when parents have entered into second or third marriages (or
de facto relationships) with the children from a former marriage living with the
parents. Weekend access of children is another arrangement. For sole mothers there
is a program offered called Bringing Up Boys. Howard (1998) states that the program’s aim is to build on the skills, strengths and resources of sole mothers raising sons up to the age of twelve. “It provides women with an early intervention approach to parenting boys and preventing aggressive, disrespectful and controlling behaviours” (p. 10).

West (1999) argues that “boys are increasingly raised in mother-headed families; their biological fathers are often physically or psychologically absent. In part, this could explain why boys are uncertain about where they are going, and how to achieve [in school]” (p. 7). Research indicates that a boy is more likely to become a school drop-out if he is raised without a father and become involved in juvenile crime (Lue et al. 1998). West (2002) reports research by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare that boys in single-parent families are twice as likely to be disabled and handicapped, three times more likely to have a severe handicap and more serious chronic illnesses.

Along with parents, other significant adults including teachers, coaches, leaders in community settings are important in the young male’s development of peer relationships as reported by Gurian (1998), “under the tutelage of a teacher or mentor, the boys bond with one another, form camaraderies around a single, important task and the potential for the creation of ‘best friends’ increases” (p. 5).

Adults working with boys need to be aware of their own importance as models. Browne and Fletcher (1995) explain:

Men who work with boys need to meet several criteria. They have to be at ease with their own masculinity (including its lusts, angers and energies) and to have arrived at a safe place through resolution not social compliance. And those men and women who would teach boys have to have a genuine liking, in fact a love, of boys - with their scruffiness, noisiness, in-your-face honesty and surprising capacity for tenderness and vulnerability (p. ix).

For some males developing good relationships seems to come easily. Other males, however, clearly experience great difficulty in developing the skills needed to form
good relationships. Cooper and Baker (1996) believe that relationships are something that many males struggle with. It is often presumed that they have been able to pick up the lead of the positive role models in their lives. They argue, however, that here role models too will be:

… notoriously bad at dealing with relationship difficulties – often they’re more inclined to avoid them than to confront them head-on. Sometimes that’s because we don’t want to admit that there’s anything wrong. Sometimes it’s because we can’t deal with the powerful emotions that talking about relationships can bring up. Sometimes we’re quite happy with what we’ve got and we’ve no desire for change. And, of course, the fact that many of us don’t know the language of intimacy doesn’t make discussing relationship difficulties any easier (p. 70).

Of course, communication barriers are not only the fault of adult males. Young males, it seems, have a reputation for being poor communicators with adults. Slade (2002) recalls a situation when a group of researchers were preparing to interview ten adolescent boys. One of the team said, “You realize that you’re talking with boys who are at the age of grunt” (his italics, p. 110). They found, however, that the interviews were intense and most of the boys participated easily. It seems that boys are quite willing to talk about their feelings, but the time and place have to be conducive.

West (2002) tells us that boys dislike being made to sit down and talk. He explains, “Don’t expect a boy to sit down and have a cup of tea and share his feelings with you. In a car, on a beach, on a golf course or in the bush – that’s where guys have heart-to-heart talks” (p. 59). Slade (2002) has found in his research, however, when he interviewed boys individually:

… they are less silenced by each other than many adults assume, and that assumption about their silence might be more the outcome of peer influence among adults. Most of all, the boys have made it clear that they feel silenced by adults in a range of ways, not least of which is that ‘they don’t really listen’ (his italics, p. 113).
2.4 Relationships with Peers

Another dimension of a boy’s potential support network exists through his relationships with his peer group. Howes (1998) and Ladd (1990) illustrated through their research that children developed more positive social interactions when they participated in stable peer relationships. These children had fewer problems in school adjustment. The peer group can be a powerful source of how young boys see themselves and where they fit in. Hart et al. (1998) state in their research that young people who have positive peer contacts appear “to foster higher levels of interaction, relationship formation, and a host of other interpersonal skills essential for the development of social competence and later school adjustment” (p. 5).

Although the peer group can enable males in some ways, they can also disable them. For some males peer group relationships can be devastating, and part of the problem of their masculine identity construction and the way they fit in. Dominant peer groups can unsettle their masculine identity. According to Fitzclarence, Hickey and Matthews (1997) the recruitment of young males to risk-taking behaviours occurs frequently in the company of their peers. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) argue that there is a strong anti-schooling culture among a large number of boys. Pressure is put on boys to adopt negative behaviours and not perform well in school. Harris (1998) warns that some boys don’t fit the masculine mould: “Some boys withdraw from the roughness and competitiveness of boys’ groups; they are apt to become loners, at least in school” (pp. 229–230). Pollack (1998) argues that during adolescence ‘boy code’ rules can be very strict and enforced, and the division between those who fit the mould and those who don’t can be extremely rigid. “Not only can it make the boy disconnect from his genuine self, but it can actually undermine and even destroy his closest friendships” (p. 159).

The ‘boy code’ is something developed between groups and is often displayed through covert signals. The code is suggestive and tentative in terms of describing the principles of boy culture. Martino and Meyenn (2001) call the code, “a kind of swaggering posture that boys embrace to hide their fears, suppress dependency and vulnerability, and present a stoic, impervious front” (p. 13). Thompson (2000) argues that boys are reluctant to speak to their parents about certain issues because
it breaks the ‘boy code’. If boys aren’t developing positive relationships with their families (Harris, 1998), then one of the reasons, possibly, why males don’t connect with adults is because of the ‘boy code’. Harris (1998) argues that, “if the peer group’s culture differs from the parents’, the peer group’s always wins” (p. 358). Boys learn very early not to display weakness; they don’t want to show emotion. Thompson (2000) argues that:

The reason that boys fall silent [to speak to their parents] has to do with the nature of boys’ social training and the nature of adolescence. These two features in a boy’s life come together to produce a boy who often does not want to tell his mother much about his life, or a boy who, even when he does want to talk to his mom or dad, feels he would be breaking the boy code to do so (p. 325).

Thompson (2000) lists the boy code ‘rules’ for fifteen-year-old boys which includes acting strong – even if you have to fake it, not talking to your mother about your feelings and “talking to your father might be cool, but not as long as he’s such an asshole about grades and mowing the lawn” (pp. 325–326).

Harris (1998) believes that children learn early on how to fit in and if they don’t learn, it is rapidly and vigorously pointed out to them. She states:

Children who are unpopular with their peers tend to have low self-esteem, and I think the feelings of insecurity never go away entirely – they last a lifetime. You have been tried by a jury of your peers and you have been found wanting (p. 179).

Harris (1998) asserts that young children learn their basic values through their parents, but as they get older their own peer group in providing socialising practices influences them. Peer pressure starts as early as nursery school and kindergarten. She states:

We know that social behaviour in humans isn’t built in, because it varies so much from one group to another. It has to be learned. We know that children learn it, because most of them end behaving more
or less like the other people in the society they grew up in. Not necessarily the one they were born (her italics) in – the one they grew up in (p. 162).

Learning to fit in with peer groups and, also, falling out or being excluded by peers can have considerable implications for young males. In a study of behavioural antecedents of peer social status, Dodge (1983) investigated the behaviour of 48 previously unacquainted second-grade boys who were brought together in six playgroups of eight boys each. The behaviour of these boys was analysed, and the boys who were rejected or neglected were those engaging in inappropriate behaviours. They socially approached peers quite frequently, but were rebuffed. Rejected boys engaged in physical aggression; popular boys refrained from aggression. Dodge concluded, “the data pointed toward the critical roles of social approach patterns and peer-directed aggression in determining peer status” (p. 1386). He also noted that physical attractiveness was a known correlate of popularity. This had much to do with personal preference, body shape and image, and being clean and neatly dressed.

Peer relationships can often be a source of contestation for parents, however. In looking at males’ relationships with their peers, we discover that one of the things that prevents their dealing with adults is that males quite often listen to their mates and give in to their peers (Hickey & Fitz Clarence, 2004). Where a peer interest becomes important it can override an adult interest. Because of the boy code many young males aren’t reaching out to adults because that could mean they would lose face with their peer group. Fitting into a peer group is a very powerful force. Their unwillingness to talk about problems with adults can possibly be suppressed by their position within the peer group. Males are not willing to lose face and are not willing to lose any cultural capital - Bourdieu (1998) explains cultural capital as adapting to an environment that has the capital you can take with you– you have capital of your culture, like middle ‘classness’. Harris (1998) argues, “in the peer group he is expected to be tough and cool. It is the tough, cool persona that will become his public personality and that he will carry with him to adulthood” (p. 359).
It has been reported that boys resort to peers when there is a family break-up or dysfunctionality. Bartlett (2002) claims:

… where a young person’s family is not supportive, school and peer relationships become more important than they already are. Where both the family and school connections have broken down the primary source of identity and affirmation becomes the peer group (p. 130).

Developing positive social relationships are crucial in the development of most adolescent males. There are two important cognitive aspects to be investigated in Dodge’s (1983) study of peer relationships. He categorises them as *social information processing* and *social knowledge* (his italics). How children process information about social situations involves peer interaction. He believes children go through five steps in processing social information: decoding of social cues, interpretation, response search, selection of an optimal response and enactment. He believes that distortions during the early phases can lead to ongoing problems:

Aggressive boys are more likely than non-aggressive boys to perceive another child’s actions as hostile when there is actually considerable ambiguity about the peer’s intention. Moreover, when aggressive boys are allowed to search for cues to determine a peer’s intention, they respond more rapidly and engage in a less efficient search than non-aggressive peers (p. 1397).

The second cognitive aspect in the construction of peer relationships is social knowledge. Dodge found that popular boys were physically attractive, and they engaged in more active positive communication and cooperative play. They did not participate in inappropriate behaviour, and were not verbally or physically aggressive (p. 1397). A strategic part of children’s social life centres around an assessment of what goals to pursue when they’re in ill-defined or ambiguous social situations. To initiate and maintain a social bond is a social relationship goal. Close relationships are important to boys’ normal growth and development. Pollack (1998) argues that boys want to establish close relationships and “actually are often very creative and successful in doing so” (p. 69).
Popularity is an issue for many boys, including those of primary age, as Santrock and Yussen (1987) explain:

Sometimes children will go to great lengths to be popular; and in some cases parents will go to even greater lengths to try to insulate their offspring from rejection and to increase the likelihood that they will be popular (p. 407).

Hickey and Keddie (2004) revealed how powerful peer social relationships can be with boys as young as seven and eight. They acknowledge the influence one of the young boys has over several of his male classmates and come to the realisation that peer group influence commences in the primary grades. The research examined ways in which this group of young boys’ social dynamics interacted to maintain dominant and collective understandings of masculinities. It is not an adolescent phenomenon. They argue “adolescence should not be seen as a unique phase where young people all of a sudden become ‘the enemy’. It is both unfair and unproductive to assume that in adolescence young people are not the same people they were in childhood” (p. 22). Keddie (2001) advises there is a “potency of peer culture in shaping and regulating boys’ dominant understanding of masculinity” (p. iv). Willingness to undertake activities that involve risk-taking appears to be widespread among boys. Cuthbertson and Callaghan (2003) ‘blame’ males’ risks on their “testosterone-tarred bodies” (p. 2). They also explain that males are twice as likely to die in a car accident as compared to females, “five times more likely to drown and four times more likely to commit suicide” (Taylor, 2000, p. 2). Boys are more vulnerable to using drugs and alcohol. Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998) reported that teenage males could be vulnerable to pressures to conform to the behaviours of their peers, and “risk taking behaviour that is part of the stereotype of masculinity” (p. 57). Johnstone (2000) reports that millions of dollars are spent each year to rehabilitate injured youths, yet these strategies are not very effective in curbing risk-taking behaviours of males, as stated by Hickey (2000). He believes a “greater understanding of peer group affiliation is needed to influence young people’s attitudes and practices in relation to risk-taking” (p. 8).

Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2001) argue that boys value deep and meaningful relationships “with other guys and girls but can feel restrained because it’s not seen
to be cool to talk about what you’re feeling – especially with another guy” (p. 59). They quote Jason, a boy aged fourteen, who believes:

Friendship is about loyalty. It’s when people don’t talk about you and they don’t tease you and they’re always nice to you. I think it’s ridiculous that boys can’t be good friends to other boys because there are a lot of kind boys out there who just want to be friends with other boys (p. 59).

Peers generally give recognition to each other, according to Salmivalli, Kaukiainen and Lagerspetz (1996), and share their feelings and worries with each other. Friendship and belonging are very important to boys in school. Group membership is often more valued than having a best male friend. However, showing too much interest or emotion toward a best friend can too easily be misinterpreted within a dominant culture of homophobia. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) discuss ‘cool’ boys and their relationships after talking with seventeen-year-old Ben:

… friendship amongst the ‘cool’ boys is based on maintaining a ‘protective circle’ to ensure that its members avoid becoming the target of the main bully of the group. He [Ben] finds the level of their interaction superficial and dishonest, particularly in his reference to how these ‘cool’ boys only seem to talk about their ‘imaginary sex lives’. In this sense, he draws attention to the performative dimensions of masculinity which are dictated by the norms of compulsory heterosexuality (p. 60).

Thompson (2000) argues that some boys don’t seek to establish best friends because they may be shy and reserved, and not feel confident unless they’re part of a group (pp. 104–105). There are situations, however, when young males need to not be like their peers, particularly anti-social and risk-taking behaviours. Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000) argue that there is a need to look for new ways to communicate with boys, and they examine possibilities for new forms of pedagogic interventions in school settings, and talk about the development of new communication patterns through peer group understandings and commitments. Tactics include learning to listen to boys, not being judgmental and working with
boys, not against them. Hickey and Boyer (2002) report that more schools are recognising the importance of support to students:

In recent times we have seen the emergence of such things as ‘advocacy classes’, which provide students with the opportunity to resolve conflicts and discuss issues of fairness, bullying and other items of concern in small groups of around seven or eight. Another innovative support for primary and secondary students is the increasing proximity of a ‘youth support officer’ or ‘youth worker’. Further to this has been the introduction of ‘peer support programs’ in some schools (p. 19).

McGrath (1998) presents an overview of prevention and treatment programs for developing positive peer relations. She argues that social competence is considered to be “the most important factor enabling a student to form satisfactory relationships with peers and interact effectively with classmates” (p. 229). McGrath notes three main types of social skill development for children and adolescents:

These are direct social skills training (DSST) programmes in which students are taught specific social skills using a structured procedure; social cognitive training (SCT) programmes which focus on teaching the cognitive aspects of social encounters; and social ecological programmes which attempt to change the wider social context of the classroom (p. 231).

McGrath (1998) maintains that an intervention can have a “profound impact on children’s well-being and behaviour, even when the documented gains are in the moderate range” (p. 240).

Recognition of peer groups and their influence in the process of education is in need of pedagogic reform. Hickey and Keddie (2004) argue that there is a “demand for a greater practical and theoretical recognition of the influence of peers in the process of education” (p. 22). Harris (1998), in a similar way, argues that peer relations are a strategic social force for young people. Quite often teachers don’t know how to deal with peer groups. Often there is pedagogical separation when
two boys sit adjacent to one another and talk – one is asked to sit far from the other boy in the classroom. True, also, for some parents if they believe their son is with the wrong crowd. Slee and Rigby (1998) explain, however, that if the boys get on well with each other and have good rapport, chances are they’ll discuss their own issues and problems with each other acknowledging what’s bothering them. They seek help from the right source, knowing their options and realising they’re not alone with an issue.

2.5 Relationships with Schools

School is the site where boys and their peers, and adults are brought together as a significant part of mainstream Western socialization. The performance of males in school has been recognized as being decreasing against their female counterparts (West, 2002; Browne and Fletcher, 1995). West (2002) reports that boys are experiencing some kind of crisis, do more poorly in exams than girls, feel that schoolwork is boring and has no value for them and leave school earlier. School is an exemplar of that aspect of society that is compulsory; all boys and girls go to school. It’s a site, an example of where relationships are showing signs of frustration. Rigby (1994) revealed that one in five boys gets bullied at least once a week at school. Compared to girls, boys have a much higher behavioural problem relating to attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD).

There is a common social concern that boys are failing school. Rowe (2000) reports that boys tend to disengage quicker with schooling and lack a focus on academic achievement, particularly in the area of literacy. Dr. Brendan Nelson (2003), Minister for Education, Science and Training, commissioned an information booklet highlighting the urgent need for action to address the educational needs of boys since “evidence shows that the ‘gap’ between boys’ and girls’ performance has increased over time” (p. 1). The report claims that in 2002 the Year 12 retention rate for males was 69.8 per cent compared to 80.7 per cent for females. In behavioural and social outcomes, the report claims that adolescent boys are more likely than girls to be unemployed, be involved in automobile accidents, get in trouble with the law, partake in alcohol and drugs or commit suicide. It is reported that because the Commonwealth Government is committed to
supporting schools in their efforts to address the educational needs of boys, they have introduced a number of initiatives. One of these is the Quality Teacher Programme which aims to “update and improve teachers’ skills and understanding in priority areas and enhance the status of teaching” (p. 6). Another is the Boys’ Education Lighthouse Schools Programme “to identify and showcase successful practices in the education of boys” (p. 6). In addition, the Commonwealth “is initiating research into significant areas of education relevant to boys, including pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and students’ perceptions of teaching as a career” (p. 7).

One of the major areas of potential educational difficulty for boys is literacy as reported by Cresswell, Rowe and Withers (2002). They argue:

Achievement results in primary and secondary education suggest that there are significant gender differences, especially in the area of reading where girls outperform boys at both levels. International studies show that, although some of these patterns are widespread throughout the world, the degree of engagement that Australian boys have with reading, is less, on average, than students overseas. It has been shown that this has an effect on the level of reading proficiency that they can obtain (p. 25).

Rather than seeing boys as failing school, commentators like Pollack (1998) suggest that schools may be failing boys. Pollack argues that there is a need to find the ‘right fit’ and “guy-ify a school” (p. 250). He argues that schools “do not appear to be doing a good job at noticing the problems many boys are having in certain academic subjects – namely, reading and writing” (p. 231). He believes “schools and their teachers tend to be poorly versed in the specific social and emotional needs of our sons, and so they often handle these needs inappropriately or inadequately (p. 232). He lists several more ways schools fail boys:

… a good number of our schools are not environments that are either warm or friendly toward boys. Especially when boys misbehave, rather than probing behind the misconduct to discover their genuine emotional needs, there’s a prevalent tendency to interpret their
behaviour solely as a discipline problem … our schools generally do not have curricula and teaching methods designed to meet boys’ specific needs and interests (p. 232).

To ‘guy-ify’ a school, Pollack (1998) describes a school where there is a sense that boys are welcome, “that they are liked, and that who they really (his italics) are – and how they really enjoy learning – will be embraced in a genuine way by their teachers” (p. 250). Browne and Fletcher (1995) concur, “we have to make the world of boys – the playground and classroom – safer and freer of ridicule, shaming and sheer physical danger” (p. ix). West (2002) tells us that boys feel that school “isn’t for them or about them. It’s about other people. Maybe that means teachers” (p. 166). In a similar vein, Ted Brierley (2001), president of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, warns not to ‘skimp on the boys.’ He believes students need more teacher time with teachers who show an interest in them and their progress. He suggests, “Class sizes above the high teens means individual attention to students is difficult to deliver and some teaching strategies difficult to implement “ (p. 12).

Slade and Trent (2000) argue that, based on their research, boys feel they don’t get recognition for their successes from parents and teachers. They have found that boys are “judged by their teachers, the school, and often parents, as being ‘failures’, ‘poor achievers’ or just not being capable of applying themselves to difficult tasks” (p. 228). One of the most damaging forces detrimental to higher academic performance for male students, according to Hawkes (2001), is that parents and teachers have low expectations for their sons. Boys themselves agree. Hawkes (2001) argues:

The educational offering has been cut to the same height so all may graze on its pasture. The mantra of ‘mean, median, mode’ is heard all too frequently in schools. There is evidence of a growing lack of vigour in some schools, of a ‘dumbing down’ with expectations of boys that are minimal. Giving equal esteem to all states of the mind, the dull as well as the informed, is yielding very poor fruit. It would seem important that teachers be empowered to suggest that some
academic standards are better than others and not be coerced into rewarding ordinary performance with extraordinary marks (p. 48).

Slade (2002) believes that many boys feel as though they’re “stuck with an unsuitable, out of date and culturally inconsistent learning environment that they cannot change” (p. x). As a result of this there are concerns that schools present as very disempowering places for many boys. West’s (1999) study indicates boys have “little compulsion to study. Study seems to be one of the last priorities among the boys. Their major concerns are being popular, playing sport, and gaining the affection of their fathers; these are closely related” (p. 18). Boys say that teachers don’t listen to them and don’t care, and they don’t believe school prepares them for a job. Slade (2002) claims that we’re in a ‘cultural paradox’ – a society where adults claim to emphasise individuality and flexibility, yet instead place value on conformity and compliance. His research is based on:

… the phenomenon of cultural paradox within the globally dominant culture, and the challenge that this poses for education into the twenty-first century … (and) the over-riding pragmatic, theoretical and spiritual imperatives that serve as starting assumptions for this work … they also provide the general context of the issues and problems that are of concern to boys in education, and they provide the ultimate criteria of adequacy for our response (p. 10).

One suggested solution to the apparent lack of engagement boys have with school is to incorporate more male role models in this space. West (2002) encourages males to go into teaching as a profession. He believes they can be role models for boys to let them know “males have brains as well as bodies” (p. 159). He believes male teachers should, “build ideas that your class has achievers. Don’t allow yourself to see reading and writing as tedious chores” (p.159). New research, however, as reported by Cervini (2004) suggests, “it is unrealistic to expect male teachers to be role models or surrogate fathers” (p. 8). It was reported the argument that primary children needed male teachers as role models confused parenting with teaching. Most male teachers interviewed by a doctoral student researcher indicated most of them “were perplexed by the idea of being parent substitutes or role models” (p. 8).
West (2003) argues, “primary schooling is a largely ‘feminised’ environment and emphasizes the need for quality male teachers” (p. 11). Bartlett (2002) agrees that male role models can make a difference:

Just as it is considered helpful for girls to see women in positions of authority and involved in activities traditional feminine roles, it is helpful for boys to see men supporting and caring for others and men who are at ease with women exercising authority. It is also important that boys and girls see men who value education sufficiently to be committed professionally as teachers. It is desirable, if not always possible, to have a balance of men and women teaching and in positions of authority in schools (p. 160).

Fraser (2004) argues, “The input of male teachers is vital to producing well-balanced young adults” (p. 8). He believes the status of the teaching profession has diminished and teachers are considered service providers; “the pastoral responsibilities of teachers have increased dramatically. So have the risks to personal safety” (p. 8). What he is suggesting, however, is a sea change:

A few scholarships for men, however well intentional, will not do the trick. And neither will political grandstanding about the sorry fate of boys today. We need a complete mindshift. We need to rethink what we value instead of lamenting what we have allowed to happen (p. 8).

The current situation in Australia indicates “only 4,247 males are training to be primary teachers, which is 18.8% of the total number of teachers in primary training – less than one in five” (Commonwealth Report, 2003. p. 10). Croucher (2003) reports the proportion of male primary teachers in Australia in 1992 was 25.8. Pollack (1998) who expands on the idea that more male teachers are needed in schools, especially in primary classrooms, says, “It’s critical that school systems make serious efforts to find more male teachers, especially at elementary schools where boys are first forming notions of gender-appropriate behaviour” (p. 268). It is evident, however, that fewer males are pursuing careers in the teaching profession at university. In the 2003 intake at Melbourne University, only 20 of the
140 students are male. In their two-year graduate primary teaching course 18 of the 121 students, or 14.9 per cent, are males. Rood (2003) reports that Kay Margetts, a lecturer at Melbourne’s Department of Learning and Educational Development, claims, “the ratio of males to females in primary teaching was similar to that in recent years. Traditionally, teaching tended to be seen as a feminine profession and that males gave a greater breadth to the profession “ (p. 6).

It is argued by Bartlett (2002), however, that there are numerous factors that discourage men to want to become teachers. He states, “the status of teachers in the community, salary, career opportunities and child protection issues are significant reasons advanced by teachers” (p. 155).

Grose (1999) argues that the significance of teachers is often underrated in the lives of children and the “core person in a school from a child’s viewpoint is a teacher” (p. 129). He believes that teachers are in a position to inspire children and young people, and to make them feel good about themselves. Teachers who spend time with boys and girls can become significant role models. Since teachers are the only adults young students are exposed to, Grose says, “their behaviour, attitudes and thinking are just as critical as the subjects they teach” (p. 130). He believes that teachers have a tremendous influence on boys and girls, and they have a right to be taught by optimistic teachers. He suggests, “it is not just a child’s learning that is affected by a teacher’s pessimism but their thinking too – particularly when they fail” (p. 131). Boys need to be taught to take responsibility for events that occur in the classroom and on the playground in a realistic way – not to deflect responsibility, nor take the blame for situations out of their control. When it comes to disciplining a child, a teacher should refer to the behaviour and not the personality. He also says children should be encouraged to believe:

… that positive events are determined not just by their behaviours but also by their positive character traits. When a child performs well in a maths test or plays a good game of netball it is not due to luck or good fortune. Talent, intelligence or qualities such as persistence that are permanent and transferable to all situations play a part in success (p. 132).
Successful teachers are secure enough to allow interaction of power and to let their pupils beat them [teachers not always having the final word] is an example to illustrate a teaching strategy spoken about by Smith (2000) who observed one of his colleagues:

He was … consistently effective in the classroom, loved and respected by his pupils and greatly admired by his cleverer colleagues. What were his gifts? He spoke confidently and naturally … It was not the case that only the able pupils would shine. His whole class would do well. That was his intention. That was his style and his expectation. He treated his class as if there was no reason he could see, if they worked and asked and listened, why they should not do well. He looked at them openly, with warmth, without irony, with humour, and he knew how to come second (pp. 126–127).

Slade and Trent (2000) pose the question ‘What does a good teacher for boys look like?’ and was responded to by boys who said it could be a man or a woman: “We’re motivated to work if the teacher’s relaxed. It makes it fun. We want to work” (p. 219). Here’s what they said about good teachers:

Listen to what you say. Respects you as a person, treats you as an adult. Can laugh at your mistakes. Can adjust rules and expectations to meet different individuals and circumstances. Explains the work, and makes it interesting. Never humiliates you in front of the class. Never tells you that you should leave school. Doesn’t write slabs of work on the board for you to copy. Lets you talk and move around. Doesn’t favour girls or quiet pupils. Doesn’t pick on people and make them retaliate. Doesn’t mark you down because of bad behaviour. Gives you a chance to muck up and learn from it (p. 218).

Getting the best information about academic needs and addressing the needs of boys and girls in a fair way are advocated by Sommers (2000). She believes we should “stop trying to re-educate the sexes and get back to encouraging moral obligations and virtues in the classroom … [students] need love and tolerant understanding. They do not need gender politics” (p. 7). There is, however, a
counter argument that sees the supposed underachievement of boys as a problem of contemporary masculinity, rather than a problem of schools.

Epstein and her colleagues (1998) argue that feminist insights need to be heard so there can be a better understanding of gender relations not only between boys and girls, but also among boys. They say, “there is an urgent need to place boys’ educational experiences within the wider gender relations within the institution and beyond” (p. ix).

Relevant to Epstein et al.’s argument is Cohen’s (1998) work that acknowledges the obsessive concern for masculinity as the source of males’ school problems and underachievement. She argues that the current preoccupation with the ‘boys will be boys’ debate has an international perspective:

… in some countries … the examination performance of boys [is] being played in a major key … there are conflicting claims about which groups of boys are underachieving, in which curriculum areas, at what level of qualification, according to which definitions of underachievement and accordance to what evidence (p. 38).

In describing this debate, Mills and Lingard (1997) say it developed in response “to the claim that girls were outperforming boys in the public exam held at the end of secondary schooling” (p. 38). On closer examination of the data they found that a small group of mainly middle class girls performed as well as the middle class boys “in the high status, ‘masculinist’ subjects such as Maths, Chemistry and to a lesser extent Physics” (p. 38).

The ‘poor boys’ debate, however, continues to have purchase in the men’s movement. Bly (1990), Biddulph (1994) and Birmingham (2000) argue that attacks by aggressive women have caused men to lose control of their lives. Males would like a return to what they experienced as a more patriarchal order when women knew their place. Such commentators claim that feminism is to blame, at least to some extent, for boys’ problems in school.
As an extension of these issues, a key discourse of feminist reporters involves failing schools and the boys who attend it fail, too. Reed (1998) suggests “two powerful signifiers shape our current educational landscape: the ‘underachieving boys’ and the ‘failing school’” (p. 56). She argues that the key challenge is to develop counter-discourse “to the dominant discourses perpetuated through the school effectiveness and school improvement literature and its associated demonisation of the underachieving boy and the failing school” (p. 72). All this would include a focus on gender, school cultures (including class and race) and curriculum along with an understanding of boys’ fears, anxieties and violent ways. Rowan et al. (2002) claim that there is no ‘quick fix’.

We need to understand we are not just dealing with boys as a single group; we’re dealing with them as a very diverse group … It is a big task, and it’s going to take a long time for us to undo the effects of hundreds of years of socialisation, but it can also be a hopeful and enjoyable experience” (p. 32).

Lingard, Martino, Mills and Bahr (2002) argue that there is an influence of gender concepts on attitudes and behaviour in schools:

There is a need to address the impact of gender concepts for all boys and all girls as an element of programs geared to achieving certain social and educational goals from schooling … The enhancement of teacher knowledge about gender and schooling appears to be an important focus for teacher professional development (pp. 85–86).

Although there seems to be a wide consensus among educational authorities that schools are failing boys, their assertion is more problematic than they give credit. An element of it might be true that schools haven’t picked up on the needs of boys. Then there’s the argument that schools aren’t all that different. It’s just that boys don’t access what’s available to them anymore, or as much as they could – and that’s not really the fault of the school.

Many males consider sport an important part of the school curriculum and an important signifier of masculinity. Mills (2001) argues that “the sporting arena is a
site in which the validity and status of a boy’s/man’s gendered identity can be asserted, challenged and negotiated (p. 24).

Sports that have a strong emphasis on violence, for example, various codes of contact football (such as rugby and gridiron) and boxing … valorise the extremes of masculinity: aggressiveness, strength, speed, competitiveness and domination of the opposition (p. 25).

Gurian (1998) argues that physical integrity “is more important for males than we may realize because often males don’t verbally confess how awkward they feel as physical beings” (p. 272). Physical integrity “is a person’s self-discipline of physical body. Elements of sexual integrity are linked to it, but mainly it involves the helpful use of body to self and world” (p. 272). In order to use one’s body healthily and helpfully, Gurian states one must: “Know one’s body, respect and care for one’s body, learn to focus one’s body enjoy one’s body and find freedom in one’s body” (p. 272).

Sports can offer chances for emotional closeness that may be lacking in other areas of their lives. Pollack (1998) argues:

… boys often feel more comfortable caring about and nurturing one another in the context of playing sports … so long as the caring and nurturing is expressed in the team concept and channelled toward a task, toward the external goals of the game (p. 276).

West (2002) talks to boys about the way towards manhood and reminisces how it was for boys “… in my day, boys played football. They went to school because they had to. Boys in my day talked about cricket and Rugby League” (p. 50). He continues:

Putting boys in classrooms behind desks all day creates trouble because we’ve put them in a pressure cooker. This is one reason why sport is so important to boys. Out they rush in a big seething mass. There are yells and shouts and lots of signs of relief. They go out onto ovals and they
run around in the bush, if they’re lucky. Sport gives boys fresh air in all kinds of ways, mentally and spiritually (p. 153).

What can schools do regarding sport? West (2002) says schools should find out through research what boys like and dislike about sport, and give boys more choices in sports. Don’t force boys to play only what the school wants. He adds:

Who is it who needs the football trophies? Is it the sports master, the principal or the boys? Don’t allow sportspeople to embarrass or humiliate boys who don’t have the skills or muscles to play certain sports” (p. 157).

Boys should be allowed to reveal their feelings about physical education and school sports, according to Gard (2001). He argues that discussions ought to be conducted in a safe environment:

For example, for a boy to voice his dislike of sport may be an invitation to homophobic abuse from other students … students need to know that it is ‘OK’ to dislike or be less skilled at particular forms of physical activity. Indeed, this may be the one message that makes the biggest difference in the amount of pleasure students derive from physical activity at school (p. 233).

Some of the arguments, such as the curriculum is too feminised and schools are not looking after boys, are displaying themselves in various contexts. One of the contexts, for example, is sex education. Issues of sexuality are a major concern for young males, including sexual identity, gender identity and the meaning of sex itself - in other words, how males recognize themselves sexually. Sex education is an area of the curriculum that needs to be improved. Gurian (1998) argues that it needs to be taught differently at different grade levels. Male counsellors should participate in boys’ sex education classes with competent male teachers. More male counsellors ought to be included in teaching sex education. Emotional education should be included as part of the program in sex education. In summary, he states:
In the area of sex education, if men don’t participate we can say that the educational system – educators, administrators and bureaucracy in general – as neglecting the boys. Unless a male stands with the boys to talk to them about masturbation, wet dreams, sexual intercourse, AIDS, pornography, and sexual aggression, the boys’ core selves are not learning, with any completeness at all, the lessons we want them to learn about these things. Unless a man or even two or three helps the boys over a few years time to deal with their sexuality, the boys will not have been educated in sexuality (p. 194).

For their own understanding and maturity, boys need to be taught sex education properly. Boys need to have the ability to talk openly about all sorts of personal and emotional issues, including sexual matters.

It must be remembered that many adult males have difficulty in expressing themselves and verbalising their problems. This is evidenced through current approaches to educating males about their health. The message is that ‘real men’ have health problems too! For example, ‘Storming’ Norman Schwartzoff of the Gulf War Desert advertised about prostate cancer to normalise it and to say that real men get it, too. Education in Australia is in the process of drastic changes. Individual schools are achieving very positive educational changes, and according to Russell (2003) what is needed “is a consistent, general adoption of this approach” (p. 9). ‘This approach’ meaning that schools must become “flexible enough to suit a constantly developing world” (p. 9). Russell is suggesting that certain qualities, strategies, characteristics and skills be incorporated into school curricula and philosophies because they are needed for Australian youths to survive in the twenty-first century:

Boys need to be encouraged to express their emotions and to be more tolerant of differences in masculinity. Schools and teachers need to play a key role. Gurian (1998) suggests that new models of manhood are needed. He believes these new models “must include but also transcend national and political boundaries” (p.231). He continues:
Without these transcendent models, we limit our masculine models to politically or religiously “correct” ones, which often do not involve vital biological or historical information, do not take fully into consideration how a boy works or how he fits into a long-term historical adaptation, and ultimately do not free the whole spirit of a man (p. 231).

2.6 Expressions of the Male Crisis

Unfortunately, instead of communicating or expressing their problems, males tend to express their problems and anxieties through aggression, violence, self-harm, stress, mental illness and a host of others pernicious practices (Goldstein and Conoley, 1997; Walker, Butland and Connell, 2000; Kimmel and Aronson, 2003). Prominent in all of the data around the abusive and risk-taking practices of males are those in the fifteen to twenty age group. McWhirter (2003) argues that at-risk adolescents are one of the greatest social, family and community concerns that need to be acknowledged and interventions put into operation. Donmoyer and Kos (1993) identify at-risk students as those who display “clearly identifiable physical, cognitive or emotional conditions or have background and family circumstances which make it extremely unlikely that they can learn” (p. 11). At-risk problem behaviours may include family problems, school issues, suicide, juvenile delinquency, public health problems, child abuse, AIDS and STDs, drug and alcohol use and addiction, school dropouts, youth gangs (McWhirter, 2003).

2.6.1 Aggression and violence

In this section it will be revealed how male aggression and violence can start very young and raise itself to serious issues in schools. It continues with a general discussion of males’ aggression and violence. School bullying is investigated, along with male self-harm, suicides and family relationships. This is followed by a discussion of males’ employment: those working who suffer from stress, and those out of work who feel worthless and lack self-esteem. Finally, there is a look at older men. Aggression and violence are not simply worked out, as men get older. It’s not the province of boys in school and they just grow out of it. There are men in their seventies and eighties who have high incidence of self-harm and suicide.
As referred to earlier, in a study by Keddie (2001), very young school-aged boys can show their aggressiveness through physical dominance and violence. It was recently reported by Elias and Zins (2003) in a case from Virginia, in the United States, “involving a kindergarten boy who exhibited acts of sexual aggression towards his classmates” (p. 191). Unfortunately, the young male was simply transferred to another classroom in the same school where he continued to assault classmates. As aggression continues into adolescence and the middle school years it becomes a definite, high profile problem. Aggression and violence appear to be male responses to many of their problems. Among the ways males vent their frustrations, anxiety and stress is their tendency to act aggressively. Anger is a natural emotion, and for men, according to Donovan (1999), it “is our most common and immediate response to the experience of physical or emotional pain and fear” (p. 2). Gentry (1999) defines anger as an emotion “beyond our conscious reason, at least in the moment we experience it … biologically, anger is defined as a stress response of the human nervous system to internal or external demands, threats and pressures” (pp. 35–36). In a recent study, Boman (2003) examined gender differences in the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of anger in 102 first year high school students in South Australia. Boman’s research indicated that boys, when angry, were more likely to break things or disrupt a class in session. They expressed their anger more outwardly when compared with female students. It was found that girls were more trusting of adults within the school setting, whereas boys were more hostile towards school. In his concluding discussion, Boman offers this suggestion:

… it may be very helpful for teachers to pay attention to statements made by students that suggest an underlying hostility towards school. This could be useful in preventing some later behavioural problems, both in the classroom and schoolyard, which reflect destructive anger coping strategies (p. 76).

We see the emergence of bullying in school and the crimes being committed against students and teachers (Cox, Stabb & Hulgus, 2000; Elias & Zins, 2003; Garrett, 2003). Daily we see on television and read in newspapers, too, the evidence of violent crimes on the public on the increase.
Thompson, Grace and Cohen (2001) explain that children want connection, recognition and power out of life. Connection leads to developing friendships, while power and recognition can lead to conflict and competition that can be acted out through bullying. They claim children have a need to connect with someone as a basis for friendship. They also believe children want to compete in order to feel successful – to bring recognition. They admit a craving all humans have for a feeling of power, even dominance. “There are many different ways to achieve that feeling of power, whether by wrestling, successfully skipping a stone across the top of the water, gossiping, having the best-looking pair of jeans, or having a navel ring” (p. 140). They state that bullying behaviour “becomes more intense starting in sixth grade and continues to be so up through around tenth grade” (p. 125).

The earliest experiences when a male might observe or be caught up with violence and aggression is at home by a parent or sibling, childcare centres, neighbours, relatives’ homes, and on films and television. Schools, in the primary classroom and playground and then continuing into the secondary years, are sites for bullying, aggression and violence. One of the greatest concerns that males have in terms of peer relationships revolves around peer group non-acceptance and violence. Kenway and Fitzpatrick (1997) state, “it is now fairly well understood that the social, cultural and psychic construction of masculinity is related to violence and that some kinds of masculinity are more directly associated with violent behaviour than are others” (p. 119). Denborough (1996) argues, boys need to accept multiple masculinities and not allow one dominant masculinity to power over all the others. Mills (2001) believes masculinity is a major problem in understanding violence in schools and yet it is seldom identified or mentioned as an issue. He argues:

In many schools there are cultures where dominant masculinising processes have a clear identifiable link with violence. Teachers and community workers conducting work with boys on violence issues need to have some understanding of the ways that shore up masculine privilege and create a hierarchy of masculinities …boys’ violence should be treated as systemic acts of injustice that preserve existing relations of power. Thus, work with boys on issues of gender and violence requires a focus on the work in which violence, domination
and oppression are implicated in the construction of an idealized masculinity (p. 140).

Because boys are the major perpetrators of violence in schools, Mills (2001) argues, “changing gender patterns and relations is a long-term process that will require major cultural shifts (p. 139). He believes schools play a strategic part in initiating and reinforcing these shifts. Although he admits there is no quick fix in solving problems of gender and violence in schools, he offers a number of principles to be integrated into work in schools including understanding boys’ violence as a masculinity issue, confronting the issue of homophobia, realising boys’ feelings of being powerless within a school context of privilege and male teachers “need to actively engage with a politics which seeks to undermine their privileged positions in the existing gender order” (p. 145). Although changes in attitude and practice can be accomplished, it will certainly need the co-operation of principals and staff, parents and the community and the students themselves, all of whom should own the program. Suckling and Temple (2001) and Sullivan (2000) have published a whole-school approach to bullying that includes preventative strategies and interventions. In the past few years, many schools have taken similar approaches to counteract bullying behaviour.

Rigby (2002) has research findings [survey of 38,000 students] that show one in six students report being bullied each week. He indicated that in order to curb bullies, schools need to improve awareness of bullying, develop a school anti-bullying policy, promote skills to counter bullying and have procedures for dealing with actual cases of bullying. Rigby announced that “bullying is one of the biggest problems facing students, with organizations such as the National Children’s and Youth Law Centre receiving more complaints and inquiries about bullying than any other issue” (p. 1). In another study, Rigby (2001) indicated that bullying usually goes on within gender groups; “physical bullying goes on mainly between boys and relational bullying goes on mainly between girls” (p. 7). In his earlier research on aggressive behaviour, Rigby (1998) indicated that bullying has some typical characteristics:

One distinctive feature is that bullying is not occasional, but systematic aggression: purposefully harmful actions are repeatedly targeted at one
and the same individual child. Another feature of bullying is that it does not take place between two equals: there is an imbalance of power. The victim is in some way or another incapable of defending himself against the aggressor (p. 66).

Those who are bullied may have certain identifiable characteristics that make them appear or seem different. Sullivan (2000) mentions racist bullying, sexual harassment, bullying of special needs and sexual preference bullying. Other reasons might include the person being older or younger than their classmates, much more or much less intelligent, new to the school, wealth, special talents and abilities, gender differences, being in foster care and even the ‘teacher’s pet’.

What underpins a boy’s violence? Perhaps having a learning disability is what sparks bullying, or it might be a way to try to win a friendship. The reasons for bullying may be complex. The person may be bullied by others, may lack confidence, may be bored and looking for fun, may have inadequate or limited social skills. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) argue, “Boys who do not ‘measure up’ to the norms of what it means to be ‘cool’ or a ‘normal’ boy become targets, and life for them at school can become unbearable” (p. 34). Suckling and Temple (2001) argue that in certain cases “bullying is the result of a student getting into the wrong group at the wrong time and engaging in wrong behaviour; it is not necessarily the result of the student having personal problems” (p. 77).

So what are other reasons why some males behave so violently? Pollack (1998) presents his theory:

When boys feel disconnected and afraid of being shamed, when they harden themselves and then put on the macho mask, the one emotion they feel it’s acceptable to show, and thus the only emotion that they will show, is anger. That anger can come out as risk-taking behaviour or, as I sometimes call it, ‘death-oriented bravado.’ The boy has such a phobia of showing his shame that he counteracts it or overcompensates for it, by showing its opposite – recklessness and risk-taking and even violence against himself (p. 347).
Bullies can upset a classroom and play havoc on the playground. Pollack (1998) claims that in the United States, the National Association of School Psychologists estimates that “some 160,000 children miss school every day for fear of being bullied” (p. 343). Davis (2001) cites that California schools have announced that if a student is caught “bullying, making abusive gestures, comments, threats or actions, written or verbal” (p. 22) he/she will be required to have counselling and/or will face suspension or be transferred to another school. In addition, any student carrying weapons to school is forced to visit a mortuary and watch autopsies. Although it is hoped that it will change their ways, it has been criticised by some as being a superficial approach and doesn’t confront the real issues. Interestingly, it is often middle class, white males who are performing these deeds. It needs to be acknowledged that aggression and self-harm are common among boys.

The 1999 massacre at Littleton, Colorado’s Columbine High School made the public aware of the practice of bullying, and the need for school security measures and counselling implementation. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold stormed into their high school on 20 April, 1999, in a murder-suicide pact that sent shock waves around the world. Michaelis (2000) states the level of violence committed by Harris and Klebold emerged as a social marker that announced violence had come into schools and needed immediate attention. Because they were bullied and treated as outcasts by their peers and teachers, they committed this vicious crime to get back at their perpetrators. Like many of their victims, Eric and Dylan were Caucasian, Christian, middle class boys.

As an aside to this ‘vicious crime’, the blackest of comedies has come out of this corrosive event – the 2003 Booker Prize winner D.B.C.Pierre’s novel, *Vernon God Little*. Martine, editor of *In Print* (2004), explains:

> Fifteen year-old Vernon Gregory Little is in trouble. His best friend, Jesus, has just blown away 16 of his classmates before turning the gun on himself. And now Vernon has become the focus for the town’s need for vengeance, and the media’s appetite for a sensational story … It’s a riotous adventure story that cuts a satirical swathe through the heart of contemporary America (p. 11).
Garrett (2003) reports that since 1992 there have been 250 violent deaths in American schools and bullying has been a factor to the violence. She also argues that many of the students who committed the crimes were victims of being bullied and they finally had their revenge. Interestingly, in most cases, bullying seems to start with what appears to be just innocent put-downs and teasing. Tomazin (2003) reports that Victorian children have identified bullying as one of the biggest problems they face in school. Although statistics show at least twenty per cent of Australian children have experienced some form of bullying and harassment, the real figure is probably much higher because problems are often not reported. A VicHealth study released as part of the first national conference on school bullying cases take place in schools – more than double the cases that occur in the workplace, during sport or on the street. It was also reported “more than half of the children bullied at the age of eight are likely to be convicted of crime by their mid-twenties” (p. 3).

“Online bullying is the next challenge for web masters,” argues Simmons (2003). “Schools won’t intervene and parents claim ignorance, making the internet a free-for-all bullying site. Say hello to the newest strain of the bullying virus, technologically updated for the 21st century” (p. 13). She continues:

The internet has transformed children’s social lives, moving cliques from lunchrooms and lockers to live chats and online bulletin boards and intensifying their reach and power… Internet bullying involves a population that is largely middleclass, usually known as the ‘good kids’ or, as many school personnel told me, ‘the ones you’d least expect’ to bully or degrade others” (p. 13).

There is a great deal of literature related to classroom and schoolyard bullying. Pelzer’s (2004) bestseller, The Privilege of Youth, autobiographically discloses his pain of being severely bullied at school:

When I was put into foster care, I somehow thought everything would change, I emphasized, snapping my fingers. But at school, man, I got my ass kicked, stomped, beaten, you name it, every day. New kid this,
skinny rat that, hey four eyes. I’ve heard it all. Man, what a pain. And all I wanted was to be like everyone else; you know, fit in. I never really had friends (p. 59)

Bullying is a topic utilised by Charles Dickens, author of *David Copperfield* in 1849-1850. As you may recall David was sent to Salem House, a miserable school outside London, run by Headmaster Creakle who treated David brutally. Magill (1949) made this comment relating to David’s treatment: “But in spite of the harsh system of the school and the bullyings of Mr. Creakle, his life was endurable because of his friendship with two boys whom he was to meet again under much different circumstances in later life” (p. 190).

Yachting celebrity John Bertrand has made public his recollections of being bullied as a fourteen-year-old student and felt intimidated by the school toughie. Protyniak (2003) reports, Bertrand mentioned that his own children, now adults, also were bullied in school. Currently Bertrand is chairman of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, an anti-bullying program in six hundred schools in Victoria and New South Wales. Buddy Bear, the foundation’s program, aims to stamp out playground bullying by pairing grade six children as buddies with those in prep grade.

In reporting consequences of negative interactions with peers among Australian adolescent school children, Rigby and Bagshaw (2001) argue:

Many schools are now responding positively to the problems of peer aggression. Unfortunately, however, there is still a tendency for schools to regard physical aggression as by far their major concern. Physical aggression is, of course, not uncommon in schools and must be addressed, but it needs to be emphasised that other modes of ill treatment are more common and often as damaging, if not more damaging, to the wellbeing of children in schools (pp. 40–41).

Another form of violence in which males far exceed their female counterparts is suicide. West (2002) indicates that drugs can be implicated in suicide because “they aggravate and complicate mental illness, and feed on personal problems. Often drugs are the means by which a young male ends his life” (p. 32). It is
argued by West (2002) that boys are much more protected from suicide ideation when they have a loving father and are members of a family who care for one another. “Living with both natural parents … in a caring school environment” (p. 32) and being able to have a friend you can talk to and trust. If they feel that no one likes them, or that they’re not big and strong then these are signs that they need to be given support.

Field (1999) explains that being bullied at school may lead to feelings of low self-esteem and depression, which often leads to thoughts of self-destruction. She indicates that those who are regularly bullied by their peers “are at greater risk of contemplating suicide than those who have not been bullied … There have been tragic cases where suicide was the only way out” (p. 57). Bullying, then, may be one of the reasons for suicide, which is now the leading cause of death among young males between the ages of 15 and 24. West (2002) believes there is not enough support given to young males, of the right kind. He says, “many of them shift into bravado – ‘Make a loud noise and try to keep them fooled’. Or they just withdraw into themselves. And inside, many boys are being eaten away by insecurity and worry” (p. 31). Briggs (1970) argues, when children are unsuccessful in establishing good self-esteem, they may resort to defences such as sublimation, self-defeat and self-harm behaviour. Others hide their feelings and withdraw. Eventually, health problems may develop.

In the language of self-harm, some males express their frustrated emotions through bodily harm whether it’s tattooing, eating disorders or wrist slashing. Leenaars and Wenckstern (1991) believe low self-esteem is a problem for victims of self-abuse:

… they may erect defences (such as sublimation, denial or projection); they may submit and begin a vicious cycle of self-defeat, leading to self-effacing and even self-destructive behaviour; or they may withdraw, hiding their true feelings. Any of these avenues can lead to major health problems (pp. 52–53).

According to Buckingham (2000) “the most commonly implicated mental conditions for suicide and self-harm are schizophrenia and depression … Substance abuse disorders are becoming recognised as a major risk factor” (p. 49). She states
that because many adolescent boys do not seek any kind of treatment, it is difficult to know how much mental illness affects self-harm and suicide ideation. In the Summary Report (1997) of the House of Representative Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, it states:

For every completed suicide there are many attempts … hospital statistics show that for every death resulting from suicide, there are ten admissions to hospitals for attempted suicide. Even this result under-represents attempted suicides, as many are not admitted nor seek help (p. 5).

Another aspect of the difficulty in assessing the accuracy of statistics on suicide, Webb (1998) argues:

… is the coincidence of high rates of suicide and accidental death in the same age groups, especially the fifteen to nineteen age group for males. More than fifty per cent of motorcycle accidents, for example, are in the fifteen to twenty-five age group for men. But whether or not the statistics on suicide are blurred by an overlap with accidental death, what suicide and accidents reveal is that young men have a very casual attitude to their own lives, and are prepared to throw them away as much from despair over an impossible personal crisis as in a momentary surge of bravado before their peers or when alone (pp. 198–199).

In suicidal cases it can be difficult to distinguish between planned suicide and accidental death. Webb (1998) explains:

Much adolescent male behaviour involves taking risks: accepting dares is a particularly male activity, even if those dares are directed by the individual against himself. The risks that many young men take seem suicidal, but rather than indicating a suicidal intention these actions indicate the extent to which an emerging teenage male will put his life on the line for his masculinity (p. 197).
Dunn (2001) said that psychologists and educators are now more aware of bullying and its impact on developing psyches. She believes “it can have repercussions well into adulthood …it is a damaging, traumatic experience for many young people that has clear links with depression and suicide (p. 28). When bullying goes unnoticed, ignored or unreported may give the bully permission to continue antisocial behaviour into adulthood.

Dunn (2001) cites one case where an aggressive boy in his class bullied the male victim:

… it had exacerbated his depression, left him lonely and isolated at school, and spurred his suicide thoughts. More than anything, it had ruptured his self-esteem to such an extent that there were mornings when he simply could not lift his head off the pillow, and sometimes he didn’t (p. 28).

The Reverend Tim Costello (2000), president of the Baptist Union of Australia, reminds us that the suicide problem involves older men now, not just young males. He points out that the generation of boys of the 1970s are committing suicide now as 40 to 44-year-old men. This thesis opened with a description of how a forty-five-year-old school principal took his own life in circumstances that even those close to him did not foresee.

The all-time-high rates for males aged 25-29, 30-34 and 35-39 were set in the latest figures available (1998), with the record for 20-24-year-old males being set in 1997. Also in 1997, the rate of suicide for males aged 40-44 leapt 17 percent – its highest level since 1969 (p. 17).

Marriage break-up makes men vulnerable to suicide, according to the Institute of Health and Welfare. Divorced men are three times as likely to commit suicide as any other group. Gray (2001) reports that the co-author, James Harrison said, “divorced and never-married men had been found to have higher suicide rates than married men” (p. 6). Hanging is the most common method of suicide, followed by motor vehicle exhaust gas.
Another Victorian-based report indicates the elderly (men aged 85 and older) have committed suicide at a higher rate than any other age group. Brown (2000) reports that according to Greta Christie, vice-president of the Council on the Ageing Victoria, some men would rather die than feel inadequate. Because older men in regional areas were more socially isolated, they were often more prone to self-harm and suicide. It seems elderly men are more reluctant to admit that they’re lonely and depressed. Psychogeriatrician Erica White at Barwon Health said it is important to look for warning signs – depression, poor sleep, weight loss, feeling hopeless, talking about death, writing a will and believing that life wasn’t worth living. Ramsey et al. (ASIST, 1999) argue that older citizens tend to suffer a loss of resources that often leads to loneliness and isolation. Other reasons for suicide ideation are:

Their powers of perception decrease. Personal health often worsens. Their self-respect and self-esteem may be undermined by a combination of societal pressures and physical changes. Older people often experience feelings of uselessness and hopelessness. They have serious depressions more commonly than young people and these depressions are often not diagnosed and/or treated (p. 26).

Family relationships are greatly affected by bullying behaviour. Quite often bullying isn’t mentioned or discussed with parents. Here’s an example of an exception. Debelle (2003) reports that bullying and bastardisation in a sporting context is quite often deemed normal. One mother, however, decided to do something about her fifteen-year-old son’s being abused and bastardised by other team members on tour, competing in a water polo tournament. Currently six of the boy’s former team-mates are on bail and will be tried later this year on indecent assault and common assault charges.

Currently a mother is on trial in connection with the suicide of her twelve-year-old son in January 2003, and has been convicted of putting her child at risk by creating a home environment that was unhealthy and unsafe. According to Santora (2003), “the court heard that her son had been picked on for months at school over his body odours… (She) was found guilty of one count of risk of injury to a minor for creating a filthy home that prosecutors said had prevented Daniel Scruggs from
improving his hygiene” (p. 13). The trial was the first case in which prosecutors in Connecticut charged a parent in connection with the suicide of their child. The assistant State Attorney told the jury that the case was about parental responsibility and that those who found the boy had to climb over debris and clutter to get to his body in the closet. The case received national attention because of the school’s failure to do anything about the bullying. Witnesses testified that Daniel was kicked, spat on and punched and teachers didn’t come to his aid. Connecticut legislators have since passed a law establishing accountability on the part of school officials to report and deal with bullying.

Workplace terrors indicate there is an increase in hostility and aggression. An example of this adult anti-social behaviour was publicised by Porter (2004) who reports that the Victoria Police have “spent more than $1 million settling complaints of discrimination, harassment and bullying within the force over the past three years” (p. 1). According to her report, however, many members of the police force are still unwilling to make complaints. Evans and Baker (2004) reported a Victorian Police detective sergeant who had spent a number of years investigating corruption in the force was tagged a whistleblower and was bashed, abused and ostracized by his fellow officers. Bullying is not only a problem in the police force, but is also prevalent in the armed forces, in clinics and hospitals, and in wider workplace cultures (OH&S Newsletter, 2003). Porter (2004) indicates a chief inspector and several other police officers were removed from their positions at the Victoria Police Academy after an inquiry into allegations of widespread bullying of staff and recruits in the constables’ course. Gordon (2003) reports an internal army investigation found that an injured trainee soldier hanged himself after enduring a culture of denigration and harassment by staff and other soldiers. Professional staffs in clinics and hospitals are being harassed and bullied by patients and their families, and by other staff members.

Urban (2003) disclosed that the Australian Education Union receives at least five reports weekly from its teacher members who are being bullied at school. It’s been reported by Munro (2003) that almost fifteen per cent of Victorian workers have been bullied at work, and although many companies have procedures to deal with bullying only half those who sought help received help. In the first national survey on sexual harassment, commissioned by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity
Commission, the Gallup telephone survey was launched by Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward (2004). It was reported that of more than one thousand people aged between eighteen and sixty-four, forty one per cent of women and fourteen per cent of men experienced sexual harassment at some time (*The Melbourne Age*, 25 March, 2004, p. 4). D’Arcy (2004) reported that seven per cent of men had experienced some kind of harassment, other than sexual, at work. The survey was launched with a revised code of practice for employers. As part of a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity campaign targeting sexual harassment, posters are to be distributed to schools, employer groups, union and community groups. According to the survey less than a third of those harassed formally reported an offence and more than half said they lacked faith in the system. As a social worker in one of Victoria’s state prisons, I was informed, occasionally, by inmates on my counselling roster of the sexual harassments and rapes that were common knowledge, but swept under the carpet.

Australian schools and teachers are now working toward interventions that successfully operate in reducing and eliminating bullying: interventions such as guidance for schools in developing policies, counselling students and parents of those who bully and those bullied and getting student support in bullying issues in the classroom. Evaluations are continuously being carried out and further evaluations with alternative methods are needed (Rigby & Slee, 1999). Hall and Handley (2004) answer the critical questions parents, teachers and school communities are concerned about to make schools safe and efficient learning environments for all students and teaching staff.

### 2.6.2 Stress and mental illness

Coping with stress is an everyday expectation for human growth; it is an integral part of our existence. Stress reveals itself as a manifestation of the lack of social and personal resources men and women have to deal with contemporary society. Arthur Jackson defines stress as “an interaction between events which can produce adverse effects on health (we call these stressors), and the way the body reacts to these stressors” (Boyer, 1992). Stress has exploded in society a great deal in the last generation. It’s become very common place to talk about it. It’s a Western capitalist phenomenon and males have their own version of it: it’s an important
issue in the workplace and a serious problem in schools. Family demands create all kinds of stress. It affects all ages; it’s not just a problem for older people – children as young as ten experience stress (Saunders, 1997).

One of the serious problems that is pronounced among males is mental illness. Adolescent males are four times more likely than females to be diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, as mentioned by Gurian (1998):

The majority of juvenile mental patients are male. Most of the deadliest and longest lasting mental problems experienced by children are experienced by adolescent males. For example, there are six male adolescent schizophrenics for every one female. Adolescent autistic males outnumber females two to one. Adolescent males significantly outnumber females in diagnoses of most conduct disorders, thought disorders and brain disorders (p. 12).

Some of the common causes of stress include: financial worries, health worries, family problems, pressure of work, worry about children, sexual hang-ups, superannuating and retirement, boredom, loneliness, constant noise, ethnic and cultural clashes, generation gap, educational backgrounds and qualifications, communication barriers, different roles we play, mid-life crisis, travel, relationship issues and poor nutrition. In other words, stress can be caused by anything – it depends on the individual. Many males encounter stress in relationships, whether it’s with family and relatives, friends or workmates. Some of the key tools required to reduce stress in relationships are mentioned by Saunders (1997) who lists: “effective communication, assertiveness, trust, respect, personal empowerment and boundaries” (p. 93).

Stress is viewed not only as source of crisis but also as a generational artefact. Saunders (1997) believes men’s stress “has to do with perceived and prescribed roles ... male stress is directly related to the social and environmental upheavals that have abounded in recent decades” (p. 25). Because of the women’s movement in the latter part of the 20th century male expectations have changed, or, at the very least, become confused. Some men feel they are being thrust into change - as though things are not taking place in coherent ways.

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According to Apple and Gault (1998) stress tolerance varies from one individual to another. They argue:

Some men get a rush from taking risks; they thrive on stress. They are the ones who work eighty-hour weeks and have a stream of women on tap. Others succumb much more easily to pressure and stress-related disorders. They are the ones who lie awake at night worrying about the mortgage and who prefer a stable working environment (pp. 138–139).

Mackay (2000) argues that stress is a pretty normal part of existence in Western capitalist societies. He believes that a certain amount of stress can be productive because it gets the adrenalin moving and makes us more alert; it can help stimulate creativity. He believes our own individual narrative indicates how we cope with stress. He considers the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves is the key to how an individual handles stress, and how we manage stress sets the tone for our own story. Mackay explains:

Our lives are stories that can be interpreted in many ways, like texts with several possible meanings, some of them contradictory. Most of us could tell convincing tales of ourselves as victims who have suffered disappointments, humiliation, failure and loss. The greater the underlying resentment, the greater the stress. But all those stories could be told in other ways – some neutral, some heroic, some inner-directed, some outer-directed. The way you choose to tell your own story (especially to yourself) may be the key to how you manage stress (p. 9).

One particular group of Australian men traumatically affected by stress were those involved in the Vietnam War. Stress played a very important role when the tough, decorated men returned home from Vietnam. There was the anti-war movement. In previous wars men were celebrated for their heroism and willingness to fight for their country. That became destabilised. Many Vietnam veterans, when they returned home, had problems of reintegration. Many felt rejected and were not given a hero’s accolade. Tacey (1997) explains that “some managed to pick up the
Of pieces of their lives, but a large number lived in a condition of nightmare and mental turmoil. This turmoil is often commented on but rarely understood” (pp. 122–123). Many Vietnam veterans have suffered from depression, low self-esteem and disorientation. Some have resorted to alcohol and drugs, while others have committed suicide. Perhaps it was the residual effect of what remained in their minds of the war experiences that could never be fully explained to anyone who had never been to Vietnam. The stressors of war and, no doubt, the moments of reflection that might have come later, perhaps have contributed to many of their own defining moments and the changes in their lives. In the current situation in Iraq soldiers are experiencing similar problems. Daily reports indicate soldiers are still being injured and killed, and there are instances of self-harm and suicide.

In contemporary business life it is noticed, too, that there are young male executives and many over-achieving professional men who are under stress. Tacey (1997) believes: “While seemingly so different from Vietnam veterans, they share with these men a profound anxiety and a feeling that they are not really ‘part’ of society” (p. 124). This raises issues of stress and whether it exists or doesn’t exist when comparing young professional and war veterans, or are there different versions of stress? He goes on to say:

Today the chosen profession or career path becomes dangerously contaminated with initiatory fervour and intensity. While tribal men ‘proved’ their worth by enduring several days of masculine testing, many modern men have to keep proving themselves in the workplace, on the sports field, or in any context where they can feel themselves moving toward the competitive edge. There is nowadays an almost terrifying burden of proof and self-validation attached to the experience of work. Work is not just a service to the community which has accepted the man as one of its own. Rather, work becomes the site of self-validation itself (p. 124).

Success, and hopefully happiness, is understood by many young professionals as having to come about through one-upmanship. Tacey (1997) explains, “one demonstrates that one is better at the task than the next guy” (p. 125). Competitiveness becomes the key. Brockes (2000) argues that office workers lead
a stressful life. For example, she tells us, “Take a close look at your colleagues. If they are eating, e-mailing or emitting a high-pitched whine in the manner of a mosquito, they are likely to be suffering from a condition that affects more than half office support workers – stress “ (p. 4).

To deal with stress by denying its existence is mentioned by Cooper and Baker (1996). Strategies such as overeating, chain smoking or drinking too much actually lead to higher levels of stress. They recommend: “What could be more useful is to find ways of dealing with stress creatively” (p. 207). They’re prescribing identification of the problem – when you’re stressed and what’s causing it – then you can begin to make positive changes.

Saunders (1997), a social psychologist, argues:

Male stress is directly related to the social and environmental upheavals that have abounded in recent decades … The men I talk to are confused about their roles, angry at perceived anomalies, uncertain for the future and resentful about what they too have lost … in the past, men’s stress came mainly from society’s expectations – men must always be strong, men must earn the daily bread, men must support all social systems and take responsibility for all failure, men must make all the decisions, men must not cry or show too much emotion, and so on (p. 26).

She admits things are changing and adds, “it will only be when you let such outworn concepts go that you will allow women to meet with you, mate with you and interact with you in the way that they’ve wanted to for generations” (pp. 26–27).

It used to be easy for males when full employment was expected, according to Cooper and Baker (1996), but times have changed. They argue when full employment was guaranteed, men had a sense of masculinity and power could be acquired from work. They explain:
Men still want their masculinity confirmed through work, but that’s no longer so easily achieved. As well as the risk of unemployment, men face job insecurity through the short-term contract, increased competition from women and the decline of the traditional heavy industries with their demand for hard physical labour (p. 211).

Townsend (1994) records what Australian males think, feel and believe, and she argues men’s work ethic is considered extremely important, “in a way that is particularly masculine” (p. 190) and if the male becomes unemployed or unemployable he becomes extremely stressed. She explains:

… in the past it may have operated as a driving force, providing an intrinsic sense of the male pride, of the male place in the community, it is now more as a subtext, a voice of conscience rather than a stated social imperative. The voice says you’re not really a man unless you’re working, that your worth is somehow less, that it is your fault. It is a voice that says that work defines you, makes you what you are, gives you a place in society and makes you a contributor (p. 190).

Stress can contribute a great deal to male students’ mental health and mental illness. Research indicates childhood victimisation is a strong predictor of later behaviour adjustment and adult disturbance (Elias and Zins, 2003). Rigby (2000), reporting on the effects of peer victimization in schools and perceived social support on adolescent well-being, states:

We may conclude that where students are known to be frequently bullied by other students, and more especially where they have little or no social support, they are at increased risk of mental illness. It seems likely that the mental health of students can be enhanced through an overall reduction in bullying in a school (p. 66).

Depression and anxiety affect up to one in five Australian adolescents – three times higher than 10 years ago, according to the 2000 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being. Yet, according to the survey, fewer than one in three gets professional help. Experts fear that until mental illness is more widely
acknowledged, and the stigma attached to counselling and prescribed drug taking removed, these adolescents will continue to flounder and seek solace in alcohol, drugs – or even suicide (2002, p. 1).

Recently Nathan Thompson, a star Hawthorn footballer, announced he has been suffering from clinical depression for a number of years. Ker and Nader (2004) report Thompson’s comments:

It is only over the past five weeks that I have sought medical treatment in addition to counselling … I hadn’t even spoken to my family about this until two weeks ago … To open up and then be able to talk about it honestly about everything has been a huge weight off my shoulders (p. 1).

Tony Shaw, Collingwood’s premiership captain, whose brother committed suicide some years ago, probably abetted by depression, said, ”If people think they have it [depression] they should not feel embarrassed about making it known to friends who love you”, as recorded by Ker and Nader (p. 1). Several days after the interviews, Wilson (2004) reported, in The Melbourne Sunday Age (Sports), “Thompson managed to demystify the stigmatic illness with his appearance” (p. 6). By having celebrities announce their own bouts with a mental illness it allows others the freedom to admit they, too, have the same condition and the stigma can be removed.

Anxiety, another mental illness, can drive people into intense fear and, for many, isolation. According to Maslen (2003), “about two million Australians suffer an anxiety disorder, and one in three may be struck by a panic attack in any one year” (p. 8). Apple and Gault (1998) define anxiety as being worry mingled with fear. They explain:

Anxiety uses up energy, as do all strong emotions … in the most severe anxiety states you lose the ability to function at all. Work and home life get neglected because either you feel too anxious to start anything or whatever you do start you are easily distracted from some other worrying job (p. 144).
A panic attack is a period of extreme discomfort accompanied by some of the following physical or cognitive symptoms:

- Palpitations
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Shortness of breath or smothering
- Feelings of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Pins and needles
- Diarrhoea
- Dry mouth
- Headache
- Derealisation or depersonalisation
- Chills or hot flushes

People commonly report a fear of losing control in some way or that they are going crazy or will die. The physical and cognitive symptoms are usually followed by a desire to escape (p. 9).

Men who are extremely anxious or deeply depressed are candidates for suicide. Apple and Gault (1998) believe suicide is not a remote risk. They say of the men who are severely depressed in the United Kingdom, five to ten per cent eventually commit suicide (p. 154). Here in Australia “more than half the 579 Victorians who committed suicide in 2000 had been diagnosed by a doctor of having a psychiatric disorder” (p. 4), according to research from the Victorian State Coroner’s Officer Annette Graham (2002). The report indicated that improved treatments could cut the suicide rates,

… but it was equally important to look at issues such as housing, work and financial support for patients in the mental health system. … the number of young people suffering from mental illness while using drugs such as marijuana and amphetamines had escalated (p. 4).

Ramsey et al. (1999) explain that being under stress is significant when it is felt by an individual with a mental disorder: “with problems in coping, a person with a mental disorder may be less equipped or able to deal with life’s stresses. The disorder itself represents a significant loss – the loss of mental health” (p. 42).

Webb (1998) asserts that male suicide has become “a particularly male solution to crises in times of transition and re-establishment of the self and its relationship to the world” (p. 197). He considers male suicide a male mystery which he explains
as a “problem that is uniquely ours as men, and we need to be interrogating ourselves about it in order to be better equipped to confront and inspect it” (p. 197).

Self-harm, according to Gardner (2002) is often misinterpreted as a suicide attempt, and is a deliberate action to inflict pain to their own body because they feel they need to and afterwards they believe they can cope better. Although boys do harm themselves, adolescent girls are seven times more likely to injure themselves as a cry for help. It seems to be brought about through low self-esteem and a deep sense of being unworthy. Ramsey et al. (1999) report females tend to ingest drugs and medication that have a less immediate effect, allowing time for rescue or for the person to change her mind, whereas males tend to use firearms (p. 24). In a summary report of a seminar, Aspects of Youth Suicide (1997), sponsored by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, it was reported:

For every completed suicide there are many attempts … hospital statistics show that for every death resulting from suicide, there are ten admissions to hospital for attempted suicide. Even this result under represents attempted suicides, as many are not admitted nor seek help (p. 5).

Margo (1996) reports, “Researchers have turned men belly-up and exposed a long-hidden phenomenon … that many men who think their behaviour is quite normal are in fact behaving quite pathologically” (p. 229). “At some point in their lives, more than 30 per cent of Australian men experience alcoholism” (p. 230). Jorm (1995), research psychologist and editor of Men and Mental Health with The National Health and Medical Research Council produced a report on male mental health and indicated that alcohol abuse was the major problem. Younger males are also experiencing this trend; binge drinking, in particular, is a popular pastime for young men. Margo (1996) argues that when depressed, men tend to become more reckless and take risks - some drink more and then race their cars and are involved in accidents. Males’ mental health problems have become more pronounced in recent years. Margo disclosed more information about boys and mental health:
In childhood, boys have double the prevalence of mental health disturbance because they act out, or ‘externalise’, their problems, usually with aggressive, antisocial or under-controlled behaviour. The antisocial behaviour boys display carries through into adulthood; men end up breaking the law more often and comprise 95 per cent of the prison population (pp. 230–231).

With the recent statistics-announcing males breaking laws, being imprisoned, displaying antisocial behaviour and some suffering depression it indicates a need for intervention and new counselling approaches. Kosky, Eshkevari and Kneebone (1992) report that for every suicide of young males there are fifteen attempted suicides. They indicate “depression is common and central to the suicidal behaviour. Chronic family discord, substance abuse and the experience of loss are important factors” (p. 90) in recognising suicide ideation. They also acknowledge that adolescents in custody and on remand have symptoms of emotional and behavioural disorders. “The symptom levels reported by the detained adolescents were similar to those reported by adolescents attending the city’s public psychiatric services” (p. 129). The problems of delinquents with emotional or behavioural disorders are actually showing up in other adolescents. This information set the alarm of urgency in promoting new counselling and educational techniques. Kosky, Eshkevan and Kneebone (1992) inform us that these recalcitrant/incarcerated male adolescents are handicapped in several dimensions: personal, cultural and social.

They have inadequate family support; they have not learnt appropriate social skills and are poorly educated; and they have little to offer the labour market. Most are unemployed, and many are retarded educationally and have cognitive handicaps. Most have had experiences of hostility and rejection during childhood, and have grown up lacking a sense of worth and acceptance … Many have emotional disorders … are subject to anxiety, depression and self-destructive impulses – all of which may contribute to their inability to learn and mature and, in turn, contribute to their dire social situation and propensity to repeatedly offend (pp. 131–132).
Many males in their search for security in contemporary times and the demands of society are experiencing isolation and loneliness. Often men experience complicity – they rarely reach out for companionship and they rarely get in touch with their own feelings. The work of Moustakas (1961) is valuable here. He believes loneliness is a phenomenon that is ever present. He has written extensively in the area of men’s loneliness and tells us that the loneliness of modern life may be considered in two ways:

… the existential loneliness which inevitably is a part of human experience, and the loneliness of self-alienation and self-rejection which is not loneliness at all but a vague and disturbing anxiety. Existential loneliness is an intrinsic and organic reality of human life in which there is both pain and triumphant creation emerging out of long periods of desolation. In existential loneliness man is fully aware of himself as an isolated and solitary individual while in loneliness anxiety [self-alienation and self-rejection] man is separated from himself as a feeling and knowing person (p. 24).

In a more recent discussion of loneliness, Titmuss (2003) argues, vulnerability is the challenge in experiencing loneliness. He explains:

It is quite possible to feel cut off and alienated, and unable to think of a single person to contact. The greater the desire for a social life or companionship, the greater the degree of loneliness … This desire for closeness, perhaps for friendship, communication or sexual intimacy with another, brings a kind of anguish and frustration, even self-blame … The strength of this experience of loneliness can become very intense (p. 97).

In the Australian context, popular writers such as Biddulph (1994) have picked up on the concept of loneliness explaining that men’s problems are with isolation and loneliness, and they are some of men’s greatest enemies. He argues that men experience loneliness and confusion – “not knowing how to be comfortable with one’s feelings or how to be close to others” (p. 13) and this makes males feel isolated and alone. He asserts, “the loneliness of men is something women rarely
understand” (p. 13). According to Wilson (1990) single fathers, in particular, have expressed their feelings of personal loneliness as significant in terms of “the absence of emotional support or physical comfort” (p. 86).

Males experience stress – physical, emotional and mental. Stress manifests itself in different ways; it comes in different forms. It’s been noted as a genuine problem in schools, in the workplace and it affects all ages. There has been a rise in mental illness – boys, in particular, are affected by it. It’s one of the reasons why males regress to self-harm, aggression and violence. There is an urgent need to be much more attuned to stress in males and the symptoms of stress. As teachers, parents and counsellors we need to know that stress is a potent problem in schools – and we are concerned here with its impact on boys.

2.7 Intervention Programs

There is a wide range of health problems for contemporary males as reported by Brewer (1995) who adds, “Male health desperately needs improving” (xiv). Examples of those concerned include community concerns such as the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and school approaches to the problems. There are health intervention programs presented to educate younger and older men concerning prostate problems. It seems that many older men do not seek help. They actually close themselves off. It’s one of the variables previously talking about – how men respond badly to these situations. They don’t call out for help. It appears that they’d rather have their heart attack quietly on their own than seek out help, and admit that they’re struggling. So there has been a number of programs that have been implemented in our communities and in our schools that have actually tried to address these issues.

There has been a range of intervention phases utilized in response to school and community issues. Currently there are at least four approaches that focus on helping males with their problems. The first one is being able to admit there is a problem. This, in itself, is quite often a problem for males because they don’t verbalise their feelings. Druck (1985) argues:
By choosing to go the way of concealment rather than that of openness, we men have too often brought upon ourselves sickness, misunderstanding and self-alienation. We have had to pay a stiff price for the right to ‘be a man’ (p. 32).

It is now widely recognised that many males need support in dealing with emotional content. Part of dealing effectively with emotions involves being able to talk about them. Cooper and Baker (1996) argue that men tend to discuss technical things or facts rather than feelings or experiences in that deeper personal level, and their learning seems to be more about things rather than functions of themselves. When an individual stops denying that he has a problem and reaches a stage when he admits to having a problem, then he is at the point of making changes.

Specific organisations have been flourishing for years in helping individuals with their problems, Alcoholics Anonymous being a prominent one. Using strategies based on disclosure and trust males learn to recognise that they’re not alone. These approaches have been very successful. Males tend to be more willing to participate in expressing their problems and even admitting there is a problem.

Intervention strategy one allows males to get in touch with their feelings. One way is suggested by Sheehy (1998) who uses ‘connecting’ as an approach men can take in getting in touch with their emotions. She explains:

Connecting means being open to both giving and receiving –from the heart, not just from the head. It means being willing simply to listen to and empathize with a spouse, not always trying to fix whatever may be wrong; being able to show a male friend how much you care and being able to accept his affection; developing an ear actually to hear the feeling being expressed beneath the words used by an adult child or an employee to express their needs or frustrations. Connecting to nature, to music, to the spiritual dimension, tuning in to his own subtle intuitions –these are all ways in which a man can enrich his inner life and render himself less and less on external valuation (p. 148).
Men need to recognise that their insecurities are real and not just expressions of male weakness. This is a more rational approach to the issues involved. They do suffer from stress, anxiety and relationship problems and a host of other issues. Men’s issues need to be seen as normal. This approach for men to become aware of their emotions and express themselves is the normalising process, an important part of the psycho-educational approach in helping males make changes in their lives. If a man realizes that his attitudes and behaviours are common, and that other people feel the same, then he can either talk to other people about how they cope with their problems or read about it, but he is also not left with the feeling that he’s inadequate because it is happening – it happens to everybody. Or, he might try to ignore his behaviour or try to rationalize it, perhaps saying, “It’s somebody else’s fault”. The normalizing process involves breaking down that isolation and that perceived weakness for having emotions and feelings. In a similar fashion, peer support programs have been organised in some schools to help individual students with their problems. Hickey and Boyer (2002) indicate that these “programs seek to decentre the adult authority figure in the process of providing support for young people experiencing difficulties” (p. 19).

The second type of intervention is getting males just to say ‘No’ to the problem or issue. There’s been a thrust through intervention programs to just say ‘No’ to drugs, alcohol and other addictions. It’s a rational behaviour to be able to say ‘No, I mustn’t do that. That’s bad for me’. This approach has been prevalent through school programs and there have been advertising campaigns sponsored by the government. Certain church groups also practice intervention techniques for males using a more punitive approach. For some, saying ‘No’ seems too simplistic, but through assertiveness training young people can learn to become assertive. Also, the TAC has looked at male youth and road trauma. Different programs, including those supplied through community education, have been presented to help young males to be more aware of the risks they’re taking when they ignore road safety rules and speed limits.

Harm minimisation, the third type of approach to intervention, is rife through health education. Schools realise students experiment with drugs, sex and alcohol and they’re attempting to give them the resources to carefully minimize harm. Pro-active measures are being employed in schools to try to prevent problems. Harm
minimisation then becomes psycho-educational by giving young people information and giving them a choice.

Some drug and alcohol users get help through motivational interviewing as explained by Miller and Rollnick (1991), “the first phase involves building motivation for change” (p. 113). With some individuals the amount of time to become motivated to change takes longer than with others. Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross (1992) devised a cyclical model of change showing movement between the stages in a drug-alcohol intervention program. A person may begin the cycle at any stage. According to Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross the stages of change are: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, treatment, maintenance and relapse (depending on the strength of the original resolution).

Levine (1993) suggests another approach to intervention known as My Caring Intervention that was developed from the intervention program (abstinence) used in AA’s twelve-step system as described by Dr. Vernon Johnson in *I’ll Quit Tomorrow* (1980).

Johnson explains that each person who participates in helping their friend should know him and care about him. Those who have been heavy drinkers should offer their stories and be willing to develop a plan for changing the behaviour of their friend. The best time to intervene is when the problem becomes life threatening. Although the teenager with the problem may not be convinced that help is needed, the teacher, parent or counsellor needs to be with him at the right time to give support.

A fourth approach to intervention can be activated as a form of surveillance. This has been on the increase in the past few years. Even the use of cameras where youths congregate is a form of intervention. Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross consider this maintenance or support group. Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous are two prominent groups. Fletcher and other men’s groups participate in this type of approach to intervention. Many of these programs use combinations of these intervention programs approaches.
Smith and Sharp (1994) present a variety of intervention programs relating to bullying, some more successful than others:

… there is considerable evidence of success in the actions of schools against bullying, though this varies greatly between schools and takes a somewhat different form in primary and secondary schools. If primary schools put effort into policy development and anti-bullying work, this will be perceived by pupils. Pupils will soon perceive a change in general bullying, and self-report levels will fall especially when all staff are involved in the work. In secondary schools, staff involvement and general effort will first have an impact on the willingness of bullied pupils to seek help from a teacher. Also, school action will be noticed by pupils, and they will consider that general levels of bullying are falling (p. 55).

Ramsay et al. (1999), linking to the case for timely intervention, use the following checklist for suicide intervention:

Estimate their level of risk. Attend to their pain and distress. Work with them to promote their immediate safety. Address and contain those aspects of the current situation affecting health and safety. Facilitate links with family, friends and professional help. Offer ongoing support yourself - complementing that offered by others (p. 74).

We must learn to recognize the timing for intervention, though. For instance, if you’re talking to school boys and young men’s groups about risk taking, stress and anxiety many will be disinterested because they’re not experiencing any of those problems at the moment. If you know when they’re feeling the pain or discomfort, and you know they’re in some sort of ‘moment’ in their lives, then that’s the time when they’re ready for help.
2.8 Complexities of Change: Insights and Perspectives

Intervention brings about change involving all the complexities that go with this process. Change is not always rational. Fay (1987) presents a scaffold to be able to think about the limits to rational change. He argues:

… through rational analysis and reflection people can come to an understanding of themselves and can re-order their collective existences on the basis of this understanding. Reason can tell them who they really are; and the power generated by reflection can be the means by which they alter their identities and their social arrangements (p. 143).

For the individual male who considers change in his personal life and behaviour, a number of requirements is usually part of the process. First, there has to be a desire for change and the belief that change is available and possible. The first strategy is through education – the rational. [Example: ‘It’s alright for boys to talk about …’.] As well as having the commitment, the individual must also know how to commence the process of change – a self-improvement book, joining a special group, and/or seeking help. They must know how to enact it – ‘I’m under stress, so are other people, too’, etc. They need to alleviate it. The second strategy is to support the change when the catalyst is at its greatest. We’re not saying we shouldn’t bother going around educating males, the TAC doesn’t matter, etc. – they do educate males. The help must be timely, however. The teacher, parent, counsellor or other responsible person needs to be aware of the male who is considering change and be timely with the help and support.

Multiple intervention programs have been discussed, particularly in the males’ adolescent years. There’s much financial support going into intervention, including concentration on peer group involvement. Change, however, isn’t necessarily going to be straightforward. It’s any wonder no one intervention works or is appropriate for everyone. We can be doing much more with the timing of our intervention strategies. To bring about change and alleviate feelings of anxiety, stress or despair we must intervene when the emotion is there, and not rely on some rational message that may have been given earlier. It’s not all rational. So education
campaigns about getting groups to sit down to talk about bullying and all sorts of issues certainly go some of the way. Yes, they can be enlightening and they can help boys. But, there’s also this level of the non-rational that requires the time when the problem or issue is actually being experienced.

Although intervention strategies can be presented at the ‘right time’, it is still the responsibility of the individual to make the appropriate changes. Change is difficult for some men. The problematic of change makes it a slow process. What I’m suggesting is intervening at the right moment – timing is crucial. In the interest of maximising the potential for change, males need first, to know they can change and second, the support to change when the catalyst is at its greatest. Intervene when the crucial moment is happening. It’s not just a case of realising a change needs to be made, and, simply changing things overnight, but getting the timing right can be a valuable tool in helping males work through their problems.

There is some optimism being felt by all those who work with males regarding opportunities becoming available for changes in attitudes toward maleness and masculinity. According to Denborough (1996), males are beginning to feel more comfortable in expressing their feelings and accepting of multiple masculinities. He does admit, however, “adult men must begin to take responsibility for ending men’s violence and creating new positive masculinities” (p. 87) and “if we are to significantly reduce men’s violence, men need to begin to forge new, non-oppressive masculinities in a multitude of sites and cultures (p. 88). One approach has been through Sydney Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) that is offering women and men an opportunity to work together with young people on issues relating to violence and gender. Within this program adolescent males are being given the opportunity to discuss gender issues and dominant gender messages. White (1992) labels these opportunities as opening up and operating on a “landscape of consciousness” (p. 87). By being given the chance to voice their resistance to dominant gender messages they are gaining empowerment to explore their own identities. Griem as and Court es (1976), therapists who proposed that all client ‘stories’ exist in a dual landscape, coined the expressions ‘landscape of action’ and ‘landscape of consciousness’. As explained by White (1992):
The first is the landscape upon which events unfold; the context into which events must be plotted in order to be rendered meaningful or significant. The landscape of consciousness is the landscape that represents the inner world of the protagonists in the story, and includes what they felt, thought and perceived, and the realizations and conclusions arrived at in relation to the developments unfolding in the landscape of action (p. 87).

It’s okay to operate a landscape of consciousness; however, it’s important there is a rational part. But there’s another part of it that is working down at these non-rational levels. Landscapes of action are a little more difficult. This is where Fay (1987) would put it. The rational must intersect with the internal and external forces that work to keep things as they are. What’s being disclosed is there is less evidence about landscapes of action and how they operate. When the time is right and when these males need help, we need to be on the lookout to give support during these moments and incidences. Timeliness is the important ingredient.

Ultimately, everyone needs to keep an eye out for these moments. Intervention has to be timely. It’s the responsibility of peers working with each other, the responsibility of parents working with each other and it’s the responsibility of teachers to work with each other to help males work through their problems. It requires vigilance on behalf of all concerned to keep an eye on males going through and experiencing these important moments.
Chapter Three: Problems and Responses Locating the Defining Moment

3.1 Introduction

The empirical dimension of this research is based on six adult men’s stories they tell of their life experiences that have been constructed around the defining moments in their lives. This can be strategic and analytic data in understanding males better and in being able to work with them more effectively as educators, parents, counsellors and therapists. I’ve drawn on narrative approaches where participants have told their stories as a way of capturing defining moments.

In my pursuit of a methodology that could accommodate the aims of this study, I explored the process of meaning through the qualitative paradigm that recognises individuality. Drawing on the principles of qualitative research, as applied through narrative inquiry, I deployed a semi-structured interview format to collect the lived experiences of the participants. As explained by Kvale (1996) “it is neither strictly structured with standardized questions, nor entirely ‘non-directive’” (p. 124). By privileging the stories that individuals tell of their experiences, the narrative method recognises that data are inexorably located in the contextual and contingent. The experiences and narratives that are presented in this thesis are built around the authentic voices of the six participants.

Selection of participants was based on males who had undergone some sort of crisis. I was looking for adult males who would be cooperative, dependable and willing to participate in a sequence of four interviews. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Reading through the transcriptions I interpreted their stories, featuring their defining moments. Drawing on my experiences as an interviewer, personal notes played a role in preparing the stories of their lives. Personal notes were recorded during the interviews, and then time was spent afterwards writing observations of the participant and his behaviour during the interview.

As an overview of this chapter, I will begin with a discussion of qualitative research and how it is framed, what the practices of qualitative research need to be
and the sorts of methods that are advocated. I will then take up my use of the narrative approach to the representation of data, and the meaning activated in stories and how stories represent people’s lives. It’s the stories they tell of their lives that is their reality, in a sense, and how I use that approach and the principles of it. Then I will talk about the organisation of this study, I’ll introduce the participants and explain how they were selected, and discuss the ethical considerations that were going on. Finally I will talk about the interviews, how many and where they were done. There were guiding themes and foci on particular themes. Prior to the initial interview the participants were asked to complete an information sheet (See Appendix 3) to be used in conjunction with the first interview.

3.2 Qualitative Research

The personalisation of methodology is important in recognising that we all have different and varying perspectives of the world. Gough (2000) explains, “The researcher you are is the person you are. By reflecting on what guides your actions it is possible to determine what methodology will most likely guide your research activity” (p. 6, original italics). Put simply, Gough suggests that there is not one methodology that is necessarily better than any other. My choice of methodology is based on my understanding of the world, which includes social and physical ascriptions. Therefore, I am part of the methodology I choose. To this end, I acknowledge my textual authority in the process of meaning making. After all, it is I who chose the participants, conducted the interviews, and analysed and interpreted the data. McLaren (1992) explains the researcher can never be neutral. You become a part of the study because you are the one who selects what to include and what to exclude, and how it’s represented. The researcher is inherent in any research. You cannot step outside of yourself to pretend that you’re neutral. McLaren (1992) recognises, also, that meaning is inseparable from language and interpretation. His argument is for a critical ethnography that recognises power differential; there are no grand truths: they are actually shifts across time. He believes that reality is not straightforward and stable, and has to be interpreted through the researcher/interviewer.
While planning the specific approaches to data collection that I intended to utilise in this research, I was influenced by Tesch (1990) and her analysis of texts within qualitative research. She compiled a list of forty-six terms social scientists use to name their own versions of qualitative research. She admits, however, that the list is not only too long, but some terms overlap, some are synonyms and even the conceptual levels are not the same. Pivotal among these were the core issues of forced groupings and that qualitative research is conducted differently depending on the scholar’s particular field of interest in the social sciences. Her own definition is “qualitative data is any information the researcher gathers that is not expressed in numbers” (p. 55).

It is noted by Josselson and Lieblich (1995) that “There is a profusion of books published on qualitative research today, and sources appear to expand exponentially each year” (p. 21). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recognise the complex nature of qualitative research and the representation of meaning/reality and arrived at their statement defining qualitative research: “it is precisely because the matter is so involved that it is not possible to provide a simple definition” (p. 8). They do say, however, that qualitative research is naturalistic. Robinson and Hawpe (1986) consider narrative thinking as a heuristic process stating, “stories are a means for interpreting or reinterpreting events by constructing a causal pattern which integrates that which is known about an event as well as that which is conjectural but relevant to an interpretation” (p. 112). And, finally, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) state:

Qualitative methods give researchers a broad range of choices, and they make clear that researchers bring to research assumptions that will eventually impact its process and results. Because of all of the ontological, epistemological and methodological options available to researchers, qualitative research is an exciting terrain. (p. 13)

Although no single methodology can master all the subtle and discerning variations in human experience, given my interest in capturing and representing the defining moments of various men, I needed a research methodology that would allow me to project their stories and reveal their authentic voices. The qualitative approach gives license to the lived experiences and recognises individuality. It offers a deep
insight into a relatively few cases, rather than a little bit of data into massive cases. Narrative as a research methodology “has become common for researchers and scholars … as a framework for understanding the construction of knowledge in relation to lived experiences,” (Kamler, 1998, p. 3). She explains, “stories do not tell single truths, but rather represent a truth, a perspective, a particular way of seeing experience and naming it. Stories are partial, they are located rather than universal, they are a representation of experience rather than the same thing as experience itself” (p. 3).

Of course, qualitative research is not without its problems. Traditional forms of ethnography assume that, with clarity and precision, researchers can record observations of the social world as a way of accurately representing the experiences of others. It is believed, also, that a real subject or individual is able, in some form, to report on their own experiences. From a slightly different point of view, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that researchers have blended “their own observations with the self-reports provided by subjects through interviews and life story, personal experience, case study and other documents” (p. 18). Qualitative researchers have merged these beliefs to search for a method that can focus in on the human disciplines in qualitative, interpretative methods. There is, however, controversy with the argument that no one method can acknowledge all the variations in human experience. Hence, “qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretative methods, always seeking better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience they have studied” (p. 19), according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000). This is their explanation:

Poststructuralists and postmodernists have contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why. No single method can grasp all of the subtle variations in ongoing human experiences (p. 19).
Denzin and Lincoln (2000) mention a whole range of methods of collection and analysis of qualitative research including observing, autoethnography, computer-assisted analysis, interviewing and focus groups (p. 20). One of the very common methods is the interview as a way of collecting data. Interviewing offers a ‘storying’ approach. It recognises that people tell their own stories of their lives and how they live it. They, the participants, use stories in the form of data and it gives me, the researcher, a medium for retelling their stories by representing them in narrative form.

Since Dewey’s Experience and Nature lectures delivered in 1925 there has been much discussion and controversy relating to quantitative and qualitative modes of research. Sherman and Webb (1988) argue that Dewey maintained, “all inquiry arises out of actual, or qualitative, life. That is the environment in which humans are directly (their italics) involved” (p. 12). Dewey (1958) believed it is the qualitative life of anything useful and enjoyable, whether it be an activity, product or object in the world in which an individual lives. He stated that the qualitative search is the individual’s direct experience and that inquiry is enveloped in a value context. Central to his work is the idea of a problem, and this problem combines both theory and practice.

The qualitative paradigm accepts the partial and contingent nature of human existence. It looks at things more specifically; the reality is that it is dependent on the contingent. Interestingly, if someone else were conducting the interview with the selected participants, it is possible that they might get different versions of reality from the participants because their reality is not fixed.

What had meaning for me was the analysis completed by Sherman and Webb (1988) who described what they consider the key characteristics of qualitative research. They alert qualitative researchers of the need to study subjects in their natural settings in order to attempt to capture and interpret their (their italics) experiences and their stories. Inherent in their description of the qualitative research paradigm is the demand that researcher’s “aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it” (p. 7). Attributes ascribed to qualitative research include an inductive process in which
themes project through data analysis gathered by interviews, observations and case studies (Erickson, 1986; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004).

In my pursuit of a methodology that could accommodate the aims of this study, I explored the process of meaning making through the qualitative research paradigm. Meaning, according to Todorov (1994) is created through the process of changing experience into a dialogical text with other texts and contexts. Brown (1994) adds to this discussion “a text becomes an intertextual network … there is not one privileged meaning but many meanings and many voices” (p. 233). This intertextual network, according to Iser (1987), is “a kind of juncture, where other texts, norms and values meet and work upon each other” (p. 219).

Thompkins (1993), on meaning, suggests, “the use of a word in one context, in one language game – one socially accepted, tacitly rule-regulated usage – bears no necessary relation to its meaning in any other” (p. 49). In his discussion of meaning, Carspecken (2000) recommends that the researcher “record body language carefully because the meaning of an action is not in the language, it is rather in the action and the actor’s bodily states” (pp. 300–301). Huntingford (1993) explains that “attention to detail and sequence required in any systematic observation can transform the pedestrian into the intriguing” (p. 126). Although the research was basically to gather information about defining moments, it was obvious that my work would include simple observations of the participants in an unobtrusive way. Some of the unobtrusive observations I had at my disposal included exterior physical signs, expressive movements, physical location and dlanguage behaviour.

Richardson (2000) encourages researchers to explore their own processes and preferences through writing as a method of inquiry in qualitative research. She argues that, “writing from our Selves (her capitalisation) should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individual voices within it, because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged” (p. 924). “In the wake of feminist and postmodernist critiques of traditional qualitative writing practices, qualitative work has been appearing in new forms; genres are blurred, jumbled”, argues Richardson (2004). She explains:
I think of them as *experimental representations* (her italics). Because experiments are experimental, it is difficult to specify their conventions. One practice these experiments have in common, however, is the *violation of prescribed conventions* (her italics); they transgress the boundaries of social science writing genres … experimental writers raise and display postmodernist issues. Chief among these are questions of how the author positions the Self as a knower and teller … the Self is always present … working with that premise, we are freed to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and retell. There is no such thing as ‘getting it right,’ only ‘getting it’ differently contoured and nuanced (p. 480).

Finally, in my research I am reminded continuously of the words of Walker (1991), one of my former doctoral supervisors, “The task of research is to make sense of what we know” (p. 107).

### 3.2.1 Interviews

In the quest to develop narratives of defining moments in men’s lives, the interview method seemed the best technique to employ. The principles of narrative were guiding me in the construction, presentation and application of the interviews. It was my intention to interview participants in order to obtain descriptions of their lived experiences – including their defining moments – with respect to interpreting their worlds and why, how, when, and where they existed in their own big (or little) reality.

The interview is, of course, a conversation with purpose and structure. Kvale (1996) explains that the research interview “is literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest (original italics, p. 2). It “is not a conversation between equal partners because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The topic is introduced by the researcher who also critically follows up on the subject’s answers to his questions” (p. 6). He argues, the focus on qualitative interviews “may in part be due to the correspondence of themes central to current philosophy and to the qualitative interview, such as experience, meaning, life world, conversation, dialogue, narrative and language” (p. 11). Miller and Crabtree (2004) believe:
The interview is better conceptualised as a special type of partnership and communicative performance or event. It is not political oratory, storytelling, rap, a lecture, a small group seminar or a clinical encounter. Rather, it is a conversational research journey with its own rules of the road (p. 187).

Carspecken (1996) believes the most effective way to use qualitative interviews is for research participants to tell their own subjective experiences. He suggests that the researcher encourages them “to begin at a concrete level where a specific action situation is recalled and then to work toward articulations of interpretative schema that the subject applies in many diverse situations (p. 39). Freebody (2003) argues it then becomes the researcher’s responsibility to “develop a rigorous way of documenting these accounts while staying close to the actual raw material of the interview transcripts” (p. 155).

Although participants are retelling their stories in the way they perceived them, their own recounting is their objective reality. I am reminded of the motion picture film *Great Expectations*, based on Dickens’ novel. Pip, the orphan, narrates the story and prefaces the recounting by explaining that what colour conjures up in memory depends on the day. He wouldn’t tell the story the way it necessarily happened, but would tell it the way he remembered it. In considering specific issues of validity and reliability in the use of interviews, Bryman (2001) summarises them as intra-personal and interpersonal. Intra-personal issues are those based on bias, when the interviewer hears only what he wants to hear, or those fabrications by the participant. Interpersonal issues may arise between interviewer and participant if there is therapeutically based transference.

As described by Kvale (1996), he outlines the mode of understanding in the qualitative research interview as a specific form of conversation. The purpose is to obtain descriptions of the participants’ lived world with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena. For example, he explains, “The interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as how it is said (p. 30); and “the process so being interviewed may produce new insights and
awareness, and the subject may in course of the interview come to change his or her descriptions and meanings about a theme” (p. 31). The researcher is reminded by Goodson (1991) that the authenticity of the participant’s account of his past experiences must be retained and defended. He explains:

… to do this such problems of lapsed memory or partial or selective recall must be faced. We only get a part of the picture, to be sure a vital part, but we need to push for more of the picture, more bits of the jigsaw (p. 135).

Although Kvale (1996) tells us that the interview is not a conversation between partners, I concentrated on balancing the ‘power’ in the relationship between researcher and participant in order to have the research subjects make sense and give meaning to their experiences and defining moments. I consciously concentrated on reducing the power differential between the interviewer and the interviewee by insuring that the participants felt comfortable in this type of situation and environment. I gave them my full attention by listening to them and what they were saying. It was important to me to be one hundred percent attentive. I did this by employing careful listening strategies whereby I showed genuine interest in what they were saying. We spent ten or more minutes at the start of each interview in a rather general discussion. I offered them a drink and a comfortable chair. I asked them if they were comfortable. I tried to break down the power differential. We sat in chairs that were exactly the same. Four of the six had been in my lounge room before since they had been counselling clients and were already comfortable in this environment. One participant sat on the floor with his arm on the coffee table. Mishler (1986) believes this approach encourages the participants “to find and speak in their own ‘voices’” and “one of the significant ways through which individuals make sense of and give meaning to their experiences is to organize them in a narrative form” (p. 118). He continues:

Interviewing practices that empower respondents also produce narrative accounts. There is, however, an additional implication of empowerment. Through their narratives, people may be moved beyond the text to the possibilities of action. That is, to be empowered is not only to speak in one’s own voice and to tell one’s own story, but to
apply the understanding arrived at to action in accord with one’s own interests (p. 119).

The research relationship, as noted by Hogan (1988), shows that “empowerment relationships develop over time and … involve feelings of ‘connectedness’ that are developed in situations of equality, caring and mutual purpose and intention” (p. 12). In light of this understanding of empowerment relationships, I opted for a semi-structured approach to the interviews whereby I would initially work with the participants by giving them a list of some questions I would be asking about their defining moments across various aspects of their lives. These questions describe or break down the stages that I would talk about and I used this as a scaffold for accessing their understanding of the interview sessions.

When you conduct a good interview, Eisner (1991) explains, it is similar to participating in a good discussion. The interviewer is “listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings rather than on abstract speculations, which are less likely to provide genuinely meaningful information” (p. 183). Participating in a good discussion also means giving full attention and showing empathic listening. Empathic listening is an understood necessary expectation in qualitative interviewing. As early as the 1960’s, Rogers (1961), who was a pioneer in developing an open, client-centred interview format and had the insight that all interviewing implies a sense of direction, and who is still considered an authority, explained empathic listening:

If I can listen to what he can tell me, if I can understand how it seems to him (sic), if I can see its personal meaning for him, if I can sense the emotional flavour which it has for him, then I will be releasing potent forces change in him. We know from our research that such empathic understanding – understanding with a person, not about him, is such an effective approach that it can bring about major changes in personality (p. 332, his italics).

In gaining the best interviews possible pertaining to men’s defining moments it has become quite obvious how important listening is. Davies (1993) reminds us, “I have since come to believe that the greatest gift one person can give another is such
careful listening. It is in hearing with care the detailed specificity of the other that the specificity of each of us is made possible” (p. xiii).

Empathy is a crucial part of good listening. Mackay (1994) adheres to ten laws of human communication that are not particularly new or unique, but when viewed collectively one feels the dynamic impact of the message. For example, the first law of human communication is, “It’s not what our message does to the listener, but what the listener does with our message that determines our success as communicators” (p. 172). Several of the other laws were particularly informative in setting up interview processes. In particular, I followed his laws of “listeners generally interpret messages in ways which make them feel comfortable and secure” (p. 25); and “people are more likely to listen to us if we also listen to them” (p. 157).

In their discussion of empathy, Bohart and Greenberg (1997) conclude:

Empathy is primarily kindliness, global understanding, and tolerant acceptance of the client’s feelings and frame of reference. The therapist shows that he or she recognizes what the client is feeling. He or she also recognizes that it makes sense that the client feels as he or she does given his or her perspective on the situation (p. 13).

Hand in hand with receptive listening is reflective listening as an important component of interviewing. Barrett-Lennard (1988) argues that reflective listening is a requirement for receptive listening:

Sensitive, non-judgemental, empathic listening, which leads to the experience of being deeply understood, helps to open inner channels and serves as a powerful bridge to others. By being clearly and distinctly heard around some acute but unclear concern, we hear or see ourselves more clearly, and often with less fear…We realize we are not alone at the moment of understanding and are freshly aware of what this is like. If this understanding recurs, our sharing can develop a self-propelling quality (p. 419).
Kvale (1996) reminds us, “the interview is the raw material for the later process of meaning analysis. The quality of the original interview is decisive for the quality of the later analysis, verification, and reporting of the interview” (p. 144). The interviewer attempts to verify his (sic) interpretations of the subject’s answers in the course of the interview.

Because of the nature of ‘defining moments’ interviewing, it is necessary to be aware of traumatic situations and experiences of the participants. Frank (1995) explains:

One of the most difficult duties as human beings is to listen to the voices of those who suffer. The voices of the ill are easy to ignore, because these voices are often faltering in tones and mixed in message, particularly in their spoken form before some editor has rendered them fit for reading by the healthy. These voices bespeak conditions of embodiment that most of us would rather forget our own vulnerability. Listening is hard, but it is also a fundamental moral act; to realize the best potential in post-modern times requires the ethics of listening … in listening for the other, we listen for ourselves. The moment of witness … crystallizes a mutuality of need, which each is for (his italics) the other (p. 25).

In preparing for the interviews it became important for me to recognise that in the narrative principle reality exists with each individual; there is no absolute reality. Reality is conveyed in the stories each subject tells. My role as a researcher, then, was how I explain it back to the reader; therefore, it is not about what is right or wrong. So in my narrative approach, although represented by me, reality exists with the interviewee, and it is conveyed in my stories that will be limited by such things as language. We work with the story to remake another story. It is not like saying, ‘That story’s wrong’ – you actually use that story as a basis for making new stories.

3.2.1.1 Corroborative data

Complementing the interviews was a number of supplementary data collection strategies. The respective participants embraced these additional strategies,
including personal notes, the twenty-word-list philosophy and Reiner’s (1978) special writing techniques.

3.2.1.2 Personal notes

My work included observations of the participants as they were interviewed in an unobtrusive way. Some of the unobtrusive observations I had at my disposal included participants’ expressive movements, exterior physical signs, physical location and language behaviours. During the interviews I noted exterior physical signs that included clothing, hairstyle, jewellery and their houses (for interviews not carried out at my residence). Expressive movements pertained to body movements, such as posture, eyes, face and features (smiling, frowning, etc.). Stress and anxiety behaviour were also noted.

3.2.1.3 Twenty-word-list philosophy

The idea for the 20-word list ‘philosophy’ originated in an approach to journal writing introduced by Rainer (1978). When I taught Autobiography and Journal Writing at a small regional tertiary institute during the middle and late 1980’s, I altered the ‘list’ approach to a 20-word list which usually developed into the writer’s own philosophy. Hence, the ‘philosophy’ was an assignment given to the participants during the initial interview to be completed before the final interview. I requested the philosophies as a supplement to become a small part of each narrative. The intent was to offer more information about the participants. The instructions for this type of writing are included in Appendix 4.

3.2.1.4 Rainer’s special writing techniques

To enhance the narratives I suggested that each participant read Rainer’s special writing techniques that she referred to in her journal writing. All participants were given photocopied material of the principles of her approach, and how it could be used, and how it might help them in giving more definition to their story and supplement the research data. Rainer (1978) discusses the four diary devices and seven special techniques she prescribes in using a journal for self-guidance and expanded creativity. Of her seven special techniques some of my participants utilised her material in discussing their defining moments. In several cases I did suggest that they write something specific. Those selected by some of the participants were map of consciousness, guided imagery and dialogue.
Several of the participants gave very vivid explanations of some of their experiences and defining moments. I felt that Rainer’s map of consciousness was an effective way to express these events. To tap into the inner consciousness free drawings are used, called a map of consciousness. It is a graphic image of what is in a person’s mind. Rainer calls it a meditative process because the person relaxes and “without intent allow the pen to move where it will on the page. You let your hand lead the drawing and see what it makes as it goes” (p. 83). She explains:

Maps of consciousness can take you into the dynamics of your personality. Making images of the self and coming to understand them may signal the beginning of release from confusion and conflict. Free-intuitive drawings come to the rescue to express feelings when words have failed (p. 87).

One of my participants, Andrew Bosley, spent a great part of his second interview talking about a particular incident that involved being rejected and bullied by his peers in junior high school. Because he found it such a traumatic experience, I requested him to draw a map of consciousness relating to it and brought it with him for his next session (see p. 116).

Guided imagery is another example of Rainer’s writing techniques and it taps into feelings, intuition and images - the right side of the brain. It is similar to daydreaming and you draw the images on paper that appears on the screen in your own mind. The person relaxes and chooses to visualise self-nurturing images. It is considered a written form of meditation. Frank kept a journal and he showed me some of his journal entries, including guided imagery (see pp. 176-177) and a poem (see p. 177)

The journal dialogue is a conversation with yourself and/or with another person to help you gain insight into an issue, person or event that you want to understand better. Rainer said it is often used to carry out imaginary conversations with someone the person has had difficulty communicating with in the past, or even getting in touch with someone deceased. It can help you come to terms with an issue involving that other person. Barry Chalmers, the second person I interviewed,
spent part of several sessions telling me about his father. This initiated a range of memories and emotions. He read an imaginary dialogue between his father and him that he read to me (see pp. 142-143). It was painful for him to verbally share with me and he finally started crying. Later he explained that he had imagined this conversation with his father many times.

### 3.3 Narrative inquiry

Interest in narrative inquiry as a method of research has been instrumental through the post-modern development in the social sciences. This interest in narrative inquiry is attributed to the post-modern perspective of truth and knowledge, explained by Brown (1994) as: “poetically and politically constituted, made by human communicative action that develops historically and is institutionalised politically” (p. 229). He goes on to say that people:

... establish repertoires of categories by which certain aspects of what is to be the case are fixed, focused or forbidden. These aspects are put in the foreground of awareness and become articulated or conscious experience against a background of unspoken existence. The knowledge that emerges from this process takes a narrative form. Reciprocally, the sequential ordering of a past, present and a future enables the structuring of perceptual experience, the organization of memory and the constructions of the events, identities and lives that they express (p. 234).

My interest in narrative inquiry developed out of the realisation that this type of research was the most suitable in allowing a portrayal of men’s experiences and their defining moments. I needed a style of presentation that was revealing the person’s authentic voice; hence, I’ve selected the narrative approach. This approach allowed me to represent the data – to retell the six participants’ stories in a narrative format. As MacIntyre (1981) explains, “We all live our narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live, the form of narrative is appropriate for our understanding of the action of others. Stories are lived before they are told – except in the case of fiction” (p.
197). The narrative allows the reader to “look where I did and see what I saw” (Peshkin, 1990, p. 280).

There appears to be some disagreement about a precise narrative definition (Riessman, 1993). There are those who suggest narratives to be stories about past experiences. Lobov (1972) describes it as a partial reliving of past experiences – “We define narrative as one method of recapitulating past experiences” (p. 359). He makes a point of bringing his narratives to life and not allowing his audience to question his interpretation of the story. Others define narratives as events linking on to other events, but not necessarily in chronological order (Young, 1987). Polkinghorne (1988) talks about an appreciation for the significance of utilising the narrative in research because it creates and organises the individual’s experiences. He describes narratives as:

… the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. Narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes the human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes. Because it is a cognitive process, a mental operation, narrative meaning is not an ‘object’ available for direct observation. However, the individual stories and histories that emerge in the creation of human narratives are available for direct observation. Examples of narrative include personal and social histories, myths, fairy tales, novels, and the everyday stories we use to explain our own and others’ actions (p. 1).

To give their definition to narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proffer some of its characteristics:

… narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated … narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (p. 20).
Still others connect stories by themes (Michaels, 1981). The key element is that meaning resides within the individual, and capturing and recognising their meaning some will do this in chronological order, some will do it by themes. Sparkes and Partington 2003, utilised narrative practice as a contribution to sport psychology. White and Epston (1990), in the field of family therapy, have utilised narrative inquiry as a counselling technique. Their method is designed “to activate a positive and responsible sense of personhood through engagement in a process we will call ‘reflexive self storying’” (p. 5). Through the collection of narratives, issues and problems are identified, and therapy is provided to present the clients with a better understanding of their own lives and how to change them. They state, “the stories or narratives that persons live through determine their interaction and organization, and that the evolution of lives and relationships occurs through the performance of such stories or narratives” (p. 12). White and Epston talk about the narrative mode of thought and state that it is characterized “by good stories that gain credence through their lifelikeness. They do not establish universal truth conditions but a connectedness of events across time. The narrative mode leads, not to certainties, but to varying perspectives” (p. 78).

White (1981) argues, to raise the question of the nature of narrative “is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself” (p. 1). White explores individuals’ past actions and how they understand the actions, in other words, the meaning behind the actions. His plots include tragedy, romance, satire and humour. He considers the impulse to narrate as natural since it translates “knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific” (his italics, p. 1).

Kellehear (1993) tells us that the personal narrative explores “issues which are not preconceived or if preconceived may stretch beyond the expected” and may “clarify and consolidate the understanding of human experience through the technical use of empathy and reader identification” (p. 65). Expressing empathy and reader identification, Webb (1998) cautions us on the dilemmas reflected in male narratives:
Whether men are writing directly about themselves or other men in biography, or indirectly in fiction, they wittingly or unwittingly reveal the masculine style by which they live, and the masculine style they most admire. However, the effect of masculinization in male biography needs to be examined because if it reflects the internalised narratives by which men order their lives then the outmoded masculine forms and men’s recurring dilemmas will be apparent (p. 218).

Central to this study is the need for methods that include a subjective element. By its nature the researcher is required to take seriously the accounts of the way others see their world and make sense of their roles within it. This method of inquiry as defined by Moustakas (1990) begins with a question or problem “that has a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives (p. 15).

As narrative researchers, we are reminded by Mishler (1995) that we are also the storytellers because we construct the participant’s story and its meaning. He continues:

It is clear that we do not find (his italics) stories; we make stories. We retell our respondents’ accounts through our analytic redescriptions. We too are storytellers and through our concepts and methods – our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretative perspectives – we construct the story and its meaning. In this sense the story is always co-authored, either directly in the process of an interviewer eliciting an account or indirectly through our representing and thus transforming others’ texts and discourses. And a related point: The teller of the tale is also engaged in a retelling. The version we hear or read is shaped both by the context of its telling and the history of earlier retellings (pp. 117–118).

Through dialogue and self-inquiry this process strives to find meaning in our human experiences. This meaning is derived from our perceptions, beliefs and values, judgments and our own senses. An individual’s defining moments can be
expressed as a narrative portrait of their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them. When I was discussing the narratives I was planning to write in my thesis with the participants, one of them, Mark Newton, suggested writing aspects of his story. I explained to him that having my participants write their own story was not my original intent, but because of his unique interest and initiative I’d be happy to read his story, and then make it a joint decision whether or not to include it. The decision was positive and you’ll find Mark’s story within his narrative on pp. 201-202.

Within narrative inquiry I’ve used the research principles and strategies associated with semi-structured interviewing. I have sought to capture and represent the authentic voices of participants, trying to go for a deep insight on a small number of participants and the qualitative paradigm allows for this pursuit. In light of the understanding of empowerment relationships, I opted for a semi-structured approach to the interviews whereby I would initially work with the participants by giving them a list of some questions I would be asking about their defining moments across various aspects of their lives. These questions describe or break down the stages that I would talk about and I used this as a scaffold for accessing their understanding of the interview sessions.

On a reflective note, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us that in doing narrative inquiry research we continually meet ourselves in past remembrances, present experiences and future dreams and, perhaps, even daydreams. In essence, they are saying:

… as narrative inquirers we work within the space not only with our participants but also with ourselves. Working in this space means that we become visible with our own lived and told stories. Sometimes, this means that our own unnamed, perhaps secret, stories come to light as much as so those of our participants. This confronting of ourselves in our narratives past makes us vulnerable as inquirers because it makes secret stories public. In narrative inquiry, it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealised, inquiring, moralising self (p. 62).
3.4 Organisation of this study

This section includes information pertaining to the six participants in this study. I’ve included the recruitment and identification of the participants and ethical considerations and confidentiality are explained. There is an extensive discussion of the interview proceedings. Although initially there were thirteen men who volunteered to participate in the four one-hour interviews, I selected only six of them for narrative presentation in this thesis.

3.4.1 Recruitment

The participants were selected with the following criteria in mind. They were men who had undergone considerable moments where their life trajectories had changed and they had to respond to those alterations to those trajectories based on crises experienced. At the same time I was looking to capture how individual males respond differently to various events and experiences. These were men who had undergone some sort of crisis. They were men who had to work through personal issues and relationships. Some of those selected were former clients of mine and I knew they had experienced trouble or discontent in their lives. I knew they had moments of instability caused by factors that they didn’t feel they had any control over, and I knew they had experienced a number of defining moments in coming to where they were. All of them, of course, had the survivor instinct. I was looking for adult males who would be cooperative, and would be motivated enough to attend all four interviews, and would speak truthfully and intelligently. These men were willing to talk and were able to reflect on their past experiences. Kvale (1996) lists more attributes to look for in a good interviewee:

> They give concise and precise answers to the interviewer’s questions, they provide coherent accounts and do not continually contradict themselves, they stick to the interview topic and do not repeatedly wander off. Good subjects can give long and lively descriptions of their life situation, they tell capturing stories well suited for reporting (p. 146).

Kvale (1996) does, however, caution the researcher:
Recognising that some people may be harder to interview than others, it remains the task of the interviewer to motivate and facilitate the subjects’ accounts and to obtain interviews rich in knowledge from virtually every subject (p. 147).

3.4.2 The Participants

The participants in the final study were selected for the following reasons. Andrew Bosley (all names are pseudonyms) came to me for counselling in 1996. I developed a good relationship with him, but I hadn’t seen him for some time. I knew he had trouble holding down relationships and employment. I approached him to be part of the study and he agreed without question. Because his defining moments seemed so unique, I felt his story needed viewing and he was cooperative in relaying his story.

I met Barry Chalmers when he and his partner were having relationship issues. Here was the case of a very bright but insecure individual who had great difficulty in disassociating himself from his family who distrusted him. His defining moments were quite unique, and needed to be disclosed and he was willing to participate in my research.

Colin Darvell came to the study through a recommendation from a psychologist friend of mine who knew he has had problems in his life. His parents were holocaust victims and much of his early life was enveloped with issues in Judaism. When I approached him on the subject of his participation in my study he was very enthusiastic and accommodating.

I met Frank Garber when he attended one of my short ‘Stop Procrastinating’ courses and then he became a client of mine. He has been a long sufferer of clinical depression. During the ten-year period that I have known Frank, I have been impressed with his persistence to amount to something. He was very willing to discuss his defining moments and, in addition, brought all his documents from hospital to show the diagnosis and procedures he experienced as a patient.

I was introduced to Karl Linnell, a school principal, by the co-ordinator for the Regional Parenting Resource Service who asked me to be facilitator for a fathers’
group Karl had organised in his school. He was included in this study because he appeared to be floundering around trying to find his identity. He was cooperative and quite willing to talk about his life.

Mark Newton and his partner were managing an art gallery when I met them twenty years ago. Over the years I have been able to know Mark very well, and because of his numerous crises I asked him to participate in this study. Mark had a number of unique experiences including over a month on remand at fifteen. During the interviews, as he unravelled his story, that he considers to be a ‘mystery’, his defining moments seemed to have an element of loneliness. Mark was most interested in my research and quite willing to tell his story.

3.4.3 Ethical awareness and confidentiality

Ethical tensions, controversies and dilemmas related to qualitative research are concerns of Eisner (1991). In his discussion, I was particularly aware of allowing a quasi-therapeutic relationship to develop. Because some of the participants were former counselling clients of mine, I clarified our relationship by stating the four interviews were not to be interpreted as counselling sessions. They were information-gathering in terms of my research into defining moments. As explained by Eisner:

… many people seldom encounter others who are willing to listen carefully to what they have to say over long periods of time. In this sense, qualitative researchers who convey … a sincere interest in (participants’) opinions and ideas are likely to elicit a great deal of information that individuals may not even know they are providing. In addition, the person interviewed often receives a kind of therapeutic experience in the process, the kind that comes from being able to ‘unload’” (pp. 217–218).

Considering the matter of confidentiality, I explained to all participants that names and places would be changed in my construction of their personal narratives. This was done early on. All interview tapes were housed in a safe place on my property. Interview transcriptions were to be seen only by the transcriber and my thesis supervisor. In accordance with the demands of the Ethics Guidelines for research at
Deakin University, the research participants were informed that they had a right to withdraw from the study at any time. A plain language statement was sent to all participants. It was explained that participants’ names would not appear on copies of the interview and anonymity would be respected across all levels. All data would be coded. The statement also mentioned that participants would be invited to talk about their own experiences and significant incidents that could be labelled as influential and/or defining moments in the context of their current situation. The aims, methods and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study were explained. Autonomy was explained and it was emphasised that no one in the study would be given information about another participant. Written contracts were signed by both participants and me (See Appendix 1). No one withdrew from the study. At all times I sought to protect personal privacy and guaranteed confidentiality. I was very much aware of maintaining high ethical standards during the entire study.

3.4.4 Interview organization and proceedings

I was pleased by the positive response of all subjects when I contacted them initially. I telephoned them to explain the research and then sent them an introductory letter confirming what I had told them (See Appendix 2) that included information regarding defining moments and Deakin University ethical standards, and supplied them with information pertaining to interview questions. They received a plain language statement explaining what the research was about, plus the consent form. The subjects agreed to participate in four one-hour interviews, either at my place of residence or their designated venue to make the narrative participants anonymous.

Through briefing the participants were informed of the purpose and procedure of the interviews. There was a written agreement signed by the participant obtaining his consent to participate in the study and to give permission to use the interviews for the doctoral thesis and private publications. Information also included the subject of confidentiality and who would have access to the material.

Information pertaining to interview questions centred around discussions regarding the subject’s background, aspects of their life, in particular, instances within their life that they found quite pivotal or had an impact on them, including defining
moments. In preparation for the interviews I requested them to ‘map’ their life, to write down crucial experiences and defining moments. We used this information to discuss how these experiences came about, who the players were and what was the outcome. I explained to them that we would discuss incidents from four phases – childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and adulthood. Prompting them in their preparation were a set of questions included, ‘How was your childhood perceived? Why do you see it this way? When reflecting on your childhood, do you consider this as a happy or unhappy time in your life? What defining moment(s) do you recall? What phase of your life has given you the most security?’ (See Appendix 3). Our discussions were guided by these questions. They weren’t necessarily done in any specific order, but often they were and once we became absorbed in the interview it became more conversational, whereby I would lead the participant and allow them to present their story.

At the commencement of each initial interview I discussed the procedures to be utilised, the ethical principles involved and then had them sign the consent form. At the beginning of each interview, after the initial one, each participant was asked if he wanted to alter or add anything to what was previously discussed. To validate the fact that each story was correct, the strategy used was to begin each new interview session with a summary of the previous interview. This seemed to provide some respect toward the whole research project and what they were contributing, and having their confirmation on the representation of the discussion. If something was unclear or if there were statements about things I didn’t understand, I would ask questions to clarify the meaning. Anonymity of the participants was respected and pseudonyms were used across all levels of data analysis and reporting. When the participant used a name that was important in telling his story I would say, “You’ve given me the name of this person. What other name do you want me to replace it with in your narrative?” All interviews were tape-recorded and transcriptions were made. Transcripts and all other data were coded.

The first few minutes of an interview are very important in order for the participant to have a good grasp of what the interviewer is investigating and to develop a sense of security and understanding in trusting the researcher. There was some interaction prior to each participant’s first interview to get him primed. For some
there was interaction between interviews. After some of the interviews, a few of them were encouraged to think about this event or that moment, and get them to respond in some sequence development. Also, the termination of each interview was important because the participant had divulged some potent, emotional and personal experiences. When the tape recorder had been turned off and the subject had had a chance to ‘catch his breath’, so to speak, debriefing was often necessary.

Some of them admitted they had thought about and shown feelings that were previously not expressed so debriefing was involved. New insights and new goals were sometimes spoken about. We ended our discussion with a summary of the main issues relating to defining moments. This allowed the participant to reflect on specific moments and make additional comments (that were not tape recorded). And, finally, I gave the participant being interviewed the opportunity to make alterations, to comment on specific issues and openly say what bothered them or surprised them in coming up with certain topics or experiences. It was understood, of course, that participants were welcome to make changes during the interviews, but sometimes they waited until we spent time debriefing. It was not unusual for me to hear comments that were deeply personal for some of the participants to make. Sometimes there was open crying, even sobbing when recalling some defining moment experiences. This occurred when a subject just happened to say something he had not thought about for some time or for many years, especially if it involved sexuality issues, schoolyard bullying or father-son relationships.

At the end of the interview I thought there might be some anxiety or uneasiness on the part of the participant. Some of the participants felt quite drained in dealing with emotional content. Some of them stayed for some time afterwards. We talked about upsetting issues that occurred during the interview and I respected their feelings by having them explain more in detail or ‘talk it out’. Although the interviews were not meant to be therapeutic, the participants needed to say what they had to say. Someone else had been lined up to talk to participants if I felt my position as a researcher was going to be compromised, or compromise my capacity to provide appropriate therapeutic support. In the first incidence, they could have come to me to discuss the issue, but if I had felt that I was not in a position to do anything I would have referred them on to colleagues of mine who are counsellors and psychologists. This, however, did not occur. Also, had I sensed that any of the
participants were concealing pain or anxiety as a result of our interviews; I was prepared to refer them to external support. Between interviews participants kept in touch with me via telephone conversations or e-mail if they had any questions or concerns they needed to discuss.

Following each interview that took place at my residence, and after the subject had gone, I spent time writing notes to myself about the subject and the ‘tone’ of the interview. Kvale (1996) suggested, “The lived interview situation, with the interviewee’s voice and facial and bodily expressions accompanying the statements, provides a richer access to the subjects’ meanings than the transcribed texts will later” (p. 129). This time spent in reflecting on the subject and the interview provided me with important data for the analysis of narratives that accompanied the conclusions to the study.

The first interview with Andrew was conducted in October 2000, and his fourth, and final, interview was held in April 2001. After each interview a transcription was made. Because I wanted to make the most of each interview with my first participant, I spent time after each interview to read the transcription and record notes in reference to the types of questions, and changing some of the themes or focusing more closely and adding a few questions that I felt would have more meaning towards defining moments. The final interview with the thirteenth participant was completed in July 2002. Most of the interviews were held at my residence, especially for those participants who were former counselling clients who knew it was a quiet and comfortable location. One participant lived in Melbourne and preferred having me drive to his home. Another set of interviews was conducted in the office of the participant’s art school.

All interviews progressed well, and I felt the participants appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their lives and the circumstances that had prevailed to shape them. Because of my years of counselling, establishing and maintaining rapport was easily accomplished and obtaining relevant data very accessible. My early training came from a Rogerian client-centred perspective. The focus of Rogers’ therapy is on the client as an individual who encompasses all the qualities of that person and all possible potential development. Also, I was reminded of Measor’s (1985) advice that “Interviewers need to keep their antennae up for
pointers, which lead into the meaning of what is being said; and for the data which fit the themes of the research” (p. 63). As the interviews progressed it became quite evident that I was experiencing a deeper understanding and significance of defining moments because of the impact felt by my participants. The self-searching and internal dialogue (self talk) generated from my own past experiences and defining moments helped to contribute to the investigation and, although these were not meant to be cathartic and therapeutic sessions, I still felt a deep empathy towards my participants. Further, most of the participants expressed the fact that these interviews were very meaningful for them, and helped to structure their life and provide insight into future plans and goals.

In the construction of the narratives, the data for this research comprised fundamentally a sequence of four interviews with the participants. There was some interaction prior to each initial interview to prepare, or prime them. There was more interaction between interviews to get them to think there was some sequence developing. After interviews were transcribed, it became my task to go through the transcriptions, concentrate on the defining moments, and present them as narratives. I collected their stories; I didn’t alter the meaning or intent of them in any way. I collected the stories as their realities and then I formed them into coherent narratives. In my representation of the narratives I used the authentic or undistorted voices, and was careful not to alter the meaning of a statement by taking it out of context. I validated their stories by reviewing events and checking defining moments for accuracy during each interview, and at the beginning of each of the following interviews. I portrayed my interpretations back to the participants at regular intervals and at the start of each interview.

At one of the weekly sessions with my supervisor we had an interesting discussion about the whole process of narrative writing. The essence was my having to speak for the six men and their stories. It is my penmanship or ‘penpersonship’ that is actually going to sit at that table and tap out the story that the participants have related to me. As much as I use other voices as direct quotes to give the narratives richness, there will still be other quotes that I haven’t been able to include. It has to be my responsibility to select and be selective. I have to make the discreet decisions.
Chapter Four: Narratives

4.1 Andrew Bosley

You have to make yourself do things. Try to be motivated. I don’t have panic attacks anymore because I discovered the way of overcoming them. After awhile you get to recognise when they’re coming and you do calming techniques and sort of hold your breath because when you’re panic-stricken you have shallow breathing. You can’t stop that and overcome the attack. (Int. 2)

Andrew, aged 33, is a former counselling client of mine. I came to know Andrew in May 1995, when he made an appointment to see me. Andrew had been suffering from an anxiety disorder that commenced while he was a graduate student. We met weekly for a period of time, and then monthly for six months. Prior to inviting him to participate in this study, I had not seen Andrew for more than a year.

I explained to Andrew that I was interested in focusing on defining moments in his life. In preparation for his initial interview, and as part of the recruitment information and interview procedure, I gave him an information sheet prior to the first session. In keeping with the format, Andrew arrived for the interview having the information I had requested. I suggested that we begin at his childhood and our interview began. Andrew reflected quite comfortably on his primary schooling, his place in the family, and his relationship with friends and relatives. Andrew perceived his childhood as an enjoyable time, carefree and fun. His positivism is expressed in the way he describes his early years:

I only remember the good times. There weren’t any major crises within the family. We shifted to Echuca for a couple of years. Then we moved back to Shepparton when I was in grade three and it didn’t take long to fit in. By then I read quite well and was good at everything. I think I could have skipped two years because nothing was an effort in primary school. (Int. 1)

When Andrew went from primary to secondary school his world changed dramatically. The first major defining moment that Andrew experienced in his life
involved being rejected and bullied by his peers in his new school. Through the four hours of discussion I had with Andrew, the events that took place around his being a victim of bullying at school were by far the most compelling and traumatic for him. From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. every school day for four and a half years he lived through a living hell. Years later Andrew would consider these events as leading to his having a type of mental breakdown and a prolonged bout of anxiety syndrome.

Andrew’s early adolescence in his secondary school experiences was a difficult time and appeared to be the complete opposite to his happy and carefree childhood in primary school. The first defining moment that Andrew recalled when reflecting on his life involved being rejected and bullied by his peers. Things were going pretty ‘normally’ for Andrew up until the day he wore his red shoes to school.

DEFINING MOMENT - RED SHOES

It was on Mufti Day, a casual dress day, that I wore red desert boots to school. One guy, in particular, carried on about the red shoes and how silly they were. He was saying I was a sissy for wearing the shoes and he just pushed me around. Other students teased me for wearing them, but I thought they just wanted an excuse to bully me. Bullying occurred not only during playtime in the corridors but, also, in classes in front of teachers. (Int. 2) Andrew recalled they would push him around, sometimes kick him, grab his schoolbag and throw it around. Then there was name-calling, ‘pansy’, ‘girl’ - he thought they called him names because he wouldn’t play rough with them. He wouldn’t fight back, but remained passive. Andrew said he was very nervous and probably a bit upset most of the time. The red shoes issue was quite a defining moment. This was the first time he felt a prolonged attack from bullies. Andrew was called a sissy and they pushed him around. While they were lined up to go to their first class, the others just jeered him on. Andrew said, it made me sad. I can’t remember if I cried, but it would be close and I guess frustrated because I didn’t see anything wrong with the shoes. I was surprised that they made fun of the red shoes, but I guess if it wasn’t that maybe it would have been something
else if they were in the mood. (Int. 2) According to Andrew his own friends just stood around him and they were embarrassed, too. I guess they just tried not to take part in case they started to get pushed around. (Int. 2) When I asked Andrew why he didn’t get support from his friends he thought the bullies intimidated them. There didn’t appear to be any camaraderie in their relationship.

It was the commencement of his being bullied. He was completely hurt, bewildered and embarrassed by what was happening to him. How did he come to think that it would be okay to wear red desert boots? Andrew explained to me that at the age of thirteen he didn’t have any fashion sense and he wouldn’t have cared what sort of shoes he was wearing. I just wouldn’t have even thought twice about what anyone would think about the shoes ‘cause I just wore them, and I wouldn’t have cared what was on my feet or what clothes I had on. (Int. 2)

When Andrew returned home from school that day, he told his mother he was picked on for wearing the red shoes. Her response was that they were just being silly. She didn’t see anything wrong with the shoes. When I asked if she had seen him leave the house that morning wearing the red desert boots, he replied: Well, she would have picked out what I wore. At that age I think she was still doing that. (Int. 2) Then he added: I guess back then I didn’t have a lot of personal space and didn’t have your own cupboards for your own clothes, sort of this drawer’s yours and this drawer is somebody else’s. Back then I would have been sharing, probably with Dad or my sister. Finally I asked Andrew if after that day did he rebel against his mother and start wearing what he wanted to wear. He remarked: No, but I think I would have been more careful what I wore to school. (Int. 2)

It was obvious to Andrew that in the process of wearing red shoes to school, he had contributed to the process of positioning himself as different to his peers. The incident was very bad, and clearly the catalyst of what would become a ‘personal nightmare’ of bullying and abuse. In a sense, he started off thinking it was the red shoes, but it was really that he was different. Andrew thought the bullying might have been because he didn’t participate in sports. It might have been part of what
would have given me an image, not doing the manly things, playing sports. (Int. 2)

I asked if he felt that he had created this image that he had become the victim. He said, Yeah, and I guess after awhile you’re treated like bad weather, just happens, not your control. (Int. 2) I asked him if it had anything to do with his size, shape or intellect, but he said: No, don’t think back then that we cared who was smart and who was dumb, nobody much really stood out. (Int. 2)

Andrew enjoyed the academic side of his school and gathered recognition for getting good marks, but his relationship with most of his peers was not good. Although he associated with a few boys, they didn’t seem to be able to offer him any support. Andrew recalls that he and his friends never really discussed the whole bullying issue. He told me he tried being more macho in his body language and in his speech. Andrew realised that the more macho boys in his class had trouble with verb tenses. Instead of saying, ‘He came here yesterday,’ they would say, ‘He come here yesterday.’ He started to become careless in his speech and use of verb tenses, but that didn’t seem to improve his relationship with his peer group.

Bullying became a real issue for Andrew. It was a school thing. Peers in and around school rejected him. He couldn’t see a viable alternative to the bullying, so he learned how to endure it. He wasn’t aware of alternatives. He seemed to have the propensity for attracting bullying from his fellow students. The red shoe defining moment changed his outlook on many things. There was a radical change in Andrew’s thinking and in his emotional state. He learned to insulate himself from being hurt by not showing his feelings. He learned not to trust people, not only his peer group but also his family. He presented a façade of unemotional nonattachment to most things he at one time had enjoyed. Andrew was now even more alone in his loneliness.

Because the red shoe incident was such a traumatic experience for Andrew, he drew a map of consciousness relating to it. He brought it with him for his next interview.
In describing why he drew the map as he did, Andrew pointed out:

Well, you sort of clear your mind and then think about the happening, the incident. The notes advise that you just let your hand just wanders on the paper and draw whatever comes into your mind, so it might be hard to describe why certain things are drawn as they are. There are the shoes and that's me and my 'knobbly' knees, back when I was skinny. I imagine that 's the short board and I guess that's the bad
That cloud became a sheep because I guess I was mild mannered, locked away. I can’t explain these things, just felt being ignored. I think that was probably going to be a hand, but it’s got too many fingers. (Int. 4)

For further clarification of his map of consciousness, we carried on this dialogue:

D.B. What’s symbolic of the hand?
A.B. It looks a bit like hitting, drawn like that.
D.B. Being bullied?
A.B. Perhaps. Been drawing these things. Don’t know exactly why.
D.B. Why the rain and the rain clouds? Was it raining that day?
A.B. I don’t know. I thought that maybe it’s raining.
D.B. How do you feel now, just discussing what happened years ago?
A.B. It doesn’t upset me or anything, but I can sort of get flashes, get flashes in my mind, pictures of what was going on, but it’s sort of hazy. It’s a bad incident and I think I tried to erase it over the years, the whole high school happening.
D.B. If you were able to relive that day, would you have selected other shoes?
A.B. No. I think now I’d be rebellious enough to boldly wear the shoes, and maybe even more if it was going to upset them and probably fight back because I think a bit of fighting back would have been a good solution, you know at the start.
D.B. But if you had been bold perhaps you would have been in their group and they probably would have gone along with it.
A.B. Yeah. I don’t know if I would’ve been part of their group. Because of their behaviour, I guess the difference between childish behaviour and nonsensical behaviour, and I guess being involved.
D.B. Was their behaviour normal?
A.B. I guess it’s normal for kids their age.
D.B. So the boys you travelled with didn’t do the same things the other boys in the class did. How did you finally resolve this issue with the red shoes?
A.B. I don’t think I did resolve it. I guess I went to school in the morning, I was bullied, and I guess then I went through the whole day and then went home in the end. I don’t think I ever wore those shoes again. (Int. 4)

Andrew described himself as a loner, yet he was seldom alone physically. He felt alone at school because he had only a few friends, and he felt alone at home because he didn’t fit in with his family’s lifestyle. His loneliness had a developmental history that commenced in early childhood when there was a lack of close personal contact and intimacy by his parents.

I guess that I have always felt lonely in some kind of way throughout my life from mid-teens onwards. This might have started as a result of prolonged bullying at high school. I know that around my mid-teens I had become very mistrustful of people and I found it difficult to make friends. I had a small band of friends, but I never really felt emotionally close to them. To this day I am very much a loner, spending lots of time on my own. I still crave meaningful contact with other people. I think that I find it difficult to become close to other people. I like my friends to be sincere towards me. Also, some part of me has some low self-esteem thing going where I can’t quite tell if people are being sincere in their friendship or just patronising. As far as my family relationship, we have always been a bunch of individuals for as long as I can remember. There was little meaningful communication or interaction between us. Around my mid-teens, when I was becoming more emotionally mature, I think I saw various family members as useless, mean, boring people. Somehow I think I was a loner inside the family, not really wanting to get close to anyone when there wasn’t an atmosphere of family cohesion. (Int. 4)

Andrew was about fourteen when he realised he had a dislike and distrust for his mother. He confessed that this has continued to haunt him even into adulthood. It was upsetting for him when he finally realised the bad relationship between his parents, and he had lost respect for his mother. Andrew told me he had never mentioned this to anyone in his family:
I realised that other people’s parents didn’t act the way my parents did. When visitors came around, my mother was well behaved. When friends came, her voice changed and she spoke in a high-pitched voice, and all nice. But when people weren’t around, there was more heavity in her voice, ‘don’t do this. Don’t put this there.’ She was boring, and dowdy, and no ambition, no character. (Int. 2) It’s probably an accumulation of things she’s done or not done. My younger sister and I became more aware of our parents’ relationship, and that they didn’t sleep together. Dad lived in a caravan in the back yard and the two of them wouldn’t speak together. They weren’t fighting but they wouldn’t sit down and have a conversation. She took the housekeeping money and ran the house, and Dad would go to work. He’d take her into town once a week so she could do the shopping. There was never any love or conversation between them. From what I’ve observed, she’s been the main cause of their problems. (Int. 3)

Andrew said he tried to control his emotions, yet there were times when he felt suicidal threats. He reflected:

I was fourteen or fifteen at the time and I was sick of the way I was treated at school by some of the kids. Going to school was a nightmare. I had thoughts of suicide at the time whether it was worth going on, but then, I suppose, the good things outweighed the bad. School lasted from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and things outside that time were quite good. I guess it was a decision that school wasn’t my whole life. I guess to do suicide you have to be pretty emotive about it, be pretty depressed or angry and, I guess, I just didn’t build up enough feeling to do it. (Int. 1)

Suicide thoughts eventuated when Andrew was in year 9 because of the constant wearing down day after day of taunts, and being pushed around. Mostly male classmates did the name calling, but occasionally one of their female friends would say something derogatory. He was clearly traumatised by the bullying. It was usually on the way to school and on the way home that Andrew thought about suicide. He explained it this way:
Yeah, I went through things in my head. Just things like lying on the railway tracks because we used to walk along the railway tracks to school. I knew it would work. There were the goods trains going from the cement works and they travel pretty slowly. Kids would just grab onto the sides of the carriages and get a ride to school that way. Occasionally people would fall off under them. One person from another school was killed doing it. Someone hurt his leg once doing it, so I knew that would work. There were, also, thoughts of poison and jumping off from things. These thoughts continued off and on. (Int.1)

Andrew recalled that when the new school year started, with different classrooms and different people, thoughts of self-destruction seemed to stop. I realised when I was having these thoughts how frustrating it was because I didn’t want to die, but it was a solution to think about. There were good things as well going on at school and weighing everything up, it wasn’t worth ending it. (Int.1) Andrew said one of the good things was having a few friends. He said they used to chat non-stop; that was good. (Int. 4)

Andrew didn’t handle physical education activities well when there were contact sports. He said it started in primary school when he developed contempt for team sports, like football. If there were a game of football, he’d just sit in the playground. If there were athletics, he’d take part and enjoy it. It was the whole idea behind team sports; it just didn’t make sense to Andrew. When he went to high school, he’d sit on the edge of the oval if there were football or cricket. If the ball came sailing past, he’d just sit there and ignore it.

It wasn’t a question of masculinity, I know at the time it was more an issue of my passiveness. I know I wasn’t aggressive, not to do with gender and masculinity issues, but more to do with being peaceful rather than violent. Although often they would call me ‘sissy’ because I wouldn’t fight back, but to me it wasn’t being a sissy. (Int. 2)

Another defining moment occurred when Andrew was in year 10. Andrew was calling out for help, but he learned that he must go it alone. The core issue here was
that he made an attempt to bring his victimisation out into the open, and call out to a teacher for help and support. Up until then you had the impression that all these incidents happened behind teachers’ backs and Andrew would be happy if they’d get caught, but they didn’t. Now he was ready to tell his teacher, to speak up about his situation. Andrew reflected on what happened on this occasion as a defining moment in his life.

DEFINING MOMENT – MORE THAN AN EGG IS BROKEN

We were given a project where we had to carry around a raw egg and treat it like our baby, that sort of thing for science. You had to keep a diary of what we do to carry this egg everywhere we went and protect it. I remember a few days into the project one of the bullies just came up to me in class, grabbed my egg and started throwing it around, and in the end someone just threw it on the floor and broke it. It was a very disorderly class. Sometimes it would be that way, just because the group I was in used to talk a lot and carry on. The teacher would never describe us as disruptive or anything, wouldn’t corner us. Everyone went back to work and the teacher said nothing. I remember telling the teacher who simply said, ‘Well, get another one’. (Int. 4)

It broke me that day, too. I think from that day on I didn’t really care what they did. I had contempt and loathing for their personalities and attitudes. But after that I stood up to them more. I didn’t jump around as much for the bullying and there was more mental acceptance, bit hard to describe. Yeah, it was more a change in me towards the whole bullying. (Int. 1)

We talked about his science teacher and how he handled the situation. Evidently his way to handle the situation was to ignore it. From what Andrew said the teacher was not a disciplinarian, but you would expect him to have them stop throwing the egg. This was Andrew’s call for help and no one heard him. With a touch of bitterness in his voice, Andrew said:
It’s a bit hard to know, if you’re standing there and there’s three or four guys throwing your egg around the room and there’s all that noise going on. The teacher couldn’t help but notice, but you wonder if they just passed it off as mucking around. (Int. 4)

Andrew drew a map of consciousness to explain his egg story. Here’s what he had to say:

Not much to explain. There’s the table. There’s the egg. That would be my chin, not a smile, there’s no mouth there. I guess there’s a lot of subconscious in these drawings that you can’t explain why. That was the dripping dagger of anger, but it’s suppressing anger. I don’t know why it’s framed. They look like chickens for some reason. Yeah, they look hatched there. There are several broken and cracked eggs. They were throwing it around the room to each other, a group of them until one of them decided to break it on purpose. That looks pretty pathetic. I suppose I felt confused and angry. I wasn’t too upset that the egg was broken because I didn’t like the experiment anyway. Thought it was stupid. (Int. 4)
Andrew realised that he was alone, again. There was no one but himself to get him out of this cycle of abuse. From that day on he decided to do it differently and actually, in a sense, came up with a resolution strategy to deal with it, to cope better, and to not show pain. He stopped calling out for help. He learned to absorb it. He might have stopped at that point and said, *This is it! They broke my egg. I’m going to the principal. I’ve had enough and I’m going to swap schools.* (Int. 4) But he didn’t. What he did, he decided to take a different stand. He’s not going to wiggle or squirm anymore. But that means he has to endure pain and torment in the most resolved way that he could.

His final year in high school was less difficult because most of the bullies had either flunked out of school, had jobs or just became dropouts. Following high school Andrew went directly to university where he majored in Meteorology and Geophysics. He said he did mediocre work at university and wasn’t proud of his marks, but he was away from bullying and away from home, so he spent most of his time partying. Andrew felt like a different person. He had a few more friends now. The university years went fast and he completed his Bachelor of Science degree at twenty. Then he went on for his master’s degree in Geodynamic Modelling. Although finally he was removed from bullies and close contact with
his family, the past came to visit him, and other problems arose including the onset of his anxiety attacks!

**DEFINING MOMENT - ANXIETY ATTACKS BEGIN**

The next significant defining moment occurred when Andrew was 22, when he was in graduate school. He was shopping at the supermarket with his housemate when, all of a sudden, he felt as though he was going to pass out. He went all shaky and sweaty; he felt ill. Andrew was experiencing his first anxiety attack. Being in a crowded space, Andrew thought, caused the anxiety. That panic attack was the beginning of the problem that Andrew said still persists. Here’s how he explained it:

*The most outstanding critical incident that led to a defining moment has to be the panic attack at the supermarket ‘cause that’s the one that’s caused the biggest change in my life. At the time I didn’t know what it was; I just thought it was some sort of dizzy spell. It wasn’t for a few months until I really felt sick and withdrawn from things. So it really took time for that to really define what was happening to me. As soon as I got out of the supermarket I felt a bit better, and by an hour afterwards it was sort of all over and done with. But then I think over the next few weeks I started to get anxious and feeling sort of physical symptoms and then more of these episodes – sort of walk to class and then I sort of stopped trusting myself walking that far, telling myself I didn’t feel that well, so I’d start riding my bike. Then after a few weeks I started driving instead, so it took time to form a pattern that defined what was going to happen in the future.*

*In September 1990 I had the panic attack and then by about December I’d start forming patterns of avoidance and feeling ill. So that time between September and December is more the defining moment. The anxiety issue was intense; there was a sense of not being able to work...*
through it. There was a sense of desperation, a sense of resignation. (Int. 3)

About a week after the initial anxiety attack, Andrew still didn’t feel right and he knew something was wrong, so he consulted a doctor at the Health Services on campus. He told the doctor his symptoms: headaches, gut aches, sore legs, just sort of a feeling like something wasn’t quite right in your body (Int. 1). For a number of years he was having a great time at university and was beginning to trust people again. Then when the anxiety attacks occurred he felt that life had come to a stand still and there was no future. Yet he was determined to fight his anxiety problem and finish his Master’s thesis. He explained his dilemma:

I was quite ill for about a year and three months, and I thought I’d never get my thesis finished. I’d get up in the morning, and work on it and then go home at midnight. Once a month I’d drive home to visit my family. I thought I’d never finish the Masters and I didn’t feel well. In the end I did a less than satisfactory thesis. Anyway, it passed but it wasn’t what I wanted to do, but I was too sick to care about it. (Int. 3)

I was put onto a gastroenterologist because of my symptoms; they thought it could be something in his field, but he did test and found nothing. He didn’t do any vigorous testing because, I guess, when I visited him I would walk in, I’d look happy so he probably thought things were fine. I didn’t have any money to stay in Melbourne, so I shifted back home the day I handed in my thesis. (Int. 1)

The anxiety attacks occurred frequently over the next five years and totally changed his life. He ground to a standstill; it really disrupted Andrew’s life. Again, people in trust let him down. As a teenager, Andrew had learned to block out all his problems, including being bullied, and then, finally, it all came out through the anxiety attacks. It infested him like a cancer. He had no one during his formative years to help him and he went to no one for help.
During the next two years Andrew met with a psychiatrist weekly. Eventually, Andrew considered the consultations a waste of time and he stopped seeing the psychiatrist. Drugs didn’t alleviate the problem. What helped him were the calming techniques and the repetitive reinforcement of activities. Here’s how he explained it:

"You have to make yourself do things. Try to be motivated. I don’t have panic attacks any more because I discovered the way of overcoming them. After awhile you get to recognise when they’re coming and you do calming techniques and sort of hold your breath because when you’re panic-stricken you have shallow breathing. You can stop that and overcome the attack." (Int. 2)

Andrew recognised the symptoms and found solutions, but still didn’t deal with the cause of the anxiety attacks. His last full-blown attack was in 1995. It was around that time that he decided to do things his way. Andrew stopped seeing the psychiatrist. He didn’t believe it was helping him, in fact, he thought he was getting worse. Finally he got help when he saw a pamphlet at a rehabilitation service centre. He explained:

"I knew I couldn’t get a job the way I am now and I heard they could help people with problems. I visited the counsellor there for six months, and she helped me do a lot of self-help therapy. Because of the avoidance phobia, I was motivated by her to go out and overcome avoiding things. When I saw the psychiatrist, I wasn’t receptive for help, but when I saw the counsellor at the rehabilitation centre, I was ready for change. But I realised that it was up to me to actually do things; I had to do it all myself." (Int. 2)

Making the inquiry and visiting the counsellor, Andrew started taking responsibility for his problems. Then there was the treatment of symptoms. There was a real lack of satisfaction with it. There was a deep questioning of self, ontological sort of insecurity of the deepest order. Then there was the drive to Canberra.

Duane Boyer
Andrew described another event as ‘defining’ in his life. It was the actual driving to Canberra that manifested another defining moment for Andrew. For several years he had had a problem travelling any distance by car. His sister had recently moved to Canberra from Brisbane. She had wanted him to visit her when she was living in Brisbane, but because of the distance and his fear of travelling a long distance, he was unable to do this. Now that she had moved, he conjured up the courage to make the journey.

I knew I couldn’t have done it by bus, train or airplane. That was out of the question because in public transport I would have felt blocked in the vehicle and there was no escape. Driving, however, I could always stop the car and get out whenever I wanted. I couldn’t have been the passenger; I had to drive because part of overcoming anxiety is to be distracted from thinking about your fears and what can go wrong. By driving I was occupied in the activity of driving. The defining moment occurred when I crossed the border from Victoria to New South Wales because that was the farthest I had travelled for many years. I could hear myself boasting: I’m actually doing it! I’ll actually make it! (Int. 2)

When asked if he gave himself a pat on the back, or stopped the car to get out and kiss the ground, he laughingly replied, That would have been too emotional for me! (Int. 2) But he did admit to having a big smile on his face because that was quite an achievement. Andrew was happy because he had driven as far as the state border and he said that since he had driven half way, he felt that he was practically there. (Int. 2)

Driving to Canberra and taking control of his disorder that prevented Andrew from travelling any long distance was a defining moment in his life. Building on this
achievement he went on to complete a horticultural course. From that he found employment and was able to hold a job at the bulb farm. Later he did a job search course that led to his computer studies. These are all examples of Andrew’s realisation that he could take some possession of his problems and make decisions to try to help himself, rather than make himself out as the victim!

The six-month TAFE certificate course in horticulture was an achievement Andrew considered important.

I guess it was a test for me to test socially to interaction, getting back into the world, doing something that I really wanted to do, something I was really keen about. That was successful because when I went into it, I just wasn’t sure what would happen. Just finishing the course was a big deal for me, more than actually finishing the uni studies. It was just a pure overcoming a personal test. (Int. 3)

When he realised he had developed the confidence to look for employment, it made him keen on horticulture and he started job hunting. Ironically, the actual job he applied for at the bulb farm ended up having nothing to do with horticulture. He did store work for four months and his time was extended to twelve hours a day for five days, and on the sixth day he worked another eight hours. He worked at the bulb farm for a year and a half. At the time it overcame my worries about ever being able to work. It proved that I could actually turn up and work, and hold down a job - I guess like normal people would, which was part of the thoughts at the time. (Int. 2) His defining moment developed over a period of time when he realised he had not only taken on a new employment but, also, he had held the job for one and a half years. Andrew linked this achievement to his Canberra experience.

By the end of 1998, however, things once again turned sour for Andrew who, again, was in the position where he couldn’t keep a job. Although the trip to Canberra did boost his self-esteem, it evidently didn’t make a significant change on a long-term basis. He actually did stand up to his phobias when he decided to take possession of his life. Perhaps this is part of a rebuilding process. His illness, however, is quite powerful and there’s a limit to what he can actually control. It’s
not a cerebral exercise. Decisions are made based on circumstances, instincts and fears; there are all kinds of factors that influence decisions. We still need the resources to be able to make changes. Self-confidence, self-preservation and instincts – all sorts of things allow us to make decisions. Andrew is still captured by his past; the sickness stays with him. As much as he tries to overcome it, it’s still with him.

During several of the interviews we spoke about Andrew’s perceptions of adulthood. The following transcript presents Andrew’s final statement about how he perceives his own adulthood:

My current life is coloured by my battle with anxiety disease, which makes it impossible to plan a future or get motivated about any activity. I am in constant pain with problems from calcification of the shoulder joints and anxiety a related problem. All this has made me inward looking and a bit of a loner because I am mistrusting of getting close to others. That’s a pretty standard philosophy for me every day. It’s hard to set goals. I tend not to bother thinking about the future or setting any big goals. It’s just that some part of me has gone missing, I guess. (Int. 1)

At the moment I’m just treading water and I guess part of the anxiety is I don’t make plans, big goals or plans for the future because I don’t know how I could possible fulfil anything. I really don’t know where I’m headed, but I don’t seem to really care. It’s like I don’t really have total control over this. So at the moment, who knows what will happen. There’s this big mysterious area, which is the future that I just don’t really think about or avoid thinking about. (Int. 3)
4.2 Barry Chalmers

I’m pushing myself up and I’m saying ‘Oh, that was some idea I hadn’t even thought about before.’ That’s you developing as a person – as a human being, and that’s what I’m doing, you know. (Int. 1)

Barry was a counselling client of mine several years ago. He experienced a difficult childhood that most people would not understand or be able to cope with. As an adult, he returned to university and received top awards at graduation. I suggested to Barry that he might like to participate in my defining moments study and he agreed. He was selected on the basis of his capacity to succeed, despite what he had to overcome. The adage, ‘Sweet are the uses of adversity,’ definitely applies to Barry’s attitude toward the troubles in his life. I’m interested in knowing how he managed his success considering the backdrop of what seemed to be a complex set of circumstances and, also, how he has worked through different challenges in his life.

Following four interviews with Barry I decided to present the narrative of his defining moments within two interacting themes. The first theme primarily involves his childhood and his interaction with his family. Pivotal here are the tensions and the difficulties he experiences in framing his identity within his family. The machination with the internal happenings with the family is important in understanding how he struggled for his position and identity within his family and beyond it. With this theme there are defining moments for him as a consequence of his family relations, and general lack of intimacy and affiliation he felt. I will describe a number of incidents that directly impinge on the internal relationships of his family.

The second theme relates to Barry’s relationships with his peers and the outside world. Things that happened to him within the context of his family were disclosed, and had implications for how he was able to exist and understand himself, and interact with the outside world. Tensions emerged within his peer group and he was singled out as ‘different’ or ‘other.’ His defining moments
emerge from his being teased about his sexuality, his father living on the streets, his mother’s health problems and other family idiosyncrasies.

The final part of this narrative focuses on when he’s older, and reflects on his previous experiences and his actions to make sense of his past and reconcile it. It is a prelude on how he has begun to overcome the torment in his life. How he has found friendship and company, and how he has found some comfort with his family relations are addressed. Barry’s narrative concludes with a discussion about where he is at the moment, and how he has reconciled some of his defining moments.

Theme One: Family Life
Two very traumatic incidents happened during Barry’s childhood. The first involved his parents’ separation while the second was when he realised his own father lived on the streets. Barry was eight years old when his mother moved out of home. She decided that she could no longer tolerate her husband’s mental condition. His psychological state was in question because of a motorbike accident. Barry’s father had incurred a brain injury and he had a metal plate put in his head. He developed mood swings and had very abusive tendencies. He was unpredictable. Barry’s father lost his capacity to be a father to his children. The whole family felt helpless about trying to help him and his explosive outbursts. Barry said it was never a happy marriage for his parents and it was better for them to separate; however, it did affect all members of his family both financially and socially. We had no money. It affected me. The process of actually splitting up, the actual trauma that was involved - there was a passage of about six months where Mum moved out, and then later we followed her. (Int. 1)

After his parents separated, Barry was living with his two brothers and his father. This was a difficult period for Barry. The fact was they were living in poverty, there was some physical and verbal abuse, and there was definitely an absence of any emotional support. The house was suffering from neglect. Dad stopped mowing lawns and so the grass was very long. There was a path around the backyard where he used to walk. There were broken beer bottles placed in strategic points around the yard to stop any burglars. He was paranoid. It was paranoia. Yeah, so Dad’s psychological state was just deteriorating all the time at this stage, some
sort of irrational thoughts were occurring between him and the outside world.
Then we left, us boys all pulled together to withstand this bloke. Yeah, so all us
boys just packed up and left Dad (Int. 1).

DEFINING MOMENT – LEAVING MY FATHER

Barry indicated to me that his defining moment came the day he
decided to leave his father and not stay with him in their commission
house. It was defining in the sense that what happened then had an
impact on the entire family from that moment on. It was a defining
point at which things actually changed, in some ways good, in some
ways bad.

Although he was only eight years old, Barry decided on behalf of his
two brothers that they should leave, so it was pivotal in expressing the
ending of that period in his life. He usually made decisions for his
brothers. I had a lot of impression over my younger brother. My older
brother wouldn’t have made the decision to leave. I think I made all the
decisions, I suppose I was dictatorial. (Int. 2) Barry recalled:

Let’s do something about this. Let’s not stay with this man. Let’s get
out of here. We haven’t got much to choose from, but we can choose
not to stay here. So one day I came home from school and said, ‘We’re
leaving’ or the eight years of me said ‘we’re leaving’. I’ve got my older
brother, twelve, and younger brother, seven. We packed a few things
and left my father. Well, we went to my mother’s sister’s place.
Eventually we were reunited with my mother. (Int. 2)

At the time Barry rejoiced about leaving because his father was quite
authoritarian and dictatorial.

We felt a sense of relief. It was like not having that domineering sort of
male figure there. (Int. 2) This man that none of us liked – he tried to
assert control over us. There was this one incident when my brother for
punishment for some transgression had to drag this metal shovel down
the concrete end in the back yard. If he didn’t drop it when Dad told
him to drop it, Dad would belt him. Behaviour like that, a few days of
that and we were just going to get out of that. (Int. 4)

In hindsight, Barry believed his father struggled so much with having
children. Eventually his father had to leave the commission house
because of the break-up, but in the few months that he remained in the
house alone everything had deteriorated. He was paranoid; it was
paranoia. There were broken beer bottles placed in strategic points
around the backyard to stop any burglars. The place was left in a
deporable mess. (Int. 2)

In a way leaving his father liberated him, and he felt some sense of achievement
and, yet, when it was completed, there was the realisation that he was ‘damned if
he did and damned if he didn’t.’ In many ways Barry had escaped the
dysfunctionality of living with his father and, yet, he rejoined another fairly
difficult arrangement. Perhaps being back with his mother and sisters provided him
and his brothers more support. It definitely liberated them from their father’s
abusive tendencies. Barry revealed he never spoke to his father from the time he
and his brothers walked out when Barry was eight.

In retrospect, Barry was completely devastated by the lack of compassion between
his parents and their separation. It disintegrated his family and his own tenuous
community ties. Barry became increasingly sensitive to his dysfunctional family.
This followed a developing sense of alienation for him.

Barry recalls that when he was a child there was no affection shown or expressed
in the family. The closest I ever got to a kiss from a female when I was growing up
was from my grandmother. She kissed me on the cheek as I was going out the door
one day. (Int. 4)

During his early primary school years, Barry found school to be a stabilising
influence because he enjoyed learning. But knowing his father was living on the
streets and being reminded constantly of this fact by everyone, he started losing
interest in attending school. This was one of the things that turned him against education. It became so public with his father living on the streets, and it was upsetting and embarrassing to be teased about it. Moving from one school to another was detrimental to his remaining interested in school. The family moved frequently when he was attending primary school. *We lived in emergency housing. It was some sort of social welfare agency. We lived there for several months and then we shifted out near the coast.* (Int. 1)

During our interviews, Barry spoke quite frequently of his loneliness. Even when he was around other people he still felt very much alone. This feeling of aloneness became a trait that remained with him into his adulthood. Barry recalled shifting schools because they had to live in emergency housing and he transferred to one of the schools in Belmont. Barry’s childhood was not a happy experience. When I asked him how he perceived his childhood, Barry responded, *Isolated. Isolated through a lack of understanding and lack of acceptance by my family. Parents and siblings did not know me and didn’t want to know me.* (Int. 1)

Another emotionally distressing experience for Barry occurred when he was fifteen and his family was looking forward to celebrating his sister’s birthday. This event is symptomatic of the failing relationship between Barry and his entire family. Barry woke up that particular morning expecting to go to his sister’s place for her birthday party. *The house was quiet. There was no one else there. I found out later that they had all gone to my sister’s home. They woke up in the early morning, snuck around, got dressed, had breakfast and left while I was still asleep. They went to my sister’s birthday celebration and left me alone in the house.* (Int. 2) The experience of being excluded from his sister’s birthday was devastating for Barry. He wanted to be part of the family unit and he was being ostracized. It made him realise that he wasn’t considered part of the family and he had to manage on his own. Although he was terribly hurt by this experience, he knew that he was very different and he had actually ostracised himself.
DEFINING MOMENT – ACCUSATION BY BARRY’S MOTHER

Barry’s adolescence was an existence of name-calling, and being labelled a homosexual and a sexual deviant. It was so upsetting for him to have to defend himself for something that hadn’t happened. Thoughts of suicide drifted in and out for Barry around the age of sixteen. It was triggered by his mother’s accusation that he was exposing himself in front of neighbourhood children as they passed by his lounge room window. This defining moment came about through his mother’s accusation. Here’s Barry’s account of that incident:

I went to the toilet one day and we had a commission house. I have to get the setting right. Commission house in Newcomb, run down commission house that’s starting to see the back end of seven kids, few coats of paints, all that type of thing, just looking like a bomb hit it, just piles of rubbish because we’ve got no car to clear everything away. Now in a commission house you’ve got the laundry out. You have an outside laundry on the veranda and you have to walk through the laundry to get to the toilet. It’s a stock standard Newcomb design type of thing. My mother was in the laundry and I went to walk to the toilet past her, to the door, and you could talk to each other from the laundry to the toilet. I was there urinating and my mother said to me: ‘Barry, will you stop exposing yourself to children? We’ve had complaints’. I have no idea where this came from, I said, ‘What?’ midstream, I said, ‘What? What are you talking about?’ ‘Oh, there’s been complaints that you’ve been standing there naked in front of the window and children or a parent has complained when they’ve been escorting.’ My head spun. I felt blood. I physically felt that I was going to pass out or faint. I vividly remember that I’m going to lose it, and that passed after a few seconds. I just lost it. I said, ‘How can you believe something like that, Mum?’ She said, ‘They’ve seen somebody standing there’. (Int. 1)

Barry is emphatic the accusation was completely untrue. Why his mother told this story Barry still doesn’t understand. What it actually
did to his sense of self was to doubt himself around children. He started stigmatising himself, saying ‘Am I like that?’ (Int. 1) His self-talk became negative acclamations and doubts. After all, she had accused him, so that must have some sort of validation. He used to think to himself, ‘Do I actually perform in the area of kids?’ (Int. 3) All the time he was consciously monitoring himself and his responses, and it was some real neurotic-type activity. Barry told me he never made plans to suicide, it was impulsive. Because he never made plans he felt it wasn’t that serious, but it was impulsive. Barry admitted that it was impulse driven by tolerance - his patience being eroded away by internal conflict. He resigned himself to never getting over this difficult internal period.

Barry went on:

I just lost it. That’s it, I’m leaving, fuck it all. I’ve had it. I’ve had it. I got some clothes together, put them in a bag and got on a bike with no gears, no brakes and I rode as far as I could. I got close to Anakie and I just realised the pointlessness of keeping on going. I had no money; I had no clothes. I had to go back and try to resolve something out of this. I was crying and it was raining, and I was walking beside the highway and got home. I was furious. I was yelling at her and it all became public in my family because I was just yelling at her. She tried to down play it, then she realised the seriousness. She must have started to clue to the seriousness of what the accusation was, what she had just placed on me. Then she started to settle down, but ever since then it’s tarnished me, you know. It’s made me feel like that’s who I am, it’s a stigma, people get perceived in a certain way and then they start asking, ‘Well, maybe there is a little bit like that in me.’ Then you start having these thoughts occurring you know, maybe, am I? No, I’m not, no, no, I’m not. I hate it. No, it wasn’t like that. I’d kill myself, all this type of stuff, and being close to suicide a few occasions, just like I can’t bear the turmoil, the conflict going on. You start saying: ‘Am I like that?’ just querying, and then you say: ‘No, no. She accused me. There must be some sort of validation.’ All that internal conflict all the time, never ceasing, or when you see a child because of the shit. It’s
affected my relationship with children because before it happened I didn’t think twice about if I was strange or odd with children. Then I would try to compensate for the conflict by setting out within myself to prove that I’m not like that. I mean, I would be King of the Kids! I mean, they wouldn’t sense it or anything like that. I’m quite the actor when it comes to those kinds of things and I can put on a good performance. I would feel that this is not how I really want to be. I’m not the king of the kids and all this. (Int. 2)

Theme Two: The Private Becomes Public
The second theme of Barry’s narrative describes the way his family faced the outside world and what secrets couldn’t be kept inside the family unit. The machination with the family’s internal happenings is important in understanding Barry’s personal tensions and his identity beyond his family. Barry’s experiences that had tremendous effects on his early life relate to sexuality issues and his sexual identity. The most traumatic event was hearing that his younger brother was forced into oral sex with his best school friend. Barry was in year eight at the time and his brother was in the sixth grade. Barry explains:

DEFINING MOMENT – WEARING MY BROTHER’S SHAME
My brother was riding through the school with his friend and the school bullies – they had a mean streak - they bailed up my brother and his friend, and they stripped them of all their clothes. They threw their clothes on the roof so they couldn’t get them back. They had to perform fellatio on each other. Afterwards, my brother was riding home and the police saw him with no clothes on riding through the streets, so they arrested him for indecent exposure. He got charged, went to court about it. They fined him and let him go. I heard nothing about it until I came to school the next morning. (Int. 3)

Barry explained that he was beginning to feel comfortable with his school classmates and his peer group. Just when he thought things were going well for him, his brother’s experience impacted on him directly.
The day I found out my brother had been forced into sex with his best friend, it wasn’t the shock of this, but the shock of being greeted with the facts by every grubby individual student at my school. I was finally starting to find a space where I could be myself or develop in some sort of way. It was just like, what I got down the street at the shops and the lack of understanding I got at home, then with the school. It was just all piled into one, just piled into one. (Int. 3)

Rather than see his brother as the victim, Barry constructed himself as the victim of a family’s curse. Here’s how he felt:

I mean I had sort of integrated myself pretty well there, I thought. I was just able to feel a bit secure. Before I went to school I went up to the shops and buddies of the people who had done it, who had performed it were at the fish and chip shop and they just teased me. All of a sudden my world had been turned upside down and I was being ridiculed. ‘You’re a poof’er. Your brother’s a poof’er. Dogged your best friend’ and all that sort of stuff. I suppose to a twelve-year-old boy who’s just beginning to know about sex, hit in the face about sex and then sexual deviates. I was devastated. And then when I went to school everyone in the school yard, apart from the teachers of course, everyone, everyone I thought was a friend or had some sort of allegiance to, so I just stopped and barrelled them. (Int. 3)

Barry described the incident as a defining moment in his life. Barry realised he was on the ‘outer’ again. What frustrated Barry most was that his newfound alienation was no direct fault of his own. Once again it was an incident that happened and he had no control over it. He wasn’t part of it and yet he became heavily involved. During this period in his life it seemed he was cursed every step when he tried to fit in and tried to be normal. His family bedevilled him.

The following transcript lifted from the second interview I had with Barry reveals some of the problems he had dealing with the incident and its implications during
his adolescence. In it he makes reference to the lack of support he got from his family, friends and teachers.

B.C. *Well, the defining moment was in school, straight. That morning when I went to school, that’s it! Everyone knows about it, everyone is poking fun at me about it.*

D.B. I guess it’s a time when it’s like, ‘Have I changed that much or is this the real me sitting here’?

B.C. *Yes, yes! It was just traumatic. I mean it was just the before and after again. It’s like you’re part of something and you’re not differentiated. Just say you’re part of a wall; you’re all similar. You’re all similar, all sort of that type of thing, amongst all the other idiosyncrasies about it. You’re a brick in a wall there. Then something like that happens and then you’re not a brick in the wall any more. You’re sort of this thing that stands out from the wall. You’re totally different from anybody else and you can’t defend yourself. You’re like a round brick. I didn’t even know the full story. It was just disbelief and shock and horror.*

D.B. You felt upset and confused. Did you hope that you could wake up the next morning to find it was just a dream or nightmare?

B.C. *Knowing that you can’t wake up. Something had happened and it was just a total change. There were so many traumas involved in that morning. I just look at that morning as a big turning point in my adolescence. To come to school and be accused, I mean as a sexual pervert or a deviate, to me that was a huge defining moment.*

D.B. In reflection, you would have had options. You could have told the teacher and explained the situation. You could have discussed with other people in the class, or maybe just fight.

B.C. *I did fight. I fought a hell of a lot, bigger than me too. That’s the only way I could gain a bit of prestige, through fighting. That was a critical time. I tried to gain prestige and integrity through being just a total outsider, and just a total recluse and fighter. The whole incident was one of the catalysts for my leaving school and*
spending time around the local parks. An adolescent, unemployment benefits — a meaningless, powerless, weak individual without a future. (Int. 2)

In year nine Barry left school. Already, he had failed year nine once because he was seldom there. He said he wagged school so he could fit in with a certain group of boys who he knew were troublemakers. Barry had given up and had just thrown it all away because school and his family were causing him too many problems. It was the social interaction, not his academic abilities, which turned him against school. He badgered his mother into signing the withdrawal papers so he could leave when he was fourteen. He was on unemployment benefits for a year, ambling about, sitting in the park, doing anything, just hung around by myself a lot of the time. (Int. 3) He said he really didn’t enjoy that year, but he needed to get away from school. After a year he did some labouring work for cash in hand while still receiving unemployment benefits.

Barry had a criminal record from an early age, shoplifting, criminal damage and other fairly minor offences. He became friendly with two boys in his neighbourhood who were thirteen and fourteen, and whose parents had separated. Barry said they were immigrants and they had a slightly intellectually disabled sister. They used to go to deserted factories and smash things up. One day they had gone to a nearby factory that had shut down and went riotous. The police came. The two brothers ran away, but Barry got caught. They tried to pin $50,000 worth of criminal damage on him. He couldn’t afford a solicitor but he did get legal aide, but they just fumbled their way through the court case. He claimed:

There was an insurance job. They tried to pin everybody else’s damage that had been done on this building for the last two years on me because it was a derelict building, for insurance purposes. Yeah, justice, I didn’t hold much respect for it. I’ve got more respect for it now, but I was quite defenceless. (Int. 3)

Barry was charged with criminal damage and burglary, and was sentenced to a male detention centre. He had to report weekly and perform community service for a year. Once more his peer group deserted him. Once more he was alone!
As mentioned earlier, it was a puzzlement to Barry why his father led the life he did. Barry said it would be very hard to say what sort of choices he had with his brain damage. Barry revealed he never spoke to his father from the time he and his brothers walked out when Barry was eight. His father died a lonely vagrant when Barry was twenty-three years old.

I couldn’t see a rational decision in any of it, so he had a choice. I don’t think he wanted to live on the streets, he just didn’t want the stress of the family and he didn’t know what to do. The choice was either living on the streets or living with the family. He just couldn’t express that, living with the family or the internal politics that go on with families and all that stuff. (Int. 2) Barry’s mother didn’t feel that she was to blame for the way he was living. She thought he had become a hopeless case and she, and the rest of the family, felt helpless in doing anything to change the situation. According to Barry, she considered herself the martyr. She wanted to be portrayed as the victim rather than having an active role. (Int. 2)

Reconciling the Past
When Barry was 23, and working at Ford, he read the front page headlines of the local daily newspaper – ‘Lonely death, no one knows him’ - and he realised his father had made the headlines. He went to the police station to identify the body. He expressed it this way:

He was unknown, no one knew him, and so I had to front up to the police station and say he was my dad, you know. I saw him ten years ago, so yeah, I’d organised the funeral. I was going to pay for it all myself because I didn’t want bitchiness in my family coming out at the funeral at all. I’ll just do it, but they helped. I felt really sad because there were not many tears shed for my father. I was really sad, but I just couldn’t bring myself to tears. I think again because it was in the public. There were other people there; they would have all seen the headlines, just rolled up for interest sake. There was a reporter looking to do a follow-up story because it was a human-interest story, and it created some sort of demand. I felt sad because I think he deserved a better life. I get upset with that. I don’t know him as a man, as a young
man. I feel there’s a real gap there. I think he deserved much better than what he got. He was suffering in the end. (Int. 3)

It was an important incident in Barry’s life. It initiated a range of memories and emotions. He felt some remorse because he was never really close to his father, but often dreamed that one day he would be. He harboured the sense of loss, yet he felt relief in a sense that he didn’t have to be embarrassed to see him scavenging in the streets. Barry no longer had to feel that his father was living on the fringe of society.

Throughout the interviews Barry became interested in reflecting on his life and started doing it through journal writing that he found very cathartic. Here’s a conversation Barry never had with his father, but he wished he could have had with him:

Me (Barry) Hi, Dad.
Dad Hello, Son. How are you?
Me I’m well and I miss you very much. You, or we left each other so long ago. You’ve missed a lot of me.
Dad I know I have, Son. I’m sorry. Why don’t you tell me some things now?
Me You missed me becoming a teenager, a young man and a man. You missed the trials and tribulations, such as the first engagement, my running success – I was Geelong’s 10,000 m. champ for a year – my Christine and my degree.
Dad You’ve told me now, Barry, and I’m so proud of you. You endured much in your life and all of it has gone into making you the person you are now. Yet these things didn’t make you, Barry. You’ve always been the person you are now. To me you are still the same bright and intelligent – and I’ve always thought and known that you could do anything that you wished to. Don’t underestimate yourself and don’t sell yourself short.
Me Thanks, Dad. I’m sorry I didn’t do anything to help you. I was the only one that could; all the others were helpless. They couldn’t see your problems through their selfish hatred. I’m sorry, Dad, that you
died in that shithole. I had only gone looking for you a week or two earlier. I had plans for putting you up somewhere, maybe even in a flat. I didn’t care as long as I knew you were safe. But it all came to nothing. Dad, I failed to act and you died in the next few weeks. I’m so sorry.

Dad Look, Barry, I was really beyond all help then. I had, over a number of years, withdrawn myself completely from society. There were many who tried to help me, but I chose to live the way I did. No one can take responsibility for my death but me. Please stop blaming yourself. (Int. 3)

Barry brought this dialogue from his journal to his next interview and read it to me. He said that he had imagined this conversation with his father many times.

Barry met Deidra when she was nineteen. After they started living together Deidra found out she was pregnant by her ex-partner. She had twin girls, so Barry knew them from birth. They lived together for four years and then Deidra decided she wanted Barry to marry her, but he had other plans. He told me they were ten weeks away from getting married when he decided he’d leave her.

Barry explained to me that several of his critical incidents have been a development of my potency or my agency whatever it is to actually - the words, the terminology used to describe getting control over your life and steering in the direction you want to go and that’s when I did two things: I left Deidra and I left my work [at Ford]. I refused to be contained on how my life was going to be like. (Int. 4)

Something positive did come from having a de facto and twin girls. It proved to Barry, and he indicated to me that he needed proof, that he wasn’t a child molester or deviate. He believed he was a good father to the twin girls and he was with them until they were four.

Another incident in Barry’s life occurred when he decided to do something about his mother’s medical problem. She had thrombosis, and it was in both shins and had ulcerated. He reminded me that it was very odoriferous! He said he never knew his mother any differently. She always had these wrecked legs and one swollen because there’s no circulation. (Int. 3) Finally, when Barry was 24, and living in

Duane Boyer
the de facto relationship with Deidra, he announced to his mother that he was going
to take her to see a doctor. As a consequence of this, his mother went to the
hospital and the doctor admitted her immediately. Medical consensus was that if
she had been much longer getting medical attention she’d probably have had her
legs amputated.

One of the positive defining moments in Barry’s life was leaving his job at Ford
Australia to return to school. Barry declared that when he quit Ford he left behind
his working class type of attitude. It was not just the working class type attitude; it
was also consumerism and other things, too.

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<th>DEFINING MOMENT – RETURNING TO SCHOOL</th>
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<td>Once I left Ford I went with a working-class type of attitude. I left all that. Life has blossomed since then. I was determined to go back to school and eventually go to university, so I left Ford and I actually took my life into my own hands. This is what I want to do and I haven’t looked back since. (Int. 2)</td>
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I always felt there was no future to be held there, but it was me saying, ‘Okay, I’ve got to make my own future. I’m not going to be dictated to and have this as some sort of future, so that was a critical moment’. (Int. 2) The defining moment was the realisation not only of his belief in himself and his gaining of self-respect but, also, beginning to feel that he was in control of his own life. Barry was accepted into Deakin University where he felt like a new man. At last he was being intellectually stimulated. It was an entirely different life.

Barry enjoys being challenged intellectually and found university studies stimulating. At graduation, he received top honours for class academic record in the Social Studies.

I’ve never experienced anything like it, just the symbolism, the meaning, the rituals, the tradition and the inauguration, and looking back on five years and how much I have changed in five years. It was
Barry is currently doing Honours in the Liberal Arts. His main study is the sociology of intellectuals. He told me that probably one reason why he decided to continue his studies was because of the award. Yes, I got such a buzz out of it. It just means so much to me to actually get that award. (Int. 3) His main study is the sociology of intellectuals. Barry is going to give himself six months to complete the study. Here’s his plan: If I give myself a good chunk of time, say six months, I’ll discipline myself enough to do it. I’ll concentrate fully on it and know that in six months it’s going to be done. (Int. 3)

His supervisor already is encouraging Barry to go on for his doctorate. Barry questioned whether he has the ability and his supervisor has told him: I’ve seen your work and I’ve seen your marks. You’ve got much more than a lot of these people have. (Int. 3) Now Barry is beginning to feel that way himself, I want to do it; I’m quite determined. (Int. 3)

Barry met Christine and she has been an integral part of his stability and his life. They met in 1995 at work, attended care. I suppose you classify it as a student nurse type of thing. (Int. 2) Christine was Barry’s boss. When I asked him how their meeting had influenced his life, he responded:

In a marvellous way. She has given me and reinforced a belief in my abilities to succeed at what I choose to undertake. I can climb to the top of the world with her. Yes! I needed the right environment, tenacity and partner to do what I want. I was waiting for it for 27 years. No, I would do nothing different. She has given me acceptance and understanding. It made me think and feel that life can be liveable. I’m a million miles from where I was. (Int. 4)
Oh, Christine, our household is fantastic from what I had as a child. We talk endlessly about things, emotions, issues, public and private issues, comments. We’re free to be ourselves and follow our interests and develop our interest. We respect each other and all of those things just weren’t there when I was a child. (Int. 1)

Barry had a very difficult childhood. He could have led a life of crime, but he rose above that. He returned to school, to university, and he received top awards at graduation. Presently he has found peace of mind with Christine. This is a relationship that he had not previously experienced with anyone, ever. Positive relationships in the past for Barry had been extremely difficult, and Christine had changed his life. Barry acknowledged that meeting her was one of his most precious defining moments. He realises how important Christine is in his life and is finding ways not to sabotage their relationship. He has had many traumatic experiences and is now trying to lead a ‘normal’ life. Barry exerts much energy into making their home a restful place with an atmosphere that was non-existent when he was growing up. Barry is doing well.
4.3 Colin Darvell

My mother took me along to a local church scout group to enrol me in scouts. I can remember vividly her being told by the scoutmaster that they only accept Christian boys. I think it was my first experience of anti-Semitism as a child and it's what my parents had fled Germany from. (Int. 2)

Colin Darvell was born 30 June 1944, in Leeds, Yorkshire, England, and parented by holocaust surviving Jews who fled Germany in 1939. Colin and I met at a social function a number of years ago. Several years after our first meeting Colin visited me in hospital the night before my major operation at the Alfred. It was only after our second interview that I realised he was quite familiar with the Alfred because he had been a patient there, too. Of all the subjects interviewed for this study, Colin was the most appreciative for being selected because he has used all four interviews as part of his ‘growth’. He explained:

I regard this activity as being a godsend because I’ve enjoyed it so much. I think it’s a great project and I’m sure it will be fascinating to read, but it’s given me an opportunity to reflect. You’ve given me a structure to work within, and I’ve really enjoyed the opportunity to say what I think and I regard it as a real privilege to have been able to participate. I’ve got a lot out of it. (Int. 3)

Colin grew up in a semi-slum neighbourhood in industrial Leeds in the early 1950s. Edward, his father, was a ‘professional’ chef and Louise, his mother, worked in a woollen mill. His father was able to get his mother out of Germany in 1939, and they married in England. Edward changed the family name to an anglicised version of a German/Jewish name, enlisted in the British army and fought in Europe for six years. Both parents lost most of their relatives to the Nazis, so all of those experiences had a profound effect on Colin’s upbringing. Colin described his father as a tyrant. He explained that his upbringing was quite tense because his father was particularly volatile. Colin always felt his father’s behaviour was caused by his war experiences. What surprised Colin was that there weren’t any stories about the war
My only sister Mary was the repository of some of the stories from my mother, but there were never any stories from my father. He never talked about his life in Germany. It was as if that didn’t exist. (Int. 4)

Originally his father was a hat maker in Germany. After the war he became a chef and was trained in the Escoffier School in superior French hotels. Being a volatile type of man, according to Colin, he didn’t stay in any one place very long; the family was uprooted and moved frequently. In fact, Colin attended ten different schools during his ten years of formal education because his father seemed to be always on the move. Although Colin’s mother was very house proud and had middle class aspirations, whenever her husband decided to move house she simply obliged. My father was extraordinarily hard working. He was a tyrant and ruled the roost. I remember we had a neat little house in Leeds, but neither parent was a good manager financially. My childhood was generally very unhappy, and I felt insecure because of my violent father and the family dynamics. I think I was an unhappy little boy. I was happy at home, and I think once I learnt to read I found the world of history and the world of ideas far more interesting than the real world that I was in. (Int. 2)

DEFINING MOMENTS – ACCEPTANCE INTO GRAMMAR SCHOOL AND PLAYING IN SCHOOL RUGBY TEAM

When I posed the question, ‘Of all your critical incidents during childhood, which one(s) presented you with a defining moment?, Colin responded, achieving acceptance into a prestigious grammar school as a result of academic achievement in the 11-plus examination and playing in the school rugby team. (Int. 1)

Although Colin’s childhood years were not the happiest, life improved somewhat because of his academic and athletic abilities. Here’s his account:

At that time I sat for what was then the entrance examination in England, the 11+ exam, by which a student’s future academic progress
was determined. There were two streams. You had the more academic grammar school education determined by your score on the eleven – plus exam. If you pass that you get into a grammar school; if you didn’t you went into what was then called a secondary modern school. I sat the exam and was accepted but, of course, we moved. I didn’t get to play in the grand final of the rugby because we moved. I still have the medal that I get sent, and the book, and the photos and a lovely pen portrait that was written for me. (Int. 1)

Colin spoke more about defining moments:

I find it hard to pick an actual moment in time. I seem to have focused on an event rather than a moment – an event that had a genesis, and something that occurred and consequences. For me it’s harder to go back and find that moment, if it ever exists, when you make a decision, no more, never again – or I will do this or whatever. I found that more difficult to pin point exactly. I tend to look at the fact that I got into the grammar school and the fact that I forced my way into the rugby team as defining moments – like they’re events that were indicative of my situation, and my personality and the environment at the time that had reacted to something. I take a lot of pride from the fact now that I was able to use my sporting achievements – I mean everything was stacked against me from a sporting point of view. I was small, light and yet it was my determination, pugnacious, absolutely just grip determination to do this that got me through. I remember the pen portrait that was written and I still have the book that was sent to me from the schoolteacher in 1954. (Int. 1)

At that point we interrupted the interview so Colin could show me the scrapbook that housed the medal, book and pen portrait.

Here it is. This is the little book that is a record of the school year. Here’s the lovely letter that was written by Mr. Grant who’s probably long gone and I kept this. Here I am. I’m not in that photo because I
wasn’t in the grand final side. But there I am at practice. I played in second row, scrum, and this is me. My rugby coach Mr. Grant wrote the pen portrait: “He forced his way into the side late by his sterling tackling in practice games. His handling was indifferent and his grasp of tactics none too good, but there was never any doubt in his mind what to do if an opponent had the ball. (Colin told me he was an aggressive player.) He was a grand team member who was a loss to the side when his family left Leeds after the semi-final”. (Int. 1)

At age twelve, Colin’s next school was the prestigious Ilkley Grammar School. Ilkley is a little country town on the moors in central England a rather up market holiday environment. At the grammar he considered himself an interloper. Socially and culturally I felt ill at ease and didn’t fit in. I soon learnt that if you told people you were Jewish there would be negative consequences. I learnt very well to disguise my being Jewish and denied it. (Int. 3)

Colin recalled that he was profoundly upset when his sister Mary told him that their parents were going to separate. I was upset, frightened, apprehensive, all of those things. I think one of the themes that I’ve identified through all this is to search for security. (Int.1). The separation never happened. The only separation was their removal from England when they immigrated to Australia in 1956 when Colin was twelve-and-a-half. This came about through a successful wool broker from Perth who was charged with the responsibility of travelling the world to find chefs to cook in the Olympic Village in Melbourne. Colin’s dad had an excellent reputation as a chef. It was his father’s decision to come to Australia. My father had this wonderful attribute of folding his arms and saying: ‘I have spoken. There will be no discussion. No correspondence will be entered into’. (Int. 1) This used to frustrate Colin and the others a great deal; their points of view weren’t welcomed at this point. At an early age Colin was determined he would never emulate his father’s behaviour.

Schoolmates and some adults were confronting one very difficult problem for Colin with anti-Semitism. He was aware that he had to hide his being Jewish which was upsetting. Colin explained that the war was never spoken about, but it
manifested itself in all sorts of ways. Colin said, they lacked trust in people. They always felt different. There was this constant fear that they were going to be singled out and picked on. My parents were vulnerably damaged by the holocaust. They were no longer practicing Jews. They had rejected their Jewish background and grew up with an a-religious background. (Int. 1) Colin recalled one particular incident when they first arrived in Melbourne:

*My mother took me along to a local church scout group to enrol me in scouts. I can remember vividly her being told by the scoutmaster that they only accept Christian boys. I think it was my first experience of anti-Semitism as a child and it’s what my parents had fled Germany from.* (Int. 2)

Colin and his mother interpreted this incident as being anti-Semitic. Although it seemed to be about his not being Christian rather than being Jewish, they felt it was more about Colin’s Jewish background than about Christianity.

When Colin turned thirteen his parents thought it would be a good idea for him to study for his Bar mitzvah, even though they weren’t devout. Colin received instruction in Judaism because he said he didn’t know how to be Jewish. The other students were good Jewish boys who spoke Yiddish at home, and who could read Hebrew because they had been sent to Jewish private schools. When he was confronted with the Torah and told to read it, he couldn’t. He had to memorise his entire Torah speech and that was how he did his Bar mitzvah.

Colin attended a number of schools: Elwood High School, Reservoir High School and Footscray High School. When he turned up at Footscray in his Ilkley Grammar School blazer and cap, and his broad Yorkshire accent: *I soon learnt to lose that; assimilation was very important. Bullying was considered a normal part of school. I didn’t often get into fights. In fact, I managed to evade fights, talked my way out of them. I soon learnt that words are powerful.* (Int. 2) Colin believed he was bullied because he was so short and always ‘the new boy’. But because he knew that he wasn’t going to remain in any particular school very long, he just accepted it as part of life. If someone ever tried to bully him, he would confront that person. *I can be a bit pugnacious at times. I won’t back off.* (Int. 2)
In 1959 after receiving his Intermediate Certificate at the end of third form, Colin left school. His parents had no thoughts of his continuing his education. No career advice or encouragement was given. It just happened; he left school. He was fifteen when he started his first employment as a junior storeman in a city firm, eight to five. After less than a year in his first job, Colin realised that unless he did something to change the situation he would always stay a storeman.

**DEFINING MOMENT – BECOMING A PART-TIME STUDENT**

Colin sought career advice. He saw the very first careers advisor at RMIT who gave him a battery of tests and told him he had reasonable intelligence. He advised him to become a salesman and to attempt the leaving qualification. It was suggested that he do Matriculation English and in 1961 he started part-time studies at Taylors College. He recalled, *they had a very systematic approach to teaching. I worked from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and then I had to grab a sandwich and go to night school ‘til maybe 8 or 9 o’clock. This continued two or three nights a week, and in four years I finished my leaving and Matriculation. Matriculation was the equivalent of getting my VCE, and it was like going to grammar school because with that Matriculation I was able to get a job with Kraft.* (Int. 2)

He started to develop intellectually as a part-time student because he became responsible for his own learning. *I was a late developer. I became productive, challenged and rewarded. It was a time of growth and maturity leading to greater confidence in myself and my potential.* (Int. 2) Because Colin considered this experience a defining moment, he wanted to explain this to me:

*I find it hard to actually recall a moment. I can come forward in time and remember a particular moment in another incident clearly, or go back and think about that incident at the scout situation. But the decision to study was a result of realising a situation, making inquiries,
When I asked Colin how this decision of part-time study had affected his life, he replied:

*It meant a life of discipline and responsibility leading to those goals I had set myself. I am what I am today because of what I have learned and applied.* (Int. 1)

Colin said he felt as though he never had adolescence. He had to become an adult early. Because his parents were holocaust survivors, they were left vulnerably damaged and this had quite an effect on his early years. His father worked long hours and Colin became the de facto ‘man of the house’ when his father wasn’t there. His mother’s health had declined and he had to spend more time with her. He said he saw the main themes of his life at that time as the search for security, authenticity and knowledge.

In 1965, at the age of 21, Colin started at Kraft as a trainee manager. Like an internship for the first six months, he worked in every department at the factory, so he had complete working experience. (Int. 2) This was a time of growth and maturity for Colin. He was allowed to grow and utilise his talents. He was responsible for induction and training of the factory employees, and that led to his becoming aware that he might have a talent for teaching. Colin had worked at Kraft for six months when it was discovered that he had a tumour of the pituitary, triggered through headaches and other symptoms. Colin’s search for health, and the health of his family, had been a major issue for him. Colin had major neurosurgery at the Alfred Hospital. The illness and subsequent recovery toughened him mentally. *It was a near death experience. It was very scary stuff, but my recovery was good and I had a new lease on life.* (Int. 2)

When Colin returned to work, he and his boss set up English classes for the migrant workers through the Department of Immigration. It was Colin’s job to
coordinate the project and he regarded it as a special privilege. He knew the employees derived long-term satisfaction and pleasure because of the difference it made to the lives of those people. It was Colin’s responsibility to coordinate the classes and he regarded it as something that he was intensely proud of. (Int. 2) It meant a great deal to Colin because he realised how important education was for him and this eventually lead to his becoming a teacher.

When Colin realised how capable he was in pursuing academic work, he commenced studying part-time toward a degree in accounting at RMIT while employed at Kraft. He confessed to me that he learned to stick to a task and complete it because it took him six years to get the accounting qualification that he admitted hating it, but *when I set my mind to do something, I’m very determined.* (Int. 3)

There was a number of critical incidents involved in his search for authenticity. One was his enrolment in courses at the Augustine Centre from 1974-78. He considered this an important experience because it was a *profoundly stimulating experience and very rewarding and challenging from an intellectual and spiritual point of view.* (Int. 2) Subsequently, Colin became involved in the Uniting Church and yet he preferred to think of himself as agnostic and:

... *be open to the possibilities that there is some kind of unifying higher force, but to think of it as some kind of judging individual that keeps a record of and watches everything we do, I think is an insult to the higher force. So that’s my view of spirituality.* (Int. 2)

In Colin’s search for security he met Rose in 1974 and married at age thirty. Rose was thirty-eight. Colin realised he was in a happy relationship and this became a very important moment for him. He explained it this way:
Meeting Rose and marrying her soon after was a very important period of time in Colin’s life. He never realised how important love was in making a person feel secure. It was definitely a defining moment for him.

I met Rose in 1974. She’d had a horrific car accident ten years before and a major disabling illness as a result of the car crash. When she and I met it was a bit like two damaged hearts of one piece of poetry coming together. We were ideally suited. As it turned out I was infertile and I had a low sex drive. That was fine for Rose because she’s almost asexual. She’s a fine woman, and she’s got a fine moral quality.

Colin’s needs for financial security and belonging now subsumed by being in a happy relationship, so he was now ready to accept the challenge of a new career. Colin explained to me that he could recall the exact day and time that it happened. I can recall ANZAC day in 1976 when I decided to become a teacher. That didn’t just happen out of the blue and then it took another few months to put that decision into effect. (Int. 4) So on Anzac Day, April 25, 1976, Colin decided he wanted to become a teacher. He had been studying personal administration at Prahran College, and changed to an arts diploma with a double major in language and literature. His wife quit her job as a nurse educator to study to become a psychiatric nurse, so there were two mature-aged students in the house. Colin took a pay cut to be on a studentship, and ended up washing pots and pans at an inner-suburban AFL Club for a living for three years. Colin explained that his decision to be a teacher was a ‘growth choice’ and, also, by both of them studying they became more supportive of each other emotionally.

He resigned from Kraft and took the challenge of a new career, teaching. He attended teachers’ college and completed the course with very good marks. He enjoyed teaching in country Victoria and was glad he made his ‘growth choice’. This, too, made Colin and Rose more emotionally supportive of each other. He still thinks of his teaching days every ANZAC day.
Colin’s mother had not been in good health for many years and she died from a heart attack when she was 54. Colin had had a close, loving relationship with her. He described it as an *Oedipus relationship, incestuous emotionally.* (Int. 2) In a later interview, Colin explained it this way:

> Well, we may not have had sex, but you can still have emotional incest. My father was absent and my mother was ill. I spent time with her. She confided in me. She encouraged me to be her emotional support, out of her need. I believed that stunted my emotional growth. It formed me; it had quite an effect on me. (Int. 4)

**DEFINING MOMENT – BECOMING A FATHER**

In Colin’s search for authenticity, another incident was the birth of his son Gary through AID (artificial insemination) with the defining moment being the realisation that he was now a father. Then he fostered and later adopted Craig with Down syndrome. Gary was seven when Craig was adopted at three years of age. When he identified the unique gifts that each of his sons had, he realised another defining moment. He said he has always been happy with his two boys.

Another growth choice for Colin was enrolling off-campus in an arts degree in History Politics at Deakin University in 1980.

**DEFINING MOMENT – “I’M NOT DUMB”**

Colin told me that because neither of his parents had a tertiary education, it was a great source of pride to them that he studied and they were very proud of him. All this brought about another defining moment when Colin realised he wasn’t dumb! Colin expressed the importance of his study at Deakin:
So here I was a parent with young kids and a full-time job as a teacher. I took on an arts degree in History Politics. In many respects I think it taught me to think. It taught me the value of concepts and the way concepts can be linked. I became a much better teacher as a result of that. I became more focused and disciplined in my thoughts, tremendous appreciation for what I got out of it. Up until then I was always a little bit burdened by a sense of inferiority academically. I never considered myself bright. After Deakin I realised that I wasn’t dumb, that I may not have been top of the tree academically, but I can hold my own in a conversation with anybody and I’ve overcome that. I think of my adolescence and I was driven by my need to prove myself and that feeling of insecurity and I think that’s tied in with my short stature. You know, the little man problem, and pugnacious little man and I struggled with that for a long time. But I tend to celebrate that now and I think, I say ‘If my height is a problem, it’s a problem. It’s a problem for you, not for me!’ True security has to come from inside. And if you haven’t got it, if you haven’t established it, articulated it, then you’re screwed. That’s the Darvell theory of security! (Int. 1)

In 1982 Colin’s father died from heart and kidney failure. It was an extremely upsetting experience for the entire family. Colin explained it this way:

All his struggles, all his fears, and all his war time experiences were locked away, and they only came back to haunt him when he was dying. He couldn’t sleep. He was fearful of sleeping because he would dream and he’d have these horrific recurring re-enactments, all the stuff that he had managed to lock away, and shut down, and bolt down and put in cupboards. Well, the cupboards got opened, and the locks were sprung and out they came. They were buried alive and they came back to terrorise him. Horrible experiences. (Int. 4)

Several years passed when Colin decided being a teacher reminded him too much of his father. He found himself constantly telling his students what to do, how to do it and he heard himself saying, this sounds too much like my father. (Int. 4) He revealed the following:
I think the feeling we get when we realise we’re sounding just like our parents is a pretty scary experience in any parent’s life because it’s the thing we fear most, that we’ll turn into our parents. It was one of the reasons I decided to quit teaching because teaching had the effect of making me more controlling, more didactic, and more rigid. I saw all of these characteristics that I thought I’d never have manifesting themselves and I thought, ‘Oh, my god! (Int. 4).

In 1984-5 Colin had his second neurosurgery and was off work for nearly a year. The surgery was unsuccessful and it was a very traumatic time for Colin. It was then that an endocrinologist discovered how to treat and shrink the tumour. Colin had prolactinoma and his body was totally infused with the female hormone prolactin. The female hormone had been replaced by testosterone that had been masked for more than ten years. Then followed the recovery and the transformation. Becoming more masculine because of the replaced testosterone, Colin became a more dynamic person who had more drive, more energy and much higher libido. This became another defining moment for him. Colin said they had been living in the Western District where he had been teaching in a Tech. school. They moved to Warrnambool where Rose could work in the psychiatric hospital. He continued the story:

When I got better I had more energy. I was more active and I had a much higher libido. I was much more interested in sex and this was just too much for Rose. She couldn’t cope with this new, more assertive person; she couldn’t cope with the drive with sex. All this energy and all of these projects on the go, I was very dynamic as a teacher, involved myself. I was playing tennis, and ten pin bowling, and working long hours, and involved in a whole bunch of things, and wanted sex as well. (Int. 1)

Colin’s marriage gradually fell apart because of his ‘new’ personality, and he and Rose filed jointly for divorce in 1989. There were new opportunities in Melbourne. A new position was acquired in 1990 in Juvenile Justice and then later he transferred to Aged Care.
DEFINING MOMENT – BECOMING ECONOMICALLY SELF-RELIANT

The day before he left public service, Colin received a telephone call from a local council asking him to take up a job in a consultancy. He left on the sixth of June on the anniversary of D-day, the day of liberation of Europe 51 years previously. He felt he, too, was finally liberated! It was another ‘growth choice’. So in June 1997, aged 53, Colin left the public service and took his package. Now he had a more complete theory of the meaning of security in his life that enabled him to develop new competencies, become more self-reliant and responsible. To Colin his decision to leave government service was one of his most important defining moments of his life. In his search for security, Colin knew he, at last, felt secure. He believes now that he has acted as a role model for his sons and colleagues, and he affirms, if it’s to be, it’s up to me’. (Int. 4) In his words:

On the surface it is a simple decision, but what’s holding me back is the fear of loss of security. What I’ve come to understand is that in my life many times when faced with a choice to do one thing or another, it’s been between a perceived security or an assumed security and the unknown. Mostly they’ve revolved around changes in employment, but they’ve also been in relation to the break down of my marriage. And in those situations to simplify it, it comes down to a choice between ‘security’ and ‘growth’. For me, it’s that marvellous quote by Virginia Satir about we prefer the certainty of misery to the misery of uncertainty, so for me, I take the misery of uncertainty. It isn’t a misery because the future and the growth choice are just that, it’s painful. It’s difficult; it’s challenging, but when you come to think of it, that’s the only choice. (Int. 4)

In 1999 his sister died from liver and stomach cancer. Colin still recalls the impact Mary had in his life. He deeply appreciates her efforts in tracing their long family history in Germany and her success in finding surviving close relatives.
Colin’s comments about family health are: *My defence in all of this is to look after myself physically. I can’t do much about the genetics, but I sure as hell can do something about the environmental factors. I see that as a major goal for me, to secure my long-term physical health because I have no time to be sick. I want to be around in 10 or 15 years so I can enjoy the time with my kids and my grandchildren.* (Int. 4) His health search is linked to a decision he made around 1998 when he decided to take up bicycle riding for recreation and social outlet. *I began to see that my health was my responsibility, something I had to manage myself. It has been an evolutionary process.* (Int. 4)

When asked to complete his ‘20 most important words’ philosophy, this was a prop to get him to do some thinking. Colin and I talked at length about this. A week later he returned having developed his 20-word list and ‘philosophy’. Colin’s twenty words are: Authenticity, security, interdependence, autonomy, integrity, innovation, self reliance, role model, technology, wellbeing, lifestyle, rewards, growth, wisdom, family, opportunity, networking, education and discipline. His five most important words from that list were: Authenticity, security, autonomy, wellbeing and growth. His most important word was growth. Here is his philosophy:

**GROWTH**

*My life is a work in progress: an evolving attempt to resolve conflicting goals of authenticity and security; to grow, to discover and have the courage to truly be who I am. In completing this exercise I have realised that in many ways I have attempted to synthesise and integrate a number of factors, such as: My personality (encapsulated by the Myer Briggs Inventory as an ENTJ), my background and life experiences (the mix of heredity and environment), belief systems/principles and ethics and needs and aspirations. Above all, I am aware of how fortunate I am to be born in the second half of the 20th century, with the possibility of being among the first generation to have the longest life span of any generation that has ever lived. In addition, I have the amazing luck to be living in an affluent, democratic, free and egalitarian society. For me, the long, slow process of self-education,*
coupled with observation of people and events, has taught me to mistrust most political philosophies, religious dogmatism, educational and social theories.

It is difficult to sum up my philosophy and the reasons for my beliefs without being trite. I believe in a few key principles, summed up in Covey’s Seven Habits of Effective People, in self-reliance and personal growth. Probably at the heart of my beliefs is the notion that real security only comes from within; inner security is not dependent on money in the bank, home ownership or marital status.

Earlier in my life I was taught that security was dependent on external factors and other people (a good job, for example). Economic change, health challenges and marital breakdown have taught me otherwise. Now I believe that my economic future depends mainly on my own efforts and opportunities within the new economy. For me, the ability to adapt, learn new skills and to network are key factors in my present and future success.

Many people are fatalistic about their health, believing that they are unable to control their own weight or to refrain from unhealthy and self-destructive habits. Both my parents and my sister died prematurely from heart disease or cancer. I have taken responsibility for my own health. Being fortunate enough to survive neurosurgery twice and being given the opportunity, I have controlled my weight, lowered cholesterol and in the last three years improved my strength and endurance, so that I am probably fitter now than I have ever been.

Another aspect to inner security is my belief that marriage alone does not ensure emotional security. Marriages can break down, despite the best intentions, while many people are unhappy in their relationship, yet seem unable or unwilling to change, a condition summed up by Virginia Satir, who wrote, “We prefer certainty of misery to the misery of uncertainty”.

I believe that along with the notion that consumption and immediate gratification will lead to happiness, the myth of romantic love is one of the most destructive ideas to be sold to the gullible world. What passes for love is usually narcissism and insecurity. I subscribe to Erich Fromm’s definition of love: “the active concern for the life and well-being of the other.”
I believe that honesty and real friendship are rare, but should be sought after, encouraged and nurtured. To have a friend I must first be a friend. For me the highest form of friendship is inter-dependence (his bold font).

Having been unable to physically reproduce has not prevented me from being a father. I have two sons, Gary, the result of artificial insemination and Craig, by adoption. One is blessed with intelligence and ambition, the other, affected by Down Syndrome, is a loving, artistic and musical person who has enriched the lives of all those who know him. Both need the same things: to be loved, and accepted and encouraged to be the best they can be.

I have learned that to be an effective parent to my older son is to give up the belief that I know better; while for the younger, my task is to gently lead him towards self-reliance. I have received immeasurably more from them than I have given.

Looking back from the vantage of my mid-50s, enjoying robust good health, adult children, relatively secure employment and the possibility of running my own successful business, I see many reasons to be satisfied, but more challenges ahead. My goal is to achieve wisdom and to constantly strive for self-improvement. One of my favourite quotes is “do the work and discover yourself ... our true purpose in life is to serve others and do good”. (Int. 2)

When interviewing Colin, there seemed to be four themes he was searching for in his life: Search for security, authenticity, knowledge and health. We investigated his thoughts relating to his search for security, including:

For me it is hard to separate the search for authenticity from the search for security. They seem to be inextricably intertwined. As my financial security improves, so does my self-confidence, based on the belief that my present course of action is producing positive results. This increases my sense of security and allows me to be more relaxed and open.
Halfway through my 57th year, with my two sons grown, I realise that my self-image is bound up in relationships. I see myself as reflected in the interactions with those who are important to me. To be authentic to my family, friends and colleagues means to be open in work and deed. I attempt to be consistently living by a set of principles that guide my actions in the direction of honesty and integrity. As my actions become more aligned with my clearly articulated principles, I can feel more myself, more authentic, as I don’t have to change, to ‘switch personas’ my roles change. I don’t have to change to be this way to this person and that way to another. (Int.4)

In Colin’s list of important words he listed authenticity as one his five most important words. We spoke at length about his search for authenticity. He replied:

A few months ago, when my present relationship with Marilyn was quite new, a crisis occurred on a Friday. Marilyn, who lives 150 kilometres away, contacted me by phone. Then emails were exchanged on the Saturday. We were both under pressure and there was a lot of tension. There was a very real risk that the relationship, which had seemed so promising, might flounder. After thinking about it overnight, I cancelled a previous social engagement, called ahead and drove to her home, arriving mid-morning. The situation worsened, but our relationship was strengthened and has gone forward, based on a firm foundation. Marilyn saw me as I hope to be, congruent in word and action, loyal and reliable. I was able to act in this way because I was able to call on past experiences (painful as well as successful), yet still be optimistic, and open to growth and love. This is the authentic person I am becoming. (Int. 4)

In Colin’s “My Story”, he summarises:

Looking back from the vantage of my mid-50s, enjoying robust good health, adult children, relatively secure employment and the possibility of running my own successful business, I see many reasons to be satisfied, but more challenges ahead. (Int. 4)
And finally, Colin admitted to me he had now become proud of the Jewish side of his origins. In regards to his health and wellbeing, he recently returned from Italy where he participated in a fifteen-day bike tour.
4.4 Frank Garber

*I was very depressed, very depressed. Just black; just black. Smoking dope, drinking every night. Lonely. Didn’t care who I hurt, my family. Mom had left us and our family had collapsed. I was told by a counsellor that I was handed ‘adult-sized’ pain when I was just a boy and the boy was still inside me, hurting and needing healing and encouragement.* (Int. 2)

On April 30, 1992, I was facilitating an evening workshop/discussion group called ‘One of These Days I’ll Get Going.’ It was about procrastination - doing it tomorrow, *manana.* Frank was in attendance. The next day he rang for a counselling appointment and I saw him that evening. He was 27 at the time. He discussed family problems, procrastination issues and his real concern, schizophrenia. A week later we met again for a relaxation meditation.

I became reacquainted with Frank about five years later when I was counselling at one of Geelong’s drug and alcohol centres. Frank told me he was having difficulty in abstaining from both marijuana and alcohol. He returned for a number of counselling sessions. In doing the research on defining moments, I believed Frank would be an interesting research participant because of the difficulties he encountered and his way of handling his problems, including his schizophrenia. He agreed to the four interviews with enthusiasm.

I asked Frank to begin by reflecting on his childhood. During his childhood the experiences that were most upsetting to Frank were his bedwetting, and being frightened of evil spirits and the dark. He recalls his Uncle Daniel’s house, and he said he could feel the bad spirits in the rooms. When I asked Frank to tell me more about his childhood he said:

*Well, I don’t remember much of it. I know I was frightened a lot of the time. I was scared of the dark, things like that. I used to wet the bed because I was too frightened to get up. They put me on medication and I think it did hinder my development. Basically I was bombed out all*
the time, so I didn’t learn to communicate or talk to my parents when I was at school. They thought I was a nutcase. I couldn’t concentrate on schoolwork, but I’m intelligent and I made it through primary school. I was not in the main peer group, but I had other ‘strange’ boys as friends. Never played much sport and I always walked away from fights. Because of my bedwetting and being frightened of evil spirits, I kept everything bottled up. They thought I had epilepsy, but nothing showed up on medical tests. (Int. 1)

Frank grew up in a small coastal town with his parents and two older sisters. They weren’t a very close family and he remembers having a lot of arguments with his sisters. His mother was an overbearing kind of woman, and his father was very meek. His father had some sort of psychiatric problem and Frank said he was known to be rather eccentric and very withdrawn. Frank didn’t feel comfortable around his parents and he didn’t go to them for support or companionship. Frank never seemed close to his family. He couldn’t understand why his parents were so distant to each other and to him. He became a loner, had bouts of depression and kept his thoughts bottled up. He recalls kindergarten because his grandmother used to walk him there. She was an important person to Frank. She used to read him stories and talk to him when he was taking an afternoon nap. My grandma came out from England in 1912 with her family. She’s a lot like myself now and I’m really good at cooking, too. I do sewing. I do cross-stitch. My grandma’s really good at that and she taught me that. (Int. 1)

Frank decided he wanted more freedom and independence, so he asked to have his own room. He spent much time alone, and became more distant and withdrawn from most people.

I was really young, probably Grade 2, and I had stopped wetting the bed and I felt confident. One of my sisters and I shared a room, yet there was another room no one slept in. So I said, ‘Go in that room, be by myself.’ I wanted more freedom. There was my single bed, a clothes cupboard and all my clothes. There was a poster of Sherbet [an Australian music group of the 70s] and I might have had a map of the world, not sure. I can’t remember. We didn’t have many toys; we had a
special shed out the back to put toys in. When I had my room to myself.  
I could just spread stuff out, just blend into my room. Mum was always saying ‘Tidy your room.’ I never did. I’m still like that. (Int. 1)

During primary school Frank struggled to communicate and he blamed it on the medication for depression. He was considered a bit ‘different’ by his peers and had trouble concentrating. He didn’t play sports, and he considered himself an unpopular sort of kid. He was a very overweight boy and was constantly bullied.

DEFINING MOMENT – THE FAT BOY BULLIED

When anyone tried to pick a fight, I would just walk away. I found it very frustrating because I considered myself a good boy and couldn’t understand why I was picked on. I never defended myself. (Int. 1)

Frank told me about his getting bashed up by other boys and having frequent nosebleeds. When he was bullied he would stew over it for a long time and withdraw from everyone. It was very embarrassing for him and he felt inadequate because he wasn’t tough enough to fight back. He recalls: That’s when I learnt I was too weak to fight anyone. I knew I couldn’t win, so I didn’t fight them. (Int. 1)

Although Frank enjoyed the academic part of his schoolwork, he did not like being bullied by his peer group. Frank never discussed being bullied because he found it too embarrassing. It wasn’t only his being overweight that caused the bullying, but Frank also felt that his academic aptitudes separated him from his peers. [His school records indicate an IQ of 135.] A fragment of our discussion about being bullied illustrates Frank’s unhappy school experiences:

D.B. Were there any unhappy times in childhood?  
F.G. Yeah, there were a few.  
D.B. Being bullied was one, what else?  
F.G. Just when I was bullied that I’d stew over it for a long time, withdraw from everybody.
D.B. Did you ever talk with any other kids in school about how you felt?
F.G. I don’t think so.
D.B. Did any of them sympathize with you or show empathy?
F.G. Probably ones in the same situation. I think we were more distracted to keep it out of our minds rather than analyse it.
D.B. Was that because you were too embarrassed to talk about it?
F.G. Um.
D.B. Were there children in your class ever bashed by other kids?
F.G. Yeah.
D.B. How did they feel about it?
F.G. Embarrassed. When we were kids, like, we felt like we were inadequate ‘cause we weren’t tough enough.

Maybe the bullying helped to isolate me from other people. That was a defining moment when I decided people aren’t going to be friendly to me, so I’m going to withdraw. (Int. 1)

There were other times during the four interviews that Frank mentioned the primary school bullying. This was an issue for him that kept reappearing and probably caused a continuation of his depression. Frank felt that it kept him from having trust in other people and from feeling comfortable around other people. He felt sad, rejected and isolated because of the bullying, and he learned to escape to a more pleasant surrounding – all part of the withdrawal process.

Because of the teasing and bullying in primary school, Frank continued to be more distant and withdrawn. He decided to excel in his school work, but even then there were times when he felt threatened by some of the other boys and a lot of the time I just held back answers that I knew because you’re just kind of smart aleck if you answer all of the questions all the time. (Int. 1) As a buffer for the bullying, Frank decided to become more studious so he could impress his teachers with his academic ability. Because of his high intellect, he realised at an
early age that he could outwit most of his peer group. Although there wasn’t ‘brawn’ there was ‘brain’. It was still very upsetting for Frank because he longed to be part of the in-group. He enjoyed the academic part of school because he knew he was a very good student and he seemed to need the recognition of getting good marks, but his relationship with most of his classmates was negative and disruptive.

He remembers his adolescence as being fun most of the time. Frank said it was quite a change from primary school. He had slimmed down and this helped his self-esteem and, eventually, his social life. Attending high school seemed to give Frank a sense of security that he hadn’t experienced at an earlier age. Probably when I was a teenager I lost weight, just a natural thing as a teenager, so fat gives up and gets skinny. I played sports, enjoyed jogging and seemed to fit in better at school. I put my head into school books, played competitive hockey, used to go running, ran four miles a night” (Int. 1). He decided to attend Geelong High School because the few friends he did have were planning to go there; also, he knew that the bullies were going to tech school.

DEFINING MOMENT – FAMILY UPHEAVAL

Later on in school things were not very pleasant in Frank’s family. In 1979 his mother started going out with another man and Frank was too embarrassed to talk to anyone about her affair. Frank exclaimed, He was an arsehole. Speaking the truth, he’s a criminal, been in jail. He’s an alcoholic. He was violent (Int. 1). That was the worst thing that happened to me. That bloke would be the worst I’ve ever known, not because of what he did to me, but it was just the way it was. He was dirty. It was awful because we had no family. (Int. 4)

Frank was terribly upset during this period of time and couldn’t believe his mother could betray his father and the whole family. He lost all respect for his mother because of what she had done. He had always put her on a pedestal, but now he had lost all faith in her. He couldn’t believe that she could do such a thing and break up the family. Frank
was devastated by the lack of compassion between his parents and their separation. He couldn’t figure out why his father didn’t defend himself or put up a fight to save the marriage, but evidently there was much going on that he wasn’t aware of during those years. The defining moment for Frank was when he realised how dysfunctional his family was, and he was just going to have to accept the fact that this incident had disintegrated his family. When Frank came to the realisation that the adult role models in his own household moulded his behaviour and he didn’t know how to change his personality. So he continued his alienation, and he felt even more isolated and alone then ever before. 

*Even around other people I often felt very much alone. The feeling of aloneness has become a characteristic trait of mine that has continued into my adulthood.* (Int. 4)

His parents divorced in 1982 when he was in Year 11, but his dad continued to live at home with the family. Frank explained that his mother and Jeremy, her second husband, fought a lot so Jeremy lived in another house; however, Frank’s father remained with the family, but had a separate upstairs room in his own home. Frank couldn’t understand their strange relationship.

While in secondary school, although continuing to fight his depression, Frank found some solace by attending his local Anglican church and he believed one of the highlights of his adolescence was being confirmed. He always felt that he was a very spiritual kind of person and joining the Anglican Church made quite an impression on him. He served in the church service and did readings. He felt that this kept him safe and calm. Frank indicated to me that the church was the one institution that made sense to him. Even during all the family problems he found the Anglican Church to be a stabilising influence for him.

I asked him: “What are some things that happened to you in school, either primary or secondary, that happened on the playground or in the classroom that you wished the teacher had been more aware of to support you or defend you?” Frank
mentioned being bullied by a ‘know-it-all’ teacher who he wished had been more supportive and understanding. Frank explained:

> Remember in year 11, I was really good at maths and a couple of mates, they were good as well, and we were having revision for the first test. I think it was sets. We were just mucking around, chatting, teacher kept saying ‘Do your work. Do your work.’ And stood behind me and poked me in the back with his pen and said, ‘You’re not going to pass this test. You’re not going to pass maths.’ And I got 40 out of 40 for every test after that. And another time the same teacher, a guy stole my pen and I was trying to get it back. The teacher didn’t like me, so he took the other guy’s side, gave the pen to him and it was my pen. It was a special pen. It wasn’t just an ordinary pen; it was a nice pen. (Int. 3)

Frank thought about leaving home because he was so upset with his mother and her connection with another man, but because he was so interested in his education he decided to stay at home and complete high school. When I asked him if he received any awards in high school, he replied, I got a hockey award, senior hockey. I didn’t get dux, but my sister did in Year 12. (Int. 1) Frank didn’t quite make dux, but his grades were good so he enrolled at university to study accounting.

As a teenager Frank had lost weight, had become athletic, had a group of friends and had the reputation of being an academic student. There were times, however, when he still had bouts of depression. He thought he was at the stage in his life when people were no longer a threat to him and he felt comfortable being with others. After year 12 and his entrance to university things started to deteriorate, however. He told me that he felt like ‘riffraff’ once he arrived at university because he was no longer in his comfort zone of his high school setting, and he felt insecure around more mature students. He thought the people from grammar schools and colleges looked down on those who went to riffraff high schools. I think they looked down their noses at me. (Int. 3) Frank started using drugs and he was beginning to show symptoms of schizophrenia. Frank lasted a year at university. Yeah, just a year. Unfortunately I got mixed up with people taking drugs and then I just bummed around for a couple of years. (Int. 2)
During our third interview Frank mentioned his attempts at suicide that started the year he was at university. He said the medication he was on for depression caused him to sleep much of the time and to be even more depressed. Because of his problems with depression he said he was taking medication on and off most of his life. He admitted that he was just worried that they were going to put me in jail, what people would be saying to you. I didn’t want that, took a lot of overdoses. (Int. 3) He was having ‘paranoid delusions’ and ‘auditory hallucinations’. He was hearing voices and thought someone would tell the police that he was using marijuana. As it happened when he did overdose on marijuana someone would come home and call the doctor. Other times he was taken to hospital. Most times his suicidal attempts were a cry for help.

Frank finally withdrew from university and he attempted employment. His work experiences were not satisfactory. He found employment at Telstra in 1986 as a services clerk. Frank became sick and left before the completion of the three-month’s probation period, and he continued to have his bouts of depression. His second job was at Ford Australia doing spot welding. He stayed eight weeks. They were just trying to get rid of me because I felt they didn’t like me. (Int. 3) Then he went to a place in North Geelong where they manufacture heaters. He was sacked after four weeks. He found out a few weeks later that they were worried about his mental state. In July 1987, he worked at Winchesters and lasted eight weeks. Because it was difficult for him to work under pressure, Frank found each new job he took to be less demanding because he knew he couldn’t take the stress. Frank recalls:

One thing led to another … family busted up and later on I started taking drugs and I wanted to be by myself all the time, to get away from the house. So I took a whole year off, just doing nothing. Those hallucinations and delusions, I still believe it actually happened … like at Ford, getting harassed and the doctors told me that it wasn’t happening – it was just in the mind and it still reminds me of that. (Int. 4)
Frank spoke more about his young adulthood and his unfortunate work experiences, drinking, using drugs, unhappy family relationships and, worst of all, being diagnosed as being schizophrenic.

**DEFINING MOMENT – DIAGNOSIS: SCHIZOPHRENIA**

Frank spent some time talking about his mental illness. He said that even before he was diagnosed he was having hallucinations. And they pestered him all the time. He had loss of drive and motivation. Sometimes you just couldn’t care less. Just lie in bed all day. Just do nothing, just smoke cigarettes and listen to the radio. (Int. 4) He spoke about blunted emotions and said the ability to express emotions was greatly reduced. Quite often he thought it was accompanied by a lack of response or an inappropriate response to external events whether it was a happy or sad occasion. Frank said he became aware that something was wrong with him even when he was attending high school. He started withdrawing from most people. I just wanted to be by myself all the time and think, and just imagine situations in my life, but they weren’t getting any lighter. (Int. 4)

I was very depressed, very depressed. Just black; just black. Smoking dope, drinking every night. Lonely. Didn’t care who I hurt, my family. Mom had left us and our family had collapsed. I was told by a counsellor that I was handed ‘adult-sized’ pain when I was just a boy and the boy was still inside me, hurting and needing healing and encouragement. I didn’t get into any cults or anything. Just really lucky, I didn’t. The worst dope I smoked was marijuana. I was pretty fortunate there. Just the pain I had to deal with, on Point Henry and I thought people were picking on me and threatening me. I don’t know. The doctors said they weren’t but I’m pretty sure they were. I did overtime on the Saturday morning, and the night before I dreamed of what I heard and I went to work. Just spinning. I thought people were saying, ‘You’re being sued. You’re going to jail’ and all this stuff like this and I said to my dad, ‘Can they take me to
jail?’ He said, ‘I’m taking you to Dax House.’ He drove me into Dax. They took me to casualty at the hospital and then transferred me to Dax House. I can’t remember much in detail, but a lot of doctors talked to me, a lot of different people, so many people for a week or so, and I didn’t want to stay. I wanted to go home. I actually wanted to go to jail. They put me on medication and after a few days I settled down. I was in for two weeks. (Int. 2)

Frank was twenty-one when he was an outpatient at Dax House in April 1987. According to his medical reports, he gradually settled down with Stelazine, but he thought the medication was too expensive so he stopped taking it. He stopped seeing the psychiatrist, too. Later that same year, in September, he was admitted as a patient for two weeks when he was having paranoid delusions and auditory hallucinations. I asked him to describe that experience:

Oh, you just sort of, it’s a directional sort of place and moseys around, wander in and out everywhere, talk to people, have a smoke, play pool, have meals. At 8 o’clock they make the rounds to get pills to make you sleep until the morning. I didn’t really think that they were that good, but I’ve heard other people say they were. The state I was in, I sort of didn’t want to listen to anybody (Int. 2).

Frank elaborated on more experiences relating to Dax House and psychiatrists. Here’s his journal entry for October 11, 1987. He explained that it related to a theme to do with ‘skillness’, and doctors, and drugs and things that make you sick, disability of doctors. I don’t really have a high opinion of psychiatrists which you’ll probably find as I go on. (Int. 4)

11th October I was born. Thanks Mum and Dad, but later I wished I hadn’t, but who cares. Who wants to be around a sad sack? Walk away, they’ve only got excuses why they can’t take my advice. Who cares about a misery guts? No one. Tell them to grow up and get a life. Cigarettes cost a fortune. Come pension day no money left, like a speed
addict, worry about the cost later. I’m not going to jail. I’m honest and decent. I sleep well with a clear conscience. I don’t want to die. I want a life. Misery drives people away, so you have to pay people to listen to your problems. They keep their job. This is the answer to closing down your psychiatrist. Tell them nothing. You can’t trust a psychiatrist. They say one thing and do another. (Int. 4)

Being diagnosed as having schizophrenia was a defining moment in Frank’s life. It changed his life completely. It has been devastating for him because he lost all incentive to form and pursue life goals. He could no longer concentrate for any length of time and this was extremely upsetting for him because he seemed to thrive on reading and learning. He explained what this meant to him:

   It teaches me that I didn’t look back. It teaches to look forward, to look after yourself. It teaches that if you don’t look after yourself then that’s it! If you take drugs you’ll just be continually sick and you’ll just be frustrated by it ... hospital treatment? You want to die and that’s not life; that’s just existing. You won’t win if you’re on drugs; you just exist. (Int. 4)

Frank brought his journal with him for our fourth interview and he read this entry from his journal:

F.G.  This doodle started off as a house, like a little square with a triangle top for a roof and two windows and a door, but then it ended up as a head with arms, arms and hands and a pair of boobs and under that I wrote, ‘It started off as a house, but ended up a lady.’ Just as a joke I said, ‘There’s a bear in there.’
D.B.  A bear?

F.G.  Yeah, it’s just a Playschool, a kids’ program. Start off as a bear in there, chose that house. I wrote about that. I guess I’d label that as guided imagery. It might be a highbred of the Tin Man. Dorothy wanted to go home and he wanted a heart. I’m not sure of the story, but one wanted courage. Then I wrote, ‘I was told a few weeks back that I have kind eyes
and eyes are the windows to the soul.’ I keep away from people with
crazy looks in their eyes.

D.B. Okay, what do you have next?

F.G. A little poem:

    I had no money to ...
    I want beer, got no cash,
    Don’t want dope, don’t want hash,
    I want beer, I love beer
But it makes my liver break out in a rash.
    I love sunshine, stop the rain
Drop more bombs on Saddam Hussein
    I like port but I don’t snort
I don’t want to end up in a magistrate’s court. (Int. 4)

Between 1984-1987, Frank had made numerous suicide attempts. As time went on, Frank felt even less secure and more inadequate than when he was younger. There were some critical incidents that continued to plague him.

According to Frank, he attempted suicide about fifteen times between 1987 and 1993. He said he just felt crook all the time, lonely and wasn’t getting things I wanted. (Int. 3) He felt very frustrated. Once instead of using pills he slashed his wrists. This occurred when he broke up with one of his girlfriends. He told me there wasn’t any hope of life, so he went down to the lake with a knife and slashed his wrists. When he realised what he had done he drove himself to casualty and they transferred him to Dax House. This incident became another expression of his fight with depression and schizophrenia for Frank because he said it made him realise committing suicide for a woman was not worth it. He told me that it taught him that life is much more valuable than he thought it was. This moment made a drastic change in Frank’s life. It made him appreciate more the friends he did have and the value of his own abilities, even thought he said he hadn’t made good use of them. He was deeply concerned about his schizophrenia, and knew it had interfered with his mental functioning and had changed his personality. There were times when he would become completely withdrawn, get very depressed and anxious, and develop phobias, especially the fear of being caught and taken to jail.
It seems that loneliness drove Frank to associate with his ‘so-called’ friends who drank heavily and smoked pot. Frank admitted that during his young adulthood he decided he didn’t need to be with those people. He started doing volunteer work at Karingal and met Gary who had gone through rehabilitation period. Gary introduced him to a new group of people and this changed his life. They cared about him and this changed him around so that he had a more positive perspective toward life.

We talked more about his life and Frank decided one of the more potent defining moments came about through his acquaintance with his friend Gary. He explains it this way:

**DEFINING MOMENT – MEETING MY FRIEND GARY**

Probably meeting Gary was a defining moment because if I hadn’t met him I wouldn’t have met David. It’s the best. If I hadn’t met Gary, I wouldn’t have stopped hurting my grandmother. Frank didn’t physically harm his grandmother. He was referring to her concern for him and his misuse of drugs and alcohol. Frank felt she was the only family member who took an interest in him. He said he really grieved at her funeral. If I hadn’t met Gary I’d probably still be on drugs and drinking. He helped me sort of express myself and communicate, sort of prepare me for what was going to happen. He helped me reconstruct my life because he told me the people I was seeing were no good for me and it confirmed what my grandmother was saying all along. Someone my age didn’t do those things. He told me it is okay to cry and to be gentle on yourself. Drugs are dumb. Your youth is not a rehearsal. You don’t get a second chance. If you don’t get it right at the most important time, then it will have consequences later. (Int. 3)

Frank believed that he had very few true friends and he considered Gary one of them. He has always respected Gary because he knew he was always there to help him. He thought meeting Gary provided him with both friend and mentor. Here was someone he could trust, someone who cared about him. Frank had not had someone like this for
In 1991 Frank enrolled at the Gordon TAFE to take the technology course called the advanced certificate in applied science in laboratory technology. Unfortunately his grandmother died shortly after his first semester into the course. He was devastated and suffered from loneliness and depression because he had been living with her. When he was a child, his grandmother was the most significant person in his life. He tried to get back into the course second semester, but he couldn’t concentrate on the work. He continued another semester and then he dropped out. He said he lost interest and he felt loneliness had a lot to do with it. Because of his mental illness he often had mood swings and bouts of depression, and Frank believed this was the reason he had difficulty not only meeting people, but maintaining any kind of relationship. By this time most of his family had either dropped out of his life or he saw them infrequently. The defining moment that is prominent in Frank’s mind in his adulthood, so far, is narrated in this article that he wrote. He decided not to tell me her name.

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DEFINING MOMENT - MEETING MRS. X

I met this person in 1992 about a year after my grandma had died. She sort of picked up where grandma had left off, but in a more appropriate style. I was a mess. My life was a mess, drinking, going out, late nights, hurting myself and I wanted to die. I was a man with cuts inside, lonely, worried about being locked up and no one could convince me. I kept it all bottled up inside, but Mrs. X eventually got me to talk about it and it seemed I could trust her, but she thought it was a bit funny in a sympathetic sort of way. We met at a field excursion in the Brisbane Ranges and she said she wanted to keep in touch and we swapped phone numbers. I saw some bats in the gardens at St. Mark’s Church grounds and I rang her to come and see them. Needless to say, they weren’t there when we met the next night and I met her husband. She kept calling and inviting me up. We got a bit
friendly. Mrs. X was talking about the seven-year itch, if you know what I mean.

It was too dangerous she thought, so she said to try to meet someone else which I did. But the pain in Mrs. X was apparent to jealousy of Miss W. It was hard to get close to Miss W. She was 19 and I was 27 when we met. She kept flirting with other blokes, and I was jealous and threatened to kill myself because I was in such pain in anticipation of not having Miss W. We had a huge fight on my 29th birthday and we split up. I took an overdose and Mrs. X took me to hospital and I slashed my wrist.

Mrs. X left her husband in 1997. We were looking for a house to rent, but we knew it wasn’t going to work. Her desire for a known platonic relationship got the better of us, but that seemed to do more damage than good. She was hurt when I didn’t reciprocate after awhile but we’re still friends... I’ve always appreciated what Mrs. X has done for me. It was the ninth anniversary since we met and a lot of water has gone under the bridge. Any time I’ve been in strife she has been there. She exchanges birthday and Christmas presents and cards with my mum and family. She seems like part of the family. My attitude, my ability to talk to people and not offend them is a result of her influence on me. Before we knew each other I was the rudest, most disgusting lad you could meet. Thanks to Mrs. X I’m not now (Int. 2).

Frank blames his mental state on the years of medication. He’s tried all kinds of jobs, but hasn’t had the motivation to sustain any of them. He did some part-time teaching at one of the local primary schools in 1993. He stayed six months and them decided he was ‘sick of it’. Then he enrolled in the certificate course in horticulture at the Gordon, but it ended abruptly because he said the Government had withdrawn funding for the course. He moved on to Karingal during the summer just looking after the place while the staff were away. This he enjoyed, watering and weeding. He admitted that he considered that summer as one of his
best because he enjoyed the work, and he was pleased that they gave him so much responsibility.

In 1996 he worked at the mail centre for Australian Post. He had to learn the names of 1800 towns in Australia and where the mail was distributed, and he said he couldn’t do it. He thought it was because of the medication he was on at the time. Frank left after twelve weeks. The following year he worked at one of the caravan parks in Jan Juc cleaning toilets and barbecues, and loading trees onto trucks. He quit after five weeks. In 1998 he picked tomatoes at St. Leonards for ten weeks. He found it extremely difficult to keep a job.

Frank brought his 20-word philosophy with him for his third interview and said. bit of a silly story, but if I had applied myself a bit better (Int. 3)… and then he read it to me:

*It’s called ‘Peace’. I’m going to tell you about a fellow from Australia who leads a life style of peace with other people who has humble pie and integrity of his nation’s government and freedom of life style having been born in Australia. As an Australian he had freedom to be educated, as any intelligent person knows. He brightens his home doing cross stitch and collecting stamps, and when he gets beer with money on pension day he likes to drink it and listens to the radio until he falls asleep. On the weekends he can go bush walking and see birds and plants in the bush and he sometimes takes his dog Brandy. He doesn’t have much money so he doesn’t go on many holidays, but he’s intelligent enough to read books and do his hobbies, so he doesn’t get bored. He’s quite adept in playing guitar but his conscience tells him when he’s had enough beer. This fellow doesn’t really believe that he can drink too much. This is his lifestyle of peacetime in Australia, things he likes to do. He wouldn’t like to live in major cities. That’s it.*

When I asked him why he wrote in third person he replied that that’s just the way it came out.
DEFINING MOMENT – SURVIVING HIS MENTAL ILLNESS

Frank recalls:

Well, you see one thing led to another... family busted up and later on I started taking drugs and I wanted to be by myself all the time, to get away from the house. So I took a whole year off, just doing nothing. Those hallucinations and delusions, I still believe it actually happened ... like at Ford, getting harassed and the doctors told me that it wasn’t happening, it was just in the mind and it still reminds me of that. (Int. 4)

When I asked Frank how he perceives his adulthood now, he replied:

Pretty mainstream. I go to the pub. I like to go to the pub. I chat with people who are different to the way I was, drinking spirits at home by myself. It’s a big difference. Couple of times a week, have a counter meal or something. I think I’m very content at the moment ‘cause I’ve got good friends, true friends. I’ve got support from my mum. She ended that relationship about five years ago which is good. I’m on a pension now, disability support pension. If I could sort out my finances and stick to a budget I could live quite comfortably. I’ve been released from the outpatients, about fifteen months ago. The medication I was on my GP thought wasn’t working, so he gave a referral back to Dax. It’s not Dax any more, it’s Swanston Centre. Now I go to my own GP when I need a prescription (Int. 2).

Although once a young man who persevered in achieving his goals, Frank believes there have been too many obstacles and he now feels worn out (Int. 1). He feels as though he is stagnating, yet Frank knows he’s a survivor and casting pride aside he’ll, literally, take his medicine and make the most of the rest of his life.
4.5 Karl Linnell

I turned fifty recently. In no way do I have all the answers; however, I am much more resilient and suffer lower levels of anxiety than I have experienced in years. I still struggle with being a father and a husband, and still experience moods and loneliness; however, I can usually overcome my moods and get on with living. I am much better at expressing my feelings, and bottle things up less than when I was younger. (Int. 4)

In the spring of 2000 I was asked to facilitate a fathers’ discussion group at one of the country primary schools. Karl Linnell is principal of that school and I contacted him to make arrangements for the three weekly meetings. Being a former school principal myself, and knowing the pressures and demands of this job, I was taken by the enthusiasm Karl showed towards his work. When I explained to him my research on defining moments, he said he’d be happy to be a participant and agreed to the four interviews.

During the initial interview I asked Karl about his childhood and whether he reflected on it fondly or not. He responded:

I believe that my childhood, through to the age of 12, was an ideal, particularly happy, childhood living with my parents, and living close to my extended family of grandparents. I lived within a block of each of my grandparents, so I had my four grandparents and they were sufficiently young enough to be able to show an interest in me. I grew up in a country town and I had a lot of friends. We were given the freedom to ride our bikes to wherever we wanted and would be home by teatime. I don’t think any of us had a lot of money, but we had great times together. I found school really stimulating; I enjoyed learning. I’ve always been a reader, and I love knowledge, and I seemed to get plenty of success and satisfaction from that. I felt very, very loved as I grew up. (Int. 1)
When discussing his childhood defining moments, Karl said he didn’t have any. He explained that it was idyllic. He wasn’t challenged, although he had some moments of ill health with a couple of bits of surgery. Then he thought for a moment and answered:

*I guess it was under the influence of my mother that everything had to be idyllic. It was important to her that you were happy and if you weren’t you needed to be because otherwise it would make her unhappy. The problem about having an idyllic childhood is my incapacity to deal with conflict. Hardship had never really been tested because if there was hardship, I had such a support network to get me through which doesn’t develop rigour in a sense for later on. But it does mean that you, sort of, value yourself a fair bit because you’ve always been taught you know that you’re capable and all that sort of thing. One of the things in this attempt to lead an idyllic life and being happy was that I learnt to be fairly compliant and, therefore, presented as being happy because it was important to all the people around me that I was happy. My mum couldn’t have coped with me being unhappy. She placed such value on the fact that I was happy; it was critical to her. I had to be happy.* (Int. 1)

When I asked Karl if this had an effect on his life he explained:

*They were really holding back their true feelings or emotions, as you do as a parent, try to create a happy family. It’s proven to be a fallacy. You can’t do it, you know. We all know that. Well, the greatest pressure for me to be good, to be a model youngster and to be happy for the sake of my mother and her needs at the time were far too great for me to contend with. Nowadays she may have had some counselling. She had terrible self-esteem. She was an only child, but her mother had brought her up with high standards and critical correction.* (Int. 1)

We carried this discussion further:
D.B. You said earlier that your mother had bouts of depression. Did she have mood swings?

K.L. Yes she did. She also had fairly dramatic pre-menopausal problems with dropping blood pressure and you’d find her on the toilet floor, but she was really moody, highs and lows.

D.B. So growing up you were aware of this and you probably had to wear kid gloves.

K.L. Absolutely, kid gloves. Yeah.

D.B. And maybe that might have been her reason for almost demanding that you said you were a happy child.

K.L. Yeah. Yeah, that’s right. I have explored it a fair bit. I think I have explored it with them. There is nothing more to be gained by talking to Mum and Dad about it. They understand it. I’ve said all I need to.

Karl spoke more about his parents. He told me that his mother wanted to be a nurse, but her family considered the profession of nursing in those days demeaning. Karl thought it was because her mother couldn’t cope with her not being at home. She’s even now a terrific nurse if anyone is sick; she loves that role. She’s very debasing of her abilities, but I’m sure she would have been sufficiently academic to do nursing. (Int. 1) Karl said his father is quite bright and academic, but he went into the post office until he could take over his share of the family business.

Adolescence was a contrast to his childhood. Karl said he wasn’t happy as he went through adolescence and he felt lonely most of the time. He explained:

*What happened to me was that I went from a small country school where I was, I guess, top of the heap, but also well known and everyone knew me and my family as they did all the kids, and I went into this huge high school which was fed largely by kids from the eastern suburbs of Geelong, lots of migrant kids who came out after the war in the early 50’s. It was an aggressive sort of environment and a competitive environment with classes of 30, and 8 classes at each year level. I felt completely invisible and completely disregarded. I was a good cricketer on the Bellarine Peninsula, a top cricketer, but I could...*
never get a game on the school team because my parents weren’t from an academic background. I battled on in this environment, but I wasn’t feeling fulfilled. It wasn’t only the school’s fault but I didn’t smoke, and I didn’t drink and I was not a footballer. In those days you needed to be comfortable in an aggressive game, and I was none of these. I can actually remember the few incidents very clearly when I was bullied, but it wasn’t frequent. But I can remember their names and there were incidents where people would have physically stood over me. It wasn’t very pleasant … leaves you feeling like shit, really, feeling very inferior. I was smallish, very small at the time, so I learned to fantasize. I learned to put my mind in places where I felt really comfortable, so it could be at the beach when I was in class, or I could be thinking of home or a whole range of things. I learned how to get through by tuning out in a way and it had been a bit of a problem later in life, but a good safety valve. (Int. 1)

We talked some more about his being bullied. Karl said it was a real skill to out manoeuvre the bullies … not only could I talk my way out of bullying, but I was sufficiently clever to be able to probably hurt the person who was bullying me. (Int. 2) As he grew taller he was not picked on very much, so life became more bearable. He mentioned, too, that as he became better at sports and grew in confidence he was no longer the butt of ridicule.

When I asked Karl how he perceived his adolescence, he thought it was incomplete because he didn’t actually bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood, and he was quite unhappy. His group of friends, which had always been large shrunk, as he stepped out of the football club scene and the drink scene, in junior high school but he remained well behaved and had to give the semblance at home of being happy most of the time. He didn’t realise at the time that his mother couldn’t have coped with his being unhappy. She placed such value on the fact that he was happy. It was critical to her; whereas his father was fairly distant, but it wasn’t important to him. He would have accepted that Karl was having a bad day. His mother used to often refer to the fact that she had nerves. Karl was aware she suffered depression and she made people feel responsible for the fact that she was
unhappy. According to Karl his mother had different standards for his sister and him.

[She] had a normal adolescence, and did all the things that adolescents do including raging anger and kicking doors, and not being happy at school. I was always shown compared as the example of stability. It wasn’t really fair because it was good for my sister to do that. She struggled at school and I was used as an example. (Int. 1)

During the outset his adolescence, Karl was also very confused about his growing sex drive, a little bit ashamed of it. He told me that he really adored girls and found them terrific to be with, but he was embarrassed about his sexuality.

Probably I wasn’t prepared for the sexual changes that were going to occur and was from a very strict religious upbringing, Methodist upbringing, and I somehow confused sexuality with being bad, so that was a bit difficult for me. From when I was sixteen, I was just absolutely besotted by girls. I don’t know if they were actually girlfriends, but there was always someone I was thinking about, occupied a bit of my space I think, mental space. (Int. 1)

Karl was able to tell me more about his being embarrassed about his sexuality. He talked about an incident that really upset him. It became a defining moment in that it taught him that all people could not be trusted, and it made him aware of the fact that he had to be strong enough not to let anyone take advantage of him and to be protective of himself.

DEFINING MOMENT – EXPERIENCE WITH A PAEDOPHILE
When I was sixteen I had an unpleasant event with a paedophile who was a friend of my father. My dad is a radio amateur and a young friend and myself had been on a field trip. This guy put us in the car to show us an antenna at the top of the Otways and that’s how I was in the car. I didn’t know he was a paedophile. He tried to touch me on my
sexual organ and I was really angry. I just said ‘Look, stop. I’m getting out.’ which was a good thing to do because I’d never been trained to do that. So I got out of the car and that did me a little bit of damage because Dad couldn’t understand it and felt this personal friend of his had always been a good person. This person had a background, but Dad didn’t know what to do. He didn’t act or he didn’t do anything that made me feel that he’d picked up on it.

My teenage years were actually surrounded by paedophilia with my scoutmaster who was also a secondary school teacher. I don’t think he taught me very much. This person abused some of my best friends. Also the foreman of the bus drivers was convicted. In those days it was an offence to be homosexual in a public place and he was convicted. I was very protective of myself around men, and it took me a long time to be confident in changing rooms because I was suspicious of people. I developed mistrust in men caused by the sexual abuse and it was an absolute defining moment for me. I would now have the paedophile chap charged if I was a 16 year old. (Int. 1)

When I asked Karl to tell me more about school experiences, he recalled:

Look, I think I was rather sort of nothing. I remember the class magazine at the end of the year. Almost every year they’d have everyone’s name and a comment about them. I remember I would always have like a series of question marks, you know, the sort of unknown. I certainly wasn’t a leader. I think I became a bit cynical. I was a bit, I guess cynicism to express my anger about things, sarcastic. I’ve always been angered by poor teaching or by a teacher who made me feel worthless, and I can remember some instances of using sarcasm towards the teacher. (Int. 1)

Karl then recalled his best high school teacher:
Clearly my best teacher was one that I had a couple of years in the area of geography. He was absolutely capable in his subject area. He allowed us to do a lot of stuff in the field, took us on the bus out to the quarry to see different things. He would chat to me about my cricket, and a couple of times he and another male teacher took a couple of us and played golf after school. He was a terrific guy. He fired the interest of the subject. I don’t know whether he was a hero to everyone, but I really appreciated him. (Int. 1)

Karl was very disappointed when he failed his Higher School Certificate (Year 12), but he did return to school to repeat his final year because he wanted to go to teachers’ college. That same year he passed his driver’s test which gave him the mobility, living in a small town, to see people when he wanted to rather than have to get someone to drive him.

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**DEFINING MOMENT – KARL’S GRANDPARENTS’ DEATHS**

Karl grew up with all four of his grandparents living close by. He had a great deal of love and respect for them and knew they were always there when he needed them. Karl considered the illnesses and deaths of his four grandparents in his middle and late adolescence as defining moments that stand out in his mind. He grew up with both sets of grandparents and he felt very close to them. He never thought they would ever die. Karl introduced this topic by saying:

*Well, it was a series of deaths of my grandparents. As they got older Mum nursed each one of them, and the way that our family handled death was not to grieve. All of them lived over eighty, but you weren’t, sort of, allowed to grieve. Grandmother on Father’s side died first. Mum nursed her, and it was a terrible death because the lymph glands in her neck became huge and she struggled for air. It was very physical in her fight for life, and she died on the way to the hospital. Mum always found her a difficult lady to get on with and always put Mum down, but Mum nursed her which must have been hard. Dad’s parents*
lived just a block away. The blocks were connected and we had a big driveway and a garden, a lovely garden going through to their place. My grandfather lived on, quite a lonely man without his wife and he ended up living with us. He was quite a dominant man, so I had to be second fiddle around the home because Grandpa would be watching telly or whatever he wanted to and that was a bit hard.

The other two grandparents, that’s Mum’s parents, her mum died in my bedroom, a very quiet death. She was sort of a fairly gracious lady. Mum had brought her down from her place to nurse her and it was a very sunny room, and Mum could do her work in the kitchen and watch her. Then my pa died, the one I loved, the one that I was close to. He died in a nursing home. He lost a lot of his memory and clarity of thought, and that was really sad. He was the only one who had dementia. (Int. 1)

The defining moments involved the whole concept of death and loss for Karl and extended over a six-year period. After each death it was as though Karl felt a deep loss and an un mendable tear in his security blanket. He had grown up with all four grandparents and he had felt secure within his grandparents’ ‘structure.’ As a teenager Karl was first confronted with a family death and it was a stark reality for him. These were the people who had nurtured him for as far back as he could remember. His one grandmother had let him develop in his own time and on his own terms, whereas his own mother had suppressed him. Karl became aware of the effect these deaths had on his parents. He was taught not to show any grief, yet his father began to show depression on milestone days for his parents. Karl explained:

Yeah, they were milestones for him. They would have been significant days for him, either their birthdays or father’s day or mother’s day and he would disappear and I’d find him in the back of a bus. He would say he was tired, but I’m sure he was depressed or sad, sad about the loss of his parents, but he never said that, never said that, you know. (Int. 1)
After high school Karl attended Ballarat Teachers’ College, and became involved in committees and was very sports minded. By his third year he had a steady girlfriend. He enjoyed teachers’ college and had this to say:

By the time I was at teachers’ college and sort of hit 21, I was sort of ‘tallist’ and by no means would you refer to me as the short one. I was fairly good at sports, and I think that does give you a lot of confidence if you are able physically to do things fairly well. I can’t remember experiencing much anxiety, stress or depression at all during my time at teachers’ college. I felt lecturers were very approachable and I felt valued as a person. I also certainly enjoyed my teaching rounds. I found the whole thing just a joy, really. (Int. 2)

Karl recalled that the only thing about his young adulthood that was upsetting and disruptive was that he suffered from a fairly chronic bowel problem. He explained it this way:

There was always a niggling appendix and by the time they got to operate on the appendix it had burst. So I had peritonitis and then you get the infection in the bowel from that. It was a medical problem that would strike me at the weirdest moments and I suffered from a twisted bowel, and so you’d be doing something that you really enjoyed doing and then you’d end up in this agony with the twist in the bowel. I ended up having a number of operations to straighten things out and I think that was a set back, but I don’t think it was a psychological set back, but it was ... it did make me a little bit ... you’d be a bit hesitant to say ... I’ve used the word sublime for the young adulthood. You’d always be a little bit worried that that twisted bowel would return, but it wasn’t like something you’d stress about. (Int. 2)

When he received his Diploma of Teaching he set about getting his fourth year that was done at Hawthorne Institute. He taught at schools in Warrnambool and Colac. He married his college sweetheart who also was teaching in the same school. When he was twenty-five he did post-graduate studies in special education.
Karl told me he perceived his young adulthood as a happy time. He enjoyed his early years of marriage because they were drawing two salaries, so they were able to do what they wanted to do. They saved their money and built a home on the outskirts of Ballarat. He said he rebelled slightly against his mother because his wife was now his security blanket. *We had similar interests. We liked nice music and we liked live performances. We just seemed to like talking, enjoying each other’s company.* (Int. 2)

**DEFINING MOMENT – BIRTH OF KARL’S FIRST CHILD**

The birth of Karl’s first child in 1984 was a defining moment for him when he was 28. He recalled his feelings at the time:

*I wasn’t at all prepared for the fact that my wife who … we lived for each other, would be able to suddenly give so much time to the baby and the loneliness of my adolescence returned to me, virtually back out in the shed again sort of thing. There was jealousy, yes, quite a bit of jealousy, but not jealousy that I would verbalise because I would have felt bad to verbalise it, it would have felt, but, yes, it’s something that we weren’t prepared for at all because your wife and you live for each other and then the baby is on the scene and quite a lot of it is instinct on behalf of the mother to bond with the baby, it’s not … it’s the maternal instinct, but the mother also is quite self sufficient in her bonding with the child. Our second child was born three years later. We have two girls. So it really did change things. At the very same time as a first child was born my wife’s parents split up and they’d been married for 26 years and had six kids. Her dad appeared to be a model father and it turned out he actually was having an affair for many years. Because I was the nearest person and my wife was the eldest daughter, we became the backstop. My wife’s mum’s behaviour was quite histrionic. It was really unpredictable and I suppose violent and angry. So, suddenly the world I’d always known to be fairly peaceful, predictable, and fair became the opposite with evidence of deception.*
Karl confessed that he filled his life with hobbies and other interests beyond the family because he didn’t have a clue how to be a father, and he lacked the patience to play with his baby girls. In fact, he thought it was a waste of time. He admitted that his own father was a shocking, shocking role model, absolutely horrendous role model. (Int.2) My wife was completely engulfed in the baby and breast-feeding and all that sort of stuff. It didn’t seem to matter whether I was home or not. (Int. 2) Karl had always been involved in yachting and so he devoted much more of his time to that. Karl continues the story of his adulthood years:

We’ve had a crisis and basically this is what happened. A few things have happened. I think that since the birth of my kids, somehow, I’ve tended to fantasize that there would be a better life for me somewhere. And therefore that’s meant that I’ve probably given more attention to enjoying the company of females, not by having affairs with them, but just enjoying them. At the same time probably fantasizing a little bit, but it’s never amounted to anything. Then four years ago after we’d had a lovely world trip, Ellie, my first born, developed a chronic illness, chronic fatigue syndrome, which meant that she required almost complete attention from Sandy, my wife. Both Sandy and I were absolutely focused on trying to get her well. At the same time I went into being a principal at 42, but I wasn’t well prepared for that because I’ve always been a perfectionist myself in my own teaching, and things have happened in my school that made me feel less than proud. Not every teacher taught with the same level of commitment that I would have liked it to be. So what happened is that for the first x number of years as a principal I was running a show that I wasn’t very proud of, and I knew that life could be better or the school could be better, and I just put up with it at the same time as having a sick
daughter, at the same time wondering where my marriage was going.
(Int. 2)

Karl felt as though everything was getting too difficult. His daughter had a long lingering illness, becoming a school principal was an overwhelming job, coming to terms with his wife’s parents’ divorce and his own unstable marriage were creating problems for him.

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**DEFINING MOMENTS – THE AFFAIR and SEPARATION**
from SANDY

And it all reached a crescendo when I ended up having an affair, and it was the most public affair that you could ever imagine because it was with a parent at school. It was an awful time for me from the point of view that I ended up making this known to my wife, but I was really denigrated in the community for it. Being a school with a fairly strict religious group of people, I was pretty heavily punished for it. By undergoing some counselling and by choosing to work things out with my wife, I started to learn that this depression that I’d experienced during this time can be traced right back to my adolescence. The pieces began to fit together, you know, why I felt bad as an adolescent and why I was feeling bad then, and so I started to learn a few really hard facts about life. (Int. 2)

I’d had for a number of years, I guess, increasing fantasies about there being a life better than the one I had or a woman, partner better than the one I’d had, and it was only when someone sort of reciprocated that really the difficulty. But I got into territory that I didn’t know anything about and because it involved things such as dishonesty, the guilt was overwhelming. It was worse than a nightmare. (Int. 4)

It was the worst night of my life. It was an awful situation and the reason I left home is after telling Sandy that this relationship had developed and got out of control, it scared the daylights out of me. The other woman concerned made it absolutely public, probably for her
own needs that she was having this relationship with me, and I was put in a position of having to choose between Sandy and this parent. There was a triangle involved because this parent had also developed a friendship with another male from the school community and it was an awful situation. Sandy was quite angry and I felt the guilt impossible to live with on a particular day and I went to live at my sister’s house just for one night, but I was intending to perhaps make it more permanent. Things changed very quickly and I chose to go back to my wife who allowed me to come back. (Int. 3)

The woman I formed this liaison with I’ve since found out does have bipolar disorder. You could see with her these incredible highs and it was during one of these incredible highs that I found so flattering that the affair began, but in my case they are not incredible highs. I go from just feeling comfortable and average to feeling sad with no peaks where I do things that astound me or surprise me apart from the affair. (Int. 3)

The defining moment, oh, I guess the crescendo was a moment, but it occurred over a period of, I’d say, three or four months. It was a period in my life where I was questioning what was going to happen to me. I felt quite out of control. Very unusual me. It’s painful. It was after I’d had the affair and told my wife about that and was on the precipice of whether to return to my wife and family, or to make a new start in life. The decision I made to my family was one that I suppose seemed at the time to be perhaps rushed and not well thought out, but in hindsight I think was the right decision to make. But it was a very painful one because I had to admit that I’d made mistakes and that I needed help, so that was a really important defining moment for me. (Int. 4)

During the interview I switched off the tape because the clock was chiming. We took a break, realised how exhausted Karl was from recounting his story about his affair and the break up. When we resumed the interview, Karl continued telling about his counselling:
I managed to make contact with Sandy’s counsellor, firstly with Sandy and then for myself. This lady is a social worker, not a psychologist, but an absolutely gifted and inspirational counsellor. What’s come out of it is I’ve always been living up to other people’s expectations and I’ve learned that I don’t have to always fit into everyone’s model of what I should be, and that’s been enormously freeing. It’s meant that as a principal I’m not trying to be liked, so I’ve set the standard and I’ve set the bar very high for our school. Some people don’t like it, but I’ve set it at a legal height. I’ve done everything with integrity and they have to just reach that height or admit during that year they don’t reach that height. So as far as the school is, it’s now much more what I think a school should be. That’s wonderful for me. So it’s my ninth year as a principal and I’ve returned whilst there would be some parents that would perhaps despise me for the affair, I’ve fought my way back to a position of some standing again which is no mean feat really. (Int. 2)

The counselling included his wife and she chose to talk to their two daughters about what had happened. Karl confessed that it was a very painful process because he was dealing with three upset females who felt he had let them down. He said that some of the things that came out of the counselling were the enormous power that his mother had had over him, and the fact that she experienced depression and had called upon others to make her feel happy. That information was important to Karl because he had depression and he, too, had looked to other people to help him feel better. So when he felt his wife was unable to make him feel happy, due to the fact that their daughter was so sick, then he turned to someone else who he thought could make him feel happy and would care for him. Karl said it was a very lonely time for him and he reminded me that he had had many lonely experiences.

Then Karl spoke about his family and how different everything has become:

But the good thing is at home. I’ve learned to not dump my feelings on my family. You know, to say ‘Look, I’ve had a really tough day!’ but not to make them feel bad for it. Because my two girls know about the
affair and they’ve had an opportunity to talk about it with the same counsellor, there aren’t many secrets. I’m not pretending to be anyone. I’m just a person to them and, also, my friends, as I have a very close knit group of friends, have all stuck with me. So I’ve sort of been to hell and back, and have come out of it much stronger and a lot wiser. So I’m just amazed that at 45 or 46, I must be a very bloody slow learner to have missed a lot of this stuff earlier on. I would think it’s because I’ve been able to live to that age without actually doing anything wrong, you know, like performing at everyone’s expectations. And when I’ve finally done something on impulse for me, I’ve learned to experience both the highs of that and the outcome that can occur, and have been knocked from the pedestal, but it wasn’t a very pleasant pedestal to be on, to be everyone’s example of how to live. I don’t really like that role very much. (Int. 2)

Although it’s difficult to prioritise defining moments, Karl indicated one of those moments that had a tremendous effect for him and his family. That would be the illness of his older daughter. He explained it this way:

**DEFINING MOMENT – ILLNESS OF DAUGHTER**

Look, one of the big defining moments underlined and in bold letters is the sickness of my child and the chronic nature of the illness. I think that if I hadn’t have had that I wouldn’t have been able to go on with this pattern of feeling bad, blaming others. I think eventually there would have been some crisis beyond her illness. But I think it’s forced me to take on a different role as a father, one that I wasn’t able to do when I had babies and that was because I isolated myself from the nurturing, being a nurturing dad. The illness of my daughter has meant that I’ve had to be, I’ve been forced to be what I wasn’t, so I’ve had an actual opportunity to experience being a compassionate father and I liked the role rather than the bread winner and the disciplinarian. I’m much more happy to just be a piece of furniture around the house, just the person there with the girls. I just feel that I’m let to have a second
chance and to have gained a better understanding of myself. I don’t think everyone gets a chance to do that and sort of proud of myself in that sense. (Int. 3)

When Karl was queried more about his depression, he said it was best described as very dark or a black feeling that overcomes you, and the difficulty is in wanting to blame someone for the feeling. Karl told me the medication Arapax he’s been prescribed has been a tremendous help. Karl explained to me that it’s a new-age antidepressant drug.

I’ve been on 100 milligrams now for three years and I’ve recently reduced it to 50 milligrams. I’ve found that by reducing the amount I’ve had greatly enhanced clarity of thought and problem solving ability, and none of the depressive thoughts have returned, so I’m quite pleased about that. (Int. 3)

I asked Karl if during his periods of depression were there also bouts of loneliness? He responded:

Loneliness is something that runs with the job. It’s something that all of my principal colleagues talk about and all experience. It’s incredible loneliness and, in a sense, it can be a sorrow, It’s a sadness because you can never be one of the group. You are by decree alone. You need to be in order to successfully watch over the lives of the kids, and to make decisions that are balanced decisions and not just based on loyalty to people. I have a support group, an informal support group, three principals and a psychologist. We’ve met each week for breakfast for a number of years and we talk about our week, and our family and that’s been incredibly helpful. (Int. 3)

He continued his thought of loneliness:

I do experience loneliness particularly in that I spend a lot of time there by myself, but they’re not really the lonely moments. The lonelier moments are the last day of school when all the kids say ‘goodbye’ to
their teachers, the last staff meeting, the time that you’ve called to tell someone something that they mightn’t want to hear. They’re the really lonely moments. Sometimes I can be working away at school on a Sunday and not feel a little bit lonely, just feel totally engaged in what I’m doing. (Int. 4)

Another very lonely day for Karl is the last day of school each year. Here’s his explanation:

It’s a funny thing. Whilst I feel quite proud of my school and the way the teachers have presented learning to the children and the way the children have contributed to their own happy lives and learning, I feel that on last day of school I’m the last thing on people’s minds and that whilst they see the teachers as a direct link to their child’s happiness, they might understandably forget that I have helped, resourced, and put into place an education for their children and a lot of other principals experience it. People just expect you to do the job. (Int. 4)

During our final interview, Karl had this to say about his philosophy of life:

Life is a constant struggle in which I am challenged by an enormous sense of responsibility for how I behave and varying moods that sometimes make me question what I am doing. I experience intense periods of loneliness even when I am with others. My solution is to persist behaving responsibly in order to satisfy the expectations of others. You well may question how I have come to be this way and why I have maintained this line of thinking right through to the age of fifty. Quite simply, I am a product of my upbringing and the environment I have chosen. Compliant behaviour has been a very successful tool for me. I turned fifty recently. In no way do I have all the answers. However, I am much more resilient and suffer lower levels of anxiety than I have experienced in years. I still struggle with being a father and a husband, and still experience moods and loneliness. However, I can usually overcome my moods and get on with living. I am much
better at expressing my feelings, and bottle things up less than when I was younger. (Int. 4)
4.6 Mark Newton

For me, art is both vocation and redemption, a collective vision to be stages in many areas. I still have much to learn about art, about being and becoming, about maintaining the habit of laughter in the face of daily adversity. I continually seek within my heart a forgiveness that serves both the spiritual and secular. Like tears, my story is a mystery, but I unravel as I go, amongst many who are too mean and ‘mingy’ to practice the common courtesies. (Int. 4)

I met Mark in 1982 when I visited his art gallery in Carlton. He and Mildred, his de facto, had the most unusual collection of art works, and I bought a large abstract painting and two sculptures. Some years later I rented a studio space in his art school, and attended some of his and Mildred’s classes. Mark came to the opening of one of my exhibitions, and bought several paintings and a collage. Naturally, I was very pleased to have a professional artist admire my work. More years passed and I invited Mark to present one of his poetry lectures to a group of art students I was instructing. When I went to the Men’s Wellbeing Expo 2002 at Deakin University, I happened to see Mark. We hadn’t seen each other for several years, so we had some catching up to do. I mentioned the research on defining moments. The following week he telephoned me to let me know he’d be happy to be one of my subjects.

Mark asked to write his own story, as follows:

My story so far has become a slow and evolving commitment to art and to having to continually show unconditional forgiveness to those who have seen fit, for whatever reasons, to place barriers and obstacles in my path.

My story so far has left me, at times, broke and despairing, and is sadly a story being re-enacted wherever the pursuit of art’s goals takes place. Possibly by these goals, I mean art in its original, truest and purest forms – spiritual, rather than material. Whatever art’s truest
possibilities takes precedence over the subjugation of the spirit, whether it be in middle class towns where I live, or within unstable countries whose political climate negates personal freedom. Wherever such things take place, you will find people such as myself, growing towards light and love, our only weapons being art.

Within stories like mine, you will also find, time and again, bizarre and surreal circumstances. Within stories like mine, in the face of many persecutions towards speech, towards manner, towards clothing, you will find that art, like favourite dogs, will never betray you. Up until this point in my life I have been surprised at how frequently I’ve felt hungry for art’s transcendent values. For me, art is both vocation and redemption, a collective vision to be stages in many arenas. I still have much to learn about art, about being and becoming, about maintaining the habit of laughter in the face of daily adversity. I continually seek within my heart a forgiveness that serves both the spiritual and secular. Like tears, my story is a mystery, but I unravel as I go, amongst many who are too mean and ‘mingy’ to practice the common courtesies.

I should like to think, at all times, whilst striving to be a gracious artist that not only dreams, prayers and promises emanate from my work, but humility, hope and kindliness. At the end of the day, or time, there is only love. As Martin Luther King once said, ‘Forgiveness should be a permanent attitude.’ Love and forgiveness have not come easily to me, but I have worked hard to attain and maintain these vital life ingredients.

I identify with all those who carry the light bulb. Thank you. (Int. 4)

Mark described his childhood as lonely, but interesting. He told me that he’s never perceived anything as being just happy, or unhappy. In fact, he said he’s never asked himself that question. Even when he was in the depth of despair he’s always thought there would be something interesting out there. Mark grew up in Queensland. His family was constantly moving suburbs or moving from town to
town. He couldn’t speak until he was four years of age, and he lived in a world of imagination and observation. From an early age, Mark experienced anxiety attacks. He explained that one of his most meaningful defining moments happened at a very young age.

DEFINING MOMENT – MARK’S INNER VOICE

The defining moment that stands out in Mark’s mind, when he was a child, occurred on his third birthday. I had just been discharged from hospital after an operation. I recall returning to my parents’ home and looking at my mother and father, my two older brothers and my older sister and the orange cat, and at that moment hearing an inner voice or thought saying, “I don’t belong here. These are not my people. When I grow up I’m going to be an artist”. (Int. 1) I asked him if he said that in front of his family and he said it was only to himself.

... an affirmation. I still to this day wonder what that was all about. Was I already aware of this terrible feeling in my family that I didn’t belong and it wasn’t going to be a friendly place for me? I was possibly very instinctive. I’ve always been very instinctive, even then I just thought I don’t belong here. I want to be somewhere else. Oh, I really don’t want to be in this mob. (Int. 1)

Mark thought that this defining moment – that this wasn’t his family and he was going to be an artist – has affected his life and has made his life challenging and difficult. I didn’t feel comfortable at all in my family. I had a deep wish I wanted another family. (Int. 1)

Why Mark couldn’t speak until he was four, he still doesn’t know. He just remembers that he was one of those kids with a speech impediment, so he just didn’t speak. He had to go into Brisbane to get speech therapy. Although he had this impediment, his sight made up for it. He recalls his father being very upset with the way Mark looked at him:
I remember my father saying, ‘those bloody eyes I don’t like, you just see everything with them. I don’t like them, don’t like you looking at me like that.’ I remember him saying that and I must have just seen everything, and it’s still to this day I see things long before anybody else to the point that people think I’m mad and I go, ‘Hang on, I’ve just seen. I’m just telling you, that person over there is not a nice person. Don’t mix with them.’ And it will be six months before anyone knows.

We have different senses that develop, like musicians have developed hearing. I think artists have developed sight. (Int. 1)

Mark said his father was a businessman, a manager of insurance companies, but he treated it as a hobby. His main interest was gambling on horses. Mark grew up in a household that every Saturday morning there were telephones ringing from jockeys, bookmakers and gamblers for tips from his father who became the person who knew everything about the racing business. As Mark grew up in that environment his life gravitated between extreme poverty and suddenly being wealthy. Then, his father lost everything through gambling. I asked him if his family was a close family and he shook his head ‘No.’ He said his parents had been under the illusion that they were close. They’re definitely connected, but it’s a misnomer to say they’re close. (Int. 1)

Mark expressed a terrible fear of one of his older brothers. He recalls when he was nine they were watching world champion wrestling, and his brother practiced wrestling and judo holds on him. Mark was thrown across the room and had his head cut open. He remembered another incident when his brother was in the backyard whipping his horse, and it was distressed and frothing. He had to call someone in the neighbourhood to come and tell him to stop. Once his brother poured petrol all over the garden in the shape of his signature. He lit it and the whole backyard was aflame with his name. Mark said even as an adult his brother is still a dangerous person.

Mark was nine when the family moved to Victoria. His father had received a promotion by agreeing to make the move. Mark explained that his dangerous brother remained in Queensland because he had an apprenticeship. Mark imagined
his father thought, ‘Oh, get him working. He’s earning money; he’ll just stop bothering us.’ Trouble was, his brother moved back the following year and discovered the other older brother had become engaged to a very attractive female. Here’s how Mark viewed the incident:

*We’re all sitting there and the next minute there’s all these flames at our front door, and the second brother was burning down the front door in jealousy, jealousy that the older brother had a good looking girlfriend, so we all went out. There’s screaming and I remember trying to stop him from doing something, and he hit me and I just thought, I don’t want to be here.* (Int. 1)

The family moved to Hamilton and Mark said he adjusted easily. He was now in the sixth grade at a little Catholic convent school. One day he bought pasties at a milk bar instead of buying them from the nuns because they were better tasting. When he returned to school at lunchtime he received a strapping in front of the entire school. He made the mistake of telling his parents, and the next day his father caused trouble with the head nun and Mark had to leave the school.

When Mark recalls his adolescence, he describes it as humiliating. *It was melancholy and dreadful, with many wasted opportunities.* (Activity Sheet – Appendix 3) His father was an alcoholic and there was hardly any home life. Mark had heard that the police wanted to get a court order against his father.

*There was this constant problem of my father, my older brother and me. I was just sort of caught up in all of it. There was a dysfunctional thing happening. The neighbours knew. People in the footy club knew. It was awful and there didn’t seem any way out of it all.* (Int. 5)

He found it hard to keep friends because he couldn’t invite them home to such a gloomy atmosphere, although his mother did her best to cheer things up. His father created lots of problems for him and the family.

*I know my father hated me. He had a genuine hatred towards me and envy because I’m so easy to get along with. He sort of liked me, but he*
begrudgingly liked me. He did some terrible things to me and stopped me getting jobs. There was one stage when I had long hair. It was the age of the Beatles and I thought, you know, this is great. My father rang up my friends’ families, and the person I was working for on the holidays and told him I was homosexual. That’s what he did in a drunken rage of envy towards me. I was so embarrassed I didn’t know what to do. I just thought I’ve got no idea what he’s on about. It was just a really strange sense of betrayal and my father often did things like this to me. (Int. 2)

DEFINING MOMENT – ANXIETY ATTACKS AND BEING BULLIED

Mark continued to have panic or anxiety attacks as a teenager. One thing that seemed to bring them on was his being bullied in school. Bullying actually started when he was in the fifth grade. He was a year younger than his classmates, and, according to Mark, he felt he was one or two years ahead of them academically. He believed that some in his peer group were very jealous of him, and they made life uncomfortable for him. The following dialogue is from the transcription of our first interview:

M.N. I was bullied in a strange way, but it was envy. I was bullied when I was at football. I was so good at football. I was going to be signed up by Carlton when I was 15. Kids at the football club started calling me names until I was an object of derision rather than somebody to be respected for my football ability.

D.B. What did the coach think or say, or didn’t he know?

M.N. Yeah, he was sort of aware of it, but he didn’t know how to handle it.

D.B. But he still thought you were good enough for Carlton?

M.N. Yeah, but I just think they were generally annoyed that we were always the outsiders and we weren’t Western District people. We came from Queensland, so it was like, ‘Oh, here comes that bloody kid who played rugby league’ and ‘He’s better at
football than the kids we’ve trained from ten years of age.’ I got a big write up in The Herald when I was fifteen, you know, best player for Hamilton who wants now the Teal Cup. There wasn’t one mention of it at the football club or at high school.

D.B. Did any of the scouts from Carlton watch you play?
M.N. They were always up in the league because, at one stage, a lot of the Carlton premiership teams were full of ex-Western District players, and a lot of the ones that I played against, I was better than all of them except one.

D.B. And what kept you from getting there?
M.N. Just my disturbing upbringing, just so much trouble at home with my older brother. He did some terrible things. I was starting to have trouble in high school, and the only thing that kept me on the straight and narrow was my football and my art. (Int. 1)

One experience that stands out in Mark’s mind during his adolescent years was being falsely accused of throwing stones at a teacher who was a goal umpire at a game, and being expelled from school. Mark was devastated, so he dropped all interest in school and in his sports. Mark recalls that experience:

DEFINING MOMENT – SCHOOL EXPULSION
M.N. Well, the Head Master took exception to me because I had long curly hair. This is like what you’d call karma. From the age of long hair this man hated long hair, and he’d come from Gippsland where he’d got into trouble with people and he was on his last legs as a Head Master. So he’d make all of us that had curly hair or long hair, he got us to go down to this barber called Lightning Jack and make us get these shocking haircuts. You could catch the tram up, get off the tram, have a haircut and then get back on the tram as it turned around. That’s how quick he was. It was shocking. Girls wouldn’t look at you for six weeks. I lost a girlfriend over a Lightning Jack haircut. This is the height of Beatles and they had their long hair. So I had this ridiculous bloody head master and to coincide with my very good
football results, this terrible situation happened. I was at the football
game and there was a maths teacher from my school and these kids
from another school were throwing rocks at him. He was the goal
umpire. I said to the kids, ‘don’t throw rocks at him. He’s a school
teacher.’ When I got to school the teacher threw me into the door and
said I was throwing rocks at him. They took me to this rotten head
master who already hated me because of my long hair. So I decided my
way of dealing with it, I refused to do any schoolwork until he
apologised and he wouldn’t. The mathematics teacher got so annoyed
because I wouldn’t do school work, so they made me sit outside for
three weeks until I did school work and I got this terrible cold in the
rain.

D.B. In the weather?

M.N. Yeah, in the weather. Stubborn me would sit out there Oh, yeah,
there’s some sadists. It was just ridiculous. I got the flu. I sat outside in
the rain and I said, ‘I’m quite willing to die out here ‘cause I’m not in
the wrong.’ They needed to apologise to me.

D.B. So what happened finally?

M.N. My old man went right off his rocket and I didn’t blame him. I
ended up being taken from the school by my father, and he threatened
the head master and the teacher, in a physical way.

D.B. And what was the final outcome?

M.N. Final outcome was my schooling went down the track for that
year. At the end of the year the Head Master blacked me out in 600 of
the magazines because my hair was too long. Because it was the late
60s and protest, I got up at the top of the school assembly and zeig
heiled him. I then got a letter from the education department saying I
wasn’t allowed back in any education institution in Victoria until I
apologised for my act of zeig heil. It just got totally out of hand. I
really went full bore as if to say these people have done the wrong
thing.

D.B. So did you go back to school?

M.N. I threw in the towel. I just said, ‘I’m disappointed in the human
race.’ I just thought, ‘this is the world of adulthood? I don’t really see
much.’ At the same time the Vietnam War was on. The people who
were speaking truthful to me were Bob Dylan, and John Lennon and Dylan Thomas who I read, so I just said, ‘Art’s the only gig I want. I didn’t see any students sticking up for me. They knew I was innocent. I felt completely desponded and cynical about the human race at the age of 15.

D.B. And the maths teacher never owned up?
M.N. The only person who came out of the blue was when my father went to Melbourne and got some old RSL acquaintance who knew Lindsay Thompson, the Minister of Education. We got in to see him and then Lindsay Thompson said, ‘Well, this is a terrible thing that’s happened.’ I think he was trying to cover up this really rotten Head Master and they were, very political it was and I walked into the centre of it. So a head master from another school, who was a friend of the education minister, rang up and said he’ll take me, long hair or not. He’s heard the situation; he’ll take me in. Some people say I have a very powerful charisma, and I had it then because it was charisma to turn on people. (Int. 1)

By the end of year 10 Mark, again, transferred to another school and continued being involved in family problems. He ended up with a new peer group, a rebellious crowd. Mark was very fit because he had played football; in fact, he was extremely fit. He recalls what Saturday nights were like in his country town when teenagers from even smaller communities congregated there. Mark said they’d do ‘blockies’ in their cars and there would be fights. To walk down the street on a Saturday night was very scary, even for Mark. I just remember thinking how we were going to get from this bus stop to the dance without getting our heads beaten in. It was scary and all my friends felt this fear. (Int. 2)

DEFINING MOMENT – “I CAN HANDLE MYSELF”

Mark recalls one Saturday night opening a stubby on the back of some farmer’s Holden, a blue iridescent Holden. At the time he didn’t realise
the significance of how important this car was to some of the country boys. He opened the stubby on his tow bar, and the young farmer got out of his car with a fixing spanner and, in front of the dance hall, proceeded to belt Mark. He kept belting Mark right down his arm and wouldn’t stop. Finally Mark punched him. He clobbered this six-footer on the nose and he fell down. Mark broke his attacker’s cheekbone and his nose in one punch. The crowd cheered. Mark remembers feeling great relief and was proud of himself for not letting this person push him around. In his own words:

So that was a defining moment for me as a male. I’d suddenly thought, ‘I don’t have to be scared anymore. I can handle myself.’ I learnt on the football field that this guy was a big scary person, and ultimately it was good for me to punch that bloke because from then on I just didn’t take any nonsense. But I’ve never liked hurting people. I don’t like it and I’m still like that today. Even though he hit me with a fixing spanner, I still feel terrible sadness about having to punch him. (Int. 2)

About a month later, after more football games and a chipped tooth, Mark went to another Saturday night dance. Because of his newly earned reputation, Mark was picked on by a big guy who was two years his senior. Mark explained to me that he remembers thinking, He’s too big and I’ve already got a chipped tooth. I don’t want to lose my tooth. I was vain about my teeth. (Int. 2) So Mark left the dance hall and walked off up the street. This guy who wanted to fight him followed him. For two blocks the other person punched him and Mark finally decided to hit him back. Mark turned around, flattened him and gave him a bloodied face. The police came on the scene. The policeman was the next-door neighbour of the Head Master who Mark had had trouble with. The police broke up the fight. Because Mark didn’t have any marks on him, they threw him in the paddy van and accused him of assault.

A month passed and suddenly Mark found himself in the children’s court. The person who assaulted him had a broken nose, a broken
cheekbone and broken ribs on one side. The presiding judge couldn’t believe the other fellow had started the fight. To continue the story in Mark’s words, he reported:

*I got found guilty of assaulting the man. He didn’t get found guilty of assaulting me which annoyed me. It was in the children’s court, so I got put on a year’s probation. I got sent to a probation office and I said, ‘I’m innocent. The bloke has assaulted me. I assaulted him back. It was a fight. If I’m to be charged with assault, he should be charged with assault.’ My father was just livid. He was so annoyed with me. Well, six months after that, my father kept on nigglings and picking on me. One night I got home drunk, and I think he was worried about me getting into more trouble. In the morning we had an argument. This is how I got put on remand. He slapped me in the face and I chased him to the front door. He was scared of my newfound physicality. But deep inside it was this child crying about the injustice of things. I’m not getting any attention for my talents. He and my mother went to the police. He convinced her to sign a form that said I’d assaulted him and I didn’t do a thing. (Int. 2)*

Mark said it was an experience he’ll never forget. He knows, too, that his parents will never get over the experience either. Mark’s parents went to the police to complain. By their complaining that Mark had assaulted his father he had broken probation. The police came to his house the next morning to arrest him.

*DEFINING MOMENT – ON REMAND*

*The police came and arrested me. I was asleep in bed at half past eight in the morning, took me out. I was in the watch house all weekend with all these idiots coming and going, being drunk and yelling out, singing, fighting, and I went to the court on the Friday. They said I’m to go on remand at Turana Boys’ Home. Turana had high security youths under
18, had remand, mainly wards of the state. So off I went on Monday, down on remand. (Int. 2)

It was March 1971, and he went in a paddy wagon with men bound for Pentridge who were dropped off and, then, he continued on to the boys’ detention centre. When he jumped into the paddy wagon he was scarred, angry, humiliated and confused. He had seen too many films where older men in prison raped good-looking boys, and he was afraid for himself. When Mark arrived at Turana he had to strip and shower, and then given mandatory clothing.

I got given these ridiculous, bloody clothing which was totally humiliating which everyone had to get. Like you weren’t even allowed to wear your own underwear. That was the worst thing, not your own underwear. I just didn’t wear it. I just put the trousers on. I just thought I’m not wearing someone else’s underwear that 120 kids have worn. You weren’t allowed to wear your own shoes, so I thought that’s like taking your privacy away, too. The food was shocking. I think I lived on corn flakes. It was just bland bread, bland porridge, greasy sausages, greasy eggs, greasy bacon. I just hated it. I stuck my nose in a book for three or four weeks, and that’s how I gained my privacy. (Int. 3)

Mark soon decided he wouldn’t be part of this system. He thought about escaping and seeing a journalist who could print his story. Mark was put into a cell with a boy who wasn’t very communicative. Mark said his cellmate’s eyes were like marbles and they just stared into space. He spooked me, and I asked him what he did and he shot his sister in the head. I didn’t ask him any more about what it was like. I just wanted to get out of there. (Int. 2) He still doesn’t remember how he was able to change cells, but after three days he was put in a cell with a boy from Frankston who stole cars.

Being on remand, Mark had no idea how long he would be incarcerated. Each day was traumatic for him. Remember, too, that
Mark was only fifteen when all this occurred. His existence became one of survival. Here’s how he explained it:

*I remember playing in a state school carnival in football. I went as a shy boy, and there’s all these kids in the football team, and they were confident and I didn’t feel confident. Now during that carnival I became the best player for Hamilton, and something inside of me said on the second game, I remember thinking these kids are bigger than me, but I’ve got courage and I’ve got skill, and I relaxed into the skill and courage that I had and I learnt something. Football did teach me something. It taught me to trust. When everyone else is panicking around you, just be calm and comfortable, and I’ve always had that in my life even though I’ve had anxiety. So even when I went down into this situation your imagination was running riot and I just relied on being calm, cool and collected, and kept my wits about me, and I spoke with courtesy and politeness to everyone. I found the courage in myself and I found an intelligence I hadn’t had. So that was a defining moment of how to survive in a proper way without being stupid, or violent, or duplicit or sinister. I kept my morality. I kept all my good values, and I relied on those and some people saw it. There was a warden in there that saw it. The detective that took me up to the court in the train, he saw it. He saw that I was a good person, and I was very special and he just couldn’t work out what I was doing there, and the judge actually saw it when I spoke. I spoke in the court very clearly. I spoke with honesty and truthfulness and some people saw it, so that was a redeeming factor of the experience. (Int. 3)*

The judge gave Mark’s father a dressing down “in front of everyone and that made my father even angrier, more angry against me in the long run because he’d been proved, the first time in his life the way he treated his sons was terrible and he’d been proven. He was doing the wrong thing. (Int. 3)
Continuing on to young adulthood, Mark had this to say, feeling totally incapable of fitting into society’s norms, unhappy! Not knowing how to be or become an artist in middle ‘classdom.’ Angry and disappointed at the untruthfulness of others. (Int. 3) At the age of twenty, Mark left the Western District and settled in Melbourne.

By the time I’d left Hamilton there were five or six friends of the group I knew who had died. That was very sad. One died of heroin overdose. I remember that kid’s parents at the funeral. And there was a lot of marijuana smoking at the time and I experimented. It wasn’t good for me, but this kid. He died. And then there was another kid who died in a motorbike accident. Another kid died in a car accident. Two other kids died in a car accident and one died in a work accident, and it was awful. Currently I attend a psychiatrist now and he thinks I’ve possibly suffered post-traumatic stress from it all. I never dealt with it and that’s the reason I left my hometown. (Int. 3)

At first it was difficult adjusting to living in a large city. Mark started getting terrible anxiety attacks. He was quite unsettled by the time he arrived in Melbourne and finally had a nervous breakdown. He saw a psychiatrist who put him on medication and that didn’t work. It didn’t do me any good at all, so I just went out and bought a bicycle. I started riding everyday. I’d go on thirty-mile rides just to get physically fit again. I started painting, and I started reading everything I could possibly read and eventually I got better. (Int. 4)

The move to Melbourne did give him a new start in life, to leave the old personality behind, new friends and opportunities. (Int. 3) Melbourne allowed him the time to become an artist. He lived anonymously from the age of twenty to twenty-five, and then he met Mildred.

DEFINING MOMENT: MEETING MILDRED

By 1980 I had a studio and house in Preston and Mildred wandered into my life. She had a gallery in Carlton. She was collecting, looking.
for work for exhibitions, and I had a house full of paintings and drawings, and she walked in. She had a life that was interesting and I got on board the Mildred bus. She’s very funny and earthy and beautiful at the same time, and we just immediately clicked. She had a gallery that had really interesting art, video art and performance art, and I just found it pretty exhilarating after what I’d been through. So when I met Mildred it was good. It was the outstanding moment in my life. She was a magnetic character. Suddenly there was a lifestyle. It was an artistic, intellectual and romantic union. It was wonderful. (Int. 4)

Meeting this woman helped me to focus on the art world. She provided me with a family life I’d never had. She was a sincere, talented and idealistic person. I’ve had many positive and negative defining moments, but meeting and sharing nineteen years with my de facto altered the course of my life. Yes, it not only reconstructed my life, but transformed it. She helped me to grow as an individual. (Int. 3)

Mark said his adulthood has been many things – sad, unhappy, happy, tragic, comic and exhilarating. (Int. 4) He experienced great highs and lows, and great losses, but at all times his adult life is varied, unusual and unique. His life experiences have been many.

Mark and Mildred had been operating an art school for fifteen years. Mark told me the toll of having to teach in order to support his art has taken its toll. I had a terrible start in life and I had that anxiety. The long haul has taken its toll. (Int. 4) Then he explained:

I had to see a psychiatrist because I started suffering terrible grief. Three years ago I was diagnosed with a Melanoma on my back. After it got cut out and after I got the all clear, I suddenly started experiencing terrible grief. I’ve got post-traumatic stress and the trigger point was Melanoma. It triggered off all the grief in my life that I’ve never dealt
with. Repressed it. I buried it somewhere inside of me and I thought, ‘Oh, well, I’ve dealt well with it’ and I just put on a brave face. I never cried, never wept in my life and Mildred often used to say, ‘You never weep. Why not?’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘if I start weeping I think there might be a torrent’. (Int. 4)

Mark was unable to explain fully what happened in his relationship with Mildred. It just deteriorated. Even though they had lived together for so many years; the love had gone out of their life. It was Mildred’s decision to separate. Mildred and I are still friends. We see each other every day in our art school, so that’s good. We can still have a friendship, but I don’t know, a lot’s happened in the last three years. (Int. 4)

Soon after Mildred terminated their de facto relationship, Mark became involved in a love affair with Julie, whom he described as his soul mate and it became one of his defining moments.

**DEFINING MOMENT – SOUL MATE LOVE AFFAIR**

I had a wonderful love affair with [Julie] a younger woman. We were great soul mates. I don’t know how one defines it, but in ‘silence there was knowing.’ We were going to live happily ever after. One day I went out and there were a few things bothering me. I went out and slowly got drunk, not by choice just by accident. I was drunker than I thought and a circumstance happened. I walked into a hotel, and my young lover was there and she’s talking to a couple of men and I just went nuts! Completely lost it! I got incredibly jealous when I shouldn’t have. And I threatened to throw someone through a window, and scared the living daylights and they fled. They just ran out of the hotel and I didn’t realise how scary I could become. The whole hotel, bouncers, bar people, they just suddenly went into fear mode. They didn’t try to turn me out, but they just suddenly went.
Mark felt that meeting Julie was an important time for him but, so too was the phase that saw the end of their relationship. He said he considered her his soul mate, but he found out that his raging anger needed to be controlled. It was a violent anger that he had experienced so often in the past. Now he realised it was an anger he would have to learn to deal with and control.

Mildred had told Mark that she had never seen him cry. I reminded Mark that he told me he had cried when he was on remand. Mark responded, *Yeah, a little bit, but I hardly ever wept in my life. I didn’t realise all I was doing was repressing it and now for three years I just weep. I’m fortunate I haven’t started weeping in this interview because it’s just below the surface.* (Int. 4)

Then followed a discussion on grief:

> Well, I was interested in the grief. I’m an artist and a writer, and I’m supposed to be different, but I’ve approached trauma in my life like a male. You put on a brave face. You really didn’t feel it. Often people ask me, ‘Do I weep?’ and I used to say, ‘No, there are some things in life that are beyond weeping.’ Some things in life are so sad that weeping just doesn’t even touch it. There is a grief beyond weeping and I don’t know how one deals with that. One of the great
philosophers said, ‘If we truly looked at reality, all of us would weep all day.’ The loss that all of us have to feel, there is that metaphysical grief beyond our everyday existence. (Int. 5)

Mark told me he’s beginning to feel well for the first time in his life. He does Chinese deep breathing that helped him to stop smoking. He follows this with a deep meditation of an affirmation of health and well being to others. Some people have thought he’s a bit ‘loopy’ because he’s apologised to them and he’s written them letters of apology. He said they probably think he’s weak, but he doesn’t care because he just wanted to let them know how he felt. Mark ended that discussion with, There’s no formula how to be a male or how to live in the world as a male. The formula of the brave face and the strong, that’s nonsense you know. (Int. 4)

Mark is currently having two books of his poetry published, as a live CD of one of them. Next year he plans to concentrate on his painting. There’s a great strength in painting. There’s a great curiosity there. There’s still this hunger to paint. (int. 4).
Chapter Five: Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Chapter five presents the evaluation of data, analyses and interpretation of the participant narratives, presented in the previous chapter, through a number of thematic organisers. These themes provide a framework around which to bring their respective experiences into some relation. There are approximately sixty defining moments described by these men in the interviews I conducted with them. The organising themes that I have distilled from the interviews include bullying and victimisation, poor relational set-ups with both family and friends, hegemonic masculinity and self, self-harm and suicide ideation, transition between social institutions, loneliness and being different. In the interest of extending individual experiences beyond themselves, I use these themes to bring together common elements of different lives. While these themes do not capture all of the experiences that were recorded in their collective defining moments, they are useful heuristic devices for bringing aspects of them into some form of meaningful relational existence.

All six men spoke about the scars left from particular incidents and events that became the defining moments in their lives. In the interest of interpreting their experiences, I use the organising themes to talk about some of the factors that led to their vulnerability at these times before contemplating how they might have been intercepted. Of particular interest to me in the presentation of this chapter are the people and structures that were, and were not, in place at these times that rendered them susceptible to forms of physical, emotional, relational and personal abuse. Through the organising themes I locate commonalities in terms of what these men didn’t have or, perhaps, had too much of.

I will begin this chapter with a discussion about the ways these men experienced their defining moments and the sorts of behaviours and emotions they reflect on. I will then look more closely at some of the factors that rendered them vulnerable to these circumstances. Many of their defining moments were experienced during their school years, especially high school. Their defining moments occurred in or around schools with peers and teachers all around them. They had developed very
few resources, so a number of their defining moments turned into negative experiences.

5.2 Relationship Issues
One of the most common aspects of the participants’ experiences with defining moments was their perceived lack of support and connection at these times. In the general sense, none of the six participants had people close to them when they were most needed. The lack of close relational support made them very vulnerable. At times these men found it difficult to relate well with other people. Relationships with adults and mentors did not appear to be very strong. Compounding this, none of them had very healthy, robust relationships with their peers. None of them described themselves as being popular at school. Perhaps in primary school they went through phases of thinking of themselves as being accepted; however, in most cases there were early signs that their perceived security wouldn’t last. There’s a way that primary schools are structured that, perhaps, gave them a sense of security. In the primary school there is a full-time teacher for each grade. Here the teacher is able to keep a much better eye on the group, and is in a much better position to correct and protect children from bullying. In primary school structures it is easier for the dedicated classroom teacher to assert a more sustained influence over a group. When students move on to secondary school the level of direct care is greatly dispersed. Underpinning this is the practice of changing teachers according to the discipline content being taught, and students moving around the school for different classes. The structures and practices of the secondary school appear to render particular students more vulnerable.

One aspect of a male’s socialisation network exists through his relationship with his peer group. This is often a powerful source of how he sees himself and where he fits in. For some males, peer group relationships can be positive and fulfilling; for others, however, they can be destructive. Harris (1998) acknowledges that children learn early how to fit in and if they don’t learn they usually become ostracised or outcast or, at least, outsiders who decided not to be part of a group. For example, the selection of red shoes by Andrew’s mother spelled ‘bully bait’ for him at school, in addition to his being shy and passive. Because of his younger brother being forced into a homosexual act, Barry was outcast and bullied by his
peers. Colin found himself in a difficult situation because his family moved around so much. He was unable to establish sound relationships with his peers and was often teased for being the ‘new boy’. Mark had artistic and athletic abilities, but was criticised and ostracised by his peers. Mark rationalised that he didn’t fit in because he came from ‘out of state’, but was also aware of other things that marked him off as ‘different’.

Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000) argue that many males have difficulty revealing the necessary emotional attitudes that enable them to communicate “in ways that are mutually generative and supportive” (p. 10). Some boys aren’t able to fit in to the peer requirements for all kinds of reasons: too quiet, too short or tall, too thin or fat, too dumb or smart, not the same race, not the same religion, the list goes on and on. In Andrew’s case, the only friends he had in high school were a few male classmates who were also bullied. Even though they were aware of each other’s torment, they were too upset or embarrassed to discuss the problem among themselves. Colin Darvell, who grew up in a semi-slum neighbourhood in industrial Leeds, England, was clearly burdened by his parents being Jewish holocaust survivors that left them tormented and unsettled. As a consequence he became socially isolated on account of moving so often and found it hard to establish long term friends.

When Frank Garber reflected on his childhood he found it quite disturbing. He was a bed wetter and he believed the medication he was given hindered his development. He felt as though he was ‘bombed out’ most of the time and didn’t learn to communicate or talk to his parents in primary school. His wasn’t a close family. His mother started seeing another man and Frank was too upset and embarrassed to talk to anyone about her affair. One of his defining moments developed during this period of devastation when he lost respect for his mother. He wanted a ‘normal’ family and was clearly tormented by his family’s disfunctionality. Eventually his parents split up even though his father retained a room in the house while his mother was sleeping with her new partner. Frank developed a sense of alienation, and seemed to avoid close relationships.

None of the study’s participants had good support networks around parents and other adults. To this end there was a general lack of mentorship. It might have been
expected that teachers, coaches and other significant adults might be able to substitute for the apparent lack of connection these boys had with their families during this important phase of their lives. Unfortunately, on reflection, it seems that no one was able to fill that void. This causes concern as an issue that needs investigating. Why didn’t their teachers and coaches keep an eye out for these vulnerable students?

The study’s participants welcomed instances where there was some kind of support by a teacher, coach, priest or other adult when they were adolescents. For instance, after being on remand, Mark benefited a great deal in the relationships he forged in another school and with another family. In his new school he excelled in maths and became a favourite student of his maths teacher. Frank knew he had a teacher who showed an interest in him and his school progress. His maths teacher, and one or two other teachers and Frank used to play golf together and Frank looked forward to their afternoon golf sessions. Colin found support by leaving school for employment and night school. He broke the cycle of self-doubt by gaining the respect of his employer and workmates and he made friends at night school. For Mark, Frank and Colin, the opportunity to form these relationships gave them confidence to build other relationships. They had the opportunity to develop friendships that had adults in their networks, thus putting them in positions of potentially giving support. Andrew, Barry and Karl, however, didn’t form any significant adult relationships.

Grose (1999) argues that parents and other significant adults need to take responsibility in giving children tools for life. This includes developing a sense of competency, building optimism, helping to develop emotional literacy, and positive values and qualities. The six narratives presented in this thesis, however, do not indicate much, if any, parental support. Andrew Bosley’s parents, although they lived on the same property, did not share any other aspect of their lives. Andrew saw very little of his father and his mother still chose his clothes when he entered seventh grade. Barry Chalmers had a domineering mother and a father who spent his later adult life living on the streets. These parents and their lifestyle did not provide an environment for a young boy to develop emotional security, optimism and competency.
Colin Darvell’s background was somewhat different. He had an understanding mother who was passive because of the domineering personality of his father. Although Colin left school early, his desire for knowledge and to be independent financially, provoked him into part-time study as a teenager. Then, again, as an adult he returned to school to get a certificate so he could teach and, then, some years later he enrolled at university for a degree. Currently he has a successful business.

Frank Garber became disillusioned with his parents when his mother invited her lover to share the same house with her husband and family. Frank graduated from high school, second in his class, yet he associated with a group who took no interest in education, and devoted much of their time to drinking and using drugs. Finally, when Frank developed schizophrenia he realised his dreams of academic distinction were not going to happen.

Karl Linnell’s story is rather different in that he had emotional support from all four of his grandparents. When they died, he became more and more detached from his family. He described his father as ‘a spineless man’ who didn’t take action when Karl was sexually tampered with, and his neurotic mother kept everyone tense by her ability to keep the family in her grip through her threatening state of depression.

According to Mark Newton, his father was quite jealous of him and his talents and potential, so much so that Mark believes he initiated his being on remand at the age of fifteen. Mark said even the Judge thought he was mistreated, and the father, rather than the son, should have been incarcerated. Mark actually felt that his father was under considerable criticism during this process, not only for wrongfully initiating the process, but also for his lack of direction in helping him. While Mark was on remand there was no moral support except for a priest who visited him every two or three days for ‘a galvanised talk’. Mark said these talks, however, probably stopped him from suiciding even though he usually responds to crises with courage and thoughtfulness. Mark didn’t have a good support structure around him while he was in school. One of his most hurtful defining moments was when he ‘walked out’ on his football club and realised he would never play football again. Mark’s comments regarding defining moments are quite revealing:
Usually when one arrives at a defining moment you can tell because quite often friends and family berate and misunderstand you completely. Reacting to defining moments creates anger and envy in others. Our society lacks appropriate rituals for our personal growth.

(Activity sheet)

West (2002) suggests that the father-son bond is essential in strengthening the relationship between father and son and the ability to form other meaningful relationships. Hawkes (2001) argues that a male’s relationship with his father is very important not only biologically, of course, but for modelling intimacy and feelings, good learning behaviours and teaching the rules of life. He argues:

Dealing with hurt, disappointment, anger, stress, boredom, love, affection, lust, surprise, embarrassment and responsibilities can all be taught to a son by a father. Some fathers wear the teacher’s tag with some reluctance but, whether acknowledged or not, fathers are the teachers of their sons. Whether they are good teachers is another matter (p. 283).

Taking a similar line, West (2002) argues that males are much more protected from suicide ideation when they have a loving father and are members of a family who care for one another. Andrew, Barry and Frank came from very unhappy and disruptive families. Their family circumstances clearly impinged on their willingness and capacity to establish meaningful connection, both within and beyond the family context.

Other significant adults need to play a role in the development of males. All of the participants in this research had been bullied when they were in primary and/or secondary school. Andrew didn’t seem to have effective coping responses to bullying. He had gone to his science teacher for help about his broken egg and was not shown any empathy at all. He was told just “to get another egg”! Following this incident he realised that he would not get support at school, and he would have to manage on his own. He had reached out to a teacher and didn’t get support. That
was one of his defining moments because, thereafter, Andrew decided there was no point asking for support and resolved to working things out the best he could.

Barry found bullying very upsetting and, consequently, withdrew from school. Colin confided in his mother and that gave him some comfort; he was able to stand up for himself and seemed to have more resilience. Once Frank became involved in sports and got rid of his ‘baby fat’, he no longer was harassed and teased. Mark received no emotional support from his high school coaches though he was an excellent junior footballer. Mark seemed to have a style or attitude that turned people away. This is his rationalisation.

When considering relationship issues, mention should be made regarding the political aspects of the personal. All the narratives contain dynamics of power (e.g., struggles for acceptance, relationships gone astray) with significant others (parents, peers, wives). They tell us that, as young people, they were caught in a web of powerful forces that they seldom fully understood. Lacking understanding and resources to cope with their circumstances, many of these men crashed and, disheartened, remained caught in the trap of loneliness. These are stories of hope and success, however, for such conditions are not necessarily permanent. As time went on – as a result of the processes of life itself – some of these men, with the help of others, were able to overcome their situations and empowered themselves to lead a life of principle and success. When understanding the issues of defining moments, it is important to acknowledge that, besides having a strong psychological component, there is also a crucial social aspect that needs to be addressed.

### 5.2.1 Loneliness

All six of the participants described prolonged periods of isolation and loneliness. It is intimately connected with self-harm because it’s partly the loneliness and not knowing where to go, so self-destruction becomes the focus. Tanner (1973) argues that in addition to withdrawal “the signs of loneliness are depression, the use of drugs, delinquency, failure in school and sometimes suicide” (p. 18). Loneliness, then, is an outcome of not being able to build good relationships with others.
Catrevas (1960) reminds us of Joseph Fort Newton’s adage that when you build walls instead of bridges, loneliness besets you (p. 367). There were times, then, when the six participants didn’t have the skills needed to build bridges. Loneliness was a factor in a number of the defining moments these men described. Their perceived isolation was an agent in some of their critical incidents.

Karl admitted having mood swings and loneliness as a child, and he believed this was brought on by his mother’s depression and his father’s failure to take action against the man who tried to sexually assault him. Also, the transition from a smaller primary school to a larger secondary school offered less supervision and support, and Karl became more vulnerable and lonely. Later, as an adult, Karl experienced another defining moment by the birth of his first child and he thought his wife focussed all her attention on the newborn. Because of this he felt the same kind of loneliness he had as an adolescent. He admitted that he still experiences intense periods of loneliness even when he’s with others, including his own family. Mark, although never diagnosed as being bi-polar, said he had many highs and lows. He was often disappointed in other people and didn’t feel that he could trust anyone. He, like Barry, felt very lonely even around other people. Frank acknowledged his feelings of loneliness had become a characteristic trait that has continued into his adulthood. Frank had this to say about his young adulthood:

\[
\text{I was very depressed, very lonely. Just black; just black. Smoking dope, drinking every night. Lonely. Didn’t care who I hurt, my family. Mom had left us and our family had collapsed and I was left with my loneliness. I was told by a counsellor that I was handed ‘adult sized’ pain when I was just a boy and the boy was still inside me, hurting and needing healing and encouragement. (Int. 1)}
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Interestingly, there was a time, however, when loneliness became a friend to Frank and he actively worked to push people away. The question needs to be asked, Are these narrative participants victims of loneliness or are they agents of loneliness? It seems that some of them do a bit of both. Some actively pushed people away at times. Some sought being alone and experiencing loneliness because they didn’t want to be hurt again. Barry told me he even felt very alone when there were other people around him. Saunders (1997) explains, “It is possible to be lonely in a
crowd. It is only inner strength that prevents loneliness, not riotous company and endless partying (p. 82). When Barry was crying out for help he found himself the most alone in his defining moments. If these participants actually have walls around themselves then they are agential in wanting to be lonely or feeling lonely.

Barry experienced long bouts of loneliness because he felt rejected by his own family. He thought his parents and siblings didn’t really know him and didn’t want to know him. He felt isolated and alone when even his own mother believed what was gossiped about his sexuality. Although one of Colin’s defining moments was returning to school, he still experienced bouts of loneliness. Because Colin moved around so often, he had feelings of loneliness because it was difficult to establish and sustain long-term relationships with his peers and teachers. As an adult he had feelings of loneliness with the advent of specific defining moments involving his major illnesses and hospitalisation, and then later with his divorce. Having experienced remand, Mark afterwards felt sad, despondent and very lonely. *The aloneness and futility pervading in the place made me despair and gave me anxiety.* (Int. 2) Like Colin, Mark found loneliness very depressing.

Biddulph (1994) argues that one of the enemies of men is loneliness: “Men’s enemies are often on the inside – in the walls we put up around our own hearts” (p. 4). Putting up walls around their hearts is quite agential – it means their loneliness is something they ascribe to. Saunders (1997) explains loneliness this way, “we are most lonely when we feel discouraged by our efforts to create a happy life for ourselves, when we’re missing a particular person, place or situation, when we are alone by circumstance rather than choice” (p. 82).

There was a number of instances across Andrew’s narrative where he talks about his loneliness. He said he felt lonely since his mid-teens and he credited it with prolonged bullying at high school. *‘Pure hell’* is how he explained each nine-to-four school day. *To this day I’m very much a loner (spending lots of time on my own), but I would rather this was not the case.* (Int. 4) Andrew admitted being a loner inside his own family. Andrew felt very isolated. He didn’t believe there was anyone to talk to or confide in. He learned to deal with, or absorb, his problems on his own. Andrew’s loneliness has a developmental history that commenced in early childhood when there was a lack of personal contact and intimacy with his parents.
Sullivan (1953) traced the need for tenderness and protective care in infancy and the early years. According to Moustakas (1961) “these needs extend into childhood when components of what will ultimately be experienced as loneliness appear in the need for adult participation in activities” (p. 35). Since Andrew’s parents couldn’t offer him their adult presence and participation because of their own inadequacies and relationship issues, loneliness resulted. He developed a sense of social isolation and felt rejected by his family.

Tanner (1973) argues that loneliness is the wall people build around fear and the fear of love. He explains that we can become aware of our emotional choices and how we handle our feelings, so that we are able to structure our lives in a more productive and meaningful way. He states:

> Loneliness is always related to the way in which we respond to people and events. Sometimes it is with irritation, fear, guilt, sadness and hurt; at other times it is with laughter and joy. This is particularly so with people about whom we care. It is not always understood that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. The more we care about someone, the more positively we will react to them and what they are, do and say (p. 21).

As mentioned earlier by Titmuss (2003), when experiencing loneliness vulnerability becomes a challenge. Some of the men in this study had a great desire for companionship, but were unable to find or experience it. This brought about an even greater degree of loneliness.

Interestingly, Moustakas (1961) tells us that loneliness can be a very positive experience:

> One can come to a recognition of loneliness as a condition of human life only through a deep and penetrating voyage of one’s own solitary nature … loneliness is within life itself, and that all creatures in some way spring from solitude, meditation and isolation (p. x).
Loneliness built up to a crescendo around defining moments for the six men in this study. Perhaps loneliness contained some hidden assets to assist the six participants to survive their ordeals. Reflection could be an asset. Reflection could give you the opportunity to think about some of the loneliness you’ve experienced and how it had affected you. Perhaps it could be a defining moment when you realise you’re going to break the habit of loneliness or whether you’re going to relish in it.

5.3 Times of Transition

Some of the participants’ defining moments were manifested within transitional phases in their lives. Whether it be moving house, being promoted to seventh grade and changing schools, changing health patterns, leaving school for employment, changing jobs or leaving one relationship for another, instances of considerable change seemed to heighten the vulnerability that these men felt in their lives. Saunders (1997) argues men’s stress differs from women’s:

Most of it has to do with perceived and prescribed roles … male stress is directly related to the social and environmental upheavals that have abounded in recent decades … men are confused about their roles, angry at perceived anomalies, uncertain for the future and resentful about what they have lost (p. 26).

One of the most powerful transitions experienced by the participants in this study was between primary and secondary school. All six participants considered this to be a transition from childhood to adolescence. Fuller (2000) reports it is not uncommon for some young people to experience a loss of self-esteem when they make the transition from primary to secondary school, and “late-developing boys may be most at risk during this time” (p. 172). Tattum et al. (1993) report “Transition from home to school or to a new school or as part of the general migration from primary to secondary schools is a time of anxiety” (p. 67).

All participants in this study reflected positively on their primary school years and generally perceived these years to be among the best years of their lives. Then things changed when they made the transition to high school. Fuller (2000) argues that many parents report that their offspring enjoyed the primary school years, got
along well with teachers and got good marks. When their children reached secondary school, however, many parents recognised deterioration in their sense of security and belonging. In Andrew Bosley’s case it was his ‘red shoes’ experience. He no longer had the close supervision that he had experienced in primary school and he was more vulnerable to bullying. Karl no longer had the support of his parochial community and found high school overwhelming. Colin found junior high school challenging because he moved from one country to another and, then, from one school to another.

Changing schools became an issue for several of the participants in the study. Mark had transferred to a Victorian Western District school from Queensland in junior high school. He was an outstanding footballer and was about to be signed up by one of the Melbourne teams. According to Mark, the local coaches didn’t like having him, an ‘outsider’ receive such an honour, and most of Mark’s team-mates were jealous of him. He still maintains that had he had more support from his father and the school, he probably would have become a successful Melbourne football player. Newcomers to a community are not always welcome – especially if they are considered a threat. For people like Mark this can be an obstacle. In Mark’s case, because he was in transition from a Queensland school to one in Victoria, he became the outstanding football player, not one of the ‘local’ boys who had been groomed by the school coaches. Mark considered his adolescence as frustrating and disappointing. He reflects on this as a time of lost opportunity. Although Mark was extremely gifted, he didn’t complete Year 11. His experience of being on remand had devastated him completely. Finally, in transition, he went to another town and boarded with a very understanding family while he attended art school. It must be recognised, however, that Mark also experienced good transition.

Karl’s transition year in seventh grade to a much larger school away from his small hometown made him feel insecure, isolated and alone. Like Mark, he perceived his adolescence as one of unhappiness. He was popular in primary school, yet in the transition to high school he became unsettled and found that he was treated differently. It really frustrated and inhibited him. During his primary school years he had all four grandparents living close by; they doted on him and spoiled him. Living in a small community, his family had established the respect of the local
townspeople. Once in high school, in a much bigger town, he was treated differently; he no longer had family capital to build on. He admitted to being bullied quite a few times. This influenced his relationship with his classmates. He recalled his class magazine with a comment about each student that was published at the end of the school year. Look, I think I was rather sort of nothing. I remember I would always have like a series of question marks, the sort of unknown. I certainly wasn’t a leader. (Int. 1) Karl didn’t like high school and use to project himself out of it.

I learned to put my mind in places where I did feel really comfortable, so I could be at the beach when I was in a class, or I could be thinking of home or a whole range of things and I learned very well how to get through by sort of tuning out. (Int. 1)

There was also the transition from school to employment. After Barry withdrew from school he seemed to drift along aimlessly. Eventually he found employment at Ford Australia and settled into a de facto relationship with Deidre. Several years later he quit his job, left his de facto and enrolled at Deakin where he graduated with top honours. This transition – leaving a relationship for education -- created some positive changes. Colin’s father withdrew him from school at the end of third form after receiving his Intermediate Certificate. In transition from school to work, he became a junior storeman in a Melbourne firm. Ambitious, Colin combined work and study by enrolling in evening courses. Some years later he received his teaching credential, and a few years after that he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree.

5.4 Bullying and Victimisation

Another recurring theme within this group of men was their experience with bullying and victimisation in school. Andrew’s experiences of bullying were mostly in school and commenced in junior high school when he was teased for wearing red combat boots. The bullying continued throughout his high school years. When Andrew was having trouble fitting in with his peer group and being bullied, he initially thought he would appear weak if he sought the help of his teacher. So he didn’t talk to any of them about it. He thought such an act would cast him as a ‘dobber’ or ‘tattler’ and would make matters worse.
When he told his mother about his experience following wearing his red shoes, she clearly didn’t appreciate the seriousness of his situation. She just said the other classmates shouldn’t have made an issue of his choice in shoes. Had Andrew received the support of his school at some of his critical moments of being bullied – had the teacher said to the bullies, “Excuse me, that is not tolerated here” – perhaps the severity of his problem could have been circumvented. Even when he did report to his science teacher that the other boys had smashed his egg project (and the teacher actually observed the incident), his teacher didn’t situate this act as part of the more serious and sustained assault that Andrew was being subjected to.

There were signs of breakdowns of relationships for Andrew with peers and often there was not a lot of family support. Andrew’s family had a great influence on his behaviour. The family lifestyle was unique in that even though his parents lived on the same property, they slept in separate buildings. There were few violent verbal or physical arguments, just passive acceptance that this was ‘normal’. Andrew did not seem to develop any real assertiveness skills and clearly suffered self-esteem issues. He ignored the reality of the bullying experiences through repression. This, of course, came to the surface years later when he developed anxiety attacks. Tatum and Lane (1989), Tattum et al. (1993) and Rigby (2001) argue that in extreme cases of bullying feelings of inadequacy and other side effects do not materialise until adulthood, and psychological problems become physical problems.

White and Epston (1990), in their use of the narrative method work in family therapy, have examined the concept of landscapes of action, which denotes reflection on experiences, and landscapes of consciousness, which involves the understanding of the affective dimension of experience. Landscapes of action are useful for thinking about the way people enact a response to something, whereas landscapes of consciousness are interesting in thinking about the way they thought about what they thought they were doing. Andrew’s landscapes of action didn’t provide him with options for considering alternative ways of handling the situation. Andrew’s reflection on the bullying events within his landscapes of action disallowed him from openly calling out for help. His landscapes of consciousness were that this would be conceding failure. The action was that he didn’t cry out for
help and the consciousness behind it was because it would be conceding his own failure or weakness. Although another issue, someone at the school must have been aware that Andrew was having problems. He wasn’t participating in team sports. His peers bullied him and it must have been obvious that he wasn’t one of the boys.

Not being one of the sporty boys categorised Andrew as weak and effeminate. In fact, all six participants were cast as different to their dominant peers. As adolescents some of them were smaller or shorter than the other boys. One wore clothes that made him stand out. One was born in another country and spoke with an accent. According to their comments, some of them seemed to think they were more intelligent than most of their classmates, yet their peers valued their academic prowess. Some of them had extra special skills, unique talents and natural abilities. Being considered ‘different’ made these six targets for bullying. Social standing and acceptance are clearly very important for boys. Lefkowitz (1997) explains the limited choices a male high school student has in regards to acquiring social standing:

For a fourteen-year-old freshman surveying the social arrangements in the school, the only cliques that seemed to count were the academic elite and the Jocks. If you didn’t fit into one of the two, where were you? Nowhere. The only thing worse was not belonging to any clique at all. Then you got treated like a lost soul, a friendless wanderer (p. 129).

When Colin immigrated to Australia with his parents and sister, he found it difficult to adjust to his first school. He was smaller than the other boys in his class and, of course, he had his British accent. He turned up to his new school in his English Ilkley Grammar School blazer, and cap and his broad Yorkshire accent. He soon learned to lose the accent because he was given a very rough time. He said that bullying was a normal aspect of his schooling and he was bullied because he was short or ‘the new boy’. Unlike Andrew, however, Colin did not accept his status as a victim of bullying. When someone tried to bully him, he would confront that person. I can be a bit pugnacious at times. I won’t back off. (Int. 2) Because he was smaller than the other boys, he realised he needed to be assertive, even aggressive in order to protect himself. Being bullied, however, did bother him, but
his family moved from place to place so much that he knew the bullying wouldn’t last that long – in any one school – anyway. Here is an example of transition as a way of getting out. As a good transition, he knew the cycle would be broken because he would be thinking he’d be picked up and moved! Karl Linnell also described being bullied when he was in high school. *Because of my size, I was smallish and I was not aggressive, although I could be fairly cutting with the tongue. I could pretty much fend off someone by my sharpness.* (Int. 1) Unlike Andrew, Colin and Karl were able to stand up for themselves and circumvent the full impact of sustained bullying. They seemed to have some resources that enabled them to confront this problem and reduce its impact. Verbal skills, in particular, were the resource that seemed to help them ward off being bullied.

For Barry, bullying came unexpectedly. School was always an important part of his childhood and a stabilising influence. But knowing his father was living on the streets, and being reminded constantly of this situation by others took its toll on him. He started losing interest in school and became increasingly marginalised by his peers. It became so public with his father on the streets, and it was very upsetting and embarrassing for him. Indeed, his family’s circumstances were a continuous source of alienation for him. Levine (1991), Fuller (2000), Hawkes (2001) and Garrett (2003) acknowledge the need to be conscious of how each family member is affected by a breakdown. Each individual is affected differently depending on his or her own unique personality, the available support and their respective resources and coping skills. For Barry, moving from one school to another because the family had to live in emergency housing was extremely upsetting and destabilising. He learned to live through numerous traumatic events. Then, in early adolescence Barry was faced with the humiliating situation when his younger brother was forced to perform a sexual act on his mate; yet Barry who wasn’t even there to see what was happening was the one branded as being homosexual, ‘a poofta’. He felt that his family, especially his younger brother, had shamed his public image and he later described himself as *a meaningless, powerless, weak individual without a future.* (Int. 1) It was such a traumatic experience for Barry, who clearly didn’t have the personal or social resources to handle this kind of abuse, that he withdrew from school. His mother and father didn’t appreciate what was happening to Barry, and the school didn’t seem to have any support structures to pick up Barry’s need for help.
Bullying was also a very real problem for Frank Garber. He said that when anyone tried to pick a fight with him at school he would just walk away. He never defended himself. It wasn’t only his being overweight that provoked the bullying but, also, he thought he was more academically inclined than most of his classmates. [His school records indicate an IQ of 135]. Frank talked about getting bashed up by other boys and having frequent nosebleeds. When he was bullied he would stew over it for a long time and withdraw from everyone. It was very embarrassing for him and he felt inadequate because he wasn’t tough enough to fight back. He recalls, *that’s when I learnt I was too weak to fight anyone. I knew I couldn’t win, so I didn’t fight back.* (Int. 1) He never told his family about the bullying and no one at school showed any concern for him. Frank became distant and withdrawn, and as a buffer for the bullying, He decided to become more studious and was able to impress his teachers with his academic ability. In retrospect, Frank recognised that this was a questionable strategy to use because, in doing so, he further marked himself as ‘different’ to his peers.

Bullying experiences for Mark Newton differed from the other five men. As a teenager he was an outstanding athlete, academically capable, a talented artist and was generally considered popular among the girls in his class. Yet still, other boys made life uncomfortable for him. “Kids at the football club started calling me names until I was an object of derision, rather than somebody to be respected for my football ability” (Int. 1). When I asked Mark what they called him, he replied, *oh, I don’t even want to repeat it, just started calling me names.* (Int. 1) Bullying actually started in the fifth grade when he was still living in Queensland because he was a year younger than his classmates and several years ahead academically. Mark responded to bullying by fighting back or by ignoring it. Mark didn’t confide in his parents because he believed he wouldn’t get support from his family. His father was a heavy drinker and had very aggressive tendencies and his mother seemed subservient with his father’s decisions. Mark ignored most of the bullying, but it still hurt because he wanted to be liked by his peers. Mark, later, developed a reputation for being aggressive on account of his breaking another boy’s jaw.

All six of the men experienced alienation by their peers, another form of bullying, at some level. When confronted with his own bullying, Andrew didn’t know what
to do other than hope it would go away. Frank withdrew into his studies to impress his teachers. Barry finally withdrew from school because of the bullying and, also, moving from one school to another was detrimental to his remaining interested in school. Colin and Karl had the resources to stand up to bullies. Mark used his brute force when things became difficult, but he was still psychologically harmed by not being accepted by some of his peers. When Mark lost control he seemed to go berserk with his strength and later this would get him in a lot of trouble. He responded aggressively to the bullying and would just explode. This really bothered him and he’s still getting counselling for things that happened to him as an adolescent.

There was clearly a lack of personal and social resources around some of them when they were experiencing bullying. Personal skills needed to overcome this include lack of confidence, self-esteem and assertiveness; social skills include support networks, strong family and peer support. There were few signs of reaching out for help by some of these boys and they did not know how to access help. Importantly, none of them sought refuge in their family. They didn’t believe they would receive support from their family. In fact, a number of them were distancing themselves from their family. Some of them placed emphasis on these experiences during the initial interview, while others didn’t admit to being bullied until the second or third interview. As adults it was ardent that these bullying experiences were the source of some very bitter and desperate struggles in their lives. They were still feeling ashamed and disappointed of their bullying experiences.

It is not unusual for people to interpret bullying as an expression of their own inadequacy. It is believed that many children blame themselves for being victims of bullying. Byrne (1994) argues there is an ugly sense of shame in being bullied. He explains:

It starts with a feeling of ‘I don’t like what they are doing’. It then moves to ‘I don’t like what they are doing but there is nothing I can do about it’. The final stage is ‘I don’t like what they are doing. There is nothing I can do about it, but they’re all doing it, so there must be something wrong with me. It’s my fault’… If people call you either fat,
stupid or swot for long enough, with sufficient vindictiveness, self-confidence is replaced by deep-seated shame … The fear and the shame mean that children seldom come straight out and say that they are being bullied (pp. 38–39).

Who are the typical victims? Olweus (1993) claims the victimised are usually more anxious and have feelings of insecurity – more so than other students. He continues:

Further, they are often cautious, sensitive and quiet … victims suffer from low self-esteem, and have a negative view of themselves and their situation. They often look upon themselves as failures and feel stupid, ashamed and unattractive (p. 32).

… a victim can improve his ‘social skills’ and acquire a better understanding of the ‘informal social rules’ of the peer group (p. 104).

Schools are fertile sites for bullying, assailants and victims are brought together on an almost daily basis, in the name of education. Harris (1998) describes how important it is to fit in. When they don’t, “their peer groups are quick to remind them of the penalties of being different. School age children, in particular, are merciless in the persecution of the one who is different: the nail that sticks up gets hammered down.” (p. 169). Lind and Maxwell (1996) state, “90% of the incidents of emotional abuse and most of the physical violence between children occur at schools” (p. 5). Three-quarters of Australian households have at least one person who has been bullied, with schools being the most common place where it occurs, as reported by Tomazin (2003). She also indicates that 81 per cent of bullying cases take place in schools – “more than double the cases that occurred in the workplace, on the street, during sport or from neighbours”.

Suckling and Temple (2001) argue that ‘bullying in the school environment can only be dealt with effectively if the whole school is behind the endeavour, that trying to handle it in isolation does not work in the long term” (p. 1). Although bullying has been a complex issue for many, many years, effective and urgent action is necessary now.
Sullivan (2000) devised an anti-bullying handbook “to provide a guide for schools for the development, implementation and evaluation of effective anti-bullying philosophies, policies and programs” (p. 3). This is indicative of the concern parents and their children have and the action being taken. Sullivan subscribes to an anti-bullying policy for the entire school community. His policy states:

… the school’s intentions and ‘how it will enforce and uphold its rules and processes; what teachers’, students’, and parents’ rights and responsibilities are; and what procedures are in place. It is, in effect, a contract between the school and its community (p. 77).

Using Rigby (1996) as a guide, Sullivan introduces a useable policy document:

A Statement about Bullying and the School’s Intentions

This school believes that, in order for students to learn to the best of their ability, they must have a safe and friendly environment in which to spend their time. In order to do this, we declare the school to be a no-bullying zone.

We have discussed matters thoroughly with the school’s community – students, teachers, parents, trustees, and the wider community – and, in order to make the sort of school we all want, we have created an anti-bullying policy. In this policy, we have made a statement about what bullying is and what people should do whey they experience it or see it happening or hear about it. (pp. 79–80).

It may surprise people to know that everyone can be bullied. According to Dobson (2003):

Everyone. Including parents, business people and sports stars as well as kids at school. As we get older though, we can choose where we hang out and with whom, because we don’t have to go to school. At school you have no choice; you have to hang out with bullies whether you like
it or not. For this reason, not everyone learns how to stop bullies, they just learn how to get away from them (pp. 1–2).

Although much is being done to eliminate bullying in schools, there is still much work ahead. According to Tomazin (2003), as part of the first national conference on school bullying, the Federal Government will soon have a uniform standard for all Australian schools to handle bullying by adhering to a national safe schools framework. Bullying is gaining much wide publicity and we are recognising now that it exists both explicitly and implicitly across almost all aspects of society. As early as 1993 Rigby and Slee indicated, “we have no cause to feel pessimistic” (p. 135). They commented:

It is now generally acknowledged that anti-bullying policies and interventions should be preceded by careful attempts to assess the extent and nature of bully/victim incidents in schools …We believe that interventions will work best when they are consistent with what most children think ought to be done about bullying (pp. 134-135).

As mentioned earlier, some of the participants in this study found it extremely difficult to discuss their experiences of being bullied. Several didn’t want to ‘open their can of worms’ until the second or even third interview. It was very upsetting for them to disclose the victimisation. In fact, one of them had never mentioned it to anyone. What was so upsetting for several of them was that the signs were there and either no one noticed them or they didn’t want to get involved. They had experienced bullying under the face of others without getting any support. In Andrew’s ‘egg’ episode his teacher simply told him to get another egg!

If we are going to help boys who are being bullied, we need to be on the lookout for signs of bullying and recognise them, e.g. the isolated boy, the extra shy boy, the one with bruises on his body and the boy whose lunch money was taken from him by a bully. The act of bullying can emerge at any time. Don’t assume that a particular boy is safe because it can change rapidly. For example, all six participants experienced rather pleasant primary school years. It wasn’t until the transition to high school that things changed drastically. For example, Andrew was proud of his red combat boots until one of the school bullies made fun of him and

Duane Boyer
his shoes. His world changed in an instant. Recall, too, that Barry enjoyed school so much until his younger brother was involved in the fellatio act, and the school peers teased Barry because they thought he was gay. Teachers and parents need to be on the lookout for boys in strife. Don’t assume that it’s stable. Just because a child hasn’t been bullied in the past doesn’t mean it can’t happen in the future.

5.5 Self-harm and Suicide Ideation

Another recurring theme in the reflections of my six participants was their feeling of worthlessness and despair. They felt so alone and different. The narratives in this study illustrate some of the self-depreciatory effects of male crisis. Indeed, there were numerous occasions where they express their problems and frustrations through isolation, self-harm and thoughts of suicide. Quite often in the interviews Mark mentioned his feelings about being different and an outsider. I wish I had a normal life, just a normal, middle class suburban life. I’ve been an outsider all my life. And I just can’t see any end to it. Everyone thinks I’m on the inside; everyone thinks I’m the centre of it, but I’ve always felt as an outsider. (Int. 2) Mark said he felt suicidal only while he was on remand because he considered it an injustice for being there. He was very embarrassed to find himself in such an environment. His thoughts changed when he was informed he would be released within the month.

Because of the prolonged pain Andrew endured as a victim of bullying, he often contemplated suicide. He remembers walking long the railroad tracks on his way to school and contemplating how easy it would be just to step in front of the next train! Although he had these thoughts of suicide he never actually attempted it. Although the school hours between 9 and 4 were a living hell, there were other things in my life to compensate for the misery. (Int. 2) Someone at school would have been aware of Andrew’s despair, yet no one came to the rescue. No one gave him the support he needed.

Andrew contemplated suicide, based on school experiences. The other men had suicidal ideation because of lack of connection in the family. For several of them every time they tried to move forward they knew they’d get stuffed up by things. It was like ‘last resort stuff’ when they’d get themselves in the position to accomplish something and things would go wrong. It’s interesting data. Here we have men
who have contemplated suicide, yet they haven’t completed the act. These men are still alive and well! They did get to a point in their lives when suicide and self-harm were demanding and urgent issues – the thoughts of suicide were real to them. It’s not about pathology and that they had mental illnesses, except for Frank. They were pushed to a position and they lacked support when it was needed. What if Andrew had stepped in front of the train? Would it have been reported as an accident?

The two most defining moments in Barry Chalmer’s childhood were his parents’ separation and his father’s living on the streets. The separation disintegrated his family and his tenuous community ties. A developing sense of alienation eventually devoured his personality and there were numerous times when he contemplated suicide. He never made plans to suicide. Barry admitted his flirtations with suicide were impulsive, driven by frustration. He resigned himself to never getting over his difficult internal period, recalling the accusations of exposing himself to children fabricated by his mother. At such times, Barry considered his life unbearable. This caused him to contemplate suicide.

Frank definitely contemplated suicide. According to Frank, he attempted suicide about fifteen times between 1987 and 1993. He said he just felt crook all the time, lonely and wasn’t getting things I wanted. (Int. 3) He said he felt very frustrated, and once instead of using pills he slashed his wrists. This occurred when he broke up with his girlfriend. He felt there wasn’t any hope of life, so he went down to the lake with a knife and slashed his wrists. When he realised what he had done, he drove himself to casualty and they referred him for psychological help. This incident became a defining moment for Frank because it made him realise committing suicide was not worth it and it taught him that life is much more valuable than he thought it was. Earlier on as a teenager Frank had lost weight, had become athletic, had a group of friends and had the reputation of being an academic student. There were times, however, when he had prolonged bouts of depression. After year 12 and his entrance to university things started to deteriorate. Frank started using drugs and he was beginning to show symptoms of schizophrenia, and he became more distant and isolated. Frank revealed that his attempts of suicide started the year he entered university and began to experiment with drugs. After that there were bouts of self-harm and more suicide attempts.
Frank was going all right until he started university. There are support resources offered in universities. Somehow, they didn’t find him or he didn’t find them.

Rigby and Slee (1999) support the concern that adolescents who are victimised at school by peers and who believe they don’t have the support when they have problems “are more likely to experience suicidal ideation than others” (p. 127). This seemed to be the case for at least two of the participants. Although they had thoughts of suicide they realised they would find ways to endure the bullying. Interesting, too, that boys who do the bullying are also at risk of having ideas to contemplate suicide. Difficulties in parent-child relationships can also reveal themselves through youth suicide.

Webb (1998) argues:

> The question to be asking, then, is why suicide seems to have become such a particularly male solution to crises in times of transition and re-establishment of the self and its relationship to the world. Suicide is ‘one of the last great male mysteries’; it is a problem that is uniquely ours as men, and we need to be interrogating ourselves about it in order to be better equipped to confront and inspect it (p. 197).

### 5.6 A Valid Masculine Identity

The sporting fields are where many young males learn what it takes to establish a legitimate male identity that will be accepted and respected. Like it or not, sport is a powerful social vector around which masculinity continues to be defined and demonstrated (Hickey, Fitzclarencce & Matthews, 1998). Andrew was conscious of the fact that he just didn’t fit into the sporting formula and tried to shelter himself away from any kind of sporting activity. Of course, you don’t actually have to play to buy into the favoured masculine identity that is on offer through sport! Nick Hornby (1998) tells us in his autobiographical novel *Fever Pitch* that although he was probably the smallest boy in first form and one of only three boys wearing short pants, it “wasn’t as traumatic as it should have been” (p. 23). The reason was he had an extensive collection of soccer trading cards that made him the envy of his more sporting peers. He used the cards to his advantage.
School sports were important to Colin, Frank and Mark. Colin, while still living in England, enjoyed soccer and was considered a good player by his coach. Although smaller than the other boys, by participating in sports he didn’t become the target of schoolyard bullies. Frank was a non-sporty kind of boy in primary school. He didn’t play sports or football, and he considered himself a ‘square sort of kid’. When he entered high school, however, he lost a lot of weight and enjoyed golf and hockey. He received a hockey award when he graduated from high school. This demonstrates that a sporting or non-sporting identity is not fixed.

Andrew, Barry and Karl seemed to be less sports inclined. Andrew didn’t handle physical education classes well. He felt uncomfortable participating in contact sports. He said he couldn’t get excited about chasing a football around to score goals. He didn’t consider it a question of masculinity, he thought it was more an issue of passiveness.

> I know I wasn’t aggressive, not to do with gender and masculinity issues, but more to do with being peaceful rather than violent, treating people nice rather than nasty. Although they would call me ‘sissy’ and all that because I wouldn’t fight back, but to me it wasn’t being a sissy. To me it was not being aggressive. That’s how I saw it at the time. (Int. 2)

The problem is that, even though Andrew chose not to participate in sport and actively avoided sporting contexts, he continued to be marked against its criteria. Andrew simply couldn’t establish a neutral sporting identity. Through his rejection of sport, Andrew got cast as weak, soft and effeminate. There is a long history of groups of sporting males asserting their authority over their non-sporty male counterparts (Miedzian, 1992). It is significant that Andrew responded to his bullying in the hyper-masculine way, by not showing his pain. Though cast as a girl, sook and a weakling, Andrew never broke down in front of his assailants and to this end kept his masculine identity in tact. Even though he was bullied because he didn’t have the macho image, he actually portrayed masculine responses.
Barry and Karl were also non-aggressive and not that interested in contact sports. They weren’t assertive, or aggressive or resilient and, therefore, they showed weakness in the context of sport. Especially in football boys are encouraged or inducted into a culture of who’s tough, who’s strong, who don’t show pain. If boys are more emotional, or show emotions, and break down and cry, they get cast as weak and, then, they become able to be dominated. Barry and Karl were rejected, or at least ignored, on account of their lack of hyper-masculine attributes. They participated in sport, although probably half-heartedly, which prevented them from Andrew’s position. Although they did get bullied and picked on to some extent, they had strategies to stand up for themselves more. Barry’s strategy was to fight. I did fight. I fought a hell of a lot, bigger than me, too. That’s the only way I could sort of gain a bit of prestige through fighting. (Int. 2) Karl’s tactics were somewhat different. Because of my size – I was smallish and I was not aggressive, although I could be fairly. I learnt to be fairly cutting with the tongue; I could pretty much fend off someone by sharpness, but if someone wanted to thump me I couldn’t ... yeah, I’d been bullied. (Int. 1)

Pollack (1998) argues that schools should do all that they can to foster the transformative experience of sports. According to Pollack, this means:

… encouraging boys to be more emotive (but cautioning them against being overly aggressive or hostile toward others); supporting the close, affectionate relationships they develop with their team-mates (but interrupting excessive teasing or taunting); providing as much positive feedback as possible to help boost their feelings of confidence (but not pushing them to become obsessive about how strong or successful they are as athletes); and modelling a good attitude about losing, one that helps them, in a positive way, to learn from their weaknesses and failures. (p. 298)

It appears, however, that Pollack’s argument didn’t happen for Mark at all. Mark was close to being signed-on with one of the Melbourne football teams when things started to go wrong in his life. Interestingly, Mark had the physical capital and fitted the prototype, but he still didn’t fit in. Even though he had the capital, he was still very much alone and considered ‘othered’. Given that Mark was an active
sporting male then, perhaps, sport could have done more to help him. He had attributes that many believe should have protected him from being bullied or victimised. This problematises assumptions about sport being a pathway to successful masculinity.

If this had been the philosophical approach years ago when our six research participants had been in school, perhaps their whole attitude toward masculinity, sexuality, sports and relationships would have been much different. Yet this tended to be more around identity politics than how the game was played. Pollack is talking about making it part of the way that identity is established ("transformative experience of sport") as opposed to having games played. He says the game does more than gets played – it actually plays an active role in identity politics. And then, more, in recognising that if people are aware that part of the game is actually forming particular identities, then more should be done about it as politics work it out.

5.7 Being ‘Different’ Or ‘Othered”

The six male participants in this study all felt as though they were ‘different’ than other boys when they were growing up. Much of this orientated around their families and the lack of affinity they felt with other families. Colin had an unhappy childhood, insecure because of family dynamics and his parents were Jewish holocaust survivors. Because he moved so often he found it hard to make friends and maintain relationships. Frank was very hurt by the separation of his mother and father. They seemed to influence his ability to establish a relationship. He found it difficult to understand how his mother could have another man sharing her bed while his father continued living on the same property. Karl’s mother and her depression seemed to have a strong bearing on his behaviour Karl said his father taught him very little about manhood and he was unable to use his own father as a role model. Mark grew up having very masculine attributes – muscular body and an excellent football player combined with his gentle nature – unless someone upset him - and artistic ability. Mark could never entertain friends at his home because his father was a heavy drinker, and so unpredictable that Mark was too uncomfortable about inviting friends home. Barry was embarrassed about his father living on the street. He was aware of how different his family was when compared...
to other families. He didn’t feel part of the family and he always believed no one in his family liked him. They all considered him different!

Sanderson (1995) asked eight eleven-year-old boys to give her a list of synonyms for boys who are different or ‘wuss’. Here’s their list: “loser, a dweeb, an idiot, a dork, a drip, a moron, posh, a pussie, a douche, a girl, a girl lover, a wanker, queer, gay, happy, gay farts, weird, a donkey brain and twinkle toes” (p. 158). When I asked Mark what names he was called, he wouldn’t answer the question. These names or labels are very hurtful. Being called different or othered can be very hurtful, too.

Being different or ‘othered’ may come about for many reasons. All the males in this study were ‘othered’ because of family problems as discussed in the previous paragraph. They felt their families were different. Academically? Some of them knew they were brighter, or more intelligent than other family members, or more academically inclined. Andrew, Frank and Mark believed they were more intelligent than their peers and this created problems for them. It wasn’t considered cool to be smarter – you were a nerd! The men in this study were considered weak, girlish and non-sporty. They were cast as outsiders – the pommy (Colin, the boy from another country) and Mark, the boy from Queensland. Another category of ‘otheredness’ includes the sick. Colin and Karl had several operations. In addition to the sick are the unfortunate (Barry’s father was living on the street.). Some of these males had sibling problems – a brother or sister could undermine them and cast them as different. Barry’s younger brother was forced into a sexual act and Barry was labelled gay. To be cast as different by a group is a potent and powerful thing, and groups do like to define themselves according to what they’re not. You can get cast out as different according to a whole range of reasons.

There is a need for better understanding about the impact on students who are isolated and alienated from the dominant peer groups. Students who experience rejection and feel isolated from their peers are at risk of experiencing future disruptions to their schooling and/or psycho-social and relationship difficulties (Newcombe, Bukowski & Pattee, 1998). There is a need to record the stories of those students who have experienced peer rejection and who have developed new forms of relationships and a different sense of personal identity. Understanding
such stories of social resilience opens the way to developing new pedagogic possibilities for students experiencing social rejection within their formative years.

**5.8 Poisonous Pedagogy**

Before leaving this chapter, something needs to be said about ‘poisonous pedagogy’ and its detrimental effects on people – be it children or adults. On the one hand, there is the fact that poisonous pedagogy is often passed on from one generation to generation as a bad genetic illness. Miller (1990) argues, “(t)he pedagogical conviction that one must bring a child into line from the outset has its origin in the need to split off the disquieting parts of the inner self and project them onto an available object” (p.91). These six men were poisoned by their own parents and teachers, who, in turn, may have been poisoned by their own parents and teachers. On the other hand, is the importance of what Miller calls ‘enlightened witnesses’ – those persons who step in to help and defend the victims. Enlightened witnesses (be it counsellors, friends, teachers, coaches, relatives) are crucial in helping the abused see the light and even recover from their traumatic experiences. In the stories of this study, it is clear that a loving wife and, especially, a caring and empathetic therapist have been key elements in the road to recovery for these men – even more so if help has come when they were actually experiencing their defining moments.
Chapter Six: Findings and Implications

6.1 Findings

In this study, defining moments have been used as a device to guide a retrospective analysis of the formation of six men’s understanding of themselves. Within this context defining moments provide a powerful insight into the incidents and circumstances that shape and inform their very identity and the way they live their lives. Although I didn’t have the opportunity to actually observe these men while they were encountering their defining moments, their reflections of these circumstances or events in their lives provide powerful analytic insights into some of the personal and structural forces that converge to exert influence over them. If, for example, Andrew’s teacher had immediately accosted his bullies who knows how his life might be different, or if Mark’s football coach had been more sympathetic to his difficulties in fitting into his new surrounds. The potential exists to observe critical incidents, or observe what could become defining moments, while they’re happening. This would require an increased focus looking at what’s occurring in people’s lives day by day. This study provokes us to contemplate and address the realisation that there are particular times in people’s lives where their circumstances change, and they may need support in creating and developing an appropriate response.

We have to realise and acknowledge that the effects of defining moments live on for a long period of time, and their consequences aren’t easily reconciled in weeks, months or even years. Defining moments can have life-long implications. They have implications for how individuals experience their next defining moment because unless they have build-up resources they probably get rendered very vulnerable. This occurred to most of the men narrated in this study. What this study has demonstrated is the importance of connection. It has highlighted the pressing need to talk about how families and schools can help young males, and to have a better support structure around them. We need to be on the lookout for these defining moments. We need to gather up peers to be on the lookout as well, not only adult eyes but peer group eyes, too. The literature tells us that males are renown for keeping their problems to themselves and not calling out for help. Because many males feel that what’s happening to them hasn’t happened to other
males, they’re afraid or embarrassed to discuss their problems with anyone. Many males believe it’s unmanly to show any type of sensitivity. For some males their sensitivity becomes such a concern or worry for them that they feel they don’t have any options but self-harm or suicide.

I opened this study describing an incident reported by Waldon and Davies in *The Melbourne Age* (18 August, 2003, pp. 1, 10, 12–13) where a high-standing, resilient male school principal had committed suicide. One of the primary concerns in Paul Wilson’s tragic story was that, although he was surrounded by people who both respected and valued him, he didn’t call out for help. Even those people who were supposedly very close to him had no idea of the gravity of his personal crisis. Everyone thought he was going well. It raises questions about the signals that are there and our ability to notice them. We need to build support structures for vulnerable people. Davis and Waldon (2003) report that an alarming number of men, aged 25 to 54, are choosing death as a solution to crises in their lives. They explain:

> The decision by *The Age* to publish a series on the largely ignored national problem of male suicide was not made lightly. In the course of this investigation, the paper was encouraged by health professionals and by families of suicide – the people most critically affected – to publish their stories. There was an overwhelming belief that the issue needed to be aired and discussed (p. 1).

In its investigation of defining moments, this study reveals that a lot of things go on during the experiencing, and there are opportunities to notice them and intercept them. All six males had adults around them who either didn’t notice or weren’t in a position to help them. Usually there are signs or signals to indicate the emotional state of a person. Grose (2000) suggests a number of ways to tune into a person’s emotions and to develop empathy. He believes in listening with your eyes. He suggests using your ears and your own eyes “for clues about children’s emotions. There are no hard and fast rules about reading the emotional signs of others, so intuition or gut feelings are important guides” (p. 165). Unfortunately, the data are riddled with missed opportunities. The ramifications of this were both powerful and long lasting. The study shows that there were people around these moments
who could have given support, and could have responded differently. This didn’t happen, unfortunately. The data also reveal insights into some of the factors that render an individual ‘available’, albeit vulnerable, to the negative impact of a defining moment. It reveals why support networks fail and how even males who appear to have ‘good social capital’ can be precariously alone. As a result, it reveals how we might approach the use of defining moments by placing more focus on ‘timely’ intervention and developing more connected support networks through families, schools, teachers, peers and their friends and communities.

On the basis of this study, there appear to be some patterns in the circumstances that render people vulnerable to the negative effects of defining moments. The data revealed recurring issues including isolation, being ‘different’, transition from place to place (primary to secondary school, school to work, etc.). Each of the six men in the study wanted to be able to talk openly and honestly about what it’s like when you need help but they didn’t know how to go about it. The end result for them was isolation and vulnerability.

It appears that some boys find themselves vulnerable in developing friendships with other boys. If they allow themselves to show affection, they easily become stigmatised as being effeminate, therefore weak and submissive. At a very young age boys learn not to show weakness or reveal any vulnerabilities. Thorne (1993) argues that should a boy “disclose a weakness to other boys, it is far more likely to be exposed to others through joking and a kind of collective shaming” (p. 94).

The men in this study found the transition from childhood to adolescence to be a daunting experience, full of conflicts and struggles. In most cases this is transition from primary to secondary school for many boys. One of the particular modes of vulnerability is around adolescence and all of the participants in my study referred back to that stage. Instances that took place in that study correlates with the literature around that says that young males, in the adolescent years, are high in terms of risk taking, self harm and accidents. This study resonates with that data.

Some of them had conflicts with their parents with the dynamics focused on power, responsibility and respect. All of them appeared to have peer relationship problems. In each of their instances, these six participating males were not alone.
They had people around them and, yet, their support networks failed them. For various reasons their support systems broke down. They felt very much alone and their defining moments became very powerful. Using the issue of bullying as an example, they had people around them, yet some of them were unable to establish a relationship with anyone who could have helped them. Some of them couldn’t access networks immediately, but found ways to make sense of it later.

Kegan and Lahey (2001), being aware of barriers that prevent people from changing, acknowledge the internal languages of an individual that need to be examined in concert with the social languages in an individual’s environment. They state, “The forms of speaking we have available to us regulate the forms of thinking, feeling, and meaning making to which we have access, which in turn constrain how we see the world and act in it (p. 7).

We need to be aware of the consequences of issues and defining moments that are not properly worked through and the effects allowed to linger on. This is particularly so with young males. The fact that Mark appeared to be going well with his football and would have appeared to have had the social resources and capital to not render him vulnerable is testimony to how difficult it can be to identify those most in need of support. No one was on the look out for him because he was a good footballer. But still in that context he had coaches and team members who built no rapport with him. Lack of connection it seems can happen in a crowded room! We need to build support systems to help young males. Some boys clearly need support structures that they can identify and trust in and that can reach out to them when they are seemingly unable to reach for support.

While the defining moment is readily identifiable anecdotally and clinically, it does not have a clear research presence in the study of male crises and men’s health (Brewer, 1995). Defining moments can be seen as potential strategies for engaging with the issues of crisis in the lives of males and actually using these moments or times as a preventative and curative strategy. Defining moments can tell us that they can come at any moment in a male’s life, one participant acknowledged his first experience at the age of three. In some cases, incidents that could become defining moments are either ignored, not acknowledged or, perhaps, the individual doesn’t realize the options available from which to choose.
Educators, parents, mentors and anyone counselling males need to be alert of the incidents and periods in men’s lives when crucial events take place where life-altering experiences originate. These are the moments where you can target interventions and give support. A range of interventions has already been undertaken, including the TAC looking at adolescent boys and road trauma and anti-bullying in schools, but one area that has been unexplored is the use of defining moments.

Because of the contemporary concerns relating to males, it is the immediate responsibility of parents, teachers, counsellors - and anyone else working with males – to be available when males are experiencing crises so that we may be able to do more for them. There is a point in time in which things can go one way or another for males. We need to look at these moments, and realize that knowing how males experience these moments can be strategic in working with them, and helping them to use positive options in dealing with crises.

If we as educators were more geared towards these defining moments, and if we were able to help males, in particular, talk and share their emotions and frustrations, and if we had better support structures around schools, teachers, families, parents and mentors, we could actually turn more of the negative defining moments into positive defining moments, or we could at least minimise their potential damage.

People can use defining moments at different levels, and you can look at these moments in relation to individuals and the moments in their lives where they might change. McGraw (2001) explains that the origin of each individual’s self-concept can be traced to ten defining moments, seven critical choices and five pivotal people. Using his own school experiences as examples, McGraw tells us, “if certain events in your life are important to you, if those events have shaped you, then that is enough to qualify those moments as ‘defining’ and therefore worthy of your full consideration” (p. 103). He goes on to say, “Defining moments anchor our emotional reactions in the world. They determine the feelings and reactions we have to the inevitable stresses we encounter throughout life” (p. 110).
Some males are confronted with their defining moments through chance and have been able to alter their behaviour. Other males have worked through their defining moments that have materialised through crisis, and others through choice. No matter how the defining moments have come about, the main concern is for the individual to understand the situation, work through the issue or problem – hopefully with a counsellor, teacher or mentor – and come closer to understanding himself and then, get on with his life in a more positive way.

As educators, teachers, counsellors, parents, coaches, scout leaders, mentors and anyone else working with males, we have the opportunity to monitor the effects of defining moments and their impact on men’s skills, capacity for insight and reflection, and provide models that form a basis for their decision making, expectations of themselves, and their independence in finding their individual way of being in the world while still being part of a broader culture. We need to be ready to intervene more with males. They need better mentors; they need better role models. One way, or one area, that we can do more is to keep an eye out for the defining moments in their lives. This intervention approach seems to fit best in the harm minimisation category since the mentor or other concerned person is helping the male through his experience. What is being offered the educational community is incorporating the concept of the defining moment into intervention programs, or setting up a separate program as a way of adding what is already there.

How do we help men feel comfortable living with the understanding and reality that they are a ‘work in progress’ constantly redefining or reinventing themselves as they progress through life? Living with that insecurity is the challenge. Although in its embryonic form, the intervention strategy using the defining moment has great value. If we can learn to recognise defining moments better we can then start to avail resources to people who are going through these experiences. Parents, family, partners, teachers, friends and mentors become intensely important.

### 6.2 Implications

I’ll conclude this chapter with a brief discussion about the need to focus more on *timely* interventions, and to show that all people can play a greater role in
recognising and supporting the vulnerable males through their defining moments. We can learn to intervene in all sorts of ways. When incidents occur and when vulnerability is high, there needs to be a better attempt to establish a safety net to catch the person who is vulnerable, and help him by giving the needed support and understanding. People in proximity can provide that support. The data reveal that when the study's participants did cry out for help there were opportunities for people to notice, but in most cases nothing was done. Teachers missed opportunities; parents missed opportunities. Peers and friends certainly missed opportunities to support their networks or to help. More timely and connected support networks clearly need to be set up.

For example, bullying is a particular issue for male group subcultures. In the arena of bullying, boys who are victimised show both physical and emotional scars, and on the basis of this study and numerous others are seriously affected. The effects of bullying can show up in the form of poor school performance, lack of motivation, alienation, feelings of loneliness, depression and self-harm. Boys, it seems, are not inclined to reveal that they feel unsafe in the classroom, or school or playground. Indeed, their feelings of distress are more likely to result in truancy or school absenteeism than self-disclosure. Boys, it seems, work hard to suppress and/or mask their vulnerability and the emotions that come with it. When distress signs become evident, there needs to be a network operating to assist and guide boys through their ordeals. Among these issues is the fact that when bullying occurs there are other members of the peer group who obviously notice what’s happening, perhaps active participants themselves. It’s an issue that exists within these group subcultures and they have to know what’s legitimate in doing something about it. They need to isolate their problem and come to the realisation that they are part of the problem. They need, also, to know it is not a sign of weakness to seek help for themselves. Because boys are not good at calling out, there needs to be a network operating within the school to assist and guide the boy going through the ordeal.

The men in this study didn’t have adequate support structures when they were experiencing their defining moments. They didn’t have good support; they didn’t have good resources; they didn’t have high self-esteem. Some or most of their problems might have been overcome if there had been someone in their network who they had felt comfortable with to confide in, or someone externally who had
initiated a discussion or intervention strategy. Andrew thought his school and his teachers should have supported him, although the school probably thought it was supportive of its students. He was upset, and disillusioned by school and the sustained brutality of the peer group.

This study shows us what’s happening in people’s lives when they experience the defining moments that change their lives. There is commentary that tells us there are interventions going into schools, but they tend not to be targeted toward timely support. There is clearly a need for decisive intervention strategies to operate within mainstream social contexts when a person is experiencing difficulty or distress. In the absence of appropriate support these difficulties or distresses can develop and fester, and have long-term consequences for the individual. We need to listen, observe and act in helping the individual work through periods of difficulty. There tends to be blanket approaches through curriculum innovations to issues such as drug education, sex education through the discourses of self-prevention and harm minimisation. These approaches make attempts to stop what’s happening, but they’re not timely in the sense that the individual is calling out for help. It is acknowledged that boys don’t call out for help very well, so we need to be particularly attuned to their defining moments when they are threatened.

Since many of the negative experiences happen in and around schools, some schools and teachers might miss the mark during a young male’s basic education. Teachers, I believe, need to play a more proactive role in helping adolescent boys work through their problems. They need be much more observant of interactions between boys and boys, boys and girls and boys and teachers. Teachers need to be better trained to assist boys when they are experiencing social difficulties or showing signs of vulnerability. So often what boys are experiencing happens in the presence of teachers and other adults, although often carefully masked. Teachers need to be on the look out for symptoms and signs of distress, or what I have referred to elsewhere as ‘the silent screams for help’ (Hickey & Boyer, 2002).

The critical thing that comes out of all this is highly targeted responses as opposed to ‘this is how we treat all youth’. We teach, ‘just say no to drugs’ or we say we prepare them through health education. For teenage boys who don’t take this approach to an issue seriously, we need to find more appropriate ways to caution...
them of these social and physical problems. Even though there have been numerous introductions and innovations into the curriculum to try to address or respond to some of these boys’ issues, they still go on. There is the urgent need to explore new ways of connecting with young males and presenting new messages in ways that can better articulate with incidents and events as they are happening. There is a limit to just supplying everyone with information! We need to be highly targeted because some young males are vulnerable, and show signs that they are going through some version of crisis or defining moment, or what portends to be a defining moment. They need extra support. We need to be attuned to when this is happening rather than, ‘Yeah, I’ve talked to him about mental health’. It is simply not enough to present prevention as a rational construct that individuals can act on independently. It’s one thing to acknowledge that boys have their problems, but how we respond is an important aspect concentrating on timely and targeted responses. It’s about being targeted – being targeted and timely.

There is the need to be much more attentive and encourage others to be attentive to the issues facing boys. Girls need to be attuned to it, too. The fact that mothers, sisters, girlfriends and female peer group members are all involved in these narratives demands that it is an inclusive approach. By having males and females share and participate together there are more chances they will increase mixed-gender interaction and get to know one another in a more respectful way. Thorne (1993) proposes ways for social change to occur in schools by eliminating many of the tasks and activities that segregate males and females. Thorne argues: “school staffs should try to open opportunities for boys and girls, and students of different class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and physical abilities, to get to know one another as individuals and friends” (p. 159). Within a more integrated approach, schools can nurture a broad range of identity positions and, therefore, a culture of tolerance and support.

You’re not going to have experts everywhere; on the local level, however, you want school counsellors who know their role and know how to help students. All teachers and all peer groups need to become part of a network that can identify someone experiencing some sort of crisis or distress. If they can identify someone in a crisis, or get a sense of it before it reaches a level of crisis, then they are a step closer to offering ‘in time’ support.

Duane Boyer
Keniston (1963), some years ago reminded us that:

Parents can no longer hope to be literal models for their children; institutions cannot hope to persist without change in rite, practice and custom. And, although many of the essential principles of parents, elders and traditional institutions can persist, even those who seek to maintain the continuity of a tradition must, paradoxically, assume a creative and innovating role (p. 186).

Part of the network is for just general classroom practitioners or parents to have some sense of what to be on the lookout for, and how to deal with the conversation. Parents and teachers need to be trained to look out for defining moments, especially with vulnerable boys. Because parents and teachers inherently deal with young people they can do more of it. Observe those who start to show signs of withdrawal and those who start to show signs of appearing to want to reach out, but don’t know how to do it. We need to build genuine connections that allow us to have regular conversations with young people. In regards to violence and bullying, one specific classroom strategy is to encourage discussion on vulnerability. For example, in instances of bullying, we recognise that people didn’t call out for help. Boys need help in understanding the connection between bullying and using their power to show their masculinity in a male-dominated culture. Salisbury and Jackson (1996) argue, “It is about the way many boys try desperately to reassert power and mastery over events and others in a situation where they feel increasingly weak and vulnerable” (p. 129).

To maximise the support structure there is a need for the whole community to be included, not only health services but a whole range of other providers. The issue here is that considerable expertise also needs to be available to support teachers and parents, and that they have to know how to access and exploit it. They are not alone! The community needs to recognise the problem and be able to do a first-order response to it. Then, when in doubt, seek special support with trained counsellors and other professional help. Dodd and Gurvich (2003) argue that “more parents recognise that therapy can pre-empt more intractable symptoms and help children to cope with one-off crises such as bullying or divorce” (p. 10). Schools
recognise they are unable to solve all their social problems alone; and are taking the initiative to provide the leaderships and coordination in collaborating with community resources. There is a need for schools to report incidents and to start to record, to refer on. There will be times when it goes beyond their expertise and there needs to be a referral process set up. The community has many resources available to schools, including businesses, social and service clubs, religious organisations, public agencies, health centres and those individuals who care for people. Community resources should contribute in meeting the needs of young people and provide opportunities for healthy development.

As indicated earlier, defining moments are a device to guide a retrospective analysis of the formation of one’s identity. They are apposite in understanding some of the factors that can influence people’s lives in ways they don’t want. If, however, we look at an incident in an individual’s life as it is occurring now it’s not a defining moment. For instance, if someone starts to get bullied then it’s not a defining moment at all because a defining moment has long-term effects. Their effects continue to reach on because they are defining in the sense that they change the course of something and the effects live on. Now if someone were to be bullied and a teacher noticed it, called all the participants together and said that kind of behaviour was unacceptable, then they were able to work through it. Rather than a defining moment, it becomes a way of subverting a potential crisis.

We need to be aware of the consequences of defining moments. If things are left unbalanced and unreconciled they can have serious impacts for a long period of time. This study has shown the impact of these moments can have serious life-long effects. In being aware of the impact and consequences that negative defining moments can have, we need to look for incidents or events that might render someone susceptible to these negative experiences. When we’re alerted to individuals experiencing critical incidents, we need to help in preventing them ever becoming negative defining moments.

The challenge that confronts those who work with young males is to explore intervention strategies that are practical, achievable and timely. This is a study of six men looking back on their defining moments with a view to understanding the significance of these moments, and what causes them, and what happens to them.
and how their lives are affected. As a counsellor you might have a strong sense of helping by working through the past; however, a more potent approach would be to become attuned to the symptoms talked about in this research and what these men went through, and how well masked they were and what sorts of things made them vulnerable. If all those working with males were much more attuned to those kinds of information, they could prevent these experiences occurring. There’s obviously a need for people in counselling, especially in retrospective work it can be very therapeutic; however, the most immediate thing would be to try to circumvent their enactment. It’s up to parents, teachers, peers and friends, whole communities and anyone involved in working with males to be aware of what’s happening in their lives and to be able to give the necessary support.

In future we need to focus on recognising the problems and issues boys are experiencing and approach the use of defining moments more effectively. There needs to be more concentration on timely interventions, and studying incidents and experiences when they happen. Indeed, this study provokes us to think about ways of tapping into defining moments at points closer to their enactment. Among the core understandings that have been gained through this work is recognition of the consequences of inaction.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX 2 PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

LETTER
OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
APPENDIX 4 YOUR STORY – 20-WORD LIST
PHILOSOPHY