Queer Youth in Straight Spaces: Tactics of Survival

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

March 2018
ABSTRACT

This thesis draws from interviews conducted between late-2012 and mid-2013 as an ‘intimate insider’ (Taylor 2011) with twenty one young queer people living on the Gold Coast, Australia, at the time we spoke. It also draws from my own autoethnographic stories about growing up queer on the Gold Coast. Through these stories of self and others, I map out shared and unique experiences of youth, queerness, and the local setting of the city of Gold Coast, in order to identify and interrogate ‘tactics’ – in de Certeau’s (1984) sense – of survival: everyday means of ‘getting by’ in spaces that are ordered (built, controlled) by dominant forms of power (viz. ‘strategies’). These tactics provide a window into the effects and affects produced in/on young queer people by heterosexed public space and by those individuals and institutions that underwrite and authorise explicit and implicit forms of violence against us. The collection of survival tactics compiled herein, which is neither complete nor authoritative (due to the nature of tactics as products of necessity and creativity), is also in a sense an ‘instruction manual’ for young queer people who might read this thesis and draw inspiration from these everyday means of getting by, to develop their own tactics of survival. Emerging as central to my mapping of tactics are the multiple forms of friendship engaged in and developed by my participants and by me, which serve as key providers of resources in the ongoing task of survival.

Collecting stories about surviving heterosexed public space and the strategies that order it is only half of the task: the final two chapters of this thesis are dedicated to means of challenging the dominant forms of power – those strategies – which impel such tactics in the first place. Dehumanisation is identified as the process underlying many instances of anti-queer rhetoric and violence, and the dual endeavours of education about and visibility for young queer people are proposed as means to produce counter-hegemonic discourses that undermine the dehumanising process. Ultimately, continuing to live, and doing so as we want, is suggested as a political task for young queer people that poses a direct challenge to heteronormative power. In this way, by becoming ‘examples’ in Agamben’s (1993) sense of the word, grounds on which we can cleave together in our simultaneous similarity and difference is produced, from which we can mobilise queer political power to improve the lot of all queer people, not just those whose lives align with the dominant, but for their sexuality.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

‘Every piece of writing reflects the disposition of its author. This book is no exception; it subtly and explicitly reveals who I am and what I value’ (Chang 2008, p. 10).

First, to my co-principal supervisors Associate Professor Pat Wise and Professor Sarah Baker: ‘Thank you’ is not enough – could never be enough – to express the gratitude I feel toward the two of you. Through our discussions over many long lunches and longer years you have helped me to build something of which I am proud. Your advocacy on my behalf – as a scholar, as a teacher – has been tireless. So much of who I am today I owe to you. And to Dr Jodie Taylor, who began as my supervisor but regrettably had to leave the project: your pragmatic advice at the start of it all has remained with me throughout the writing of this thesis. You have left an indelible mark on my work, and its shape today is, in no small part, because of you.

To Dr Peter Wise, who is exactly what I imagined The Academic to be before I came to university, white beard and all. An assignment I once received back from you was accompanied by a page of notes written in red pen. When I saw it my stomach dropped. Your feedback was critical, direct and honest, suggesting nothing more than I could do better (though you still gave me a high distinction). I owe my drive to do just that – better – to you.

To Dr Brady Robards, whom I first met serendipitously outside a gay bar and talked to about Battlestar Galactica: I am here because of you. Your instruction as my tutor, your fellowship as my colleague, and finally your unwavering friendship through our drinking sessions, debates and various other projects, have been the stuff that kept me going. You have been a sounding board for good (and not-so-good) ideas, a role model for what it means to be an academic, and an all-around mensch.

To the Original Gang, Dr Raphael Nowak, Dr Anne Ferguson, Shanene Ditton and Chris Driver – I will never forget our time together in that shared office at the top of G30 and I miss it still. That was my introduction to PhD life, and I learned so much from you. And to the New Gang, with whom I have shared several office spaces, time, and innumerable angry rants, Dr Chantelle Bayes, Karen Bird, Diti Bhattacharya, Dr Zelmarie Cantillon, Laura Rodriguez Castro, Veronika Folkmanova, Elham
Golpushnejad, Samuli Haataja, Tina Howard, Yoko Lance, Terri Lethlean, Jovana Mastilovic, Kym Melzer, Kristy Seymour, Vicki Weetman – it has been an absolute pleasure getting to know you, learn alongside you, and to walk together on this eminently bizarre path. In particular, I would like to offer special thanks to Skye O’Dwyer and Ashleigh Watson, with whom I have shared a unique and special friendship in the last year of my thesis (thanks fam), and to Ira McGuire and Dr Chris Bowman, whom I don’t see nearly enough and yet can pick up with wherever we last left off and talk about books, food, and the deep questions of life.

To the staff, past and present, at Griffith University who have, variously, shown interest in my work, offered words of advice – scholarly and professional – and otherwise provided a collegial atmosphere in which to get this thing, finally, done: thank you. I fear I will forget someone, but: Bevan Bache, Prof Andy Bennett, Dr Sally Breen, Sharon Buchanan, Prof James Carson, Lyn Canning, Dr Peter Denney, Dr Christine Feldman-Barrett, Dr Kerrie Foxwell-Norton, Dr Margaret Gibson, Kate Grattan, Dr Stephanie Green, Helen Griffiths, Caron Krauth, Prof Nigel Krauth, Dr Sue Lovell, Assoc. Prof Jock MacLeod, Dr Robert Mason, Assoc. Prof Halim Rane, Ashil Ranpara, Sheree Robinson, Dr Yorick Smaal, Prof Stephen Stockwell, Dr Samid Suliman, and Dr Marcus Waters.

To my friends, near and far: thank you for learning never to ask ‘how is your thesis going?’ or ‘when will you be done?’ and for providing me with companionship, fun and grounding over the years. I love you all dearly. In particular, the Magic troupe – Tim, Andrew, Hayden, Alex and Craig – have provided a weekly reprieve from higher-order thinking and a helpful check on my ego. Bentley and Jono have also been nearby at all times, ready to share a much-needed drink and their delightful company. Over the past few years, Amy, Blake, Chris D., Chris O., Clay, Clayton, James, Joel, Katherine, Kaye, Lachlan, Mao, Nina, Pete, Yong and Zac have also been around to distract me in a number of different and valuable ways.

Toby, your unique perspective has challenged me to rethink a number of my assumptions about the world (though I’d never say so, because then I’d be wrong). Jayde, your incisive questions and eternal interest in the world and in me are invaluable; your effect on me is literally written on my skin. Meg, you are the other half of my heart. Without your wit and rage, the sadness of this work would have consumed
me a long time ago.

To my family: my mother Jenni – the most exceptional woman I know bar none, who raised my siblings and I alone for many years and who gives all of herself to us; my brother Liam – all grown up now and one of my best friends; my sisters, Morgan and Kathleen, strong and clever and wonderful in your own different ways and always there for me when I ask; my grandad, Guy, who always valued learning and is to blame for my pedantry; my late grandma, Pat, who I wish were alive to see me today; and to my father, Paul, who I haven’t spoken to in some time.

To my participants: this thesis is dedicated to you, and has only been possible because you agreed to share your life’s stories with me. The hour or so you gave me means more than you could know. I am forever in your debt.

To each of these people, again, and to those I have missed or forgotten (mea culpa): thank you.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

____________________________
Robert Buttigieg

February 2018

PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE DISSERTATION

Earlier versions of sections of this thesis have been published under the author’s name, as outlined below:


ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethical clearance for this project was granted on 15 Feb 2012 (Ref: HUM/02/12/HREC).
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Coming Out

One day, a number of years ago now, I went for a walk with my best friend. At the time, I was no older than sixteen and my friend, fifteen. We’d been at school all day – on a Saturday, no less – rehearsing for the school musical, which was Godspell that year. There was a long break for dinner before a full cast rehearsal in the evening, so my friend and I left the auditorium where we’d been cooped up for most of the day, walked off the school grounds and began the trek – an hour, return – to the nearest petrol station. Ostensibly we headed there to eat; as a major waypoint between the Gold Coast and Brisbane, this particular petrol station housed a number of fast food outlets. I had an ulterior motive for taking us there that evening, however, and my suggestion (that its offer of so many food choices made it the best option for our meal) was a cover.

We talked, along the way, of the event we fled that late afternoon. The detail of our conversation is lost to me now – inconsequential chatter, really, but no doubt full of gossip about our peers and the musical we believed we’d been ‘roped into’ (and had tried to weasel our way out of, along with a number of other students, before an address from the school principal made it clear that he believed we’d all made a commitment and that we had an obligation to see it through). Regardless, after twenty minutes wandering along the roadside, with the petrol station moving into view as we rounded the final bend, I ‘came out’ for the first time. I told my friend that I was gay. What followed between us is, as they say, history. We are still best friends. There was no major upheaval, no conflict, no tears. In remembering this event and sketching it out here, I am not so interested in my first coming out as I am in the forethought I had invested in that walk. I went out of my way, quite literally, to isolate my friend from other people before I told her my secret. Outside the bounds of the schoolyard and away from our classmates and teachers, I won a small patch of ground for myself, if only temporarily. There, on the empty road, I felt safe enough to out myself as gay (though I prefer the term ‘queer’ now for several reasons). I knew with

1 Villiers (2012) contends that ‘[t]he metaphor of “coming out of the closet” is hegemonic’ (p. 1) – part of the way in which sexuality is produced as ‘a truth that must be made to speak’ (p. 2, original emphasis). I am aware of the way in which opening this thesis with my own ‘coming out story’, yet another reflection of ‘the most distinctive form of les-bi-gay life writing’ (Jolly 2011, p. 476), serves to reproduce the hegemonic power of this metaphor. And yet, the power of the closet is to make speaking from a queer positionality without this revelatory moment (whether explicitly disclosed or otherwise) unthinkable.
relative certainty that my friend wouldn’t have an issue with my sexuality, and yet…

For me, my comings out – and there have been a number of these over the years – have all been non-events like this one. Whether I have told family members – like my mother, who said ‘Did you want me to be surprised?’ over her cup of tea – or other friends, what have constituted critical life events for others have been, in practice, little more than everyday disclosures for me. I tell this story by way of an introduction, not so that I, too, can buy into that trope in gay and lesbian writings of the revelatory moment of the coming out; the unburdening of the queer self by stepping out of the closet and ‘confessing’ (in that very Catholic manner of seeking absolution). What I want to draw attention to here is not in the ‘outing’ itself (as a going-out with a friend, and a coming-out as gay), but in the way I went about things; my careful planning and performance.3

Tactics

Michel de Certeau (1984) writes that ‘[t]o walk is to lack a place’ (p. 103). My walk, on reflection, was indeed a response to a lack of place; a certain kind of place. In school, at home, at my best friend’s house: all of these locations, regulated by others, were places over which I had little control. By extension, my fear at the time was that I had little control over the flow of information about myself within these places. On my walk, at my pace, at the right time and distance from those other places, I claimed a space of refuge from this fear. Without altering the space through which we moved; by making use of its qualities, such as its distance from other places and people (isolation; privacy), and the time required to traverse the space (time to observe a response; time for planning); and ‘dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances’, I was able to ‘use, manipulate, and divert’ that little slice of roadside for my needs (pp. 29-30). My little refuge would inevitably slip away, but I didn’t need it for long.

This walk – my planning thereof – is an example of what de Certeau (1984) calls a tactic. ‘A tactic

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2 As Taylor (2013) notes, there are multiple contested meanings for ‘coming out’, including ‘an empowering act of recognition, a normative ideal or an option not available to everyone’ (p. 51, note 1). It is important to keep these contestations in mind, especially as I recount here the immense privilege I have had to come out, again and again, and suffer no adverse consequences. My experience should not be read as typical of all outings.

3 Orme (2011) argues for reconceptualising coming out as ‘strategic outness… the continual contextual management of sexual identity’ (p. 682). This process is certainly integral to the suite of survival tactics I trace in this thesis through my own stories and those of my participants. Strategic outness, as a theoretically reconsidered conceptualisation of ‘coming out’ that accounts for strategies, motivations, and the social contexts in which coming out occurs, is, however, just one part of the ongoing managing of sexual-minority identities by queer youth. This managing also includes tactical considerations beyond coming out (or not), such as the navigation of potentially hostile spaces (see Chapter 3), and tending to friendships (see Chapter 6).
insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances’ (p. xix). Tactics, the ‘art of the weak’ (p. 37), are contrasted with strategies, the manoeuvres and practices of the strong. Strategies are the ways that order is imposed upon spaces enduringly, including their physical ordering (such as in the design and construction of buildings, roads, landscaping, etc.) and their sociocultural ordering (such as in laws, norms, notions of authority, etc.). They ‘seek to create places in conformity with abstract models’ (pp. 29-30). While strategies implement regimes of order, tactics are employed by people who must live within these regimes as a means of getting by.4

By focusing on my walk as just one example of the everyday practices that can be employed as tactics in opposition to the strategies that would ‘order’ our lives, I lean towards the central thread of this thesis: an exploration of tactics. Specifically, I examine the kinds of tactics that queer young people use to survive in a society that deploys strategies which threaten their lives – sometimes as central aims of these strategies, sometimes as side effects, and sometimes as mere collateral damage. Always, however, these lives are lived out by very real people for whom ‘surviving’ often requires a repertoire of many and varied tactics.

One of the means of cataloguing and transmitting these tactics is by way of stories. As in the retelling of my walk above, stories ‘provide the decorative container of a narrativity for everyday practices’ (de Certeau 1984, p. 70, original emphasis). The shelves of libraries and archives the world over house stories – true and fictitious, fantastic and mundane – about the vast reaches of human experience and beyond. Each story, as a container of ‘things happening’, holds the potential for these things to happen again. A reader may take a story as a schema for action, and do again, more or less faithfully to the narrative account, what was done therein. As de Certeau writes, narratives ‘… set forth ways of operating in the form of tales’ (ibid.). Their value, then, is in their provision of schemas for action that can be read, understood, adapted, and redeployed in service of others’ everyday getting-by, or perhaps, literally, in

4 de Certeau (1984) develops a distinction between place as ‘the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence’ (p. 117) and space as ‘the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities’ (ibid.). Space, for de Certeau, ‘is a practiced place’ (ibid., original emphasis) – what is constituted when an ordered and stable place is populated, lived, experienced.
their survival.

**Narratives**

Ken Plummer (2001) notes in his revised and expanded edition of *Documents of Life* (hereafter *Documents of Life 2*) that the use of life stories – of narratives – in the social sciences and humanities has a long history with multiple paths of origin (p. x). Plummer traces an influential line of thought that emerges from the Chicago School, the progenitors of Symbolic Interactionism, and their body of ethnographic literature emerging in the 1920s and 1930s, and leads to the prominence of life stories in his own discipline of Sociology.

Using the example of Leo Simmons’ 1942 case study of Don, the Sun Chief, Plummer (2001) illustrates how different cultural systems, that is, different ways of understanding the world (always expressed through individual lives), can be fundamentally incomprehensible from the outside. What life stories can do, as narrative forms, is act as ‘a source for understanding the workings of a life and the culture of which it is a part’ (p. 39). This is not, of course, to suggest that we have unmediated access to others’ experiences through the telling of stories. Rather, it is a recognition that humans have a capacity for the sharing of affect, in addition to the sharing of mere schemas for action, and that narrative is one of the means of experiencing this sharing (Keen 2007, p. 4).

Roland Barthes (1977) provides a forensic analysis of the narrative form, breaking it down into constitutive parts. Within Barthes’ model, the ‘source for understanding’ other lives (and therefore other cultural systems) might best be located in what he calls the ‘integrational units’ of narrative. These units provide implicit metaphoric relations between aspects of the narrative (whether that be settings, characters, events, etc.) and the meaning each reader elicits from it. As metaphorical indices of understandings that are not included in the explicit detail of the text, integrational units are resolved by readers at the level of the paradigm (rather than the syntagm). That is, the integrational units of a narrative correspond ‘to a functionality of being’ (p. 93), providing a framework for how things are (in the sense of a plural present). They construct a ‘world view’ for the reader that exists interior to the narrative.

For Barthes (1977), narrative is not merely representational. It does not take what the author has known (experience) and provide it, wholesale and accessible, to a willing receiver:
Narrative does not show, does not imitate; the passion which may excite us in reading a novel is not that of a ‘vision’ (in actual fact, we do not ‘see’ anything). Rather it is that of meaning, that of a higher order of relation which also has its emotions, its hopes, its dangers, its triumphs. ‘What takes place’ in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally nothing; ‘what happens’ is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming. (pp. 123-4)

The ‘what happens’ of language in a narrative is an exchange: from an author who writes, through the literary device of a narrator who tells, to a reader who interprets. This exchange is a simultaneous cutting off of the reader from direct access to the author, and an opening out to the reader of the possibility for empathic connection with the narrated experience.

From a viewpoint that understands all experience to be mediated, the author is never directly accessible. Any ‘cutting off’ is a reified idea of somehow being able (impossibly) to transcend our embodiment and our always-already embroilment in culture and society. Put more simply, mediated experience is just experience. Any understanding we might gain from narrative is, from this view, no more or less ‘valuable’ or ‘authentic’ than that which comes to us from other sources. Narratives are more easily reproduced and distributed, however, and this proves inherently useful for a project such as mine. Narratives in media such as queer stories and films can provide points of entry into cultural systems that may not otherwise be visible (the marginal, the silenced, the invisible, the interstitial, the incomprehensible); that may not otherwise be speakable (the obscene, the offensive, the indecent, the immoral, the abject); or that may not exist at present (the virtual, the utopian, the apocalyptic, the alternative). On this basis, even narratives that may not be ‘true accounts’ of actual persons and events still hold value (see, for example, Clough 1996). Narrative can work as both a carrier of actual experience made virtual, and a carrier of virtual experience awaiting actualisation.

This thesis draws on three different ‘types’ of narrative. The first is my own, as it relates to my experiences as a queer young person living in Australia’s Gold Coast City. This is an autoethnographic narrative in a dual sense, in that I write my own ethnography, and in that it is ethnographic work on my own queer ‘group’. The second is a collection of stories I have gathered during a series of interviews carried out with queer^5 youth^6 on the Gold Coast. The third is what might be called a cultural geography

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^5 See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the problem relating to this term. For the purposes of an initial understanding, ‘queer’ is taken to mean ‘not straight’ (not heterosexual).
of the Gold Coast. This is a narrative of space, and it takes the Gold Coast as a central character, impacting the lives of its residents, and, within the focus of this thesis, queer young people in particular. I agree wholeheartedly with De Certeau (1984, p. 115), who writes that ‘every story is a travel story’:

> From the alphabet of spatial indication (“It’s to the right,” “Take a left”), the beginning of a story the rest of which is written by footsteps, to the daily “news” (“Guess who I met at the bakery?”), television news reports (“Teheran: Khomeini is becoming increasingly isolated…”), legends (Cinderellas living in hovels), and stories that are told (memories and fiction of foreign lands or more or less distant times in the past). These narrated adventures, simultaneously producing geographies of action and drifting into the commonplaces of an order, do not merely constitute a “supplement” to pedestrian enunciations and rhetorics. They are not satisfied with displacing the latter and transposing themselves into the field of language. In reality, they organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it. (p. 116)

Nigel Thrift (1996, p. 3) draws out the importance of including spatial stories, for me, through his concern for context, ‘or the complexification or mediation or spacing of the event’. Drawing together time-space, practice, the subject and agency (pp. 1-3), ‘context’ for Thrift is ‘not … an impassive backdrop to situated human activity’, but ‘a necessary constitutive element of interaction, something active, differentially extensive and able to problematise and work on the bounds of subjectivity’ (p. 3). At the same time as I provide context by writing stories of the city, implicating the Gold Coast in the interactions that play out here, these stories also ‘carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places’ (de Certeau 1984, p. 118). Spatial stories operate in/on the world, producing ‘trajectories’ (p. 115) – lines of movement, lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari 2004, p. 27) – that map a lived and living space.

Here I am stressing the use and value of these narratives for this project but I am also indicating their potential within and beyond social science writing. In Chapter 2 I discuss my methodological deployment of narratives in this thesis, and in Chapter 7 I consider their implementation more generally as strategic responses to processes of dehumanisation. Such processes and the assumptions that underpin them are integral to the continuous social/cultural authorisation of homophobia and transphobia in Australia and more broadly. It is thus a central concern of my work to demonstrate the effectiveness of

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6 My focus here is on the age bracket 16-35. On the one hand, the emergence of sexuality is closely linked to puberty, which can begin at different ages between individuals. On the other hand, ethics protocols dictate that it is neither possible, nor appropriate to suggest arbitrary ages at which potential participants can consent. As I am dealing with a combination of factors that make declaring such an age bracket both necessary and meaningless – such as the highly subjective ‘acceptance’ of one’s own sexual orientation and the socially constructed concept of ‘youth’ – there is an inescapable degree of ‘blurriness’ to this age bracket.
stories/narratives as a means to destabilise them.

**Speaking Out**

I wrote above that, for queer young people, to survive in a society hostile – intentionally or not – to your existence often requires a repertoire of many and varied tactics. The frequency with which these tactics are required just to go on living needs to be stressed as it is the constant threat of harm to queer young people that, in part, spurred this project. In 2010, Berman and Robinson published a report entitled *Speaking Out: Stopping Homophobic and Transphobic Abuse in Queensland*. Their study builds upon earlier research from other Australian states and was ‘the first to explore the way homophobia and transphobia impact upon Queensland’s LGBTIQ population’ (p. 9). As the setting of this thesis is the Gold Coast, in Queensland’s south-eastern corner, the *Speaking Out* report is important as a snapshot of queer experiences in the state at that time, many of which can probably be taken to have pertained locally to the city of the Gold Coast. Among the many disturbing statistics their report presents (especially disturbing for me: a young, queer man living in Queensland), Berman and Robinson summarise some of the findings of an earlier report by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), *Writing Themselves In Again: 6 Years On*:

A 2005 survey of 1745 young individuals aged between 14 to 21 found 38% had experienced unfair and unlawful treatment on the basis of their sexuality at work and school. School was the most conventional venue for abuse, with 60% of young people in this category reporting forms of both verbal and physical abuse and 75% reporting that such abuse occurred in school environments. The researchers conclude school continues to be the most unsafe setting for these types of abuse. (p. 213)

Reporting five years after the *Writing Themselves In Again* survey and drawing upon 1095 survey responses across Queensland (p. 17) – of which 27% of respondents were aged between 18 and 24 years (p. 20) – Berman and Robinson found that, ‘[b]ased on survey responses, it seems that respondents of a younger age are more likely to be the victim of homophobic or transphobic abuse’ (p. 69). Why queer kids more than queer adults might be subject to this abuse is a question that is explored further in Chapter 2, but what is important to note here is that the framing of the report means it captures only part of the picture. *Speaking Out* is a comprehensive investigation only of violence and harassment against LGBTIQ
Queenslanders (p. 9). That is, forms of mundane violence’ against queer people that are less recognisable or less visible – such as exclusion, silencing and discrimination, as well as the structural or institutional sanctioning of these – are not captured by the study. When Berman and Robinson write that ‘an overwhelming majority of LGBTIQ individuals had experienced abuse and harassment in the past’ (p. 56), and that ‘[f]ifty-three per cent of survey respondents reported experiencing homophobic or transphobic harassment or violence in the past two years’ (p. 93), they do not take into account those other forms of violence that are explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by various structures and institutions of Australian society. Further, they fail to capture the positive experiences of queerness, such as the strong communities built around it, and the many pleasures of sexuality.

My aim in pointing out the absence of these experiences in Speaking Out is not to criticise the authors’ thorough and valuable work, but to highlight the impetus behind my project. Insidious forms of mundane violence underpin and foster the more overt homophobic and transphobic abuse recorded by Berman and Robinson (2010). Both forms of abuse are further sanctioned by individuals, groups, and society-at-large when they are not addressed in a satisfactory manner, or at all. Such sanctioning may be passive, but it is a sanctioning nonetheless. My research aims to make visible the underlying sociocultural strategies that affirm an extensive array of hostilities toward queer youth. Whether revealed spectacularly in fits of rage, as in the ‘overkilling’ of queer bodies (Stanley 2011), or perpetrated silently and ‘invisibly’ over lifetimes in what constitutes a protracted wearing-out of queer lives (Berlant 2007), these hostilities take many forms. In Chapter 5 I explore the perpetuation of a wide range of experiences of abuse.

There is no separation for me, no degree of removal, between waging ‘abstract’ arguments for and against the recognition of queer lives (same-sex marriage, adoption and inheritance rights, etc.) and the ‘real’ lived experiences of queerness (my own, my friends’, my respondents’). The one affects the other, and vice versa. Of course, those people conducting ‘abstract’ arguments are wont to maintain their abstraction: admitting the power of words – of ideas – would mean that there is no mythical, political outside where neutral argumentation can take place. And sometimes it is very difficult to see the links between these ‘abstract’ arguments, such as that of former Prime Minister Julia Gillard who once said, ‘I

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7 I borrow the term ‘mundane violence’ from Butler’s (1999) Preface to the reprinting of Gender Trouble (p. xx). ‘Mundane’ here does not mean that the violence is considered humdrum or insignificant but rather that it is so commonplace that it goes unnoticed, except by those who must live with it.
think for our culture, for our heritage, the Marriage Act and marriage being between a man and a woman has a special status’ (*The Daily Telegraph* 2011), and a suicide rate for same-sex attracted youth up to six-times higher than for heterosexual youth, for example (Dyson et al. 2003). Making links such as these clearer erodes the grounds to which apologists for an anti-queer stance can retreat.

**Heading Out**

That queer youth have been – and continue to be – subject to a spectrum of disadvantages is quite evident. This spectrum ranges through the overtly homophobic abuses catalogued by Berman and Robinson (2010) to the more insidious and habitual forms of violence that emerge in and through homophobic/anti-queer discourses. Yet, identifying these instances of violence is only the first step in addressing them. Halperin (1995) notes that homophobic discourses cannot be countered by means of rational argument or ‘truth’, because they ‘are not reducible to a set of statements with a specifiable truth-content that can be rationally tested’ (p. 32). While the *content* of these discourses demands attention, the *strategies* of the discourses also require focus and engagement (pp. 37-8). Only by engaging with the strategies that determine how these discourses are deployed, by discovering the rules of the games they play, can any kind of ground be won. And yet it is naïve to believe that the goal here is freedom or liberation – it is *resistance*. That is, even if the rules can be changed, there is, of course, no ‘outside’ of power (ibid., pp. 17-8; Foucault 1982).

Here, then, is a way forward: even without being explicitly aware of what they are doing, or how they are doing it, queer youth are always already managing their sexual-minority identities in spite of anti-queer discourses and in spite of the multiple forms of violence levelled against them. There is, in living their lives, a form of resistance already in play; a ‘strategy of struggle’ (Foucault 1982, p. 794). By drawing on the narratives of queer young people who live across both public and private space as *sexed* space – as that space in which anti-queer discourses are deployed to facilitate the forms of violence outlined above – the strategies that enable these discourses can be identified, analysed, contested. Providing a resource that helps to move toward this contestation is the central objective of this work.

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8 I would prefer ‘tactics of struggle’ here, following de Certeau’s framework, but I retain Foucault's words.

9 A false dichotomy in any case. See Valentine (1992) for a succinct overview of the myth of the public/private divide.
As a means of compiling such a resource, my primary interest in developing this thesis has been the ways in which queer young people manage our minoritarian identities within the potential and actual constraints of a world that speaks at great length about and acts unduly upon our lives. Pedagogy, medicine, psychology, politics, religion and culture are but a few of the discourses that have produced and institutionalised sociocultural understandings of ‘queer youth’, and in the process have invested themselves with authority to speak about us. My interest in managing minoritarian identities arose out of several research questions that frame this thesis. These questions are:

1. What are the practices of managing identities that queer young people engage in?
2. What underlying relations of power do these practices reveal?
3. How do queer lives play out across heterosexed space? (That is, what impact do our lives and these spaces have on each other?)
4. How can queer young people be meaningfully engaged in making the decisions that affect them?
5. How can we share the practices of managing identities (broadly speaking, the ‘tactics of survival’) that queer young people are routinely engaged in?

These are the broad questions that have driven my work, and they cover a great deal of theoretical ground.

The first research question relates to the theoretical framework that informs my understanding of identity and queer personhood. It asks who we are – who I am. Through this question, I have engaged with various schools of thought, such as gay and lesbian studies, youth studies and cultural studies, as well as queer and feminist theories, that all attempt to grapple with the question of what makes an individual. How are people – especially queer young people – constituted as people?

Questions two and three aim to explore the troubles queer youth experience in their day to day lives that are connected with not being straight, or that emerge as a result of failures to abide by the mandates of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1999, p. x). They signpost my search for the peculiarities of queer lives. These peculiarities lend themselves to ways of resisting discourses that try to establish (determine) queer youth as one thing or another, such as ‘at risk’, ‘perverted’, ‘unknowing’ or ‘unnatural’, especially without any input from queer young people in defining themselves (self-determination).
The final two questions are directed at larger practical outcomes, to the conclusions I might draw from my auto/ethnographic research, and to discussion points that might be raised. They ask where this thesis can go beyond its intended practical use as a collection of survival tactics for queer youth.

Because this project developed out of a sense that, as a queer person, and as a young person, decisions were made for me, things were said about me, and all the time this was done without actually consulting me, the issue of engagement – meaningful engagement – has been of central importance. I can’t be certain that it is important to others, but in the discussions I have had with participants, their agency in making decisions about their own lives was valued.

In a society that purports to value individual agency (and whether that’s true or not, and beneficial or not, is an argument for a different time) the lack of control that queer young people have over policy and institutions that directly affect them is decidedly incongruous. Even if we recognise this lack of consultation and control, and attempt to change it, this is not enough because we must also go on living day to day in a world that – at this point – deals with queer youth as problems or impossibilities rather than as people. The law pre-emptively strips them of agency, of the ability to consent, of the capacity to know who they are and what they want, simply for the fact of being not yet 18: an arbitrary age at which full adulthood is magically bestowed upon (most) people.

My five research questions, then, cover both the everyday practices of living as a queer young person – a cartographic project; and they cover the issue of societal recognition of queer youth as capable, knowing agents – an ethical project.

Chapter 2 deals with the ‘problem’ of representation through engagement with the narrative form as an appropriate carrier for representations of experience. An important distinction is made between representation as denotative versus representation as connotative. The former is a ‘standing for x’ while the latter is a ‘suggestion of x’. Representations of queer lives are addressed as ‘examples’ in Agamben’s (1993) sense: they stand for all by standing apart.

Chapter 3 examines theoretical and vernacular understandings of ‘queer’ and ‘youth’, paying particular attention to the kinds of subjects that arise at the intersection of these two identity markers. I also consider how the lives of such subjects (our lives) play out across Australia’s Gold Coast, a city that
draws inspiration from a number of different global influences in its ongoing production of itself (Wise 2006).

Chapter 4 looks at school as a site of particular angst, both for queer young people and those who stake a claim to our lives in various ways. The ‘problem’ of queer kids is addressed as I examine the cultural need to delineate clearly, and keep separate, queerness from youth, as concepts and in actuality. Sexual education is highlighted as a key institutional strategy for ordering youthful sexualities, in which queer sexualities have been inadequately addressed, or simply excluded.

Chapter 5 maps key survival tactics employed by queer young people in their everyday encounters with the heterosexed public spaces of the city. Gold Coast City is used as a backdrop, drawing on its unique position as ambiguously global/local depending on context, and spanning metropolitan, urban, suburban and rural classifications. This is examined in particular through the lens of the Gold Coast tourism/nightlife scenes, where temporal and spatial zones of heteronormative familial fun and hypersexualised hetero-romantic ‘fun’ intersect, leaving little to no room for alternative sexualities and conceptions of interpersonal relations.

Chapter 6 looks at the friendships that the queer young people I interviewed have cultivated, and considers the multiple ways in which these relationships are drawn on in the daily task of surviving straight spaces. It also examines some of the more significant troubles queer young people might be required to confront in maintaining friendships, and how my participants have navigated these.

Chapter 7 argues that anti-queer violence results from strategies that allow for aggressors to disassociate their queer targets from a shared humanity. I pinpoint two processes of dehumanisation that work together to sanction anti-queer discourses and thus underwrite anti-queer violence. In an attempt to combat these processes, this chapter posits methods of intervention in culture for humanising queer young people.

In Chapter 8, I draw these threads together to argue for the meaningful engagement of queer young people in decisions that affect their lives. As an ethical project, this thesis aims to make itself redundant such that the survival tactics itcatalogues are no longer required. This is idealistic, if not utopian, but such thinking is employed as a means of propelling the work further.
CHAPTER 2: INCOHERENCE AND MULTIPLICITY

Fireworks

On December 31st of 2013, as midnight approached, I sat with a handful of my closest friends on the beachfront in Southport, near the centre of the Gold Coast. Southport is separated from Main Beach by a shallow estuary, called the Broadwater, and its calm western shore is one of many places locals gather to watch the New Year’s Eve fireworks over Sea World. Nearby to us, a young family – eight children, father and mother (heavily pregnant with a ninth child) – sat on their picnic blankets talking amongst themselves. Our group somehow began speaking with this family. This was likely because of their clothing, which resembled the plain and conservative dress of the Amish, if more colourful. After a little while and no doubt at our questioning, they told us about their faith: a fundamentalist Christian sect. One of my friends, who happens to be both curious to a fault and profoundly protective of me, somehow got caught up in conversation with the eldest child (in her early teens at most) about homosexuality. The girl parroted something to the effect that gay people aren’t real, to which my friend took exception. She began to interrogate the girl’s plainly erroneous belief: ‘But why do you think that?’

Coming from my friend, this was not an attack as it might have been, were I asking. She truly desired to know. In this my friend is a better person than I am – I have a cynical outlook towards religiousness in general that someone too-polite might call ‘dissenting’. Before long, as she was getting nowhere fast, my friend gestured toward me: ‘But he’s gay, and he’s real’. The child looked bewildered. Not knowing how to deal with the fleshly emergence of some thing that, moments ago she had derided as imaginary, the discussion ended. The girl went back to her parents, perhaps still unconvinced of the existence of gay people, and I resolved to have a quiet word with my friend.

On the walk back to the house, after the underwhelming fireworks display (though it was never really about the fireworks so much as the public drinking and socialising), I broached the topic of being outed with my friend. I had not enjoyed it. I told her that I’d felt vulnerable because she used me as an example of something that to the child was inconceivable, and, I presumed, was reprehensible to her parents, while I was present. My friend moved quickly from expressing confusion at my objection, to

10 An ocean-themed amusement park of no relation to the similarly-named U.S. theme park chain, SeaWorld.
sadness that I felt she had put me ‘at risk’, remote though that risk might have been. I explained to her that it was not the risk of the outing in particular that made me feel uneasy with the situation. Rather, it was the risk that being outed and coming out in general pose to people – like me – who aren’t straight. Even when I am in complete control of the disclosure, every coming out still evokes for me the same fear of unknown repercussions that imbued my first time. I am still standing on a bend in the road, telling my best friend, hoping nothing goes wrong. I have, I admit, become a lot better at predicting the outcome of the revelatory moment and disclosing, or not, as appropriate. The fear is still there.

I have had a long while to think on what happened that New Year’s Eve. By way of some uncomfortable reflection, I understand now what bothered me so much about the situation. The disclosure of my sexuality to a complete stranger terrified me because I was (and still am) keenly aware of the violence some members of society visit daily on those who are, or who appear to be, queer. As a queer person, I live constantly in the shadow of such violence, whether or not it is a clear and present danger to my life. I became aware of this violence slowly, over many years, beginning long before I came out for the first time. At first, it hid in language, in the way my schoolmates in primary school would say ‘that’s gay’, and mean it as a negative. Before I came to know that I was gay, I said it myself – it was a part of our language: ‘that’s gay’. I heard it, too, in my father’s and grandfather’s use of ‘poof’ – a term from an older generation – but I slowly discovered that it meant the same thing as gay, and that it, too, was a bad thing. More than a bad thing, I felt there was a subtle threat in the way they said it. It didn’t take long to connect these terms – gay, poof – and the way people felt about them to my own sexuality that was directed exclusively at males. (At the time, Aaron Carter had just released his cover of the song ‘I Want Candy’ and my fourteen-year-old self couldn’t have been more infatuated.) I knew that I was gay, and while I came immediately to accept this fact – a great privilege, I am aware – I also knew that no one else could know. It was clear to me, without ever having witnessed physical homophobic violence, that it bubbled just under the surface of the mundanely hostile way people said *gay… poof*…

It wasn’t until a number of years after I came out that I experienced the brunt of any kind of homophobic abuse, and even then, it was solely in the form of verbal abuse yelled from cars: ‘Faggot!’ On the Gold Coast, just walking down the street can make you a target for this kind of drive-by vilification, as
so many of the young people I interviewed attested (and according to those interviewees who had lived elsewhere, this kind of drive-by abuse was noticeably more frequent on the Gold Coast). Toby (23, male, homo11) described one such incident:

T: I parked my car in front of my house, and then I got out and was walking. I was probably five metres from my car and they were just driving past, and he yelled something out. I turned around because I heard it and I was like, ‘What?’ and then they were gone. I was like, ‘ugh, whatever’, and kept going.

B: Why do you think he yelled something out?

T: Because of what I was wearing.

B: What were you wearing?

T: Some slouch cargos. Yeah, low-crotch, and they’re fitted tight up to your knee, and then they’re drop-crotch, and I had a shitload of bracelets and a necklace. I looked pretty homo now that I think about it.

Most of the time, when it has happened to me, I was certain I didn’t ‘look gay’; like many of my interviewees, I have internalised an awareness of how ‘straight’ (or not) my style and comportment are from moment to moment. The abuse was most likely opportunistic and anyone could have been the target. Still, because they were always right, for me it stung.

When I was 19 I dated a boy who, after we broke up, was badly beaten in Surfers Paradise while leaving a club on Orchid Avenue with his new boyfriend. His lower jaw was shattered. A year or so later, for the first time, I experienced overt homophobic violence directed at me. Two of my female friends and I were walking home from a club called The Meeting Place – the only gay bar on the Gold Coast at the time. We approached a man, in his mid-twenties I’d guess, walking the other way. I looked at him, then he looked at me, and he pushed me to the ground and said ‘fucking faggot’. My friends were bewildered, then enraged, one of them turning to chase the man a short way down the street (the same protective friend who’d outed me that New Year’s Eve). I picked myself up and dusted off my skinned palms, which I’d used to catch my fall. I remember thinking at the time that it was very funny watching the man who’d just pushed me over run away from a woman, but now I just think how lucky I was then, and how lucky I am now, that this has been the worst I’ve experienced.

11 While I am not entirely comfortable with ‘homo’ as a self-descriptor, it is Toby’s chosen identification and I have respected this throughout. At the same time, I recognise the difficulty some LGBTI people have with the term ‘queer’, especially when it has been used to wound them.
To return to that New Year’s Eve outing: in addition to the awareness I have developed over my lifetime of the quotidian danger that queer people face – that I face – as a condition of merely existing, I had not undertaken the extensive groundwork of risk assessment that I normally would when deciding whether or not to come out to someone. In lieu of knowing the members of that family for long enough to make a reasoned guess at how they might react to the sudden presence of queerness among them, I had only the information that was at hand to make a judgement. This kind of judgement occurs automatically for me, and goes hand in hand with a constant awareness of who around me knows and does not know that I’m not straight. That evening, with that family, I used what little I had – my knowledge of their religion and my longstanding feelings of mistrust for the religious – to make assumptions about them that may or may not have been correct. I extrapolated from what I saw of them, rendering them a particular kind of people, and I found them wanting.

When I think about this, I cannot fault my caution around coming out, even as I wish I was braver (I always wish I was braver). The state of existence for queer young people today should not be news to those with an eye on contemporary Western popular culture at this historical moment. In Australia, at least, initiatives such as the ‘It Gets Better Project’, launched in this country in November of 2011 (Star Observer 2011); The Foundation for Young Australians’ (FYA) ‘Safe Schools Coalition; and – while not targeted specifically at youth – phase one of beyondblue’s ‘Stop. Think. Respect.’ campaign, have served to raise awareness of the day-to-day experiences of violence, discrimination and marginalisation that queer young people may face. The many videos posted online as contributions to the ‘It Gets Better Project’ capture the zeitgeist of these experiences as queer individuals from all around the world recount personal stories. The purpose of these videos, summarised on the project website, is ‘to show young LGBT people the levels of happiness, potential, and positivity their lives will reach – if they can just get through their teen years’ (It Gets Better Project 2014). Following the format of the original video by Dan Savage and Terry Miller that launched the project (It Gets Better Project 2010), a pattern

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12 Safe Schools Coalition Australia is a program dedicated to supporting schools to be safer and more inclusive for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse young people. It is the first national coalition that brings together the whole school community – school staff, students and families – to create learning environments that support sexual diversity, intersex and gender diversity’ (Foundation for Young Australians 2014).

13 With a plea to ‘stop the discrimination, think about how comments you make could cause real distress and harm, and respect people who are different from you’ (beyondblue 2018).

14 Upwards of 2,700 on the ‘It Gets Better Project’ website and ‘about 580,000 results’ for the phrase ‘it gets better’ on YouTube as of 17 Nov 2014.
emerges across these narratives in which the person recording the message catalogues past hurts before arriving at a more pleasant – more liveable – now. That is, a now beyond queer youth.

While I am personally wary of a message that casts one’s teenage years as something to ‘just get through’ (It Gets Better Project 2014), I do not dispute the potential good that a project like ‘It Gets Better’ can achieve through its global outreach to vulnerable queer young people and through the attention it draws to the (sometimes deadly) ordeal that growing up queer can be. And yet I also take Jasbir Puar’s (2012, p. 151) point, citing Tavia Nyong’o, that ‘Dan Savage’s sanctimonious statement “it gets better” is a mandate to fold oneself into urban, neoliberal gay enclaves: a call to upward mobility that discordantly echoes the now-discredited “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” immigrant motto’. In an earlier opinion piece for The Guardian, Puar (2010) draws attention to the problematic nature of such a message coming from Savage himself:

Savage embodies the spirit of a coming-of-age success story. He is able-bodied, monied, confident, well-travelled, suitably partnered and betrays no trace of abjection or shame. His message translates to: Come out, move to the city, travel to Paris, adopt a kid, pay your taxes, demand representation.

Summarising a number of other critics, Puar notes the way ‘It Gets Better’ addresses itself more fully to the concerns of white, cisgendered, middle-class gay men than it does to ‘queer people of colour, trans, genderqueer and gender nonconforming youth, and lesbians’ (ibid), and calls for the broader conversation around queer suicide to include discussions of race, class and gender.

While paying attention to the critiques levelled at the ‘It Gets Better’ campaign, other scholars have explored the ways in which it is also productive. Goltz (2013, p. 148), for example, contends that within the tapestry of diverse stories produced for ‘It Gets Better’, the inclusion of radical and diverse stories is happening: ‘While some stories express joy in the normative dimensions of their futures, others call for lives of creativity and vision that challenge and rewrite social scripts’. Gal, Shifman and Kampf (2016) examine the ‘It Gets Better’ video template as a meme employed in the performative construction of collective identities, and West, Frischherz, Panther and Brophy (2013) consider the value of the campaign for queer worldmaking projects, ‘imagining more hospitable worlds beyond the here and now’ (p. 74). Despite their positive (if not emancipatory) intent, the initiatives mentioned above are not immune to problems as the example of ‘It Gets Better’ demonstrates. At the same time, despite their
problems, the beneficial work they may do should not be disregarded out of hand.

For my purposes, the above initiatives are useful for identifying the symptoms of anti-queer sentiment – acts of everyday and spectacular anti-queer violence – but they do not directly address themselves to the cause. What underlies explicit and implicit acts of violence against queer people is a range of historical discourses about queer sexualities produced in specific institutions.

Through the various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies, moralists, but especially doctors, brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination. (Foucault 1990, p. 36)

These changes to institutions during the ‘discursive explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ (p 38) that Foucault catalogues, have had effects on society that still linger. On one hand, there have been positive changes. The legal sanctions against ‘perversions’ like homosexuality and transsexuality may be gone (or going);¹⁵ the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association 1952) no longer lists homosexuality as a ‘sociopathic personality disturbance’ (pp. 38-9); and thinkers like Foucault (1990) and Steven Seidman (2010) have shown linear and ‘normal’ sexual development to be a cultural construct. On the other hand, the social distinctions embedded by these historical discourses and the institutions they underwrite are long-lived. And while institutional discourses may have changed with prevailing thought and changing values, dropping anti-queer language and conceptualisations along the way, this is not necessarily the case for all members of Western societies, some of whom may adapt in fits and starts, while others rage against what is seen as ‘political correctness gone mad’.

In my Introduction I quoted Halperin (1995) who points out the problem with current arguments against anti-queer discourses. They use truth to combat anti-queer content, when it is actually

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¹⁵ At the time of writing there have been moves in some Australian states and territories to expunge historic convictions for homosexual acts: Spent Convictions (Decriminalised Offences) Amendment Act 2013 (SA); Criminal Records Amendment (Historical Homosexual Offences) Bill 2014 (NSW); Sentencing Amendment (Historical Homosexual Convictions Expungement) Act 2014 (Nc); Spent Convictions (Historical Homosexual Convictions Extinguishment) Amendment Act 2015 (ACT). Homosexuality was illegal in the majority of states and territories until the mid-80s; the last state to remove homosexuality as a criminal offence was Tasmania in 1997 (see: Toonen v Australia). These positive changes in the Australian context must, of course, be viewed alongside new sanctions and criminalisations of homosexuality and transsexuality in other parts of the world – such as Russia’s anti-gay ‘propaganda’ law (see, for instance, Human Rights Watch 2014) and recent pushes to revive Uganda’s ‘Kill the Gays’ bill, which was originally struck down in 2014 (Leighton-Dore 2018) – that may have carry-over effects beyond their local jurisdictions (including in Australia).
the *strategies* of those discourses that give them their force. Instead of continuing ineffective agonistic practices, an understanding of how these strategies work allows the false or partial arguments of anti-queer discourses to be side-stepped, countered, altered, and so on, rather than directly confronted in the way that has been expected and is often called for: through rational argument. As I emphasised earlier, there is no outside of power, and so the goal of the ongoing struggle against anti-queer discourses and the multiform violence they support is not for the fight to be won, but for the battlefield to be so altered as to change the fight qualitatively. If we can shift the terms of the fight, then it may no longer need to be fought (at least not on the same grounds).

By virtue of living in a society suffused by strategies of discourse and arrangements of space that are also inescapably relations of power and dominance, queer young people necessarily work with (or against) these strategies/relations on a daily basis. Queer young people are always already managing their sexual-minority identities in the context of and despite whatever anti-queer discourses, heterosexed public spaces, multiple forms of violence, and strategies that sanction and deploy these are specific to their society and culture(s). Multiple resistances may be put into play by queer young people in the everyday living of their lives,

resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (Foucault 1990, p. 96).

The central concern of my thesis lies in where and how these resistances are enacted: I attend to and engage with the tactics that queer young people use to get by. Here, ‘getting by’ is commensurate with ‘surviving’. If the ‘what’ of this project is to reveal (collect, interpret, recount) the tactics of survival utilised by queer young people, then the ‘how’ is through narratives, through stories. Clearly, the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ cover a range of expressive forms (spoken, written, gestural, drawn, and so on). For this work I privilege my self-stories and the stories of others told to me, over the stories that have for too long been told about us.

*Stories of Self*

I recount in this thesis my own experiences of living and growing up as a queer young person,
because the questions that drive the work arose in no small part from my own life in Australia – especially on the Gold Coast. Chang (2008) notes that ‘[a]ll writings are in some way autobiographical because they reflect authors’ perspectives and preferences in their choices of topic, writing style, direction and conclusion’ (p. 35). Living these experiences, which have become stories, has influenced me and my writing. I would not exclude them, even if I could. Arendt’s analysis (1998) suggests that even if I deliberately aimed at ‘objectivity’, striking out all evidence of myself, this would be ‘to overlook the inevitability with which men [sic] disclose themselves as subjects, as distinct and unique persons’ (p. 183).

I write my self-stories as a present and vocal subject who resists false objectivity. So it is that this writing is inexorably my writing, and while autobiographical writing focuses on the self, and mine on my self, ‘self-stories often contain more than the self. The irony of self-narratives is that they are of self, but not self alone’ (Chang 2008, p. 33). All writing is, in a way, writing about the self, and all writing about the self is also writing about others, because ‘selves’ only emerge within the social.

In writing autoethnography as a method of self-storying, Chang (2008) recounts Ellis and Bochner’s triadic model of authoethnographic verity, explaining that all autoethnographic writing falls somewhere on three different axes: an axis of relation to self (auto); an axis of relation to culture (ethno); and an axis of relation to the research process (graphy). Chang argues that autoethnography ‘should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its context orientation’ (p. 48). Reed-Danahay (1997) briefly describes three genres of anthropological writing, placing autoethnography at their intersection:

(1) “native anthropology,” in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group; (2) “ethnic autobiography,” personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3) “autobiographical ethnography,” in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing. (p. 2)

In each of the genres listed by Reed-Danahay, a different relation to the three axes discussed by Chang (2008) can be observed: native anthropology foregrounds the culture (ethno) of the author; ethnic autobiography foregrounds the author’s personal narrative (auto); and autobiographical ethnography foregrounds the research process (graphy). The aspect of this thesis that aims to take account of the ways in which queer young people are subjected to a double movement of exclusion, on the basis of youth and
on the basis of sexuality, calls for a balance of emphases across these three axes.

As a ‘way in’ to this project – as a means to distil experiences that have left me sad, angry, confused and, indeed, in all manner of other moods and dispositions, and to turn them into objects of study – a reflexive focus on my own recounted memories in the form of autoethnographic writing has been invaluable. As Chang (2008) writes, autoethnography ‘allows researchers easy access to their primary data source from the beginning because the source is the researchers themselves’ (p. 52). Having access to such a data source has allowed me a holistic, and deeply personal, understanding of the multiple exclusions that are enacted against my body, which is (or has been) categorised by me and others as both queer and young.

I recognise, of course, that my experiences are not necessarily shared by every other queer young person. Indeed, some experiences may not be shared at all, and in conducting interviews for this thesis and encountering others’ stories, I have had to rethink how I came to certain understandings. I have little doubt my unique and particular being (in an ontological sense) has been through some things that no other has or will. However, my life – my experience – serves as one example, for myself and readers of this thesis, which ‘stands for each of them and serves for all’ (Agamben 1993, p. 10). Recognising that my own experiences are just that, my own, I acknowledge the need to include others’ stories. In my participants’ stories about growing up queer on the Gold Coast – an experience they and I shared to varying degrees – there are similarities, but also many differences. There are experiences I have not had because I am male, and I perform masculinity relatively consistently and comfortably, and I am ‘white’ (as much as my Maltese surname might suggest otherwise). An exclusive focus on my own narrative (the ‘auto’) fails to stand on behalf of queer youth in a meaningful way. In the context of this thesis, which addresses queer youth as a group (albeit a diverse one), autoethnography alone suffers from a problem of authority.

This problem arises out of the conflict between speaking on behalf of others while drawing solely on autoethnographic data. As Reed-Danahay (1997) notes, ‘[w]ho speaks and on behalf of whom are vital questions to ask of all ethnographic and autobiographical writing’ (p. 3). While I am able to represent my own experiences and interpretations thereof with some proficiency, this representation is, on the one
hand, still only representative of my experiences and, on the other hand, a re-presentation – never a whole and direct presentation of self. These two points are also identified by Reed-Danahay when she writes that ‘who represents whose life, and how, are also central topics of concern in our current age of bureaucratization’ (ibid.). This is a key concern of my research. How are the lives of queer young people interpreted and represented by the various discourses that have empowered themselves to speak with authority on the subject of ‘queer youth’? Indeed, how do I interpret and represent the lives of queer young people? To speak for and on behalf of ourselves, multiple voices must be included in the conversation.

Before I move beyond autoethnographic writing, a brief point on style: like Chang (2008) I consider autoethnography an engaging and appealing writing style. I take such works as Probyn’s (1996) Outside Belongings and Game and Metcalfe’s (1996) Passionate Sociology as illustrative of this. Being addressed directly and knowing by the author/s and spoken to about her/his/their own experiences is, for me, far more interesting than being indirectly addressed as a mere symptom or object of a work that might be read. My writing is informed by this interest and reflects it.

**Stories of Others**

In order to include the voices of other queer young people in the discussion, I draw upon 21 in-depth, semi-formal interviews I conducted between late-2012 and mid-2013 with young queer people who were living on the Gold Coast at the time we spoke. In (re)telling their stories, it is decidedly not my aim to ‘represent’ queer young people in the sense that what I recount can be taken as ‘representative’ generally. The experiences recounted here may be typical of some queer young people, and perhaps even of many (like ‘coming out’), but certainly not all. Even if that were the case, it would not be the point.

My aim here in telling certain stories in certain ways is to show particular events in their full significance. Hannah Arendt (1998) puts it this way: ‘The specific content as well as the general meaning of action and speech may take various forms of reification in art works which glorify a deed or an accomplishment and, by transformation and condensation, show some extraordinary event in its full significance’ (p. 187). The life events of my participants and I are ‘significant’ in the sense that they demonstrate ways of acting in the form of stories. For Michel de Certeau (1984), these “stories” provide
the decorative container of a narrativity for everyday practices’ (p. 70). They provide a presentation of the thing to be done – the practices – in such a way as can be reconstituted through the act of reading, or listening, or watching. For someone confronted by an act of violence against them for the first time, to have already heard a story in which a person like them ran away and survived means they have access to a ‘schema for action’ (ibid.) for that particular circumstance: run. It may not be the best schema, but it is better than none at all.

Ultimately, within this kind of study where the data collected is qualitative, the number of participants is a secondary concern. More important is the depth and range of individuals’ interviews. As stressed above, the stories of the 21 participants, and of myself, that inform this project are not intended to be representative in the sense of being proportional. The answers given by my participants to my questions are directly about their personal experiences of growing up and living in the Gold Coast. While they may have similar experiences to one another, and to other individuals locally or further abroad, my purpose is not to isolate universal queer experiences. That is far outside the scope and ethic of my work. I aim to draw out, from the lives of real people, a number of difficulties and violences they have faced, due to their age and gender- or sexual-identities, and often in association with other dimensions of their identity (race, ethnicity, class, education, etc.). I hope that the difficulties, inequities and violences identified by this process of drawing out can become the focus of policies and programmes designed to eradicate them.

Another hope I have is that some may use these narratives as an ‘instruction manual’, so to speak. My participants described experiences of personal pain and of victory. Sometimes these pains and victories would not have been felt as they were, but for their queerness. As such, the tactics they employed in surviving what was levelled against them, and the hindsight they have gained from their experiences, may prove useful to others who find themselves confronted by similar situations or threats.

The queer young people I have interviewed are, by necessity, creative in the way they go about their everyday lives. They have found ways of living in a society and a culture that, through the accretion

16 Throughout this thesis I employ the ‘singular they’ to avoid the exclusionary ‘he or she’. I recognise that this can sometimes read awkwardly, however to explicitly exclude a potential reader of my work, someone who is neither ‘he’ nor ‘she’, or perhaps is sometimes both (so the ‘or’ is the exclusion), would be worse. Where I write specifically about men and women only, I revert to ‘he or she’ or the appropriate inflection.
of innumerable rules, laws and norms, both written and unwritten, make it incredibly difficult to live outside of particular bounds. Their tactics may therefore work for, or be reworked by, other queer young people. Ideally such tactics will become unnecessary, but until that time, their provision through this work is my contribution to the fight for celebration of difference – not for tolerance or grudging acceptance. I strongly believe that celebration of difference is necessary for a better world in which surviving gives way to thriving. Indeed, if I have done my work well it will render itself obsolete. In this sense, autoirrelevance is the work’s ultimate goal.

The especially difficult issue with using examples from the lives of queer young people is that these examples exist in highly complex life-worlds. If I designate x experience as paradigmatic of queer life on the Gold Coast, and others do not share this experience, then I am vulnerable to the charge that I have not isolated a paradigmatic experience at all. Indeed, x experience would be unique; a singular experience. And so it is with many of our experiences – every day we necessarily do the same things, but we do not necessarily do things in the same way. I wake up, get out of bed, and brush my teeth. These three things are repeated every morning (or perhaps of an afternoon on particularly lazy days). And yet I wake up anew each day, and each awakening is different from the last, and each awakening has a set of unique qualities not shared with any other. But each one also shares the fact of there being an awakening: I can let the one stand as paradigmatic of all, in that all share the universal fact of an individual waking up. The example stands in for all, in spite of its differences, and because of its similarities. The example is the ideal form, ‘… which defines the intelligibility of the set to which it belongs and at the same time which it constitutes’ (Agamben, 2002). So it is that my participants’ similarity to one another, and to me, is located in our shared identities as young and queer. This allows our stories to carry meaning for all queer youth, despite our differences.

It all falls apart…

Like me, the young people I interviewed are ‘queer’ in the vernacular sense that they self-identify as ‘not straight’ (that is, not exclusively heterosexual); however, the majority of participants interviewed do not call themselves queer. The labels ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ and ‘bi’ are the norm, and these are best associated with the homonormative lives that most of my participants described. Drawing from Lisa Duggan (2003)
by ‘homonormative’ I mean that they express ‘a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption’ (p. 50). They pursue and live in long-term monogamous relationships with a view to marriage and a family that includes children (the ‘Australian dream’); they express a particularly neoliberal view of ‘freedom’ as freedom in the privacy of one’s own home rather than on the streets of one’s city; and they consider themselves and their sexualities ‘normal’, actively reproducing the gay and lesbian liberationist discourse of essentialised biological sexualities (‘born this way’). My participants may not be straight, but what is called ‘queer’ in the theory deployed in this project – most plainly, a positionality in the sense of ‘whatever is at odds with the normal’ (Halperin, 1995, p. 62) – is most often not called ‘queer’ by my participants. Their use of the term is almost exclusively synonymous with ‘not straight’ in a broader sense, lacking the potentially radical, anti-identitarian connotations and political force of ‘queer’ as it is used in theoretical discourse.  

‘Queer’, as I deploy it throughout this thesis, is necessarily contextual and notes on novel usage are made where required. I return to discussion of ‘queer’ and identity in the next two subsections of this chapter. In general, the intended meaning is as a vernacular catch-all for ‘not straight’ that does not exclude those who fall outside L, G, B and T sexual identities.

The notion of ‘youth’ that I use is inclusive of an age range from 16 to 35 years. Considering that the average Australian lifespan in 2013 was approximately 82 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014), this 19-year ‘youth’ age range (which excludes the very young for ethical reasons) represents a period spanning just under a quarter (23.17%) of the average lifespan. Biological age is not a meaningful way to distinguish youth from adulthood, given that the variables that we might use as yardsticks to measure a person’s transition into adulthood – education, employment, mobility, independence, competence, resourcefulness and so on (Henderson et al. 2007) – do not have age as a causal factor. Youth is an expanding ‘stage’ that binds its population together only tenuously – and quite arbitrarily at that, given the range of bodies, experiences and capabilities encompassed by the term. A person can be highly educated, gainfully employed, independent and mobile but still considered a youth. Similarly, a person can be

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17 This is not a critique of my participants so much as it is a note on the slippage of ‘queer’; a similar occurrence is documented by Robards (2016) in relation to the term ‘subculture’.
When I talk about queer youth, then, I refer to a group that is simultaneously drawn together by the fact of their sexual dissidence, and ‘factionalised’ by age, sex, gender, sexual orientation and sexual identity. Their memberships are multiple, and they exist on spectra of duration and intensity (how old… how queer…). They all have particular experiences informed by their unique circumstances and history, and this goes to paint a partial – though by no means inconsequential – picture of growing up queer in a city like the Gold Coast. Given the multiplicity of sexual and gender identifications encompassed by the vernacular ‘queer’, and the broad range of capabilities and capacities available to ‘youth’, what this project calls for is a ‘scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior’ (Halberstam, 1998, p.13). Scavenger methodologies, here rendered in the plural to capture the slightly different practices enacted by Halberstam (1998) and Taylor (2012), are ‘queer … because [they attempt] to remain supple enough to respond to the various locations of information … and [betray] a certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods’ (Halberstam 1998, p. 10). Halberstam herself draws from ‘some combination of textual criticism, ethnography, historical survey, archival research, and the production of taxonomies’ (ibid.). Taylor (2012, p. 4) extends this queer methodology to include a transgression, too, of theoretical boundaries, opening out her own analysis to the disciplines of musicology, sociology, cultural studies and philosophy, beyond a merely interdisciplinary methodology. Scavenger methodologies, then, enable the consideration of work from multiple disciplines whose methods have the capacity to deal with diversity and multiplicity, such as theories of intersectionality developed by black feminists, especially Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1988; 1989; 1991) and, in an Australian context, the ‘interlocking oppressions’ of Anna Yeatman (1995). No single discipline addresses all of the concerns of

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18 Within this thesis I take ‘sexual orientation’ to mean the performative ‘directing [of] one’s desire toward some others, and not other others’ (Ahmed 2006, p. 557) – homosexual, bisexual, and so on – which depend[s] on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but [is] also created as an effect of this repetition’ (p. 555). Sexual orientation, then, is produced by and produces the bounds of the bodies it desires in the act of desiring them. ‘Sexual identity’, in contrast, refers to how one conceives of oneself in terms of sexual orientation, for example, as gay, or lesbian, or queer. Neither term is reducible to ‘sexuality’, which is a capacity for sexual affect (see footnote 20 below). In colloquial speech these three terms are often used interchangeably and I have noted special usage where required.

19 See Halberstam’s (2012) blog post ‘On pronouns’. As the author has expressed a preference not to provide clarification on ‘what must categorically remain murky’ (ibid.), and as Female Masculinities (Halberstam 1998) was published under the given name ‘Judith’, I retain the female reflexive pronoun here.
this project, and yet many provide valuable tools for approaching particular aspects thereof. I have thus
drawn selectively from a range of methodological approaches: auto/ethnography, rhizomatics, narrative
research, phenomenology and discourse analysis. Because I consider myself and my participants as the
products and producers of the various cultures in which we are embedded, and since these cultures cut
through many arbitrarily erected boundaries (public/private; self/other; subject/object; straight/queer;
adult/youth), context has informed my selection of multiple methodological tools, rather than the
selection of particular objects of analysis for the sake of what Halberstam (1998) calls ‘methodological
consistency’ (p. 13).

Queer youth are uniquely difficult to identify without individuals self-identifying at some point,
and this particular population – as I have already mentioned – is one that (to put it mildly) ‘may carry
discrimination or stigmatization’ (Minichiello, Aroni and Hays 2008, pp. 172–3). Anti-queer abuse is still
prevalent in Queensland, and young people are at greater risk of such abuse (Berman and Robinson 2010,
p. 69). Participants were enlisted using a combination of snowball sampling (Minichiello, Aroni and Hays
2008, p. 172) and self-selection sampling (Sterba and Foster 2008, pp. 807–9). A rationale for the selection
of these methods is provided below. An interview schedule was developed to direct questions and
discussion around the themes of space, mobility, sexuality, and belonging in relation to my participants’
lives as queer young people who were living on the Gold Coast at the time of our interview. The initial
interview schedule was refined after a pilot interview, and then refined further over subsequent
interviews. Questions that were found to be irrelevant or not directly relevant were removed and further
questions in response to lines of thought opened up by participants’ responses were added. Some
questions, which were not initially structured in a way as to elicit relevant discussion, were modified.
Interviews ranged between 45 minutes and 2 hours in duration, with an average of approximately 75
minutes.

Just over half of my participants (11) were contacted through snowball sampling because the
criteria for inclusion in this research – self-identification as ‘not straight’, aged between 16 and 35, and
currently living on the Gold Coast – made participants uniquely difficult to identify without drawing on
my own personal knowledge of the Gold Coast queer scene and its members. I approached a number of
friends and acquaintances who I knew did not consider themselves to be straight and/or had social connections within the Gold Coast queer scene. If in the right parameters for the survey group, I asked them to be participants in my research; otherwise I requested that they contact people on my behalf who they knew fitted the criteria I provided for inclusion. The remaining participants (10) self-selected and contacted me directly after reading informational flyers about my research project posted online on social-media sites (Facebook, Twitter) and queer networking apps (Grindr, Hornet), and in a small number of Gold Coast sites identified as likely to be frequented by queer young people, including a university campus and a youth health clinic.

There are two significant issues with regard to snowball sampling as a method for finding participants. The first is that, because of the contacts I had at the time, the connections I managed to make, and the networks that were available for me to draw upon, there is little racial, ethnic and cultural diversity among this group of participants. Their responses have a distinctly homonormative bent, as noted above. Beyond my intentionally seeking out a diverse group of friends and acquaintances for the benefit of my research (a dubious foundation for friendship or research) the inherent bias emerging from such a sampling method is difficult to counter. The second issue is that a small number of this group of participants are close personal friends of mine. Taylor (2011) and Taylor and Dwyer (2015) discuss the ethics of intimacy in research. Taylor (2011) reflects on her understanding, while interviewing friends/participants, that some things said were ‘off the record’: ‘not because my informant explicitly said so, but because I understood implicitly that what they were telling me here was not as a researcher but as a friend’ (p. 14). Where Taylor’s implicit understanding was not enough – ‘when a conversation or observation falls into a “grey area”’ (ibid.) – she sought out the judgement of her participants to ‘help protect the trust between the friend-researcher and friend-informant, while also affording the friend-informant a greater feeling of control over her own representation’ (ibid.). As an insider and a researcher – an ‘intimate insider’ (p. 5) – Taylor is keenly aware of the balance between truthful representation of her ‘local queer culture’ (ibid.) research focus and the personal relationships that constitute it. As advice for other researchers navigating intimacy and research, Taylor directs us to ‘not only think but also feel our way empathetically in the field’ (p. 19, my emphasis). Taylor and Dwyer (2015, p. 241) recognise the way
intimate insider research is complicated at the level of the ethical review board when combined with youthful sexualities. They point to a range of manoeuvres, in research institutions and society at large, by which young queer people are variously situated in relation to the researcher as disempowered, desexualised, depoliticised, at-risk and risky (ibid.). Taylor and Dwyer argue for an approach that maintains a focus on minimising harm to queer young people in research processes, while also confronting heteronormative and homonormative ideas that assume that ‘engaging with sexuality in any way in research is risky’ (p. 248). Ultimately, Taylor and Dwyer suggest an approach to conducting research with queer youth that is ‘always localised and situational… where ethics are performatively negotiated in situ, temporally and locally bound to our own queer embodiments, and underpinned by a willingness to see and act past the ethical imperatives that structure frigid relations between research/researched, hetero/homo, homo/queer and adult/youth’ (pp. 248-49). This approach must acknowledge the agency of the researched – advice which goes toward answering my fourth research question (see Chapter 1) – and recognise the special role intergenerationality plays in cultural relations among queer people (see Chapter 5).

In light of the above considerations, the label ‘queer youth’, then, is my attempt to contain and cohere an overflowing and incoherent constellation of qualities or characteristics along multiple dimensions of identity, despite both the anti-identitarian project of ‘queer’ in theoretical usage and the vagueness of ‘youth’ as an intelligible life stage. Speaking about a ‘queer youth culture’, especially within youth studies/subcultural studies contexts, is problematic in that such an attempt at categorisation makes several assumptions:

• that there is a coherent culture at all that is discernible from other cultures – one around which we can ‘draw a line’ and which we can accurately represent as a culture;

• that there is only one queer youth culture and not a multiplicity of them (requiring specifically tailored methodologies for studying them);

• that there are specifically queer practices of consumption and production that are unique to this particular culture, not just universal practices taken for granted (and therefore invisible) in the majority, but observed among sexual minorities (as an over-researched group) and read as
specifically queer;

• that ‘queer youth culture’ is somehow separate and separable from (an) older queer culture(s) or generation(s), and is different to such an extent as that it can reasonably be considered as apart.

Given the multiple sexual and gender identities captured by the vernacular ‘queer’ and the multiple life trajectories possible for ‘youth’, the value of the term ‘queer youth’ is not in its reification of a category that falls apart upon closer inspection, but in its use as an analytic tool – a focal lens. By questioning the assumptions that undergird normative understandings of youth and sexuality, both on the Gold Coast and further afield, they can be destabilised.

**Queer Identities and the Privilege of Identifications**

One of the assumptions that I had made before conducting my interviews was about the way my participants would talk about identity. I had assumed, for most, a firm awareness of and identification with specific identitarian labels, such as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’. As I carried out the interviews, I became more and more interested in the ways my participants perceived and delineated their own sexual and gender identities, as well as their sense of belonging to (or exclusion from) social groups, as revealed through the language they used and how they used it. Since I take identity and sexuality\(^{20}\) to be socially constituted (Hacking 1999), the way my participants spoke about their associations with others – especially in the context of queer friends, acquaintances, partners – also reflected (and inevitably reinforced) the way they perceived and delineated their ‘selves’ and their sexual identities. Through thematic analysis of interview transcripts, I found that, despite an initial use of identitarian labels to describe themselves – the expected ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ and ‘bi’, for example – how my participants went on to speak about themselves and the relations they have with others was far more fluid and contingent once conversation turned away from explicit and formal questions of self-identification and labelling. This struck me as a chance concurrence with Elspeth Probyn’s (1996, p. 23) exhortation not to let identity become ‘a set of hard and fast rules that police comportment’. The identitarian labels constituted points of departure (ibid.), from which my participants took leave to articulate their singularity.

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\(^{20}\) While ‘sex’ is a biological fact of human existence (even as the lines we draw around sexes to delineate them are socially constructed), ‘sexuality’ – the socio-cultural practices of wanting and having, or not wanting and not having, sex – is not. Sexuality, as how we understand the sex that we have (or don’t have), is constituted within society, culture and history (see Taylor, 2012, p. 29).
Like me, the young people I interviewed for this project are all ‘queer’ in the sense that we identify or identified as ‘not straight’ in some way or other. This is a vernacular use of the term that neatly assembles – in an unrealistically uncomplicated manner – a wide range of non-normative lives into a (seemingly) coherent whole. In practice, there is not so much coherence between the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, (some) trans, (some) intersex and other queer people as the vernacular use of ‘queer’ suggests. What a vernacular use of queer does and does well is give a simple way of indexing particular kinds of sexed, gendered and sexual difference, which may be linked with particular (shared and individual) lived experiences. What it does poorly is talk about these differences and experiences in any detailed way that reveals specificities. In order to address this dearth of precision, I need to make important distinctions between queer as a vernacular term, a derogatory term and a theoretical term.

In the first instance, as already discussed and as the term has been deployed thus far, ‘queer’ can refer to anyone who isn’t straight – that is, isn’t heteronormative. I use heteronormative rather than heterosexual here because heterosexuality refers explicitly to binarised male–female sexual relations, whereas heteronormativity subsumes this – a part of what Michael Warner (1991) calls heteronormativity’s ‘totalling tendency’ (p. 8) – within a model of aligned sex–gender–sexuality (male–masculine–attracted to women/female–feminine–attracted to men) that has the power to interpret itself as society, even while alternative (subordinate) sexualities are allowed to exist. If, however, ‘straight’ is taken to mean only ‘heterosexual’, then it excludes trans and intersex people who identify as straight, as well as heterosexual people who engage in queer practices.21 In this way, ‘queer’ is shorthand for polymorphous differences of sex, gender and sexuality from the norm of that model (heteronormativity) in which these variables align. In the vernacular sense, queer is an identification; something which one is, or can be.

In the second instance, as a derogatory term, ‘queer’ emerged in the U.S. out of ‘strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric’, coming to refer to homosexual people and acts during the first decade of the Twentieth Century (OED Online 2015). The derogatory use of queer was not reported in my interviews, chiefly due to a regional preference for epithets such as ‘faggot’ and ‘dyke’ in the verbal abuse my

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21 Heteronormativity also elides non-normative heterosexual expressions behind a monolithic reified ‘straight’ identity - this is an important recognition, but not one that is within the purview of this project.
participants and I have experienced. In the derogatory sense, queer becomes a weapon. There are parallels here to Pascoe’s (2007) discussion, drawing on Butler, of the way that American teenagers use the term ‘fag’ (as in the title of her book, Dude, You’re a Fag) to produce an abject ‘fag’ position (pp. 15-16). The term acts as a ‘threatening specter’ (ibid.) of failed masculinity and, given masculinity’s complicity in heteronormativity, of failed heterosexuality. All of this operates without regard to whether or not the person called ‘fag’ is actually queer. Pascoe examines how this ‘specter’ is continually overcome (thus reaffirming masculinity/heterosexuality) through ‘the daily interactional work of repudiating the threatening specter of the fag’ (p. 81). This is an argument to which I return in Chapter 4, but it is useful to note here the existential crisis that queerness can pose – especially to masculinity – as an abject identity.

In the third instance, as a theoretical term, ‘queer’ has an important connotation of radical alterity. What is ‘queer’ is not just those things excluded by heteronormativity, but it is contingent upon all forms of normativity: ‘Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant’ (Halperin 1995, p. 62, original emphasis). It is always defined in opposition to the norm and it may be stretched beyond issues of sex, gender and sexuality (though these terms structure its domain). This use of queer is a theoretical tool to be applied against power imbalances. Further, unlike vernacular queer, this theoretical conception of queer is not simply an affirmation of a positive identity. It does not designate based on what one is (as third person, singular, present tense of the verb ‘to be’). Rather, it is ‘an identity without essence’ (ibid.), because it can refer to anything (so long as that thing is opposed to what is normative, legitimate, dominant).

“Queer” … demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative—a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of his or her sexual practices… “Queer” in any case, does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibilities whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. (ibid.)

And this is its power. Because queer is a contingent term – in an inverse relation to the averages of a society’s sexual mores – it retains its interrogatory force if that average should move. When norms change, who or what was queer may no longer be so, but ‘queer’ as an analytic lens remains, and it is focussed on those who are always already in a subjugated position in relation to the dominant.
**Mainstreaming**

Since the decriminalisation in Australia of homosexual acts between men, beginning with South Australia in 1972 decriminalising some acts and ending with Tasmania in 1997 (Bull, Pinto and Wilson 1991; Carbery 2014), there has been a steady movement of issues pertaining to LGBT individuals into the political mainstream. Phelan (2001) calls the result of this kind of mainstreaming effort ‘the new gay visibility’ (p. 84), which has been achieved – in the context of the United States at least, in which Phelan writes – ‘by demonstrating their fundamental normality’ (ibid.). The arguments made by activists and advocates in the Australian political context have largely followed this normalising approach, aiming to engender a feeling of belonging through similarity.

Australian Marriage Equality (AME), for example, a ‘national organisation working for equal marriage for all consenting adults’ (Australian Marriage Equality 2014), has been a vocal advocacy group for same-sex marriage rights in Australia. A key aspect of their approach was to lobby Federal Members of Parliament to support amendments to Commonwealth marriage law to allow same-sex marriage. In their ‘Marriage equality 101’ fact sheet (Australian Marriage Equality n.d.) – one of 19 informational flyers provided on their website to give clear, accessible information about same-sex marriage laws, arguments and statistics – AME listed other countries that had legalised same-sex marriage, a number of Australian celebrities and public figures who supported same-sex marriage, and statistics from a poll gauging community support, alongside common rebuttals of arguments against same-sex marriage. Here, AME drew upon a number of comparisons – countries, public figures, public sentiment – to create an implicit argument for equality through two kinds of popular appeal. In the first instance, both by comparing Australia’s failure at the time to support same-sex marriage to those countries in which it had already been legalised, and by comparing the reader of the factsheet to the majority of Australians who supported same-sex marriage (62%) and who believed it was inevitable (75%), AME’s suggestion was that ‘everyone is doing it’. In the second instance, by stating that some of Australia’s most well-known celebrities and public figures supported same-sex marriage, AME’s suggestion was that ‘the best of us are doing it’.

These two kinds of argument – subsets of the logical fallacy of *argumentum ad populum* – are used in

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22 ‘Females have never come within the ambit of Australian statutes, nor has there ever been any attempt in Australia to introduce penalties for consensual lesbian behaviour’ (Bull, Pinto and Wilson 1991, p. 1).
conjunction with a calculated choice of language (i.e. their use of ‘marriage equality’ rather than ‘same-sex marriage’ or ‘gay marriage’) to normalise the concept, emphasising similarity (between straight and gay relationships) over difference (between straight and queer individuals).

Phelan (2001) acknowledges that the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian political issues that results from these kinds of assimilationist approaches, ‘represents a significant advance for gays and lesbians’ (p. 85), but she also observes that this advance has a price. For those who cannot demonstrate ‘their fundamental normality’ (p. 84) by assimilation into the established structures (and in the context of now-legalised same-sex marriage in Australia, the ‘established structure’ is the expanded definition of marriage to include same-sex partners), then the price ‘must be acknowledged as the exclusion and rejection of actual persons’ (p. 85).

Alongside newly mainstream gay and lesbian political issues, aspects of gay culture have also moved further into the mainstream. AfterEllen and AfterElton (which is now called NewNowNext, after a brief stint as TheBacklot), websites founded to catalogue representations of lesbian/bi women and gay/bi men respectively in mainstream media, track queer characters in television and film – and, in the case of AfterEllen, in music – as well as queer (and queer-friendly) celebrities. For example, in January of 2014, Heather Hogan posted ‘The 14 most important LGBT shows on TV right now’ to AfterEllen, listing How I Met Your Mother among the titles, in which Neil Patrick Harris, a gay actor, plays Barney Stinson, a notorious womaniser; The Ellen DeGeneres Show, with which the website shares its namesake; and Modern Family, which includes a gay couple, Mitch and Cam, raising their adoptive daughter, Lily. Although AfterEllen is a US website, each of the aforementioned shows, among others listed in Hogan’s post, has also aired on Australian television, bringing these mainstream US media representations of gay and lesbian characters and/or actors to local audiences.

On Australian television, the long-running soap opera Neighbours (which is also broadcast internationally) included the character Chris Pappas, played by James Mason, from February 2010 until March 2015. Chris’s story traced his coming out as gay and his various relationships. Chris was the second recurring homosexual character on Neighbours, following the introduction – and departure five months later – of Lana Crawford in 2004 (Star Observer 2008). The presence of Chris (and, previously, of Lana) on
"Neighbours" is notable for its General (G) television classification, which is ‘… suitable for everyone’ (Department of Communications and the Arts 2015). Though Chris is no longer on the show, Aaron Brennan, a gay male character played by Matt Wilson, joined "Neighbours" in 2015, and remains a member of the main cast of characters at the time of writing.

Representations of gay and lesbian identities and lifestyles in popular culture, and the popularisation of particular gay and lesbian cultural products, mean that some queer people find themselves and their lifestyles reflected back to them in media and products. In the case of Chris Pappas on "Neighbours", for example, the character represents an intersection of many potential characteristics of Australian lives: male, of Greek descent, a mechanic, gay, masculine, in a monogamous relationship, and so on. Many of these characteristics can be related to by viewers, and indeed, any one characteristic might be related to by quite a large number of Australian viewers considering the country’s demographics. For those people who do not share commonalities with the character (perhaps some women, Indigenous Australians, those who are camp, or feminine, or polyamorous, and so on) there is no representation.

The mainstreaming of gay and lesbian politics and culture in the West has indeed ‘liberated’ a certain section of the gay and lesbian population. The people who find their bodies, lifestyles and interests represented in both majority politics and popular culture tend to be white, affluent, and normative. Counter to stereotypes of queer individuals as just that – queer – the ‘new gay visibility’ has made a certain kind of gay and lesbian person especially visible, with lifestyles reflecting dominant values. Mitch and Cam from "Modern Family" mince about and dress fabulously and drop queer slang, but they are also affluent, middle-class, white, educated, married, with a child and a pet. Chris from "Neighbours" was an out gay character on Australian prime-time television, but he was also a masculine man’s-man mechanic whose characterisation didn’t challenge any of those nasty boundaries around gender conformity while he kissed another man (but nothing more) in a G-classified time slot.

This is to say that the gays and lesbians whose lives are represented by media are overwhelmingly ‘straight’, but for that pesky queerness. The represented gays and lesbians are homonormative: queer subjects whose politics lend them to lifestyles that are largely uncomplicated by their non-heterosexuality (Duggan 2003). This notion of homonormativity is traced further in Chapter 7, but for the moment it is
sufficient to notice the presence in Australian media of homonormative subjects, and the absence – the complete silence – of the queerest of the queer; the radically different. Those who do not fit the homonormative mould have been sidelined, ‘meaning that aspects of queer culture are rendered invisible and are denied access to the same public space being claimed as a right by newly empowered sexual citizens’ (Bell and Binnie 2004, p. 1811).

And so ‘queer’ refers, in the vernacular sense, to a group that are very differently provided for and discriminated against depending upon a very wide range of personal and relational dimensions of their identities. It is important to keep in mind that inclusion in the collective ‘queer’, as the catch-all it has been to this point, can mean little without also considering the ways in which other dimensions of identity can affect a person’s life. For example, in my interview with Daniel, a 21-year-old male, he initially said, ‘I don’t classify myself as gay; I like both as well, so, I’ve had past girlfriends and everything like that, so, I don’t mind a bit of both worlds’. When asked how he chose to identify, he said ‘I’m bisexual’, but later qualified this, saying, ‘I don’t use it [bisexual] that often, but if there’s going to be a label to like both sexes, then it might as well be the label that’s out there’. Ryan, Daniel’s partner and also a 21-year-old male, identified himself as ‘gay’, but when asked why he chose to use this term in particular, he said that ‘they all [labels] mean the same thing, so it doesn’t really matter what I refer to myself as’. Both of these young men, of course, participated in a research project – this project – that explicitly sought interviews with ‘queer youth’.

Daniel and Ryan occupy positions of relative privilege. They are mobile, both having moved from rural Australia to the Gold Coast; they earn dual incomes; they have both achieved at least a secondary school education; and they are both white Anglo-Australians. Due to their multiply-privileged positions – male, white, educated, English-speaking, middle-class – Daniel and Ryan perceive themselves as being afforded relative freedom from labels, which translates into a kind of ‘carelessness’.

A degree of carelessness with labels (in that they couldn’t care less) revealed itself in interviews with all of my participants, as they slipped between calling themselves, variously, ‘queer’, ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘bi’, ‘bisexual’, ‘homo’, ‘homosexual’ and ‘dyke’. This is not to say that my participants are thus ‘careless’ with all classifications – merely those that are used popularly or theoretically to classify and define
sexualities and their subcultural groupings. Many of my participants used ‘queer’ in their interviews to refer to themselves and other LGBTIQ people inclusively. Yet, when asked whether they used this term regularly, they answered that they did not. It would appear that, having heard me use ‘queer’ and having read it in their informed consent packages, my participants took it up contingently within the interview context.

In contrast to these ‘careless’ identifications, slipping back and forth between terms as my participants saw fit to use them, for Samantha (19, transgendered female, lesbian), identititarian labels around sex are deeply important to a sense of self. When asked if there is a particular reason she calls herself transgendered, as opposed to ‘transsexual’, she replied:

It’s what I am. It’s how I feel. And that’s why I consider myself transgendered. Not because I like the name; because it’s actually what I am. I don’t want to be transgendered. It’s not my choice. I was born this way. I don’t claim the title for… whatever reason. I didn’t become transgendered because I liked men or something, because I like women. So I could’ve remained straight if that was how simple it was. So I transitioned, and I became… I am now considered a gay female. Why would I go through all this shit just to… I don’t know. I was born like this. I’m transgendered and I can’t help it.

Later in our conversation, Samantha elaborated on this, saying:

The main thing would just be people realising to treat me entirely as female, and never to bring up the transgendered thing, because it’s not an identity. I’m female, that’s what I identify as. I don’t identify as transgendered. I identify as female because that’s what I am. Transgendered’s just a term to describe what I went through.

For Samantha, being transgendered is an experience she has undergone to become female, which is the ‘identity’ she claims. When considering the many interviews with doctors and mental health professionals, alongside the significant, near-daily instances of transphobic violence that Samantha recounted, it is small wonder that claiming a female identity is so important. Samantha’s fight to embody a female sex was not only against the sex she was assigned at birth, but also against the society she was born into. Ours is a society that routinely binarises sex, gender and sexuality, and essentialises/naturalises their alignment in heteronormativity.

In comparison to the importance of claiming a female identity, like my other participants Samantha comfortably slipped between the use of ‘gay’, as in the above quote, and ‘lesbian’, which was her term of choice when asked about her sexual orientation. Indeed, it was on the basis of sexuality that
Samantha said she shared common experiences with other queer people, though to different degrees: ‘They probably will all have experienced, at some point in their life, some form of discrimination to do with their sexuality, but nothing I would consider severe’. Unfortunately, along lines of sexed identity that were so crucial to Samantha, she felt excluded by those same people: ‘The fact that I’m transgendered… It shouldn’t separate me, but everyone else separates me from them because of that’. For Samantha, being female and a lesbian are self-evident, embodied truths. But for those people with whom Samantha believes she should have common ground, being transgendered becomes a significant point of conflict, as was revealed most starkly through recounting her experience of online dating:

I really wouldn’t recommend dating sites for someone who was trans, because I’m openly trans on dating sites and… I don’t use them anymore because I’d go through my inbox and it’s hate, hate, hate, hate, hate. All from lesbians. I get tons of straight guys going after me, but every message from a lesbian is completely putrid stuff. Death threats, even.

Such abuse, Samantha believes, comes down to a lack of understanding due to the absence of education about, or miseducation about, transgender. Sadly, she doesn’t see a way to fix these problems within her lifetime, believing that, for most, it’s too late to educate or try to change their minds.

For Toby (23, male, homo), his approach to identifying his sexual orientation was to establish his distance from the term ‘gay’ – an oppositional decision. While he spoke freely about his attraction to and interest in men, quite comfortable with a non-heterosexual orientation, he initially avoided any specific identitarian labels. When asked how, or if, he chose to label his sexuality, he said: ‘Oh, yeah, I’m a homo.’

B: That’s how you identify yourself?
T: Yep.
B: Why do you use that term and not others?
T: It’s easier.
B: Why not gay, or queer?
T: I feel gay has too many meanings these days. You know, people use gay as, like, “oh yeah, that’s gay”, like it’s stupid. Or you can use gay as happy. I feel there’s too many meanings for it. And [queer], I don’t like that word. I just don’t like the sound of it.
B: Do you prefer “homo” or “homosexual”?
T: Homosexual’s more politically correct.
B: Is it?

T: Yes? I don’t know. “Homo” is what I use around friends, people I know. If I was out in a public place, I wouldn’t be like, “Oh, I’m a homo”, I’d be like, “I’m homosexual”. It’s more formal, I guess.

For Toby, the other connotations of ‘gay’ – as a slang term of abuse or as the dated adjectival form of gaiety – crowd the term for him, overwriting its potential as a label of identity. While he is quite comfortable with cultural products and forms associated with queer lifestyles (such as music, films, television, fashion, language), and he comments on his performance of queerness in the way he talks (“[It’s queer] because it’s more high-pitched than what a traditional guy’s would be’), he does not feel accepted in the local gay scene: ‘The homo community here is very clique-y and there’s only really one place you can go to hang out and be open. … Every time I’ve been there I’ve had a bad experience.’

Even as Toby identifies cultural markers and experiences that draw other queer people (especially gay men) and himself together – ‘Oh please, every homo would like Britney,’ and ‘The other day, when I got yelled at, I’m sure they go through the same thing,’ – he excludes himself from that connection:

I don’t really relate to many queers. Even my friend, he’s probably one of my only queer friends because I just can’t really stand most of them. They annoy the hell out of me.

Toby traces this annoyance back to the only local gay club, Escape, and the kinds of leisure practices that occur there. ‘All they care about is getting drunk, wasted, and looking pretty’. While his language is cynical, Toby’s tone is often sarcastic as he describes the scene, aware that his past experiences have left the club and its patrons in poor esteem as far as he is concerned. As a result, he avoids going out. Further, because the club and the local queer population largely overlap, it has been hard for Toby to make other queer friends:

I would like more homo friends. That would be nice. There are some things I just can’t talk about with straight people, because… I feel it’s a bit inappropriate.

Samantha felt excluded from the queer scene by others because of her trans identity. Toby, on the other hand, self-excludes based on his perception of the local gay population as revolving around a club scene, while still monitoring its members through Grindr:

T: I know a lot of homos, but they don’t know of me. And that’s how I like it. I know of them… I know when they come in [to my store], or when I see them around.
B: So how do you meet or learn of these people?

T: Grindr. It's a very good way to learn, and recognise. I get good with faces. Like, I had a guy in today that I've seen on Grindr a few times and I'm like, you're a homo… But yeah, I don't meet a lot. I don't go out, so I don't meet a lot of homos out.

Feeling a part of something, or not – belonging and not belonging – was a consistent theme throughout my interviews.

At stake here is the question of what it means to belong: what is belonging, and how does it happen? For Elspeth Probyn,

belonging is situated as threshold: both public and private, personal and common, this entails a very powerful mode of subjectification. It designates a profoundly affective manner of being, always performed with the experience of being within and inbetween sets of social relations. It precisely emphasizes and moves with that experience. Moreover, belonging cannot be an isolated an individual affair. (1996, pp. 12-3)

Here, belonging is both relational – one belongs to and with others – and affective – one feels like one does or does not belong. Probyn also links belonging to identity, when she suggests that belonging captures

the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state. (p. 19)

The ‘longing in belonging’ (p. 13) is, for Probyn, ‘what oils the lines of the social’ (ibid.). Our yearnings to feel as though we have a place, wherever and with whomever we so desire, and to have that affirmed by others, brings life to a world of relations in which we find ourselves embedded.

Nira Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 15) draws our attention to the way our belongings are also multiple:

People can “belong” in many different ways and to many different objects of attachment. These can vary from a particular person to the whole of humanity, in a concrete or abstract way, by self or other identification, in a stable, contested or transient way.

Belonging as an undifferentiated sense (‘a sense of belonging’) then, might more productively be thought in the plural, as belongings, but in doing so it is important not to collapse their difference; to retain the ‘stable, contested, or transient’ ways in which we can belong.

Vikki Bell (1999, p. 3), sketches out how belonging is performative, in that it “cites” the norms that constitute or make present the “community” or group as such’, to which one belongs. For Bell, belonging is ‘an achievement at several levels of abstraction’ (ibid.), not some thing directly given by the
mere fact of being (or of being this or that). Through repetition, the acts that cite group norms both produce the group and one’s belonging to it. Belonging, like identity, ‘is the effect of performance, and not vice versa’ (p. 3). Also, like identity and like gender, the performative nature of belonging does not render it mere artifice; belongings are lived out and acted upon as real.

The relational, affective, multiple and performative nature of belonging(s) suggest why my participants spoke about and described the concept of a queer community, and of a collective queer identity, very differently from one another. While it might be relatively straightforward to feel a connection to and with people who share a sense of style, vernacular, consumption choices and social practices (as might gay men in any given city, for instance, feel among themselves), an abstract feeling of belonging to some queer community or queer collective identity that is necessarily devoid of positive content, determined by its inverse relation to ‘the normal’ (Halperin 1995, p. 62), is harder to envisage.

**Complicating Queer Collective Identity**

None of my participants mentioned belonging to a queer ‘subculture’ or ‘community’, except when prompted by my questions. Even then, after being asked to consider whether there were any queer communities on the Gold Coast, participants only took up this scholarly language in order immediately to reframe the discussion in their own words, and with very different ideas about what constituted a queer community, or a queer identity. As an individual identification, ‘gay’, for example, was easily taken on, but a shared ‘queerness’ or ‘gayness’ could rarely be imagined beyond a sameness with regard to same-sex attraction. Several interviewees, for instance, made mention of a ‘queer fashion’ of sorts that set them apart from a dominant culture and allowed them to identify other queer people:

> This has happened with one of my friends. She’s extremely feminine, and she started noticing a lot of the gay girls were wearing men’s clothes. And then she started to change like that. Cut her hair and start dressing more masculine, and I guess it’s … if someone’s new to a gay scene and they see that that’s the popular style, then I guess they try and go into that kind of stuff. (Kelly, 18, female, bi)

> That’s something I look for in a person, is the way they hold themselves, the way they move. Sort of in their speech a little bit too, sometimes. It’s just different ways that people speak. Um… and the pride you take in the way you dress. A lot of gay people tend to be a little bit more prideful in their appearance. (Thomas, 22, male, gay)

Kelly’s friend transgressed gender dress codes in order to identify more closely with the lesbians she had
observed on the scene, while Thomas described another form of transgression by gay men that had the
effect of proclaiming membership of a sexual culture: fastidiousness in dress, a traditionally ‘feminine’
characteristic. These are tactical practices of fashion and style that at the same time are performances of
gender because dress is inherently gendered (and the absence of gendered dress may be noted just as
pointedly as its presence under certain circumstances). In Butler’s (1999) terms, gender performance is a
‘strategy of survival’ because it is always performed in a ‘situation of duress’ with ‘clearly punitive
consequences’ for those who do gender incorrectly (pp. 177-8). Precisely by straying outside the border of
the ‘impossible’ definitions of male and female (Halberstam, 1998, p. 27), queer people make themselves
visible to others who understand the visual discourse, and especially how its rules are being broken or
bent.

Notably, each description of a tactical practice of fashion/style encompassed only a certain sub-
group of queer people – especially gay men or lesbians. Despite the acknowledgement that these fashion
practices allowed for the recognition of queerness in others, participants would consistently answer ‘no’
to my question about whether they believed they shared anything with other queer people more generally,
that is, outside of their own identitarian labels (‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, and so on). Occasionally, participants
identified non-normative sexuality as a commonality (though some trans individuals – despite a queer
sex/gender – may choose to identify as straight in the sense of heterosexual, as did one of my
participants), or experiencing discrimination and homophobia (though some of my participants
maintained that they have never experienced these based on sexuality), or having to come out as queer
(though this is by no means shared by all queer people; the fact of ‘the closet’ is proof of this).
Resoundingly, however, my participants did not agree on any one thing outside of non-normative sexual
or gender identities that drew queer people at large together. Indeed, one participant, Lulu (29, female, no
identification), who had had male partners in the past and was dating a woman at the time of our
interview, chose not to label her sexual orientation at all and did not believe she had anything in common
with queer people collectively:

I wouldn’t say that I have anything in common with queer people, necessarily. Depending on the person. It would depend on the person and whether I had anything in common with them.
While ‘queer’ could be uttered in one breath to draw everyone together under a single inclusive banner, in the next breath, in every interview, the deep divisions and differences between gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer lives re-emerged.
CHAPTER 3: MOVEMENTS

Moving Out

My family moved to the Gold Coast six months after my fourteenth birthday, at the beginning of January in 2001. I didn’t want to leave my hometown of Portarlington; a bayside community nestled at the northernmost tip of Victoria’s Bellarine Peninsula. All of my friends lived there, as did all of the people I had ever known. My entire life to that point had been spent in that small town. I remember threatening (emptily) to run away from home and stay behind more than once. Ultimately I had no say in the matter. My parents decided to move, so we moved.

While I am deeply thankful – now – that my family left that little town of fewer than 3,000 residents for a city with a more cosmopolitan outlook, the relocation proved formative for me. It is my first memory of experiencing a complete lack of control over my life. Certainly as a child I was made to do things I didn’t want to (cleaning my room, for instance), but these demands on my person were minor; they were of a very different order of magnitude to my family’s departure from a place I felt was my whole world. When we eventually packed up our home and set out for the Gold Coast, this compulsory mobility meant realising that doing what I wanted and going where I wanted was a freedom that could be imposed upon by others, and even taken away entirely. My family’s move at the beginning of the new millennium came to epitomise for me a kind of adult authority, deployed in response to my (perceived) age, that I would spend a great deal of my late teenage years skirting around. I placed a high value on being able to go where I pleased; on being mobile in very particular ways.

In discussing mobility I am aware of the term’s most common sociological connotation of ‘social mobility’ – including ‘vertical social mobility, connoting the movement from one class or strata of society to another, and horizontal mobility, referring to, for example, the movement from one occupational position to another roughly equal one in the social stratification system’ (Faist 2013, p. 1637). Here, however, I am concerned with bringing spatial or geographic mobility – the ability to move from place to place in the material world – into contact with social mobility. Urry (2011) identifies ‘five interdependent [spatial] “mobilities” that are producing social life organised across multiple distances and which form (and reform) its contemporary contours’ (p. 4). Alongside the physical movement of bodies in space,
which Urry calls ‘corporeal travel’ (ibid), he includes ‘the physical movement of objects’ (p. 5); ‘imaginative travel effected through the images of places and people’ (ibid); ‘virtual travel … transcending geographical and social distance’ (ibid); and ‘communicative travel through person-to-person messages’ (ibid). These mobilities are not, however, mutually exclusive, as something like a postcard – one of Urry’s examples for communicative travel (p. 5) – is also an object physically moving through space as it is mailed, as well as imaginative travel as it brings with it an image of distant places and people on its surface, as well as representing the corporeal travel of the person who sent it in the first place.

Freudental-Pedersen (2009) suggests that spatial mobility allows ‘a vast variety of possibilities which have created the kind of life we know’ (p. 3). Flows of people across the globe, historically and currently, have shaped and continue to shape the modern world in quite obvious ways (colonialism; trade; migration; displacement). Urry (2011, pp. 3-4) also highlights the development, in the Twentieth Century, of five interdependent systems of mobility based on the availability of carbon fuel sources (oil, gas) that underpin such flows of people, including: electricity grids and the light, heating and electrical goods dependent on them; petrol-powered cars and their requisite road networks; the spread of suburbs built away from places of work that make commuting via cars and public transport necessary; the emergence of electricity-based technologies enabling telepresence and the (easier) maintenance of dispersed social networks; and the proliferation of site of consumption and leisure that require travel away from one’s home. While Urry warns of ‘a potential “de-mobilisation”’ (p. 16) resulting from changes in the cost and availability of oil, and thus shifts in our habitual social practices, at present these five interdependent systems of mobility remain in place, still largely underwritten by carbon fuels.

Urry’s (2011) de-mobilisation warning is, however, not to be ignored: Sheller (2008) recognises that ‘constraints on mobility are experienced as a loss of freedom’ (p. 25); indeed, mobility is considered so important it is enshrined in Article 13 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 2014). How you are mobile matters, too. The language of Article 13 is telling, stating that ‘freedom of movement’ within and between each state is a human right (ibid., my emphasis). According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (1999) this freedom of movement is ‘an indispensable condition for the free development of a person’, and Skrbis, Woodward and Bean (2013) call this kind of
mobility ‘a fact of life’ (p. 617). Moving about from place to place, even just in the welter of day-to-day living, is an inescapable demand of corporeal existence in three-dimensional space, inevitably bringing into play and setting in motion ‘specific assemblages of humans, objects, technologies and scripts’ (Urry 2011, p. 5).

Mobility and humankind – mobility and personhood – are, then, closely intertwined. In the unavoidable task of constructing selves in the sense of Giddens’ (1991) ‘reflexive project of self’ (which he believes is a condition of modernity)23, getting around (or not getting around) is central to how people are able to conceive of a world and their place in it. Giddens argues that it is through the ‘sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives’ (the reflexive project) that self-identity is produced (p. 5). We move within the material world, experiencing its forms and its goings-on – its people, places, things – and we re-tell these experiences in ordered narratives. By telling such stories about the self, to oneself and to others, as well as by constantly revising these biographical stories, ‘[integrating] events which occur in the external world and sorting them into the ongoing “story” about the self’ (p. 54), a person’s identity is brought into being. In this way, ‘[e]ach of us not only “has”, but lives a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life’ (p. 14, original emphasis). Further, as the experiences from which we ‘story ourselves’ are inseparable from their occurrence across both time and space, experiences and stories are also inseparable from movement as an element of our spatio-temporal existence. Of course, we don’t move entirely freely in the world: the ‘shape’ of a space produces particular concerns for people engaged in the daily practices of getting around. Spaces are not neutral, and so the way a person moves through the world is unavoidably arranged by the topography and infrastructure of their location, and also by contingent temporal, structural, sociocultural and individual circumstances. The interactions between these intersecting dimensions of existence and personal mobility are explored in the next part of this chapter, ‘Navigating the City’.

For Henderson et al. (2007, p. 101), consideration of mobility entails physical movement as well

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23 For Giddens (1991), ‘modernity’ is not a precise term, being ‘roughly equivalent to the “industrialised world”’ (p. 15), but also including the institutions of capitalism and surveillance, and ‘an era of “total war”, in which the potential destructive power of weaponry, signalled above all by the existence of nuclear armaments, becomes immense’ (ibid.). While the emergence and characteristics of modernity are not directly relevant, it is important to note that Giddens believes the ‘reflexive project of self’ is an emergent practice of modern lives pervaded by the multiplication of choices for how to live (p. 5).
as cultural and social mobility. All of these forms of movement exist in what the authors call ‘economies of mobility’ (p. 103), where multiple competing forces (ideological, material) affect the ways that mobility becomes available: ‘Mobility means different things in different places and young people within the same locations engage differently with mobility’ (p. 111). The authors focus on the ways that young people are able to leverage mobility as a resource ‘both in growing up and in intergenerational patterns of continuity and change’ (p. 101). In addition to the multiple forms of mobility noted above, the authors divide geographic mobility into two forms: pragmatic – ‘getting around, public transport, learning to drive’ (ibid.) and aspirational – ‘travelling, migrating or associating with the music and style of a different place’ (ibid.). Thus, young people are embroiled in economies of mobility that include everything from day-to-day decisions about getting around (where to go, how to get there, which places to avoid); more significant life decisions (moving out of home, moving houses, travelling, immigrating); as well as social and cultural aspirations (pursuit of upward social mobility and stylistic affinities).

In addition to the many concerns that confront young people in general in navigating economies of mobility, only some of which I have canvassed above, there are further concerns for queer youth that are not present for straight people. Where being young may mean dealing with a range of largely-institutional restrictions, such as mandated schooling hours and parental supervision, being queer means taking into account social and cultural matters that can have literally fatal outcomes if not navigated ‘correctly’. In the sections that follow, I examine economies of mobility as they play out in the lives of young people generally and queer young people respectively. By dealing with them separately here, I hope to draw attention to the ways in which different relations of power make demands on the bodies of queer young people in different circumstances (as young, as queer), and how these demands can intensify when and where they intersect.

**Youth and Mobility**

Mobility in modern Western societies like Australia is manifestly more difficult to achieve for young people than adults, especially – but not only – because of their legislated minority status. In Queensland, people under the age of 18 fall under the ambit of a broad range of different legislation at the state and federal level that deals with them as a special group. They are defined in the Queensland
Law Reform Act 1995; their care is ordained, at the national level, by Part VII of the Family Law Act 1975 (Cwlth); and their behaviour before the law is dealt with through the Queensland Youth Justice Act 1992. Schooling is mandatory until Year 10 or the age of 16 (whichever comes first) and thereafter, if not still in school, participation in the workforce is required until the age of 17 (Department of Education and Training 2014). Children under the age of 13 are unable to be employed except in certain circumstances, and the maximum hours that young people under the age of 16 may work are restricted (Child Employment Act 2006 (Qld)). For people under the age of 21, ‘junior’ pay rates apply, receiving only ‘a percentage of the relevant adult pay rate’ unless stipulated elsewhere (Fair Work Ombudsman n.d).

All of this is to say that young people are not addressed by the laws of society in the same way that adults are. Instead, a different set of laws legislates dependence and proper behaviour for particular subsets of young people in particular circumstances. To whom these laws pertain depends largely on age rather than capacity; that is, what a person is allowed to do does not, in most cases, depend on what they are able to do. The result is a system that enshrines young people’s dependence in law using their age as a measure with no direct relationship to an individual’s actual capacities. All young people are tarred with the same brush of youthful incompetence. Individuals mature at different rates, and capacity (mental, physical) need not be related to biological maturity at all. This does not mean that the system we have is necessarily a good or a bad system; it is, however, a system that imposes itself in a number of ways on young people’s ability to get around, in the forms of children’s passports, age-restrictions for drivers licences, requirements for paperwork for unaccompanied minors, and so on.

In remembering my family’s interstate move above, I have drawn attention to one of the ways that my inclusion in the category of youth corresponded with a lack of control over mobility. For instance, while the force of the Family Law Act 1975 (Cwlth) was never brought to bear on me, its latent power gave my parents complete control over my movement. This withholding of control is underpinned by the construction of the concept of ‘youth’. While both of these – ‘youth’ as a category and the withholding of control from those within the category – are produced in discourse, they are enacted spatially, as Massey (2005) demonstrates:

[A] range of “authorities” in wider society invent and implement rules for the spatial ordering of the population in terms of age. So teenagers are not allowed into children’s
playgrounds (which are reserved for people younger than them) or into certain clubs, drinking places and cinemas showing certain films (these places being reserved for people older than them). Such rules have a number of evident rationales – the protection of toddlers (assumptions here about the potential behaviour of teenagers in children’s playgrounds), or the protection of teenagers themselves from contact with influences they are deemed not yet sufficiently mature to cope with. Even such “ordinary” rules are bound up with assumptions about identity and attempts to construct socially acceptable identities. And indeed the very drawing of age lines and the definition of the spaces where particular age groups are allowed, is part of the process of defining an age group in the first place. The control of spatiality is part of the process of defining the social category of “youth” itself. (p. 128)

“Youth” is constituted in opposition to terms like ‘infant’ on one side and ‘adult’ on the other. It sits in a liminal place, able to speak (contra. ‘Infant’) but not to be heard (contra. the age of majority). Boundaries are drawn using age as their measure and in their drawing life stages are produced: childhood (versus adulthood, i.e. pre-pubescent), or even adolescence (another in-between, i.e. in the process of becoming-adult). This is not, of course, to argue against the obvious fact of biological human development: birth, through puberty, to physical maturity, then degeneration and death. I mean to point out that ‘youth’ is not a normal or natural category because there is no such delimitable life-stage inherent to the human life cycle. While ‘child’, in some usages, denotes pre-pubescence, ‘youth’ is not so precise. Instead, it is a normalised and naturalised constellation of biological, social, cultural and intrapersonal variables that are together coded as ‘youth’, which individuals are then read against (along with whatever other variables of identity intersect in their person).

In the reading of an individual as a ‘youth’, s/he is automatically separated out from the otherwise undifferentiated individuals of the general populace (read: adults), and drawn together with those others with whom it is assumed s/he shares… something. Immaturity? Riskiness? The stories that are told about youth – that they are immature, that they are risky – constitute the category in the present and into the future. They set expectations for how youth will continue to act, given that they have acted this way before (even if not everyone acted that way; even if only a few people did; see: Cohen’s 1972 work _Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers_). If the narrative is big enough, strong enough, if it becomes true for those who hear it, then it becomes a yardstick against which all youth are

24 Compare ‘child, n. … 2. a. A young person of either sex, usu. one below the age of puberty; a boy or girl’ (OED Online 2014a) and ‘youth, n. … 6. a. A young person; esp. a young man between boyhood and mature age’ (OED Online 2014b). The former stipulates its occurrence _usually_ before pubescence, while the latter is less precise, drawing its meaning from two similarly indefinite terms. Both ‘child’ and ‘youth’, as well as ‘adolescent’, blur into each other as definitional terms, and as life stages.
measured. Even by themselves.

Narrative control over how people are understood – how the youth are understood – is no small matter, given the understanding we have from Giddens (1991), for example, that the stories we tell about ourselves actively construct those selves, for us and for others. Narratives structure the way we relate to the people being storied. When the narrative about youth is, for instance, that they are ‘not yet sufficiently mature to cope’ (Massey 2005, p. 128), then such a narrative becomes self-fulfilling prophesy. Given a narrative that youth cannot cope with alcohol, or drugs, or gambling, or sex, it makes sense to control access to these ‘influences’ and the areas in which they are located. Let us overlook for the moment the ‘adults’ who cannot cope with alcohol, drugs, gambling and sex, it is children who are most at risk in the cultural narrative. Given a narrative that youth are at risk, too, from the nefarious influences of ‘Others’ who ‘present an enemy, a threat to structure the power of authority’ (Beattie 2009, p. 166), it makes sense to separate and conduct surveillance of young people ‘for their own good’. Beattie (somewhat sardonically) encapsulates this kind of narrative-driven approach in his discussion of the way childhood is produced and used as a regulatory strategy with regard to sexuality: ‘Children are simultaneously the victims of predators and vulnerable to exposure to dangerous images. All accompanied by the shrill cry of “will no one think of the children?”’ (ibid.). How we talk about young people affects how we deal with young people, whether we talk about them as ‘children’ or ‘adolescents’ or ‘youth’ – each of these terms has its own connotations that modulate how we perceive the people being described. A person’s inclusion in any of these categories, then, has very real effects on their ability to move freely in the world.

In my interview with Wright (21, male, gay), he recounted his experience of travelling around the city on public transport before he got his drivers’ licence and a car:

When I was younger I actually did catch public transport. It was quite hard. Transport is always an issue on the Gold Coast. Even in driving a car, the amount of construction on the roads and stuff like that makes it quite hard to manoeuvre around, but in terms of when I was younger it was a lot harder. When I first started at university, I didn’t have my licence, didn’t have a car, so I had to catch two buses to get to uni… it was a two-hour bus ride to go there for maybe a two-hour lecture or a one-hour tutorial, you know? It’s a lot different now that I have my licence.

As a minor in Queensland, Wright had to wait until he was at least 16 years old before he could apply for a learner (L) licence and begin learning to drive. While holding an L licence, he could not drive a car
alone. Before Wright could apply for a provisional (P) licence in order to drive without supervision, he had to log 100 hours of supervised driving experience. He was then required to pass an on-road practical test and pay a fee\textsuperscript{25} to receive his P1 licence (the first of two provisional licences in a graduated system). A rationale for this system, of which the above is an incomplete sketch, is given on the Department of Transport and Main Roads (2014) ‘Young drivers’ web-page, stating that its requirements exist ‘… to reduce fatalities on our roads, particularly among young motorists’. This is presented alongside the statistic that ‘Young drivers aged 17-24 years are one and a half times as likely to be involved in fatal crashes as drivers aged 25-59 years’ (ibid.).

Though clearly – and to my mind, rightly – aimed at reducing the number of young drivers dying on Queensland roads, these provisions do make freedom of movement significantly more difficult to achieve for young people in the state. For some, like Grey (19, female, gay), the demands of the licensing provisions made getting a licence in the usual way completely inaccessible:

\begin{quote}
I’ve had my learners’ [licence] for a while, because I have no one to drive me around. Like, I don’t have someone with a car that can kind of go with me. Because I’ve not had that… I mean, it’s easy with family because they have insurance, but people don’t want to give you their car, people don’t want to try to teach you, so, the only way to get hours is through lessons. And they’re really expensive, so I’ve had to wait to get my exemption. So yeah, that’s been my thing.
\end{quote} 

The exemption Grey mentions is a dispensation from the requirement to log 100 hours of supervised driving, where ‘no car is reasonably available to you to learn to drive’, ‘no supervisor is reasonably available to supervise your driving’, or ‘the road network where you live is significantly limited’ (Queensland Government 2016). Application for such an exemption also attracts a fee; it seems there is no escape from the expense of learning to drive.

Having a licence and a car to drive was consistently identified by my participants as important, especially on the Gold Coast, which so heavily depends on its road infrastructure. The area a person lived in was also a factor in whether one could move about easily. Kelly (18, female, bisexual) explained her frustrations with living in Pimpama when most of her free time was spent in Varsity with her friends:\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} $76.25 for 1 year as of 1 July 2017 (Department of Transport and Main Roads 2017).

\textsuperscript{26} Pimpama and Varsity Lakes are approximately 30 kilometres apart as the crow flies, though the distance is just over 40 kilometres by road. Direct travel between these two suburbs takes around 40 minutes by car.

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It’s difficult, in the area I live, especially. Because the bus only comes once every hour, or just doesn’t turn up. But, like, here on the Coast, either this area [Helensvale] or Varsity, it’s really easy to catch public transport, just because it’s so frequent.

Josh (23, male, gay), who got his licence on the very day he was legally able put it succinctly: ‘Having a social life, being able to do anything… if I didn’t have my car, I wouldn’t survive on the Gold Coast. It’s too spread out.’

For my participants, being under the legal driving age meant depending on family, friends, or public transport to make your way around. For many, this was a necessary dependence, because not travelling meant having no social life, not being able to get to school or university, and not being able to get to work. In contrast to this, having a licence and a car was seen as integral to achieving independence through mobility. This independence, for many of my participants, could not come soon enough, because their sexuality meant they could not, or would not, depend on others to travel – whether to specific locations, or at all.

**Queer and Mobility**

Identification as queer, by self or others, may also affect a person’s mobility in a number of ways. In the previous chapters, when I used ‘queer’, I used it to mean, simply, ‘not straight’. This draws from Rasmussen, Rofes and Talburt (2004) who use queer ‘to refer to individuals and communities of young people who may identify themselves as not straight’ (p. 1). As a beginning point, this provides a minimal definition required to get on with the work of talking about the particular group of people with whom I am concerned. What it does not do, however, is adequately reflect the multiplicity of lives elided into that single word, and the distinct experiences of the same spaces by such different people. For the majority of my participants and for me, access to mobility is relatively simple; for the rest, getting around is fraught with very real dangers and complications.

Zeus, a white 21-year-old gay male who had lived on the Gold Coast for his entire life, described getting around the city by car and by motorbike. Before he got his licence – ‘on my birthday… I was right on to it, I got it on the very date that I could’ – Zeus was largely dependent on his parents for transport. This was a recurrent theme throughout my interviews: dependent mobility associated with youth. For Zeus, this was countered by his achievement of independent mobility through a driver’s licence, as soon
as he was legally able.

When I asked Zeus whether getting around the Gold Coast was difficult, he said it was more frustrating than hard:

Traffic at peak hour is a killer… the schools that are near home always have traffic building up for kilometres, it’s a little bit hard to, you know, sit in that all morning, and you’ve got to time your day a lot better to get to work on time.

He described the flows of the city – traffic, construction, schooling – as minor impediments to his free movement now that he has a licence, but before he was able to drive himself, public transport was a particular concern: ‘Like, I hate public transport. One of the main reasons is because I’m afraid of… are they looking at me? Do they think I’m gay? What are they going to do?’. Zeus is very slight of stature, and is acutely aware of his body size. ‘I am very conscious about my body, like, I’m not the bulkiest guy out there, and I always was very skinny. I definitely consider [how I look] if [I] go anywhere.’ For Zeus, his body potentially reveals his sexuality, and he associates his lack of bulk with an absence of masculinity – ‘bulkiness’ is a signifier of hypermasculinity, especially on the Gold Coast, where the gym-sculpted ‘buff’ male body is foregrounded. Zeus’s queer (non-masculine, and therefore feminised) body is potentially traitorous, outing him. His fear of others’ (preternatural) knowledge of his sexuality – that it could be read on his body – is a fear that stops him moving freely around the city by public transport.

When asked if he had suffered any homophobic confrontations on public transport, Zeus said, ‘[It’s] just something I think might happen. I’ve always been like that… I’ve always worried about that sort of thing’. Zeus is aware of the heteronormative policing of public space, in which public transport is included, and automatically excludes himself from these spaces – and hence, from the mobility that they enable. Instead of being actively excluded by others from public transport because of his sexuality, Zeus chose to self-exclude as a precaution. But then he also had the resources (time, money, transport) to get a drivers licence, he had access to a car, and he had a job to pay for fuel and maintenance.

Samantha (19, transgendered female, lesbian), in contrast to Zeus’s self-exclusion, was not in a financial position to remove herself from public transport. She got around using lifts from friends when she could, but otherwise made her way through the city on buses and trains. She recounted a number of difficulties with buses:
The buses stop at a certain hour, and not everyone has an iPhone with internet and stuff. I have an old phone, I can’t access bus timetables, and if you don’t have that… your only luck is to find a bus stop and then ask the bus driver for help.

When asked if she ever had issues with other people while trying to make her way around the Gold Coast on public transport, Samantha said that she had:

B: More than once?
S: Almost every time. Actually, can I rephrase that? Every time.
B: Every time?
S: In this area, every time.

These ‘issues’ included staring, verbal assault, and even being followed when she reached her destination. For Samantha, passing through public spaces and therefore coming into contact with other people is, however, a necessary evil:

B: Are there any places on the Gold Coast that you feel are unsafe for you to go?
S: Everywhere. I only go to these places to get to the few places that aren’t littered with people.
B: Why do you feel they’re unsafe for you?
S: Because I’ve nearly… like, I’ve been beaten, I’ve nearly been beaten, I’ve nearly been raped several fucking times, you know, this is… it’s a shit of a place.

Samantha’s is an extreme case compared to my other respondents, and she believes it is her transitioning from male to female that draws this constant negative attention to her. Passing through a space, for Samantha, is also a matter of ‘passing’: being seen as, and therefore treated as, female. For Samantha, even though her presentation is feminine, she is aware that some people can tell that she is trans and this is the motivation for the violence and threats of violence that she has experienced while making her way around the city. For queer people in general, who do not necessarily present a disconnect between their gender identity and expression, Samantha said things are slightly better:

You can walk down the streets relatively safe that you’re not going to have the shit beaten out of you, but you know it’s always a possibility. I always recommend to go with someone else, if you’re going to go in public around here. (Samantha, 19, transgendered female, lesbian)

These brief accounts highlight the potential for violence – physical or otherwise – when moving about in
public spaces that is a theme running through each of my interviews, to different degrees. The examples above also begin to identify some of the many tactics that are used to deal with the problems that can arise.

Navigating the City

The first part of this chapter dealt with some of the ways that mobilities become (or do not become) accessible to young people and to queer people. Here I want to move beyond looking at mobilities alone to examine some of the different contexts in which they are leveraged. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, where ‘youth’ and ‘queer’ identifications intersect, mobilities may become considerably more difficult to access. Because mobilities are leveraged as individuals move in space, across time, and while situated in a sociocultural world, these are the four contexts\textsuperscript{27} that underlie and give shape to the way people are \textit{able} to move: the individual, the spatial, the temporal, and the sociocultural. These contexts, then, should be read here as the disentangled sets of circumstances – both existential (time; space) and emergent (individuals; society) – that together provide the setting for mobilities to play out and issues to arise. As this study was carried out on the Gold Coast, the city and its residents form part of the context – in Thrift’s (1996, p. 3) sense as something active and engaged – for the daily efforts of getting around, for me and for the queer young people I interviewed.

In the conversations I had with my participants, and in my own experiences of growing up queer on the Gold Coast, a range of issues presented themselves which fall broadly in line with these four contexts in which all people are unavoidably implicated while getting around and living day-to-day. Spatial issues arose due to the physical arrangement of places and spaces on the Gold Coast. Terrain, distance and infrastructure (like roads and public transport networks) are all slow- or un-changing features of the spatial context in which we necessarily move and conduct our lives. Moreover, in a city marked by the particularly rapid development of certain structures and facilities (hotels, shopping centres, housing estates), public transport and road infrastructure is often built to service current rather than future needs. Temporal issues were created by circumstances like the ebbs and flows of traffic, tourist seasons, regular

\textsuperscript{27} I note a technical difference between my use of ‘contexts’ here, as a way of describing different ‘settings’ as well as the conceptual lens that focuses my analysis thereupon, and Nigel Thrift’s (1996, p. 3) ‘context’, mentioned in Chapter 1, which would subsume my four contexts within its ambit.
and irregular citywide or local events in various parts of the city. They are situations occurring in the temporal context affecting our lives at some moments, but not others. Where one might expect a spatial issue (e.g., road infrastructure) to always be present, a temporal issue (e.g., road traffic) might not. Sociocultural issues arose from actual and potential interactions with other people and their culture(s). Sociocultural issues impacted our lives directly when they confronted us in our interactions with other people, and indirectly when we considered their likelihood and modulated our lives to avoid or minimise their impact. Finally, individual issues were dependent upon matters of our own biographical particularity. A person’s degree of dependence on others, access to wealth, place of residence, where they needed to travel to, and so on are examples of individual issues, each of which affects mobility differently. Though individual issues inevitably occurred within the other contexts (for example, in one’s place of residence, which is also a spatial context), they are individual issues inasmuch as they arise from a person’s unique life history and circumstances.

While I have disentangled these contexts here for the sake of analysis, in practice they are not experienced in isolation from one another; they are lived in, always, at the same time. The issues that reveal themselves in the various contexts spill over their bounds: they are intersectional issues also, and they demonstrate the ways in which disadvantage is not linked solely to dimensions of identity, but also to time, space and sociocultural interactions. Such issues shape the lives of those who are confronted by them. They reveal the complexities of life, where structure and history meet agency and biography; the emergence of what seems like the cruelties of chance, that things happened just so, but need not have done. The remaining subsections of this chapter provide an overview of some issues (but certainly not all) that arose in each of the four contexts for my participants and me while living on the Gold Coast. These range from those that affect the lives of people in general, to specific issues that arose for us, often due to our queerness and our categorisation as ‘youth’. I conclude this chapter with a return to the intersectional, and consider the value of a multi-perspectival view.

**Individual**

Issues that arose in individual contexts are the most difficult to generalise, because they depend on a person’s singularity; their having been ‘produced in the process of reducing possibility’ (Probyn
That is, as a person’s identity is constituted in relation with the social world they find themselves in, and as it is variegated by their specificity – or what Probyn (1996, p. 22) calls ‘zones of possible forms of belonging: being lesbian, being Welsh, being woman, being red, etc.’ – the things that set us apart describe a singularity; ‘exclusive actuality’ (p. 24) that is more than just the sum of its specificity. Thus, individual contexts are also singular, but always intertwined with the spatial, the temporal, and the sociocultural contexts in which they are embedded and with which they overlap. For some of my participants, their individual circumstances meant significant access to wealth, independence from parents and other people, a stable and central place of residence, easily accessible places of study and work, and other privileges. For others, their experience was less marked by abundance and freedom. Individual contexts, which necessarily differed for each of my participants and for me, are therefore set apart as a section because for each person their particular context anchors personal experience; living outside of it is impossible. It is also placed first because I wish to emphasise the importance of keeping in mind that an issue revealing itself in any one context may be experienced by all, but its impact on an individual’s life depends on the intersectional ways in which that issue interacts with that individual life.

Below I address in turn the spatial, temporal, and sociocultural contexts of living on the Gold Coast as experienced by my participants and by me. I then conclude this chapter with a return to the intersectional, and the value of a multi-perspectival view in a dynamic system.

**Spatial**

Viewed from above, the Gold Coast is vaguely rectangular – longer from north-to-south than from east-to-west – but narrower in the middle, as though cinched in around its waist. While the city has clear boundaries on paper (City of Gold Coast 2017), in actuality these borders are largely unmarked, except for a handful of signs and symbolic dividers in Tugun and Coolangatta along the main roads south out of the Gold Coast and the State of Queensland. These dividers symbolise the convergence/abutment of the states of Queensland and New South Wales, ‘two communities working together’ (Monument Australia 2010). To the north, a sign hangs on a highway overpass: ‘City of Logan’. Between the Gold Coast and its northern neighbour, farmland, sparse residential and industrial areas fill the gap.

As a condition of Gold Coast life, the city’s proximity to the New South Wales border and its
‘Far North Coast’ (relative to the rest of the state) plays into conceptions of the city and its residents, often in an oppositional relationship. This relationship is revealed especially in comparisons between the Tweed Heads region, just south of the state border, and the Gold Coast. For example, when the Tweed Shire Council and NSW State Government developed plans for a central business district including new residential and employment opportunities, as well as ‘increasing the allowable heights and floor space of buildings in some parts of the city centre to better reflect the role of Tweed as the capital of the Far North Coast’ (Noffke 2010), the Tweed mayor of the time, Warren Polglase, maintained that ‘It will never be a Gold-Coast-type area’ (quoted in Noffke 2010). This label, ‘Gold-Coast-type area’, is likely a reference to the towering skyline of Surfers Paradise and its dense population; Surfers Paradise and the Gold Coast are often conflated. This relationship of definition by opposition plays an important role in the self-understanding of the Gold Coast.

To the west, an escarpment known as the Hinterland borders the city. The Hinterland features several national parks and state forests, as well as the main fresh-water reservoir for the Gold Coast City. This region and its surrounds are home to Tamborine National Park, Nerang National Park, Lamington National Park, Springbrook National Park and the Hinze Dam catchment area. Each of these areas (except the Hinze Dam catchment) is governed by a principle of ‘permanent preservation of the area’s natural condition and the protection of the area’s cultural resources and values’ (Department of National parks, Sports and Racing 2014). Development to the west, then, is constricted by the boundaries of these National Parks that are ‘set aside forever’ from human interference (ibid.). Development to the east of the city is obstructed too, by the Pacific Ocean.

A further constraining force, in addition to these frontiers of mountain and ocean, is the network of rivers and over four hundred kilometres of constructed canals that joins the Coomera River to the Nerang River and the Broadwater – an estuary between the Gold Coast mainland and Stradbroke Island (Gold Coast City Council 2015). These human-made waterways and natural rivers reduce the land available to be developed in the Strip, ‘a narrow sand bar between the beach and the lesser known Nerang River’ (Hassell 2011) running from Main Beach to Mermaid Beach.

Of course, these constraining ‘walls’ continue to be buffeted by the ongoing development of the
Gold Coast in pursuit of a consumer desire for waterfront living:

The key driver behind the development of the Gold Coast urban framework is the historic connection to the water’s edge, either as beachfront or canal frontage. Water access and water views have driven built form through each successive period. As population and building scale has increased in the corridor, water access and views have continued to drive the city’s dominant building typologies to serve market forces, often to the detriment of the quality of the urban street environment. (Hassell 2011)

Hugging the beachfront from Southport to Broadbeach, the mixed-use skyscrapers of the high-density Strip – fringed by low-rise properties – give form to a cityscape like an undulating wave. This characteristic is recognised in the discourse of city planning literature: ‘the coastal strip, stretching from Coolangatta to Main Beach, provides the most significant visual image of the City’ (Gold Coast City Council 2011, p. 15). In that cityscape, what one would guess is the ‘downtown’ or ‘central business district’ of the Gold Coast is, in fact, not. As Wise (2012) writes:

While its concentration of high-rise buildings means that from any distance Surfers Paradise appears to be the ‘downtown’ of Gold Coast City, this is an illusion. The Gold Coast’s ‘downtown’ functions – banking and finance, local government headquarters, law courts, cultural institutions etc. are dispersed across other parts of the city. (p. 115, note 31)

The city encompasses several different ‘clusters’ of business, residential and leisure sites that nestle within variously urban, suburban, peri-urban, rural and sub-tropical landscapes. These clusters abut one another, and their boundaries are permeable and often invisible. The slippage from rainforest to cityscape happens smoothly here.

As the more densely populated zones along and surrounding the Gold Coast’s central shoreline reach capacity and increase in price, development is forced to move further outward into the north and south of the region. Under the 2015 Draft City Plan, these outer Gold Coast regions are broadly designated ‘Non-urban Areas’, except around the major arterial motorway that connects the city’s north-western-most point – and beyond to Brisbane – to its south-eastern-most point – and beyond to Sydney (City of Gold Coast 2017b). Tracing the city westward from its developed coastline we encounter the M1 Motorway, lower-density residential zones cluster on both sides of this artery, interspersed with stand-alone shopping and tourist destinations (and shopping malls as tourist destinations).

Limited by its location and shaped by its economic history as both non-Industrial and built for
beachfront leisure, the Gold Coast does not conform to the ‘traditional’ (that is, now Post-Industrial) layout of a city. Wise (2006) notes that ‘[n]one of the sedimented or concentric ring arrangements of familiar urban formations is present’ (pp. 177-8). Instead the Gold Coast is spread along seventy-five kilometres of Australia’s eastern coastline and covers approximately fourteen hundred square kilometres, stretching a little over thirty kilometres inland at its widest point. The structure of the Gold Coast, then, shaped by its terrain, borders, and a little over a century of Western settlement – preceded by approximately 23,000 years of habitation by the Yugambeh people – provides a narrowing of the possibilities for mobility within its limits.

The *Gold Coast City Transport Strategy 2031* notes that ‘the Gold Coast is made up of a large number of centres, with no dominant central business district. This city structure makes it challenging to provide high-quality public transport across multiple centres’ (Gold Coast City Council 2013, p. 2). On top of this, travel within the distinctively structured city is complicated by the expansion in population it has seen over the last four decades, its significant tourist numbers, and its projected growth into the future (Gold Coast City Council 2011, p. 3). At the 2011 Census, the population of the Gold Coast was 494,501 persons in usual residence (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013a). This was 11.41% of the population of the state of Queensland, at 4,332,739 persons (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013b). The city’s population as at 30 June 2016 was estimated to be 567,644 residents, or 11.72% of Queensland’s population (Queensland Government Statistician’s Office 2017). Add to this the 3,543,000 domestic and 804,000 international visitors to the Gold Coast in the year ending March 2014, for a total of 4,347,000 people just visiting (Tourism and Events Queensland 2014). Almost ten times the full population of the Gold Coast passes through the city as tourists each year.28 These circumstances compound a situation in which the city’s transport infrastructure is under significant pressure (Gold Coast City Council 2013, p.1).

A single train line services the Gold Coast, beginning in Varsity Lakes and heading north to Brisbane City, through Robina, Nerang, Helensvale, Coomera and Ormeau. Trains run between Varsity Lakes and Brisbane at half-hour intervals, decreasing to fifteen-minute intervals during afternoon peak hours (Department of Transport and Main Roads 2016). Unfortunately, railway stations are set

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28 Since the Global Financial Crisis, although the numbers are unreliable, the number of tourists has halved. When I was turning 18 on the GC, 10 million tourists were coming each year - a truly cosmopolitan city. And yet, it is so hostile to queers.
significantly back from the main work and tourism centres of the Coast – Helensvale station is almost 9km directly, or just over 11km by road, from Southport; Nerang Station is almost 8km directly, or just over 11km by road, from Surfers Paradise (Google 2015). The first stage of a light rail service opened to the public in July of 2014 (Potts and Elder 2014). Stage one of the ‘G:link’, as it is called, runs from the Gold Coast University Hospital in Parkwood to Broadbeach, via sixteen stations, including at Southport, Main Beach and Surfers Paradise. The trams, running at between 7.5 and 30-minute intervals, have the capacity to carry up to 309 passengers each. A second stage of the light rail opened in December of 2017, extending the line from the Gold Coast University Hospital to Helensvale Station, connecting the two rail services (G:link 2018).

Both of these rail lines are oriented north-to-south. Along with the M1 Motorway, these three (major) routes are relatively effective high-capacity transit corridors, but they do not service passengers who wish to travel east-to-west (or vice versa). For this purpose, a network of connecting bus lines is in place. Dean (19, male, gay) pointed out some of the problems he had experienced with the longitudinal layout of the city’s public transport infrastructure:

If you’re going north to south, it can be annoying at times but it’s relatively okay. But if you ever try and go east to west on the Gold Coast, you’re fucked. Straight up and down the line, like, to Griffith [University] from Surfers [Paradise] or Southport, that’s probably the easiest you’ll get. But if you’re trying to go to Labrador, or Ashmore, or down to Robina, it is not easy. When I lived in Ashmore, I couldn’t get anywhere. It’s a 10 minute drive from Surfers Paradise and there’s not a bus that goes between the two.

This entire transport infrastructure is, of course, subject to the ebb and flow of people from home to work, school, various leisure sites, and back again, as it shares roads with private vehicles. Despite the provision of bus to rail links, and because of the multi-centred layout of the city affecting the rollout of an integrated rail system as in Melbourne, Sydney or even Brisbane, ‘88 per cent of trips on the Gold Coast are made in cars and public transport use is low’ (Gold Coast City Council 2013, p. 2). For those who do not own a car and do not live near a train or light rail station, travelling within the Gold Coast can mean extended periods of time in-transit and multiple route transfers.29

29 Not to mention the cost associated with using the public transport system’s perhaps ironically named ‘go card’.
**Temporal**

In addition to the daily flows of people around the city, whether to school, work, leisure sites or elsewhere, the Gold Coast is home to ‘at least one major event in the city each month of the year’ (Gold Coast Events n.d.), and ‘many family-friendly, free and low-cost events taking place across the Gold Coast every week’ (Gold Coast City Council 2014b). Each of these events produces its own eddies and currents in the flow of people from place to place: ‘Events have specific transport needs, requiring high numbers of people to be moved, often to a single location, within a small window of time’ (Gold Coast City Council 2013, p. 2).

While the Gold Coast is not as subject to traditional tourist seasons as other destinations are – ‘Formal seasons are less apparent with an average of 300 days of sunshine a year’ (Gold Coast Tourism 2018) – there are discernable patterns in visitors. Middle Eastern tourists, for example, ‘come during the quieter winter season escaping searing summer temperatures back home’ (Stolz 2011), while ‘the peak season for Chinese visitors is December, when parents fly down to attend their children’s graduation ceremonies’ (Wen & O’Sullivan 2013) – an offshoot of the market for international students studying abroad on the Gold Coast for a semester or frequently, a whole undergraduate or postgraduate degree. Domestic tourists favour the Australian school holiday periods and weekends for obvious reasons. Indeed:

The diverse business and leisure tourism products attract domestic and international visitors year round, offsetting the seasonal peaks and troughs traditionally experienced by seaside destinations. (Gold Coast City Council 2014)

Because of the year-round flow of tourists, and despite the particularities of visitors from one location or another, the existing infrastructure network must also cope with non-residents travelling to and from locations that may not fall in with the regular flows of city traffic and public transport use.

**Sociocultural**

Despite these cosmopolitan flows of tourists and temporary residents, Queensland has a reputation as Australia’s most conservative state, ‘consistently [supporting] the [conservative] Coalition at Federal elections by more than the national average’ (Goodman 2013), as well as serving as the birthplace of right-wing political parties such as One Nation in 1997 (Pauline Hanson’s One Nation 2015) and
Katter’s Australian Party in 2011 (Lion 2011). This conservative bent is especially problematic in Queensland in particular because the state parliament is unicameral, having abolished the Legislative Council – ‘the institution with the greatest potential form limiting executive dominance’ (Sharman 1987, p. 47) – in 1922. Queensland is the only state in Australia to have a single parliamentary house, and Sharman uses Queensland’s experience as an example of the potential negative outcomes for such an arrangement, writing that ‘the conduct of the unicameral parliament in Queensland speaks powerfully for the costs that may be incurred if legislative councils are removed’ (ibid.). The ‘costs’ Sharman refers to here are drawn from Coaldrake (1985), and include the burden placed on the Legislative Assembly’s resources by ‘the entire responsibility for the construction and consideration of legislation’ (pp. 220-21), an ‘abject incapability’ of securing government accountability (p. 221), and ‘a confidence – even an arrogance – among successive governments… about the seemingly unbridled nature of Cabinet authority in Queensland’ (ibid.). Ultimately, Queensland has no parliamentary protection from the ‘tyranny of the majority’ and none of the benefits of burden relief otherwise provided by an upper house.

In research conducted Australia-wide by Roy Morgan in 2001, 42% of respondents from Queensland said they believed homosexuality is immoral – the greatest percentage in the country, exceeding Tasmania and Western Australia at 39% each. Results from research conducted between 2008 and 2010, again asking if respondents agreed with the statement ‘I believe homosexuality is immoral’, showed that the three highest-rating electorates in Australia (agreeing with the statement) were from Queensland, with Wright – which captures the westernmost area of the Gold Coast – as the second-highest rating electorate (at 44.1%) (Roy Morgan 2010). Indeed, five out of the ten highest-rating electorates and only one of the thirty-five lowest-rating electorates were located in Queensland; McPherson – the Gold Coast’s southernmost and lowest-rating electorate (24.4%) – comes in twenty-sixth (ibid.).

**Intersectional**

Having disentangled the various contexts in which issues arise, it becomes clear that it is the way these contexts overlap – intersect – in the life of the individual that is central to the emergence, or not, of disadvantage, marginalisation and violence. Further, relatively small differences in one of these contexts
can mean significant differences in the issues that the people living within them may experience. While it is not helpful to compare people in such a way that we are counting dis/advantages to reach a definitive answer for which particular constellation of characteristics leads to the most marginalised position, in this study an intersectional approach is very useful for drawing attention to the different effects that structures, institutions, rules, and norms have in the lives of different people.

More than just a ‘context’ in the way I have deployed the term above, an intersectional approach calls for a roving eye that moves across, between and through perspectives. Mobilising such a multi-perspectival view has been critical for this project, given the need to engage with the stories of so many different people whose backgrounds, belongings, and identities are, in many ways, incommensurate with one another. The multiplicity of identity categories – or, in Probyn’s (1996, p. 22) terms, the ‘zones of possible forms of belonging’ – that we occupy, and the pragmatic recognition that ‘we do not live our lives as general categories’ (ibid), means an intersectional approach to oppression, discrimination and violence necessarily moves between perspectives, across different scales of time and space, and accounts for effects that are not merely additive but may result from unexpected interactions.

The law, for example, before which all people – despite our specificity – are supposed to be held equal (United Nations 2015, Article 7), is not always free from discrimination. In Queensland, until 2016 – with the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 2017 – there existed a ‘gay panic’ defence against a murder charge, whereby the accused could claim that their (same-sex) victim was making sexual advances against which they defended themself. While a successful gay panic defence would not acquit the accused of a murder charge, it would reduce their culpability.30 The very existence of a gay panic defence suggests first that same-sex romantic overtures are something that may be defended against with deadly force, and second that the life of a queer person (real or imagined) is worth less in its taking than a straight person, due to the reduced punishment assigned.

At various points in history, laws have been struck down for having discriminated against particular groups of people in opposition to their ‘inalienable right’ to be free from prejudicial treatment. In Australia, a number of Commonwealth Acts have been established at the federal level to protect

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30 The partial defence existed under §304 of the Criminal Code Act 1899 (Qld) whereby a person committing an act that would be considered murder, but for an unwanted sexual advance, would be guilty of manslaughter only.
people from certain kinds of discrimination, including on the basis of race (Racial Discrimination Act 1975), sex (Sex Discrimination Act 1984), disability (Disability Discrimination Act 1992) and age (Age Discrimination Act 2004). On 1 August 2013, the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Act 2013 amended the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, making it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity under a range of circumstances, including in offers of employment (§14), in the provision of education and accommodation (§21; §23), and in admission into clubs (§25). Notably, religious bodies and education institutions established for religious purposes are exempt from these measures to ‘avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of that religion or creed’ (§37; §38). What might happen if a girl attending a religious school comes out as a lesbian? What might happen if a formerly male teacher in a religious school reveals she is trans and will begin living as a woman? Under the Act, if the student’s sexual orientation or the teacher’s gender identity are not ‘in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of a particular religion or creed’ observed by their educational/employing institution, then the student may be expelled, and the teacher may be dismissed (§38). Whether or not this hypothetical student and this hypothetical teacher are ‘equal before the law’ is not so important as the realisation that, for those whose sexual orientations/gender identities align with the religious observations, there is protection from discrimination; for others, whose sexual orientations/gender identities are not in alignment with the religious observations, there is legal discrimination. For others again, whose sexual orientations/gender identities appear to align with the religious observations (whether they are not out, or passing), there is a situation reminiscent of the United States’ Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy.\footnote{‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ was a U.S. policy, announced by former President Bill Clinton (1993), regarding a ban on homosexuals in the military. Its name describes the ‘practice… of not asking about sexual orientation in the enlistment procedure’, but where ‘an open statement by a service member that he or she is a homosexual will create a rebuttable presumption that he or she intends to engage prohibited conduct’. The resulting situation was one in which the only way a queer person could serve in the military was under a shroud of silence regarding their sexuality.} The point is that, in this extended example, the intersection of the same law, religious body and educational institution in spatial, temporal and sociocultural contexts with different personal characteristics in individual contexts (straight student/lesbian student; cis-sexed teacher/trans teacher) results in different outcomes: acceptance, education or employment for some, and discrimination, expulsion or dismissal for others.
CHAPTER 4: QUEERS IN SCHOOLS

That’s so gay…

In the language of my high school, a private Christian co-educational college in a northern Gold Coast suburb, ‘gay’ meant ‘bad’. Consider its use in the universally dismissive, ‘that’s [so] gay’ (insert or remove ‘so’ to taste). The thing, the event – whatever it is – isn’t good, it’s shit, it’s fucked, it’s gay. The term was quite flexible, too. The degree of badness to which it could refer spanned anything from slight inferiority to monumental disgrace. Only secondarily did it refer to sexuality – exclusively male homosexuality – though usually ‘fag’ was the word of choice where a word for that was required (or its more formal appellation, ‘faggot’). Every time I heard the word ‘gay’ in the classroom or the schoolyard, I winced inwardly, afraid for a fleeting moment that it was directed at me, and also afraid to be seen reacting. I still wince – no longer inwardly – when I hear it used pejoratively by a person I know, but for a different reason. Now it is with disgust, rather than fear. In school, when I was still ‘in the closet’ and then later when I was only out to a few close friends, I suffered silently.

I’m almost amused at my younger self, thinking back on how cutting the word was to me, each time it passed the lips of some kid I was forced to spend most of my waking hours with every school day. I’m not quite so delicate, these days. I understand the intended separation, as it is deployed in the speech of (mostly) young people, between ‘gay’ as a synonym of ‘bad’ and ‘gay’ as referring to a sexual orientation or identity. They are homonyms, almost. But the only way ‘gay’ is able to mean ‘bad’ is by its very association with queer sexuality. Calling a thing ‘gay’ denigrates it by impugning its masculinity, which is – in the system that undergirds these structures – a straight masculinity. The separation between the two meanings must be imagined into being, because it doesn’t exist to begin with. ‘Gay’ always already means both bad and fag at the same time, in such speech. This is why the argument that goes ‘I didn’t mean it like that’ holds so little water for me. As Bahktin (1981) put it, ‘there are no “neutral” words and forms—words and forms that can belong to “no one”; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents’ (p. 293). Bahktin writes of the ‘taste’ of a word (ibid.), and I find this

32 For the sake of privacy, in part, I do not name my school here. It would not be difficult to find it out with the aid of the internet. Even so, I made a conscious decision to leave my school unnamed because, in many ways, it was a good school, and also because it could be any school.
fitting. Whenever one of my schoolmates used ‘gay’ as a pejorative term – and this occurred regularly – it left a bitter taste in my mouth, as if just by hearing the word I had said it myself. Anti-queer language, even without anti-queer intent, is still anti-queer. This is the reason ‘reclaimed’ terms like gay and queer are double-edged swords. They can still be taken up and wielded as insults, both against the sexual minorities they directly target and those to be denigrated by likening them to us. Archaic or surpassed meanings are long in dying. The language of my peers, people that I generally liked for the most part, was ‘populated–overpopulated–with the intentions of others’ (p. 294). Each time they called a thing, an act, or a person gay, even without its pejorative intent, the word retained the bite with which others had long ago imbued it.

The use of anti-queer language was common enough at my school, but it was not the worst of things to confront a young queer kid just trying to get by. Indeed, my teachers reprimanded students who used anti-queer language whenever they were caught. Many of these teachers were wonderful mentors to me and they were never homophobic (that I saw), despite the religious creed of my school. Even as the teachers stamped out instances of anti-queer speech, the language that came naturally to my peers was undergirded by a pervasive system of heteronormativity at an institutional level, which reflected (and refracted, through a religious lens) the wider society in which my school sat. This system maintained the normative presentation of sex, gender and sexuality from students as it worked through the organisation of and interactions between the school’s various apparatuses – its policies, its architecture, its staff. At the time I attended the school, regularly confronted by expectations that I be other than how I wished to be, I often felt out of place and overwhelmed for reasons I couldn’t quite pin down. Only looking back, with the benefit of understandings gained from queer studies and gender studies, do I now recognise the scale of this systemic heteronormativity and the different ways in which its rules were quietly, and not so quietly, enacted.

My first encounter with the systemic heteronormativity permeating the organisation of the school occurred at the beginning of 2001 when I met the headmaster. My parents and I had an appointment to meet him before I could be enrolled in Year 8 (my second first year of high school, thanks to my relocation from Victoria, where students start secondary education in Year 7). This large, gruff man spoke
fluently in sporting metaphors, able to relate almost anything in some way to rugby union and cricket (his two favourite games). As we toured the school grounds, I asked if there were any ‘tech’ classes I could take, like woodworking, metalworking, and the like. I had taken such a class at my previous school and found that I quite enjoyed it. The headmaster shook his head and described the school as a ‘sporting and academic college’, which was a way of saying, by exclusion, that it did not have any kind of manual arts curriculum. The order in which he gave the terms should have been telling: sporting then academic. In addition to attending the usual academic classes (English, mathematics, and so on), participation in regular team sport against other nearby schools was compulsory.

Through the team sports that played such a significant role in school life, several layers of separation were enacted between boys and girls, and these were regulated in obvious and subtle ways. At whole-school assemblies, the Head of Sport would give presentations about the rugby boys’ performance in the past week (the most skilled team of which were known especially as the First Fifteen), or the achievements of the cricketers (also boys) in their most recent match. Girls played netball in place of rugby and softball in place of cricket, and while their exploits were followed, their teams did not have any special designations or place of prominence in the school’s ongoing regard for its own sporting culture. The other sports played at the school (tennis, soccer, hockey, volleyball) had both boys’ and girls’ teams – never integrated – and these received passing mention. Rugby and cricket, however, played only by boys and coached only by men, always received disproportionate attention.

Physical distance was maintained through separate training and competition sites for boys and girls, on our school’s grounds, at other schools, and at independent venues for ‘away’ games. This separation occurred even for the sports both the boys and girls played, where their teams could have trained together (though sometimes they did train against one another in ‘friendly’ matches – yet another partitioning of the sexes). Separation was also maintained symbolically, through the use of visual indicators such as gendered uniforms, but also through a dress code that called for gendered grooming – short hair and clean-shaven faces for boys; ‘natural’ hair, tied back for girls, among other stipulations: a whole bodily regime of maintaining boys as boys and girls as girls.

Having separated the boys from the girls, the focus of school officials like the Head of Sport on
male/masculine endeavours meant that the endeavours of females and those pursuing other activities were given less attention over less time, having been placed – intentionally or not – in a subordinate position. While the school also had thriving curricular and extra-curricular music, theatre, art and dance scenes, outside of academic achievement the ‘cultural’ came in second place to sport, with its stark gender segregation and disproportionate focus on boys’ performance.

In addition to the inter-school team sports competitions, each year, the entire school was pitted against itself in seasonal sporting ‘carnivals’ – swimming in summer, cross-country running in autumn, and athletics in winter – to vie for the ‘House Crystal’. These carnivals held anything but a feeling of the carnivalesque for me, especially the dreaded swimming carnival which stipulated that boys must wear what were affectionately known as ‘DTs’, or ‘dick togs’ (a.k.a. ‘Speedos’). In Grade 10, at the height of summer on the day of the swimming carnival, I decided that I’d had rather enough of parading around a pool wearing what was essentially underwear in front of the entire school populace. I was already uncomfortable with my pubescent body, as are many people at that time of life, and this discomfort was compounded by the fear that, when surrounded by other mostly-nude male bodies, I would somehow be found out. While I learned to overlook instances when my peers used ‘gay’ in conversation, the lingering understanding remained in my mind that gay people were not welcome. It was an understanding developed over time and from different sources. It was learned in sex education class, when the kind of sex I knew I wanted went unmentioned; when the very existence of non-heterosexualities was overlooked; and when the only kind of sex discussed was reproductive penile/vaginal penetrative sex. It was learned in schoolyard discussions among my peers about who kissed whom, and who touched whom, and which kids were the first to lose their virginity, and these were always discussions about straight couplings. It was learned through snickering that went on behind the backs of certain boys who were involved in ‘feminine’ extracurricular activities (dance, ice-skating) and what that snickering said about their manliness, and thus their sexuality – yet another example of the convergence of sex, gender and sexuality in heteronormativity. These lessons and many more formed a ‘hidden curriculum’ (Jackson 1990) that taught and continually reinforced the normalcy, the naturalness of heterosexuality, and through their resounding silence on queer sexualities, taught that these were unwelcome. The requirement that I
strip down and swim in Speedos, together with my sense that queer people – that I – shouldn’t be present, made the swimming carnival a site of significant angst and potential humiliation.

So I refused to swim. Or I would have refused, if that had been an option. Participation in the swimming carnival was mandatory, so I confected an excuse not to join in. The morning of the carnival, I borrowed a palette of my mother’s eye shadow and went about producing a large, multi-coloured bruise on my upper thigh where my shorts would hide it from constant view. Beginning with a deep purple centre, I built up a reddish-orange ring around it, and finished it off by fading out into green and yellow. This, I still believe, was one of my greatest masterpieces. Though it glittered ever so slightly if you looked closely enough, this was only an issue in direct sunlight. In addition to the limp I aped, the faux-contusion sufficed for the brief flash to my teacher that I needed to get out of swimming. Only one student asked me about my ‘injury’ that day. I let her in on the secret and we both sat in the shade of the swimming pool grandstand, smug in our excuses (she had chosen period cramps), decidedly not being humiliated. More importantly, I wasn’t outed.

Schooling and the Hidden Curriculum

In Queensland, young people are considered to be of compulsory school age from six years and six month old until they turn 16, or complete Year 10 – whichever comes first. During this (almost) decade, young people are required to be enrolled in a school, and to attend for around six hours on every ‘school day’, or just over half the days in a year. Schooling, then, comprises a significant portion of a young person’s life. This means that young people are mandated to have attended school on a little under a third of all the days they’ve been alive by the time they turn 16. Schooling is, then, of particular interest because it occupies so much of a young person’s life, and because it impacts their development in so many ways. Because students are also future citizens, schools are also an investment in the future of society. What a ‘good’ citizen looks like, and thus, what a student should be taught, depends on who is looking. The rest of this chapter is concerned with schooling as it pertains to queer young people. While I focus in part on the formal sex education curriculum included (or not) in Queensland schools currently

33 Educations (General Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld, Part 5, §9).
34 This does not include Prep, which has preceded Grade 1 as the first year of schooling in Queensland since 2007, nor does it include kindergarten programs, which ‘help to prepare children for the Prep year’ (Queensland Government 2015a).
and in the past experiences of my interviewees, I am especially interested in the ‘hidden curriculum’ to which queer young people are subjected, and which shapes them in particular ways.

Jackson (1990) is credited with coining the term ‘hidden curriculum’ to refer to a set of demands produced by various features of school life (being around peers, being rewarded for achievement, being subject to school officials’ commands, and so on) that students, as well as teachers, must learn to navigate. These demands are ‘… represented by three R’s, but not the familiar ones of reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic. It is, instead, the curriculum of rules, regulations, and routines’ (Jackson 1966, p. 353). The demands of the hidden curriculum run alongside the ‘official’ curriculum, and may in fact contradict it. Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (2003) conceptualise the hidden curriculum more broadly than Jackson, suggesting instead that it is ‘all the things that are learnt during schooling in addition to the official curriculum’ (p. 65). Walton (2005), writing about the effects of the hidden curriculum on LGBTQ youth, understands it similarly as ‘student learning that takes place within the perimeter of a school that is not recorded or reflected within the official curriculum’ (p. 18). What these later conceptions have in common is an understanding of the hidden curriculum as a process of learning that occurs in the ‘negative space’ of official curricula: all the learning that isn’t intended/expected/documented by those who aim to teach.

A second advantage of the broader conceptions of ‘hidden curriculum’ is how they shift what constitutes its curriculum. Where Jackson (1966, p. 353) took the hidden curriculum to be the things students are expected to learn – the rules, regulations and routines of schooling – the more recent conceptions point instead to what students actually learn from these institutional expectations. Further, because the ‘hidden’ in ‘hidden curriculum’ is so ambiguous and encompasses expectations that have been intentionally obscured, unintentionally produced, and even lost, forgotten or neglected (Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford 2003), it is much more difficult to assign intention. In any case, ‘[t]he outcomes of “hidden” may be more significant than the reasons’ (68, my emphasis), precisely because there may not actually be any reasons for an institution’s expectations, even as they are inscribed in the living body of its students as learned outcomes.

In his foreword to the 2010-11 Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (2010) annual
report, Commissioner Kevin Cocks writes that ‘across the broader Queensland community there is … a culture of exclusion of certain groups based upon attributes covered by the Anti-Discrimination Act including race, religion, sexuality, impairment, and gender identity’ (pp. 2-3). More than two decades after the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 became law, queer people in Queensland continue to suffer the lingering effects of bigotry that had been present in the law for so long it became normalised and embedded in the values of society. In the same year as the passing of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991, Wotherspoon (1991) wrote that ‘even after ostensible religious “justifications” have long passed away, the prejudice and bigotry they created will live on’ (p. 25). Since many of the laws of Australia are derived, originally, from ecclesiastical law, the prejudices of traditional Judeo-Christian sects concerning sex, sexuality and gender passed unquestioned into our legal frameworks. Many instances of residual legislative prejudice have been identified, debated and amended. And yet some prejudices have been more recently injected into our laws, as in the Marriage Act 1961 (Cwlth), which was amended in 2004 to provide a legislative definition of marriage as ‘the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life’ (§5). Schools, as core social institutions, cannot be immune to the inherited norms and values that target queer people. Indeed, they are complicit in their reproduction.

Schools are microcosms of their wider societies. Jackson (1966) writes that in attending school, students are thrust into two worlds – ‘the world of the institution and the world of scholarship’ (p. 356). The latter, comprising the official curriculum, teaches students to read, write, solve equations, and so on, through its documented and timetabled academic classes, while the former teaches students to comply with often implicit rules, regulations and routines – institutional demands that form part of the hidden curriculum. To the worlds of institution and scholarship I would add the world of school social relations, which imposes further demands on students from their peers, their teachers, and the wider school community. These three worlds together comprise the field across which a full curriculum, both official and hidden, works: a machine deploying many parts and operations to ensure that, as effectively as possible given how students differ in their capacities, culture reproduces itself in and through students,

35 This legal definition of marriage, which stipulated the requirement for one man and one woman in a couple to be marriageable, was only introduced to the Act by the Howard Government in the Marriage Amendment Act 2004 (Cwlth). Prior to this intervention, marriage had not been explicitly defined in Australian law. The definition stood until the Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Act 2017 (Cwlth) replaced the words ‘a man and a woman’ with ‘2 people’ (p. 5).
passing on its dominant understandings, values and norms. As Walton (2005) writes:

Curriculum as a cultural mechanism is … hegemonic in how it serves dominant interests not through sheer repression of the underprivileged, but through social practices that are normalized over time and mask the ways in which the disadvantaged participate in their own repression. (p. 19)

Through this cultural mechanism all students, with varying degrees of self-recognition and reflexivity, are instilled with heteronormative values despite their own (perhaps latent) desires. Through a hidden curriculum that, daily, championed heteronormativity and practiced anti-queer discourses, I learned that people like me were unwelcome at school. So I developed tactics that I thought would allow me to survive. My response was to get through school without being found out. By taking the measures I did to hide, and thus preserve myself, I avoided the exclusion – or worse, the retribution – that I feared from others. But the workings of the hidden curriculum are insidious. Others did not punish me; I punished myself. I had built into myself the understanding that I shouldn’t be seen, so I self-silenced. I hid. I ‘passed’. I was complicit in my own sexual invisibility.

The process of self-silencing/self-exclusion is discussed further in the next chapter. For now, I mean to focus on the outcomes of the hidden curriculum: in terms of effects on and for queer young people, and tactics of survival developed in response to these effects. One effect of my school’s hidden curriculum was to instil in me a fear of being outed as queer. It also spurred me to develop and deploy a survival tactic, unique to that time and place, that let me avoid participating in an event that I was afraid would out me. I strive to avoid making moral judgements as to the ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’ of hidden curriculum outcomes and corresponding survival tactics because these outcomes are real in that they are lived (and telling someone that they should simply feel otherwise is futile), and because survival tactics are cobbled together on-the-fly (and need not be perfect to work). What I am interested in doing is pointing out that queer young people are forced to participate in a world that at the same time refuses our full participation. In response to such a state of affairs, we sound out the rules as best we can, try to figure out what is expected of us, and then get by in whatever ways we think might work.

Learning to get by in school may very well mean choosing between contradictory demands. Because ‘students themselves, as well as school officials, contribute to the hidden curriculum’ (Walton 2005, p. 21), at any moment there are a number of different ‘authorities’ imposing their demands, to
which students may or may not adhere. Jackson (1966) points out that there are thus a number of costs to be weighed up by students in deciding which demands to comply with as they go about their school days:

The cost of scholastic success must be measured not only in terms of the intellectual energy expended or the non-academic gratifications denied. For many students there is also a social cost. The students who accede willingly and sincerely to both the intellectual and the institutional demands of the school run the risk of being perceived as defectors by their peers. (p. 355)

From one perspective, students are expected to perform academically in a way that would require curiosity, creativity and rigour; an ‘intellectual aggressiveness’ (ibid.). From another perspective, students are expected to routinise their lives, following rules and commands without disturbance; an ‘organised docility’ (ibid.) to paraphrase Jackson. On top of this, students are also expected to interact on an interpersonal level: with the teachers who instruct them, the peers who work alongside them, and the various others who move in the social world of the school (administrators, counsellors, parents, community members, and so on). This requires an ongoing and multidirectional social performance that cannot possibly please everyone. The lessons contained in the official curriculum must compete alongside those of the hidden curriculum; which lesson takes priority for any particular student at any particular moment depends on too many variables to enumerate. Situated simultaneously in the academic, institutional, and social worlds of the school, each of which is populated by differential demands, students must choose where to focus their attentions and which expectations they want to meet. Investing in one world might mean disinvesting in another, and thus failing its expectations by default.

It is also important to note that the demands placed on students by curricula (hidden and official) do not necessarily affect all students in the same way. In other words, a demand that one student can meet effortlessly may cause significant misery for another. Epstein’s (1995) passing observation that ‘boys who are “cissy” are usually punished more severely than girls who are “tomboys”’ (p. 59) is central to this point: the lessons of the hidden curriculum fall unevenly and with varying severity upon students depending upon who they are or who they appear to be. In the case of gender performance, even as appropriate gendered behaviour is rewarded and inappropriate gendered behaviour is punished, these rewards and punishments are not administered equally. To understand how children are gendered, Epstein draws upon Butler’s (1999) concept of the ‘heterosexual matrix’,
that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized. … [A] hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (p. 194)

This matrix depends upon the assumption of heterosexuality as a rule. Without a foundational understanding that bodies are always-already heterosexual, their oppositional (male vs. female) alignment in hierarchically gendered (masculine > feminine) relation to one another does not make sense. It is the pre-existing assumption of compulsory heterosexuality – a relation (‘-sexuality’) between two terms (the *thing* and its ‘hetero-*other*) – that sets the ‘male’ and ‘female’ sexes opposite one another in a binary. The two sexes then express ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ respectively, genders which are defined against one another: what is considered masculine requires a subordinate feminine against (and above) which to be constituted and rendered intelligible. All of these terms are naturalised in their ‘proper’ alignment through their *prima facie* application to all bodies as either one set or the other: male-masculine-attracted to women or female-feminine-attracted to men. Sex and gender, while the most visible registers of the heterosexual matrix in operation, are also ‘the naturalized terms that keep that matrix concealed and, hence, protected from a radical critique’ (p. 141). The very visibility of sex and gender allows the foundational assumption of compulsory heterosexuality to go on unnoticed. Indeed, the problem with trying to explain a system like the heterosexual matrix is that its entire purpose is to keep its inner workings unexplained, unseen and ineffable. Butler put its machinations into words, but she did so from within the same language system that is leveraged by hegemonic discourses that would define sex, gender and sexuality. At the same time as Butler worked to critique the heterosexual matrix, language itself – overpopulated by dominant understandings of the world – continued to reinforce it. Without the presumption of heterosexuality and the system of rewards and punishments that makes it compulsory, the terms of the heterosexual matrix would cease to be intelligible. There could still be genders, but they might be internally cohesive and defined by their contents rather than by an opposing term in a dominant-subordinate binary. There could still be sexes, but they might better encompass the range of human sexual difference that exists beyond genitalia. There could still be sexualities, but they might be fluid and polyvalent, less interested in what bodies look like than in what they can do. Sadly for those students who do not fit easily into the system as
it is, these ‘coulds’ are the product of idealism, and the heterosexual matrix will continue to exert its pressure to be one thing or the other (and nothing else) through the hidden curriculum.

The significant control that the heterosexual matrix wields over discourse on gender and sex(uality) is foregrounded by Epstein’s (1995) recognition that ‘there is no language other than the language of gender available’ (p. 59). The gendering of children begins before their existence as subjects, when they enter into the speech of others as in the questions to an expectant mother: ‘Do you know what you are having? Is it a boy or a girl?’ Any discussion of young children is likely to gender them. In addition to nouns that specifically and intentionally identify gender like ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ (as well as indicate age in this particular case, relative to ‘man’ and ‘woman’), there are statements like ‘Isn’t he such a good baby?’, ‘Oh, she’s just precious!’, and so on. Each time this occurs, a child is assigned a gender by the English system of gendered singular personal pronouns and our habitual assignation of subjectivity to humans (avoiding ‘it’). At the same time, the child is told his or her gender. In the schoolyard and in the classroom, the kind of linguistic precision it would take to avoid gendering students is unlikely to be important, if even possible, given the primary task of teaching the official curriculum. In my own teaching at the tertiary level, even as I try desperately to avoid doing so, I often catch myself addressing my classes with ‘ladies and gentlemen’. Epstein (1995) points out that ‘schools and classrooms constitute discursive fields within which meanings are produced about social relations of many kinds (including, particularly, age, class, gender/sexuality and race)’ (p. 67) and that ‘[t]he discourses in play will include and be drawn from those current in the world outside the school’ (ibid.). The world outside the school is a sexed and gendered world based upon an assumption of compulsory heterosexuality. Discourses in schools reflect this.

In Dude, You’re a Fag, Pascoe (2007) explores a particularly cogent example of the hidden curriculum’s more stringent expectations of correct gender performance for boys than girls. Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out over a year and a half in a United States high school, Pascoe describes a ‘fag’ identity, separate to a homosexual orientation, that can be inhabited by male students: ‘Any boy can temporarily become a fag in a given social space or interaction’ (p. 54). ‘Fag’, in Pascoe’s work, is an identity attached primarily to failed masculinity rather than failed heterosexuality, though the two terms of
reference are linked in the heterosexual matrix, where masculinity is defined and ordered by heterosexuality (p. 27). While students who are, or are perceived to be, homosexual are targeted by others for anti-queer harassment, Pascoe notes that ‘becoming a fag has as much to do with failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength or in any way revealing weakness or femininity as it does with a sexual identity’ (p. 54). While it is still an example of homophobia, becoming a fag is more a punishment for failing expectations of correct gender performance than of sexuality, even though these are expectations founded on normative heterosexuality. The imputation of failed masculinity occurs because of the homophobic connotation of ‘fag’, in that homosexuals are always-already considered to be failed men. Pascoe demonstrates this by recounting an exchange she had with ‘David’ who explained that ‘gay men could be men if they tried but if they failed at it … then they deserved to be called a fag’ (p. 58). Gay men can, then, be recuperated as (masculine) men by performing masculinity correctly, but they always-already begin from a position of not-men or ‘fagdom’. This disciplinary system, part of the hidden curriculum that teaches boys to be masculine by avoiding ‘becoming a fag’, is a gendered system at the same time that it is a gendering system. Pascoe points out that girls ‘rarely deployed the word fag and were never called fags’ (p. 56, original emphasis). For girls, a separate system existed in which ‘slut was the worst thing a girl could be called’ (ibid., original emphasis), and that term was deployed far less frequently: ‘one time for every eight times the word fag appeared’ (ibid., original emphasis). These are but two examples others have identified of the differential demands that hidden curricula make.

**Surviving School**

I noted above that the hidden curriculum deploys lessons that may contradict other curricular lessons, hidden or official, and that its lessons affect students differently depending on who they are or appear to be. While many of my participants’ mentioned their experiences of schooling in passing, it was not a central aspect of our discussions, as the focus was mainly on their current experiences of the Gold Coast. In this concluding section to the chapter, I draw on participants’ stories about getting through school, focusing on the expectations placed upon them by the hidden curriculum, and how they dealt with these.
For Grey (19, female, gay), sexuality and gender were policed explicitly though unofficially by both staff and students. Grey is a slight, caucasian girl who looks several years younger than she is. She is highly animated and talks rapidly, barely pausing to breathe when telling a story. Grey demonstrates a remarkable level of personal insight, discussing a complicated family background, troubling experiences of schooling, and plans for the future with constant references to her own complex feelings and motivations. Though Grey did not live with her family and had to work to support herself, she was passionate about her university studies and the opportunities these provided. I quote Grey at length given how many aspects of her experiences of the hidden curriculum she conveys in this part of the interview:

G: At school [my sexuality] was a big issue for me. I was… there was one other gay girl in my grade I think, but she wasn’t out until after school, and I went to a very big sporting school. We have all these really famous sporting people that came from our school, so it’s… and it’s a big school. It’s gotten bigger since I was there, but when I was there, there were two-thousand two-hundred students. It was busy… huge. There were a lot of sporting guys, a lot of throwing fruit at people, and just ridiculousness. And I was in that group that kind of forces together because they have nowhere else to go. The ‘lost-cause’ group. And yeah, I think I focussed really strongly on my own work because I had a lot going on at home, and I think it was my escape to go to school, but I wasn’t really big on friends. But with my sexuality, I think it was something that was really hard to deal with at school, because I came out in year eight, and…

B: At school?

G: At school, yeah, not by choice. I had a friend who I told, who told everyone. And that… it didn’t change a lot with people in my grade, but I noticed that when I got into older grades, a lot of the younger students were really rude. It was actually… a lot of the older students were just kind of… they were horrible people, because they were older, and they thought they were better than everyone and that kind of thing, but they were never outwardly rude to me about my sexuality. But a lot of the younger kids were really full-on. A lot of horrible, horrible things. A lot of yoghurt [being thrown] and just weird… like, following me around the school. Really intimidating. But I found the teachers to be the worst. With students you can just go somewhere else or you can avoid them, but I think the teachers were the worst part of it. I had a lot of teachers that didn’t like me because I was gay, and didn’t like me because I ‘interrupted their classes’ or whatever. I did Legal Studies. I was top of my grade for year 10 and year 11, and in year 12 we got a new teacher, and I did my major project for the year on LGBT in law, and gay marriage, and that kind of thing. And I was failed for it, and the entire time she said that I was doing the wrong thing, that it wasn’t going to work, that it was wrong, and I was wrong. And the same thing in my Art class, I had to drop out in year 11 – and he was fired, not for that, but the next year for something similar – because he failed my piece on gay marriage and religion – which I’d spent a lot of time on, and he still failed me on it. So I found that a lot of teachers were really narrow-minded and just didn’t agree with it. I was told, especially in Legal Studies and in year 12, to choose a safer topic. To do anything else, anything, rather than gay marriage. And anything I had to say in class, she wouldn’t pick me to talk, she would completely avoid me. And I failed because of that. My OP dropped to a 12 from an 8, which I found to be really horrible, because I tried so hard. So yeah, I think dealing with teachers was the worst part of my
high school, they really gave me a hard time about my sexuality.

There are three central points of Grey’s narrative that I wish to expand on. First is the difference Grey perceived in reactions to her sexuality between older and younger children. Second is the attempt by Grey’s teachers to implement a ‘chilling effect’ on her engagement with queer topics. And third is the issue of the (in)visibility of sexualities, which is a theme running through most of my participants’ stories, as well as my own. I address these three points respectively below.

Grey’s observation that it was the younger kids who were most unpleasant about her queer sexuality is significant. It suggests a deficit in the way children are educated about difference and diversity. Epstein (1995) notes the ‘great deal of social/cultural work’ that has gone into maintaining the male/female gender binary for a child by the time she or he enters institutional schooling, pointing out that ‘[i]t would in these circumstances be astonishing if the vast majority of 3 to 5 year-olds had not inscribed themselves well within the gender to which they had been ascribed’ (p. 59). Indeed, as I noted above, when parents can know the sex of their child before it is born, ‘the construction of [sexual] difference can now be extended to life in the womb. Parents can then actively construct the foetus as a gendered identity’ (Grieshaber 1998, p. 15). Recognising just how early in a child’s life sex and gender are ascribed provides a point of entry into understanding the different reactions that Grey experienced between younger and older students. Young children, unlike older children, do not have the benefit of time and experience to begin to undo the pervasive teachings of the heterosexual matrix.

Drawing from the experiences of several early childhood teachers in Australia, Glenda MacNaughton (2000) documents a number of exchanges in which young children perform traditional gender roles and enforce strict gender boundaries during their play and interactions. She also provides examples where such behaviours are changed through intervention, the modelling of alternatives, and open discussion with children about gender. This suggests that, while certainly dominant, these behaviours that are founded in an idea of concrete binary gender are not inevitable. MacNaughton argues that the prevalence of a ‘broader discourse in western society about childhood innocence’ (p. 95) has led to the idea of the ‘developing child’, emerging out of developmental psychology, being positioned as an organising principle in early childhood education. That the developing child (that is, every child) is
conceived as qualitatively different from adults in how and what they know – and indeed, in how they come to know – justifies dominant pedagogy that insists children are innocent of certain ideas, especially regarding sex, gender and sexuality, and that ‘we need to closely observe and supervise children in order to control their access to knowledge we consider safe for them’ (ibid.). MacNaughton suggests that understanding children as ‘gender innocent’ has the dual effect of silencing children’s voices in their own education and allowing educators to avoid dealing with complicated sociocultural issues around sex, gender and sexuality that are so often positioned as ‘private’ matters, with no place in the (necessarily separate) public sphere of schooling. Beyond enabling teachers to skirt potentially difficult discussions with students, the problem with this is that children are not ‘gender innocent’ in the first place. Indeed, Gerard Duveen (1993) argues that the binary masculine-feminine conceptual structure ‘influences how children interpret the world around them, while their participation in collective life provides a scaffolding which confers further legitimacy on this conceptual structure’ (p. 5). If young children have only a single conceptual scheme for gender and if the social world they experience daily (home, school, etc.) faithfully reflects and legitimises that scheme, then it is little wonder they respond negatively when something queer presents itself. It quite literally challenges their worldview. This is more indicative, perhaps, of a sociocultural reticence to teach children in ways that prepare them for being in a diverse world than of the innocence and/or concrete thinking of young children. Grey’s responses to the harassment she suffered from other students were either to avoid them or to leave the area. Both of these are instantly effective tactics for protecting oneself in the face of direct abuse or violence. Unfortunately, avoiding harassers or removing oneself from their presence does little to challenge or change their behaviours, and indeed, may just be giving them what they want. It also runs counter to the kinds of observations documented by MacNaughton (2000) whereby young children’s heterosexist behaviours endured until they were interrogated, challenged, redirected. Changing heterosexist and homophobic behaviour is a worthwhile goal, but this must come second to surviving such behaviour.

For Grey, more concerning than the bullying she suffered from other students was the conduct of her teachers, who she said ‘didn’t like me because I was gay, and didn’t like me because I “interrupted their classes”’. Grey lists several different approaches taken by her teachers to exclude queerness, in the
forms of Grey’s presence and voice, from the space of the classroom. She was accused of ‘interrupting’
classes, directed to focus on topics without queer content, given failing grades for including queer content
in her assessment, and actively ignored in class. The approaches Grey describes take two particular forms,
applied with differing intensity: the first to control attention, and the second to control information. By
trying to control attention, Grey’s teachers moved between complete withholding (ignoring her) and too
much (labelling her a distraction or interruption). By trying to control information, the teachers moved
between redirecting Grey’s focus (to other, non-queer content) and punishing her ‘incorrect’ focus (failing
assignments with queer content). In the face of these strategies of control, Grey had little recourse.
Teachers wield significant power in the classroom and are able to impose their will on how class time is
spent, who speaks, what content is covered, and indeed, what content and conduct is appropriate. For
Grey, her non-compliance meant failing several assessment items and a drop of four points in her OP
(Overall Position).36 Rather than fall in line, Grey chose to continue researching topics that were
interesting and relevant to her and her sexual identity.

Grey came out in year 8, but not by her own choosing. Grey was outing by a friend to whom she
had disclosed her sexuality, and this highlights a central issue with non-heterosexualities: while they
remain unspoken they are assumed not to exist. In this ‘speaking’, I also include bodily performances that
‘give away’ a person’s sexuality, truly or falsely, as in camp boys or butch girls. Epstein (1995) points out
that this is due to the fact that the compulsory nature of heterosexuality ‘is perhaps less clear when
thinking about children, mainly because we are not accustomed to thinking about them in terms of
sexuality or sexual orientation’ (p. 59). In Act Your Age!, Nancy Lesko (2001) traces four ‘confident
characterizations’ in academic and popular discourse that position adolescence as a natural(ised) period of
growth and change: that adolescence is a transitional period leading into adulthood; that it is inherently
bound to time; that its effects are hormonal (and therefore natural); and also that adolescents are
particularly attuned to and compliant with the influence of other adolescents (pp. 2-4). These
characterisations of what young people are (or should be) like

… operate within and across numerous fields, including education, law, medicine,

36 A student’s Overall Position (OP) is their “position in a statewide rank order” of 25 bands (with 1 being best) based on achievement in the final two years of high
school and a ‘core skills’ test (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2017).
psychology, and social work, as well as in popular culture, such as movies, television, and literature. They declare the nature of youth and they incite us to find instances of their truth in new encounters. (pp. 4-5).

The production of adolescents or youth in public discourses means that certain assumptions become commonplace, even ‘common-sense’, and can lead to changes in how young people are dealt with. The notion that young people are (especially) vulnerable to harm and/or corruption, for example, underpins social anxiety about sexual predators and has spurred changes in laws regulating adult-child relations (for example, the introduction of Queensland’s ‘blue card’ system37). Public discourses also ‘construct the child as pre- or asexual, as “innocent”, at least as an ideal’ (Epstein and Johnson 1998, pp. 1-2). This assumption of childhood sexual innocence, Epstein and Johnson argue,

… is deeply problematic. First, it seriously mis-recognizes the position of children. They are assumed to lack sexual curiosity, knowledge or beliefs: they ought to be wholly unconscious of “such things” – “should not even be beginning to think about understanding, never mind understanding” them. (p. 96)

The illusion of innocence, of an absent sexuality, then, is a product of how children are perceived from inside a culture that is always already underpinned by the heterosexual matrix and the discourses it authorises. In actuality, children’s sexuality becomes invisible so long as that sexuality can be taken for granted as heterosexuality. In the absence of children’s explicit practice of straight or queer sexualities, latent heterosexuality is simply assumed (because it is compulsory) – it is just a thing to come with time. The invisibility ascribed to youth sexuality in this arrangement is what enables children to be so successfully painted as ‘innocent’. It is, importantly, a conditional invisibility. As long as a child conforms to the expectations of the heterosexual matrix, as long as their performed gender aligns with their genitalia, then it can continue to appear as though that child has no sexuality at all; that she or he is ‘pre or a-sexual’ (ibid.). Within this system, because childhood has been ‘desexualised’ (p. 62), queer children and children acting queerly become quickly visible. As Epstein and Johnson put it, ‘[t]he alter ego of the innocent child is the precocious or corrupted child’ (p. 120, original emphasis): a Jekyll and Hyde relationship in that queer sexualities are considered warped rather than just different. Grey’s sexuality was quite trivial in the grand scheme of things, but by being outed she all of a sudden stood out (precocious, corrupted) among

37 The ‘Working with Children Check’, commonly known as the ‘blue card check’, is a mandatory screening of criminal and disciplinary history for any persons ‘working with children or young people in Queensland’ (Blue Card Services 2017).
twenty-two hundred other students who could be assumed to be heterosexual (who were, for all intents and purposes, straight until proven otherwise).

**Sex Education**

If, in dominant discourses about youth, youthful desire is rendered invisible by a taken-for-granted compulsory heterosexuality, and children are produced as naive and in need of protection by an idea of the ‘developing child’ (MacNaughton 2000, p. 96), then what is to be thought of queer youth? Unlike children who grow up to be straight, or choose to engage only in heterosexual relations, queer young people do not have the benefit of a world built to accommodate their sexual orientations. As I discuss in the next chapter, where queer spaces do exist, queer youth are often excluded from them.

Rasmussen, Rofes and Talburt (2004) write that ‘queer youth agency, whether linked to sexual desire or activity, or to projects of crafting the self and relations to others, is relegated to the domain of the unthinkable’ (p. 7). Considering queer youth to be sexual agents rather than merely the result of ‘lesbian and gay teachers … corrupting the “normal” sexual and gender development of their charges’ (Blount & Anahita 2004, p. 65), means also confronting inadequate sex education curricula that strip sex of all but the biological and focus on reproduction and sexual health for normative bodies and practices.

On 4 December 2012 I wrote to the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (now simply the Department of Education and Training), requesting the policy for sex education in Queensland schools at that time. A section of the response from Education Queensland reads as follows:

The Department expects its schools, principals and teachers to provide sensitive, age-appropriate sexuality and relationships education programs. While it is primarily up to parents to educate children about sexuality and relationships, individual state schools develop and deliver age-appropriate education programs for their students. The school Principal, in conjunction with teachers and the school community, makes decisions about what to teach in any program. This supports the central role parents play in educating their children about sexuality and relationships. (Personal communication, 10 December 2012)

While a national curriculum was introduced in part into Queensland’s schools in 2012, the national Health and Physical Education (HPE) programme, in which sexual education is included, was not to be introduced until 2014 (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2015). In 2015, ‘[r]esponding
to concerns raised by schools and stakeholders’ (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2016, p. 1) the then-Minister for Education requested the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority produce a report on implementing the national curriculum. This report was finalised in June 2016 with a recommendation to revise the implementation timelines (p. 12). Writing now in 2017, the core national curriculum has still not been rolled out in full state-wide, with the Department of Education and Training (2017) noting in an information document that ‘[s]chools are required to implement the whole Australian Curriculum… by the end of 2020’ (p. 1). School principals, then, maintain control over program provision and content in the interim. In the absence of a national, mandatory sexuality education curriculum, the potential remains to use terms like ‘unnatural’ or references to ‘risk’ without context to justify the absence of queer experiences, as does Kevin Donnelly (2004) in his book, Why Our Schools are Failing, to argue against the Australian Education Union’s policy of presenting LGBT subject matter in sexuality education:

Forgotten is that many parents would consider the sexual practices of gays, lesbians and transgender individuals decidedly unnatural and that such groups have a greater risk in terms of transmitting STDs and AIDS. (p. 155)

This is particularly egregious example of homophobia masquerading as considered thought because Kevin Donnelly is one of two men (the other being Kenneth Wiltshire) who were chosen by the Abbott Government to review the content and scope of the Australian Curriculum in 2014. In their report, Donnelly and Wiltshire (2014) make some encouraging remarks with regard to the sexuality education and the alcohol and drug education components of the HPE curriculum, as when they note the ‘considerable need for professional development for teachers’ (p. 207), many of whom have not been prepared to teach adequately in these areas by their undergraduate training courses. Unfortunately, their use of the term ‘controversial’ to describe sexuality and alcohol/drugs education has the effect of equating religio-moral arguments against their inclusion in the HPE curriculum with evidence-based arguments for their inclusion. More worrying than their poor word choice is the recommendation that ‘schools should be given greater flexibility to determine the level at which [sexuality/drugs education] are introduced and the modalities in which they will be delivered’ (ibid.). Considering that some of the submissions to the review opposed any inclusion of queer content in sexuality education (p. 204), and
others opposed all sexuality education generally (ibid.), and yet others stated that they would simply refuse to implement the sexuality education content as set out in the curriculum (p. 205), the recommendation that the curriculum architects capitulate to views that value personal beliefs over evidence-based curriculum designed to benefit the welfare of students is deeply troubling.

Though the submissions to the curriculum review that are broadly opposed to sex education do represent some Australians’ views, such views require an imaginary division between the public domain of schools and a private domain where sexuality belongs in order to be justifiable. This imaginary division ignores the very real facts that young people are sexed beings (including, sometimes, trans or intersex); sexual beings (including, sometimes, non-hetero- or a-sexual); and mandated to attend schools for upwards of seven hours a day with other sexed and sexual beings who are not magically unaffected by their surrounds. Schools and sexuality are coextensive. It is absurd to think that students come to sexuality education free from any ideas about sex, gender and sexuality when they have been learning about these things from their peers, their teachers, their parents, the media they consume, and the surrounding world since birth. A problem arises with sexuality education when children are not being educated in an official capacity about that very real world, which exists outside and inside the school grounds and includes non-heteronormative sexualities, genders, bodies and sex-practices. Failing to educate students leaves them open to misinformation from sources with their own agendas as well as otherwise avoidable harm or difficulties. And, so long as sexuality education is taught in a heterosexist way that presumes heterosexuality for all ‘in language, in daily interactions among people, and in institutional policies and practices’ (Walton 2005, p. 26), what is left out of sex ed will form its own programme of teaching: a hidden curriculum of silence and omission, run in parallel with official classes. The exclusion of queer sex from formal sex education, for example, reflects an assumption that ‘straight sex’ is the only valid or even extant kind of sex. This is the ‘hidden’ lesson that is passed on to students, intended or not, and the outcomes of the lesson will differ. For some it could mean simply going on with their lives and having straight sex while none the wiser, but for queer young people it might mean fumbling through awkward early sexual encounters to produce queer sex practices in the moment, or experiencing pain that is easily avoided or mitigated, or being ignorant of the different requirements for
safe queer sex and exposing themselves to unnecessary risk. Teaching inadequate sexuality education has consequences, just like not teaching sexuality education at all.

Of the queer young people I interviewed, almost all had gone through some form of official sexuality education curriculum. Some, like Jason who left school when he was 16 and Ricky who attended a full-immersion Maori school in New Zealand, had no formal sexual education at all. Unfortunately, the sexuality education that was taught revolved solely around the biological dimension of sex and was described in almost all cases as ‘straight’. While a number of students attended schools with religious affiliations, the approach to sexuality education across these institutions varied greatly. Some schools, including my own, were relatively liberal and comprehensive within the bounds of heteronormativity, while a handful of schools taught abstinence only. What was considered appropriate varied significantly from school to school across year levels. Consistently absent, however, was any information about or for queer young people. When I asked my interviewees how and where they learned about queer sex practices, they recounted the many different ways that they filled in the gaps left for them by their sex ed classes.

Frankie (28, female, lesbian) recounted a sexuality education programme similar to my own, which was held over a number of weeks across year levels:

We would have a person come in once a fortnight and they would talk about sex ed and we’d watch videos about, like, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy videos, um, kind of touched on drugs and alcohol, and then they showed us how to put a condom on a banana and things like that. And also at the end we had a question box, so we could write questions anonymously, put it in, and the next time they would answer them.

Frankie attended a secular private school in the north of the Gold Coast. While the sexuality education curriculum at her school was comprehensive and reinforced over the years – indeed, it stands out as the best example among my interviewees – it failed to address queer sexualities, and it did not cover queer sex practices. When I asked Frankie where she learnt about queer sex practices, her response was succinct: ‘I was shown.’

Josh (23, male, gay) grew up in a rural area of the Gold Coast and attended a small, public school. He recounted having a sexuality education class only twice, in Year 7 and Year 10:

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38 Not the inherent risk Donnelly (2004, p. 155) ascribes to LGBT individuals’ sex practices. It certainly follows that if we teach young people how to have safe queer sex, we mitigate the risks of STI transmission for queer individuals, just as we do for straight individuals when we teach safe straight sex.
By that stage you’ve already got couples that’ve been… there’s people in the class that’ve been having sex for the last four years, and it’s going to be no good then. So it needs to be done earlier.

Josh recalled that a number of his classmates were already sexually active by the time the classes were taught, making their content largely irrelevant. When Josh wanted to learn about queer sex practices that were not included in the sexuality education he experienced, he drew from several different sources:

The internet, a lot. Um, from friends, hearing things, and *Queer as Folk*. I didn’t watch too much of that. I didn’t really… I always forgot when it was on and all that sort of thing, but you do learn things from shows like that, even some documentaries and things. But… yeah, mainly online.

The internet proved to be a valuable source for many of my interviewees. It provided access to chat rooms and forums, where they could talk with other queer people, young and old, and discuss experiences with people who shared them. It provided access to various resources specifically designed to educate about queer identities, culture, and sex practices. It also provided access to pornography, which many of my interviewees cited as a valuable, if problematic resource for learning about queer sex practices. With regard to pornography, each of my interviewees admitted watching it at least once. Most interviewees saw porn as useful in learning about queer sex practice, because it depicted real (if contrived) sex acts. All of my interviewees made some comment about how *porn* is not ‘real’ even though the *sex* is. They were all very aware that there is a clear separation between sex as an *act* and porn as *acting*.

Lulu (29, female, no identification) was my eldest interviewee and had attended an Anglican high school on the Gold Coast in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Her narrative recounted an impoverished form of sexuality education:

It was an extremely biased Christian abortion video. And that was it. There was no talk about sexually transmitted diseases or contraception. There was none of that. It was just, “If you have sex, you can get pregnant”, and “Don’t have an abortion”.

Lulu contacted me shortly after our interview when she remembered that a group of students’ parents had organised external sex education, taught by a trans woman, in direct response to her school’s dearth of information. This informal ‘class’, held outside of school hours in one of the parents’ houses, dealt explicitly with queer sexualities and gender, identity issues, as well as covering safe sex practices and answering any questions the kids who attended had. Unfortunately, only a small number of students attended this supplementary gathering.
Dean (19, male, gay) also received sex education with a religious bent, having attended five different high schools of which three were Catholic. While there was some engagement with biologically-focused sex education around puberty in the classes he attended at one of the Catholic schools, the content was largely abstinence-only:

I can tell you a lot about a woman's menstrual cycle and... yeah, that's about it. When it came to safe sex, and especially safe gay sex, it was not spoken of.

Like Lulu, Dean too received supplementary sexuality education outside of school. For Dean, this came by way of a therapist he had been referred to:

I learnt [about queer sex practices] from my gay therapist. He, you know, gave me the little flyers and whatnot, and he also talked about it, and said if you have any questions, ask.

In both Dean's and Lulu's cases, the provider of sexuality education happened to be queer. Whether or not it is a coincidence that these individuals went out of their way to educate others on non-normative sexual and gender identities, both Lulu's trans sex education teacher and Dean's gay therapist were able to draw from their own personal experience to provide relevant information outside of what was considered appropriate at these students' schools. What was inappropriate for these schools, however, happened to be just what Dean and Lulu needed. Seeking out or being put in touch with someone who can speak from experience about life as a queer person is one of the ways that my interviewees were able fill the gaps in the heteronormative sexuality education they received at school.

My interviews revealed a wide range of information-seeking tactics to counter the lack of queer sexuality education provided by most schools. They also give the lie to the concept of 'innocent' or pre-/a-sexual youth. Each of my interviewees was able to speak in depth and at length about their sexual orientation/gender identity as it developed. Finally, they show that, even while political arguments rage about the provision of sexuality education in Australian schools, queer young people are able to seek out the kind of information they need in order to get by, and to get on with producing queer selves in a cultural climate that pretends, and perhaps would prefer, that they don't exist.
CHAPTER 5: SURVIVING THE CITY

Loitering

When my best friend and I were sixteen and seventeen respectively, we spent a lot of our free time (and some time that was not supposed to be free) in Surfers Paradise. Though we lived approximately twenty minutes away by car at the northern end of the Gold Coast and had neither our own transport nor much money, we still managed to make our way into Surfers on most weekends. What we ‘did’ there is hard to define because we didn’t really do much; it was enough for us to be in this space that felt bigger than life at home and at school. We visited certain cafes and shops regularly, eventually befriending employees at a number of them. We loitered in Timezone, a gaming and amusement hall, sometimes playing pool on the deteriorating tables. We wandered up and down Cavill Avenue, the Esplanade, Elkhorn Avenue, and Surfers Paradise Boulevard more times than I can remember. We visited Off Ya Tree to peruse body jewellery and trawled through clothing stores, making plans for our future selves and how we’d look: I would have a lip-ring and shaggy black hair; my friend would own skull-crushing boots and get a tongue-bar.

Being in Surfers Paradise and away from the boring suburbs where nothing ever happened felt like what I imagined adulthood to be. It was also the only place nearby that I could get to regularly and find other queer people without fail. In 2004, The Meeting Place (which everyone simply called ‘MPs’) was the sole gay bar on the Gold Coast. After a day of wandering the streets, as night fell my friend and I would inevitably find ourselves smoking on a bench near the venue’s entrance – too young to get in – waiting for the first patrons to arrive. It was sitting on that bench that I came to recognise, and eventually to meet and get to know so many of the queer people who populated my late-teens and early twenties. I met wonderfully camp men, and women who dressed like the punk-rock boys of popular bands of the time, and colourful, shimmering drag queens with sharp wits and glorious, cackling laughs.

In our own way, for that brief period of our lives, my friend and I became something of a fixture of the Gold Coast’s queer nightlife, even without going into the club. Because we were there so often,

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39 MPs would later have competition in Escape, a club that, while less overtly queer-oriented, was located in the heart of Surfers Paradise. Both clubs operated concurrently for about a year before MPs closed down.
regular patrons began to remember us, and then to talk to us – often to ask why we weren’t going in. When we said it was because we weren’t eighteen yet, we suddenly became co-conspirators in elaborate plans to sneak us in somehow, or to procure fake IDs. Others would tell us that the bouncers didn’t even care and that we could just walk right in (they did care; we couldn’t just walk right in). What my friend and I were able to do was insinuate ourselves into queer nightlife without being legally old enough to be a part of it, and without breaking the law (despite the urging of friendly strangers). Having no other place available to us on the Coast that offered the kinds of characters we wanted to know (people we felt were like us; interesting people; queer people), we did what we could to gain whatever access we could. For us, proximity was a bountiful tactic. Simply being in the space that, at night, doubled as MPs’ de facto smoking area – because the club was built belowground, patrons had to leave the venue to smoke – opened up a queer world for us.

We lived a sort of double life. We had our time at home and school, and then we had our time in Surfers Paradise and the penumbra of the queer scene we loitered in before it got too late and we had to go home. My introduction to the Gold Coast queer scene (which was really just a mostly-mainstream gay and lesbian scene) came through this hanging out on the street outside the gay bar at night. I am certain that if our parents knew what we were doing, they would have tried to put a stop to it. They knew we were ‘hanging out’ in Surfers together, but not much more. I felt very strongly that what my friend and I did was ours to know, and no one else’s, and I maintained a wall of secrecy to keep it so. Much of this had to do with fear of coming out, if I’m honest. I eventually got a job in Surfers Paradise through one of the local connections my friend and I had made in our rounds, and I worked in a coffee shop alongside two older gay men. These two taught me a great deal about the queer community (often through their culturally-appropriative caricatures of fierce and sassy African-American women).

Unlike the ready-made unit of family and the peer group provided by school, I had to seek out other queer people. For queer kids, there is no simple and straightforward method for making connections with similar people. If one is to take part in queer cultural and social life, it must be by choice, because we do not have the benefit of mandated attendance, as with school, and we are not born
into it, as with a family. Queerness is anoriginal, arising without/beyond heredity like so much else that makes us who we are. Any connection, association, or friendship we build is based also on that same unsorceable origin, neither passed down from above nor absorbed by osmosis from the surrounds. It is anoriginality, however, that allows such strong bonds, due to shared experiences – like ‘coming out’ may be – that bridge the gap between the lives of vastly different individuals. The remainder of this chapter deals with the City as a heterosexed space that poses significant existential threats to queer young people, but also looks at its nightlife precincts as a time/space in which queer young people are likely to find themselves when seeking out queer connections.

**Producing the City**

In Chapter 3, I looked at the spatial, temporal and sociocultural ‘flows’ of the Gold Coast. I suggested that the ways these flows come together and interact affect how an individual (with their own set of particular circumstances) is able to navigate the city. In this chapter, I want to consider how the city of the Gold Coast is produced through particular kinds of stories it tells about itself, both to itself (residents) and to others (outsiders). In-between the countless individual stories manufactured by the many and varied sources writing about the city, is a kind of authorless ‘congealed narrative’. It is this story, attributable to no single author but dependent upon each one of them, that produces the city’s ‘character’ and perpetuates a discourse all its own about the Gold Coast. This discourse about the city inevitably affects how it is thought, and how the city is thought affects how people engage with it.

Perhaps the most prolific producer of stories about the Gold Coast, aside from the News Corp-owned *Gold Coast Bulletin*, is the tourism industry. This is an industry comprised of ‘major institutional players’ like the Gold Coast Tourism Corporation and the City of Gold Coast’s Economic Development Branch (Gold Coast City Council 2014); smaller institutional stakeholders like the Surfers Paradise Alliance, Broadbeach Alliance and Connecting Southern Gold Coast groups; and businesses and organisations reliant upon or supplemented by tourist income (leisure services, hotels, transport

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40 *While the term may lack immediate novelty, that which it is assumed to identify is an ontological complex that cannot be represented because there is no one thing to represent* (Benjamin 1993, p. 166). Anoriginal here refers to an inability to locate an origin. It ‘does not lends itself to a “simple/single view” because there is no such event that can be viewed, in its totality, in this particular way’ (p. 50). I thus leave open the possibility for multi-causal queer sexuality that inter-implicates biological heredity, mutation, environment, nurture and agency.
providers, souvenir stores and so on). The ‘destination narrative’ they collectively produce, in concert with various media (as with the heavily cross-promoting *Gold Coast Bulletin*), sketches a Gold Coast of ‘beaches, surf, theme parks, shopping, nightlife and hinterland’ (Tourism and Events Queensland 2015); a location ‘famous for fun’, as touted by the city’s leisure branding from 2010 (Bartlett 2010; Gold Coast Tourism 2013; Gold Coast Tourism 2015), until a rebranding as ‘Destination Gold Coast’ in early 2017 (Skene 2017, p. 6).

The ‘fun’ for which the Gold Coast is allegedly famous takes on two very particular forms in the city’s destination narrative. The first form is ‘family fun’, highlighting family-friendly (that is, child-friendly, in the same vein as the ‘innocent’ youth discussed in Chapter 4) interests and leisure sites, such as the city’s various amusements and theme parks, its beaches and hinterland, its historical and heritage sites, and other ‘wholesome’ activities. The second form is ‘nightlife fun’, largely located in the entertainment districts of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach, with smaller suburban hubs elsewhere. This kind of fun includes clubs, bars, pubs, the casino, and seasonal or yearly sporting events that are oriented mainly or entirely towards adults (horse racing, football, car racing). These two types of fun are divided by daytime and nighttime, with each colonising their respective period of the day. A twilight crossover can also be observed, when holidaying families still wander the streets of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach as revellers begin to make their way in to the clubbing districts. Zelmarie Cantillon and Patricia Wise (forthcoming) document this cycle in their rhythmanalysis of Surfers Paradise, carried out over a 24-hour period on a weekend:

In Surfers Paradise, the rhythms of day and night are not determined by a demarcation between the working day and leisure hours. Rather, they are almost completely tied to leisure consumption. The linear rhythms of the city are more in tune with its cyclical rhythms. Its workers hours are in turn dictated by hospitality, entertainment, retail and service activities. Instead of two peak periods that mark the beginning and end of working days, in Surfers Paradise the rhythms of labour are continually present, manifesting in a series of subtle troughs and peaks between various periods of relative quiet and activity depending on what is preoccupying its residents and tourists.

The two forms of fun, structuring respective spatio-temporal ‘worlds’ each with their own participants, exist alongside one another with some overlap. There are also occasional skirmishes carried out in the media, as in opinion pieces that paint Surfers Paradise as ‘a neon mess of drink, drugs and violence at night’ (McKenna 2010) or lament the ‘devastating blow’ of nightclub closures in order to ‘hold on to
family-friendly business’ (Houghton 2015). While it may seem that these two visions/versions of the Gold Coast cannot or, perhaps, should not exist comfortably together in the same place – with the debauchery of city nightlife corrupting its family-safe environment or the ‘think of the children’ brigade encroaching on a healthy party scene – they are in fact two sides of the same coin. In the way they are produced on the Gold Coast, both ‘family fun’ and ‘nightlife fun’ discourses are decidedly heterosexist, and work to maintain the heterosexed public space of the city.

While neither ‘family fun’ nor ‘nightlife fun’ explicitly excludes queer people, they are implicitly excluded from both. They are excluded first by the absence of invitations for queer people to partake in either form, and they are excluded again by their absence from discourses about such fun. The ‘family fun’ discourse, for example, is inherently heterosexist with its orientation towards the heteronormative family unit: mother, father and child/ren. This orientation is revealed through the use of the term ‘family-friendly’, which is rarely defined (for good reason). ‘Family-friendly’ indexes a particular set of ideas, values and expectations about a space, event, organisation, and so on, by linking the apex social institution – the family – with the notion of friendship. While there are many forms of family, only one has had unbroken hegemonic dominance (if not statistical prevalence) since the Industrial era:

The family cell, in the form which it came to be valued in the course of the eighteenth century, made it possible for the main elements of the deployment of sexuality … to develop along its two primary dimensions: the husband-wife axis and the parents-children axis. (Foucault 1990, p. 108).

This ‘family cell’ or ‘nuclear family’ no longer reflects the lived experience of most Australians, but it still retains power in discourse as an ideal. Whether a family takes on a ‘nuclear’ shape or some other arrangement, the institution of the family continues to serve in contemporary Australian society ‘as the core social unit that maintains people’s welfare’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010), as well as the primary locus of child-rearing and (legitimate) population renewal. When this socially and culturally valued institution is linked to an idea of friendliness (with connotations of being kind, helpful, pleasant), anything that is not ‘family-friendly’ is automatically connoted as unkind, unhelpful, unpleasant to ‘the core social unit that maintains people’s welfare’ (ibid.), and, if taken to its conclusion, can be read as counter to

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41 In the 2016 Australian Census, only 44.7% [of families] were couple families with children’ (ABS 2017). This measure does not take into account the marital status of couples, which is reported separately.
the continuation of society and culture. That is, apocalyptic.

While the ‘family-friendly’ discourse seems innocuous, it produces a space of exclusion for queer people whose sexual practices can be construed as merely oriented towards hedonism. Without reference to (always-already heterosexual) procreation and a drive to produce family, queers are thus not engaged in the biological project of (re)producing society. The ‘family-friendly’ discourse allows for any practice or lifestyle that fails to directly aid the ideal – that is, procreative – family to be spun as nihilistic. ‘Family-friendly’ is better read as an index of what is or should be absent from a space than as a sign of any positive content.

The ‘nightlife fun’ discourse is similarly directed towards a heteronormative subject, in this case the straight individual: young men and women with a view to coupling. The Gold Coast’s mainstream nightlife is situated mostly in Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach. Orchid Avenue, the main nightclub strip of Surfers Paradise, is home to venues like SinCity, The Bedroom (previously ‘Vanity’), Cocktails (previously ‘Cocktails & Dreams’), and Elsewhere, while Broadbeach houses East, Platinum, Howl At The Moon, and Love Nightlife. These clubs, with their thematic names (sex, beauty, extravagance, escapism) and decadent interiors ‘capture the codes of the city’s tourism narratives, aiming to produce excessive, escapist, hedonistic experiences, specialising in an internationally familiar kind of glitz and glamour along with an internationally consumed menu of popular music and style’ (Cantillon 2015, pp. 183-4). By using specific language, curating particular images, and structuring spaces to specific ends, these mainstream Gold Coast nightclubs produce their own nightlife narratives as they go about putting female bodies on display – both online and on premises – and cater to a specific form of idealised masculinity: ‘a hegemonic expression of masculine sexuality characterised by voyeurism and the objectification of women’ (p. 184). When the clubs’ individual narratives are picked up by tourism bodies, they are rendered as a generic ‘nightlife fun’ discourse, sketching out a city that is ‘stylish’ and ‘exciting’ (Surfers Paradise Alliance 2018), while also incessant and catering to all: ‘always something happening’/‘whatever you’re looking for you will find it here’ (Broadbeach Alliance 2015). Indeed, for straight people this is not an exaggeration. The Gold Coast has much to offer in the way of drinking, dancing and associating with members of the opposite sex in the pubs, clubs and bars of the city. The
ongoing production of these venues collectively as a space of heterosexual mingling is, indeed, dependent on such a clientele. There is diversity among venues, if not the way in which people are expected to relate within them: a masculine predator-subject/feminine prey-object pattern. For queer people young and old looking to engage with the ‘nightlife fun’ discourse, the only available options are either to visit the heterosexed space of straight venues (which are not for them), or to patronise the sole gay nightclub on the Gold Coast (which is not quite a part of the same ‘nightlife fun’ space).

Both the ‘family fun’ and the ‘nightlife fun’ discourses play significant roles in the exclusion of queer people from city life through the production of a heterosexed Gold Coast. This is not, in most cases, an explicit or forced exclusion, where queer people are physically removed from public spaces, or harmed for being in them – though, as I noted in Chapter 1 homophobic violence in Queensland is still prevalent. Instead, in the face of implicit cues that they are not welcome, queer people are more likely to engage in self-exclusion from situations, spaces, and interactions that, in effect if not intent, make them feel uncomfortable. While forced exclusion and the means used to enact it can be easily recognised in law – as through assault and discrimination charges that identify and punish a perpetrator – self-exclusion looks like a personal choice and cannot be dealt with so directly. For queer people, self-exclusion is simply the least-bad option from a range of undesirable alternatives. Ultimately, while forced exclusion and self-exclusion are very different in their execution, the end result of each is the same: queer people not participating fully (or at all) in forms of public life such as ‘family’ and ‘nightlife’ fun.

Self-exclusion is more than just a response to the real or imagined threat of violence. Consider the prisoner in Bentham’s Panopticon who internalises the visible yet unverifiable observation from the prison watchtower and self-regulates – disciplines – his own behaviour (Foucault 1995, pp. 200-201). After the same fashion, all people internalise the discipline of heteronormativity; the product of the performativity of ‘correct’ sex-gender-sexuality under the dispersed gaze of society-at-large. As Butler (1999) explains, ‘performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration’ (p. xv). For cisgendered straight people who are able to perform their particular racialised

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42 Even the role of the ‘cougar’, a sexist cultural caricature of an older female looking for a young male sexual partner, is mapped onto this design: the cougar takes on the masculine predator-subject role (because she is sexually active), and her ‘victim’ becomes the prey-object due to his passivity (a ‘feminine’ trait).
version of heteronormativity well enough, this discipline does not bear heavily on them insofar as it feels natural to perform as such: affectively, they are simply being themselves. For queer people whose sex, gender performance and/or sexuality do not ‘correctly’ align, perhaps because of ‘failed’ sex, gender or sexuality in whatever arrangement, the disciplinary power of heteronormativity is felt keenly as a breach of both the schema for proper being and the limits of proper acting. The kinds of explicit violence tracked in other projects like Berman and Robinson’s (2010) and dealt with by the legal-juridical complex, do not represent the last bastion of queer oppression. The self-exclusions that result from internalised heteronormative discipline appear self-inflicted because they do not look like what they are: legitimate responses to a ubiquitous yet largely imperceptible hostility to anything queer that is anything but eradicated in our society and culture.

Feeling Wrong

Each one of my participants recounted some experience of this kind of hostility, even if they didn’t – or couldn’t – explicitly name it as such. Ryan (21, male, gay), whom I introduced in Chapter 2, noticed it when he went out with his boyfriend for dinner on a day ostensibly set aside for the celebration of romance in general:

Dan and I, we went out for dinner for Valentine’s Day this year, and um… in a room full of straight couples, there was us sitting at the table. The restaurant we were at was awesome, like, the waiter was so nice about it. He obviously knew that we were there on a date, but some of the looks we were getting, like, people just staring… that was uncomfortable. That was kind of off-putting.

Ryan felt stared at, observed, but not by any one person; indeed, the only individual he mentioned – the waiter – was ‘so nice about it’ (about them). The staring came from the anonymous diners around them in the restaurant, a ‘people’ constituted from ‘a room full of straight couples’. Being together with his boyfriend in a public space and surrounded by straight couples wasn’t the sole cause of Ryan’s unease. It was also the timing. February 14th has been saturated by heterosexual romance through the investment of time, producing tradition, and the investment of money, producing commerce. The heterosexual
component of Valentine’s Day remains unspoken yet presumed. Ryan and Dan’s dinner together on this day meant they stood out because, in this instance, time itself is heterosexed.

What is important to notice is that these two young men having dinner together stood out to Ryan as significant, rather than to anyone else. It was Ryan, after all, who recounted the event to me. On Valentine’s Day, which is set aside for the celebration of heterosexual romance, and in a setting charged with sexual expectation (the motif of the ‘romantic dinner’), Ryan and Dan transgressed the social expectation that only straight couples should partake of this tradition. The boys ‘failed’ to self-regulate their sexuality (not being heterosexual constitutes a fundamental failure within a culture underpinned by the heterosexual matrix), and then they ‘failed’ to self-exclude from the heterosexed space and time of the restaurant on February 14th. As a result, some of their fellow diners negatively sanctioned this breach by staring. That is, Ryan felt sanctioned, first by his awareness (real or imagined) that he and his boyfriend were being stared at, and second by his knowing why (or at least suspecting why) they were being stared at. In our interview, Ryan explicitly linked the staring to his and his boyfriend’s queer sexuality. This means that Ryan was aware of the social expectations in the situation (dinner on Valentine’s Day), and also that he was aware of their transgressing these expectations. This awareness is more than an intellectual notion, as revealed by the language Ryan used: he felt it. Ryan described feeling ‘uncomfortable’ and said the feeling of being stared at was ‘off-putting’. Having internalised the rules of heteronormativity through the daily practice of living in a social world that derives its meaning from the heterosexual matrix on which it is founded, Ryan’s knowing breach of its rules meant feeling like a rule-breaker. Even though he didn’t agree with the rules, Ryan experienced an affective state at the breach of a promise he never made, but was held to nonetheless.

I want to consider Ryan’s feeling of discomfort in terms of a Spinozist understanding of affect. To do so is to equate feeling with being. In the third part of his Ethics, Spinoza (2001) observes three primary kinds of affect: desire, joy and sorrow. Desire here is nothing more than the undertaking to continue existing, which we are aware of in the body as ‘appetite’ and in the mind as ‘will’ (pp. 106-7). This drive to keep being, according to Moira Gatens (1995), is the ‘fundamental and determined desire of

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43 In addition to the normalising effects of the heterosexual matrix that underwrites society-at-large, this presumption may be a carryover from the legend of St Valentine solemnising illegal (opposite sex) marriages.
any existing body’ (p. 111). It is thus inescapable. Alongside the affect of desire, Spinoza (2001, p. 108) describes joy as the positive affect and sorrow as the negative affect through which the mind – and therefore the body, because for Spinoza mind and body are parallel expressions of the one substance – passes to greater or lesser ‘perfection’ respectively. ‘Perfect’ in this sense is akin to ‘accomplished’ or a thing completed successfully as planned (p. 161, translator’s note). Put at its simplest, affects change our very being. Positive affects (joy and its variants) move us closer to perfection and increase our power of acting, while negative affects (sorrow and its variants) move us further away from perfection and decrease our power of acting. It is important to make a distinction between affects and emotions: merely feeling happy or sad emotions will not fundamentally change our power of acting, which joyful and sorrowful affects do. Emotions are like tides that come and go, while affects are like changing coastlines, tectonic movements in the ground, man-made and natural rivers that redirect the waters. The former are temporary and may be party to affects, but it is the latter that fundamentally change the shape of one’s being and hence what a person can do.

Ryan’s discomfort could be understood in terms of Spinoza’s (2001) typology of affects – for example, as an admixture of aversion, fear, despair, humility and shame (pp. 149-54) – but this typology is not as useful as the effect of affect on Ryan. As a sorrowful affect, Ryan’s discomfort decreases his power of acting. Feeling scrutinised (uncomfortable, put off) means Ryan is less able to do the things he could do, had he not experienced this sorrowful affect. This does not mean necessarily that he cannot do certain things that he might have been able to before, but that they might become more difficult for him. For example, not only would Ryan need to carry out whatever action he wanted to do, but he would also need to find within himself the power to ignore or overcome the aversion to carrying out such an action that was caused by the sorrowful affect. Put another way, sorrowful affects might be thought of like heavy baggage to be carried around, making it more and more difficult to carry out certain tasks. On the other hand, joyful affects might be thought of like an exoskeleton, strengthening the wearer and lending itself to the easier completion of certain tasks.

44 While it is not my intent to recapitulate Spinoza’s entire metaphysics, suffice it to say that ‘substance’, God and nature are the same and only existing thing. All other entities are different manifestations or modes of the one substance/God/nature, which has infinite attributes.

45 By ‘power of acting’ I understand our ability to be the ‘adequate cause’ of anything done (Spinoza 2001, p. 98). That is, if I can be the true and direct cause of any change in the world, then it is within my power of acting.
Heteronormativity, then, can be understood as a particularly pervasive affective system – an arrangement for producing affects in people. Those people who willingly abide by its rules (because they believe it is a ‘good’ system for them, or for society) are positively sanctioned and they experience joyful affects. Their way of being/acting is affirmed and they are perhaps more likely – because they are more able – to act in such a way in the future. For example, heterosexual couples see their relationships represented in the world around them and across almost all media, and in recognising themselves are so affirmed in their existence. Those people who break the rules of heteronormativity (accidentally or willingly) are negatively sanctioned and they experience sorrowful affects. They are perhaps less likely – because they are less able – to act in such a way in the future. There are many examples of the negative sanctioning of people who break the rules of heteronormativity, such as in anti-queer violence (‘gay bashing’), in the derision of alternative female sexualities (‘slut shaming’), and so on. For those people who unwillingly abide by the rules of heteronormativity, however, there is a contradiction. On the one hand, they are positively sanctioned for behaving ‘properly’, but on the other hand, they behave in a way opposed to their own being. They are affirmed in their existence by the system that upholds and is in turn upheld by heteronormativity, but they betray themselves by acting in such a way.

Gatens (1995) writes that ‘the striving or “essence” of each thing is to seek out, as far as possible and in so far as the individual’s understanding allows, those things which enhance its power of existing and to avoid those which harm it’ (p. 128). Here, ‘striving’ and ‘essence’ are the same as desire – the inescapable drive of an existing thing to ‘persevere in its own being’ (Spinoza 2001, p. 106) – and this goes to explaining why a person might submit to heteronormativity despite its hostility to their own being, which includes sexuality: insofar as abiding by heteronormativity allows a person to avoid harm, then this fulfils her desire to persevere in her own being. However, insofar as behaving in accordance with one’s queer sexuality allows a person to ‘enhance [their] power of existing’ (by experiencing joyful affects), then this too fulfils her desire to persevere in her own being. Both abiding by a repressive system and resisting a repressive system can fulfil the essential drive of a person to continue being as she is. The important question is, which path allows a person to move towards ‘a greater or less power of existence than before’? (p. 158). Ultimately, heteronormativity is a system that, in some way – whether by abiding
by its rules unwillingly or by resisting them – causes sorrowful affects in queer people and in those people for whom heteronormativity is not a ‘good’ system, because they must either labour to be otherwise (suffering from within), or be subjected to negative sanctions (suffering from without).

When my participants reported feeling uncomfortable, nervous, uneasy, or somehow wrong in situations where their sexuality or gender identity was an issue, this provided an indication for me that some kind of mundane violence was, or might have been, carried out against them. In analysing the transcripts of my interviews, I paid particular attention to the terms my interviewees used when they referred to experiencing negative affects (that they thought were) due to their sexuality/gender identity. This included terms such as ‘uncomfortable’, ‘afraid’, ‘threatened’, ‘sad’, ‘angry’ and ‘embarrassed’. I also looked for examples of ‘gallows humour’ in stories I was told, because such humour is often an attempt to deal with the painful realities of queer life in heterosexed space. For example, EJ (25, male, gay) said the following:

When I was younger and I’d just come out… I dressed a bit more flamboyantly and my friend and I, we had a joke where we’d run into the nightclub [MPs] because we joked about getting bashed up on the street. And, you know, while it was a joke, I think we both thought that it was a possibility. It wasn’t like an improbable joke that would never happen. It definitely could have. So we joked about the situation, and made light of it. I think there was still… we may still have been confronted on the street.

EJ recognised the joke for what it was – a front concealing fear of potential violence against him because of his sexuality. In this, gallows humour is both an indicator of negative affect (fear) and a tactic for dealing with it (or, rather, transmuting it into something else). EJ and his friend feared being bashed, and to counter the resignation to despair to which accepting this fear might have led, they chose to make light of the fear: they ran in order to counter fear with the hope that they might make it into the club and avoid being harmed. Descriptions of experiencing negative affects are markers for me that the heteronormative system within which my participants and I cannot help but live is harmful to us: the mundane violence it authorises or carries out against us is counter to our very essence: our inescapable drive (desire, ‘striving’) to continue existing in our existence indefinitely.

Certainly, some people are fundamentally anathema to the social body (psychopathic serial killers, for instance), and their desire to continue existing at liberty is something that must be weighed against that of the social body. However, the social body – as always-already constituted by a particular group of
always-already empowered people to maintain their being and interests – is existentially threatened by queer people in a different way. Rather than threatening to extinguish the social body through attenuation, as does murder, the celebratory inclusion of queer sexualities as a valuable component of the social body threatens to change it beyond recognition. That is, a more inclusive social body requires that the social body become something qualitatively different to what it is, thus extinguishing it in an altogether different way. What is good for the social body – for the current arrangement of people and laws – is not necessarily good for all of the individual bodies that make it up, and in order to become so, the social body must change.

By paying attention to my participants’ accounts of experiencing negative affects I can identify sites, people, behaviours and so on, that are potentially harmful to the existence of queer young people like them; like me. Following Spinoza’s (2001) assertion that negative or sorrowful affects move us ‘from a greater to a less perfection’ (p. 147) – that, by experiencing such affects our ‘power of acting is diminished or limited’ (ibid.) – these potential harms (mundane violence) are significantly more problematic for queer young people than they might otherwise seem. Put another way, ‘just getting by’, or mere survival, while vitally important for particular individuals from moment to moment, may be as destructive to a person in the long-term as resistance to a hostile and oppressive system can be in the short-term. Continuing to abide by the rules of a system like heteronormativity, which aims to exclude if not destroy queer people, is a pathway to personal and social subsistence. It means upholding a structure that is built on our backs but does not benefit us, that lets us live on oppressed, but never to thrive. And so, while I map survival tactics used by the queer young people I have interviewed, I also recognise the political and existential imperative for queer people to fight on all fronts to transform the social body such that, rather than grudgingly tolerating our existence, it celebrates our inclusion as fundamental to a vibrant, pluralistic society. This means working to rebuild the social body into a configuration that is inclusive, instead of proceeding by way of small changes and extending institutions to include just a few more here and there, but never doing away with the unworkable. It means accepting that some institutions, some structures, are unworkable and must be abandoned. Of course, in order to create change one must be alive to do it. And so, while the recognition is important that radical upheaval must
occur for the social body to become fertile ground for the flourishing of queer lives too, keeping those queer people alive who can work towards this goal is clearly paramount. The one cannot be without the other.

In a briefing paper written for the National LGBTI Health Alliance in 2013, Gabi Rosenstreich notes that ‘LGBTI people have the highest rates of suicidality of any population in Australia’ (p. 3). While it is not within the scope of this thesis to extensively explore the issue of queer youth suicide, there is a necessary line of connection between my project – which focuses mainly on the mundane acts of anti-queer violence that populate our daily lives and the tactics which ensure our survival – and what Rob Cover (2012, p. x) calls the ‘ethical urgency’ of the topic. The urgency is certainly not lost on me, given the ways in which LGBTI rights are often considered one battlefront of the ‘culture wars’ that are played out across Australian media. In any ‘war’, over culture or otherwise, having your opponents attempt to and succeed in killing themselves could clearly constitute a powerful strategy for winning. For queer young Australians, the rate of suicide attempts is argued to be six times higher than for their straight peers (Rosenstreich 2013, p. 3). This statistic does not include successful suicides. Furthermore, ‘[t]he average age of a first suicide attempt is 16 years – often before “coming out”’ (ibid.), and ‘[m]any LGBTI people who attempt suicide have not disclosed their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status to others, or to only very few people’ (ibid). That so many queer people attempt suicide so young, and do so without disclosing their queerness, means that it is impossible to determine a) exactly how many queer young people successfully commit suicide, and b) whether any young person’s suicide was related to queerness if they left no indication. It is a fair assumption that the number of queer young people, and queer people more broadly, who kill themselves each year is underrepresented by available statistics. But it is important to remember that beneath the surface of universalising statistics that draw queer young people together under one figure – e.g. suicide attempt rates ‘6x higher’ for same-sex attracted young people than their straight peers (Rosenstreich 2013, p. 3) – there are many different kinds of lives being lived out.

Waidzunas (2012, pp. 213-4) warns against the ‘erasure of difference in the attribution of risks’, which ‘glosses over the complexity of human lives by lumping many people into one category represented by a

46 See, for example, Andrew Bolt’s syndicated column in News Corp newspapers or online for a right-wing perspective, and Gay Alcorn’s column in The Age or her opinion pieces published by The Guardian online for a left-wing perspective.
single number, while it also facilitates the commensuration of diverse life experiences by applying a common metric of suicide risk. Averages, or ‘coarse generalizations’ (p. 219), like ‘6x higher’ are particularly troublesome given their potential to simultaneously understate and overstate the lived experiences of all but the most typical of individuals in a given group, especially when edge cases fall far from the mean.

What we have then – without forgetting Waidzunas’s (2012) warning against the elision of difference – is a heteronormative sociocultural system that is explicitly hostile to queer people, as well as implicitly hostile to queer people, as well as compelling the internalisation of anti-queer hostility within queer people. That is to say,

queer younger persons are not vulnerable because they are queer; rather, there are greater risks of vulnerability resulting from social, cultural and psychological factors that may be a result of the heteronormative environmental context in which that person is having, feeling or expressing non-normative sexual desires or behaviours. (Cover 2012, p. 4, original emphasis)

The picture is further complicated by the way in which statistics can provide ‘a means for young people experiencing same-sex attractions to make sense of their lives’ (Waidzunas 2012, p. 214), given the ‘inevitable recursive relationships between research and self-formation of the subjects under study’ (p. 219). That is, we hear stories about ‘who we are’ (found in statistics as well as in newspaper opinion columns), and reflexively reinterpret ourselves in (or against) the terms of the stories, which in turn alters the grounds for possible stories about ‘who we are’ into the future, and so on. Ian Hacking (2004, p. 279) calls these ‘looping effects’: ‘the ways in which those who are classified, and who are altered by being so classified, also change in ways that causes systems of classification be modified in turn’. Waidzunas (2012, p. 215) argues that the ‘looping effect’ provided for by statistics on ‘gay youth suicide’ entering the public consciousness has led to the production of a ‘suffering suicidal script’, where suicidality becomes ‘an expression of identity and a rite of passage’, as well as a resistant ‘resilience script’, ‘homogeniz[ing] the category of “gay youth” as only an experience of invincibility and self-determination’ (p. 217). It is no small wonder, given this dynamic interaction of forces, that my participants – most of whom are otherwise relatively privileged (white, middle-class, male, homonormative) – recounted so many instances of feeling wrong in public spaces (which are always already heterosexed spaces) across the Gold Coast. If the
fight for queer rights is part of the so-called ‘culture wars’, then in those wars we are constituted as ‘the enemy’ along with those allies who support us. Despite the extent to which many of us present as particularly ill-equipped soldiers who are not especially willing to go into battle, we have to acknowledge that this is a struggle in which we must participate if we are ever to feel like we are not living in hostile territory and/or being treated as ‘enemy aliens’, unwelcome in our own culture. The suicide statistics recounted above suggest that frequently, before we can ‘come out’ (an expectation that does not bear upon straight and cisgendered people), queer youth are attacked from without and within by multiple forces, already drafted into a war that takes our bodies as the battlefield. Some of us, of course, experience this far more keenly than others given the innumerable ways queer sexualities intersect with race, class, sex, gender, and so on.

**Surviving the Nightlife**

How the queer young people I interviewed navigate the different kinds of hostility that confront them when seeking out other queer people like themselves includes a range of tactics that are complex, contextual and gendered. There was unanimous recognition in my participants’ narratives that to meet other queer people meant ‘going out’, even if, individually, this wasn’t always enjoyable or, in some cases, was feared. In this section I draw on my interviews with Frankie and Dean, who had extensive involvement in Gold Coast nightlife, for work and leisure. I am particularly interested in how they navigated the various nightlife issues that they identified.

Frankie (28, female, gay) is caucasian, slight and feminine, though she says she ‘appears gay’ to others due to her clothing (generally more masculine or androgynous), her ‘look’ (little or no make-up, very short hair, heavily, visibly tattooed), and ‘the way I portray myself’, which I take to include comportment. Frankie seems relaxed during our interview; she commands personal space by splaying herself out on her chair while we talk and holds herself in what I would call a ‘boyish’ manner – playful, active and open with her body language, and tending away from what are traditionally considered ‘feminine’ mannerisms. In our interview, Frankie talked at length about her experience of Gold Coast nightlife, both inside and outside of venues. When I asked if there were any places across the city that made Frankie feel unsafe, she focussed on the Gold Coast’s entertainment districts and nightlife:
I don’t quite feel “unsafe”, but sometimes harassed in straight clubs. And then, just walking in the streets, I’ve felt not so much unsafe, but just, yeah, the harassing that you get from drunk people and things like that.

I asked what Frankie meant when she said she didn’t feel unsafe despite the harassment she suffered and she clarified that one of her friends was a bouncer at a club she used to frequent: ‘he used to protect me’.

Frankie then elaborated on the kinds of interactions she called harassment, detailing behaviour that is both anti-queer and sexist: ‘People would know that I was gay and either try to change me, or just want me to hook up with a girl in front of them. I was like their little show-pony’. Frankie discussed being targeted simply because she was with another woman, and because of her open display of affection to her partner of the time:

I was walking with my then-girlfriend in Surfers and a group of guys walked past and told us that we were a waste, and another time at the Avenue we were just kissing and we had some guys come up to us and tell us to keep going, keep kissing each other.

The interactions Frankie described are based on several different interlocking oppressions (Yeatman 1995). Frankie is, for example, subjected to sexism when she is urged to perform her sexuality. She is transformed into a spectacle – a mere sexual object that exists only for the gratification of those (men) around her, and whose own sexual pleasure is inconsequential (because of the presumed inconsequentiality of women’s sexuality without men). Frankie is also subjected to heterosexism when men assume a right to demand that she behave in ways that align with the heteronormative, thus denying even the possibility of her queer sexuality as real. When she and her partner were called ‘a waste’, they were subjected to both sexism (which denies or denigrates female subjectivity) and heterosexism (which denies or denigrates queer sexualities). Such interactions are typical instances of the kind of mundane violence to which queer people are subjected in heterosexed public spaces like the time-bound space of city nightlife.

In those spaces, men behave as if they have proprietorial rights over the bodies of straight women (Cantillon 2015); it is thus unsurprising that they try to control the bodies of queer women too, even though these bodies are likely to be even less available to them. When I asked Frankie how she dealt with these different forms of harassment, she said, ‘I had the bouncer, and also I would just tell them to fuck off’. While telling someone to ‘fuck off’ is a tactic that bears a significant risk of inciting further harassment or violence, for a woman to be verbally aggressive to a man carries less risk, due to social
mores against a man hitting a woman. A little later in our interview, Frankie admitted ‘I tend to hide the PDA\textsuperscript{47} things now’, due to the regularity of harassment that turned her sexuality into a spectacle.

Cleaving to others – forming alliances with nightlife personalities like security guards and bartenders – is a tactic that a number of my participants drew upon to make their way through the heterosexed spaces of Gold Coast nightlife. How regularly this tactic was discussed demonstrates a clear understanding among my participants of the different forms of power that circulate in nightlife venues and on the streets, and how they can be valuable resources for survival. Frankie noted this at several points in our talk, drawing particular attention to the value of a police presence on Surfers Paradise streets at night:

I’ve never had to use them [the police], but I do think it’s a lot safer, especially on the other [western] side of Surfers, like, if people are walking home to the taxi ranks and things like that. I do think it’s quite good.

It is the passive presence of the police that contributes to a feeling of safety for Frankie – an opinion shared by the four other participants who specifically mentioned the police presence in Surfers Paradise. In recalling her nights out at MPs while the venue was still operating, Frankie observed that the club’s distance from the police station and a poor police presence contributed to an atmosphere of danger she felt in the venue’s immediate surrounds:

MPs was quite a small club, so everyone was mingling with each other, and there wasn’t a smoking section in the club – you had to go outside, which could tend to be unsafe because it was on that side [of the street] where a lot of people would walk through to go to the other clubs and stuff, so a lot of fights would happen, and the police were, at that stage, right down in Cavill Ave, and they just had that little shopfront.

Frankie’s recollection of a number of fights outside MPs is similar to my own. I remember witnessing the sister of a close friend of mine being punched in the head by a drunk man when she left the venue, for no discernible reason. Unfortunately, she was out of sight of the highly vigilant security guard, and was not expecting to be attacked. Whether or not this was an anti-queer attack is not clear. That it took considerable time for police to attend the scene goes to the importance of location to safety, and perhaps survival. By contrast, Escape – the current gay and lesbian venue in Surfers Paradise – is situated in a more trafficked, well-lit area, surrounded by 24-hour fast-food restaurants.

\textsuperscript{47} Public displays of affection.
Frankie offers a unique perspective on Gold Coast nightlife, because she also worked as a bartender in a (straight) Surfers Paradise venue. Unlike in her experience of the streets at night, Frankie said she has had to call on the police as a resource while at work:

I’ve had a couple of instances in the bar when I’ve had bikies [motorcycle gang members] and stuff come in and cause fights, which I’ve had to break up and call the police, so I would say that Surfers isn’t quite safe. There’s been a couple of fights…

Frankie’s interview draws attention to the multiple ways in which the police may be a resource for queer people. Aside from acting as a passive deterrent against anti-queer (or sexist) violence by their mere presence, police are able to actively put a stop to incidences of anti-queer violence that they witness or are called to intervene in. There is, however, an embittered history in Queensland between the police force and queer people, with police ‘enthusiastically’ enforcing anti-queer legislation enacted by the Liberal Joh Bjeeke-Petersen Government as recently as the 1980s (Carbery 2014, p. 21). This history of institutionalised violence may affect whether queer people feel they can trust police officers today, let alone fellow Queenslanders upon whom ‘the history of those conservative decades continues to cast a long shadow in terms of politics and cultural values’ (Faulkner 2014, p. 21). This said, as a tactic for getting around safely in heterosexed public spaces, nightlife authorities like police on the beat and club bouncers can prove invaluable.

Dean (19, male, gay), first introduced in Chapter 3, provides a unique perspective, having worked in Escape, the Gold Coast’s only operational gay bar at the time of our interview. Dean is caucasian, of average height and build, and while he does not dress in an overtly queer manner, he is flamboyant in his mannerisms and speech. During our interview, Dean spoke broadly on his experiences at work and while partying across both straight and queer nightlife scenes. When asked to clarify what he said were some ‘negative experiences’ he’d had at a handful of straight clubs in Surfers Paradise, Dean replied:

I don’t feel welcome at a large majority of the straight bars and straight nightclubs. … Nothing too extreme, just general rude commentary, [I was] barged out of the way, you know, shouldered. … If I’m in a straight club or whatnot, if I’m dancing, I’ll have girls snarl at me, or I get commentary, “Oh, fucking faggot”, or “Who wants a fag around?”

‘Nothing too extreme’ for Dean included verbal and physical aggression. When I asked if this was something that anyone could expect while clubbing on the Gold Coast, Dean said that it was particularly
gay people who could expect this kind of behaviour:

It’s… gays in particular. You see a certain level of aggression from a wider variety of the community for less of a cause. But there is definitely a very aggressive nature to the Gold Coast’s nightlife, just in general. You know, seeing a fight… you don’t even flinch. Like, I was walking home the other week and I saw a guy getting chased down by three other guys along Cavill Ave and no one turned a head. When the guy fell down and the other three started kicking him, then people stood up and said, you know, ‘Hey!’ and called over the police, but… that was only two or three people.

For Dean, an air of aggression, which goes beyond just anti-queer sentiment, pervades the Gold Coast as a whole. Unlike in Frankie’s narrative, where the police act as a passive safeguard for potentially harmful behaviour, they are only mentioned by Dean as having been called upon by others in response to violence, or as noticeably absent in lower socio-economic suburbs like Nerang, Labrador and Ashmore:

I specifically noted those [suburbs] because of the lack of transport and real presence of any sort of law enforcement or whatnot. You go into those areas and if you were to get bashed, you’re fucked. Straight up and down the line. There’s no people around, there’s definitely no people that are going to help you, um, you’re stuffed. Like, you have to call a cab, which, you know, cabs take a substantial amount of time to get anywhere. Like, I’m just thinking from a survival aspect.

Relative safety and risk, for Dean, are balanced upon mobility and the capacity to escape from potential problems in particular areas. Whereas Frankie says she generally feels safe around the Gold Coast but reported harassment of an intrusive sexual/voyeuristic nature exclusively perpetrated by men, Dean explicitly mentions survival as a conscious consideration in the city, and recounts several instances of verbal abuse from women and physical aggression from men. The difference between these two perspectives of the same city is one example of how interlocking oppressions that arise from intersectional identities play out in different people’s lives. In this case, the differing quantity and quality of violence experienced by Frankie and Dean (as regular sexual harassment or as instances of verbal/physical abuse, for instance) is arranged along lines of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Unlike Frankie, who makes active use of nightlife authority figures like police officers and club bouncers to deal with the harassment and violence she experiences, Dean describes a more informal range of tactics that he draws on to manage his own wellbeing and mitigate/mitigate against potential problems:

Just being around large groups of people, I always feel safer. Because, you know, when... and it has happened to me in the past, in my hometown, if you’re alone and
people start shouting abuse at you, and if they want to come after you and there’s no one else around, you’re screwed. If there’s a large group of people, you at least have that element of hope that someone would stand in.

By surrounding himself with other people – even strangers – Dean says that he feels safer. He draws on his faith in the power of groups to regulate aberrant behaviour, and the capacity of individuals to regulate their own aberrant behaviour because others are potentially watching. Dean also believes that, because a large number of the people in nightlife areas like Surfers Paradise are tourists, ‘they are usually in a more loose, relaxed mood’, and so less likely to cause problems. This trust in hope, as ‘unsteady joy, arising from the image of a future or past thing about whose issue we are in doubt’ (Spinoza 2001, p. 113), belies an undercurrent of fear: here, the ‘image of a future … thing about whose issue we are in doubt’ is personal safety. That Dean has to rely on hope is a worrying but practical element of his everyday mobility in heterosexed public spaces.

Dean is highly conscious of how he presents to others, identifying his queer appearance and behaviour (‘It’s like Elton John came on a Will and Grace Christmas special and then I walked out of it’) as a point of contention in instances of harassment he has experienced:

It’s not uncommon for me to dress up quite elaborately for end-of-month parties and such at [the gay bar] and, like, I only walk seven hundred meters or so from my house into Surfers, and I’ll get comments yelled at me. Really obscene, weird ones as well. … It’s easy enough to blend in and moderate your behaviour to avoid abuse, but the point is that you shouldn’t have to, and that… like, I will just sit there and listen to music with headphones. If I run into a friend in a large populated area, or even more dauntingly, in a small area populated by people of an aggressive nature, I wouldn’t greet them in the normal manner that I would if I ran into them at work.

Dean expresses a politics of queer visibility that is tempered by specific tactics of survival that he uses to avoid the anti-queer harassment and violence that he expects on the Gold Coast. Instead of choosing to dress inconspicuously to pass (as straight), Dean draws on other tactics to deflect negative attention. He knowingly walks a fine line between presenting queerly and preserving himself, admitting that, though he shouldn’t have to blend in, he will moderate his behaviour – if not his appearance – for his own safety.

Dean identifies listening to music as a tactic for separating himself from others while in public – a tactic that several of my other participants also draw upon, and that Grey (19, female gay) equates with ‘becoming invisible’. Wearing headphones is a clear indication to others that a person does not want to be disturbed, and that her or his attention is directed elsewhere. This can, however, be a double-edged
sword; being distracted by music means not being fully aware of your surroundings. The second tactic Dean noted was the different way he would greet a friend in public compared to when he is at work. The ‘normal manner’ he refers to in the context of our discussion is an exuberant – queer in that it is not traditionally masculine – display. Dean identified similarly modulated behaviour in another when he recounted leaving Escape one evening with a friend and his partner:

I left the club at about 3 a.m. with my friend and his boyfriend. We stopped off to get smokes and my friend, when we ran into someone who wanted to bum a smoke off him, adopted a very macho… more prevalent heterosexual stance and attitude. Even with his voice deepening. Yeah, a much more macho attitude.

Dean is not disapproving of his friend here, but merely observing with interest the change in his behaviour. Throughout our interview, Dean notes at several points his anger at the necessity of modulating behaviour to fit in or pass by, but he is pragmatic in his recognition that this is often done to survive.

Dean moved to the Gold Coast at 17 years of age to attend university and lived in student housing when he first arrived. He described developing some friendships among the female residents, but said that none of them would go with him to the gay bar after he turned 18. He also described anti-queer bullying carried out by straight male residents:

‘[T]he straight boys decided that whenever I said anything ‘obscenely gay’ in their choice of words, I would get a point. And if I got three points I was to leave the room.’

Because Dean felt isolated and had no queer friends locally, he attended Escape alone and used the bar as a resource to develop connections within the city’s queer scene.

I originally went [to Escape] by myself as none of my straight friends would come with me, and I met friends there that have become my best friends on the Coast. You know, there is a lot of snickering and bitching that goes on there, but there is a certain sense of community amongst the right people. It depends on the people there.

Dean admits that going to the bar by himself was a bit difficult, but that ‘[a]ll it really takes is a set of balls. Just go and say “Hi, I’m such-and-such”, you know, and talk’. This was how Dean met his best friend:

I met Elle, who is a lesbian, at Escape exactly through that manner. Walking up to her at the bar and saying “Hi, I don’t know anyone here, would it be okay if I joined you?” And yeah, we hit it off like… two things that hit it off.

Because of his own experience of moving to the Gold Coast and not knowing anyone, Dean is watchful
for others who might be going through the same thing.

I know how lonely it can be, you know, being in an area where you don’t know anyone, and also because it is such a… straight community, it is really hard to be the one who goes to the gay bar first. It’s not uncommon for me to talk to someone there who says “It’s my first time at Escape”, and I’m like, “Oh, are you new to the Gold Coast?” and they’ll say “No, I’ve been here for years.” It’s just sad, you know. It’s a daunting experience. … If someone’s sitting by themselves I’ll often go over and be like, “Okay bitch, are you by yourself or are you here with a group of people?” and if they are by themselves I will pick them up and direct them to a group of people I knew. Because I do work in the club, I know nearly everyone.

Dean’s earlier reference to a ‘certain sense of community’ among (some) queer people at Escape helps to explain his inclination to help others create connections. He commented more than once that Escape is ‘like a second home’ to him, though this sense of belonging is not an all-encompassing inclusiveness, but rather is based on developing personal relationships with individuals, even if those relationships are short-lived:

I think that people should just get out there, get up, like, don’t worry about people being bitches or whatever. Everyone’s out to have a good time, and it is the positive side of the Gold Coast being a transient community. Everyone is so relaxed. People don’t really give a fuck about much. You know, you go up and talk to someone, and if they don’t like you they will, you know, wander off slowly, but there’s no huge “go fuck yourself” there.

This is a fundamental tactic of survival for queer people that was returned to again and again by my participants during our interviews. Being around or building relationships with authority figures (police, security, venue staff) may engender personal safety while going out, but forging attachments to other queer people was viewed universally among my participants as important for personal wellbeing. This is despite the individual difficulties some participants described with actually doing so. Furthermore, creating queer attachments is particularly relevant in the context of Gold Coast nightlife because of the scarcity of queer spaces other than Escape. While there is a small number of other spaces for queer people to gather on the Gold Coast, these are time-limited or infrequently run (e.g. Q-Space; Gold Coast Gay Day/Gold Coast Pride), age-limited (e.g. Q-Space; headspace), specialist resources (e.g. Miami Sexual Health Clinic) or not specifically set aside for queer people (that is, ‘queer friendly’ businesses that cater to all).

The concentrating of queer socialisation around an adult-only entertainment venue like Escape is problematic. It sets up a relation between queer socialisation and potentially harmful activities such as
drinking, smoking and drug-use, and reinforces the association that already exists between queer culture and nightlife. Perhaps most importantly it excludes queer people under 18 years old – an already vulnerable population. Despite these problems, having such a stable and identifiable locus of potential queer connection can be life saving for someone who is socially isolated, and it provides a site of ready-made queer culture for individuals wishing to engage with others like themselves.

**Escape**

‘Escape Bar and Club’ is a unique site in the nightlife of Surfers Paradise. Its name provides some indication of its value to queer people living in a city saturated by heterosexism. It is, at the time of writing, the only venue on the Gold Coast that caters specifically to a queer (though mainly lesbian and gay) clientele. In addition to the importance of its existence for this niche market, Escape’s floor plan provides a distinctive and valuable stage for particular rhythms of socialisation to play out. In my interviews with queer young people living on the Gold Coast, time and again Escape was identified as the only specifically queer space available to them in the city, even if they hadn’t yet been there. Significantly, every single participant said that if someone they knew was queer was coming to the Gold Coast, they would tell them to go to Escape. The level of enthusiasm with which they talked about the bar differed greatly – from resignation to the fact that it is the only queer venue, to sincere fondness for the club – but it is recognised without exception as the main avenue for meeting other queer people. Toby (23, male, homo) put it succinctly when he asked, ‘Where else are you going to meet queers?’

Of all of my interviewees, Toby had the most antagonistic relationship with, and opinion of, Escape. Indeed, many of his stated views on queer life, the Gold Coast, and its residents conflicted with my other participants’ perspectives and my own. I found my interview with Toby to be one of the more difficult, because of his unswervingly pessimistic opinion on almost everything I wanted to discuss. Listening back to and transcribing the recording of our interview, I was aware of several moments when I stopped myself from saying something argumentative because I felt Toby was being flippant or unfairly harsh. On reflection, I believe that Toby’s perspective on the Gold Coast and the local queer scene comes from a number of very negative experiences that he hinted at in passing, or glossed over, but was unwilling to discuss with me in greater detail. Toby’s response has been to withdraw almost entirely from
participation in any kind of queer socialisation beyond one gay male friend he met through another friend from university. Of the queer scene, Toby said:

I know a lot of homos, but they don’t know of me. And that’s how I like it. I know of them, like, when my friend says “This one’s doing this”, I’m like, “Yep, cool”. I know when they come in, or when I see them.

Toby’s experience of Escape must be read, then, through a surface engagement with other queer people on the Gold Coast, except for his one gay friend, and through his negative experiences of the local scene. Even though Toby recognises that Escape is ‘really only the one place you can go to hang out and be open’, he follows this thought with ‘it’s really quite gross, that place, and every time I’ve been there I’ve had a bad experience, so… yeah’. When I asked if he had any tips for a person attending Escape looking to meet other queer people, Toby’s response was not encouraging:

Good luck and make sure you’re hot in their eyes. I come from a small town where you’re like, all friendly, you know, if you’re at a bar, you just have a chat and think nothing of it. I was standing at the bar here, asking how this guy’s night was going. He looked me up and down, said “Ew, as if you have a chance”, and walked away. Or pranced away, rather. Now, I wasn’t hitting on him, there was no ulterior motive, it was just, we were standing at the bar waiting for a drink, it was quite a long wait and I thought, you know, I’ll be friendly, because that’s how I was raised, that’s how we’d be in our town, that sort of thing. But yeah, I got looked up and down and treated like trash.

Toby admitted that this was just one experience that stuck out to him, not something that had occurred multiple times, but he referred back to the incident more than once as we talked. It seemed to have corrupted any potential for viewing Escape in a positive light. Even so, Toby’s experience should not be written off as insignificant.

Each participant that I interviewed considered Escape to be a safe queer space, and in most cases it was thought to be the only safe queer space available on the Gold Coast. The potential for social rejection by other queer people within a supposedly safe queer space is, then, of particular concern, especially if it results in complete withdrawal from that space. Rosenstreich (2013) writes that ‘the elevated risk of mental ill-health and suicidality among LGBTI people is not due to sexuality, sex or gender identity in and of themselves but rather due to discrimination and exclusion as key determinants of health’ (p. 4). Isolation from one’s in-group might be felt more keenly than isolation from the wider community, considering the kinds of assumption a number of my participants held, such as that other
queer people had ‘gone through what you would be going through’ (Josh, 23, male, gay) and are ‘a group that… you feel all sort of open and safe with’ (Thomas, 22, male, gay). If other queer people are assumed or expected to be understanding and accepting because of potentially shared experiences (of discrimination; of ‘coming out’; of feeling alone, and so on), the reality for most of my participants falls short of this, but perhaps not so short as in Toby’s pessimistic reckoning.

Queer socialisation at Escape is arranged along particular lines, the most prominent of which is sex (in the sense of male and female sex, rather than sex acts). Dean (19, male, gay), for example, talked extensively about the different way he saw gay men and lesbians using the venue; Samantha (19, transgendered female, lesbian) discussed the coexistence of a prominent ‘gay male scene’ with ‘that acronym’ [LGBTI] and her relation to members of each group; and Zeus (21, male, gay) made a distinction between different ‘crews’ and how they made use of the club – on the one hand as a dance-club and on the other as a space of relaxation and leisure ‘just sitting around chilling’. While most of my participants did not explicitly describe the social arrangements at Escape, their use of gendered language and the absence of particular people, that is, people not of their own sex, from their stories about nights out sketched an image of association among similar people (both in sex and sexuality). Gay men tended to socialise mostly with other gay men, and gay women and lesbians tended to socialise among themselves. Those participants who identified as bisexual – Daniel (21, male, bi), Gabrielle (19, female, bi), Kelly (18, female, bi) – told stories that placed their socialisation largely among people of the same sex, and Samantha talked mostly about those other trans women she knew at Escape (she did not refer to any trans men) and, to a lesser extent, about the ‘gay male scene’, the members of which she seemed to get along with more than with lesbians/gay women. When my participants talked in the abstract about the people at Escape, they described an amorphous queer collective of sorts. In any concrete descriptions of nights out, however, the vast majority of socialisation was clearly divided by sex.

A second division along racial lines was clear, but discussed much less. This is, I believe, because the majority of my participants were caucasian, and – as with sex – associated primarily with people like themselves. EJ (25, male, gay) whose mother is Japanese, and Ricky (21, male, gay) whose father is Maori, spoke about the kinds of racial division they saw. Ricky spoke about his experience of the Gold Coast
with regard to race after living in the city for a little under a year:

In my opinion it’s actually shockingly racist for the amount of tourists and different people they have coming through. A lot of it I know is coming from some of my friends, and I don’t… I don’t understand how they can do that when, one, you live on the Gold Coast and it’s full of tourists; two, the majority of them are queer and you complain that you’re not accepted but you refuse to accept people because of where they’re from, which is highly contradictory in my head. Yeah, I’d say the Gold Coast is extremely racist for the place that it is.

Ricky said that although he hasn’t been the target of explicit discrimination based on his race or ethnicity, ‘I do see a lot of that stuff [racism] about Asians’. This ‘stuff’ Ricky mentions comes in the form of statements like ‘No Asians’ or ‘No Curry, No Rice’ on individuals’ profiles on location-based gay networking apps like Grindr and Hornet. While Ricky agreed that discounting all people of a single race or ethnic background doesn’t constitute a valid personal ‘preference’ or ‘type’, he said ‘I don’t know how to try and explain it’ and referred back to his reflection that racism is endemic to the Gold Coast.

EJ also believes the Gold Coast can be a racist place, stating that although ‘[t]here are lots of people that are quite accepting, and embrace multiculturalism… there’s definitely racism around’. When asked about racism in the gay community, EJ is diplomatic:

I think it’s gotten better. I think maybe it’s more unspoken, because to openly say “no Asians” is an open discrimination, which is… I think there’s more awareness in the gay community where there is a huge internal discrimination within the minority, and I think a lot of people see that and try not to engage in it, so it’s not said as much anymore, in the headline [of networking app profiles], but I think it is still there. Which is fine, it’s just life. It’s just people’s preferences, um, and… it’s hard because it’s a fine line between having a preference and just being racial about it.

EJ believes there might be a connection between experiencing discrimination based on one’s sexuality and being aware of/sensitive to racial discrimination. This is a mindset that bell hooks (1982) identifies in the U.S. feminist movement of the 19th Century, where ‘it was assumed … that identifying oneself as oppressed freed one from being an oppressor’ (p. 9). Perhaps EJ is correct that queer people are less likely to discriminate based on race due to their own minority position; on the other hand, perhaps a world where this is the case is simply a more amenable reality for him to exist in. Another possible explanation for EJ’s measured discussion with me of racism in the Gold Coast’s queer scene might, in fact, be my own white racial positionality. I cannot discount a desire for EJ to avoid possible conflict with a member of the oppressive group, and so to downplay the issue in our interview. Whatever the reason,
explicit racism can be readily observed in the local gay male community in the form of statements that exclude potential friends/partners based solely on race and/or ethnicity that appear on so many location-based networking app profiles. While there is no clear link between these online statements and the racial division apparent among groups out at Escape, the users of apps like Grindr/Hornet/etc. for men and Qrushr/Her/etc. for women who exclude based on race/ethnicity are in many cases the same people attending Escape who choose to associate with others (or not) based on the same prejudice. That ‘it’s not said as much anymore’ does not equate to proof of a queer scene free from racism, as EJ recognised when he said: ‘I think it is still there’. Instead, it is unspoken and so is difficult to see for what it is: not a personal preference, but racial discrimination and exclusion. Further, the recasting of racism as personal preference and covert exclusion means it is so much more difficult to call out.

Even as the same ingroup/outgroup patterns – of sex, of race – that play themselves out everywhere else are replayed at Escape, the club does provide a unique space to potentially overcome some of these divisions. Its location outside of the main clubbing zone of Surfers Paradise – along Orchid Avenue and central Cavill Avenue – means ‘you can exit without walking through the centre of Surfers’ (Lulu, 29, female, no identification). Escape’s floorplan is also notably different to other clubs and bars in the area. Approximately half of the club is located outdoors, overlooking the Surfers Paradise beachfront and the easternmost end of Cavill Mall. Ostensibly a smoking section, this outdoor area becomes the main socialising space of the club every evening. Indoors, dim lighting and loud music makes conversation more difficult, so there is a rhythmic flow of people indoors for drinks/dancing and outdoors for smoking/talking. This rhythm is similar to the way MPs used to operate – a particular confluence of venue specificity, ambient noise/lighting, liquor licensing and anti-smoking legislation that means people are forced to flow into certain spaces to engage in certain activities. Escape differs from MPs in one respect, and this is in its inclusion of a ‘designated outdoor smoking area’ (as is the terminology in legislation) within the perimeter of the club. Flows of people between the indoor bar/dance floor/seating and outdoor seating/smoking area are continuous, smooth and conducive to socialisation. As Lulu put it:

Other clubs are all about the dance floors and not the outside areas, and I think that’s why I actually quite like going to Escape. Because you can sit outside and talk and drink
and smoke.

Due to liquor licensing regulation, when patrons are outdoors, they are required to be seated. This means that sometimes patrons will have to sit with people they don’t know. Unlike other clubs, Escape’s large, quiet outdoor area allows its patrons to drink, smoke and socialise at the same time – meeting new people by choice or through the ‘accident’ of the requirement to sit down while outdoors. The regular movements of people in and out of both areas mix people up together in ways that encourage, if not compel, social interaction.

For a bar catering to a vulnerable population, Escape has its positive and its negative aspects. It falls into patterns of in-group/out-group division along lines of sex and race, but its layout, unique to the Gold Coast, provides the potential to overcome these divisions, and also encourages individuals to mingle freely and with greater ease than in other venues; away from dimmed lights that hide faces and throbbing music that drowns out conversation. If discrimination and exclusion are indicators of negative mental health and suicidality, then participation in the queer nightlife of Escape may be lifesaving. It is clearly not perfect, but it does provide a distraction, however temporarily, from the constant pressure of heteronormativity and the surveillance of heterosexed public spaces that it authorises.
CHAPTER 6: QUEER FRIENDSHIPS

A Series of Unfortunate Events

In August of 2013, I moved from the Gold Coast to Melbourne. A year later, almost to the day, I moved back. For most of this year I had a wonderful time. I had a job I loved, a relationship with a boy I loved, and an excellent house and housemate. In the last few months, my relationship ended, the ceiling collapsed in my workplace, and my housemate got into a serious relationship, which allowed her less time for adventures with me. All of these events conspired to leave me in a precarious position. With the loss of my relationship, I also lost the social connections that I’d made through my boyfriend. The ready-made group of friends that came with him (i.e. his friends) was not inaccessible, but to continue spending time with them felt inappropriate. At the same time, my housemate was enjoying the beginning of her new relationship and – along with the many small but time-consuming freelance jobs she needed to work to get by – this meant we spent much less time together. When the ceiling of my workplace fell in, I was redeployed in another arm of the company which I didn’t particularly enjoy. I grew bored, in addition to my loneliness.

This was a particularly low point in my life. A therapist I saw at the time called my extreme and unrelenting sadness coupled with bouts of panic ‘adjustment disorder’. I remember speaking to her about not having any friends in a city filled with people and laughing, while I cried, about how juvenile it seemed to need friends around me. In retrospect it is amusing to me that I moved to a city where I felt safer as a queer man than I ever had before, but suddenly felt more miserable than I’d ever felt. Indeed, I could easily have dealt with the work issue had that happened in isolation: as a PhD student in the present age of precarious work, I am well versed in getting by with temporary contracts and casual jobs. I could have resolved the misery I felt at my break-up too, if it had come separately to my other troubles. The clincher, when I think back to what was truly wrong, and wrong enough to send me running back to the Gold Coast with my tail between my legs, was that I had no friends nearby that I could draw on.

Certainly I called my friends on the Gold Coast, I chatted to them online, and I sent them messages while I was experiencing my trilogy of troubles. There is, however, something about physical proximity that cannot be substituted with communication alone – no matter how much communicating
goes on in the attempt to do so. When I finally arrived ‘home’ to the Gold Coast (Melbourne had very abruptly ceased to feel like home), and after debriefing those close friends who I’d longed to be close to when I was feeling so down, there was a powerful comfort in simply being near one another and not having to speak.

De Villiers (2012) writes briefly on the connection between friendship and silence, especially as it emerges in the thinking of Barthes and Foucault. He quotes from a 1982 interview with Foucault in which the ‘kinds of silence’ that ‘meant deep friendship, emotional admiration, even love’ are set against those that ‘implied very sharp hostility’ (Foucault in de Villiers 2012, p. 23). He also draws on Barthes’ ‘Inaugural Lecture’ at the Collège de France, wherein – speaking about Foucault – Barthes refers to the ‘silence incumbent upon friendship’ (Barthes in de Villiers 2012, p. 24). From this, de Villiers recalls Blanchot’s conception of friendship that ‘… does not allow us to speak of our friends but only to speak to them, not to make of them a topic of conversations (or essays) …’ (Blanchot in de Villiers 2012, p. 24). De Villiers is engaged in demonstrating how Barthes, Foucault and Warhol each represent strategies or tactics of ‘opacity’ in the face of incitements to confess one’s sexuality and ‘come out of the closet’, and how, in this context, the friendly silences to which Barthes and Foucault refer might also suggest a shared confidence about one another’s queerness. I wonder that de Villiers does not also recognise the silence that may fall between some friends when all that needs to be said has been said, and there is simple comfort in saying nothing. This is, to me, another possible meaning to be taken from the words of Barthes and Foucault; that friendship of a certain kind allows room for silence.

The question ‘What is a friend?’ is not one that I mean to address, but as a point of departure, I think A. C. Grayling’s (2013) distillation of friendship from Classical to Modern (Western) thinking in his book *Friendship*, is comprehensive enough for my purposes:

[A] friend is a person one likes who returns one’s affection and concern; who shares some of one’s interests and attitudes; who gives when asked or even without being asked; who understands, or tries to, without being too judgemental; who is loyal and constant, rejoicing at good fortune and supporting through bad; who tells unpleasant truths and pleasant untruths when either is necessary; whose affection is freely given, not bartered for services or advancement or other interest; and who makes the innocent and proper assumption that all the claims, expectations, rights and duties of this vital and valuable human bond are reciprocal. (pp. 171-2)

It is a comprehensive definition, and perhaps also overly exigent, except in relation only to the most
intimate of friends. I think it is enough that a ‘friend’ be taken to include most of these things some of the time. As Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) note in their chapter on the ‘friendship ethic’ that they locate in the non-heterosexual world of their participants, ‘no matter how altruistic someone is, we are not saints’ (p. 75). I understand from personal experience and from the conversations with my interviewees that friends can act towards us in unfriendly ways on occasion as, no doubt, we can to our friends also.

Among my participants, friendship (what makes up a friendship) is largely taken for granted. Since friendships are the product of the society and time period within which they exist – Grayling’s (2013) flight through the history of Western friendship demonstrates this – and ‘different people’s friendships can take on different forms and involve different solidarities’ (Allan 2001, p. 336) depending on the social and economic location of those engaged in them, it is clearly beyond the scope of this project to pin down what friendship ‘is’. Instead I mean to draw out what friendships, and the friends with whom we carry them out, are good for in the lifelong project of survival that queer young people are engaged in. Further, while friends of all persuasions may provide us with the qualities of friendship Grayling (2013) identifies – mutual ‘affection and concern’, sharing ‘interests and attitudes’, and so on – for queer people, and perhaps especially for young queer people whose lives are so often constrained by schooling and parental demands in addition to the particularities of not being straight, there is something significant about making friends who are also queer. This is not to suggest that the friendships between queer and straight people are in some way diminished by comparison, but rather that there are additional dimensions to consider in friendships among queer people. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), for example, note a sense among their participants that, ‘regardless of how liberal straight friends are… a different agenda is operating for many self-identified lesbians and gays’ (p. 66), and a ‘broad sense of common identity that is shared between non-heterosexual men and women when faced with heterosexual assumptions’ (ibid.). The different agendas of straight and (many) queer people, and the sense of common identity among queer people collectively confronted by heteronormativity, are but two points of further connection in friendships exclusively between queres.
Multiple Understandings of Friends

My participants spoke extensively during our interviews about their friends, and about the various shapes their friendships took on. Some participants told long stories and linked their narratives about friends to aspects of their own identity or shared meaningful experiences; others used their friends as exemplars for various concepts, explaining, for instance, what a ‘good friend’ does. Some participants mentioned friends in passing, giving no further detail, except perhaps a name, as if this person’s very presence in the narrative was foreknowledge to all and taken for granted. As Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) put it: ‘[T]here are friends, and then there are friends. Some may be friendly acquaintances or those who you socialise with on only a casual basis; others form part of an intimate circle, part of the intricate weave of your life’ (p. 52, original emphasis). ‘Friend’, in practice, referred to a broad spectrum of actual and possible relationships that were contingent on several conditions: proximity, familiarity, affectivity, as well as identity. (In the next section, ‘Resourceful Friends’, I discuss the ways in which my participants spoke about drawing on their relationships with friends to provide different resources, whether directly or indirectly.)

My participants’ separate narratives of making, negotiating, and experiencing friendships sketched out a range of ways in which these queer young people think about and understand their friends. It became clear that the term ‘friend’ is overloaded with possibility and determined largely by the context in which it is deployed from moment to moment. Josh (21, male, gay), for instance, talks about ‘making out with a friend’, which in this context intimates a romantic association. In recounting a past event to me, Josh may have recast this character in his life as a ‘friend’, when at the time he may have thought differently about their relationship. This ‘friend’ is inevitably viewed through the lens of contemporary feeling and past experience. At another point in our conversation, Josh speaks about having ‘friends … on Facebook’ whom he has blocked from seeing certain things ‘just to make it easier for me’. These ‘friends’ are not privy to the full knowledge of his online life, and yet they too are called friends, even if only because this is the term Facebook provides its users for all social connections. This is an issue Blatterer (2015) assigns to social media more generally, before pointing out the methodological implications for such a conflation, suggesting that ‘[u]nder the conditions of a social media society the
terms “friends” and “friendship” have become especially ambiguous’ (p. 64). Regardless of whether Facebook or some other ascendant social media giant is to blame, between the two examples above we begin to see how flexible ‘friend/ship’ is in my participants’ usage, let alone in contemporary society at large.

In my analysis of our interviews, three methods of categorising the kinds of friends my participants had (or wanted) emerged. They cast their friends in a hierarchical system of quality and intimacy, or deployed a territorial system of spaces and boundaries, or understood their friends in terms of a temporal system that meant how long a friend was known indicated the kind of relationship they shared. These systems of categorising friends delineate the contextual, flexible, and sometimes vague ways that my participants deploy ‘friend’ to capture relationships ranging from the closest intimacy to a degree of ambivalence or even apathy.

**Situating Friends**

In the remainder of this section, I look at how my participants deployed these three systems of categorisation to situate their friends in relation to themselves, to other friends, and to non-friends.

The first, a hierarchical system, situated friends in a number of tiers or rings, from ‘best’ friend, downwards or outwards through a series of qualified positions (‘good’ friend; ‘close’ friend; ‘friend’), to the acquaintance, or decidedly non-friend. Qualifiers like ‘good’ and ‘best’ were used to represent degrees of intimacy, which often came through in stories. Samantha (19, transgendered female, lesbian), whom I introduced in Chapter 2, first came out as transgender to her mother, and soon after that to her best friend:

> I came out… it’s hard to remember. It was either at the very end of fifteen, or the early part of sixteen. Yeah, I told my mum, and a week after I told my best friend, who was my bi friend. And that’s why… and I chose her middle name for my middle name as a sign of respect.

Samantha uses a short biographical detail here to demonstrate the ‘bestness’ of this friend, such that the friend is memorialised in her own chosen name. Unlike Samantha, Gabrielle (19, female, bi) deploys a hierarchy of intimacy or closeness, using ‘good friend’ to classify a person she had known for several years and also currently works with at a pizza bar:
One of my good friends, who I’ve known since grade eight, he’s Christian and he’s very homophobic. And I don’t want him to see me as anything different. When he’s not there, generally I’ll act however… I mean, a few people there know, like, some of my closer friends there know.

Gabrielle distinguishes this ‘good friend’ from her ‘closer friends’ at work on the basis of whether they know about her bisexual orientation or not. Gabrielle’s unwillingness to let her good friend ‘see [her] as anything different’ due to his perceived homophobia means that this friend lacks an awareness about her that Gabrielle uses to determine others’ closeness. At the other end of the intimacy hierarchy, some participants were invested in expressing distance. Whether that distance was bound to time, ‘I’ve made a few acquaintances who have later become friends from seeing them out clubbing’ (Dean 19, male, gay); or due to a lack of intimate knowledge, ‘[I was] more “friend slash acquaintance” with Alan, because I didn’t really know him that well because he was a grade above me’ (Josh 23, male, gay); these determinations were about when, where and how some people were not friends, not quite friends, or not friends yet.

The second system of categorisation ordered friends in view of their location in specific domains or territories of life: ‘work friends’; ‘gay-’ or ‘straight friends’; ‘school friends’; and ‘male-’ or ‘female friends’. This system reflected participants’ division of their lives and the relationships that populate them along clear lines (of institution and of identity, for instance), with specific interactions for each type of territorially-defined friend. In the above quote from Gabrielle, she mentions her friends from work.

When Gabrielle describes her workplace, she does so largely in terms of the relationships she is engaged in there:

I work at a pizza bar. … It’s mostly young people that work there too. It’s owned by a 23 year old, and he’s pretty awesome, and then we have older drivers, so it’s just like I work with my friends, which is good, ‘cause I enjoy going to work, which, you know, that’s what you want to do.

These relationships, however, are restricted to the workplace and intersected by other considerations, such as age and type of work (‘mostly young people…’/‘older drivers’). Gabrielle explains that she also has other sets of localised friends, for example, her friends in Logan (a nearby city) where she grew up, as well as a group of ‘gay friends’ with whom she attends university and regularly visits a local shopping centre to hang out. Jason (17, male, gay), too, captures the territorially-bound ‘work friend’ when he
describes going to work occasionally at his family’s restaurant:

Well, when I do work, it’s fun because everyone likes me. Or, they have to like me. It’s all the same. … Work’s… I just come in and I do my job. I leave. I get paid. Like, it’s fun to socialise with everyone. It’s nice, it’s a really calm work environment unless it’s really busy, but everyone here’s all good friends, so, it’s fun to work. No one’s… this restaurant’s not homophobic.

For Jason, there is a requirement to get along at work, but he still enjoys the social aspect. Even so, there are limits to what he will discuss, and with whom: ‘I’ll talk about [my boyfriend] if people know, they’ll ask, like, “How’s Tom”, and I’ll talk about it, but with some people I don’t really want to talk about it, like, I won’t openly talk about it.’ Jason’s social network is largely restricted to workmates, his boyfriend Tom, and friends from high school. Though he has met several other (older) queer men through Tom (including myself), he does not socialise with this group except when his boyfriend is included (yet another domain). Jason spends most of his free time – when he is not with Tom – with his friends from high school, at Australia Fair (a local shopping centre), at the ‘[b]each, friends’ houses, you know, when friends have parties, you go there to socialise’. Toby (23, male, homo), too, discusses the grouping of his friends by territories. While talking about the trouble he has had with meeting other queer people at Escape, he says:

I don’t know, it’s not really easy, in a way, like, to meet guys or to do anything like that. Like, you go there and then you get judged anyway. It’s like, cool, I’d rather go straight clubbing with my friends and all my school friends and my friends from work.

Here, Toby has ‘school friends’, and ‘friends from work’, which are separate again to just ‘friends’. He also mentions ‘friends from uni’, ‘friends that I’ve worked with’, and ‘girlfriends’ (referring to his female-only friends) throughout our conversation. For each of these groups there are specific sets of behaviour and interactions Toby will engage in, constituting different ‘social personae’ (Grayling 2013, pp. 170-71). He can, for example, play the ‘homo friend’ with his girlfriends – ‘that friend that they can, you know, get naked in front of and they don’t care, and like, that male friend that they can just feel more comfortable around’ – and in a different setting, while out clubbing with his school friends and friends from work, ‘I might not make out with a guy, but I’m going to have a good time’. Toby’s different (groups of) friends in the various territories of his life are integral to how he performs himself in whatever social arena.

The third system, a temporal categorisation, is a sorting of friends based on how long they have
been known. Interestingly, a longer friendship could signify either significant closeness or a distant relationship that simply lingered on – time does not necessarily beget intimacy. Each of these kinds of temporally understood friendships was contextualised in our conversation. EJ (25, male, gay), for example, described his relationship with his housemates – three other gay men he found through a queer-oriented housemate search website – in terms of their friendship developing over time:

Yeah, and we’ve all been friends for a couple of years as well, so it’s very comfortable. We’re all quite open with each other, so there’s no issues with that kind of thing, or how they might feel about things.

The time that EJ and his housemates have spent in close quarters with each other has led to the development of friendships that include partaking in shared activities like going out to clubs together, and a degree of intimacy and openness with communication.

Daniel (21, male, bi) spoke about the opposite effect when he recounted the disillusionment he experienced regarding some school friends after years apart:

[T]his was a while ago when I first moved here, I was at a coffee shop with some friends that I met… well, that I went to school with, and they hadn’t seen me for ages, like, didn’t even know that I was going crazy up here, and then these two lesbians walked past and they just judged them and I was like, “So what? They’re just doing their thing. Focus back on our conversation.”

Indeed, Daniel had intended to come out to those school friends, but after their comments, he decided otherwise: ‘Obviously I didn’t tell them because I couldn’t… I had planned to, actually, until that came around.’ Daniel went on to explain a difficulty he contended with when deciding whether or not to come out to more longstanding friends:

It’s harder to tell people you’ve known for longer than a random. I think. I feel that way, so… I don’t know, I try and fit the situation, like, I let it go and then… I think about how they’re gonna react and stuff, so some people are easy, like, some of the comments they say, you’re like, “oh, I could tell them now, quickly”, but then other times other people say stuff, like those girls, and then you’re like “nah, I can’t tell them”.

While knowing some people for a longer time engendered a sense of intimacy for Daniel, having not disclosed something he considered important for such a long time meant that it was harder to tell an ‘old’ friend than a new one, or even someone he didn’t know. De Villiers (2012) notes the hegemonic power of the closet, whereby a truth about oneself (sexuality) is cast as a secret, which is thus revealed in the act of coming out. Not coming out, beneath the aegis of the ‘metaphor of “coming out the closet”’ (p. 1),
becomes a dishonesty that can only grow more potent with time. If one is always already cast into the role of a liar by the metaphor of coming out of the closet, it is no wonder Daniel finds it difficult to disclose his sexuality to those he has known the longest.

I include in the temporal system of classification recognition of the role that age differences play in forming or impeding friendships. Ricky (21, male, gay), for example, noted the trouble with making queer friends of a similar age, and provided an explanation for why friendships with older queer people might be more accessible or desirable:

If you’re young, it can be quite hard to tell your mates that you’re gay. So, you’re attracted to… people that are older ‘cause they’re more comfortable about it, so you can be yourself around them, so you end up making friends with those sort of people.

Ricky’s point here is also relevant in light of the anoriginality of queerness (first addressed in Chapter 5), where queer youth are not provided with a ready-made group of queer peers by virtue of their birth, as they are with a group of similarly-aged peers through mandated schooling. The heteronormative culture of school (indexed by Ricky’s simple statement that ‘it can be quite hard to tell your mates that you’re gay’) and the dispersed nature of any queer cohort of the same age (the potential emergence of queerness from any birth anywhere) mean that relationships of all sorts (friendship, romance, and so on) between younger and older queer people are often the only ones available to queer youth.

It is important to recognise that none of these systems of categorisation operates on its own. Each one intersects with, and operates alongside, the others. For example, both Samantha’s and Gabrielle’s classifying of their friends drew on more than one system of categorisation. By designating her best friend as also her ‘bi friend’, Samantha also categorises this friend in the terms of a territory of sexuality (straight/queer). Similarly, Gabrielle’s discussion of good/closer friends was about her work friends – another life territory separate from home, school, and so on. Finally, Dean’s mentioning of acquaintances who became friends uses temporality to describe the shape of friendships (the third system of categorisation), recognising the changes that time, and hence familiarity, can engender. My participants each deployed a complex, personal calculus of friendship that rarely reflected another’s. Another reflection by Grayling (2013) illustrates this well:

[O]ne cannot adequately convey the meaning of “yellow” unless at some point one can
display a focal sample of that colour; or “sweet”, as applied to the sense of taste, without offering a sample of sugar or honey or some other substance which provokes that taste.

For each of us individually and therefore differently, the association of “friend” will have the equivalent somewhere of a colour patch or a spoon of honey in personal experience. (pp. 194-5)

Which is to say – as Grayling recognises in his examination of the history of friendship in Western thinking – that friendships come in a number of different shapes, sizes and durations, which does not necessarily diminish them. The ‘friendness’ of a friend cannot be pinned down, only approximated through the narratives we tell about how we feel about them.

Resourceful Friends

In an online article for Archer Magazine, Tammy Thomas (2015) writes about her early experiences of transitioning, having started hormone therapy only four months prior. The article is about the importance of safe spaces for a person whose trans status makes her ‘worthy of ridicule, abuse and violence’. Thomas makes a very significant point about the potential for violence; she notes its ever-present threat – ‘especially when I’m on my own’ – and the kind of calculation that goes into determining, in non-safe spaces, ‘whether [a] person is interested in sleeping with me or killing me’. As I have pointed out in previous chapters, for queer young people the threat of explicit forms of violence can be a daily threat. Most pertinent here, however, is Thomas’ recognition of the safety temporarily created by people occupying a space:

[T]he most important safe space in my life is the one that travels with me, the one that’s made of my friends and our broader social network. When I’m part of a group of other gender and sexually diverse people I am at my safest. Having friends around who will correct strangers when I get misgendered is a truly reaffirming experience. Being surrounded by people who see the version of myself that I see is empowering. Having friends who are as excited and happy as me to see my body change is joyous. (ibid.)

By their co-presence in a space, Thomas and her friends – and other queer people – may constitute a temporary zone of safety that, while not unassailable (the hegemonic power of heteronormativity is always in operation), provides a base of mutual support and defence. The shared benefit that Thomas and her friends derive from their relationships is not the reason for making friends in the first place; it would be a poor world in which to live if our freely chosen friendships were forged on the basis of utility rather than enjoyment. On the contrary, ‘an additional bond comes to exist, which transcends the other reasons
we entered into association with those people in the first place’ (Grayling 2013, p. 1). Even so, there are benefits, material and non-material, that we derive from our friendships with others. Indeed, the tactic deployed most often by my participants in day-to-day survival was, quite simply, to draw on the myriad resources provided by their friends. What kind of resource(s) a friend provides depends both on the context in which support is required and on what ‘type’ of friend they are (that is, some friends were better than others for particular wants or needs). For Thomas, her friends served as a protective resource in their occupation of space.

Drawing on the accounts of their own queer research participants, Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) write that ‘friends provide both emotional and material support, but they also affirm identity and belonging’ (pp. 51-2). These provisions were reflected often in the accounts of my own participants. Zeus (21, male, gay), for example, described drawing on a friend as a material resource in his last year of high school, when he would get a lift to school in the morning: ‘When I was a senior I actually got a lift with a friend of mine that actually drove past our house… our street, so I used to meet him at the end of the street and he’d give me a lift every day’. Of course, being the friend who provides the material resource of transport can be burdensome too. When I asked Jason (17, male, gay) whether he found getting around the Gold Coast expensive, it was his friends’ drawing on him as a resource that made it so:

It is expensive, because I have a lot of friends and they treat me like a taxi, so… and then they’re like, “We’ll give you $2.50 petrol money”, and I’m like, I can’t wait until you get a car and you realise that’s not going to get me anywhere. That’s going to get me to turn the car on and then get the fuck out, because that’s all $2.50 is going to get you.

As discussed in Chapter 3, mobility is a significant issue for young people on the Gold Coast. Giving friends ‘a lift’ may seem like a small favour – or not so small, depending on the circumstances and expense – but it can have profound consequences, potentially providing access to services and institutions, to a social life, and to employment.

Daniel’s (21, male, bi) situation demonstrates some of the ways that mobility, enabled in his case by a friend, may provide access to additional benefits. Daniel relocated to the Gold Coast from a regional Queensland city. He had a friend who was moving to study at university, and Daniel came along, getting a job as an assistant manager at a café. Daniel and his friend were able to share the financial burden of moving to the Gold Coast, and they lived together for a year before Daniel moved in with his boyfriend,
Ryan. While Daniel's friend provided material support for their relocation and home, he also provided the social connection through which Daniel met Ryan. The ability to avail oneself of this connective form of assistance was sometimes taken for granted – as in the case of meeting other people through friends, an informal ‘grapevine’ usually acknowledged with ‘I met X through Y’ and nothing more. Teasing out the mechanics of such a pattern was often initially a cause for amusement because it seemed so banal, as in this exchange between Alice (22, female, lesbian) and I:

B: Have you met any queer people? Queer friends?
A: [laughs] Yeah.
B: And how did you meet them?
A: Um, randomly [laughs]. Yeah, through another friend. Yeah.
B: Is meeting through friends the way you tend to meet queer people?
A: Yeah, it's like… my friend is straight, and it happened that her friend was bi, and that her friend was gay… so yeah.

In most narratives my interviewees were decidedly aware of their friends’ utility in various situations, however, in the case of acting as a connective resource, the highly useful social network beyond one’s friend went largely unremarked upon, unless specifically asked about.

Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) describe what they call a ‘friendship ethic’ operating in the non-heterosexual world, which engenders a sense of care among friends through mutual responsibility and involvement, knowing one another’s needs and respecting one another’s individual autonomy and dignity. Throughout my participants’ narratives about their relationships with their queer friends, aspects of such an ethic can be seen alongside the provision of resources. Josh (23, male, gay), for example, speaks about the ways in which he draws on his friends as emotional and informational resources, both as providers of support and solutions to problems:

I draw on them in that sense. I haven’t for a while, but when you need to, you’ve always got someone to talk to. So if you’re having troubles with something you can talk to someone. That’s the good thing about having a broad friends group, and especially a broad gay friends group. Because you can discuss problems, you can… a lot of people have gone through what you would be going through, so they can give advice, they can recommend things, they can help. So it’s really good to have.

He points out the value of having a broad group of friends, which expands the range of experiences
potentially available to him. The provision of experience-based advice, recommendations and assistance are three concrete benefits Josh identifies, though he notes that he hasn’t had to draw on his friends in this way for some time. Josh also points out that friends provide emotional support in the sense that they ‘essentially won’t judge you for, like, anything unless you’re a terrible person… just acceptance’. With queer friends in particular, Josh says ‘it’s good knowing that you are not the only one in the area’, which provides a sense of belonging.

Gabrielle (19, female, bi), too, discussed the value of her friends as emotional resources. While talking about her experience of coming out to various friends over time, Gabrielle mentioned one main friend/confidante whom she told:

I had one good friend who, um, who’s very involved in the queer community. She writes for a magazine, like, for Q Magazine, she goes to all of the Pride festivals, and she was my main confidante, because she’s comfortable. Not a lot of my friends were confident with it … they don’t really know about their [sexuality], but I told her, this is mine and she was really accepting, so obviously I told her whenever I was having strife about it.

This ‘main confidante’ was especially valuable to Gabrielle due to her own comfort with queer sexuality, and participation in a community about it. This was someone with whom Gabrielle could discuss troubles she might be facing, and hopefully draw on her experiences with similar matters.

In addition to listening, and providing advice, Gabrielle also just spent time with her friend, hanging out and attending events. They attended the Queen’s Ball in Brisbane (an annual Pride event) together, with some other friends, about which Gabrielle noted, ‘[e]ven just at the Queen’s Ball, I felt that… being with people who were like me, it felt good, and I think that’s important for people… I think just that feeling of belonging is really important, you know?’ Like Gabrielle, Grey (19, female, gay), who we first met in Chapter 3, describes a sense of belonging she feels around friends, this time when working alongside them at a pizza store:

[T]wo of my best friends work there as well, and one of them is gay as well, well… kind of not openly gay, but has had girlfriends in the past, and you know, when I’m working with them it’s really good because I can be myself, but any other time it’s just work, you know, you put your head down and just do the job. But it’s not uncomfortable, I’d say, because it’s just something that I’ve lived with, so it’s not foreign to me to not be myself.

This feeling that Grey could ‘be herself’ is something that came up later in our conversation when she was talking about how she met her girlfriend, Jen. In an aside, Grey described her experience of a dinner
they both attended:

[W]ith Jen, actually, I met… her sister is gay as well and lives up in Brisbane, and for Easter one year, we went up to her sister’s house and had dinner there, and all her sister’s friends were over, and her partner, and everyone was just, like… everyone was gay, and talking about, like, weird things, like, going to the toilet, just really weird, just really openly comfortable things. And it was the first time that I’d actually been in a room with more than one gay person in the room, and it was just amazing. We were having, like, vegetarian pasta, and I was like, “Oh my god, this is amazing!” It was such a good feeling, I felt so comfortable, and so, like… it was probably the first time that I felt like I could be myself. Even though I kind of stayed quiet for the whole time and was just listening to them, it was so amazing to just listen to them.

In both of these short accounts – about her friends at work and at the dinner, other people she feels she can trust, and no one else – Grey mentions positive feelings about her surroundings that mean she is able to feel as though she belongs. This is most clearly revealed through the language she uses: ‘I felt so comfortable’, ‘I can/could be myself’. This sense of belonging Grey describes is linked to her social connections – her friends – and the space they occupy, rather than to any static place. Being around people you trust with information about yourself, thus feeling able to ‘be yourself’ and experiencing a sense of belonging as a result, are specific benefits of both Grey’s and Josh’s friendships. Indeed, Josh underscores this link when he discusses his move to the Gold Coast: ‘I didn’t have a lot of friends back then… so it kind of didn’t really feel like a place where I belonged when I first got here’. Josh contrasts his initial lack of friends which meant he felt like he didn’t belong with his positive feelings, later on, when, thanks to his friends, he knew that he was not the only queer person around.

Gabrielle (19, female, bi) describes a relationship she has with a female friend that she draws on, in part, as a sensual resource:

I’ve got a very close friend and… we don’t know why we aren’t going out. Everybody asks, “Are you guys going out?” Um… sometimes, you know, I’ll put my arm around her or I’ll be stupid in a line or something and hug her, and you get people that are kind of like… you can see it’s ticking over in their head. “Are they together, or…?”

Setting aside Gabrielle’s awareness of being watched (recall Ryan and Dan’s Valentine’s Day dinner in Chapter 5), the physical closeness between her friend and her fulfils a need to be touched that, over and above simply feeling good, may contribute to our wellbeing.48 Gabrielle is aware that she walks a line between contact that seems friendly and contact that extends beyond mere friendship, explaining that ‘it’s

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48 See, for example, Field’s (2010) review of research on touch and its role in socioemotional and physical wellbeing.
socially accepted and expected of friends who are girls to, you know, put their arms around each other
and sort of… mild displays of affection, but anything more extreme than that, that indicates a
relationship, is sort of frowned upon.’ This is a line that is finer for males than for females, as Josh (23,
males, gay) points out when he discusses public displays of affection:

At a party, if, say, if a girl’s hooking up with another girl, it’s fine, they’re just having fun. If a guy’s hooking up with another guy, it’s weird. And by bloke standards, it’s apparently wrong. But depending who the friends are, and what the situation is, it could be seen as just a bit of fun, but generally it’s just… nup.

This uneven standard of affection between males and females belongs to the list of binaries populating Western culture, and underpinning the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1999), such that the left-hand terms of the binaries male, masculine, active and dominant/subordinate align, as do the right-hand terms female, feminine, passive, subordinate. Clearly, the Male qualities imbue the Female qualities with an apparently complementary but clearly asymmetrical and inferior status. Within such a logic, ‘if a girl’s hooking up with another girl’, it’s ‘fine’ because women are passive, subordinate, objects. ‘If a guy’s hooking up with another guy’, it’s ‘weird’ because it’s insensible. It defies the ‘logic’ of the system, reflecting back its flawed foundation. So, while Gabrielle might feel like people are looking at her when she hugs a female friend and carries on doing so regardless, Josh recounts experiences like this:

I remember making out with a friend outside, and someone walked past and said something, and the friend just yelled something back at them, so it was just a verbal exchange, but it was just… rude? Like, that’s the… since then I haven’t really… unless I’ve been really drunk, I haven’t really done anything in public.

And this:

When I’m walking around with my partner I don’t hold hands or anything. Um, he doesn’t like it either anyway, so, it’s fine. Um, out in public, just… you try and tone it down a little. Say, at home you hug and stuff, you just don’t do that in public. You’d have a chat normally. It’s more of a friend relationship in public, rather than a romantic relationship. It just feels restricted.

In the first account, Josh experiences verbal abuse when a stranger sees him kissing his male friend. This, he says, has led to the moderation of his affection with males in public. In the second account, Josh ‘tones down’ his relationship with his boyfriend to a ‘friend relationship’ for fear of reprisal. Both of these accounts, and Gabrielle’s above, reflect the ways in which friends can be drawn on as sensual resources, but also how doing so may come into conflict with the demands of heterosexed public space, and a
society that negatively sanctions affection between people of the same sex, and even within that, differentiates between degrees of acceptance whereby women are more able to express affection – within limits – than men.

Allan (2001) notes that ‘individuals routinely use those in their personal networks to help interpret, accommodate, and resolve personal issues and dilemmas, in the process informing the detailed manner in which portrayals of the self are articulated’ (p. 334). Not only, then, do friends serve as emotional and informational resources, providing support and understanding where required, but they also have a hand in shaping how we see, and hence, present ourselves. Wright (21, male, gay) spoke about the power he saw in friendship when he answered a question I asked about how he might help a friend who confided in him about his sexuality. In response, he told a story about the role his influence played in the life of one of his friends and helped him come to terms with his sexuality. I quote Wright at length below:

I’ve got one friend who actually moved out here, and he was struggling with his sexuality for a while. Um, he identified himself as bi, but it was quite obvious that he had a preference for guys, um, and with my help in making him feel more comfortable and stuff like that… I wouldn’t say it was completely 100 per cent me, but I think with my influence and my advice and stuff like that, it made him feel a lot more comfortable. He actually lives with his boyfriend now, and it’s just amazing the transition that he’s had in one year, like, compared to the person that he used to be. He used to be quite ashamed of it and stuff like that. I think it’s quite… yeah, quite a big difference that you can make by just inviting someone out to go clubbing with you and your gay friends, or just even inviting someone out to have drinks, or something like that. Making them feel comfortable and talking about it, you know? Because he went from no one knowing at his work and his family not knowing, to his family knowing now, the fact that he has a boyfriend, everyone around him knowing, everyone at work knowing, like, and feeling more comfortable in several different social circles. So I think that’s a really big difference because that actually happened to me in my life, having someone come out to me, and me making them feel more comfortable.

For Wright, spending time with his friend, making space for discussion about things that his friend may not have discussed before (or felt safe discussing around other people), and introducing him to other queer people and places, were all steps that allowed his friend to feel more comfortable with himself. Wright tracks the development in his friend’s story from struggling with his sexuality in a rural city to a new ‘out’ life in a new city with fulfilling social and romantic relationships. Of course, Wright distils more than a year of another person’s lived experience into a little over a hundred words, and it seems rosy, however his narrative illustrates the powerful influence that friends can wield, and the benefits we can gain.
– and offer – in friendships.

Wright’s influence in his friend’s life was to do with making him more comfortable with a queer identity, but he also mentioned another form of influence that he draws on from his friends’ experiences with other people. For Wright, his friends act as vetting agents for potential relationships with others: ‘it’s sort of that… that trust, because if a person’s good enough to be friends with my friend, well, then they’re good enough to be friends with me’. Daniel, too, notes this as a useful benefit of friendship, encouraging newcomers to a local queer scene to go out with ‘friends that you know’, ‘Otherwise you could get taken into the wrong crowd… people that would probably just give you a one-night [stand], or pretend that they’re going to be your friend and then just ditch you.’ Using friends as a vetting resource was common among my participants. Ricky (21, male, gay) identifies the ‘safest way’ to meet people as through mutual friends:

Because you’re meeting people that someone else knows, there’s just a lot more trust. If you meet someone out, or you meet someone on Grindr, you know nothing about them, so you’re going by what they tell you. Whereas, if you’re going through what a friend’s telling you, I personally just believe… there’s more trust there, so it’s a lot safer.

This is, then, not just a useful benefit of friendships and the connections friends have into a broader social network, but is also an important survival tactic for queer young people, whether building a friendship network, looking for potential partners, or otherwise entering into a social arena with unknown actors.

The final resource that my participants derived from their friendships is less clear-cut, but still serves an important function when needed. Almost all of my participants discussed feeling a sense of comfort around other queer people. Frankie (28, female, gay), for example, talked about coming out at sixteen, and the difference between her experience at school and at soccer:

At the time, none of my friendship group at school, no one was gay. I did play a lot of soccer and there were a lot of gay people, like, gay girls on the soccer team – and hockey, they’re quite similar. So I guess when I was at sport I felt more comfortable, but at school I felt like I was just an alien.

For Alice (22, female, lesbian), this feeling of comfort comes from commonality, a feeling she suggests exists in queer associations, like Gay-Straight Alliances and LGBT groups, as well as among friends: ‘it’s always better to have people who know what you are experiencing and everything, so being able to share
with people who know what you are talking about and everything. Yeah, like, to have friends like you.’

Indeed, having friends ‘like us’, who reflect aspects of ourselves, serves to validate our identities; this is the basis of discussion around adequate representation of queer people in popular culture and the original impetus behind sites like AfterEllen and AfterElton. With regard to sexual identity, seeing other queer people in everyday situations serves to normalise our existence and also to provide models for living a queer life. With regard to individual identity, developing friendships with people who are like us reinforces who we are as individuals, and helps us to brace ourselves against a world that encourages conformity to particular archetypes of personhood (‘be an individual, but like this; ‘be yourself, but in that way’). Allen (2001) suggests that developing new relationships with people ‘located similarly’ and letting go of ‘less congruent’ relationships ‘helps to consolidate perceptions of changed identity’ (p. 335). This is recognition of the role that (new) friends can play in reflecting who we are. At the same time, Allen notes that ‘relationships provide active models of how different identities might be patterned and the transitions involved negotiated’ (ibid.). This is recognition of the role that friends (new or old) can play in reflecting who we could – or might like to – become. Thus, as a reflective resource, friends might not only reinforce an already-existing self, but serve as aspirational models for a future self.

Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) mention certain opportunities arising from queer friendships that my participants did not raise in their narratives. For example, they suggest that queer friends ‘offer the opportunity for alternatives that challenge the inevitability or necessity of conventional family life’ (p. 53). Such friendships might be understood as aspirational resources, offering the potential to change one’s life circumstances and the patterns of relations therein. Perhaps Kelly (19, female, bisexual) comes closest to describing such an opportunity when she tells me of her plans for after our interview: ‘I’m going to a barbeque this afternoon with all of my gay friends. They’ve all organised to go to Burleigh and just have a… we always catch up, like, randomly. We call each other “framily” as well. Not quite friends, not quite family’. Her description of her friendship group as ‘not quite friends, not quite family’ has parallels with the ‘important difference between heterosexual and non-heterosexual experiences of friendship’ (p. 52) that Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan argue for. Later in our conversation, Kelly explained what ‘framily’ meant in practice: ‘we all rely on each other. If I’m upset, you know, they’re there like that.
That's why it's a famly, it's awesome. We all look out for each other and take care of each other.'

Set against a heterosexual world that pervades our modes of relating to one another (through the heterosexual matrix) as well as most of the places in which such relating is carried out (through the heterosexing of space), queer friendships 'provide the space for the exploration of who or what you are, and what you want to become' (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001, p. 52). That is to say, where the institution of the family fails to foster or share in queerness, then queer friends can fill this role and serve as the foundation for untold different future selves. As Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan suggest, ‘[n]on-heterosexual friendships must therefore develop simultaneously as a focus for survival and self-actualisation in a hostile world, and as a framework for love, sex, reciprocity and commitment in building alternative forms of life’ (p. 58). While it is friendship’s role in survival that I am keenly interested in, I do not want to forget the potential for queer friendship as an aspirational resource in self-actualisation and the creation of ‘alternate forms of life’ like families of choice (ibid.), or for Kelly and her friends, ‘framily’.

It is, of course, very difficult to separate out the many ways that my participants’ relationships with their friends are drawn upon as resources. Friends can and do fill different roles at different times and the kinds of roles they fill – the kinds of resources they can provide – are dependent upon what type of friend they are. This is often reflected by their location in whatever system/s of categorisation we might use to make sense of our friendship network. A ‘close friend’ might, therefore, be an excellent confidante but a terrible source of material support, while a ‘work friend’ might be enjoyable to spend time with but not be the kind of person you want to hug when you’ve had a bad day. As I stressed in the opening of this chapter, context matters. Furthermore, even as our relationships with friends can provide useful resources to apply in tactics of survival, they carry with them their own problems that must be navigated.

**Friendship Troubles**

In their narratives my participants occasionally noted issues that they had to confront in the maintenance of their friendships. Invariably, there will be stumbling blocks in the lifetime of any friendship: ‘[r]elationships have to be worked at, and worked out, over time (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001, p. 70). I open this section with a ‘friendship trouble’ that I personally have been working
through, which only became obvious while conducting research for this thesis. This trouble began to reveal itself through the snowballing method I employed to gather participants. As I noted in Chapter 2, most of the friends that I initially contacted to participate tended to be like me – white, cis males. Indeed, most of their friends who contacted me to participate tended to be like me too. While I had some friends who weren’t cis males and ‘fit the bill’, and other friends who weren’t white, by and large my network of queer friends was fairly homogeneous. While this is not necessarily an issue with regard to my project, which does not aim to be demographically representative of the Gold Coast, it is an issue for me, especially given some of the ways in which friends prove to be resources in an ongoing project of self. Even as my friends provided connections – as I had hoped in employing the snowball method – the people on the other end of these connections were all quite similar to me. Even as my friends provided information, the information provided by a group of people ‘like me’, who have grown up in similar social and economic environments, is all quite similar. And even as my friends provide a locus for reflection, the reflective surface provided by people ‘like me’ is, perhaps, slightly narcissistic: a surface that reflects my ‘self’ (or specific aspects of myself), but does not necessarily enable or encourage reflection on my ‘self’. As I noted in the foregoing section, there are benefits for queer people in seeing representations of other queer people throughout our lives. Still, undertaking this project has at least revealed to me a trouble I have with the homogeneity of my network of friends, which I have only begun to interrogate. This is a personal project that extends beyond the bounds of my thesis, but it is important to recognise its beginnings in asking a few of my queer friends to answer some questions about getting by on the Gold Coast.

While on the subject of asking questions of friends, another trouble that I touched on in the last section, introduced through Josh and his Facebook connections, is the potential for friends who hold intimate knowledge about us to leak that knowledge to others. This is a trouble whether we have actively confided in a friend, or they have merely been present to observe our life. In Josh’s case, he militates against such leaks by managing his Facebook privacy settings such that certain aspects of his life are not visible to particular people. There is always the risk when people know sensitive or intimate things about us that they might not keep such knowledge to themselves. Toby (23, male, homo), for example,
recounted an anecdote about going out to a gay bar with his friend:

I’d get really annoyed at him because he used to always, like, see a hot guy, and I’d be like, “Oh my god, he’s really hot”, and my friend would go up and be like “Hey, my friend thinks you’re really hot”, and I’d be like “I fucking hate you”, and then I’d run away.

These disclosures to attractive strangers are minor breaches of confidence to be sure, and no doubt his friend thought he was ‘helping’, in that embarrassing way that only a friend can. Even so, taken further – disclosed to someone less receptive to queer attention, for instance – the result might not have been an amusing anecdote.

Michelle (19, female, gay) experienced a more egregious breach of confidence when she came out to some close friends at work:

M: I came out, told a couple of close friends, and then somehow, you know, news like that just spreads so fast, it’s amazing.

B: Before that, did you actively avoid letting your workmates know?

M: Yeah, I was pretty scared.

B: What were you scared of?

M: I don’t… I guess, people judging me? I don’t really know why I was, like, I just pretty much came out last year, and I’m 19, so… I’ve just been afraid, you know, of judgments and that’s probably it – what people think of me, I guess.

B: So it was not that you’d actually seen anything, just that you were afraid it might happen?

M: Yeah. And I was scared that people would treat me differently.

For Michelle, her fears were unfounded. Her workmates treated her no differently, and she says she feels comfortable at work, now that she is out. Regardless, the experiences of Toby and Michelle allow us to acknowledge the concerns that young queer people (especially those who are not out) might rightly have around their friends knowing sensitive or intimate information, and the potential for negative consequences – even if ultimately unrealised – should their confidences be broken.

The friendship trouble of leaking information is linked to another: that of maintaining boundaries between who knows about a person’s queer sexuality, and who does not. This was a trouble confronted by almost all of my participants, whether in the past – revealed when talking about their process of coming out – or presently – revealed when describing the sometimes quite complicated
balancing of openness and privacy. Wright (21, male, gay), for example, describes his living situation, and the state of non-disclosure about his sexuality that he maintains with his housemates:

W: I live with other people, um, friends, just general friends that I have, um, that don’t actually know about me. I don’t… I choose not to tell them basically because they have different views on life and stuff like that…

B: What do you mean?

W: Um, basically, one of them is Christian, so he would view me very, very differently, and the other one’s quite macho and quite, um, male, so he would um, he would express… like, they’ve both expressed different opinions of me, and fair enough, like, that’s sad because they are my friends, but at the same time, like, not even my own father knows, so… in all reality, like, it’s only the people that I think deserve to know, so.

For Wright, believing that his friends would view him in a different (negative) light is reason enough not to tell them. In our conversation, Wright stressed a personal belief that his sexuality does not shape who he is, saying ‘it is something that’s part of me, but it’s not something that formulates my life. It’s not something that forms different facets of my life and, like, shapes who I am. I’m still me, you know?’ There is a tension here between a self that includes queer sexuality but is unchanged by it, and a self that is queered by its sexuality. The issue, perhaps, is not whether Wright believes he is ‘still himself’ despite his queerness, but whether others would, given full knowledge of his sexuality, believe it too (‘he would view me very, very differently’). Regardless, the tension remains unresolved, and as a means to determine who should be told, Wright employs a calculus that takes into account how a person might react.

When asked whether he feels free to act however he likes in his home, Wright’s answer is succinct: ‘No.’ When pressed on the ways in which he feels limited, the main issue is having other queer friends over:

Basically I feel like I can’t have my friends over. I do have a lot of gay friends as you can imagine, so it would be nice to invite them over for a drink and stuff like I have in my previous houses, um… and I feel like I’m not able to do that in this house because, like, it would either offend or it would make my roommates feel uncomfortable or things like that.

The trouble Wright navigates around disclosing his sexuality is one that cascades into others, such as feeling unable to enjoy his home, and others’ company, as he wishes; balancing the personal/political beliefs of his (supposedly) unaccepting friends with his and his friends’ queer visibility; and maintaining current friendships in the knowledge that, given full disclosure, they might end. Maintaining this uneasy
balance of secrecy and comfort with his housemates is not a permanent solution; Wright says that his living arrangement is ‘alright for the moment’, but he has plans to move in the future.

Yet another trouble that some of my participants recounted confronting has to do with the way that certain forms of friendly physical contact between men is parsed as inappropriate. This trouble was introduced in the previous section through Josh’s experience of verbal abuse when he was seen kissing a male friend. While talking about the double standard that exists for heterosexual and homosexual public displays of affection, Thomas (22, male, gay) briefly related his own first-hand experience of similar abuse:

I was threatened walking through Surfers Paradise with my arm around a male friend. It was just friendly, like, we were just friends, but the person that saw us obviously took it completely too far in his imagination, the poor man, and you know, he yelled out verbal abuse and threats.

Recall Gabrielle (19, female, bi) in the last section, who was able to put her arm around and hug her female friend with little more than strange looks from nearby strangers, because ‘mild displays of affection’ between girls are ‘socially acceptable’. For Thomas and his friend, a similarly mild display of affection resulted in abuse. This particular friendship trouble, where one is expected to balance physical closeness with gendered norms around interpersonal contact, is the other side of drawing on friends as a sensual resource. Where, and with whom, one engages in friendly affection can precipitate violence.

This is not an exhaustive list of the troubles that arose for my participants in navigating their relationships with friends, but a selection of those that were mentioned most often, or had the potential for the most serious consequences. The potential for breaches of confidence was a constant concern for many, and this was taken into account when deciding whether or not to come out to particular people. Likewise, the potential for negative reactions was an influential factor in such decisions: a friend who had previously expressed disapproval of queer sexuality was less likely to be told than one who had expressed a positive opinion or no opinion at all. For my participants, navigating these troubles was part and parcel of friendship.
Yelling from Cars

While walking the streets of the Gold Coast I have been called a *faggot*, *queer*, and *gay* (among other pejoratives) — all yelled at me from the window of moving cars. This has happened on more occasions than I can remember. Sometimes I have expected it, like when I dyed my hair pastel pink, or when dressed in certain clothes (the Gold Coast has specific parameters for what is acceptably male — that is, masculine — dress, outside of which you’re seemingly free game). At other times there was nothing I could think of to have drawn the attention of my drive-by abusers. A sneaking suspicion that queerness is written on my body gets the better of me. I fear that my innermost thoughts are visible to all, that there is nothing I could conceivably do to pass as unremarkable — as straight — even when I *think* I am passing.

The experience of drive-by homophobic abuse affects me in a range of ways. I fear that the shouted slur might presage something more. *What if they stop? What if they get out of the car? What if they hit me?* It doesn’t matter who it is yelling. Because they are strangers, it makes them all the more terrible — not so much a person as a force of hatred. I am gripped by sadness at who I am; a sudden shame. *How do they know? How can they tell?* The slur, unattached to any particularly queer act beyond simply being, sticks to me — to the actor — prior to anything I might have done. *Did I do something? Did my body act without permission?* I become angry at their gall; at their presumption that they have any right to do such a thing. *How dare they? What could possibly motivate someone to abuse a person they don’t even know?* I hate them. I loathe them. I wish them ill. Finally, there is confusion. A lump of bewilderment and uncertainty where understanding should sit. *Why?* The word stands alone, a question in itself, before it becomes something more: *Why do men yell slurs at me from cars?* It is invariably men who do it. I have never been yelled at in this way by a woman. A close female friend who has had similar experiences concurred when I asked her: ‘It’s only ever by men’.

Perhaps these men don’t know what they’re doing when they yell those words, tinged with hatred or disgust or anger or... or just nothing. The words need not be intoned with negative intent to cut deeply. The words are enough. Perhaps they *do* know the effect they have, and their aim is to awaken exactly the feelings I feel. Maybe they can guess, and accurately, how it breaks me a little bit more each time. How it
quashes whatever small happiness I have while going about my business. How it hangs as a pall over the 
rest of my day, a threat of something worse to come. Short of excluding myself from the streets, or aping 
a form of masculinity that just doesn’t fit my body – temporary and unsatisfying tactics for survival – 
surely, I think, what needs to change is others. The fault does not lie with me and I refuse to accept that it 
does, even when a nagging voice from the least secure parts of me asks: Isn’t it a little bit your fault?

Didier Eribon (2004, p. 15) calls these insults ‘verbal aggressions that stay in the mind’:

They are traumatic events experienced more or less violently at the moment they 
happen, but that stay in memory and in the body (for fear, awkwardness, and shame are 
bodily attitudes produced by a hostile exterior world). (ibid.)

While the specifics of these moments of abuse are soon forgotten, once I can rally myself back to 
resilience and getting on with whatever I was doing, the memories of the feeling linger still in my mind, and 
they have shaped the ways I move through public spaces: more tentatively, more aware, more fearful of 
men. Eribon argues that an insult ‘is more than a word that describes’ (p. 16); that it is a performative 
utterance, a ‘linguistic act… by which a particular place in the world is assigned to the person at whom 
the acts are directed’ (p. 17). Such performative utterances function to ‘produce certain effects—notably, 
to establish or to renew the barrier between “normal” people and those Goffman calls “stigmatized” 
people and to cause the internalization of that barrier within the individual being insulted’ (ibid.).

Even as I write this, I am almost certain it will happen to me again. I will be yelled at – abused – from a car. Some man will shout faggot, or queer, or gay – or perhaps something new the next time – and the cycle of doubt and questioning will begin again. It seems inescapable here, in this city. Between 
August 2013 and August 2014, while I lived in Melbourne and walked to work through the city each day, 
it didn’t happen once. When I moved back to the Gold Coast again, it happened within the week. 
Thinking back on my time in Melbourne – the second largest city in Australia, and home to a significant 
queer population49 – I never once experienced nor, indeed, expected homophobic or anti-queer abuse. 
Perhaps this was luck, and other people who live in big cities like Melbourne or Sydney, or even closer to 
home in Brisbane, weather this kind of abuse daily.

49 Compared to the Gold Coast’s sole gay venue and handful of LGBTQ-specific service providers, The Greater Melbourne Area hosts numerous queer venues, 
queer events such as the Midsumma Festival and Melbourne Queer Film Festival, multiple LGBTQ-specific service providers, and was acknowledged by most of my 
participants as a relatively queer-friendly city, like Sydney.
I open with my affective experience of being yelled at from cars to introduce a chapter that investigates the processes that underlie mistreatments of queer young people – especially under circumstances, like random drive-by abuse, where neither the perpetrator nor the victim knows one another. I use drive-by abuse as an entry-point to unpacking the processes at work, the reasoning – or lack thereof – that might lead a person to disregard the human dignity of queer young people and to discriminate against, abuse, attack or vilify us. What impels the abuse is less pertinent here, for me, than the effects it produces in and on the people so abused and their abusers. It is my hope that by examining the underlying processes that legitimate one person’s abuse of another, tactics for undermining and disrupting this legitimating process can be identified or developed.

Being Human

Throughout my participants’ narratives, a theme emerged in their discussions of anti-queer sentiment and violence. There was a shared recognition that, in those instances of anti-queer abuse, assumptions were being made about who was and who was not properly human. To what degree a person partakes of humanness – how human they are – is the basis on which it is decided whether or not they deserve to be afforded basic human dignity and all of the trimmings that go along with it. Whether or not this dignity has been granted is revealed in the ways people act or behave towards them. During our interviews, my participants drew on a range of concepts dependent on an idea of what is ‘human’ in order to discuss their experiences of anti-queer sentiment. Two participants in particular – Grey and Thomas – referred to ‘dehumanising’ and ‘humanising’ experiences respectively.

Grey (19, female, gay), who I introduced in Chapter 3, mentioned the arguments used by opponents to same-sex marriage as strategies that relegate queer people to a nonhuman or subhuman position:

It’s so dehumanising. I mean, they’re people that just don’t agree with [same-sex marriage], and that’s okay, to have an opinion. But the extremists that go out and say that, you know, “If we let them marry, then we have to let people marry animals”, really kind of degrading people to nothing, and talking about us like we’re not human, or that we’re not… that we’re not real, or that we’re diseased or something. That if we get into society, we’ll turn everyone gay. It’s just gone too far.

Grey points out that some arguments against same-sex marriage draw fallacious connections between
dissimilar groups – in the example she gave, between same-sex relationships and inter-species or bestial relationships – which, in the process, reduce queer people to a less-than-fully-human status. By likening same-sex marriage to inter-species marriage (despite the clear qualitative differences between the two cases) or by applying base characteristics to queer people generally (for example, painting us as carriers of disease) our degree of humanness is impugned.

Thomas (22, male, gay) is caucasian and moved to the Gold Coast from regional north Queensland. He is well-spoken and deeply interested in politics. At many points throughout our interview, Thomas related what he was discussing to contemporary goings-on in the Australian and international political arenas. When I asked about whether he thought certain groups of people are more accepting of queer people than others, Thomas drew on the concept of humanisation to explain why he thought this might be:

You’ve got people that have, you know, strong friendships with gay-identifying or queer-identifying people, and they’re always going to be more accepting because they’ve handled that sort of an issue first-hand, and so they have a slightly more unique perspective than someone who’s got no idea and is just making an assumption based on what they’ve read or seen. And so, you’ve got people like that or people with a queer person in their family as well. They’re obviously going to be a lot more accepting. … I think, like, as some people are slightly more liberal-minded and, you know, they don’t just take the facts and just build a personality or persona for you, and judge you from that point. They like to get to know you and work out who you are. … People that have a more humanising contact and stronger bonds with their friends, stuff like that, personal connections, they’re going to be able to accept a queer-identifying person because, at the end of the day, it’s not going to be a big deal for them. It’s a non-issue. It’s just who you are and that’s it – you can’t change it.

For Thomas, ‘humanising contact’ with queer people is a key factor in building acceptance. He does not, however, make the argument that having a relationship with one queer person means that the acceptance for that individual will be generalised to all queer people. Indeed, Cortes et al. (2005) found that, despite varying levels of self-reported familiarity\(^{50}\) between surveyed individuals and members of outgroups (to

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\(^{50}\) Familiarity was measured using three questions: ‘Approximately how many people of the [name of the group] do you know?’ ‘Approximately how many people of the [name of the group] would you consider good friends of yours?’ and ‘Approximately how many minutes per month do you spend interacting with people of the [name of the group]?’ (Cortes et al. 2005, p. 249).
whom they were asked to assign secondary emotions\textsuperscript{51}, ‘familiarity does not seem to account for infrahumanization biases,’\textsuperscript{52} that is, the lower attribution of secondary emotions to outgroups’ (p. 252). In the findings of Cortes et al., a person’s familiarity with an individual member of an outgroup (a queer friend or relative, for instance) does not necessarily make the entire outgroup (queer people \textit{in general}) seem more human.

Grey’s and Thomas’s mentioning of de/humanisation highlights an interplay between individual and general (or shared) queer identities that complicate anti-queer sentiment. On the one hand, dehumanisation works to tar all queer people with the same brush (fictionality, disease, degeneracy), while on the other hand, the inverse process of humanisation grants specific queer individuals their humanity through direct familiarising contact. This seems an impossible game for queer people: humanisation exempts individual queers from subhuman status while at the same time dehumanisation generalises any perceived faults to each and every one of us.

Even though there seemed to be an awareness among my participants that perceptions regarding one’s humanity are related, if not central, to the anti-queer sentiment and violence queer people face, there was no unified discourse among them for talking about or describing how and why humanness mattered. Lulu (29, female, no identification), for example, noted that the value of the GetUp! (2011) \textit{It’s Time} advertisement\textsuperscript{53} was that ‘they [queer people] become human’ to those watching the ad when they can identify similar life experiences. The implications of this, however, were not discussed beyond a recognition by Lulu that it ‘challenges the way people think’ about queer people. That the default categorisation of queer people might be non-human or sub-human remained uninterrogated. Ricky (21, male, gay) located a similar moment of potential identification in the video clip for Macklemore’s song, released in 2012, \textit{Same Love}: ‘they go to a dance party, they go to the beach, they jump off a cliff. If you

\textsuperscript{51}‘Secondary’ or ‘uniquely human emotions’ are those emotions not shared among humans and animals, for example, ‘admiration, resentment, love, melancholy’ (Cortes et al. 2005, p. 244). These were contrasted with ‘primary’ or ‘non-uniquely human emotions’, which are shared among humans and animals, such as ‘fear, surprise, anger, joy’ (ibid.). There is a problem for me with the premise of this schema that suggests animals do not feel love – anyone who has enjoyed the companionship of a dog is likely to feel similarly uneasy. I retain the schema here for its usefulness, but stress that the human/animal distinction therein emerges from an outmoded ‘either/or’ categorisation typical of the binary oppositions that pervade Western thought. See footnote 54 below.

\textsuperscript{52}In this context, infrahumanization bias is the tendency for people to assign more human essence (‘intelligence, language, and refined emotions’) to one’s own social group – one’s ‘ingroup’ – than to other social groups – relative ‘outgroups’ (Cortes et al. 2005, p. 244).

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{It’s Time} was an ad produced by community campaign organisation GetUp! in 2011 to advocate for same-sex marriage in Australia. On the organisation’s website, users could enter their email address to digitally sign a petition calling on then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard and then-Opposition Leader Tony Abbott to ‘do what you were elected to – exhibit political courage and leadership to make marriage equality a reality’ (GetUp! 2018).
switch one of the guys out with a girl, it’s exactly the same thing. It’s what hetero couples do. It’s showing that we’re no different. We do the exact same things’. This, Ricky says, ‘makes them [queer people] into real people that others can relate to’. What being related to might mean for queer people in practice, however, was not elaborated on. There was, then, a colloquial understanding of the value of humanness for queer people among some of my participants, but little explanation or explication of its function: what it means to be considered fully human, and what it means to have that humanness taken away.

**Taking It Away**

In the case of verbal abuse using terms like ‘faggot’, ‘queer’, or ‘gay’, dehumanisation occurs in the relation between the abused body (be it mine, or that of another queer person), and the pejorative term (signifier), which carries with it a relation to something else (signified). By naming me ‘faggot’ as an insult, what is signified by ‘faggot’ is intended to stand in for me. The slur ‘faggot’ elides my being, or that of its target and carries its negative meaning with it: effeminacy, sissydom, queerness. It is a floating signifier of abnormality that acts to set up distinctions between what I am and what I am supposed to be (that is: properly human). The imputation in ‘faggot’ is that I am, in fact, not properly human at all, but a broken human; or a lesser human; or a thing indelibly marked by a trait which subordinates me. By naming me a ‘faggot’, there is the imputation that something is amiss with my very being as a human being.

Dehumanisation, then, is the process whereby characteristics of humanness and personhood are denied – wholly or partially – to human persons. We dehumanise others by seeing them ‘as less than human, likening them to beasts or unfeeling objects and treating them with inhumanity’ (Haslam, Loughnan, Kashima & Bain 2009, p. 56). This has very real consequences for those on the receiving end (p. 55). While dehumanisation has no direct effect on an individual’s species, the discursive denial of another person’s humanity clears space for that person to be treated as subhuman or in inhuman ways.54 The discourse of dehumanisation shapes our perceptions of those whom we dehumanise, then shaping how we act towards them. This is a self-perpetuating cycle: We see a certain group as less-human, then treat them as such, which reinforces our seeing them as less human, and so on.

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54 This discursive operation depends on the structuring idea of a hierarchy of beings, where humans exist above all other living creatures: a great (vertical) chain of being, rather than a broad (horizontal) spectrum of co-equal evolution. Contrast the ‘Great Chain of Being’ from Didacus Valades’ (1579) *Rhetorica Christiana* with the ‘Hillis Plot’, designed by David Hillis, which represents all life on earth as equally evolved.
Dehumanisation is also not a rare process. It is both commonplace and taken for granted. Haslam, Loughnan, Hashima and Bain (2009) trace its appearance in everyday phenomena:

"Common terms of abuse compare people to nonhuman entities, individuals who violate social norms are described as beasts or monsters in the news media, and discourse about race and gender contains explicit or thinly veiled comparisons of people to animals. These forms of dehumanisation are, in short, frequently employed strategies in intergroup contexts. (p. 56)"

Vernacular speech is rife with dehumanising discourse, revealing itself wherever police become ‘pigs’, women are reduced to ’bitches’, and various other disliked individuals or groups are labelled, for example, ‘dogs’ or ‘rats’. This kind of language takes on ever more innocuous forms where human subjects are reduced from whole human beings to, perhaps, ‘just a girl’, or ‘just a kid’, separating them from full agency. This kind of dehumanisation doesn’t appear particularly malicious, but its effects run deep: How can ‘just a girl’ do traditionally male work? How can ‘just a kid’ know their own desires? These dehumanised positions are viewed as less-than-fully-human, and thus may be treated as such.

As an everyday strategy, dehumanisation works to obstruct identification with another person. The flipside of this is that when we perceive others as human like us, we can identify with them, put ourselves in their position, and, perhaps most importantly of all, empathise with them. In a psychological study of 156 undergraduate students, Locke (2009) found that aggression towards peers positively correlated with the tendency to ascribe more humanising traits to the self than to others. Locke suggests that this indicates an association between aggression and ‘conceptualising others in less human terms than the self’ (p. 101). If viewing one’s peers as less human than oneself (not even necessarily as non-human) results in a tendency to act more aggressively towards them, what one might do to a person one did not see as human at all is a concerning notion.

The problem of dehumanisation is not easily addressed because it is not just a matter of degree, but also of kind: Haslam, Loughnan, Hashima and Bain (2009) identify two different kinds of dehumanisation, animalistic and mechanistic, as the denial of ‘uniquely human’ characteristics on the one hand, and ‘human nature’ characteristics on the other. Uniquely human characteristics include ‘civility, refinement, moral sensibility (and related forms of cultural learning), as well as higher cognition and—because uniquely human attributes are seen as relatively late emerging—maturity’ (p. 62). Human nature
characteristics include ‘emotionality, warmth, openness, agency (desire and vitality), and depth (i.e.,
essentialised characteristics)’ (p. 63). The denial of what is uniquely human results in ‘an overt or implicit
likening of people to animals and the ascription of relatively bestial or barbaric characteristics to them’
(ibid.), while the denial of human nature results in ‘an image of others as object- or automaton-like, or
robotic. … [T]hey are implicitly or explicitly objectified or seen as machine-like: lacking animation,
agency, emotionality, and heart’ (p. 64). Each of these forms of dehumanisation – animalistic and
mechanistic – aligns with one side of the binary that characterises humanity: nature and culture,
respectively.

Spinoza and Dehumanisation

There is, for me, an explanation for why we dehumanise others in Spinoza’s Ethics (2001, p. 79),
when he states that abstract concepts of things (that is, Universals) are the result of the inability of the
human body to imagine every individual instance of a set in their specific difference. He gives the
example man, of which ‘the mind has no power to imagine the determinate number of men and the small
differences of each, such as colour and size, etc.’ (ibid.). In lieu of the power to imagine all men in their
individual specificity, Spinoza says the mind ‘will therefore distinctly imagine that only in which all of
them agree in so far as the body is affected by them’ (ibid.). Thus, the aspect of each individual that has
‘chiefly affected’ the imagining body and is common among those individuals, becomes the measure of
what is or is not man, ‘covering thereby an infinite number of individuals’ (ibid.). Deleuze (1988)
summarises the process as such:

[A]n abstract idea arises when our capacity for being affected is exceeded and we are
content with imagining instead of comprehending: we no longer seek to understand the
relations that enter into composition; we only retain an extrinsic sign, a variable
perceptible characteristic that strikes our imagination, and that we set up as an essential
trait while disregarding the others…. (p. 45, original emphasis)

Because we are unable to comprehend the multiplicity of differences between individuals, we take the
aspect or characteristic we have most been affected by that is similar among those individuals, and use it
as the basis of a universal image of the thing(s). Spinoza (2001) writes that ‘those who have more
frequently looked with admiration upon the stature of men, by the name man will understand an animal of
erect stature’ (pp. 79-80, original emphasis). From this example, it is easy to see how man can become a
universal based upon any number of aspects/characteristics; indeed Spinoza provides several more: ‘an animal capable of laughter, a biped without feathers, a rational animal, and so on’ (p. 80). While the capacity for laughter, a lack of feathers, and rational thought are certainly characteristics held in common between most, if not all men, they are not truly universal.

Spinoza (2001) warns that these supposed universals are, in fact, specific to the person imagining them into being because they are founded upon the aspect/characteristic of the universalised set that most often affected the person. He writes, ‘[w]e must observe that these notions are not formed by all persons in the same way, but that they vary in each case according to the thing by which the body is more frequently affected, and which the mind more easily imagines or recollects’ (p. 79). Because different people are disposed to different affections, how a universal abstract is imagined – on what commonality it is based – depends on an incomplete form of knowing, which Spinoza calls ‘knowledge of the first kind, opinion or imagination’ (p. 80). Knowledge of the first kind comes to us ‘from individual things, represented by the senses to us in a mutilated and confused manner, and without order to the intellect’ (ibid.) and ‘from signs; as, for example, when we hear or read certain words, we recollect things and form certain ideas of them similar to them, through which ideas we imagine things’ (ibid.). That is, from sense perceptions (or affects), and our association of sense perceptions (or affects) with one another. I understand this kind of knowledge as somewhere between empirical data and conjecture, providing apparently true observations about the world, from which are drawn dubious conclusions.

For Spinoza (2001), ‘images of things’ are representations of ‘external bodies as if they were present… although they do not actually reproduce the forms of the things’ (p. 65). What agrees among those things that ‘more frequently’ affect the body ‘and which the mind more easily imagines or recollects’ (p. 79) forms the basis for our abstract concepts or universals. For example, the presence of one’s parents in childhood and the image or recollection of one’s parents may both cause affects in the body, because images or recollections are experienced as though they are actually present. From this example of parents, what a person understands to inhere in the universal parent will be that which ‘agrees’ in her own parents and in other parents that most frequently affected her. Her incapacity to comprehend all parents in their multiplicity of differences leads to a ‘universal’, but one that is specific to her own experience and
affection. She may, therefore, understand parent to be an adult who raises a child, but she may also understand the concept to depend on biological parentage. Both understandings are strictly true in specific instances, but neither is necessarily true in all cases, that is, universally.

The most direct access any person has to a thing that allows the formation of the universal human, is one’s own body. Beyond this a priori access, a person is born into a social world populated with other actors. As a person grows, they are socialised and enculturated, processes informed by their surrounds; an ingroup with whom one can identify, outgroups against which one can define oneself, and a culture that is underpinned by structuring notions like binarised nature/culture and the heterosexual matrix. This is to say that, for the majority of people – born to heterosexual parents, growing up heterosexual, within a system of compulsory heterosexuality, let alone any other shared traits (race, ethnicity, class, and so on) – what becomes universally human is what shares those traits in their experience and affection. The perfect representation of what is human becomes a reflection of oneself, and those like oneself. Unless, perhaps – as is the case for queer people – they are told, and shown, and assumed to agree, even coerced to agree, that they are not quite as human as others: an exception to the rule, surrounded by reproductions of the rule.

And so I return to dehumanisation as a process of negating or denying what is ‘human’ in others. While a dehumanising act like calling me a faggot from a moving vehicle is unpleasant to experience, its real power is not in reducing me to a bundle of sticks in that moment.55 It is rather in the underlying structures of thought that inhere in the person yelling anti-queer abuse, which disallow a ‘faggot’ even presumptive humanity. What might a man who does not believe me to be human do were he not in a car but confronting me on the street?

There are protections in place for queer and young people at various levels, such as the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld), which protects against direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of both (actual and presumed) age and sexuality (§7). Such protections aim to address a specific list of

55 The violence inherent in the word ‘faggot’ is exposed in an episode of the television show Louie (2010), when comedian Rick Crom tells a (likely apocryphal) story about its origin during a poker game: ‘Well, the word “faggot” really means a bundle of sticks used for kindling in a fire. Now, in the Middle Ages, when they used to burn people they thought were witches, they used to burn homosexuals, too. And, they used to burn the witches at a stake, but they thought the homosexuals were too low and disgusting to be given a stake to be burnt on, so they used to just throw them in with the kindling, with the other faggots. So that’s how you get “flaming faggot.”’
injustices explained in the Act, and there are exemptions that mean certain acts constitute legal forms of discrimination (Part 5, §§103-113A). What is not protected against, and arguably would be impossible to legislate for, is an abstract concept of universal ‘human’ that, by exclusion, designates queer people as sub-human, and young people as always not-yet-adult and thus not fully human. To legislate against concepts would be to bring thoughtcrime into the realm of non-fiction, and yet it is the presence in the Australian cultural imaginary of an exclusionary idea of human that ultimately gives license to acts of dehumanisation. There is a long and ugly history of anti-queer sentiment that – in myriad small and not-so-small ways, over lifetimes – leaches into our conception of what is properly human. This history goes largely unchallenged by the scarcity of positive representations of queerness in widely consumed cultural products, from the canonical texts we explicitly designate as educational, to other media, like television, comics, books, music and games. The effect is to make admitting queer people into the universal human archetype difficult from the outset.

There is, then, a double-bind where the humanness of queer youth is concerned: queer people are seen as lacking in essential characteristics of ‘human nature’, and young people are seen as lacking in developed characteristics of what is uniquely human. This means that queer youth are subject to both animalistic and mechanistic forms of dehumanisation. These dehumanising practices are not necessarily consciously carried out, but always already colour individuals’ perceptions of queer youth as an outgroup. The presence of such practices are revealed through language, for instance. In description of queer sex practices and desires, the language of ‘nature’ is frequently evoked: ‘It’s not natural’, ‘It’s not normal’, ‘It’s a perversion’. Such statements reveal mechanistic dehumanisation, where queer people are transformed into non-human others by the speakers failing to perceive or actively ignoring the fact that queer people have human biological characteristics. When talking about young people and their capacity for self-determination and self-knowledge, the language of development (as a member of the culture) is evoked: ‘You’re too young to know’, ‘It’s only a phase’, ‘You’ll grow out of it’. These statements evince animalistic dehumanisation, where young people are transformed into non-human others by infantilising them, denying their capacity for higher-level thought processes, and by suggesting they have not (yet) developed the characteristics that make one fully and uniquely human.
Because there are two distinct processes of dehumanisation enacted upon queer young people at any one time, denying us personhood on the basis of human nature and human uniqueness, there must be two distinct approaches to countering these processes that address the specific contours of each. In the first instance, the normalisation of queer sex counters this perception. Over and above this, it is important to bring to light the sheer diversity of human life and therefore the impossibility of declaring one thing or another ‘unnatural’ simply because it is not common. While we may not accept the notion of ‘an essential human nature’, if we are to counter mechanistic dehumanisation we need to acknowledge the essentialist beliefs that underpin it. In the case of animalistic dehumanisation, it is important to recognise that young people have agency, and to reinforce this recognition consistently in order to counter a perception that they remain unable to make informed decisions about their own lives until some future time when they are designated ‘old enough’ – that is, ‘adults’. Of course, the irony for queer young people is that this point can never be reached because being queer is not considered a ‘normal’ adult state.

Getting It Back

During the interviews for this project, I included several questions that invited my participants to consider changes that could be made in specific areas of their lives that would improve things for them as a young queer person living on the Gold Coast. In particular, I asked how it would be easier to get around the city, what would make them feel more comfortable in the public spaces in which they find themselves most often (at school, in the workplace), and how it might be easier to find and meet other queer people. One of the final questions I asked was whether my participants could think of any changes that could be made in any area that would improve things for themselves or for other queer people on the Gold Coast, or in other parts of Australia. These interviews, conducted between 2012 and 2013, precede a number of important changes to state and federal Australian laws that affected the lives of queer people. For example, in Queensland, until September of 2016, the age of consent for vaginal and oral sex was 16, while for anal sex the age of consent was 18 (Burke 2016). Another example, mentioned in Chapter 4, was the change to the legislative definition of marriage in Australia from ‘the union of a man and a woman’ to ‘the union of 2 people’ with the Marriage Amendment (Definitions and Religious Freedoms) Act 2017 (Cwlth) in December of that year. At the time of our interviews, my participants responded strongly to –
and in the context of – these now-historical legal discriminations. Though laws have changed in response to prevailing social norms, two things are important to keep in mind. First, removing discriminatory apparatuses from the laws of a society does not immediately (or, necessarily, ever) divest members of that society of similarly discriminatory beliefs and behaviours. Second, despite these changes, the opinions expressed by my participants provide a unique snapshot of a particular time and place in Australian society, revealing hopes and fears that were specific to them, but also shared more broadly among queer people on the Gold Coast, in Queensland, and in Australia.

Responses to the questions about specific issues of mobility and comfort/safety were largely pragmatic, referring to practical, material changes that could be made by authorities to city services, infrastructure and institutions. Alice (22, female, lesbian), for example, said that the G:link tram was a positive change for her personal mobility, and that completing the second stage of the G:link project would make getting around easier still. Samantha (19, transgendered female, lesbian) and Thomas (22, male, gay) both said that getting around would be easier for them – because it would be safer – if Gold Coast public transport services provided an increased security presence to deal with actual or possible incidents of violence (whether anti-queer or not).

Responses to the question about queer sociality most often placed responsibility on individuals and their friends. Michelle (19, female, gay) suggested that there are places and services available to people and it’s just a matter of going out, or engaging with them. Kelly (18, female, bisexual) returned to the notion of the ‘grapevine’, encouraging the use of already-existing friendship networks and their connections to meet other queer people.

In response to the more general, aspirational question about any changes that could be made to improve things, my participants took two approaches. The first approach, taken only by Daniel (21, male, bi) and Alice (22, female, lesbian), related to small-scale changes oriented towards the local queer community, respectively suggesting the establishment of government-funded spaces for local queer communities and holding more queer events. My other participants’ approaches to improving things for themselves and other queer people, both locally and further afield, were to suggest large-scale, sweeping changes to institutions and shared cultural understandings: Wright (21, male, gay) and EJ (25, male gay),
for example, both believe that it is societal *attitudes* towards queer people that need to change, though their ideas on how this can be achieved differ. Others, like Kelly (18, female, bisexual), Ricky (21, male, gay) and Michelle (19, female, gay), argue that changes around the *acceptance* of queer people in society would improve our lot. Finally, Ryan (21, male, gay) and Lulu (29, female, no identification) suggest that increasing *awareness* about queer people, our lifestyles and our sexualities would change things for the better.

While my participants produced between them a range of different ideas about what needed to be changed to make life better for them and other queer people, suggestions for how these changes could be implemented to address queer disadvantage and discrimination against them, were largely similar. They converged around two key themes with multiple possible approaches: *visibility* and *education*. If deployed strategically, tactics of visibility and education may work together in effecting change. Queer visibility could, for instance, serve to educate people, while education may serve to increase queer visibility. How my interviewees thought increasing visibility and educating people could be achieved differed from person to person, however their responses agreed on several significant points.

**Visibility**

During our interviews my participants discussed the importance of queer people ‘being seen’: of showing queer representations in media to friends and family, the value of people being ‘out’, and, speaking more generally, the value to queer people of attention, awareness, acknowledgement, visibility, and recognition. That is, it was considered important that queer people’s existence be recognised and acknowledged, and not just in the abstract (“Oh, there are queer people out there…”), but in everyone’s lives in some way, to have people know first-hand that queer people live in their communities, that they might *know* a queer person.

A concern for me is that those interviewees who spoke about the importance of queer visibility only mentioned the value of *normative* representations of queer people and lives. Gabrielle (19, female, bi), for example, discussed queer visibility arising from research projects like my own in terms of their benefits, like ‘raising awareness of the fact that it’s there and it’s not different, it’s just… it’s just a part of everyday life, like, “Oh, that person has diabetes. Oh, that person’s not straight.” Just that sort of thing’.
While the connection Gabrielle draws between queerness and diabetes is perhaps a little unfortunate, her point is that acknowledging the existence of queerness is important. Even as this kind of recognition is something Gabrielle said she takes comfort in, she reduces queerness to something that is ‘not different… just a part of everyday life’. This is true for Gabrielle who lives every day as her (queer) self, but for the majority of Australians, queerness continues to be seen – and lived – as a minority experience.

Samantha’s (19 transgendered female, lesbian) response is emblematic of a normalising approach to queerness many of my participants suggested:

It’s a matter of giving examples of real gay and transgender people, showing the exceptions to the typical stereotypes which are over-pronounced, like your typical drag queen or the flamboyant gay man. Because everyone seems to think that all gay men are like, you know, super feminine. Most of the ones I meet are actually masculine gay men. But everyone seems to think that if they see a skinny guy who talks in a slightly higher-pitched voice, that they’re suddenly gay.

Samantha’s focus here on effeminate men being mistaken as gay might be related to her own experiences before she transitioned. She spoke early on in our interview about the trouble she had with other people mislabelling and misgendering her as a gay man, when she identified as a female born into a male body who was attracted to women. Whatever the reason, Samantha suggests that there are stereotypes about queer people that are overblown, and that it is a matter of showing what queer people are really like behind the ‘typical drag queen or the flamboyant gay man’. How this is to be done, Samantha suggests, is

…to find the most, you know, optimal… like, a good citizen, that upholds all the laws, does everything nice, has a great job, a great life… they’ve got things underway and they’ve earned it from scratch – because people like to see that stuff – and have them be gay. To have them explain their story, and see what they’ve come through, and to give humanity to something that people think is just not human.

This mention of ‘giving humanity to something that people think is just not human’ is important in terms of the broader processes of dehumanisation I have identified, however, I want to focus here on the suggestion that the ‘best’ representation of queer people for changing others’ opinions is an individual who, ‘but for’ their queerness, is completely normal. In fact, this is an individual who is remarkably ‘normal’; who excels at the life expected of everyone: ‘a great job, a great life… they’ve earned it from scratch’. Rosenblum (1994) calls this particular figure, following Ruthann Robson, the ‘but-for queer’:

‘[S]omeone who, “but for” their being queer, would be perfect’ (pp. 93-4). Rosenblum discusses the ‘but-
for’ queer in the context of gay and lesbian legal ‘victories’ that were really only clear victories for a subset of all queer people; that is, the least queer, those whose identities are not also intersected by (non-normative) ‘class, sex, race, sexual practice and gender performance’ (p. 94). Rosenblum explains that the ‘but-for’ queer serves as an ideal participant in legal proceedings based on sexual orientation, one who is free from extenuating circumstances related to their identity (class, sex, race, and so on) that ‘might confuse the issue before the court’ (p. 93). This figure is ideal, then, because it allows the court to determine more readily that the discrimination came down to the issue of sexuality alone, and not to race, or poverty, or some other complicating factor.

Of course, lives are not lived in isolation from the circumstances of our existence, and even the ‘but-for’ queer is inescapably situated in a socio-economic class, and impacted upon by race, sex, gender, and so on. Even if one ignores categories of identity and the dis/advantages produced by their intersectionality, these categories do not cease to exist or to operate in and on people’s lives. The point Rosenblum (1994, p. 93-4) makes is that the ‘but-for’ queer, as a party in a legal process, is unremarkable except for his or her sexuality, and it is on this ground – and only this ground – that legal battles must then be fought. ‘While “other” queers may benefit from such litigation, their exclusion from lesbian and gay litigation means that intersectional discrimination is not addressed by that litigation’ (ibid). And here lies the issue with Samantha’s ‘optimal… good citizen’ who also happens to be gay: using this figure as representative of queer people and the vastly differing lives they might lead is decidedly unrepresentative. That ‘typical drag queen’, the ‘flamboyant gay man’, and all the rest of the colourful queer crowd who aren’t normal ‘but-for’ their queerness are forgotten in such an approach. Any visibility gained in this kind of endeavour is in fact only visibility for the ‘but-for’ queer, the ideal homonormative subject (see Chapter 2).

Education

The second key approach to improving things for queer young people was through ‘education’, broadly understood. My participants spoke about developing ‘understanding’ and ‘reducing ignorance’ as two separate conceptions of education (a building up; a breaking down); they discussed where education does or should come from – especially media, schools, and governments – and in a number of cases, they
described education as a means for improving queer visibility.

Ryan’s (21, male, gay) response is illustrative of linking visibility to education. To improve things, he said, we need to

put more awareness out there that there are a lot of actual gay people on the Gold Coast, and it’s not such a big deal. Like, showing photos of a straight couple holding hands… have that, but as a gay couple, so it’s not so shocking for people when they see it.

Ryan suggests that images of a gay couple holding hands – partaking in a representation of a relation that for a straight couple would be unremarkable – might raise the visibility of queer people and act as an educative tool, acclimatising or desensitising viewers to (supposedly ‘shocking’) queer relations. For Ryan, visibility and education work together, with images – he is referring here to advertising images in particular – serving to passively educate people and break down old belief structures. This kind of approach depends a great deal on the receivers of images, whether they are viewing photos, as Ryan suggests, or other forms of media (television shows, films, music, and so on).

Grey (19, female, gay), however, is critical of an advertising-based approach to education and spoke in particular about several ads designed specifically to address anti-queer discrimination:

With those ads, especially because they’re short, and they’re seen, and they’re good, and people quote them, and they show their friends… those people that are watching them and showing their friends, they’re already advocates. It’s not going to change anyone’s mind because the people whose minds need to change aren’t going to be watching them. And if they are, they’re not going to just change on a dime, otherwise they would’ve been changed by the amount of pleas beforehand. So I think [ads] are good for raising awareness, but… I don’t know.

Grey’s comments raise two important factors. First, because queer issues are a relatively niche concern, queer-themed advertisements are either narrowcast to a queer (and queer-friendly) audience or posted on the internet to be actively sought out by those who want to watch. Thus, the ads are either accessed by choice, or targeted to particular sites and users expected to be receptive to their messages. What this means for education is that those who would view these ads are already amenable to their content, and those who are not amenable would never seek them out in the first place. Second, Grey questions whether new anti-discrimination ads would effect change in those holding anti-queer sentiments if past

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ads, debates, and pleas have been ineffective. The concern Grey raises about people having to be open to learning about queer people and our experiences is one shared by a number of my participants. Frankie (28, female gay), for example, expresses a particularly pessimistic view of media with queer content effecting change, saying: ‘I just don’t think people care. Unless it’s got something to do with them, unless they’ve got a family member or a friend, they’re not really willing to be educated on it.’ For Frankie, it is apathy towards topics that don’t directly relate to them, which means that people are unreceptive to attempts to educate. Samantha (19, transgendered female, lesbian) also expresses doubts about the value of queer content in media, but regards people’s unchanging opinions as an effect of the media rather than distance – real or imagined – from queer people and issues:

People don’t change their opinions about this stuff when they see that. Young people seeing it, yes, but people that have already been infected with Two and a half Men and other shit like, you know, regular crap media, nothing will change. And it’s generally through the media because that’s what gives the general consensus to society, you know?

Even as Samantha denounces mainstream media for producing the status quo, she leaves some room for optimism: young people are more likely, she says, to change their minds, but only if they haven’t been ‘infected’ by dominant – heterosexist – media content. (An implicit understanding of the workings of cultural hegemony if ever I saw one.) There is, I think, further cause for optimism here: as Samantha believes people’s opinions are developed out of the content they consume, increasing the amount of quality queer-friendly content available and making it easy to access might go some way toward increasing viewership and, thus, changing viewers’ opinions.

EJ (25, male, gay) expressed this very view when he mentioned television shows he had seen that included queer characters and content portrayed in a positive light: ‘TV shows like Modern Family that have a gay couple, that’s great… um, there’s a program I saw yesterday called Please Like Me with Josh Thomas,57 … I think that makes it a lot more acceptable for people to be, and talk, and act that way’. For EJ, including representations of queer people in media is just one possible method for effecting change. When I asked if there were other ways people’s minds could be changed, EJ said,

It’s all about attitude… acceptance. And I think that attitude comes from education, probably coming from the government. But I think it’s quite a global issue. A lot of our

57 A well-known gay Australian comedian.
government just reflects what other countries do, so education in other countries will just educate us, just by passing down.

EJ draws an important link between the state of affairs for queer people in Australia and the status of queer people in other nations around the globe. Indeed, EJ is the only participant who explicitly situated the Australian queer experience in a global context (though he refers largely to a Western/ised context, those countries where one is less likely to be executed or gaoled by the state for being gay). Most participants, however, referred to international media products and celebrities – particularly out of the United States – as useful tools for education: implicit recognition of the potentialities of global queer experiences for eliciting change.

**Interventions**

The approaches to education and visibility recounted above may play a significant role in attempting to counter the original dehumanisations of queer and young people that persist in the cultural imaginary, as well as in the broader ethical project of this thesis. That is, the societal recognition of queer young people as capable, knowing, and now fully human, agents. While I raise here some potential solutions to dehumanising discourses, emerging from my participants’ narratives, I have also identified some complications: the ‘but-for’ queer and its challenge to visibility, and the general public’s receptiveness to educative tools. Unfortunately, I do not have a clear solution to counter dehumanising processes beyond these fragmented and preliminary ideas, drawn from a pie-in-the-sky concluding question about how we can ‘make things better’. What I do have is a pathway forward, and a suggestion that future research might be productively focused on the ways in which counter-hegemonic discourses – which humanise, because they familiarise, diverse queer personages – can be produced that directly address (respond to; contradict; undermine) dehumanising discourses that, by taking away our humanness, sanction anti-queer sentiment. If, as I suggested in Chapter 1 following Barthes (1977), narratives provide an exchange that cuts the reader off from the author but opens out the possibility for empathic connection with experience, then here we might locate a response to dehumanising discourse.

Ashleigh Watson (2016) suggests that ‘novels arguably have an edge that non-fictive scholarly work does not’ (p. 437), as novels ‘are approached differently by publics and often engaged with for
different purposes’ (ibid.). There is a rich body of literature aimed at young adults that brings personal narrative into exchange with its readers. *Sprout* (Peck 2009), for example, presents the narrative of Daniel (‘Sprout’) Bradford, dealing with his mother’s death, his father’s alcoholism, and a move to a new town, only revealing him to be gay about a quarter of the way through the book (p. 69). As a means of providing the opportunity for empathic connection, the novel presents a number of touchstones of everyday adolescent life – school, peers, teachers, and so on – while also introducing the reader to experiences that might not be directly accessible otherwise: Sprout has a fleeting and formative sexual encounter with a boy that his female friend also lusts after; he develops (and destroys) a relationship with another boy, Ty, who suffers ongoing physical abuse at the hands of his father; and he doesn’t get a ‘happily ever after’, instead beginning a process of self-learning as the book comes to a close. Another novel, *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* (Cameron 2007) follows James Sveck as he navigates his relationship with his divorced parents, expectations that he attend university, therapy, and an unrequited attraction to John, the manager at his mother’s art gallery, where James also works. In this novel, too, the protagonist is flawed (read: human) and through his imperfect actions irrevocably ruins a (desired) relationship. It is only partially with James that the reader is meant to identify, however; James lusts after John and invents a persona on ‘Gent4Gent.com’ after he discovers John’s dating profile. The resulting conflict leaves John betrayed and angry, and James seeming cruel and juvenile.

I might also add to the aforementioned works novels from my own bookshelf such as *Mysterious Skin* (Heim 1996), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky 1999), *Boy Meets Boy* (Levithan 2003), *Two Boys Kissing* (Levithan 2013) and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (Green and Levithan 2010), each of which adds to the cast of available queer characters with whom a reader might find a point of identification or, perhaps, empathise. I introduce these novels as an optimistic view toward a future when, as the years go by, more and more works of fiction and non-fiction join the corpus of queer works, as well as other writings which include queer voices to a greater or lesser extent. The production and dissemination of narratives – even fictional ones – that familiarise and, thus, humanise queer people, should be considered alongside any other approaches to visibility and education that serve as interventions against dehumanising discourses.

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58 Unless you happen to read the blurb on the book’s back cover.
In terms of interventions in the Australian context, it would be a meaningful step toward humanising queer people to embed in primary- and high-school curricula a range of texts, like those few mentioned above, which represent queer lives. For young queer people just discovering who they are, or – already knowing who they are – wondering who they can confide in, seeing faithful and positive representations of a range of queer lives provides existential futurity and open potentiality for a life just beginning to be led. And for those young people who aren’t queer, but are schooled alongside us, such representations introduce queerness not as something to be feared, shunned or destroyed, but simply part of being human; being people, with dreams and desires that, though different, are only different by degree and not by quality.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

I must admit that I have felt sometimes, while writing this thesis, ‘the stark impossibility of thinking \textit{that}’ which Foucault (1994) attributes to his reading of a passage in Borges, which ‘quotes’ a “certain Chinese encyclopaedia” in which it is written that “animals are divided into (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies”. (p. xv)

How can I apprehend ‘in one great leap’ (ibid.) the thing I have spent years now, \textit{years}, writing about? I have attempted to bring together a collection of narratives recounting just-in-time, on-the-fly manoeuvres \textit{– tactics} – for surviving a world (constituted by many interlocking and overlapping individual life-worlds) that deploys, in numerous ways, strategies hostile to queer lives. At the same time, I have endeavoured to draw out significant moments in a local-global history which brought us here, as well as outline the contemporary ‘lay of the land’ – quite literally, at times – of the city in which I undertook this research (which, without regard for my project, would happily morph into something \textit{new} as I tried to capture its ‘feel’ at any point in time). No wonder Foucault laughed (ibid.). Have I achieved consistency?\footnote{\textit{‘Not in the sense of a homogeneity, but as a holding together of disparate elements’} (Massumi 2004, p. xiv).}

The narratives of the queer young people I interviewed have afforded me vicarious access to a range of experiences – affects – that sometimes reflect my own past, and at other times diverge significantly. In asking about the things that we, as queer young people in a small (though cosmopolitan) east-Australian city, might have in common with one another, I feel a sense of connection distinguished by our shared ways of being (becomings) and shared cultural touchstones (happenings). For me, this sense of connection – not quite \textit{community} (which designates something more formal than I or my participants would have it) – links our local queer people and places to those further afield (with their accreted queer histories – Oxford Street; Stonewall; SoHo), to a global(ising) queer cultural imaginary, and to an anoriginal queer diaspora, always-already cast out and cut off from home the moment one comes out. While my participants and I discussed navigating the idiosyncrasies of our home city, we were able to bond over national and international queer icons, cultural products, and events. Even as I listened to stories recounting instances of anti-queer abuse, violence and discrimination, there were moments of
humour and optimism, and points at which I felt a deep sense of kinship with this group of people, the majority of whom I knew only remotely or had never met before. How to conceive of this connection without drawing, as I did in my interviews, on an idea of ‘queer community’, which doesn’t hold as true as I would like?

I have sought to produce this thesis as an ‘assemblage with the outside’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 25) rather than a reflection, or ‘image of the world’ (ibid.). That is, the fragmentary narratives from my own reconstituted rememberings (and admittedly, perhaps, misrememberings) and those of my participants are not mere tracings (viz. representations) of violence and survival, but come together to help constitute a map,

open and connectable in all of its dimensions; … detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. (ibid., pp. 13-4)

I set out with an aim to make this thesis irrelevant, eventually, such that the tactics of survival captured within are no longer required: a resource helping to contest the strategies that enable anti-queer discourses and the everyday and spectacular violences against queer young people they sanction. This is an ethical project and an inescapably political project.

The bodies most exposed to such violences – my own, those of my participants and of queer people like us – are also, it seems to me, best placed to confront such strategies as they are revealed, whether through our interactions with other people, organisations, institutions, and in confronting other blockages. As dehumanisation is the process that I see underlying so much anti-queer discourse and the violence it authorises, there is a labour of humanisation that we carry out simply by continuing to exist; in living our sexual minority identities and surviving those spaces that so often pose us existential threats. Processes of humanisation and dehumanisation play out constantly in the living out of our lives. In our longing for and pursuit of belongings with other people who are more or less like us, we change the fabric of the social world. By drawing closer to people who would other us, working at belonging with them, we ‘[give] life to static categories that would underpin claims to exclusive essentialism’ (Probyn 1996, p. 13), demonstrating the ways in which our differences are not borders, but ‘moments and
movements that establish contact across a geography of division’ (ibid). The identities of the people whose stories are included in this thesis become more than the sum of our specificity – ‘zones of possible forms of belonging’ (p. 22) or ‘necessary zones of difference’ (p. 23) – and in our singularity perhaps ‘bypass the meanness of individualized identities’ (p. 35). For Probyn (ibid), and for me, in the ordinary everydayness of our lives, propelled by the desire to feel that we belong without obliterating the very differences that make us us, there is the potential for connection that is not based on binaries of inclusion/exclusion. In the meantime, we must survive.

The tracings of tactics of survival I recount have been invaluable tools to the queer young people I interviewed. It is my hope that in putting these tracings ‘back on the map’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 14) that is this thesis, it might be taken up as desired by any other queer individual who stumbles across this work and finds themselves in need of help to navigate some impediment or other. Tactics as vectors: ‘point[s] of application of a force moving through a space at a given velocity in a given direction’ (Massumi 2004, p. xiii). By deploying tactics of survival to continue to exist we inevitably become a part of an ongoing humanising force that may remake the ground across which it moves. But to join this force is not to become one with all others such that we are indistinguishable in our collective, resistant queerness (a balanced binary, normal/queer). Instead, it is to challenge by our agglomerative singularity, the capacity for the use of universals as means of oppression.

Queerness is, on its own, ‘an insipid generality’ (Agamben 1993, p. 2) – there is no lived universal queerness to which we can stake claim, and across time and place its meaning slips away, given its opposition to whatever is the norm. And yet queerness is an attribute of our existence that colours our lives (sometimes with rainbows, sometimes with shades of black and blue). We are each an example of queerness in this way, as we ‘escape the antinomy of the universal and the particular’ (p. 9), on the one hand by being queer in our own unique ways, and on the other by sharing together in what it means to be queer. At once pursuing whatever life you want (to be ‘[your] own possibility or potentiality’ p.43), and in so living (gloriously), opening out the possibilities or potentialities for being and action.

That there are so many ways to be queer is an uneven reflection of the consolidation of a ‘normal’. Perhaps this relation is better conceived as a dense, homogeneous core, encircled by a periphery
that slips away beyond what is visible, knowable, and conceivable; from the nearby and somewhat-similar out into the weird, motley wilderness. The two metaphorical spaces are not balanced, not opposites, but they coexist, and one can invade and reshape the other. As a political task, living the way you want, and demanding alongside others to live the way you want when you are cut off from such a possibility/potentiality, is a direct challenge to the heteronormative power of that core. It is a challenge precisely because being queer in our own unique ways means we are relegated to that outside, that we ‘form a community without affirming an identity, that [we] co-belong without any representable condition of belonging’ (Agamben 1993, p. 86). It is easy to cleave together on the basis of similarity; much harder to belong with all manner of queer creatures (‘animals … (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame,’ etc., Foucault 1994, p. xv). Harder, that is, until we remember that we are all relegated to the outside. Then, sharing together in what it means to be queer as a positionality (Halperin 1995, p. 62) becomes possible.

While discussing what would come after same-sex marriage became legal in Australia in terms of queer people’s political agendas, my friends and I often wondered whether, for some, the answer would be ‘nothing’. What do those gays and lesbians who can live comfortably in cosmopolitan inner-city communities, who can build their ideal families, have left to gain? The attrition of queer political force due to homonormative support for a new status quo is certainly one prospective outcome. Even so, I live in hope that when our victories are won and ‘it gets better’ for some of us, we will not forget that it might not be ‘better’ – or even very good at all – for others.

**Where do we go from here?**

I am left with the lingering question of what I owe my participants who gave up their time, several years ago as I write now, to tell me their stories of living and getting by on Australia’s Gold Coast. Am I bound to be sympathetic? Must I truthfully, if always partially (Taylor 2011, p. 4), account for their lives, or is it okay to bend the truth beyond merely changing identifiable names, dates and places as per ethical standards? Inevitably I have misread and misremembered. Inevitably I have made mistakes. In translation – from interview to recording, from recording to transcript, from transcript to manuscript – things are lost or transformed. For that I can only apologise, and hope that I have risen to the task I laid
out for my kind participants at the beginning. What emerges from this research is a contribution to a broader sociocultural project of humanising queer young people by privileging our voices, and an indication that the related processes of de/humanisation are critically important areas for future study.

What I have attempted to develop is a cartographic project that maps the lived experiences of some queer young people in a small corner of Australia, which may resonate with others, near and far, who have experienced similar violences, events, joys. I have also aimed to develop an ethical project that recognises queer youth – beginning, at least, with myself and my participants – as agents in control of their own lives and desires rather than not-yet-normal not-yet-adults. Certainly young people make mistakes, but the follies of youth do not also include by default mental isolation from one’s own sexuality and gender identity. Finally is the political project of resistance against and contestation of the range of strategies employed by dominant forms of power that produce anti-queer discourse and, by so doing, authorise the multiple forms of violence queer young people experience. Of course, countering these strategies, alongside recognising the agency of queer youth, is also a part of the ethical task of this thesis.
APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Interview Instrument | Interview No. ______

Chosen Pseudonym: ____________ Age: ____________ Sex: ____________ ID: ________

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

☐ Just to break the ice, do you mind telling me a little bit about yourself?
  It doesn't matter where you start, but:
  ☐ How old are you?
  ☐ Where are you originally from? GC? Elsewhere?
  ☐ What do you do at the moment? Study? Work? Other? Do you enjoy it?

☐ This interview is mainly about sexuality and life on the GC, and a lot of the questions I will ask are related to your sexual orientation. Can I ask about when you came to realise you weren't straight?
  ☐ IF UNMENTIONED: How do you choose to identify?
  ☐ CONFIRM: So you choose to identify as _____?
  ☐ Is there a particular reason you choose to identify in this way?

☐ In my research, I'm drawing connections between the way we experience our own sexuality, and the way we experience everyday spaces. So, where are you staying on the Gold Coast right now?
  ☐ Where is it? Do you live with other people? How do you feel about your current home? Do you like living there? Do you feel like you're free to act however you like there?
  ☐ How long have you been living here now?
  ☐ What is [home area] like?
  ☐ Are there any particular reasons you chose to live there?
  ☐ Have you lived in any other parts of the GC?
  ☐ And what [was that/were they] like to live in?

☐ How do you feel about the GC in general?
  ☐ As a 'city'? Do you think it is a city?
  ☐ Do you think it's a good place for people to live?
  ☐ Do you think it's a good place for you specifically to live?
  ☐ Are there any particular reasons you feel that way?

☐ How would you describe the queer scene on the Gold Coast?
  ☐ Just for a moment I'd like you to imagine that you're having a conversation with a friend of yours - let's call them Alex. They've never been to the Gold Coast before and they're considering moving here. How would you describe the GC to them? What would you tell them?
  ☐ Is there a reason you singled out those aspects of the GC in particular?

☐ Now I'd like you to imagine that while you are talking, Alex tells you that they're [self-ID], and is still considering moving to the Gold Coast. Would you describe the GC any differently to your friend now that you know their sexuality? Is there anything new you'd tell them?
  ☐ Is there a reason you singled out those aspects of the GC when you knew Alex was [self-ID]?

☐ Do you think these aspects you mentioned are characteristic of the GC – things that make it unique? Is there anything else that sets the Gold Coast apart from other places?

☐ What about the people who live here? Is there something that makes them uniquely “Gold Coasters”?
  ☐ Would you categorise yourself that way?
  ☐ Why/Why not?
Do you think queer people are accepted on the GC in general?
- Why/Why not?
- Are there certain groups of people that are more accepting of queer people here?
- Are there groups that are less accepting?

I’d like to ask you now about some of the everyday places you go to on the GC. What places do you find yourself in most often?
- You mentioned you [work/study] at [workplace/school]. What do you do there? Could you describe a normal day at [workplace/school] for me?
- How do you feel when you’re at [workplace/school]?
  - Do you feel welcome there? Do you feel safe? Do you feel like you belong? Do you feel like you fit in?
- How do people act towards you when you’re at [workplace/school]?
  - Workmates? Peers? Strangers?
- Are you ‘out’ to everyone there?
- Do you actively avoid letting your work-/school-mates know about your sexuality, or would you not be bothered if they found out?

- IF OUT: Do you feel comfortable acting however you like there? Do you feel like you need to control the way you behave or what you speak about?
  - Why/Why not?
- IF NOT OUT: How do you act when you are there?
  - Do you talk to people freely or keep to yourself? Do you dress in a particular way (outside of a uniform) if you know you are going there?
- Do you feel like you need to control the way you behave or what you speak about when you are there?

Are there any places on the GC that you feel are unsafe for you, or that you avoid?
- Why in particular do you feel that [place] is unsafe for you?
- Why in particular do you avoid [place]?

Are there any places on the GC that you feel are safe and appealing for you?
- What makes you feel safe there?
- What is appealing about it?

How is it that you get around the Gold Coast? Do you have a licence? Do you catch public transport? Is it expensive? Etc.
- Have you ever found it particularly difficult to get around on the GC? Why?
- Have you ever had issues with other people while trying to make your way around the GC?
- Can you think of any ways it would be easier for you to get around the GC?

I want you to imagine another person, Taylor. You don’t know them personally, but maybe you’ve seen them around before. If Taylor were watching you at [workplace/school], how do you think they’d describe the way you act there to me?
- Do you think Taylor would be able to tell you were [self-ID]?
- Would it bother you if they could tell, or would you not care?

If Taylor were able to watch you at home, do you think they’d notice a difference between the way you behave at [workplace/school] and home?
- IF YES: What would they notice is different? What would they describe to me?
- IF YES: Do you think there’s a reason you behave differently at home than [workplace/school]?

Can you tell me about a time when you felt your sexuality was an issue in a public space? What happened?

Can you think of any changes that could be made – by you or others – that might make you feel more comfortable at [workplace/school]? These changes can be as small or large as you like.
- What about changes that would make you feel safer?
- What about freer to act how you like?

Thinking about queer people in general, what kinds of things do you think you have in common?
- Do you think there’s something that all queer people – or all [self-ID] people – share?
Can you remember how you learned what it meant to be [self-ID]? That is, who taught you, or where did you learn it?

- Can you remember a specific time when you discovered something about being [self-ID] that you didn’t know before?
- Were there any queer TV shows, or musicians, or artists that you learned from? What did you learn? [Provide examples].
- Thinking back to the [self-ID] friend I asked you to imagine – Alex – what kinds of queer-friendly places would you recommend to them on the GC?
  - What about if they were still under-age? Where would you recommend for them to go?
  - Are there any events or festivals that you might recommend?
- Have you been to any ‘queer spaces’ yourself? By this I mean places where your sexuality isn’t an issue and you’re free to act however you like.
  - [If under-18] Did you go to any specifically queer spaces when you were under-age?
- Can you remember the first queer person you ever met? How did you meet them?
- What about your other queer friends? How or where did you meet them?
- Again, thinking of Alex – they want to know how to find and meet [self-ID] people like themself, and like you. What would you tell them to do? Where would you tell them to go?
  - Do you attend youth groups? Do you meet them online? Grindr? Do you go out? Through friends?
- Can you think of any ways that it would be easier for you to find and meet other people like you?
- I’ve been asking about places on the GC that are queer-friendly, or ‘queer-specific’, places. What about places outside the GC that you know and have been to – in other cities or towns?
  - Is there a difference between places on the GC and these other places?
  - What is the difference? Which is better? Why?
- Do you think there are any ‘queer communities’ on the GC?
  - What do you think they do?
  - Do you think they’re important?

The previous questions were trying to get at ways that laws, policies, or social norms affect the way that you live your life as a queer young person, without necessarily asking outright. Now, I do want to ask:
- Can you tell me about the sexuality education (sex ed) you had at school?
  - What did it consist of?
  - [18+] Did it mention queer sex?
  - [18+] Did it mention pleasure?
- [18+] Where did you learn about queer sex practices?
- Can you think of any policy or laws at any level of Government relating to sexuality that you know about, or have been affected by?
- Can you think of any social rules or ‘normal ways of behaving’ in public that relate to sexuality?
  - [18+] Do you think there’s a double-standard about ‘public displays of affection’ depending on the sex of the person you’re being affectionate with?
  - [18+] Have you been affected by these rules in any way?
- Do you think there are any changes that could be made to improve things for you, or other queer people on the GC, or in other parts of Australia?
- Thinking about non-policy or governmental interventions like the Get Up! It’s Time ad, or the Left Hand anti-discrimination campaign being run by Beyond Blue, do you think these are effective?
  - Why do/don’t you think they are effective at improving things for queer people?
  - What is/isn’t effective about them?

CLOSING

- Do you have anything else to add, or can you think of any questions I should have asked in relation to what we’ve been discussing?
Would you be willing to ask if any of your queer friends would be interested in having a similar interview with me?

Would you be willing to be contacted by me for a follow-up interview, if I have more questions?

THANK YOU FOR BEING INVOLVED
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