

# Queer Women's Experiences in Public Spaces

Submitted by

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## SUMMARY

This dissertation draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with fourteen queer and/or trans women to explore their experiences in public spaces. While there is a large body of work that focuses on women's safety in public, not much research has been undertaken on queer and trans-identifying women's safety. This thesis blends insights from feminist phenomenology, cultural geography and queer theory to explore factors structuring spatial and gendered or sexed experiences. Most interview participants experienced harassment or were subject to acts of violence. Themes surrounding safety and feelings of comfort and discomfort in public spaces emerged from the interview data. I argue that claiming public comfort for queer people provides a challenge to heterosexualised public norms.

I claim that social positionalities or horizons shape queer women's experiences in public spaces, their knowledges and what is sayable about their experiences. My use of experience as an analytical category applies the insights of feminist phenomenologists who argue that experience is interpreted via these social positionalities. I argue that these experiences do not merely happen on a random basis to individuals, but rather are structured by the norms that govern public space. These norms are strongly underpinned by the model of a private/public divide best elaborated in liberal political philosophies, in which the public individual is abstracted, and difference is confined to private spaces. The thesis provides evidence to confirm that those who do not fit in with these norms are often positioned as "out of place" or as not belonging. It will illuminate the processes through which femininity is policed in public spaces and examine the effect of social expectations of gender normativity. In line with these arguments, this thesis seeks to

understand how neoliberalism and its associated responsabilising ethos influence queer women's experiences in public spaces.

## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Human Ethics Committee.

Kyja Noack-Lundberg

Date

30/11/2012

## INTRODUCTION

The focus of my doctoral research is queer<sup>1</sup> women's experiences in public spaces in the Melbourne urban area. In particular, I will explore participants' experiences of violence and harassment, their safety strategies, feelings of comfort and discomfort and their sense of identity and belonging within queer communities. The initial impetus for this project was for me, a series of events that began during 2005 and continued, albeit more sporadically, thereafter. The following vignettes are an attempt to reconnect my initial motivations with the project that resulted from them.

### **The Tax Payer**

I was walking along the street in an area in Brisbane known for being one of the most queer friendly areas. It was a sunny day and I was holding hands with my partner at the time. An older man, perhaps in his fifties or sixties, squat, balding, conservatively dressed and with what I might now, in hindsight, describe as a malicious grin on his face gestured to me to come over. "Come here." When I think back on it, I don't know why I went. Everybody who knows me well knows that rebelliousness is one of my key personality traits. I am hardly one to be beholden to others. I imagine that he wants to know the time. "I don't want to see any of this," he says. "Any of what," I say, confused. "Any of this." "This," he gestures, at me and my ex, who is more timid and is standing a few steps back at this juncture, looking quite uneasy. "This" appeared to be a sort of linking gesture, at

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<sup>1</sup> Queer will be defined on page thirty-three of this chapter.

us, our hands. “But”...I said... “but...don’t you ever hold hands with anyone else?” “My wife,” said the man, looking like he’d won a prize. “I’m a taxpayer and when I go out I don’t want to see anything like this.”

### **Ugly Lesbians**

I’ve rarely ever gone on dates with people. But, in the same year as the incident above, I was actually on a date with someone I’d met through a friend. As the date had gone well, we were sitting on a small island in Brisbane’s Southbank Parklands, kissing. Picnic Island is separated from the rest of the island by a narrow canal. It was a dark night and we were sitting by the water. I eventually became aware that across the canal a man was sitting, squatting, watching intently. He didn’t seem to want to leave and just kept sitting there, staring, long after we’d noticed he was there, long after he’d probably noticed that we knew he was watching us. We left the island, I’m not sure whether immediately or after a short time, and continued on to the City. I’ve never really received as much abuse as I have that night. I remember counting at least ten separate incidents, and mostly this was just when we were walking along holding hands. Most of the incidents were comments or verbal abuse hurled by men. One I can remember more clearly is a woman who hissed “ugly lesbians” as she walked past. I don’t know whether this is still clear in my mind because of the vitriol with which it was hissed, or because it was much more uncommon to be harassed by a woman.

### **Just Ignore It**

I have been in much scarier incidents than the two mentioned above, even some where I’ve been quite scared for my safety, but those two are the ones that stand out the most for

me. The second incident stands out more perhaps because the person I was with at the time whispered urgently, “Just ignore it, ‘don’t get angry, just ignore it.” I had never really been deprived of what I felt was my right to anger before, and I wasn’t sure I liked it. I started wondering whether other queer-identifying women were having similar experiences. That year was the first time I had ever noticed such occurrences, although before then I had probably been a lot more “out and proud” and a lot more affectionate in public.

It may have occurred to you that the events described above took place in Brisbane, not in Melbourne. Prior to beginning this research project I conducted a previous smaller research project in Brisbane, which explored very similar issues to those covered in the present project. I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine women and one genderqueer person about their experiences in Brisbane public spaces. While the interview questions were different, the same themes of violence and harassment and comfort emerged. The participants in that project described very similar experiences to those in Melbourne, although, I will argue that place is an important factor in identity formation and affects experience. However, whenever I have mentioned that I conducted research in Brisbane previously, almost every person I have discussed this topic with has said something approaching, “You must have very different results in Melbourne. Melbourne is a much better environment for gay people.” As this project is small and qualitative, I can’t quantify the differences in the amount of harassment and violence experienced and how it differs between Brisbane and Melbourne. With the people I spoke to, however, I can’t say that I have noticed patterns that would indicate a greater severity

of incidents occurring amongst the Brisbane participants than amongst the Melbourne participants.

Another variation on this theme, when I have discussed my work with people, is that they have thought a while and said “Oh, yes, I imagine that it must be terrible for young people in the country...” I don’t debate that it might not, in fact, be terrible for young queer people in the country, although I do think that perhaps sometimes people are creating a homogenous representation of rural areas, which may not be typical of the experience of all queer people living in those areas. The issue for me was that they were consistently relegating prejudice against queer people to a realm outside of their existence. Similarly, responses to my research topic frequently included “but gay people are normal these days, they don’t have any problems.” This need to reinforce social sameness and a reality of tolerance was perhaps, in the end galvanising for this project. The denial of issues, both by queer people who think ignoring issues is the best strategy, and by heterosexual people who assert “tolerance,” even in the face of evidence to the contrary, signals a challenge in how to address these issues. It poses intriguing questions about our political and social structures and how they lead issues to be represented in ways that seem almost contradictory.

### **Methodology**

This research project draws on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fourteen women who identify as queer, bisexual, or lesbian. The interviews explored their experiences in Melbourne public spaces. The questions were deliberately open-ended as I wanted to find what was most salient for the women, even if their views ended up completely different

from my own. One aim of the project is to present their experiences, using their own terms and definitions. There is also an interpretive aspect, where I contextualise their experiences in relation to each other and in relation to my reading of relevant literature. One main thesis of this project is that queer women's experiences in public spaces differ substantially from those of gay men and those of heterosexual women. Drawing on theories of intersectionality, I will argue that social positionality is important in experiences of place. I predicted that queer women's experiences in public spaces would be similar to those of heterosexual women, gay men and other queer people in some ways, yet would not merely mirror aspects of the experiences of both of these social groups in a simple manner. When "gay and lesbian" or GLBTI<sup>2</sup> are presented as categories in analyses, the overall data can present a much different picture than data that is disaggregated by different social groups included under this rubric. This is even more likely to be the case when smaller numbers of one group are included. In such a case the differences in their responses would be subsumed under the general pattern of the more dominant group.

One advantage of an in-depth qualitative study is its utility in providing a range of narratives of different experiences in rich detail to compare differences among participants, as well as similarities. While larger scale quantitative projects illuminate

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<sup>2</sup> GLBTI or LGBTI(Q) are acronyms that stand for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex and queer. Occasionally acronyms such as LGBTIQQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning and allies) are used, however I have more often heard such long acronyms used mockingly, to indicate issues of community definition in queer communities. At times, in this thesis, I have referred to "gay men and queer women." I have most often used the term queer women, as I framed and advertised this project using this nomenclature (see discussion in methodology chapter). I have often used "gay" to refer to men, as the phrase "queer men" is not, to my knowledge, in common circulation. A third reason I have used "gay" is that the term "gay" has more normative connotations, and there is often a dominance of cisgendered (those whose sex assigned at birth matches their self-identified sex-see pp.37-38) men in queer community organisations and representations of queer communities.

broader social trends, and give reliable estimates about how much of a population may be affected by a particular phenomenon, this study has allowed me to capture rich detail regarding the contexts of queer women's experiences. Statistics, for example, might provide a measure of how many queer women were harassed in the street, or how many enjoy attending queer club nights, but they do not provide answers as to how the events played out when the harassment occurs, where it was, what they were doing, or who the perpetrator was. Nor do they provide details regarding what going to club nights means in terms of a queer woman's identity, who she attends with, and why she prefers particular nights to others, or what makes a queer venue feel safe and comfortable. Qualitative research projects on the topic of queer women's experience are relatively rare. There hasn't been much of this kind of research undertaken in Melbourne on this topic. Qualitative studies that explore harassment and violence towards queer women in Melbourne, in particular, are very rare. This research project contributes to an understanding of queer women's experiences of violence over time, as the previous research project on this topic in Melbourne, undertaken by Gail Mason took place around fifteen years ago (2002, p.28). While there are some excellent large scale studies with small qualitative components (written questionnaire responses) that incorporate this issue (Leonard et al.2008; Hillier et al. 2010; Tomsen & Markwell 2009b) my research interviews provided an opportunity to complement the findings of these large scale projects with in-depth interview data. In my research interviews, the participants had the opportunity to question the terms of engagement and disagree with my interpretations or questions and to elaborate or expand as much as they wished.

Although there is a growing body of research on queer identities and issues, much of this research does not distinguish between the experiences of queer men and queer women. This project provides a different focus by offering insight into queer women's experiences in all their specificity. As stated above, exploring queer women's experiences of violence in public will explicate the differences from violence towards other queers and will help to provide more informed prevention initiatives. Another focus of this research is on conflicts within queer communities, and this project provides queer women's perspectives on these conflicts. The issues raised by queer women on community and inclusivity may be quite different from the types of issues that would be salient for gay men, for example. This project is significant as it explores queer identities and the constitution of queer communities at a time when queer has become more visible than ever (partly due to the influence of the mainstream media's portrayals of queer people) and when conservative gay and lesbian identities and queer identities are not always in agreement within queer social and community groups<sup>3</sup>.

While there is some research on queer people's (usually gay men's) experiences in public spaces and a large body of research on women's experiences in public spaces (Koskela & Pain 2000; Pain 1997; Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink 2009; Wesely & Gaarder 2004) particularly in relation to fear of violence, the specific experiences of queer women remain under examined. One might assume that these experiences contained elements of the experiences of both types of subject: for example, the fear of public attacks, particularly sexual violence, which forms part of many women's experiences, combined with the greater awareness of stigmatisation and physical violence that gay men

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the Facebook group *To the Exclusion of All Others* which critiques gay marriage as the appropriate goal for non-heterosexual people.

experience. However, as is argued in the literature on intersection, particularly within gender and critical race studies, identities are not simply additive (Yuval-Davis 2006, p.195) and the effects of living with multiply stigmatised identities are not a simple combination of one stigma and another.

This is particularly true of the intersection of identities that are sexual and sexed or gendered. Biological sex does not give rise to a corresponding gendered expression which is then linked to sexual object choice. Sex/ gender and sexuality are entwined in a mutually reinforcing system, which is referred to as compulsory heterosexuality or the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990, p.23; Ahmed 2006, p.71; Rich 1980; Wittig 1992). This is to say that such a system usually presents a view where gendered identity and expression are closely tied to biological sex (which is usually assigned at birth, defined by the appearance of the genitals) (Fausto- Sterling 2000, p.20). It follows from this view that the natural choice of sexual partner is an opposite one or someone with sex and gendered traits that are seen to be diametrically opposed. In queer social groups where the relationship between these traits is seen as more variable, a fluidity of gender positions may be acknowledged. Even amongst more conservative gays and lesbians, gender positions that differ from the heterosexual matrix may be recognised or fostered. Where queer people are not seen to fit within the matrix they are sometimes interpreted in ways in order to make them fit within a normative heterosexual understanding of the world (Ahmed 2006, pp.84, 87, 95). This is displayed in the derogatory assertion that lesbians are “too ugly to get a man,” for example, which fits them neatly back into the matrix as erstwhile heterosexuals who have been as yet unsuccessful. Queer women in public spaces may be interpreted according to heterosexual norms, as fitting in with them and

therefore unremarkable; as not living up to such norms adequately (not meeting heterosexual standards of attractiveness enough to find a partner); or as deliberately defying them.

Additionally, representations of particular types of people may not be simply be the conjunction of multiple identities, but develop their own particular characteristics. An example of this is the representation of black women as having an exotic and primitive sexuality (Butler 1993, p.128). No doubt this representation drew on existing stereotypes of black people and of women, but it is transformed beyond a simply additive process.

Another reason processes of gender interpretation might be particularly problematic in public spaces where queer people are not in the majority (i.e. most public spaces) is the constitution of the divide between spaces classed as private and those classed as public through liberal political ideals. While liberal models may appear to successfully manage or even encourage diversity, there are many criticisms of this method of management (Young 1990a; Hage 1998) One criticism is that whilst privacy is constructed as the place of individual differences, the public is constructed as a place of debate and mixing where people's individual statuses do not matter and people's differences are or should be treated as neutral (Young 1990a). However, neutrality is not possible as differences are still visible or otherwise noticeable, and perhaps even called to attention in an environment where they are not meant to matter (Young 1990a, p.123). "Publicness," or the ideals of being in public, is covertly premised on the behaviour and attributes of groups marked as dominant, such as whiteness, middle classness, or maleness (Young 1990a, pp. 110-11, 126). In public forums, dispassionate unemotional argumentation, or adopting the use of particular forms of rhetoric is expected for arguments to be taken

seriously. Behaviours and attributes falling outside norms may be stigmatized or even criminalised (for example youths gathering in public are often seen as “dangerous” or “loitering”). This often disadvantages those groups that are meant to benefit most from the presumed neutrality of publics. I argue that definitions of the public and the private greatly contribute to shaping gendered norms as the public has been historically associated with masculine endeavours and the private with femininity and homemaking (Connell 2005, p.78). The assumed vulnerability of women in public, especially in terms of the risks of sexual violence, help shape feminine gendered norms and contribute to female feelings of fear in public (Pain 1997; Stanko 1997).

Because some people are seen as at greater risk in public, as they are not seen to belong or fit in. This leads to categorisations of some victims of violence in public as “deserving” victims, because they are assumed to have both not conformed to the norms, and not taken responsibility for their own safety. Women and queer people are often cast as deserving victims (Plumm et al. 2010, p.271; Richardson & May 1999, pp.308-12) particularly if their behaviours do not conform to norms of gender or sexuality and publicity and privacy. These assumptions of individual responsibility are fostered by broader programs to individualise responsibility operating within a neoliberal social order.

Policing of gender occurs through comments, looks, unfriendliness, hostility, harassment and violence. In public, in the streets, or in the workplace, or at a bar, gender policing may take the form of sexual harassment (for example, groping), yelling “dyke” from the window of a passing car, making unwanted sexual propositions, or staring, or making comments about someone’s appearance or their displays of affection such as holding

hands with a partner. Queer women “self-discipline” in an inculcation of these norms that is not always thought through and can operate as an unreflexive way of inhabiting majority heterosexual spaces as a queer woman. Feelings of discomfort or vulnerability often lead to queer women self-surveilling to limit visible displays of queerness or to avoid affection such as hand holding or kissing in public. Of course, these feelings of discomfort, vulnerability and “out of place”-ness vary according to temporal as well as spatial criteria. “The city at night” was the standard reply interview participants gave when talking about places in which they felt unsafe. These feelings also differed according to the particular areas of Melbourne and with their familiarity with places and whether they were known as having a reputation for being queer friendly.

### **Lesbian Geographies and Geographies of Sexualities<sup>4</sup>**

Geographies of sexualities, and “lesbian geographies” more specifically began to emerge in the early 1990s. Geographers began to detail spatial trends such as gentrification in “gay spaces” in major metropolises. Sexual diversity was seen as strongly tied to and developing within urban spaces (Knopp 1995, p.149). Rather than simply celebrating the development of queer spaces, Lawrence Knopp explored how power was produced and functioned within these spaces. While gay men sought freedom within gay urban spaces, power was still linked to financial capital (Knopp 1995, p.152) and largely white, male

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank my thesis examiner, Dr Andrew Gorman-Murray, for his suggestion of amending this section to include a short literature review on lesbian geographies. I feel that the inclusion of salient information about the extant work in this area helps to provide important contextual details and helps to situate this thesis.

and middle class and heterosexual (Knopp 1995, p.154). Knopp argued that “gender-based divisions of labour shaped lives” (1995, p.149) but also allowed for single-sex environments to develop that were conducive to queer lives. Men were able to access more forms of public spaces than women as well as more private spaces and forms of consumption (Knopp 1995, p.155). The growth of the private sphere meant that new subjectivities could emerge that challenged previous gendered and spatialised divisions of labour (Knopp 1995, p.154).

Knopp contends that white, urban, gay man’s spaces are imbricated in racist, sexist, capitalist discourses (1995, p.158). Urban spatial processes involve identity-based struggles around spatial difference (Knopp, p.159). Difference is spatialised in a way that allows power to be consolidated, but there is always resistance to these processes (Knopp 1995, p.159). Urban spaces can be “destabilised” by their contradictions and fractures and new ‘alliances’ can be formed (Knopp 1995, p.158).

Gill Valentine’s early work on lesbian geographies challenged the focus on gay men’s spaces within geographies of sexualities. Previously, work focused on gay male-oriented spaces, communities, and bars (Valentine 1993, p.237). The focus on gay spaces meant ignored queer people’s need to live in predominantly heterosexual spaces. Lesbians often passed, that is, appeared to heterosexual people, as heterosexual (Valentine 1993, p.241). Valentine theorised heterosexualisation as a spatial process whereby “sexuality therefore appears as a process of power relations which mediates our everyday interactions rather than a feature of private life” (1993, p.246). Queer women maintained a number of strategies to manage their needs to pass and to maintain their queer friendships and relationships. These included spatial separation of identities (such as moving away from a

hometown) or socialising where they would not be seen by work colleagues and the temporal separation of identities (for example, only holding hands in public at night when people they knew would not be around).

More recently, Kath Browne in her introduction to a collection of articles on “Lesbian Geographies” detailed the issues within geography that needed redressing. This was the first collection of articles on this topic in a geography journal. While ‘lesbian geographies’ could be considered to be a subsection of feminist geographies, Browne claims that feminist geographies are “heterosexualised”. Within “sexual geographies”, on the other hand, “women disappear in relation to men” (Browne 2007b, p.3) and women’s experience is not examined in relation to queer/gay spaces.

Elsewhere, Browne argues that cultural geography needs to take into account identities beyond the binary of male/female (2007a, p.332). Toilets work to resituate bodies within the male/female binary and are a key site of surveillance and policing (Browne 2007a, pp.332-33). Such policing is labelled “genderism” and the author seeks to examine how participants deal with genderism in sites that enforce gender and sex conformity.

Spatiality is important as gender and sexuality differ according to context (Browne 2007a, pp.334-35). Not only do places create gender and sexuality, but gender and sexuality create places (Browne 2007a, p.335). People who are “gender outlaws” subvert spatial normalisation (Browne 2007a, p.335). Clearer boundaries are drawn in sexualised sites (such as nightclub toilets) (Browne 2007a, p.337) People’s deviant gendered presentation challenges the binaries implicit in the site (Browne 2007a, p.339).

In an Australian context, Kirsten MacLean also explored the policing of gender and sexuality. She came to the conclusion that, within lesbian communities, whilst behaviour and identity might be sexually fluid for some women, it is strongly policed as people and norms “prevent this flexibility from being fully realised in certain contexts” (MacLean 2008a, p.312). Like in Valentine’s work, there were subcultural codes and ‘discourses of authentic lesbianism’ that excluded some women (MacLean 2008a, p.304). Some women no longer identified as lesbian after sleeping with men. Sexual fluidity was seen as challenging by many in the lesbian community and sexuality was framed as “permanent and unchanging” (MacLean 2008a, p.309).

Valentine argues that, against the common conception that public spaces are “naturally” heterosexual (1996, p.146), this heterosexuality is produced and maintained. She discusses “the heterosexing of space” (Valentine 1996, p.146), arguing that it is “a performative act naturalized through repetition and regulation” (Valentine 1996, p.146). This process involves representations in particular places that are mostly or only of heterosexual people, such as pictures of heterosexual people, mostly heterosexual people occupying the streets, and love songs about heterosexual people playing on the radio (Valentine 1996, p.146). This “heterosexualisation” can be a factor contributing towards queer people feeling out of place or that they don’t fit in an area. This can act to reinforce queer women’s self-surveillance and complement gender policing. The presence of many other people who do not appear “queer looking” can have a similar effect of inducing a sense of surveillance.

While limiting self-expression may seem relatively minor, especially if it is implemented in order to ensure one’s safety, I will argue that self-expression is closely tied with

identity. This was made clear to me by the many participants who spoke of wanting to “be who I am,” and this desire is also evident in other research on queer experience. If queer women feel vulnerable and limit self-expression, then there is even less representation of queer people in public spaces, and those who do express their identities will stand out even more.

Processes of normalisation that underpin the policing and marginalising of some social groups do not occur only in heterosexualised spaces, however. In the interviews that inform this research project, many research participants had experiences of being excluded within predominantly queer spaces or queer friendly spaces by other queer people. Although they weren't subject to the pressures of the heterosexual matrix when expressing gender, gender divisions served to create feelings of exclusion from particular queer venues. People who identified as queer did not always feel comfortable in gay and lesbian venues and the reverse was also true. Furthermore, not all queer venues were designed to be accessible to those with disabilities. There are differences in opinion regarding trans inclusivity as well as on the necessity of women's only spaces. These differences clearly reflect different positions on gender and sex. Those who identified as queer were generally more likely to be aware of trans issues and gender diversity. Queers tended to define queer as a resistance to processes of normalisation, particularly in relation to heterosexual norms or heteronormativity.<sup>5</sup> However, many of those who identified as lesbian or bisexual were also committed to resisting heteronormativity, although some were perhaps less explicit about this, or may not have expressed it in these exact words.

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<sup>5</sup> The term heteronormativity was first coined by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in their essay “Sex in Public,” which first appeared in the journal *Critical Inquiry* in 1998.

This thesis will attempt to navigate a theoretical path between fixed (essentialist) and voluntarist conceptions of identity. The above discussion of processes of normalisation and difference, both in predominantly heterosexual spaces and also within queer spaces, perhaps sheds some light on processes of identification. This thesis will argue that an in-depth appreciation of queer women's experiences reinforces the view that identity forms within communities and in reference to others, and that these communities are multiple and overlapping, occurring at different spatial scales. Even identities based (at least partly) on resistance such as queer identities are working within particular social and economic paradigms, such as the constraints of a neoliberal<sup>6</sup> economic order, and this helps to shape the forms those identities take. Resistant identities are also formed in part through participation in production and consumption processes. The level of the body and bodily expression is where important social communications about meaning take place, and where, as seen above, feelings of belonging or being out of place are negotiated. Identity is also formed in relation to communities of place, as the suburban allegiances of interview participants living in Melbourne demonstrate. It is also constituted in relation to place at larger scales. The way Australia as a nation is lived and imagined and who is seen to belong here and who is excluded has an impact on identity formation. Who has the power to set the terms of inclusion or exclusion also influences this process.

Identity is difficult to extricate from discussions of identity groups or communities. The term "community" is often used amongst queer people, although the exact meaning of the word and whether it is even seen as a useful expression varies according to the person

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<sup>6</sup> According to Le Heron, the term "neoliberal" "embodies the overriding principles of marketization (making markets where none existed) and liberalization (freeing up markets from the restraints of governments) which together offer a framework for facilitating and managing globalizing economic processes (connecting markets to enable greater prospects of economic growth) (366).

with whom it is discussed. The meaning of queer community/ies according to the participants will be explored, along with divisions and tensions within these communities. Drawing on feminist phenomenological theories of community, I will argue that communities cohere around particular identities (including place or social group identities) and simultaneously are “unworked” (Secomb 2000, p.140-42) by processes of differentiation that inhere in identity formation. “Queer” provides a productive model for community based on a relation to non-normative practices and a resistance to identity. However, it is still evident that queer becomes an identity and takes on significant characteristics, rather than acting as purely resistance. Queer as a signifier of identity can also take on normative interpretations. While there will always be difference within communities due to processes of social differentiation, some understandings of community, such as liberal and communitarian models, work to reduce or negate difference (Secomb 2000; Diprose 2003).

It is clear from the experiences faced by the interview participants, as will be discussed in the body of the thesis, that processes of violence based on an assumed public sameness have damaging effects on individuals and their ability to move safely and freely through public space. In order to address queer women’s experiences of violence and harassment, I will provide recommendations to address the violence faced by queer women and to ensure their safety. These recommendations largely speak to the need for public acknowledgement of the specific issues queer women face, rather than addressing them through general anti-discrimination measures or through minimising or ignoring them.

## Key Terms and Concepts Central to the Thesis

### Experience

As is evident in the title, “experience” is an integral part of the conceptual framework of this thesis. In this research project, I take experience to encompass sensory perception and its interpretation) taking into account that interpretation often happens simultaneously and is influenced by social positioning and previous experience); in effect there is a learnt factor in perception. This research project draws heavily on the experiences of those interviewed as told to me by the research participants.

Experience is not always clearly defined in queer and feminist research, which contributes to ongoing debates about its relevance as a concept. Experience has been a contested term in feminist and queer theory mostly due to the influence of postmodern and poststructuralist theory. Some poststructuralist theorists argue that experience is not the most useful concept (Stoller 2009, p.707-8) as it does not take into account factors influencing interpretation of sensory data (Scott 1991, p. 777-80). For such theorists, to talk of experience is to posit an unmediated access to the world. In the most extreme versions of poststructuralism,<sup>7</sup> one’s experience is of little import as experience is discursively constituted as are individuals’ subject positions, therefore experience is the sum total of intersecting discourses.

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<sup>7</sup> See Lois McNay’s analysis of Foucault’s treatment of the body and experience in *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish* (1991, p.134).

Despite the objections, experience is central to this project as I was interested in hearing from queer women themselves and what they have to say about their lives rather than surmising this from an abstract perspective. This approach allows for a more detailed and, I would argue, more valuable perspective on the issues to be examined and, in allowing the participants to challenge my own perspectives, it creates a more nuanced picture. Focusing on personal experience also allows me to capture experiences of violence that may not be addressed in the literature on violence, as much of this research focuses on criminal violence and its effects. The research participants' narratives capture their own understandings of their lived experience of everyday violence and harassment and the effects it has on their lives. In order to present the experiences of my research subjects as meaningful and research worthy I will need both to give an account of my understanding of experience and to explain, against the strongest objections, how it can be drawn on productively within research.

## **Space and Place**

### **Public Space**

Public space is not as self-evident a term as it might appear. The words "public space" might conjure up images of urban parks, or the streets, or even alfresco cafes, for example, but it is difficult to declare any space as truly private or public. In fact, I will claim that the divide between what is considered private and what is considered public is constantly shifting and that this divide is fundamental to structuring major social elements of society including norms related to gender and sexuality. It is also integral to understanding social structures influenced heavily by liberal and neoliberal political philosophies.

There are several dimensions that are used to define a space's categorisation as public or private, but not all are always used and the criteria used to define publicness often vary. Common criteria include the conditions of access (including whether payment is involved), ownership of the space (including whether the space is government owned or privately owned) and regulation of the space. Regulation of the space may take place through laws or zoning rules, surveillance and codes of acceptable behaviour. In *The Politics of Public Space*, Setha Low and Neil Smith claim that “[p]ublic space is traditionally differentiated from private space in terms of the rules of access, the source and nature of control over entry to a space, individual and collective behaviour sanctioned in specific spaces, and rules of use” (2006, p.3-4).

In actuality, many, if not almost all, spaces have some limitations on allowable behaviours and conditions of access and who is eligible to frequent the spaces. Therefore, publicness is, to some extent, always qualified. However, there are some spaces that meet fewer of these conditions of publicness (or have more constraints) and these can be classified as “semi-public” spaces. Spaces where there are a range of people and limited privacy, for examples workplaces, could be considered as semi-public spaces. Cafes and nightclubs, or other establishments in which members of the general public are allowed to enter for a fee or in order to purchase a service, might be best defined as semi-public spaces.

In the research interviews, participants often questioned what I meant when I said “public space.” I responded by saying “Any space that you would consider to be public.” This allowed me to gauge which spaces participants defined as public, which fit well with my aims of exploring how participants defined their own experiences and the issues that were

most salient to them. However, participants occasionally described experiences in locations that would almost always be considered private, such as a dinner in the home of their family of origin.<sup>8</sup> These experiences generally haven't been included, unless they were particularly relevant to another theme of the thesis, such as identity, for example. However, experiences such as a family gathering in a park have not been excluded.

A common concern within cultural geography and related disciplines concerned with the public/private divide is that norms of publicness are shifting as the norms of privacy are transferred on to public spaces (Sibley 2005, p.156). As David Sibley argues, "Comfort and security are sought increasingly in the home and in privatised commercial spaces, such as shopping malls and children's play facilities. This trend in the production of space in the most developed societies thus returns us to the first use of 'private' in English as 'withdrawal from public life', from the Latin *privatus*" (Sibley 2005, p.156-7). Sibley also argues that public spaces are becoming increasingly regulated, with behaviours marked as private excluded. In addition, and to the contrary, he also claims that rules of conduct in the home have come to be expected in public as well, so people expect to be unencumbered by social differences that are read as threats (Sibley 2005, p.158). Sibley claims that

"[i]n effect, rules that might be applied in the well-ordered private space of the home are extended to public space, so that all space becomes *heimlich*<sup>9</sup> for the

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<sup>8</sup> While these sort of experiences haven't been discussed in the thesis, some family homes may not necessarily be experienced as particularly 'private' or 'comfortable' if queer women do not feel 'at home' in these situations, or feel out of place. Sara Ahmed claims that the "family home puts items on display that measure sociality in terms of the heterosexual gift" (2006, p.88). In other words these objects, such as wedding photos and gifts, for example, "demand a return" (2006, p.90) and that we embrace this past by continuing a family line through heterosexual procreation.

<sup>9</sup> homely

powerful. The idea of public space as a space of difference, of encounters with strangers as well as familiars, is erased. But anxieties about threatening others can never be erased—they are only displaced. One of the problems with social science perspectives on public and private has been the common failure to capture the world-views of those ‘Others’ against whose transgressions private space is defended” (Sibley 2005, p.158).

This thesis will help redress this issue by capturing the views of some of those people against whom public space is often defended, as queer behaviour is often positioned as “private” behaviour and against public norms. Although, it must be cautioned that while my research participants are “Othered” in some ways in respect to their queer identities, there are also ways in which many of them are privileged (for example most have white skin privilege, and some have class privilege).

### Space/Place

Disciplines in which space and place are key concerns, such as cultural geography, have often had difficulty agreeing on clear definitions of space and place. The geographer Phil Hubbard claims that “though the concepts of space and place may appear self-explanatory, they have been and remain two of the most diffuse, ill-defined and inchoate concepts in the social sciences and humanities” (2005, p.41). There is no strict consensus as to the meanings or uses of these terms (Hubbard 2005, p.41). In its most common usage, place denotes a specific, bounded location and space denotes social production and consumption processes and mobility and flux (Hubbard 2005, p. 43). Spatial analyses are associated with subjectivity, or the construction of subjects through social processes, and

can be aligned with the work of theorists such as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida (Hubbard 2005, p.46). Place analyses tend to focus more on the concrete experiences of people.

Within geography in particular, there are divergent trends in the discipline that have led to very different understandings of these concepts. Hubbard has characterised this split as occurring between “Marxist and materialist accounts” (2005, p.41) and “humanistic accounts that emphasise the ‘sense of place’” (Hubbard, 2005, p.41). Hubbard claims that both these trends are themselves reactions to a more positivist “empirico-physical” (2005, p.42) understanding of space more common in pre 1970s geography. The Marxist theorists, such as Henri Lefebvre, according to Hubbard, argue against absolute space, as social activity relativises and historicises spaces (2005, p.42). In this view a place is a particular, named, social space created through “distinctive activities and imaginings” (Hubbard 2005, p.42). On the other hand, the humanistic view tended to focus more on place as “lived-in” spaces and interrogate people’s lived experiences of place (Hubbard 2005, p.42).

It is quite difficult in practice to draw a clear distinction between space and place (Hubbard 2005, p.45). In *The Politics of Public Space*, Setha Low and Neil Smith provide the following definition of space and place:

“By ‘public space’ we mean the range of social locations offered by the street, the park, the media, the Internet, the shopping mall, the United Nations, national governments, and local neighbourhoods. ‘Public space’ envelops the palpable tension between place, experienced at all scales in daily life, and the seeming

spacelessness of the Internet, popular opinion, and global institutions and economy (2006, p.3).

In this thesis, I have deployed the term “space” in a similar way, although I have not focused on the internet as a space as it was not discussed often within my interviews. I have focused on both broad social processes and lived experiences of particular bounded places. Throughout this thesis I have generally used the term “space” rather than “place,” although at times I do refer to place and I do this more commonly to refer to a specific, bounded location.

### Scales

A trend in the study of space that is relevant to this research is the study of “the politics of scale.” In its most basic sense, scale refers to levels or hierarchies of space: for example, the body, the house/hold, the street or the neighbourhood, the suburb, city, region, nation, or globally. In some conceptions of scale within the field of cultural geography, scale is seen as socially produced (Herod 2011, p.14-16). So, scale could be briefly defined as a socially produced, hierarchical ordering of spaces. Previously these terms may have been thought to be relatively stable and self-explanatory, but more recent research has disrupted notions of fixed spatial hierarchies and some research has focused on the social constitution of spatial scales (Marston 2002, p.220; Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008, pp. 537-8). While an in-depth foray into the processes that constitute geographical scales is beyond the scope of this research, a basic understanding of scale as it relates to identity and processes of inclusion and exclusion within spaces is useful in understanding queer women’s experiences in public spaces. As was discussed above, it is argued that public

spaces have come to be seen as an extension of private spaces with the attendant expectations of sameness and middle class norms. Gilbert Caluya provides a similar example of the mutual constitution of scales in his discussion of the “the family home” in the racist politics of Pauline Hanson<sup>10</sup> and her followers in which the space of the nation is understood as (ideally) conferring “familiarity, comfort and security” (2011, p.206). Similarly, cities and towns are situated in relation to the nation or the region, and areas within towns are viewed in relation to other areas or similar areas in other cities. Within global cities and creative cities discourses and place-based marketing cities are viewed in relation to potential competitor cities globally in the race to promote an image in order to attract funds (Waitt et al.2008, p.159). Constitution of identities, social groups and social movements occurs in relation to the local, to norms of publicity and privacy, city-based and regional understandings and international movements. An understanding of the constitution of scales is therefore relevant to understanding of gendered, sexed and sexual identities, as well as the processes of inclusion and exclusion that can work to render queer women out of place within particular spaces.

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<sup>10</sup> Pauline Hanson was leader of Australia’s One Nation Party and was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1996. The One Nation party platform included limiting immigration and was against multiculturalism.

## **Normativity, prejudice, identity and resistance**

### Heteronormativity, Heterosexism, and Homophobia

This project aims to explore queer experiences in public spaces, but in the literature the terms used to describe negative experiences and unfavourable attitudes towards queer people are not always explained in great detail. Common terms used are anti-gay prejudice, discrimination, hate crimes, homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity, queerphobia, biphobia and transphobia. The language used to describe negative attitudes and behaviours towards queer people has shifted in recent decades (Kitzinger 2005, p.477) as homophobia has been associated with individual attitudes and prejudices. This association has allowed some people to assume a social distance from those who are seen as homophobic, such as perpetrators of hate crimes<sup>11</sup> against queer people, and claim that any casual negative remarks against queer people are meant in good humour. The term heterosexism, on the other hand connotes an inbuilt structural and societal systemic prejudice. A commonly cited definition of heterosexism is the psychologist Gregory Herek's definition: "an ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek 1990, p.316). More recently, and similar to some recent categorisations of racism and sexism, (Eldridge and Johnson 2011, p.384) heterosexism has been divided into two classifications: old fashioned heterosexism and modern heterosexism (Eldridge and Johnson 2011, pp.384-5). This classification process takes into account that many people

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<sup>11</sup> Gail Mason defines hate crimes as "crime wholly or partly motivated by, grounded in, or aggravated by, bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people (2009, pp.326-27). She claims that research on hate crime undertaken in the last twenty years shows that ethnic, religious, sexual, and gender minorities, and people with disabilities are the main victims of this type of crime in Australia (2009, p.327).

may not support or commit hate crimes for example, but still hold attitudes that queer people should not have access to particular social privileges or roles that others are entitled to access. While heterosexism is useful in understanding prejudice, “heteronormativity” helps explicate the social context that licenses heterosexism.

Heteronormativity is closely related to heterosexism. Perhaps, even more than heterosexism, it denotes an everyday cultural and social naturalness and social structuring in which everything is designed so as to render heterosexual norms as the only choice and other forms of sexual and gendered expression as aberrant. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner originally coined the term heteronormativity in their essay “Sex in Public.” They argue that society is imagined through a particular type of intimacy and kinship predicated on heterosexual norms (Berlant & Warner, 2002, p.194). Heterosexuality, they argue, generates a “whole field of social relations” that are sanctioned as “normal” and “right” (Berlant & Warner, 2002, p.194). It is this “rightness” which refers not just to sex, but to the broader organisation of society in ways contingent on these norms that Berlant and Warner refer to as “heteronormativity” (2002, p.194) Celia Kitzinger provides an exhaustive definition of heteronormativity:

“socio-legal...cultural...organizational...and interpersonal ...practices that derive from and reinforce a set of taken-for-granted presumptions relating to sex and gender. These include the presumptions that there are only two sexes; that it is “normal” or “natural” for people of different sexes to be attracted to one another; that these attractions may be publicly displayed and celebrated; that social institutions such as marriage and the family are appropriately organized around

different-sex pairings; that same-sex couples are (if not “deviant”) a “variation on” or an “alternative to” the heterosexual couple. Heteronormativity refers, in sum, to the myriad ways in which heterosexuality as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon” (2005, p.478).

In keeping with the recent changes in the language used to describe negative queer experiences, I will be using the terms “heterosexism” and “heteronormativity” in general, rather than homophobia in this research. This is also due to the assumption underpinning this research that heterosexism is upheld by constellations of (hetero) social norms throughout society, politics and cultural institutions, rather than simply being confined to those individuals who would actively profess to holding homophobic attitudes.<sup>12</sup> This said, I also use terms such as “queerphobia,” “transphobic,” “biphobic,” and “femmephobia” when referring specifically to (the actions of) individuals who have demonstrated such attitudes towards the research participants.

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<sup>12</sup> Two further related terms are “homonormativity” and “homonationalism”. The first term was coined by Lisa Duggan and refers to a particular type of gay activism and politics which is strongly influenced by neoliberal ideals. In her essay “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” Duggan describes homonormativity as “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” (2002, p.179). Proponents of homonormative ideals seek to reconfigure the private/public divide through a smaller state (2002, p.188) with less control over private corporations, a limited public sphere (2002, p.182) with less spaces for an engaged democracy and “a narrow zone of ‘responsible’ domestic privacy” (Duggan 2002, p.182). “Homonationalism” was coined by Jasbir Puar. This term describes the “collusion between homosexuality and U.S. nationalism” (Puar 2007, p.46). While Puar is discussing the US context, perhaps similar “homonationalisms” could be argued to exist in other liberal societies where there is some tolerance or acceptance of at least some forms of queerness or homosexuality. In the US context, Puar discusses how nationalism and homosexuality have become interlinked in displays of patriotism such as flag waving at Mardi Gras and flags in gay and queer spaces (2007, p.43). She argues that some types of homosexuality are permitted or licensed by the nation (although often contextually or conditionally) (Puar 2007, p.46). These are the types of homosexuality which can be acceptable within homonationalist discourses, and are purged of content threatening to homonationalisms, so such homosexualities must fit with patriotic ideals of nation in terms of class, race and gender (Puar 2007, p.46). Homosexuals who benefit from this patriotic homonationalism collude with racist and homophobic ideals (Puar 2007, p.46).

## Normativity and Queer

As well as often being defined in relation to heteronormativity, “queer” is sometimes defined in relation to any kind of normativity altogether (Jakobsen 1998, p.512).

Jakobsen claims that the academic discipline of queer theory also “often defines itself through claims of resistance to ‘the norm,’ the ‘normal,’ or ‘heteronormativity’” (1998, p.512). It must be acknowledged that queer can have several meanings. Queer is often used colloquially as an umbrella term for non-normative sexualities, and can be used simply to mean gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex. Exactly who is considered to be part of (the) queer community/ies is debated and definitions vary from person to person, as I will explore in later chapters. As well as a broad category, queer is used as an individual identity term, somewhat paradoxically, for people, many of whom are same-sex attracted, attracted to two or more sexes, or trans. Its use as an identity term often signals a commitment to resistance towards normative sexualities and/or gender norms. The reason I am claiming its use as an identity term can be paradoxical is that often assuming this identity involves a critique of identities and identity politics.<sup>13</sup> It is particularly used to critique identities constructed around gender or sex binaries with

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this “paradox” might be best illustrated by referring to earlier debates around the evolution of queer activism. The term queer began to become more prominent in the late eighties and early nineties with the founding of the organisations ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in 1987 and Queer Nation in 1990. ACT UP was founded in response to inaction on the part of US health authorities in the midst of the AIDS crisis. Both organisations, along with other forms of activism, used “guerilla” tactics and more theatrical forms of protest such as kiss-ins and die-ins, and protested in all-American venues such as baseball games and Republican meetings. In his article on ACT UP as a social movement, Joshua Gamson claims that such tactics undermine categorization (1989, p.362), and challenge labels (1989, p.360-61), boundaries (1989, p.361) and processes of normalization (1989, pp.359-60) at the same time as building a more positive identity under the labels of gay or queer (1989, p.362). While Berlant and Freeman generally agree with Gamson’s claims regarding what these tactics can accomplish, they also criticize Queer Nation for engaging too much with US ideals of nationalism and the glamour and social sameness that they entail (1992, p.170). They criticise the movement’s masculinism and lack of diversity. This, in their opinion, ties together “sexual object choice and individual identity” (Berlant & Freeman 1992, p.171) as it subsumes other identities under the “queer” of Queer Nation (Berlant & Freeman 1992, p.171).

heterosexuality acting as a dominant (normative) term against which other identities are defined. Queer identities can involve a critique of a two sex model (men and women) where gender is seen to be primarily a fixed expression of biology.

Another definition of queer can be seen in the phrase “to queer.” This verbal use of queer is perhaps more related to the second term I outlined above than to the first catch-all term. It is commonly used in academic writing when authors seek to approach an issue from a new angle or when multiple norms are being contested. This can be contrasted with the use of queer meaning from a homosexual or transgendered perspective. Work that seeks “to queer” an issue, could, however, still focus on or include, queer content. This use of queer is evidenced, for example in Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray’s volume *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologisation of Bodies* where they define queer in the following terms: “Queer, at least as we understand it, is a heterogeneous and multidisciplinary practice aimed at ‘bringing forth’ and thus denaturalising the taken for granted, the invisibilised, the normalised; in short the *dispositifs* or technés of (necessarily material) (un)becoming” (2009, p.4). Their argument for a “queer” that isn’t tied to sexuality is that a definition of queer delineated as solely sexual or aligned with sexual identities “limits some of the interventions practiced under the banner of queer” (Sullivan & Murray, 2009, p.4). They claim that many of the articles in their collection are not primarily about sexuality (Sullivan and Murray, 2009, p. 4).

Sara Ahmed (2006) also uses several separate but interlinked meanings of queer in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. The first sense in which she

uses queer is as “oblique” or “offline” (Ahmed 2006, p.161). In this context, oblique seems to mean metaphorically out of place. She also uses the words “angle” (Ahmed 2006, p.161) and “slanting” (Ahmed 2006, p.92) to convey a sense of not fitting in with a straight “alignment.” Ahmed uses the word “offline” in the sense that bodies are oriented in space (2006, p.14) in such a way that we follow or are directed by particular, often normative, lines automatically (Ahmed 2006, p.14). The second way she uses queer is to refer to queer sexual practices and the people who “practice nonnormative sexualities” (Ahmed 2006, p.161).

In this thesis, multiple meanings of queer will be used. This is necessary both because the interview participants held different understandings of queer— as “non-normative” and, sometimes in tension with the first meaning as an identity term, and as an umbrella term for a group of related sexual identities. Beyond the interview transcripts and participants’ reflections, in my own analysis, I will also draw on many of the interrelated meanings of queer. I will discuss “queer” identity (both individual, group and as an umbrella term), queer as anti-normative, and in other cases I will attempt “to queer” by making the taken-for-granted or normal seem contingent or a product of specific circumstances. While drawing on multiple meanings risks confusion, many of the meanings are clearly related, and I believe that the ambiguity and polysemic nature of “queer” is part of its appeal for those seeking to counter norms and restrictive identity terms. While this is the case, within this thesis, in the context of discussing sexual identity, queer, however, is often related to sexual identity.

## Transgender/ cisgender

In this research study, there are two people who identify as transgender or transsexual and at least one other person who identifies ambivalently as a woman. Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook define transgender people as people who “live their lives in a social gender that was not the one they were assigned at birth. People who make these social transitions—often termed ‘transgender’ people—disrupt cultural expectations that gender identity is an immutable derivation of biology”(2009, p.441). In “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies” Susan Stryker describes the history of the term transgender. It seems to have been first used in the 1980s to mean an identity somewhere on a continuum between transvestite and transsexual (Stryker 2006, p. 4). She explains that “a *transvestite* was somebody who episodically changed into the clothes of the so-called “other sex,” and a *transsexual* was somebody who permanently changed genitals in order to claim membership in a gender other than the one assigned at birth, then a *transgender* was somebody who permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of self, without recourse to genital transformation” (Stryker 2006, p. 4). In the early nineties, Stryker explains that transgender came to have a more political meaning, largely due to Leslie Feinberg’s formulation of transgender to mean “a political alliance between all individuals who were marginalized or oppressed due to their difference from social norms of gendered embodiment, and who should therefore band together in a struggle for social, political, and economic justice” (Stryker 2006, p. 4). Stryker claims that it is this understanding of transgender that has proliferated and is in current usage. While these terms are often used interchangeably, there are conflicts

related to these identities and each identity term represents a different view on sex/gender and biology.

The category of “heterosexuality” was coined after that of “homosexuality,” as the normal term that was defined against its aberrant “other”. Similarly, the term “cisgender/ed” is used to denote someone whose gender identity fits with the social and cultural expectations of gender based on the sex assigned at birth. This is defined in relation to the other of “transgender.” Sex is often assigned according to the morphology of the sex organs (Kessler 1990, p.3).

Like queer, it is difficult to pin down clear definitions for transgender and transsexual that fit with everyone’s lived experiences without appearing contradictory. However, one central conflict relates to adherence to binary conceptions of sex and gender. Transsexual is commonly understood to mean someone who transitions surgically and medically in order to change sexes within a binary model of sex and gender (Nash 2010, p.193; Nagoshi & Brzuzy 2010, p.432). Transgender people may or may not be undergoing or intending to undergo surgery or make medical changes, and transgender is more associated with questioning the necessity of binary sex/gender models. In Catherine Nash’s interview-based study of twelve transpeople, for example, rather than seeking to “pass,” her interview participants were happy to maintain ambiguity in their appearances by not conforming outright to gendered and sexed norms (2010, p.198). Nash explains that this ambiguity was not intended to be interpreted as androgyny, but rather as being outside of sex/gender binaries (2010, p.198). In her study she found that her interview

participants preferred socialising in queer spaces rather than gay or lesbian spaces. She saw queer and transgender as more closely aligned: “Queer as an identity or a subject position, while seeming to create a category of essentialized identity, provides an alternative positionality that seeks to avoid essentialized expectations and the labelling of relationships as either heterosexual or same sex” (Nash 2010, p. 204). This is in contrast to gay and lesbian identities, which, while challenging the notion that gender and sex should neatly align with sexual partner choice, still maintain a link between identity (gay or lesbian), sex and sexual partner choice. While gay and lesbian identities do not necessarily limit the expression of gendered identity, they operate on a binary model of sex/gender.

### Passing

As already suggested, when queer people (or any other sort of people from a minority group or who would be categorised as deviant) do not appear to people from outside that group to be part of that group, this is known as “passing.”<sup>14</sup> Passing may be a deliberate strategy or it may work as a function of heteronormativity, as those who are not clearly marked as non-normative are often assumed to belong to majority groups. They might, for example, be assumed to be heterosexual. Working in the discipline of psychology, Nathan Shippee characterises passing as to “choose not to reveal” (2011, p.118) stigmatised identities. Daniel Renfrow provides a definition of passing drawn from

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<sup>14</sup> The term “passing” appears in the sociologist Erving Goffman’s 1963 work *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* and has subsequently been frequently cited within the discipline of sociology. It is linked to early Black Studies literature from the 1940s to 1950s, which refers to racial passing, including Reba Lee’s memoir *I Passed for White* and St.Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton’s *Black Metropolis* (Goffman 1963, pp.79-80, see notes).

Erving Goffman's seminal work in sociology on passing that allows for a wider scale of behaviours ranging between the completely agentic and the unconscious. He defines it as: "cultural performances in which individuals perceived to have a somewhat threatening identity present themselves or are categorized by others as persons they are not" (Renfrow 2004, p.485-6).

I take the view that, in many cases, passing is not always a conscious choice or an automatic behaviour, but exists somewhere on a continuum. Indeed, within my research it was difficult to elicit exact accounts of deliberate passing practices and participants found it interesting to reflect on these issues as it was not always the kind of thing they necessarily thought through systematically. While I disagree with Shippee's definition of passing as choice, he makes some pertinent points as to the value of passing for queer people. He claims that, when passing "actors are not expected to advocate, apologize, or otherwise comment on a personal attribute" (Shippee 2011, p.118) whereas those whose identities are stigmatised are often required to explain their differences (Shippee 2011, p.118).

Passing is related to the division of spaces into private and public and the acceptable behaviours within each sphere. Carol Johnson aptly demonstrates this in her article "Heteronormative Citizenship and the Politics of Passing" when she refers to the former Australian Prime Minister, from 1968-1971, John Gorton's comments that the law ought to be reformed in order to allow male homosexuals rights, so that good, non-objectionable homosexuals who only displayed their homosexuality in private (including not touching or holding hands) would be allowed to practice homosexual relationships in

private (2002, pp.320-21). While clearly much reform has occurred since the early 1970s, I would agree with Johnson that this sort of thinking about public and private spaces and homosexuality is still influential at the present time. Gorton was effectively claiming that homosexuals needed to appear heterosexual in public (Johnson 2002, p.321). This expectation that homosexual people will regulate this behaviour encourages self-policing of gender (Johnson 2002, p.321). This is further entrenched by the reactions and harassment queer people often encounter in public spaces (Johnson 2002, p.221), which will be examined at length throughout this thesis.

### Intersectionality<sup>15</sup>

Intersectional frameworks developed in the 1980s within black feminism and critical race studies, as a response to the universalising of white, middle class women's experience in feminism (Erel et al. 2010, p.57). Nikki Sullivan defines intersectionality as "the complex interaction between a range of discourses, institutions, identities and forms of exploitation, that structure subjectivities (and the relations between them) in elaborate, heterogeneous, and often contradictory ways" (2003a, p.72). Intersectional approaches generally aim to theorise identity outside of an additive model of identity that posits identity as a sum of multiple social positionings, arguing instead that the way subjects are positioned within multiple identity groups brings about new identity configurations that are not simply the combination of the two categories. Intersectionality, however, is used

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<sup>15</sup> I would like to thank my thesis examiners, Dr Yvette Taylor and Professor Arlene Stein, for their feedback on intersectionality. I appreciate their suggestions and I have included this section in order to ensure that intersectionality is adequately theorised.

in a lot of different ways, and for different purposes within different projects (Erel et al, 2010, p.56).

As intersectionality has been a major theoretical framework in critical race and gender studies since the 1980s, a number of critiques have recently developed. Yvette Taylor highlights the importance of ensuring that intersectional approaches take into account the lived experience of interview participants (2010a, p.37), rather than simply being mobilised self-reflexively to explain the researcher's positioning in relation to the research topic or subjects (2010b, p.70). Kath Weston's critique of intersectionality focuses on the different meanings different identities take on and their variability according to context. While she doesn't dispute the interconnections of identities, she asks whether different identities may be more prominent at certain times and whether intersectional frameworks can accommodate tensions between different identities (Weston 2010, p.16). She argues that a concept of identity as comprising intersecting axes doesn't take into account the ways in which gender is done that may escape or exceed identity (Weston 2010, p.32). Erel et al.'s critique of intersectionality centres around the ways in which intersectionality is being used by academics to credential themselves and used to paper over the ways in which power functions as well as avoiding situating oppressions locally and historically. They also claim that, in practice, intersectional analyses mainly consider the axes of gender, race and sexuality, and do not often explore other aspects of identity.

The interface between intersectional analyses and queer theory and the way in which they mutually inflect each other must also be considered. Taylor argues that queer theory's emphasis on challenging boundaries and identity categories as well as processes of

normalisation can lead to a lack of emphasis on the “material dimensions” (2010b, p.40) and not enough focus on the way material processes and resources inform subjectivity (2010b, p.40). She also critiques queer’s reluctance to focus on its own boundedness and the way different subjects are situated within queer theory (Taylor 2010b, p.71). She points out that queer produces a particular relationship towards challenging normativity and articulating one’s experiences of identity and social positioning that are more accessible to those of the middle or upper classes (Taylor 2010b, p.75). Similarly, Erel et al. also claim that intersectional analyses are dismissive of identity claims, which they see as ignoring the forms of agency that may come from membership in identity groups (2010, p.64). Identity, they argue, is often positioned as oppressive (Erel et al. 2010, p.64).

Many theorists have posited ways around some of the abovementioned difficulties. Some require the abandonment of intersectional analyses, and others have reframed intersectionality to better address some of their critiques. Taylor’s critique of the theoretical and descriptive nature of intersectional analyses has lead her to prioritise intersectionality within empirical research, attending to the ‘interconnections’ and how these are experienced in women’s lives (2010b, p.52-3). She also finds reconceptualisations of intersectionality as “situated positionality” and “hybridity” useful (Taylor 2010b, p.41). Weston surmises that “stories” may work better than axes to theorise intersecting identities:

The intersections model has a hard time with contradictions or hard-nosed questions. It portrays all axes as equivalent, all lines coming together, all of the time. Could it be that stories do a better job than geometric models

of conveying how race, class, gender, sexuality, and the like come alive?”

p.30

The fact that identities are bound up together does not mean they always come into play together. Different identities have different significance in different contexts. Sometimes they hardly operate at all. (Weston 2010, p.16)

Individual “storying” or self-narration may work to explore the intricacies and complications of identities, as well as the ambivalences and resistances experienced by the research participants. She suggests the term “renditions” (Weston 2010, p.33) as a way of framing the interlinking of identities in place of intersections. Renditions happen when identities intersect, but, according to Weston, they don’t have the same geometric metaphor of axes intersecting that is implied by the term intersections (Weston 2010, p.33) Storying or “renditions” also help to bring attention to the particular contexts and locations in which intersections occur.

Erel et al. were also concerned with the need to specifically locate intersectional analyses and ensure that they are anchored in local histories of oppression and local contexts (2010, p.72). Care must also be taken to ensure that the relations of power are not overlooked in the focus on interesting, interlinking differences. They argue that differences can be depoliticised when differences are positioned similarly and given equal weight and hierarchy and power relationships are not adequately theorised (Erel et al. 2010, pp.65-66). Against arguments for challenging identity/ies, they contend “that the relations of domination and subordination which are circumscribed through these

categories still exist and continue to demand analytical and political specification and engagement” ( Erel et al. 2010, p.65).

Whilst I have not drawn explicitly on intersectional frameworks in this thesis, I have aimed to explore the ways in which queer women experienced their identities, which obviously encompassed the interlinking and mutual production of sex, gender and sexuality, but also (although to a lesser degree) class, race, dis/ability, age, education, employment status and residential location. I have discussed these intersections in terms of multiple positionalities, rather than intersectionalities, in general, in line with the phenomenological, hermeneutic and feminist standpoint frameworks discussed in my methodology chapter.

### **Chapter Outlines**

Given the centrality of the concept of experience in this research and its contested nature, in chapter two I will examine the theoretical debates regarding the status of experience in some depth in order to further explain and defend the appropriateness of first person accounts of experience for research. I will illustrate my methodology and choice of methods. I will begin by discussing factors that influenced my choice of research topic, position myself in relation to the research, and explore my investments in this topic.

Following that, I will introduce the research participants and discuss my research process from the initial stages. This chapter will include interview design, participant recruitment and sampling issues, as well as explicating the benefits and limitations of the semi-structured interviewing method. I will describe my particular implementation of this method and account for my choice of frameworks. The benefits of my approach will be

delineated and I will explore the limitations of other approaches in considering similar research problems.

Another purpose of this chapter will be to explicate the theoretical background of this project. In particular, I will argue that experience is important and should be maintained as an analytical category in defiance of opposing arguments. The positioning of experience as important stems from my belief that this analytic offers a way to understand the perspectives of minority groups, such as queer women, in their own terms. It is also premised upon arguments that knowledge is locational, and is dependent on identity and embodied experience. I will argue that experience and its interpretation is embodied and depends upon particular spatial locations and contexts as well as more abstract social positions. This embodiment of knowledge runs counter to liberal conceptions of a rational, autonomous subject and with full intentionality. Embodied identity and relationship to places are built through the sedimentation of habit and norms. This can lead queer women to be feel “out of place” in particular places premised on heterosexual norms.

Chapter three will discuss interview participants’ experiences of violence and perceptions of safety. Much research focuses on violence towards gay men or undifferentiated queer or GLBTI people. As I have already suggested, violence and harassment towards queer women are under examined. Whilst in general, more violence towards women occurs in private, and more violence towards men occurs in public, it is not clear that violence toward queer women follows these trends. One of the purposes of this chapter is to provide a background to the reader as to the types of violence experienced by queer

women and the particular circumstances in which they are experienced. Violence here is conceived broadly, and includes a range of behaviours such as harassment and verbal abuse, which may not be physically violent or criminal, but are designed to intimidate queer women, or make them feel unsafe; I will also discuss incidents more commonly considered to be violent, such as physical attacks. The participants' narrations of their experiences of violence are contextualised in relation to quantitative data from local surveys of violence against queer and GLBT people. They are also contextualised in relation to qualitative research conducted previously in Melbourne and with qualitative research conducted quite recently in other parts of the world. This allows for synchronic and diachronic comparisons. Another main purpose of this chapter is to illuminate patterns related to experiences of violence. Generally speaking, types of violence experienced are divided along gendered lines, with more androgynous or butch women attracting particular sorts of negative attention, which are often different from the sorts of violence experienced by femmes, and can also be different from those experienced by trans women. When interview participants were with queer-identifying friends or partners they were more likely to be seen as queer and consequently faced more violence or harassment. While quantitative studies provide a broad overall picture of violence towards queer people, my research clarifies spatial and contextual details of queer experiences of violence, such as the exact places, turn of events, what was said and done and who the attackers were. Illuminating the details of violence against queer women will provide information that could help to target violence prevention programs and safety initiatives more appropriately in order to more effectively address violence against queer women. A third purpose of this chapter is to begin to explore queer women's feelings and

perceptions of safety in Melbourne, given their experiences of violence. It will examine personal geographies of safety and the impact of previous experiences of violence on feelings of safety.

I will argue that queer women are subject to gender policing based on gendered self-expression and displays of affection, such as hugs or hand-holding. Such policing can restrict queer women's lives by preventing them from frequenting particular areas. This process of restriction is furthered by discourses of female vulnerability and notions of responsibility for avoiding harm that lead women and those with non-normative sexualities to avoid particular spaces. It may also compel queer women to limit particular forms of gendered expression and affection to private or semi-private spaces. If this becomes a pattern amongst queer women, then public spaces will become purged of non-normative expression of gender and sexualities, and potentially those who didn't limit these forms of self-expression in public would face even greater sanctions and become even more unapprovingly visible; public spaces would become more heteronormative.

Chapter four follows on from the discussion of safety in the previous chapter. It focuses more specifically on the strategies undertaken by queer women in attempts to ensure their safety in public places. It will discuss the ways in which queer women changed their behaviour or appearance in order to avoid harassment or violence. It will argue that these processes of ensuring personal safety do not always occur at a conscious level, but rather are part of the habitual embodied experience of queer women. Within the interview data it wasn't always easy to distinguish between participants' personal preferences for frequenting particular places and safety concerns. Some interview participants' claims about personal safety were inconsistent. I argue that this is due to wanting to avoid the

feelings of vulnerability that might accompany admitting fear or avoidance or acknowledging danger. I continue on to investigate queer women's ideas for creating safer spaces. Most participants said that they thought that there was a need for harassment and discrimination to be addressed.

The safety interventions suggested are varied and encompass personal, institutional, policy-based, local council, broad scale attitudinal changes, grassroots level consciousness raising, legislation and environment-specific initiatives. Related to the question of safety initiatives is the question of responsibility. It is frequently acknowledged within feminist research on violence that there are certain strands of research and practice that attempt to address the issues of violence against women and minority groups by advising greater caution on the part of potential victims i.e. members of groups that are seen to be vulnerable (Stanko 1997, p.492; Stanko, 1996, pp 13-14, 17). I will argue that the types of solutions suggested in order to counter violence against women and queer people will depend on who is seen as responsible for their safety. I suggest that queer women sometimes internalise responsibility for victimisation and illustrate this with interview data. I argue against undifferentiated safety campaigns and safety advice directed at the general public, as queer people face different types of harassment and violence for different reasons. At the end of this chapter, building on the findings so far about queer women's experiences of safety, I will provide a series of recommendations to address safety issues for queer women in public spaces.

While safety was the most salient issue for most of the interview participants in regard to their experiences in public spaces, considering safety, by itself, does not provide a full, nuanced picture of queer women's experiences in public spaces. Similar to safety,

comfort was a term used frequently in the interviews to describe experiences in public spaces. This is congruent with my findings from my previous research and with the findings from other research on similar topics (Gorman-Murray 2009a, pp.448-50).<sup>16</sup> In chapter five, I will present the data from the interviews relating to comfort. A key finding from the interviews was that comfort's negative counterpart, discomfort, seemed to stem from feeling that one didn't "fit in" or was "out of place" in particular public places. Being represented in spaces, for example, feeling that one's identity was reflected in the design, the other people in the spaces, the advertising and other elements of public space, was important in allowing interview participants to feel as though they fit in. I will argue that both "discomfort" and "comfort" can become habitual and engendered as ways of "being-in-the-world."

Surveillance and policing of gender complemented heteronormative representations (in advertising and spatial design and occupancy) in signalling to the research participants that they were out of place. Negative comments and staring were some of the tactics that aided this process of exclusion. Participants internalised surveillance according to social norms which increased self-monitoring for signs of visible queerness. As policing and surveillance are linked to visibility, those who appeared most obviously queer often faced the most sanctions regarding their sexuality.

I also provide a brief historical background in regards to design and spatialisation. This history will describe the increase in surveillance according to societal norms. It will demonstrate how this spatial monitoring and surveillance rose to prominence in line with

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<sup>16</sup> Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* introduced me to the idea of "queer comfort," which resonated with my findings in interviews undertaken prior to this project that comfort was important to queer people.

the rise of modernity, liberal ideals and processes of individualisation. These ideals are linked with privacy, and I will argue that privacy and comfort are closely linked and that public spaces are increasingly privatised and modelled on notions of individual comfort and privacy. While comfort can be seen as regressive or insular, I conclude that comfort is an important claim to make for queer women and other minority groups in public spaces.

Chapter six will explore queer identity formation and the impacts of place on the development of identity. It will argue that the converse also applies, that identity also impacts place development. Another argument running through this chapter is that these processes of place and identity formation both take place within a particular historically situated complex of (neoliberal capitalist) economic processes which also influence the structure of places and identities. Queer identity development is also claimed to be related to processes of normalisation that I began to explore in chapter five. Self-expression of identity can be constrained by normalisation processes. While this occurs, resistance to normativity also occurs and is linked to ideals of queer identity as resistant to norms. Participants' ideals of resistance will be discussed. While some participants expressed a commitment to resisting heterosexual or dominant norms, most of them could not always sustain this commitment, particularly in the face of potential threats or queerphobia.

Participants saw some areas of Melbourne as limiting queer women's self-expression and others as helping self-expression to flourish, although the particular areas that were detrimental and those that allowed for expression varied. They drew on resources from "queer-friendly" areas to develop their own identities. Queer self-expression or "being who I am" was seen as very important by the participants.

In a neoliberal climate, social responsibility is displaced onto the individual. Self-empowerment and self-development therefore come to be seen as solutions to social issues. I argue that this is also the case with some queer women.

Following from the previous chapter, and related to the topic of identity, chapter seven will demonstrate how queer identities develop within communities. This will be explored in relation to models of community that value diversity. Within queer social groups, the idea of a queer community is sometimes questioned. Some queer people see it as a fiction, or claim that there is no commonality between groups marked as non-sexually normative. Such non-sexually normative groups might include queer and trans groups, gays and lesbians, kink and other groups based around alternative sexual practices, and any other groups that exist outside of heteronormative standards of sexuality. Some participants identified with particular subgroups or subcommunities more than they identified as part of a broader queer community. Most participants agreed that the queer community was somehow bounded, although where the boundary should be drawn was contested. I will present data from the interviews relating to how the participants defined “queer” and “queer community.” Interview participants defined queer in a number of different ways. They also had different levels of engagement with queer communities. For the most part, the interviews present a model of community based on diversity, more than a liberal ideal of community based on commonality. While many described diverse queer communities, these communities were not without conflict. A lot of policing of gender and sexuality within queer communities was discussed. I will explore processes of inclusion and exclusion that constitute and redraw the boundaries of queer social groups. The picture presented of queer community is of a community that is being “unworked”

(Secomb 2000, pp. 140-42) as the boundaries are dissolved, as well as continually being reconfigured. “Queer” presents a useful model for the development of community, as it allows for a range of identities to coalesce under a broad banner that is loosely linked together on the basis of sexual non-normativity, without very restrictive conditions for membership.

## **CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY**

### **The Topic of Investigation**

This project explores a number of factors informing queer women's experiences in public spaces that are generally occupied by a majority of heterosexual people; such experiences include violence and harassment, and feelings of safety and comfort or discomfort. This thesis will ask a number of questions of relevance to queer women's experiences in public spaces. These include: "What are queer women's experiences of public spaces and how do they name and describe them?", "How do they manage these experiences and do they have particular management strategies?", "How are these experiences best explained?" And, "what needs to change in order to improve queer women's experiences in public spaces?"

By interviewing women who identify as queer, I explore the affective bonds (or conversely, fraught and divisive emotions) which create and fracture social and identity-based groups. I examine the role of affect in queer communities, in activism, and its structuring of experiences in public space. I hope to capture the ways in which queer and female embodiment influences experiences in public spaces, including encounters with non queer, non female "others." I investigate queer women's experiences in relation to the design of public spaces, which are underpinned by prominent sociopolitical discourses such as neoliberalism and heterosexism, which consciously or unconsciously, act to limit the available actions of particular subjects within these spaces.

### **A Reflexive Approach: On ‘Knowing Myself’ and Disclosing My Investments**

As I mentioned above, I became interested in “queer women’s experiences in public spaces” largely because of my own experiences as a queer-identifying woman in public spaces. In this thesis I seek to avoid, to the best of my ability, Cartesian paradigms which structure the way we see and interpret the world according to a mind/body duality, which separates emotional investments from what is considered to be “impartial” and “rational” (Young 1990a, p.100, p.103). So, as I may have alluded to above, I undertook this project very much because of my positionalities, very much from my own perspective and because of my previous experiences. Being the person I am (or in a more poststructuralist sense, the “subject” I am in the process of becoming) I have always been very motivated by anger to undertake research in particular areas. And it is perhaps my own tendency to be particularly emotionally motivated, which leads me to be interested in questions of emotions.

In narrating myself, I might hope to disrupt a conception of researcher as knower and participants as known. This could help to dissipate any sense of “God’s eye view” (de Certeau 1984, pp.92-93; Young 1990a, p.100) where the text helps to make me invisible in a tactical way, and the focus is on the participants whose experiences are magically narrated and tied together by an unseen outsider. This narration of self will also help to explore some of my positionalities relative to those of my participants, so perhaps readers can make up their own minds as to whether some parts of my explanation are shaped by

the positionalities that shape my life and my experiences. This positioning of myself also helps to underline that I cannot claim that this knowledge that I and my participants have created can apply universally, or speak for all kinds of queer women in all kinds of places and situations (Rose 1997, p.308). It will help me admit to my privileges (as it is often the privileged who can tactically choose invisibility or visibility to suit their needs) and also the ways in which I have not been privileged. I do try to openly acknowledge my own social positioning and investments and I am sure these will influence my own work and my interpretation of the interviews. I do not believe it is possible to maintain full objectivity as is assumed within a positivist paradigm, and, as such, research is an interpretation, approximation or sketch of the phenomenon under investigation.

### **Critiques of Reflexivity**

“The authority of academic knowledge is put into question not by self-conscious positioning but by gaps that give space to, and are affected by, other knowledges” (Rose 1997, p.315).

While a reflexive approach is commonly used in feminist research, there are many recent critiques, which address the limitations of this approach. The feminist geographer Gillian Rose has outlined several of these critiques. She argues that reflexivity is often framed according to tropes of visibility and other spatialised metaphors (Rose 1997, p.309). This kind of practice is linked to what Alcoff calls an “ocularcentric epistemology” (2006, p.198): a modern Western condition in which seeing is equated to knowing. In other words, one feels that one has unmediated access to truth through vision. Following from these visual metaphors is an understanding of reflexivity as “transparent” knowledge (Rose 1997, p.309). That is, if reflexive researchers “survey” the field of knowledge in

order to situate and critique their knowledge claims, and then position themselves, then this kind of reflexive position is entirely possible. One must effectively explicate all the power relations between both the researcher and the researched and in the field of knowledge in order to achieve this kind of reflexivity. Rose suggests that this is not possible, as it would be both extremely difficult to unpack these power relations, and one must necessarily perform this tactic through some kind of theoretical lens which would in turn need to be unpacked; Rose suggests that feminist geographers perform this move by using spatial and scalar metaphors such as “micro” and “macro” (1997, p.311). She also argues that the self is in part constructed through the process of reflexivity, as it is not transparently knowable (Rose 1997, p.313). This self is also constructed through the research interview process (Rose 1997, p.313).

The cultural studies theorists Fiona Nicoll and Melissa Gregg also advance a critique of how reflexivity is used in much academic work. They distinguish between a performative reflexivity, the object of which is to determine “the limits of the subject of knowledge” (Nicoll & Gregg 2008, p.208) and a “form of reflexivity that recognises the effects of one’s investment in these limits” (Nicoll & Gregg 2008, p.208). They claim that a genuinely reflexive, or “strong” reflexive approach is about accounting for the specific situation of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the way “concrete investments” are negotiated in the project (Nicoll & Gregg 2008, p.209). Further, they claim that a reflexive approach opens up the possibility of new ways of being and representation (Nicoll & Gregg 2008, p. 209).

A further issue with reflexivity is the distinction between reflexive research practice and researchers’ own self-reflexive analyses (Taylor 2010a, p.70). Taylor argues that, rather

than focusing on situating oneself, it is more politically useful to locate positionalities within the research interviews (2010a, p.71-2). The interaction between the researcher and the participants can be and the “subject positions mobilised or refused in and beyond the research encounter” (Taylor 2010a, p.72) can be analysed in terms of their functions within economies of power. Taylor contends that self-reflexivity often discursively privileges the researcher by giving them space to discuss themselves and their positioning. This may have the effect of making research participants from disadvantaged groups even more silenced, as the focus is shifted back to the researcher who is already privileged in the research encounter as well as having control over the interpretation of the research data.

In this dissertation I will attempt to heed cautions against a disconnected type of reflexivity where the author establishes their positionalities briefly and then continues on in a positivist kind of tradition as if there was an unmediated access to the world (Nicoll & Gregg 2008, p.208). I will also question my investment in determining “the limits of the subject of knowledge” (Nicoll & Gregg 2008, p.208) and, in recognising that my knowledge is at best partial, to explore the nature of these partialities and connect them to “wider questions of interest, capital and investment” (Nicoll & Gregg 2008, p.209).

Rather than using reflexivity in order to further establish my authority and dominance in the text, I will reflect on the way my interview participants position themselves and how they are positioned and the claims this positioning allows them to make.

Narrating oneself in these contexts is almost always painful in the manner of diving into an icy pool, but here goes... I am 29 years old... I identify both as a woman and as queer or lesbian, depending on the context. I grew up and spent most of my life in Brisbane,

and moved to Melbourne to undertake my doctoral research. This makes me not quite an insider in some of the Melbourne queer social networks, sometimes despite my best efforts. I come from a lower class background (my mother raised my brothers and I whilst on a single parent pension) and this has often made me feel like an outsider in the academic establishment, but I have learned to perform middle class norms quite seamlessly. I expect other people in similar situations might feel even more uncomfortable and out-of-place, but as my mother originally came from a middle class background, I think I imbued these kinds of ideals from the beginning. My father is from a working class background, but I never learned how to be working class convincingly. I think this sometimes poses a problem when I interview working class people, as some people possibly perceive me to be stuck up or inauthentic. I suppose, in a way, these kinds of reflections show that class is fractured like any other social group, even though it is often made out to be more uniform. I am a white Australian and I know that my skin colour gives me the kind of privilege of invisibility that I mentioned just before, but also a privilege of being visible when I need it. If I want to go to a shopping centre to buy a product, for example, I will be likely to find white people heavily represented in advertising and on product packaging. I know that my white skin and European features give me advantages in crucial areas such as in job and housing markets (McIntosh 1990, pp.32-33). It gives me the freedom to go more places without being looked at suspiciously. And crucially, as a Non-Indigenous Australian, I don't face the disadvantage that many Indigenous Australians face; I don't face the legacy of dispossession and mass violence and the intrusion of value systems that are not my own to steal and govern my land without my permission. Thinking about these kinds of things,

I feel quite uncomfortable, at the same time as acknowledging that the confessional (which I am currently performing) is a longstanding Western tradition with cathartic value (Foucault 1990, pp.61-62). And I know too well from reading many self-reflexive accounts that it is irritating to read peoples' privilege marked out on the page. How many times have I read "As a White, middle class man" or just as often "As a White middle class woman" with very little explanation, and felt quite irritated? So, I can understand if you, the reader, find it irritating too. But all the same, my discomfort is nothing compared to the kinds of discrimination some people face on an everyday basis...

### **Intellectual Debts and Theoretical Framework**

This research has been influenced by theorists working in the areas of feminist phenomenology, political philosophy and feminist standpoint epistemology. Two of the main theoretical influences on this project have been the feminist phenomenologists, Linda Martín Alcoff and Sara Ahmed.<sup>17</sup> The stated aim of Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* was "to queer phenomenology" at the same time as "moving queer theory toward phenomenology" (2006, p.5). On one hand she aimed to incorporate phenomenological insights into queer theory and on the other hand to make phenomenology more queer. While Ahmed's work is an autoethnography, her queer phenomenology provides a framework through which to explore queer women's experiences of public spaces. In *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self*

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<sup>17</sup> In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* Sara Ahmed draws on the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, and Sartre and the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl. *Queer Phenomenology* also owes debts to Marxism and psychoanalysis (2006, p.5), as well as more obviously, queer theory, 'feminist philosophers of the body' (2006, p.4) and critical race and whiteness studies. Ahmed's work was unique at the time of publication in that it combined queer theory and phenomenological approaches. In *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* Linda Martín Alcoff combines phenomenology, mainly drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, with the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Charles Taylor (2006, p.88).

Linda Martín Alcoff does not elaborate a “queer phenomenology” as such, but draws on phenomenology to explore “lived identities” and their relationship to visibility, with a particular focus on raced and gendered experience. Like *Queer Phenomenology*, it does not rely on interview data; it examines filmic, journalistic and literary texts, as well as some data from cognitive science and psychology, and anecdotes from her own personal experience. Where necessary, I have also sought to incorporate the insights of those working within the areas of poststructuralist feminism and queer theory. Because the subject of existential phenomenology is a body-subject, there is a focus on embodied experience, particularly on embodied experience from the phenomenological perspective of the subject. Because phenomenology often emphasizes generality of experience over differentiation of experience, I also draw on (poststructuralist) queer theory and its tendencies to question and analyse processes of normativity and differentiation in order to attend to the specificity of queer women’s experiences in my analysis of the interviews.

In order to articulate the phenomenological methodology I have employed both in the framing and the analysis of the interviews, I will highlight central insights from Alcoff and Ahmed, while also incorporating the work of other feminist scholars. Because Alcoff and Ahmed are interested, as I am, on focusing on the experience of members of specific social groups, I will start by examining how they reformulate the work by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose conception of experience is more general and undifferentiated, and implicitly based on male experience.

As Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains in *Phenomenology of Perception*, from a phenomenological perspective, experience is oriented towards objects viewed against other objects forming “horizons”:

In normal vision... I direct my gaze upon a sector of the landscape, which comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there. Now, with them, I have at my disposal their horizons, in which there is implied, as a marginal view, the object on which my eyes at present fall. The horizon, then, is what guarantees the identity of the object throughout the exploration; it is the correlative of the impending power which my gaze retains over objects it has just surveyed, and which it already has over the fresh details it is about to discover. No distinct memory or conjecture could fill this role: they would give only a probable synthesis, whereas my perception presents itself as actual (1962, pp.78-9).

In viewing an object, one can never see all facets of an object at once, and one needs to zoom in on a particular object, among all the other surrounding objects in order to see it; attention is therefore directed towards objects. In order to focus on one object, other surrounding objects “recede” or take a lesser prominence. These objects form a background or horizon. This discussion of spatial perspective, according to Merleau-Ponty, can equally be applied to a “temporal perspective” (1962, pp.79-80).

Horizons involve an orientation to the world as well as to particular objects. Drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Alcoff argues that horizons are “perspectival locations” (2006, p.95) from which one views the world, and these locations incorporate culture and traditions (2006, p.95). She argues that, as well as horizons being individual, identity groups, to some extent, share horizons or perspectives. The interpretive horizon helps to frame the self as well as how one sees the world (Alcoff 2006, p.100). As such, it is “a material and embodied situatedness” (Alcoff 2006, p.102).

One of Ahmed's main innovations is developing an account of the "orientation" of experience in relation to sexual orientation. As we always are in space through our bodies, our body is our starting point through which we locate ourselves in relation to other points. Terms such as "right" and "left" or "up" and "down" are related to bodily configurations (Ahmed 2006, pp.8-9). In contrast to orientation, or being at home or feeling "in place," "disorientation" occurs when people are uprooted, the objects around them change, or they are unable to "take up space." Ahmed's notion of taking up space, or "extension" draws on Iris Marion Young and Frantz Fanon's development of Merleau-Ponty's concept of motility. Motility is the ability to extend one's body freely into space, or what Young refers to as taking up an "I can" compartment (1990b, p.146). In Fanon's development of black experience, however, it is the "I cannot" of the body being unable to extend itself, unable to complete an action because it is blocked, that is salient (cited in Ahmed 2006, p.139). If experience is oriented towards objects, Ahmed argues that we are also always "directed" along lines (2006, p.15). While Merleau-Ponty talks of a general, or often of a "normal" body, Ahmed claims that "bodies acquire the very shape of such direction" (2006, p.15). Becoming a lesbian means taking a different line.

Moreover, I argue that embodied experience involves the sedimentation of norms, in a similar way to Merleau-Ponty's description of habit. Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of "habit" within inhabitation. If inhabitation is a spatial term, connoting inhabitation of a place, inhabitation, and therefore habit, are "sedimented" in the body. Habit refers not only to the traditional or old or ingrained, but also takes place through learning in which habits are also inculcated. Rather than a conscious deliberation, Merleau-Ponty describes learning habits as "the motor grasping of a motor significance"

(1962, p.165). Habits, for Merleau-Ponty, are significances or meanings (1962, p.169). That is, there exists a dimension of meaning that is habitual and embodied and situated. Meaning, within phenomenology, is not merely linguistically mediated. Neither is it only a Cartesian rational interpretation or “understanding” in an intellectual sense. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.170) Like Iris Marion Young, I take the view that meaning and culture inheres in habits, “forms of perception and comportment” (1990b, p.14). In a parallel with poststructuralist accounts of discursive systems, meaning is not self-evident or consistent (Alcoff 2006, p.110).

Instead, meaning and experience are mediated and interpreted through “positionalities”: (Alcoff 2006, p.148) through who one is told one is, one’s membership in national or ethnic communities, cultures, social classes, biological sex, as well as, and overlapping with one’s visible attributes such as sex, skin colour, gender presentation and social class. Rosalyn Diprose best describes meaning as embodied significances:

It is because the body expresses existence and meaning as it actualises existence and meaning that it is so hard to locate the meanings and values that drive us and that we assume we share with others. This meaning exists most fundamentally through the bodies that express it through other bodies. This is not to deny that social meanings and values have institutional support through written laws and principles (of democracy, justice, equality etc.). But here too these principles and laws are expressed and actualised through the bodies that write, govern, enact, monitor, and interpret the law. That meaning is actualised and expressed by a body through other bodies is why I can only grasp a sense of belonging to one or several communities, and then only in passing, not by pointing to a table of

ideas, but as I live these ideas with and in relation to other bodies; and then I only grasp these most explicitly in retrospect when I feel a failure of belonging with others: when I find my local cinema invaded one day by a group of blokes with baseball caps worn backwards, or when I am passed over for service in favour of a younger person, or if I were refused entry on the basis of sex or the colour of my skin (Diprose 2003, p.39).

These embodied meanings are bound up in systems of power (such as heteronormativity and gendered, raced, classed and sexed normativities) which have concrete effects on people's lives and senses of self. Ahmed argues that the normative "can be considered an effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time, which produces what we can call the bodily horizon, a space for action" (Ahmed 2006, p.66). However, this repetition and inculcation is influenced by social position, so that it depends on context whether or not one will feel out of place. To a large degree, feeling out of place depends on the others inhabiting places, as when the implicit norms of public places are heterosexual, white, male and able-bodied embodied norms and spatial designs lead places to be inhabited in particular ways that enforce particular norms or discourage certain behaviours.

Alcoff's concept of "interpretive horizons" also helps to explain how one's social location shapes the types of knowledge one has access to, and shapes one's experience. In order to argue that "rationality is embodied," (2006, p.104) Alcoff cites the work of the sociolinguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who claim that much of our thought processes (and conceptual metaphor in particular) are based on embodied spatiality. A simple example of this process is the metaphorical use for "up" to mean "more" or the representation of loss as "down" or "falling" (Alcoff 2006, p.104). While Lakoff and

Johnson have developed this understanding of thought processes as based on embodied/spatial experience, Alcoff points out that they haven't taken into account the impact of bodily differences on the development of spatial metaphors and the impact of cultural differences on experiences of spatiality.<sup>18</sup>

Like Alcoff and Ahmed, I maintain that spatial experience, rather than being universal and aperspectival is learned and can be different for members of different social groups. Following in the tradition of feminist theorists who apply phenomenological methods or analyses to queer, raced or sexed experience, I apply this method and form of analysis to the specific spatial embodied experiences and knowledge of queer and trans-identifying women. At the same time, because I take the processes of normativity and differentiation to be spatially mediated as well as socially mediated, to better understand embodied experiences within particular spaces, I also selectively incorporate useful insights from spatial theories drawn from human and cultural geography. This in turn allows me to refine some of Alcoff and Ahmed's ideas that I have drawn on in the light of the research subjects' specific spatial embodied experiences and knowledge.

My epistemological approach draws on standpoint feminism in so far as I reject the fundamental assumption of the western intellectual tradition, which holds that knowledge is generated by an individual through the application of their powers of mind.<sup>19</sup> That is, rather than focusing narrowly on individual powers of reason that are taken to generate knowledge that is value-neutral and devoid of emotion, the specific arguments of this

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<sup>18</sup> Alcoff argues that Lakoff and Johnson suggest that Japanese metaphoric systems are very different, even while they argue that most systems of metaphor are universal (2006, p.105).

<sup>19</sup> Tanesini attributes the development of epistemological theories that take knowledge to be "something like a mental representation, an individual has or possesses" (1999, p.17) to the philosophers Locke and Descartes. Tanesini goes on to claim that most current epistemological theories are still individualistic in this way (1999, p.18).

thesis are developed on the assumption that positionality influences the kinds of knowledge one can have, the individual and group identity of the knower, as well as the processes of evaluating knowledge claims.

Following from the claims that one's social location or membership of particular social groups influences what one can know, queer women's accounts of their own experiences are important, as people who do not identify as queer women might approach the same experiences from different horizontal perspectives. Rather than arguing that all perspectives would be equally valid, I maintain that, in particular contexts, such as, for example, queer women's experiences of heterosexist violence, queer women's perspectives would be more useful than, say, those of straight men.

While this approach might seem to neatly cordon off the perspectives of some social groups from those of others, people have many different intersecting identities, which help inform these perspectives and many people will at least have some commonalities of perspective and experience, even if these are only minimal. That is, while identity is shared by members of social groups, it is not a closed system and many people have multiple identities, or maintain reflective or critical orientations toward identity groups that they nonetheless feel that they are a part of.

Identity is always cohering as well as fragmenting, and new identities are forming. Within many groups it is difficult to know the exact commonalities between members, and issues of commonality and difference are often disputed. Individuals might also change identities during their lives, both due to processes such as ageing or becoming a parent, for example, or perhaps taking a lover of a different sex may cause a re-evaluation

of sexual identity. Because of this, there will always be tendencies toward closing off the conditions of membership of social or identity groups, in order to create a clearer, more defined identity, and towards widening the conditions to avoid processes of exclusion.

### **In Defence of Experience as an Analytic Category**

While I have outlined the epistemological approach that this research project takes above, in this section I will address some of the main critiques of experience as an analytic category, demonstrating that these do not apply to this project.

According to Silvia Stoller, since the 1970s, the concept of experience has been subject to critique by poststructuralists (2009, p.707). One of the reasons for their critique is because they claim that subjects come to know themselves through discursive categories and their experience is therefore mediated through language.<sup>20</sup> The experiences of subjects will reflect their social positioning. In some feminist research, experience is used as a foundation on which to base analyses and taken as given and true. According to Stoller, poststructuralists argue that experience is not an ahistorical category (2009, p.709) and experiences would be interpreted differently given contemporary circulating meanings, discourses and identity categories. Further, talking of “experience” of a category of subjects, such as women, assumes a universal experience of the people in this category (Stoller 2009, p.720). Theorists who insist on unified categories and the experiences of those within them are often charged with essentialism. Experiential analyses may not take into account the ways in which subjects are positioned in various

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<sup>20</sup> Scott argues that “subjects are constituted discursively” (1991, p.793). Susan Hekman states that postmodernists “argue that meaning derives from the interplay of sign and signified within the discursive formations of language... Postmoderns emphasize the way in which subjects are constituted within discursive formations” (1991, p.47).

other ways, such as through race or ethnic background, culture, sexuality, class, age, ability or other types of socially differentiating factors. They do not always consider the intersections of different social locations.

Talking of “women’s experience potentially entraps people who are already classified as “woman” subjects to be further categorised by assumed similar experiences to other women. It reifies or strengthens the identity category of women when people in this category are already marked as a unified but subordinated group.<sup>21</sup> Variety and difference and ways of being which could open up or rework this identity are therefore constrained within the group. Stoller argues that critics assert that there is little room for agency, and in a similar tangent, for change, in work that relies on a concept of experience (2009, p.718).

In her seminal work on experience, Joan Wallach Scott argues that the possibility for agency comes from within conflicts between discourses, which allow for multiple meanings (1991, p.793). While individuals are “subject” to “conditions of existence” (Scott 1991, p.793) Scott argues that agency comes into being through these categories, which are productive (Scott 1991, p.793). To be a subject is therefore to have some, although limited, choice. This choice occurs within “situations and statuses conferred on them” (Scott 1991, p.793).

While I have some disagreements with Scott and other poststructuralists, there are several points on which I concur with Scott. To begin with, Scott rightly takes issue with the rational, autonomous subject of liberalism. She claims that subjects are not “unified,

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler claims that “in this effort to combat the invisibility of women as a category feminists run the risk of rendering visible a category that may or may not be representative of the concrete lives of women” (1988, p.523).

autonomous, individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them” (Scott 1991, p.793). I would add that the liberal subject is argued to be problematically based on a Cartesian dualism where the rational mind is separate from the visceral, animal emotional body.<sup>22</sup> The liberal subject maintains full intentionality and freely and consciously makes decisions based on sets of abstract ideals.

Further, within this project, I find it necessary to attend as a matter of priority to social differentiation, to “how subjects are constituted as different in the first place” (Scott 1991, p.777). This is particularly appropriate as queer identities seem to be changing so much at the moment, at least in many Western countries, and new identity terms are springing up, whilst old ones are coexisting alongside. As this causes a lot of debate within queer communities around inclusion and exclusion and around feeling comfortable or belonging in spaces this is a salient aspect of queer women’s experiences. Therefore it is necessary to examine processes of social differentiation, rather than “naturaliz[ing] difference” (Scott 1991, p.777).<sup>23</sup> I am also wary of reifying social categories by appeals to unity of experience, not because I am worried about being charged with essentialism, but because I hope this project will demonstrate the differences between the queer women interviewed as well as some commonalities of experience. While there is not much racial or ethnic diversity in this sample, there are many differences in terms of identity, cisgender/transgender, gendered presentation, age, class background, occupation and personal history which underline the divergence in experiences of these people. In

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<sup>22</sup> See Mervi Patosalmi’s analysis of the work of Martha Nussbaum, p.128.

<sup>23</sup> In fact, in a way, this can be said to historicize some of the tenets of these poststructuralist discourses, if these discourses can be seen to be influencing the fragmentation of identities.

addition, I believe that this question of attending to social differentiation extends to the research context, positionalities of the researcher and research participants, research location, personalities and other variables that will all shape the interview process and interview data gained.<sup>24</sup>

In my view the major problem with explanations which take experience as a foundation is that they take “experience” as self-evident and true in an unmediated and absolute sense. As Scott has convincingly argued, this often precludes the examination of categories and historical and other factors which have contributed to experience being interpreted in such a way by researchers. Accounts of experience based on interviews, narrated in the first person, must necessarily be a partial account of the experiences of people in a particular group, and not representative of all who identify or are otherwise seen to belong to a particular social group. I acknowledge that these methods may present a partial picture, and certainly one delimited by sample composition, place and time and interview methodology. While using interviewing as a method presents a picture of particular people’s experiences of sexuality and gender, I will not present their experiences and interpretations as pure and unanalysed. It is necessary to position the experiences and beliefs of the interview participants in relation to broader social structures and discourses and with my own interpretations.

Within this particular project the very different social positionings and beliefs of the interview participants also act to challenge each others’ opinions. However, by claiming that these interviews must be contextualised as taking place in a particular space and

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<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Broom et al. (2009, p. 61) for an analysis of the effect of gender and location/context on interviews.

time, with different people who are positioned differently in regards to sex and gender, I do not mean to imply that people's experiences are false or untrue. Throughout the dissertation, I have tried to include, where possible, large quotations in order to provide context and ensure that interview participants' opinions and experiences come across clearly and in their own words. What I would aim for is best encapsulated in Sonia Kruks' description of the work of Iris Marion Young as *binocular*, that is combining first person experiences with broader structural analysis, as Kruks describes it:

She endeavors synthetically to view both structural injustices and the idiosyncratic-yet-shared lived experiences that they may induce as one. She calls for the development of styles of feminist theorizing, and for methods of investigation, that move back and forth, fluidly, between the large-scale “structural” or “poststructural” and the subjectively “lived” aspects of women's subordination, between “gender” and “lived body”—until it may be seen how each twists into and comes to inhere in the other (2008, p.340).

For Scott, and presumably for other poststructuralists, talk of experience, then, is not always useful, as it will merely reflect dominant or subversive discourses (she states that “experience is a linguistic event” (1991, p.793)) and the question becomes how to analyse language. Of course, analysing language is necessary when the participants' experiences are relayed via interview transcripts. As “discourse” derives from textual metaphor it locates meaning within language, either through postmodern or poststructuralist arguments<sup>25</sup> or via a detour through psychoanalytic frameworks.<sup>26</sup> Even the terminology

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<sup>25</sup> Scott describes experience as a “linguistic event” (1991, p.34). See also Stoller's critique of Scott (2009, p.722).

<sup>26</sup> See Lois Mc Nay's critique of the work of Zizek as “linguistic abstractionism” (2003, p.140).

of “inscription” which is often used in arguments which pay more attention to embodied existence, retains the trace of this textual metaphor as it is synonymous with writing.<sup>27</sup>

This becomes problematic when it is necessary to discuss things which are not as clearly or easily delineated as discourse as others. Spoken or written forms of communication fit most easily with a discursive model of meaning. When discursive models are applied to extra-linguistic activity and communication systems, arguments and terminology sometimes become muddled; this is because “discourse” is made to signify several concepts, although it resonates more clearly with textual and oral forms of communication. This is clearly the case in Anna Mehta and Liz Bondi’s article entitled “Embodied Discourse: On Gender and Fear of Violence”. The authors aim to apply poststructuralist understandings of subjectivity to women’s fear of violence to explain why (they claim) women fear violence more than men do, even though women are less likely to experience violence in public (Mehta and Bondi 1999, p.67). They state that they incorporate an analysis of “non-linguistic as well as linguistic forms of knowledge and practice as ‘embodied discourse’” (Bondi and Mehta 1999, p. 69). They make the distinction between “practical” and “discursive” knowledge, but acknowledge that this is hard to uphold in practice (Bondi and Mehta 1999, p.69). Mehta and Bondi claim that discourse becomes embodied and also that practices, in their multiplicity, enact spaces of resistance. In this work it is unclear why practices are also known as “embodied discourses” and therefore what the difference between discourses and practices might be.

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<sup>27</sup> In her critique of phenomenology, Judith Butler argues that “gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed on the individual, as some poststructuralist displacements of the subject would contend” (1988, p.526).

While experience is largely influenced by language and also by all the new communicative technologies occasioned throughout history (such as the printing press or the internet) it is not the same as saying that everything is language. Further differentiation is required for analytical clarity. While it might be impossible to clearly distinguish between social and linguistic, or linguistic and other systems as they are so intertwined, it seems arbitrary to assign primacy to linguistic systems.

I agree with Silvia Stoller's analysis of this issue. Stoller makes a distinction between predicative experience and pre-predicative experience. Pre-predicative experience includes experiences such as perception, where "the objects of the experience are experienced in an unmediated way" and are experienced through the senses (Stoller 2009, p.724). Predicative experience involves a logical judgment, or a naming, rather than simply being receptive towards the object (Stoller 2009, p.725). Stoller's model of pre-predicative experience still maintains a relationship to language, but this relationship to language is indirect (Stoller, 2009, p.726). Language will have an effect on pre-predicative experience through established cultural meanings, but this is not the strong effect of predicative experience. Stoller argues that there are ways of knowing that are not as directly linked to language, such as a preverbal infant's knowledge of its parents (Stoller 2009, p.727).

Lois McNay also argues that it is necessary to situate language as a form of social interaction and attend to its intersubjective dimensions in order to "counteract the symbolic determinism of post-structural theory that asserts the priority of linguistic systems and structures over experience" (McNay 2003, p.148). It is the "recognition, intention and agency" (Mc Nay 2003, p.148) implicit in the concept of intersubjectivity

that will counteract the tendency towards this determinism. In order to resolve the abovementioned issues, I structured my interview questions and subsequent analysis in accordance with a phenomenological methodology.

Maintaining a focus on experience allows me to examine the concrete experiences, emotions and embodiment of queer women. Research that focuses on abstract discussions of the discursive constitution of subjects and categories is valuable in analysing the ways in which power functions in society. Focusing on individual experience, however, allows me to highlight how harassment and violence occurred and the exact circumstances in which they occurred. The research participants reflected on and struggled to verbalise embodied knowledge and feelings that occurred in relation to their experiences in public places. This project will contribute by explicitly documenting this kind of embodied knowledge.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with queer women living in Melbourne to gain an insight into the experiences they have had in these spaces that they consider relevant to their sexual identity. Semi-structured interview methodology allows the interviewer to frame the interview and inquire about issues they may perceive to be relevant, but it also allows a lot of leeway for interview participants to disagree with the ways in which questions are framed, to offer suggestions to the interviewer about directions for the research, and to challenge what they perceive to be its limitations. Inviting the participants to narrate and explain their experiences helps to reveal the

various everyday political concepts queer women use to define and make sense of their experiences as well as highlighting changing notions of queer and gay identity.

Originally, focus groups were planned, but they were not conducted due to time constraints after the interview phase of the project took longer than expected. An advantage of focus groups is that they can allow participants to challenge each other's explanations and definitions, elucidate the particular shared knowledges of, and highlight central debates amongst members of a social group (Morgan 1996, p.139). As individual interviews are performed in isolation, there is not as much of an opportunity to highlight debates and demonstrate shared knowledges. Interviews and focus groups have been shown to generate different data on the same topics (May, p.138; Morgan 1996, pp.138-9). This does not mean that either method is invalid, but that the different contexts of the interview and the focus interview may allow for different meanings to be generated. More personal or sensitive topics are not always as suited to focus group interviews, as participants may be less likely to be open about these topics in a public setting (Morgan 1996, p.140).

Semi-structured qualitative interviews presented an interesting and detailed picture of queer women's experiences in public spaces, but it was not possible to generalise the findings to ascertain the incidence rate of harassment and assault in this population. Further quantitative research in this area would be useful for both activists and policymakers. Participant observation could have been used if my primary concern was queer and community organisations, or particular spaces such as queer nightclubs or bars,

but I was more interested in individual experiences and meaning-making processes than the functioning of organisations. I also wanted to access a range of participants and not necessarily just those associated with particular organisations or venues.

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

I sought out a broad range of participants in order to incorporate greater diversity of experiences and perceptions of the relevant issues. For this project I succeeded in recruiting a sample of fourteen participants. I had initially hoped to recruit a larger number of participants, but it was difficult to find people interested in participating in the research and when people expressed interest it was often hard to find a convenient time and place. Some potential participants initiated contact with me and expressed interest in the project, but did not reply to further email contact or could not decide on a suitable time for an interview. These factors also contributed to a reduced sample size. My methods of recruitment were through posters, fliers and postcards, through internet social networking sites and through “snowballing,” or “word-of-mouth.” Posters and fliers placed at Melbourne universities and in bookshops and cafes known to have queer clientele were not effective recruitment tools. Emails sent directly to community organisations along with word-of-mouth and social networking were more effective. Community magazines were considered as a way of accessing potential participants, however, this method was not used due to funding limitations. Because queers are a relatively small and hidden<sup>28</sup> population, it is not always possible to recruit participants in the same ways as more broadly-defined projects might (Taylor 2011). Random sampling,

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<sup>28</sup> “Hidden populations” are social groups who are difficult to locate or include in social research. It often refers to marginalised, small minority, or criminal groups, or those who don’t have access to technology such as mobile phones or the internet that might facilitate research participation.

for example, is not a possibility in small-scale qualitative projects, such as this that target a particular group, and representative sampling is not achievable, because of the small-scale nature of the project.

Instead, I decided to undertake sampling with an intention of attending to “difference” and I therefore sought to interview many queer women from different backgrounds and with different identities, in order to gain a wider range of data about “queer experiences.” This may seem like a representative approach, but I do not aim to, and possibly cannot access participants in direct proportions to the makeup of the queer community. I would not trust that any existing statistical data would fully shed light on its variability, as it would be vulnerable to all the same sampling and access issues that I have just detailed in relation to “hidden” populations. Even then, it would be questionable if this kind of data would be of any use to me in the project I wish to pursue. While I had originally committed to attending to difference, in practice the small group of potential participants meant that it wasn’t possible to select people on the basis of membership of different social groups. The resulting sample mainly consists of people who identify as “white” and is limited in cultural diversity. I contacted some queer and lesbian ethnic community groups, but this did not result in more participants. This may be due to my “outsider” status as I am not a member of any ethnic community groups and I did not have any snowball starting points (i.e. friends or acquaintances) who had close connections with ethnic communities. People from such groups may also understandably be less likely to want to participate in research done by outsiders as they may potentially feel

uncomfortable, or might not feel that they share common experiences or standpoints due to differences in identity.<sup>29</sup>

Researchers who work with “hidden” populations often rely on their own insider information and networks to recruit participants (Browne 2005, p.48). “Snowballing” is essentially recruitment by word-of-mouth, where the researcher’s acquaintances or participants will then pass on information about the study to other potential participants (if they feel like it, they aren’t induced to). Online social networks like *Facebook* can also tap into broader queer networks through friends of friends. Posters and fliers were placed in known queer-friendly areas such as bookstores or clubs, and emailed to queer social and welfare organisations, and distributed through e-lists.

Clearly, this method cannot deliver a neutral population sample of queers with no relation to the methods used to obtain this sample. A common criticism of snowball sampling is that the sample reflects the starting place of the snowball (Browne 2005, p.52).

Nonetheless, the same could be said about other, more traditional recruitment practices, such as recruitment of university students, who have often tended to be relatively homogenous, middle class and largely white populations. Still, it is necessary to see the sample as a small sample of people located in a particular place (urban and suburban Melbourne) and as part of the broader networks, or at least accessed by insider queer Melbournite knowledge, of the researcher. As such, knowledge produced by this study is not generalisable to all queer-identifying people or all places or times, but some insights may be able to be applied to other contexts, in a limited and contextual way. Another

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<sup>29</sup> See Armitage (2008) and Noy (2008, p.329 )and Weber Cannon et al. (1998 )for discussions of the difficulty of accessing interview participants who do not share the same social group or political identities as the researcher and McCorkel and Myers (2003) for an account of how different positionalities influence the research process.

issue with sampling is that participants were obviously self-selecting, and perhaps these people are the people who have the strongest viewpoints about particular issues, or have a greater need to discuss their experiences in public places.

Kath Browne, in her article, “Snowball Sampling: Using Social Networks to Research Non-Heterosexual Women” argues that there are both benefits and drawbacks to using one’s own social networks as a starting point for a research project (Browne 2005, p.57). Among the benefits is that one may be more easily able to establish rapport, if the participants are people already known to the interviewer, or if they have heard about the project through word-of-mouth. If the research project is “guaranteed” to be “authentic” or if the researcher’s motivations are accounted for by friends of the participants (Browne 2005, p.50), then they may also feel more at ease during the interview and more likely to divulge information. However, as I only moved to Melbourne in 2008 when I began my research, I did not have such an extensive friendship network to draw on. Some of the interview participants were previously known to me, but I deliberately avoided interviewing any people with whom I share a strong friendship network, or with whom I share a friendship or close relationship. While it might seem best to be an “impartial” researcher with no further contact other than the interview with research participants, this hasn’t been possible as the people who participated in this research were heavily involved in queer activism and social circles and it was impossible not to run into these participants at queer events, or for those recruited through snowball sampling, at gatherings with “friends in common.” Nonetheless, I avoided interviewing close friends or others I knew well so that they did not have more influence on how their interviews were represented than others who I interviewed with whom I did not share a close

relationship. As Kath Browne (2005) discussed, in her research, most of her participants were well known to her. This meant that casual conversations with her interview participants after the interviews took place reframed her interpretation of the interviews.

One major issue in constructing a sample of participants was trying to capture the diversity of identities (and some defiant “non-identities”) among lesbian/queer/trans/female-identifying people. Heaphy et al. found, in their 1998 study, that “the work on the nature of non-heterosexual identities that has been carried out over the past 20 years... has demonstrated the shifting and problematic nature of such identities” (1998, p. 455). They go on to claim that such identities are formed relationally, and, as such are “contingent”, “emergent” and “processual” (Heaphy et al. 1998, p. 455). Both Heaphy et al. and Browne, who have conducted interview based research in queer communities, have navigated this issue by recruiting participants identifying as “non-heterosexual.” This would have been a possibility within my own research, but to me the term queer can fulfil a similar function to “non-heterosexual” and in this way the group is not constantly defined in reference to a norm of heterosexuality. Heaphy et al. and Browne’s nomenclature, however, does not remove the need for some kind of term to signify “gender” or “sex.” Browne uses the term “non-heterosexual women.”

In order to focus on the kinds of areas which are of interest to me, it was necessary to limit the sample. There is already (relatively) a lot of research on gay men’s experiences in public places, particularly in “gay villages,”<sup>30</sup> which often might as well be read as

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<sup>30</sup> See Hunt and Zacharias, (2008), for example. Binnie and Skeggs analyse Manchester’s gay village and argue that cosmopolitanism and a particular type of sophisticated gay masculinity become discursively linked (2004, p.52-53). While they do refer to lesbians, throughout the article, and transgendered people once (Binnie & Skeggs 2004, p.57) the main analysis is of gay masculinity. Lesbians are mostly referred to in terms of their exclusions- for example the lack of lesbian bars and their lack of identification as

“gay men’s villages.”<sup>31</sup> As soon as one begins to construct a sample, some people are excluded, and this imposes a unitary category on the participants. Having pondered this question deeply, it was difficult to find a solution to this conundrum. I didn’t want to impose a unitary category, but nor did I want to just study anyone who identifies as queer (for example, gay men). The easiest solution was just to advertise for people who identify both as queer or some other synonym, “lesbian, dyke, gay, or many diverse cultural alternatives,” and as women. However, as I found in my previous research, not all of the target group identify as women. Anecdotally, there seems to be an increase in people identifying as “genderqueer” as “bois” or as “trans.” I could exclude these people, as this study is meant to be specifically about the experiences of women (meaning people who identify as women), but these are often people who socialise with queer women, who have longstanding associations and networks within these groups, but don’t feel that the term “woman” fits them; they might self-identify using terms such as “genderqueer,” or “two-spirit” if they are Native American, for example.

The problem becomes a problem of wording, of how to make it clear that I don’t want to draw the boundaries too tightly to exclude people who might want to participate. I can appeal to participants’ self-identifications as a “woman” and a “queer,” but this could easily seem facile when I may be talking to people who have strongly taken up the call to abandon (or at least refashion) identities, and gendered identities in particular. So, not wanting to act as the arbiter of gender and social group inclusion, I tried to recruit people

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cosmopolitan (Binnie & Skeggs 2004, p.44). The article claims to explore how “lesbian and gay cultures become configured within debates on cosmopolitanism and urban politics” (Binnie & Skeggs 2004, p.40). An analysis of lesbian cultures is lacking, however.

<sup>31</sup> A lot of work on gay villages is, however, critical of the dominance of gay men or of the tendency of scholarship in this area to focus on gay men (see Nast’s discussion of middle and upper class gay white male dominance in Boy’s Town in Chicago (Nast 2003, pp.884-86).

who identified as queer or trans and women or trans/genderqueer, but elsewhere (for example in my information sheet for participants as shown below) I have taken a whole paragraph to express this quite complex idea:

It is acknowledged that interview participants may have very different ideas about who and what the terms “queer”, “GLBTI” and “woman” or “women” mean, and who these terms represent. This research is open to anyone who identifies as queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual or intersex, genderqueer, a dyke, or any other term which designates a non-normative and/or non-heterosexual identity and who also identifies as a “woman” or a female person.

This definition may serve to be broad and inclusive of people with a range of gendered and sexual identities, but even though I did have some genderqueer, transsexual and transgender participants, I did not end up recruiting any trans male participants, perhaps due to the way I phrased the above paragraph.

In defining and categorising the research participants, perhaps I seem to be artificially creating a community. But, I am interested in the working, the upkeep it takes to keep an identity group fitting into its definition, and also in its unworking or unravelling (Secomb 2000, p.143) which I argue is an ongoing process. So, since I have spoken with these people about their experiences, I will examine the ways in which they define these groups. The participants in the research were quite different in many ways, some more conservative, some younger or older, some involved in projects to counter heteronormativity. Perhaps they are the best people to say where the boundaries are, or

who is accepted in these identities. In some ways their answers were quite similar and in other ways opinions and experiences recalled were radically divergent.

### **Social Class in Research Interviews**

Rather than viewing class simply as easily identifiable categories, recent research on class and sexuality has explored the ways in which class is performed, negotiated and discursively constructed (Skeggs & Loveday 2012; McDermott 2004; Taylor 2010b) as well as evident in more material ways such as through flows of capital, spaces, and aesthetics (Taylor 2012). As I'd begun the interview by asking participants to answer questions about demographic information, including class background, some definitions of class were presented as narratives, rather than necessarily as clear-cut categories. This means that the identifications of some participants had shifted over time. While Amber and Beth both identified their class backgrounds as middle class, Amber was unemployed at the time of the interview and Beth said that she was 'poor.' Sofia had started off as lower class, but her parents had worked their way up to solidly middle class jobs. Courtney and Erin came from working class backgrounds and lived in traditionally working class suburbs, but had achieved postgraduate and honours level educations. Samantha was raised by a single mother and lived in public housing, but was a university student.

In her interviews conducted with middle and working class lesbians about coming-out stories, Elizabeth McDermott found that middle class women were more confident and less hesitant than her working class participants (2004, pp.181-82). She argued that differences were due to differential access to legitimating discourses and "linguistic

capital” (2004, p.180; p.182). Yvette Taylor also found that working class women had less access to “resources for self-fashioning” (2010b, p.74) While the working classes are pathologised, middle classes are represented as the norm against which other classes are defined and the middle classes have more access to be able to shape social values and social representations (McDermott 2004, p.180; p.184). As a mode of being in the world, middle classness was linked to self-assurance (McDermott 2004, pp.183-84). I found that some of my working class participants (Courtney and Erin) were very eloquent and confident, but many of my participants were highly educated and education can affect class belonging and access to resources. Skeggs and Loveday claim that: “Various mechanisms of distinction such as aesthetics and language and institutions such as education, have formed and shaped class relations” (2012 p.473) These mechanisms of distinction may be more easily accessible to educated working class women. Erin and Courtney were also significantly older than I was at the time of the interviews, so this may have affected the interview dynamics, as they took more of a guiding role in the interview process. The interviews also took place at their houses, which may have helped them to feel more comfortable and in control of the interaction.

Class can be seen as embodied, spatialised and aesthetic. Particular places are associated with classed identities (Taylor 2012, pp.546-7), and this came across clearly in many of the references to particular suburbs and areas of Melbourne in the interview data.

Aesthetics of place and personal style also express classed meanings (Taylor 2012, p.547). Researchers on class found that class orientations were habitual, entrenched and emotional (Taylor 2010a, p.45-46). Queer spaces were not always comfortable for queers from non-middle class backgrounds (Taylor 2010a, p.47).

### **Navigating the Insider/Outsider Divide**

Insider researchers have traditionally been seen to have a greater understanding of the cultural meanings that are implicit in their research communities and to be more easily accepted by participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p.58). Outsider researchers, on the other hand, have been associated with a perception of greater objectivity (Haviland et al. 2005, p.10) The clear divide between insider and outsider researchers has been questioned and reframed in recent decades (Kerstetter 2012, p.100). This has been due to the recognition of participants' and researchers' multiple positionalities, which means that I may share a subject position of queer with one of my participants, but have a very different gender identity, cultural, age or class background. I may share more commonalities with some participants and less with others.

In many respects, I was an insider in this research project, as the majority of my participants belonged to similar social groups to myself, such as white, educated, and queer or lesbian-identifying. A large minority of my participants were my age or younger, whilst many of the participants were older than I was. Most participants self-identified as middle class, with a minority from working class or lower class backgrounds. My mother was on a single parent pension but was raised in a middle class family and my father (who I visited on the weekends) was from a very working class family. In many ways, I feel like I'm a class outsider with people from all different classes, but I also use this to my advantage, because I can fit in with people from different class backgrounds.

However, I think I come across as predominantly middle class due to my accent which is closer to ‘cultivated English’ (Harrington et al. 1997, p.156) and vocabulary. The most salient difference was in terms of gender. I self-identify as a femme, and tend to be fairly feminine (particularly for a queer woman) in terms of mannerisms and appearance (although not necessarily very feminine in the way I dress). In previous research, this has lead interview participants to question my queer credentials, and participants in past research were also suspicious about my motives for conducting the research. I also think my appearance may lead to a lack of trust, as I do not appear very alternative, which I think can lead people to explain terms to me, or assume I am not well-versed in queer theory and activism. In some ways these challenges led to a greater clarification of contested terms. One participant, for example, contested my use of the term ‘queer community.’ This led her to explicitly detail her understanding of community and highlight the fractures within the queer community and the difficulties in establishing a community based on commonalities. Where participants were unsure about my queer alliances or politics they sometimes elaborated on their own ideas about the topic. I think this was information was very useful in highlighting differences in beliefs about queer activism and the queer community. Another research participant challenged my use of ‘queer’, explained why she thought GLBTI was more inclusive, and reflected that perhaps the changing terminology was partly to do with age differences.

As many interview participants were much older than me (some of them were between fifteen to thirty years older) perhaps it was not quite as easy to relate to their lives and experiences and there wasn’t the instant rapport that I had with younger participants.

Having said that, I did establish a strong rapport with many of the older participants. Older participants tended to produce lengthier interviews as well. Perhaps they were happier to take the lead, more used to the interview format, or had more experience at narrating their experiences. Older participants went to greater lengths to ensure I felt comfortable, such as offering me snacks or beverages.

### **Participant Descriptions**

I have provided a short introduction of each of the participants in the research project below. Quotes from the participants will feature throughout the dissertation. Participants' experiences and expertise will contribute to the formulation of recommendations and to the analysis of queer experience throughout the body of this work.<sup>32</sup>

**Amber** is a twenty-six year old bisexual woman who has been living in a lesbian relationship for ten years. It has been an on/off open relationship. She describes herself as having looked quite feminine when younger, but says that she has changed to look more dykey. She used to wear skirts and bosom revealing tops, but no longer does. She grew up in "a white, middle class suburb halfway to Frankston." She currently lives in the inner north-west, and has previously lived in Collingwood. She is currently unemployed, but has previously completed an Arts/Science degree at a prestigious university, and has also trained as a gardener. She is involved in the creative writing and theatre scene and likes to celebrate at parties by dressing in masculine and feminine drag. She describes herself as "not really out and proud."

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<sup>32</sup> Participant Descriptions are also included as an appendix after the concluding chapter for further reference.

**Samantha** is “queer and a woman as well.” She is nineteen years old and is undertaking an undergraduate degree at an inner city university. She also works as a sex worker and teaches dance. She comes from a lower class background. She grew up in public housing and was raised by a single mother who received welfare benefits. Her father was an unemployed musician. Her family are fundamentalist Christians and her grandmother is a minister, but she is an atheist. She was born in Australia to an English mother and she isn’t sure about her father’s ethnic background as he is adopted. He is black and had an Australian mother and possibly a father of African-American or Samoan descent.

**Finlay** is twenty-nine years old, queer, and works in community services. She lives in the inner north, but is originally from Canberra and has also lived in Lismore. She often wears “clothing that would be identified as masculine” and doesn’t “tend to conform to dominant ideas of femininity.” She describes herself as assertive and says that she doesn’t conform to gendered rules. When describing her gendered/ sexual self-presentation she says that she might, in some situations, agonise over her appearance, for example, if attending a wedding, “but ha[s] to confess that [she] just can’t do it any other way.” She says that she definitely identifies as a feminist. She is white and her father’s side of the family is Dutch, while her mothers’ side of the family have been in Australia for generations and were originally from Ireland. She comes from a middle class background and was raised Catholic but doesn’t “subscribe to that or any other” religions.

**Poppy** is a twenty-three year old lesbian who lives in an outer eastern suburb. She previously lived in St Kilda. She works as an administrative officer in the community sector. She has undertaken some undergraduate university study at an inner city university and some TAFE study as well. She prefers to go out with her partner in the city

and in the inner suburbs, in places like Smith St, or Brunswick St in Fitzroy where “you just feel part of the community...because it’s such an open gay scene out there.” She thinks that there are stereotypes of “the butch lesbian” and “the girlie lesbian,” but says “I think I just look like *me*, I don’t feel like I fit into a different stereotype.” Although she says she dresses in a “pretty girlie” manner she also has short hair, which she describes as a “dyke cut.”

**Bella** is a sixty-three year old transwoman and lesbian. She has lived in Melbourne since 1956. She came out and began the process of transitioning in the early nineties. She lives on bushland acreage in an outer suburb. She is now retired and had a long career as an electrical engineer. She is not religious, but was baptised into the Church of England. She has done both paid and volunteer work for many years in community radio and television. She has been very involved in transgender advocacy and support and anti-violence activism.

**Shannon** is a twenty-one year old environmental science honours student at a suburban university. She also works part time at a sweets shop. She is very involved in the university queer club. She likes to hang out in the uni queer space and go on uni outings with the queer club to inner city pubs as well as helping to organise on campus events and attend citywide events such as pride marches. She has also been involved in a queer youth group in her local area and is being trained to take on a leadership role within that group. She goes out to straight clubs and pubs with her straight friends and gay or queer clubs and pubs with her queer friends. Some of her gay and lesbian friends haven’t been very understanding of her bisexual identity as she says they don’t think that someone can

be attracted to two sexes. She lives in the middle to outer north-eastern suburbs and comes from a middle class, background and is of Irish and English Australian descent.

**Erin** is a fifty-six year old lesbian who lives in a mid-ring Western suburb. She worked as a social worker for twenty years. She is currently completing a doctorate at a suburban university that focuses on her experiences working in that field. She comes from a working class background and is an atheist who sees herself “as a humanist.” Her ethnic background is Anglo-Saxon. She identifies as a feminist and says that that interplays with her identity as a lesbian. She says that she prefers “an androgynous look” and looks like a “70s, 80s dyke, really.” She has previously lived in the northern suburbs and was involved in lesbian social groups there before moving to the west and setting up a social group for lesbians in the western suburbs. She is also involved in a local landcare group.

**Alisha** is a forty-four year old transwoman who describes her sexual identity as either bisexual or pansexual. She lives in a northern suburb and works as an accountant in the not-for-profit sector and as a queer community advocate. She describes her background as Caucasian, liberal Jewish and middle class. These days she describes herself as more of a “humanist wiccan” with a “belief in karma.” She has worked in community radio for many years and has been very involved in a large number of trans and queer community organisations. She enjoys taking part in stand up comedy, character based performance and improvisation. In her leisure time she enjoys attending sporting events such as football and wrestling, but has recently stopped attending the football due to the queerphobia, racist and sexist statements often made by other spectators.

**Eloise** is thirty-one years old and identifies as a lesbian. She lives in central Melbourne with her partner. She has also lived in the bush in New South Wales. She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and now manages a store in the inner southern suburbs. She described herself as having been a “feral” during the time she was at university, but now dresses more conservatively. She says that at different times she experiences different senses of queer community; at times in her life she has “experienced such an *amazing*, strong network of lesbians or queer community” and other times she has been busy and realised that she has lost touch with that community and has made an effort to get back in touch with it. Over the last several years she has been involved in personal and professional development activities. Her background is middle class and her mother is Welsh and her father is Australian of Irish descent.

**Lauren** is thirty-five years old and queer. She lives in a mid-northern suburb and works in a social organisation. She completed a Bachelor of Arts/ Bachelor of Social Work at university. She comes from an upper middle class Anglo-Caucasian background. She doesn't always feel that she fits in at more mainstream gay and lesbian events like Pride March, but really enjoyed going to a (no longer running) alternative club night where “you could be whatever, do whatever and just play out whoever you are and that that was okay.” She also described another club night she enjoyed where people were “toying with different notions of gender and sexuality, rather than, I don't know, like some other events that you go to and it's all pretty much saying the sameish kind of thing.” While she says she dresses conventionally, has long hair and wears make-up, she also says that even when she was younger and identified as straight people “picked up on something” because she “didn't really conform to some of like the really girly gender stereotype kind

of stuff.” The way she feels about the queer community is that she and they have “got some things in common but not heaps.”

**Sofia** is twenty years old and identifies as a lesbian, although she says that she doesn't think that “people pick up on it” because she doesn't look “like a stereotypical lesbian.” She lives in an inner eastern suburb and works in community development and women's health promotion in the northern suburbs. She has completed some TAFE studies in community development and has just started a social work degree. She has been heavily involved in activism ever since she was in Year Nine when she helped to start a Gay-Straight Alliance at her high school. She currently runs sexuality and diversity education programs in schools in the northern region. She is of Polish and Irish descent and grew up lower class, but her parents became more middle class during her childhood and she now describes her family as “firmly planted in middle class.” She says that the public activism she has been involved in “has been, for the most part, really, really positive.”

**Courtney** uses several terms to describe her identity: lesbian, dyke, and bi. She is forty-nine years old and lives in an outer Western suburb of where she grew up in a “working class Westie family.” “[Her] father worked in the factory up the end of the road for most of his life so... very much working class.” She has previously lived in the north and east of Melbourne. She has long hair and people tell her “You don't look like a lesbian.” She has completed an honours degree in Professional Writing at a suburban university, and has previously worked as an artist. She is currently looking for work and hopes to be employed as a writer. She participates in a gay and lesbian dance troupe and is a member of a social group for lesbians in the western suburbs.

**Beth** is thirty-seven and describes her sexual identity as queer or lesbian, although “If one goes, it’s lesbian, not queer.” She works in the mental health field and has completed a bachelors degree in Arts and Social Sciences. Although she comes from a middle class background she describes herself as currently “poor.” Her ethnic and religious background is Anglo-Caucasian and Catholic. She lives in an inner southern suburb and has previously lived in Queensland. In her gendered presentation she has “become more and more outwardly femme,” whereas when she was younger she “had a shaved head and looked more outwardly dykey.” She says that “by and large I’m assumed as straight which I really *don’t* like.” She is involved in the Butch/Femme and kink communities. She has been very involved in community groups and helped set up a queer parenting group, a queer mental health group and a butch femme and trans group among other initiatives, and also worked for a women’s phone line and a gay and lesbian phone line in Queensland.

**Olivia** is fifty-one years old and lives in an outer south-eastern suburb. When asked to describe her sexual identity, she said “I struggle with this one a bit because I don’t really like labels.” She said that if she uses any labels she uses “lesbian” and doesn’t mind dyke. She has previously lived in the inner northern suburb of Parkville and in the Central Northern Coast of New South Wales and has a long term partner who lives in New South Wales. She has two young adult daughters. She is a doctor and has completed postgraduate degrees in medicine and public health. She is involved in a professional organisation for lesbian medical practitioners and also networks through a lesbian social networking site.

### **Interview Schedule**

The interview schedule was developed based on feminist phenomenological methodology principles. This methodology pays attention to people's experiences within a particular situation, "being in public spaces," and attends to the details of interactions between differently marked groups in specific spaces. Drawing on phenomenology to frame my interview schedule helped to attend to the "body-in-situation," experiences in particular places, focusing on embodied experience and emotions. The interviews often revealed a lot about the histories of the participants, how they had experienced being queer or lesbian in different places and different times, as well as their other intersecting identities.

While they were focused on broad themes, the interview questions, and in particular the initial questions about a topic, were written to elicit a broad range of answers. This was in order to attend to the issues that were most salient for the interview participants. Such broad, open-ended questions as "How do you feel as a queer person when you are in public spaces?" or "Can you tell me about any negative experiences you've had as a lesbian in public spaces?" allowed for a wide range of responses. The interview participants, however, did often need to pause for a long time to consider such open-ended questions, or needed to ask for clarification. As the lived experience that the questions refer to is largely habitual, it was often difficult for interview participants to articulate actions, reactions and feelings that are not always clearly intentional or thought through. While I did have a schedule of questions, in the semi-structured format of the interviews there was the possibility for me to prompt further about particular issues, or for interview participants to explore issues that were meaningful to them.

As many feminist scholars and qualitative researchers have noted, there is the potential for power imbalances in the interview situation (Plesner 2011, p.471; Broom et al.2009, p. 51; Brinkmann and Kvale 2005, p.164). Having open-ended questions allowed my interview participants greater space to bring up issues that were relevant to them. This limited my ability to fully define the topics that were suitable and unsuitable to discuss in the interview.

Further, I made clear before each interview that the participants should feel free not to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable or that they did not wish to answer or to raise any topics or questions that they wished to discuss throughout the interview. I also informed them that they were free to disagree with the terms used, or the types of questions asked. While not all interview participants took up this opportunity, many asked for clarifications, especially for terms such as “public space” and one quite strongly questioned (what I think she perceived as) my commitment to the notion of a cohesive queer community, as I used the term “queer community” within the interview schedule. Others questioned or reflected on my use of terms, for example, specifying that they preferred “GLBTI” to “queer.” I also asked for feedback from each participant about the interview experience, in order to incorporate feedback into my interviewing process, to make the experience better for the participants, and to allow them to contribute to the development of the project. Most participants, however, maintained that they were happy with the interview and the way it was conducted.<sup>33</sup> I have provided a copy of the interview schedule as an appendix.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview participants were asked whether they wished a copy of their interview transcript for perusal. Some interview participants did not wish to receive a copy of the interview transcript. Other interview

## Coding

Interviews were coded manually, using printed copies of the interviews as well as in Microsoft Word. The coding frame was based around the themes from the interview schedule. The first pass was done manually and themes were highlighted using felt tip pens. Further themes emerged during this process. Further passes were done manually to capture the themes that had emerged and categories that were generated previously. Microsoft Word was subsequently used to search for keywords or synonyms of key terms that might have been missed in previous passes.

The next two chapters will focus on queer women's experiences of violence and harassment in public spaces, and offer some solutions based on both participants' suggestions and current research. They will demonstrate the effects of harassment and violence experiences on the interview participants. They will then analyse how queer women handle these negative experiences in public spaces and how they modify their behaviour in order to avoid such encounters or to confront attackers. Further chapters will place these experiences within a broader context, analysing spatial and structural factors that contribute to such experiences. Rather than reifying queer identities as absolute, they will attend to the development of identities and communities, and explore conflicts surrounding identity and space within queer communities.

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participants did request a copy and some made minor amendments to the transcript. One participant requested a copy of the recording of the interview and this was sent via email.

### CHAPTER THREE: VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

This chapter will detail the forms of violence experienced and the interview participants' perceptions of safety. The interview participants reported a range of negative experiences in public spaces that contributed to their feelings of unsafety. These included violence, physical and sexual assault, vandalism, harassment stalking and threats. "Everyday" incidents such as people staring or making comments also contributed to participants' perceptions of unsafety. Their feelings of safety varied according to time of day, place, who they were with at the time, and the presence of others in the space. Many participants reported that the type and severity of harassment or violence they experienced was influenced by their gendered self-presentation.

While the interview participants' experiences detailed in this chapter may have been discussed in response to any of the interview questions mentioned in the previous chapter, for the most part, they were in response to the questions "How do you feel, as a queer person/ [self-identified label] when you are in public spaces?" and particularly "Can you tell me about any negative experiences you've had as a [self-identified label] in public spaces?" After coding the interview transcripts in relation to the theme of safety, the participants' experiences were categorised as physical assault, indecent assault or sexual harassment, verbal abuse, stalking, vandalism and threats. It is necessary to categorise these incidents in such a way in order to identify commonalities between the experiences of different participants, and in order to isolate possible causal factors, or explanatory frameworks. It is also, however, important to note that many of these incidents occurred concomitantly. There were cases, for example, where verbal abuse preceded physical violence, or sexual assault was accompanied by threats of violence and

verbal abuse. For the purposes of this chapter, I will present and examine the abovementioned issues under the following headings: sexual violence and violence based on sexuality; physical assault; physical harassment; sexual harassment and stalking; and threats and verbal abuse.

The findings in this chapter largely reinforce the findings in previous studies of violence and harassment of GLBTIQ people (Mason 2002; Hillier et al. 2010; Tomsen and Markwell, 2009b; Couch et al. 2007; Corteen 2002). However, they also complement the quantitative studies by providing detailed descriptions of how queer women experience and interpret violence and harassment. As there is a lack of recent, qualitative work on this topic, my findings will address this research gap.

In this chapter I will engage with the “fear of crime” literature, which crosses the disciplinary boundaries of gender studies and feminist research, sociology, criminology and human geography. This body of literature details the effects of fear of crime, such as modifying behaviour or always feeling on edge when outdoors. It discusses the prevalence of different crimes and the relationship of fear of crime to this actual prevalence. This paradigm tends to divide fear into “irrational” and “rational” fear and argue that society is becoming more fearful even though crime victimisation rates, in general, are falling (Walklate and Mythen 2008, p.213). This claim has been disputed by Walklate and Mythen, among others, who contended that “when geographically focused and structurally informed surveys that related people’s expressed fears with their likely risk from crime were conducted, the disparity between these two measures — with the exception of young males — disappeared” (Walklate and Mythen 2008, p.213). Further, this strain of research can be charged with universalising fear, or not taking into account

specific or greater risks according to social differentiation. Feminist literature has begun to focus instead on the conditions in which women feel safe and on questions of “ontological security” (Walklate and Mythen, 2008, p.213-14), rather than only or mainly on criminal victimisation. This chapter will draw on this feminist literature to examine queer women’s perceptions of safety and experiences of violence and harassment in public places. It must be noted, however, that not all queer women interviewed did explicitly discuss fear, as such. They sometimes expressed a heightened “awareness” or sense of vulnerability instead, or modified their behaviour in particular circumstances in order to avoid victimisation. These latter findings accord with the fear of crime research.

### **Sex-Based Violence and Violence Based On Sexuality**

Although I did not ask specifically about sex-based violence, many of my participants were keen to point out experiences of violence based on sex and to distinguish them from violence based on sexuality. This seemed partly in order to make sure that the experiences of violence targeted towards sexuality were very clear and distinguishable from other forms of violence, almost in order to make a case. However, when participants discussed separate incidents of violence that they believed to be premised on their sex, they did not tend to trivialise these forms of violence in order to highlight the severity of sexuality based prejudice and abuse. Samantha described an incident where she was followed, which she didn’t necessarily think was premised on sexual identity: “I don’t think they could tell I was queer, but just as a woman even,” and she took this incident very seriously, describing herself as being “traumatised” by it. Alisha compares living as a transwoman to the experiences a cisgender woman (a woman whose biological sex conforms with her identity as a female) would have in public without diminishing the

potential impacts of sexism on cisgender women. Erin also expressed an opinion that women need to be more focused in public spaces as men don't feel as much of a threat. Sofia's comment below is particularly related to her concerns about using public transport late at night.

And I think it's a matter of being *practical* we'll say as a cisgender woman, that is a woman whose gender identity matches her body, how they would behave, feel, how they would behave, I mean. If you're going to go around wearing a very short skirt then a cisgender woman probably would attract attention, and a transwoman would possibly do that as well... So, yeah. You could say with dry or dark humour, welcome to being a woman, sort of thing (Alisha).

In terms of a woman in *public* places, yeah, definitely I copped stuff early in the early days of coming out and perhaps I wasn't good in terms of appearance and I was still nervous about it, that sort of thing. Well, it's not in *public* places but certainly I've copped sexism, which I say almost in an embarrassed way, it was a massive shock to realise there was still that level of sexism out there. I thought, I mean, I came out ten years ago, well, transitioned twelve years ago and the early stages were just horrendous, particularly from gay men in particular, but not so much in public places though, to be fair (Alisha).

I just think as a woman you, I think you naturally are more aware of your circumstances because men own the space, men, I don't think men have that overlay of as much of a threat as women (Erin).

It's just safety and just being a woman, like really conscious of um vulnerability (Sofia).

While most really tried to clearly distinguish between these forms of violence, forms of violence and harassment based on sex were also taken seriously when brought up by participants. Research participants seem to be distinguishing these forms of violence and harassment for the sake of clarity, but in practice it is quite difficult to know which factors lead to particular people being targeted. In the absence of insults or other verbal or physical cues related to sexuality it is difficult to tell which factors lead perpetrators to assault or verbally abuse people. Lesbians and gay men tend to look for clues in perpetrators' statements or insults to determine whether violence was anti-queer, or in other situations they might see violence as homophobic when the victims were displaying affection or were near openly queer venues.

### **Physical Assault**

There has been a large increase in recorded levels of physical violence towards GLBTIQ people in the last twenty years (Tomsen 2009, p.37). The criminologist Stephen Tomsen speculates that this may be to do with higher levels of visibility in "urban gay and lesbian subcultures" (2009, p.38) and argues that recorded levels are most likely in part rising due to more concerted efforts at "community monitoring" (2009,p.38). Tomsen contends that, in spite of this caution, the rates of "criminal" violence directed towards gay men and lesbians are probably higher than those directed towards heterosexual people (2009, p.38). He claims that rates of criminal violence, victimisation and harassment follow broader societal trends of higher levels of violence towards females in private spaces,

such as home and work with “known perpetrators,” and higher levels of violence towards men in public spaces by strangers (2009, p.38).

Leonard et al.’s findings detailed in their research report *Coming Forward: The Underreporting of Heterosexist Violence and Same Sex Partner Abuse in Victoria* found that more women reported incidents of violence perpetrated by strangers than men did (Leonard et al. 2008, p.35). The reverse has been reported to be the case in New South Wales, (Leonard et al. 2008, p.36) which may explain the discrepancy between this research and Tomsen’s, as Tomsen’s is largely Sydney focused.

Hillier et al.’s recent report *Writing Themselves in Again 3*, which focused on the health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and genderqueer young people, reported slightly different findings again to the abovementioned studies. This survey’s sample only included participants from the ages of fourteen to twenty-one. It is to be expected that this younger age group may face constraints on mobility and access to spaces, and this is likely to have had more of an influence on the data, as compared to surveys of only adults. In this survey, the second highest levels of abuse occurred “on the streets,” followed by “at home” and “at a social occasion” (Hillier et al.2010, p. 47).

It is notable that, in Hillier et al.’s research, while, generally, young men and genderqueer people were the victims of more abuse on the streets and at social occasions, and young women experienced more violence in the home, the levels of violence experienced did not differ greatly. Around 21% of young men reported experiencing violence in the home as compared to around 25% of young women; about 43% versus 35% on the streets; and about 45% versus 38% at social occasions (Hillier et al.2010, p.47) .The levels of abuse

reported by genderqueer young people differed slightly, with higher levels of victimisation both at home and on the streets than either cisgendered young men or cisgendered young women (Hillier et al.2010, p.47).

While attacks on queer women in public are not as prominent as attacks on gay men, it does not follow that such incidents should not receive adequate scholarly analysis and attention, as there is arguably little research on this phenomenon. In my own research, however, the workplace is classified as a public space as it meets at least some of the criteria for publicness as detailed in the introduction. My research participants reported a wide range of experiences which fit into the category of physical assault. This section will present experiences of physical assault including punching, knocking unconscious or being spat upon. The assaults described took place in the streets, with one occurring in a car stopped at traffic lights. Of the two who experienced physical assault, one identifies as trans and bisexual or pansexual, and the other presents in quite a masculine manner and identifies as a woman, although somewhat ambivalently.

Finlay is a twenty-nine year old queer person who identifies as a woman, although it seems that she does not always do so unequivocally. Describing her experiences of violence and harassment in public, she says:

I have queer friends, *women*, who identify as women and we have conversations about this stuff and they go “I don’t experience half the shit” that I do. I would say that I often wear clothing that would be identified as being *masculine*. Like a shirt or, you know, I don’t tend to conform to dominant ideas of femininity.

In this quote, it appears that she contrasts herself with “*women*, who identify as women” and appear more feminine. Elsewhere in the interview she described herself as “being, in whatever way, a woman” suggesting that her identification as a woman is somewhat provisional or complex, given that she does not see herself as being a woman in the same manner as her female queer friends.

She lives in the inner city suburb of Brunswick, which she expected to be more relaxed than her previous residence in the northern New South Wales coastal town of Lismore.

I thought ‘oh, it’s a big city, like I’m kind of living in Brunswick’ like, you know, that things will probably be *OK*. But since being here I’ve actually, you know, experienced quite a lot of, I suppose, negative attention, like even just in the city, you know? So, here in Brunswick, and essentially anywhere. So, whereas, say, when I lived up north, I actually didn’t experience the degree of, I suppose, *overt* negative attention that I have experienced here (Finlay).

When I asked her to describe some of the negative experiences she’d had in public spaces, she said that “the most extreme is, like, men, or as far as I- I didn’t ask them how they identify, but I’m assuming that’s how they do-kind of being verbally aggressive and also, like, getting into fistfights with people. And, you know, they always threw the first punch, or in those situations they have.” I then probed to try to gain further details of the incident. She described the following incidents in some detail:

Um, well there were a couple of different ones, There was one that happened in [the inner northern suburb of] Northcote, where I was with my friends and we were walking back from *Upstart Alley* [in Fitzroy], as it happens, and there were

just these guys who, this group of guys, probably four of them. And they were being derogatory towards us. And so, I confess, I don't hold back. I go 'What did you say? What the fuck are you on about? Fuck off!' And so, we kind of got into this verbal altercation and then so *he hit me*, and then I hit him back, and then I think my friend got involved and then his friends...it's hard. I don't remember it very clearly, cos it's really charged. But, basically his friends, I *think* were yelling at us still, but kind of trying to stop him from getting involved and then the cops turned up.

And then another time, in the city, I was coming out of another queer night...And, yeah, again, these guys started yelling at me and so I yelled back and they were really keen on it, and again he hit me first. And he was actually a really good fighter, so that one, that time he actually knocked me out. And I think my friends was trying to kind of get me to come away from it, and then another mate of mine smacked him and then he smacked him back and he was like 'Oh, we can't win here,' cos he was just really good. The thing I remember most vividly was this huge group of people just standing, watching him go about his business. And, like, after the fact, their looks toward *me* and us were like we were the ones who were fucked. So that was really intense too, like the public spectacle of it.

Eloise experienced an attempted physical assault in the inner southern suburb of St Kilda where she previously lived. It occurred when she was with her partner, holding hands and had just alighted from a tram. She described this experience in great detail:

we were walking along the street and we'd gotten off a tram, we were having a great time, I was really happy and I think we were holding hands, and then we walked past this guy, he was on the public telephone, and he was *really angry*, and he was yelling at someone on the phone and I was just smiling, cause that was the mood that I was in and I looked towards him and I kind of still had this smile. And really I knew that I shouldn't have even looked at him 'cause he was *in a state*. He was in a rage and I kind of knew I put my hand in that fire I am going to get burnt, but I did it anyway and I kind of directed my energy and attention towards him, and he reacted to that and he chased us down the street, or followed us down the street. He started yelling out 'What the fuck are you looking at?' and then started making it about our sexuality, making it about 'You fucking lesbians. I'll come and kill you' and like that. And because I could hear him still, we'd just walked past and then I stopped and I turned around to face him. And he was in a complete rage, and then he made it about race as well. He said that he was Native American background and that he hates white people like me and that, and I was standing there facing him doing my best to just be with him, and just said 'I got it. Got your communication' kind of thing. I didn't say that but that's, I was like 'okay, I got it'. And then he was still enraged and I was still facing him and he came up and he went to punch me in the face, and he was a *big* man. Like he was a lot taller than me and he raised his fist, and he, I mean I was just really lucky that he didn't, there was some sense of restraint from himself, and that he didn't punch me in the face, but he went to. And I just was doing my best to be open with him and be with him as another human being. And then I think we, he

started backing away then after that because I didn't react and I didn't, and I just said 'I'm sorry' and apologised and got his communication and then he started backing away, and still yelling abuse and et cetera, and then I, when I went home I reported it to the police. I thought about it for a while and then I thought no I'm going to report that cause it was, you know he brought up sexuality as well and all of that. So that was in a public place and that was *really* frightening.

Tremendously frightening and I rang the police, the gay and lesbian liaison officer, as well, in particular, and what else did I do? Yeah. I had a severe reaction a couple of weeks later which is often what happens with me. Like I'm okay for a bit and then my body goes into shock later or something.

Clearly, this incident, as she described it had a strong emotional effect on Eloise as she said it was "tremendously frightening" and explains that she was fine for a while after the incident and then her body went into shock. This situation involved both threats to murder Eloise and her partner, and an attempt to physically assault them. Similar to some of the situations described below, Eloise and her partner were visible as lesbians because they were holding hands. Eloise highlighted the size and height discrepancies between her and her attacker, and this seems to have contributed towards her feelings of terror and the intensity of this incident. Although the attacker was already enraged in this situation, the attacker's subsequent clear identification and targeting of the women's sexuality played a key part in Eloise's decision to report the incident to the police's Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer.

Alisha also experienced a serious physical assault. As Alisha related her experiences she was unsure whether this assault was related to her sexual identity, or was entirely

random. This is in contrast to other interview participants who seemed certain that the experiences they discussed were related to their gender identities or expression of sexuality, often because of comments or verbal abuse that preceded the attack. In this situation, the attackers yelled at Alisha prior to the assault, but she could not hear what was being said as the car windows were closed. She describes her experience below:

I was in my car at an intersection in South Melbourne just waiting for the lights to change and two people walked across the pedestrian lights and for some reason just started banging on the car, yelling. I don't know why or what. I couldn't hear what they were saying because the windows were shut. And so I was a bit shaken by that, so when the lights changed I drove across the intersection and thought, 'well, I may just grab a few deep breaths,' and before I know it, the guy- the two people who were the offenders- well, the guy had run around the intersection, put his fist through the driver's side window and hit me in the side of the head six times and then just walked off. Now, I don't know whether the guy was on drugs or something; or just in a bad mood; I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and, you know, I never will. It's one of those things, but you can't help wondering, 'did the people, as they crossed the road see someone who they thought *didn't* fit their expectations about gender expression and go, 'oh, we'll yell at them?'" And then the next thing, they assault that person. As I say, though, I'll never know for sure whether that was a queerphobic attack.

It is not always possible to impute a motive to an attacker in circumstances where the attacker is not known, but Alisha is well aware that transpeople experience much higher rates of physical assault than others. As she pointed out, "I mean, all the evidence for the

last ten years, for example, shows transpeople are ten times more likely to be physically assaulted. It's about twenty-five percent versus two percent or something for the average population." Alisha is correct to claim that transpeople experience high levels of physical assault. In a recent report on "The Health and Wellbeing of Transgender People in Australia and New Zealand," nineteen percent of research participants had experienced physical attacks "due to their gender identity" (Couch et al. 2007, p.60). In addition, 33.6 per cent of participants had received "threats of violence or intimidation" (Couch et al. 61) and 14.6 per cent had had objects thrown at them (Couch et al.2007, p.60).

Yet, awareness of increased rates of physical assault could lead to feelings of unsafety for transpeople. This is clearly not to say that transpeople should not be made aware of these statistics. It is simply to claim that the awareness of public assaults on transpeople, may lead some transwomen to feel very vigilant in public, or vulnerable to potential assault. This vulnerability may be compounded as often even gender normative women fear being in public at particular spaces or times, especially at night. The intersectionality of feeling vulnerable as a woman and as a transperson could lead to transwomen feeling especially vulnerable. People with strongly expressed non-normative gendered presentations often face sanctions directly related to their gendered expression. Alisha relates another example, of being spat upon in public, where it is entirely clear that the assault was due to her gendered expression:

I'm walking down Swanston St in the City. Some person goes to me, 'Are you a man or a woman, or what?' And I just said, 'It's really not up to you.' And he just goes 'Pffft', and spits. I mean, that's definitely physical assault as far as I'm aware, under the law, and so that was pretty horrendous, and, I mean, someone

once said, ‘to spit in someone’s face is possibly one of the worst insults you can give someone, so, yeah, pretty upsetting...

“Are you a man or a woman?” is a question commonly directed at transpeople and also at queer women who appear androgynous or non gender normative (Mason 2002, p.53-4). The “girl/boy repertoire” is the term Gail Mason uses to describe common incidents where lesbians are asked “Are you a girl or a boy?” and are subject to harassment or physical attack because they do not fit in with a binary model of gender and sexuality in which female (cisgendered) people maintain a feminine appearance and behaviours and male (cisgendered) people act according to traditionally masculine social norms and sartorial and grooming conventions (Mason 2002, p.52-53). In my interviews, this repertoire was useful in categorising many of the experiences of my interview participants. Many women and transpeople who did not fit with these socially sanctioned gendered and sexual norms faced physical assault, harassment and verbal abuse associated with their sexual and gendered identities and self-presentation.

In some cases, the person’s biological gender or gender identity may not be clear to the questioner (although presumably, many people would consider this to be an insensitive question and not appropriate in most contexts). This questioning may be an attempt to reframe gender in terms more acceptable to the questioner, i.e. in a binary gendered framework where identity, presentation, and gender identity clearly correspond with no room for any potential ambiguity. While not many of the participants in this study reported being similarly questioned, some participants reported that their trans friends had faced similar experiences of assault or harassment regarding their gender identity. In Couch et al.’s study, 53.4% of participants were victims of direct personal insults of

verbal abuse (2007, p.61). In contrast to these experiences, other transpeople in Couch et al.'s study volunteered that they had not "experienced discrimination" because they could pass unproblematically (2007, p.61).

While not all my interview participants commented specifically on passing, very few expressed a desire to be invisible, although Bella expressed that the difference, particularly in height, drew attention to her and her partner so they felt like they couldn't hold hands in public. She claimed that, "You don't want looks you want to just sort of pass through society and do what you have to do and get on with life." When asked how she felt as a lesbian in public spaces, Sofia responded "Most of the time I feel pretty invisible." Later in the interview she maintained that "Everyone just assumes I'm straight" as "I do wear skirts and I'm pretty girly." She saw this as a double-edged sword—on one hand she felt that she was protected from a lot of the abuse that was targeted towards her "incredibly butch" looking lesbian friends, but on the other hand she felt that "it also makes me invisible to a large number of people who could potentially, you know be cool people that I wouldn't mind meeting." When asked what type of issues she thought might need addressing in terms of queer and lesbian experiences in public spaces she gave the following reply: "I think there's two things, and the first thing is about *not being seen at all* and the other's about always being picked up on and trying to find a happy medium between like 'freaks!' and invisible. Um, cos at the moment it seems we only get picked up at either end of that."

### **Physical Harassment**

The other form of physical violence described was deliberate bumping or shoving. Three of the interview participants related experiences of being deliberately bumped or shoved because of their expression of their sexuality or gender. Erin described two incidents where she and her partner were deliberately bumped or shoved, where the attackers were unknown (presumably straight) men. In contrast, Lauren and Amber described experiencing similar incidents which were perpetrated by gay men, and lesbians respectively. These experiences occurred in places that were more likely to be described as “gay spaces” or “queer spaces.” It’s important to note, however, that this description wasn’t universal, as there was quite a lot of difference in responses about which areas were regarded as queer or queer friendly or gay friendly and which were not. In particular, some areas described as “friendly” for gay men were described in a more ambivalent manner by queer women. Lauren’s experience occurred in Commercial Road in the inner southern suburb of Prahran, which was seen as more of a space that was either friendly to gay men or “in decline” by the interview participants. Amber reported being pushed in a hostile manner by women who she described as “butch” in queer clubs and pubs.

Erin described two experiences of being deliberately bumped or shoved. One experience took place when she and her partner were on holidays in a seaside town in South Australia, and the other took place when she and her partner were crossing the bridge from the City to go across to Southbank. The most recent of these experiences occurred around four years ago, and Erin described experiences dating back to the mid 1980s in the interview. Although the experiences ranged temporally from twenty-five years ago, to

relatively recently, she says “maybe things have changed, but, in a way, I don’t really think they have in terms of behaviour towards people that are homosexual.” Erin describes both incidents below:

...my partner and I have been together eight years and we were actually crossing to go to Southbank and we’re both in our mid-fifties now, so we were probably fifty at the time. We were actually arm in arm and we were just crossing the bridge to, as I said, to go across to Southbank and two guys must have seen us arm in arm and he proceeded to pretend he was taking a photo of his friend and I tried to get around the back of him and he basically kept moving back and back and back until he bumped into me. So, it was this really overt demonstration of him and his mate’s disgust that we were walking arm in arm, so he, he just harassed us and then I guess we both, Nicole and I, responded by saying ‘what the hell are you doing?’ And then they proceeded to come out with a lot of expletives and I guess another horrid experience for Nicole and I, it was probably three years ago where we were travelling in South Australia in a campervan. We went to the local pub for New Year’s Eve and I guess it was a small venue. We weren’t overtly friendly, because we’re conscious of public spaces, and what proceeded to happen was, it was sort of like there was performers. So, we were on the dance floor; we were on the dance floor as two women, but we weren’t being overtly sexual like heterosexuals can be, and one guy proceeded to keep bumping into Nicole and then my drinks kept getting kicked over, so we actually felt quite scared that night, so we both, we made sure we left before it turned twelve o’clock. And that was in a seaside beach in South Australia so that was pretty

scary. We felt a little bit scared walking back to the caravan park, so that's probably some incidents which, probably, in a sense, haven't changed over the years.

In both cases, Erin was identifiable because she was with her partner, and in the first incident discussed above she was clearly identifiable because they were holding hands. She was certain that the harassment was motivated by prejudice or disapproval towards her sexual and gendered expression. This was particularly the case in the first incident, which she described as clear cut because she and her partner had been obviously identifiable due to the hand holding and because of the types of comments that were levelled at them. She added "So, sometimes it's not so subtle, and sometimes it's absolutely overt comments. I think it's pretty clear in one form or another."

Amber and Lauren's experiences were quite different to those discussed above, as they were physically harassed by other people who were assumed to identify as gay or lesbian. The incidents occurred in places known to be, in at least some ways, "gay-friendly." Amber's experiences occurred in queer clubs, and Lauren's occurred on Commercial Road in Prahran, which is seen as a "friendly space" for gay men. In some ways the incidents were also similar, as it seems that in both incidents the harasser's gendered or sexual self-expression was identified as being quite different to that of the interview participant who was a victim of the harassment. Both experiences seemed to be related to claiming ownership of a space, and trying to discourage people who they saw as different or undesirable from frequenting those spaces.

Amber explained her experiences:

...I think, often when I go out, I do feel sometimes, maybe, *physically* intimidated by the really butch dykes. Like, I mean, just the queer clubs where...if I'm getting hustled at a bar or something, usually it's a woman and I find that sort of strange and

Interviewer: So hustled is?

Oh, just like rough, like bumped into, or just physically kind of imposed upon... You know, so I think I have a very different feeling of... I don't know if it's manners, or what, just personal space and I am sort of like, 'I know that you're asserting a space, but you don't need to do it to me, I am not your enemy, you know. I don't know, they might be reading me as straight or something. I don't know what's going on, but it seems to happen to me quite a bit, to be kind of like 'What are *you* doing here?' from other dykes.

Lauren doesn't think that she is particularly visible in public or that people necessarily "pick up" her sexuality. She thinks that being with partners makes her look "more queer." In the following incident she felt that her sexuality was noticeable because she was with her partner.

Especially when I was working in the HIV sector, and so maybe I was just a bit more attuned to negative reactions from gay men, but, oh, if I ever hung out in places like along Commercial Road, there was just places around there that would be like visibly physically hostile sometimes towards, if you weren't like a pretty

little fag hag, kind of thing. Yeah, like being shoved by people, or you know, whatever, because I was there with my girlfriend.

Commercial Road, in the southern suburb of Prahran, where the incident Lauren described took place, was mentioned by four of the interview participants. Bella said “Yeah, Commercial Road, but a lot of the gay owned or gay/lesbian owned shops and restaurants down there, they seem to be drifting away.” Similarly, Alisha described the area in the following way: “I’m not sure where Prahran’s at, at the moment, the old Commercial Road strip seems to be in, I don’t know, it seems to be in decline. I mean, it’s well past its peak...” While Lauren herself described Prahran among the places she thought of as being queer friendly, her response was qualified. It reflects the impact of increased visibility on queer people’s safety in public. Her response below is to the question of whether she knows any neighbourhoods that are known of as being queer friendly.

Yeah. As we know, that’s not always straightforward, either. [laugh] So, it can mean that sometimes, like the visibility factor plays a... You know, you look at somewhere like Commercial Road, like it’s seen as gay friendly but then there’s actually a quite high, yeah, rate of targeting of people along there.

Beth, who lived within a few suburbs of this area found parts of the area to be unsafe and states that she would generally avoid it at certain times.

Chapel Street any weekend night, walking pretty much past anywhere from [short pause] the corner of High and Chapel Street up towards Toorak Road I will avoid that area because even if I’m out with other people who’re obviously queer we’ll

get harassed, it's not safe. There are a lot of young guys who hang around and drive up and down and get drunk and look for trouble and I just try to stay away from the area.

### **Sexual Harassment and Stalking**

Other incidents described by the interview participants included indecent assault and sexual harassment and other sexualised behaviours directed to the interview participants in connection with their gendered and sexual identities. In general, the participants who reported experiencing indecent assault or sexual harassment were not the same participants who experienced violence of a non-sexual nature. Two of the interview participants reported experiencing indecent assault or stalking. In most instances described, the participants felt that these experiences were directly related to their visible or disclosed sexual identity. The participants who reported experiencing sexual assault or harassment were Poppy and Samantha.

Poppy described three different experiences of sexual harassment or assault in her interview. One occurred on a tram on her way to the inner northern suburb of Fitzroy, and another took place in the inner Southern suburb of St Kilda where she lived with her partner for around two years. She now describes the suburb of St Kilda as a place that she avoids. Poppy currently lives in an outer suburb in what she labels “families’ area” and says that she feels “a bit less safe” in this area. However, in this particular interview, the distinction between safe and unsafe spaces seemed ambiguous. Poppy seems quite ambivalent and sometimes contradictory when describing safe and unsafe spaces. This

suggests that safety is a function of both previous experiences in a place, as well as the types of people who frequent the area.

She likes the way in which, in Fitzroy, “You just feel part of the community there, part of the scenery— you blend in because it’s such an open gay scene there.” But she goes on to qualify this statement with: “But you’ve also got a lot of, how do you say it without sounding wrong- -seedy characters and I’ve been, you know, often accosted and that in those areas, but I’ve never been accosted in the suburban areas.” When asked to clarify her definition of accosted, she said that she meant harassed or verbally abused. She continues on to describe her experiences on the tram on the way to Fitzroy:

Oh, the *best* example, it was on the tram, I think, to Fitzroy. That tram is notorious for being the unsafe tram, and I was just sitting there with my girlfriend and I think we were just holding hands or something, and then there was this older guy, and I think he was a bit wasted, but he comes up to me and he’s just looking at me just like ‘I’m going to give it to you, even if you don’t want it, you dyke!’, and I’m just like ‘Aaagh!’

Interviewer: Is that what he said?

Yeah. *Yeah.*

She also detailed an incident on public transport where she was sexually assaulted:

“Again, sitting on a tram with my girlfriend and someone come up to me and grab my boob [laughs uncomfortably]...Just a random person, and then I forgot what he said, something really gross.” The third incident she described occurred in the inner southern suburb of St Kilda. She relates it below:

Oh, there was a other time in *St Kilda*. St Kilda is another area where it was really hard, that's where we first lived together in St Kilda for two years, and, um, it was good in some ways, but there was heaps of dodgy characters, especially in the early hours of the morning and we both worked really *early*, so we'd often get harassed and stuff. But there was this one time we were getting off the tram and then this guy just came up to me and grabbed my arse and was saying all this stuff and my girlfriend was swearing at him, yeah.

Interviewer: So, that's to do with your sexuality, you think, or just general?

It's always been if I'm with my girlfriend or holding her hand.

Samantha is another queer woman who has experienced sexualised behaviour directed towards her by men in public spaces. She has experienced these sorts of incidents when she has been alone, although she isn't sure if this is related to her sexuality or not. She has also experienced negative incidents that she didn't necessarily interpret as sexualised, such as being stared at or glared at when she was with partners. She explains that she has experienced verbal sexual harassment "just, like, sleazy people trying to like 'Yeah, give us some of that,' stuff like that. They think that for some reason, queerness makes me want them."

There was one particular experience when she was alone and walking home at night that she found particularly disturbing and described in greater detail:

Yeah, another one's probably walking home at night. I don't think they could tell I was queer, but just as a woman even, and I was walking down a kind of abandoned part near a TAFE and had this crate full of stuff and was kind of

struggling along and then, just this guy on a bike was circling me and saying ‘Is there anyone at home? Where are you headed?, Come to mine.’ and stuff like that and just kept going up little alleys and coming back and just trying to intimidate me...

While she didn’t think the experience detailed above was necessarily premised on being recognised as queer, she explains why some may recognise her sexual identity, or potential other reasons why other may single her out for harassment:

...I usually kind of dress oddly. I don’t know whether that they can tell that I’m queer because of that, or if they just like to intimidate me because I look different. But, yeah, at night, especially because I live in Coburg, so tends to be a lot of big groups of youngish guys that walk around at night and try and scare you.

Unlike Poppy and Samantha’s experiences which occurred on public transport, or in the street, Beth describes experiences of sexual harassment that mainly took place in the workplace, although she does say that they also occurred outside work as well. She goes into detail regarding her experiences of being queer in the workplace:

Workplace is another environment: people are *ignorant*, people are *homophobic*. When you’re femme, people are just disgusting and pervy. If you’re out, it colours all your interactions and relationships, but I’m not someone who can lie. I’m not prepared to lie and be closeted. I feel like if everyone else is talking about their partner, or what they did on the weekend, I should be able to do the same and I’ve always been out at work, but certainly I’ve had to pay the price, not being offered a promotion, that kind of stuff.

I asked her to clarify what kind of pervy things others said or did in the workplace. She responded: “Guys are just really sleazy and I’ve been sexually harassed at work and outside of work. You know, ‘Can we join you? Can I come and watch you and your girlfriend?’ trying to pick you up continually, not accepting it as ‘no’. And they’re the nice ones...”

Most of the participants who reported sexual harassment or sexual assault were those whose gendered self-presentation was more feminine, or less masculine or androgynous. Most were also younger women, in their late teens to thirties. In this research project it was generally the case that men were more likely to challenge and physically assault women who present in a more masculine way, and to sexually harass queer women or lesbians with a more feminine presentation. There are some cases, however, that elude this explanatory framework. The “heterosex repertoire” is what Mason describes as “the tendency among heterosexual men to respond to lesbianism as if it were a personal challenge to their own sexual desire and identity” (2002, p.47). In other words lesbian sexuality is policed by straight men through sexual harassment and assault, in order to try to bring it back into accord with the predominant “social order” (Mason 2002, pp.49-50). Unfortunately, the explanatory power of this repertoire still seems to hold today, and research participants described incidents of sexual harassment closely related to their sexual and gendered identities.

### **Threats and Verbal Abuse**

This section will describe verbal abuse experienced by participants, as well as threats of physical, verbal and sexual abuse that didn’t eventuate in physical or sexual assault. This

is, again, a somewhat arbitrary delineation, given that it is not clear whether some of these threats would have resulted in violence if the victims had not been able to escape, or if the situations had been slightly different. Another factor that makes any clear separation of negative experiences into distinct categories difficult is that often harassment or verbal abuse occurred alongside other forms of violence, as described in earlier accounts. Participants described being chased by groups of men, threatened with physical or sexual assault, “harassed,” yelled at from moving cars, and having “disgusting objects” left on the doorstep.

Beth is one of the interview participants who experienced verbal harassment, vandalism and being chased. She did not go into great detail about all of her negative experiences in public places, so sometimes it is unclear exactly what kinds of experiences she is describing. She explained that she has experienced less problems over time as she has become “more and more outwardly femme” and thinks that most people in public would assume that she is straight (although she still dislikes this assumption). She explains: “it doesn’t impact me these days, but when I was younger I had a lot of problems because I had a shaved head and looked more outwardly dykey; people harassing me, assaulting, that kind of stuff. So, I guess, the lingering thing is, I don’t feel safe in a lot of public spaces, particularly if I’m out, or with someone, and where it’s obvious.”

There were two major incidents that Beth recalled and described more fully in the interview. She was surprised that one had occurred in Brunswick Street in the inner northern suburb of Fitzroy, which she relates that she had always assumed was a “relatively safe” area. Before she was involved in an accident, she worked as a waitress in a café on Brunswick St and “was walking back to my car with my girlfriend, we were

holding hands, chased by a big gang of guys, and we got to the car in time, but that was just kind of luck, really.” Although this experience occurred in Brunswick St, she still says that she “always thought Brunswick St, to some extent, The City, depending where I am, certain areas I feel safer than others.” This seems to indicate that she would still consider Brunswick St to be “relatively safe” despite this experience taking place there. This is in contrast to the mid-outer northern suburb of Preston where she previously lived with her partner. She explains, “When I used to live in Preston, my partner and I, we had a lot of harassment from the neighbours and we’d get disgusting objects left on our doorstep, all that kind of stuff, I wouldn’t have walked around holding hands in that neighbourhood, for instance.” Where she currently lives, in the inner southern suburb of Windsor, she feels that she would be “walking around holding hands,” if she were currently in a relationship.

Erin is another lesbian who has experienced threats and verbal abuse as well as the physical harassment that was described in the first section of this chapter. There are three incidents Erin described in detail in her interview. In one incident she and her partner were camping when some men threatened to enter their tent, in a different circumstance men repeatedly walked backward and forward on top of their car, and in the third she was verbally abused at a Pride March. These particular incidents were not recent, as the campground incident took place around ten years ago, and the verbal assault at the Pride March occurred during the nineteen-eighties. The camping incident took place just outside Melbourne, while the Pride March incident occurred in the City. She didn’t specify the location of the other incident but it’s likely to have occurred in Melbourne. Erin does not think, however, that the situation has necessarily improved for lesbians

since that time. In two of the incidents she was with a partner, and in the Pride March she was surrounded by queer people, and therefore presumably easily identifiable. As well as being perhaps being easily identified when with a partner, Erin describes herself and her partner as looking “like stereotypical dykes with the short hair.” She elaborates on the camping incident below:

Probably another one was a couple of incidents probably around about ten years ago when I was camping with my, with a partner and it actually was a public space like a footy ground, a big open space where there’s lots of campers. And obviously my girlfriend and I, we do as I’ve said in the last question we look stereotypical like dykes with the short hair, and the guys who parked their tent next to us on a *huge* public oval with, crowded with tents on Australia Day weekend, I think it was. We kind of knew when they parked there, they looked pretty rough and there’d be trouble, they proceeded to get *very* drunk and I guess it was probably around about 12 at night there so we’re surrounded by people in tents and kids...

Interviewer: And whereabouts was this oval?

It was just outside Melbourne and I’m trying to remember now, I might remember before the end of...

Interviewer: No, that’s okay.

But it’s not that far out of Melbourne and so they proceeded to get really pissed and by the time that it got dark and a lot of the people were in their tents settled down they proceeded to say they were going to come in the tent. They were drunk

and so we were really quite terrified and I guess what, what hit home was that nobody came to our rescue and there was...

Interviewer: And so other people *were* around?

There was a whole circle of camping around this oval and so you've got a hell of a lot of families but not one person you know came to either quieten him down or yell something out. So I guess we, we felt a bit trapped but yeah so that was a pretty horrible experience because no doubt if they'd have come in the tent who knows what would have transpired, so, yeah that was a really horrid experience.

What seemed to be of concern to Erin, in this particular situation, was the number of bystanders who didn't intervene to help her and her partner. The escalating drinking also seemed to be of major concern to Erin. Her statement "Who knows what would have transpired?" in regards to the drunken men potentially entering the tent seems to suggest that she was perhaps afraid of being sexually assaulted. Another situation Erin described was "a parking situation, where some blokes just walked over the top of our car, backwards and forwards..." This situation could be interpreted as an attempt to intimidate Erin and her partner, and also as vandalism of her possession, which was also her means of escape from the situation. The third instance, which was one of verbal abuse, is described by Erin below:

...in the mid 80s I think I was in a march in the city and it, it was a bit hard to remember what it was, but no doubt it was probably a gay march and I remember some bloke you know, yelling out that 'you should all be put on a desert island and poured petrol over you and *burnt to death.*' And I remember how I did

respond at that time and I was probably younger so I was probably a little less vulnerable and I did say to him, well ‘you’re standing there with obviously your daughter and I wonder whether you’d say this whether, if your daughter grows up and she happens to be a lesbian, I’d like you to remember that,’ so anyway we marched on.

In the above quote, Erin seems to feel more of a sense of mastery of the situation. This is similar to other participants who described being involved in Pride Marches where they felt more strength from being amongst a large number of queer or GLBT identifying people. This seems, for many, to translate into feeling safer when in the majority, and less safe when part of a minority, even in instances where they had experienced a negative incident related to their sexuality in a particular area that was generally thought of as being frequented by more queer people. It seems that a sense of ownership of spaces is related to feelings of safety within those spaces. In their discussion of Christopher Street in New York City, Berlant and Warner claim that “After a certain point, a quantitative change is a qualitative change. A critical mass develops. The street becomes queer. It develops a dense, publicly accessible culture” (2002, p.204). When asked later if her sense of feeling less vulnerable when she was younger meant that she felt more vulnerable as she grew older, Erin was unwilling to say that this was the case. This suggests that she feels ambivalent towards equating vulnerability with age.

Alisha’s experience of verbal abuse was slightly different than some of the others’ as it was specifically transphobic, or as she expresses it in her interview “queerphobic.” It was similar, however, in that others had experienced verbal abuse directed at them by people in moving cars. Alisha was described earlier in the “Physical Assault” section. It was

also similar because the attacker was presumably noticing aspects of Alisha's appearance that did not fit into a binary model of sex/gender where men appear entirely masculine and are sexually attracted to women and women appear entirely feminine and are sexually attracted to men. The incident occurred in the inner southern suburb of Prahran. Alisha describes the incident: "The worst verbal comment was early, a couple of years after coming out but before transition, and I was going to a venue in what was the old Dome on the corner of Commercial Road, walking towards there someone yelled out a car window, quote, 'Beat the fuck out of you, transvestite.'"

As discussed earlier, Alisha is well aware of the heightened risk of assault for transgender and transsexual people, and these kinds of threats, even if they are not realised, along with Alisha's previous experiences of assault, could contribute to feelings of unsafety in public places. Like some of the other participants she also sees the inner southern suburb of St Kilda as unsafe, as she feels that people assume she is a sex worker in that area and will "sleaze onto" her: "although I know Port Phillip, St Kilda, is the home of Pride March and all that sort of thing, there are some parts of St Kilda where actually I don't feel safe because it's just 'oh, anyone who's transgender is a sex worker and we're going to sleaze onto you.' And it's a dichotomy there."

Finlay, whose experiences of physical assault were also described above, had also experienced verbal abuse. Finlay's experiences are somewhat similar to Alisha's as, although Finlay is cisgendered and identifies as a woman, it is with some qualification ("in whatever way"). Finlay, therefore, may not always be seen as conforming to binary expectations of gendered behaviour and presentation. In most of the cases where Finlay has been verbally abused, it has been from people in moving cars: "Mostly, yeah, if people

yell stuff, they tend to be in a moving car. Yeah, so [laughs] the coward's way.”

However, Finlay mentioned being yelled at as a “general low level” negative experience as a queer woman. When I asked what kinds of things people yelled at her, and she replied “Ah, I don't know. Like ‘dyke,’ ‘slut.’ Yeah, stuff like that.” She explained that in most of the experiences where people have yelled stuff at her, apart from the experiences that escalated into physical assault, the verbal abuse was hurled from moving vehicles. In this case, a quite androgynous woman is signalled as sexually deviant, by use of the term “slut,” which also sexualises her, but concomitantly denigrates her sexuality. While there have been some cases “on the street” where people have made comments and then there has been a “verbal dialogue,” she claims that many of those cases have escalated into physical violence. In the assaults described earlier, verbal abuse was a precursor to physical assault.

Another of Finlay's experiences occurred not in the streets, but in the workplace. Like Beth, who described her negative workplace experiences, Finlay works in the community services field. However, it was Finlay's clients, not her colleague, who verbally assaulted her. One client accused Finlay of “touching her” inappropriately and verbally assaulted her, and another threatened her. Finlay felt particularly upset by this behaviour as she hadn't expected that women would make personal attacks based on their understanding of her sexual orientation. Finlay also expressed that this incident particularly affected her, because it is difficult to escape from a workplace, as it is necessary to be there on a regular basis.

Also at work, people like, I work in community services, so there's a lot of people coming through and there have been incidences when people have, *women*

actually, that's the only time I've actually, that I'm aware of, that I've experienced that stuff from women, threatening violence or accusing me of being sexually inappropriate without me having made any kind of particular behaviour... There was this one woman who, like, she was already upset. She was already upset at someone else. And I walked past her, cos I was, I think, you know, were a number of people around and I was going somewhere. I wanted to position myself differently. And I walked past her and she accused me of touching her and called me, like, I don't know, something gross. Yeah, something like, 'filthy lesbian' or whatever... Yeah. 'Don't come near me' and blah, blah, blah. That really actually affected me. And this time this other woman like, was standing at the door, and she called me, you know, 'I know what you are, like if I saw you in a dark alley way me and my friends, we'd, you know, fuck you over and stuff.' Those incidences, more than incidences from men, cos I suppose I just kind of *expect* it, like they really upset me, yeah. Especially being at work I think as well. Cos you have to be there every day.

Olivia says that she doesn't really know if anyone knows if she's a lesbian when she's in public, although she sometimes wonders if they can tell. She describes herself as a "touchy-feely" person and expresses affection toward her partner, but thinks that it is perhaps more acceptable for older women to hold hands or link arms "perhaps than for younger women who may look more out lesbian." This is similar to sentiments expressed by Bella and Erin about feeling like they've become more invisible as they've grown older. She says that when she is out with friends, she is more "curious" about what people will think than worried about whether she will be attacked. She thinks that "perhaps

people are much less likely to verbally or physically attack an older woman ...rather than perhaps a young, feisty sort of woman.” She explained that she has been “out” since 2002, and was married prior to that, so she feels that she has had quite a different experience to other lesbians. The one main negative experience she recalled in public space was an incident in which the police drove past and levelled abusive language at her and her partner when she lived in a country town.

I did have one experience once with my first female partner, we’d been at a dance in the country town we used to live in and we were leaving the dance and it was a – it was the local gay and lesbian group dance and we were leaving and um, actually the police drove up to sort of, you know, do their round and, I can’t even remember what they said to us now but my first partner looked like a dyke, I mean she was really dykey... I think we were probably holding [hands] or something at the end of the night and they drove past they made some really negative comment, I can’t even remember what it was and I sort of, you know, brushed it off but she really reacted to it because I – and I think that’s possibly because she had had many more of those experiences than I had. But as far as really negative experiences, I don’t think so.

As can be seen in the interview excerpt, Olivia did not see this incident as “really negative,” but her partner was affected by it. Olivia rationalises that perhaps this is because she has experienced many more similar situations. This seems to be the case in other interviews as well, and it could be argued that negative experiences in public space have a cumulative effect on queer women’s experiences of safety in public. One would expect the police to protect against harassment and violence, rather than to perpetrate it.

Samantha's experiences also seem to uphold this claim, as she began to feel different and more intense emotions after having multiple negative experiences related to her sexual and sexed identities. Samantha's description of her feelings seems to highlight the cumulative nature of repeated incidents of this kind on (queer) women's sense of safety: "I usually get, well I used to just get angry, but like after, I got really kind of traumatised by getting followed by the guy on the bike, so since then I kind of get really terrified and then really, really angry just after they've left. Like, 'wait come back here, I'll get you.' Really just enraged."

While the incidents that the interview participants discussed above were perceived as particularly salient and had a high impact on them— as evidenced by the fact that they were usually more readily recalled and recounted— this is not to imply that more "everyday" forms of harassment, such as looks, stares and comments do not have huge effects on queer-identifying women. Some interview participants found it important to modify their everyday behaviours in order to avoid these more commonly occurring incidents. In the interview with Beth it is difficult to tell whether these kinds of experiences are what she means when she mentions "general harassment": "There aren't reactions simply because people assume I'm straight, once they realise, the homophobia comes into play and then my safety goes down and the general harassment goes up..." Or, as Finlay explained when describing her experiences of being physically assaulted "they're probably two incidents that stand out. And then there's just the regular kind of general low level..." Elsewhere, she described experiencing the following behaviours in public: "and then there's kind of being yelled at out of cars as people drive past. And then there's I suppose where you, like, people kind of scowl at you or point and talk

amongst themselves or, you know, yeah.” Similarly, Sofia explains “Outer suburbs, like I said, [I] have had more reactions.” Bella reported experiencing mostly looks and some verbal comments, which she tries to avoid by “being cautious” in public:

And the ones that you have to worry about are basically the young adolescents to late teenagers, early 20’s like they’re the ones that tend to give you the grief and I suppose by being very careful I’ve avoided a lot of hassles.

Interviewer: and so when you say they give you grief what kind of things

I’ve been lucky that because I’m sort of very cautious I don’t tend to get, I haven’t had any well for quite a while.

### **Interpreting Fear of Violence in Public Spaces**

In this section, I will examine my research data in relation to the literature on fear of violence and violence towards women and queers. This will help to contextualise my findings. While not all the interview participants were fearful in public spaces (some were angry or resistant, for example) experiences and fear of violence and harassment impacted on their abilities to move through public space. What the fear of crime literature tends to disagree about the most is the “objective” level of violence and its relationship to fear. Some simply contend that it is important to highlight the places where the highest levels of crime occur in order to direct resources to focus on these spaces and assuage people’s fears of crimes. A clear example of this is the feminist argument that because most violence against women takes place in the home, the home should be the focus of safety campaigns, policy and academic work, rather than the disproportionate focus on public crimes (Pain 1997, p.233). Another strand of argument posits that it doesn’t matter

exactly where the crimes occur, as the fear of crime still limits women's mobility and access to public spaces, and that "rationalist" arguments are dismissive of people's fear of crime and paint them as passive and foolish in the face of minimal threats. I can sympathise with the "objectivist" arguments that fear of crime should be examined to see if it is consistent with the levels of crime in particular areas and for particular people. If queer or women's fear of crime was affecting them and limiting their mobility then this might mean that there might be even less queer people and women in particular places marked as dangerous at night, for example, which might make other queer people and women even less likely to frequent these spaces, and perhaps more likely to be targeted as easy victims. People's perceptions of spaces, in other words, have the potential to shape spaces to make them more or less welcoming or more or less safe for particular groups of people.

On the other hand, my research clearly takes into account queer women's experiences in public spaces and women's experiences of violence are known to disproportionately occur in private spaces and be perpetrated by intimate partners or acquaintances. In contrast to the previous arguments, while it is necessary to focus resources on intimate violence in private spaces, this does not mean that women's experiences of violence in public should not be given research priority. Similarly, incidents of violence which do not follow predominant patterns such as women's violence against other women or even women's violence against men should not be ignored simply because they are anomalies. More research in any of these areas can only help to understand the role of gender in experiences of violence in greater depth. Further, it isn't clear that queer women's experiences of violence follow women's experiences of violence more generally. While

men most often experience violence at the hands of a stranger (or strangers) and women at the hands of intimate partners, the *Coming Forward* report found that perpetrators of ‘heterosexist abuse’ against women (70.6%) were more likely to be strangers than people who perpetrated ‘heterosexist abuse’ against men (64.5%) and that men were more likely to know the perpetrators as casual acquaintances (Leonard et al. 2008, p.35). The findings from the state of New South Wales differed slightly (68% for women and 81% for men) (Leonard et al. 2008, p.35). It is clearly a mistake, however, to assume that the prevalence and types of violence faced by queer women will always mirror those experienced by the broader category of women (of whom most can be assumed to be heterosexual) in general safety surveys. In their study of same-sex attracted and gender questioning youth’s wellbeing Hillier et al. found that while young gay men *are* more likely to experience “heterosexist abuse” on the streets (over 40 %), young queer women were only a little less likely to experience “heterosexist abuse” on the streets (over 30%) (Hillier et al.2010, p.47).

The work of some queer and feminist theorists and mainstream criminologists working in the area came to the conclusion that fear of crime generally followed crime trends (Smith and Torstensson 1997, p.622). Smith and Torstensson’s analysis, however, shows women to be more fearful than men whilst experiencing less crime in public, but “fear” figures by neighbourhood generally mapped onto crime levels. Two main exceptions to this argument were that men’s fear of crime was often lower than would be expected in relation to the occurrence of crimes; women were more fearful of public crimes, although less likely to be victimised in public than in private spaces. One criticism of this literature is that much of it only takes into account the impacts of *criminal* violence, rather than

also including the much more frequent everyday violence and harassment which might also limit people's mobility.

The largest previous qualitative research project of violence against "lesbians" in Victoria is the legal theorist Gail Mason's monograph *The Spectacle of Violence: Homophobia, Gender, and Knowledge*. The research, published in 2001, consisted of interviews with seventy-five women in the state of Victoria (Mason 2001, p. 28). This included forty-seven individual or couple interviews and three focus groups. These interviews took place between 1993 and 1996 (Mason 2001, p.28). As my research interviews took place during 2009 and 2010 there was a thirteen to sixteen year gap between these projects, which makes it possible to observe changes in violence toward lesbians since the earlier research took place. Mason categorised the incidents of violence experienced by her research participants into four "repertoires" of violence (2001, p.43). These repertoires are "Dirt," "Heterosex," "Butch," and "Girl/boy?" (Mason 2001, pp.44-55). Many of her interview participants were denigrated by being called "dirty" or "filthy lesbians" (Mason 2001, pp.44-6). In my research only one interview participant discussed being called a "filthy lesbian." No one in my research described comments or verbal abuse intended to insult lesbians by calling them "butch." This may be because language and repertoires have changed since Mason's research was undertaken, as deviations from gender norms were still met with harassment and violence.

A recent major project relevant to this research is the "Violence, Sexuality and Space" research project, which was conducted in the cities of Manchester and Lancaster in England from 1998 to 2000 (Corteen 2002, p.259). Multiple methods were used in this project, including analysis of media and documents, focus groups, key informant

interviews and surveys (Corteen 2002, p.260). Corteen's analysis begins from the point-of-view that spaces are "heterosexualised" (2002, p.260) or "naturalized through repetitive and regulatory performative acts of both heterosexual desire and gender identities" (2002, p.260). Visibility of lesbians may have increased over previous decades due to media representations (Corteen 2002, p.273), however Corteen argues that most of the representations that were current at the time of writing were of "lesbian chic."

Furthermore, she believes that "[t]he politics of recognition remains rooted in expected gender presentation and the extent to which it deviates from the 'norm' – heterosexual femininity" (Corteen 2002, p.274). This can be taken to mean that there is more awareness of lesbians due to an increase in media representations, but lesbian visibility is related primarily to deviance from or distance from gendered norms of appearance and presentation. Corteen claims that lesbian visibility relies on an "absence" of femininity (2002, p.271). The other key aspect of visibility in Corteen's study was interaction with others who appeared to be lesbians (2002, p.274). This led lesbians in Lancaster to be more likely to attend queer events alone, as they felt they were less likely to be noticed. In contrast to my interview participants, Corteen's focus group participants expressed that they would prefer to be "invisible" in public spaces rather than passing as heterosexual (2002, p.274).

My research findings were similar to Corteen's in this respect, as more "gender deviant" appearing women and transpeople in my research were often subject to more harassment and violence in public than more gender normative appearing women were. On the other hand, women whose appearances were quite gender normative or feminine were likely to become visible as lesbians and were subject to more sexual harassment and abuse when

they were with other lesbians, queer or transpeople, particularly when they were displaying affection. Corteen also expressed that “abuse predicated on gender,” by which she means abuse which is targeted towards one due to their sex, was more likely to be dismissed as trivial by her research participants (2002, p.268). Participants in Corteen’s research distinguished between violence based on sex/gender and violence based on sexuality (2002, pp.267-8).

While there were minor differences in the findings from similar research projects undertaken in the past, my interview participants’ experiences were similar to those of previous queer women interviewed in Melbourne and in the United Kingdom. The interview participants’ comments provide evidence for Corteen’s contention that queer people become more visible in places that are largely heterosexualised. People who deviate from gender norms or who display public affection or proximity to other queers or venues marked as queer stand out from the background of heteronormative space.

When queer people stand out from this space their presence and actions are policed by disapproving looks and comments and sexualised harassment and sometimes physical harassment or intimidation, stalking, threats of violence, and physical violence follow. This in turn leads some queer people to become “responsibilised” subjects and take it on themselves to exercise caution, manage signs of queerness, and refrain from frequenting potentially dangerous areas. When queer people refrain from visiting particular areas or hide visible signs of queer identity, this further entrenches processes of the heterosexualisation of space and creates boundaries between spaces where queer people might be accepted and those where queer identities and same-sex affection is less likely to be tolerated and more likely to be policed. These processes combine with those already

restricting women's movement through spaces, such as those occurring in the City late at night or on late night public transport, which are seen to be unsafe for women. Further, these spatialisation processes are inextricably linked with the processes that serve to create and enforce distinctions between public and private spaces and define acceptable identities and behaviours for each space.

While many queer women expressed some fear, there was a range of emotions expressed ranging from "cautious" to "aware" to "vigilant" to "terrified" or "traumatised," to "angry" and "curious." This suggests that there is a range of fears, sometimes co-existing, that affect queer women in various ways. It was also not uncommon for the interview participants to express anger or resistance, sometimes alongside fear or caution. Participants were also affected by potential violence through having previously experienced violence, or hearing of violence perpetrated on friends. There was a variety of strategies undertaken to create safety or manage threats of violence and these will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **Concluding Remarks**

There were many variables surrounding the experiences of victimisation in public spaces. As was seen in the analysis of the interview data, company was the most frequently discussed variable. Many interview participants had had negative experiences in public spaces when they had been more visible, in that they were recognisable as queer or lesbian when they were with partners or in groups with other queer people. Some of the participants who had experienced the most serious incidents were more easily identifiable when alone as their appearances did not adhere to gendered norms. Alisha, whose

experiences were described above, was sometimes identifiable in public as a transwoman and faced violence. Finlay, who did identify as a woman, but somewhat ambivalently, or not as much as other women, and described aspects of her appearance as “masculine,” was identified as a “dyke” and was also subjected to violence.

Three of the women who were older, in their fifties or sixties, mentioned that they experienced less harassment in public and thought that this might be due to the “invisibilisation” of older women, leading to older women being less likely to be noticed in public. This may be related to sexual assault and harassment being more often experienced, in this sample, by younger women. The two youngest women experienced the greatest amounts of sexual harassment. This finding is similar to the British geographer Rachel Pain’s findings from the survey and interviews she undertook in Edinburgh during the mid 1990s in relation to women’s fear of violent crime. She found that the older women in her survey were less likely to feel scared of physical or sexual attacks by strangers in public (1997, p.240). They were also less likely to change their behaviour in order to avoid such attacks. The younger women who participated in her research said that they were more likely to avoid going out alone at night due to fear of an attack, whereas women over sixty years old were said that they were less likely to modify their behaviour in this way (Pain 1997, p.240)

In this chapter I have aimed to do justice to and share these women’s stories. I have also attempted to contextualise these experiences in relation to quantitative research, which demonstrates the ubiquity of harassment towards queer women. Whilst these types of experience should still be taken seriously by authorities such as police and policy makers, even if they were more isolated experiences, combining individual accounts with data

from larger empirical projects demonstrates that harassment and abuse have been ongoing and regular for queer women, rather than simply the result of “being in the wrong place at the wrong time.” While there are several larger scale quantitative projects, many of which have been cited in this chapter, there are considerably fewer in-depth qualitative accounts such as the one I have offered. These sorts of accounts allow more room to elaborate the context and circumstances in which these types of harassment occur. Whilst survey results must work within the structure of pre-given categories for the collection of information, qualitative research can amass large amounts of information from interviews and then decide on the best manner of categorisation afterwards. This has allowed me to gather rich descriptions of the phenomena under consideration and precluded ruling out information during the collection process that did not fit in with pre-existing categories. I have also been able to examine accounts of violence towards lesbians and queer women from the past in order to ascertain whether the types of abuse have varied. I have found variations in the identity terms of queer women and in the types of verbal abuse which can demonstrate the “frames” or “repertoires” through which queer women are seen by their attackers.

The next chapter will build on the themes in this chapter by elaborating the participants’ responses or “management” strategies related to public places. It will detail how they confront or avoid harassment or circumstances in which they expect violence or harassment to occur. Rather than arguing that these strategies are either useful or ineffective, I will argue that these strategies are imbricated with networks and structures of power. These power structures further social policing and control by delimiting the sorts of behaviours or types of personal presentation seen as acceptable within public

spaces. Resistance or compliance to norms occurs within these limits. Rather than making safety solely a responsibility of the individual to avoid the kinds of circumstances detailed above, the next chapter will present the participants' ideas for strategies for social change aimed at reducing incidents of harassment and violence. I will analyse these suggestions in light of current research aimed at the prevention of harassment and violence. I think it is an important step simply to draw attention to these sorts of experiences, which can often be ignored or sidelined within some liberal discourses that imagine everyone as equal (and sideline incidents of discrimination that might indicate otherwise).

However, I have gone beyond simply drawing awareness to the issue, to provide a series of recommendations. These recommendations draw on the wealth of experience of the interview participants who have been heavily involved in queer and GLBT activism and advocacy personally and professionally and with many other community groups and social causes. Despite the anti-normative stance of much of the queer theoretical perspectives that have influenced this project, I have developed this normative programme in order to specify ways ahead that might not be applicable for all places, institutions or social groups, and certainly would change over time as forms of discrimination or harassment changed and as identities also varied. While I acknowledge that queer women's experience varies, and that queer women themselves vary greatly, I still maintain that it is at least possible to delineate some "negative freedoms" and a potential program of action for countering harassment towards queer-identifying women.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SAFETY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

I want to suggest that fear is felt differently by different bodies in the sense that there is a relationship to space and mobility at stake in the differential organisation of fear itself (Ahmed 2004, p. 68).

So women, if they are to have access to feminine respectability, must either stay at home (femininity as domestication), or be careful in how they move and appear in public (femininity as a constrained mobility). Safety here becomes a question of not inhabiting public space or, more accurately, of not moving through that space alone. So the question of who is fearsome as well as who should be afraid is bound up with the politics of mobility, whereby the mobility of some bodies involves or even requires the restriction of the mobility of others. But the production of “the fearsome” is also bound up with the authorisation of legitimate spaces: for example, in the construction of home as safe, “appropriate” forms of femininity become bound up with the reproduction of domestic space (Ahmed, 2004, p.70).

This chapter will further the discussion of safety first introduced in the previous chapter by exploring queer women’s safety strategies in public places. The main strategies queer women undertook to attempt to ensure safety were avoiding particular places (or frequenting “friendly” places) and minimising expressions of affection to partners or lovers when in public. After exploring these individual safety strategies, the chapter will examine the research participants’ suggestions for creating safer spaces in light of relevant research about safety. There were many suggestions for creating safer places. These included changing broader social attitudes, especially through education, as well as organisational, policy and legal interventions. Subsequently, spatial and design interventions will be discussed. These include the creation of women and queer only spaces. Part of finding solutions to issues of safety involves determining who needs to act to ensure interventions are implemented. I will discuss some of the interview participants’ feelings about responsibility for safety. These will be related to current safety literature about the ascription of blame to particular victims of crime in different ways. Finally, in

order to provide a possible program of action regarding issues of safety for queer women, I will discuss potential strategies based on the interview participants' suggestions and the relevant literature and will make recommendations based on these.

### **Strategies**

While participants' comments and suggestions did not necessarily flow from a particular question in the interview, there were several questions in the interview schedule which were more likely to elicit answers relating to safety strategies and social change. The most relevant questions were:

What kind of places do you prefer to go as a [self-identified label]? What kind of places do you avoid? Is there anything that stops you from using particular public spaces? Are there any things you would like to be able to do in public spaces but don't feel that you can? Can you tell me about a time you avoided doing something in a public space because you are queer? What kinds of issues do you think might need addressing in terms of queer and GLBTI experiences in public spaces? In your opinion, what would be the best ways to address these issues?

Knowledge of violence prevalence, such as the much higher rates of crimes, especially crimes against the person committed by men (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008), have probably engendered particular responses to, for example, coming across large groups of young men in public at night. While this is a stereotype, and particular types of masculinity might be more likely to be associated with criminality, the queer women interviewed seemed particularly inclined to avoid groups of young men, and this may be a valid safety strategy.

Public safety campaigns and advice often reinforce limitations on women's (or queer people's) mobility by suggesting they avoid going out at night alone, for example, or that they should avoid particular places. This, of course, reinforces spatial trends and processes of marking queer people and women as more in place in the private realm. It also engenders distinctions between "undeserving" victims, or those who took the appropriate precautions by adhering to the risk narratives, and those who "put themselves at risk" by not following what often tend to be "common sense" social precautions that aren't anchored in the research on crime prevalence (Stanko & Curry 1997, p.525). It can be argued that more emphasis should be placed on the perpetrators of crimes and harassment than on policing the potential victims as a crime prevention strategy. While the focus would ideally be more on limiting harassment and violence, I suggest that public safety campaigns should draw on queer knowledge and strategies of creating safety, rather than purely being based on what are seen as common sense safety strategies targeted at the general public, or those aimed at heterosexual women.

### **Avoiding Places**

While most participants said that they wouldn't necessarily avoid particular spaces, many had strong preferences of places to go and places they preferred not to frequent. One major reason supplied for these preferences was taste or volition, rather than concerns for safety. Another reason participants gave was that they liked to frequent places with people who identified in similar ways. It is very difficult to discern whether safety concerns were inherent in these choices or not. Social venues may encourage queer clientele who may enjoy socialising with other queer people, but queers may also feel more comfortable in such spaces because there is less chance of uncomfortable or unsafe

encounters, and they may feel like they are able to be affectionate without encountering any problems. In the interviews, it was difficult to distinguish between these factors.

There were also certain places that interview participants avoided because they were generally thought of as unsafe (“King Street at night” was a common response) or they were thought of as unsafe for women in general, rather than for queer-identifying women, such as many areas of the City late at night.

One may recall that Bella’s experiences were discussed briefly in the “Everyday Violence” section of the previous chapter. In this chapter the experiences discussed previously will be reviewed, focusing particularly on Bella’s safety strategies. Her strategies for maintaining her safety included avoiding travelling on public transport at particular times, such as late at night, when there are few other people travelling, and avoiding trains around school time. If she does travel during school times, she retreats to a corner to read a book “and try not to look conspicuous.” She maintains that these issues do not stop her from travelling on trains, however. Loukaitou-Sideris and Fink’s study of public transport providers and their safety initiatives for women travellers found, for example, that women preferred increased police or transport officer or conductor presence rather than technology strategies such as panic alarms or buttons (2009, p.559). They also favoured drivers refusing inebriated travellers (Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink 2009, p.559). Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink also found that fear of crime affected women’s use of public transport as they would often limit their travel to particular routes or modes of transport and only at particular times that they felt were safe (2009, p.557).

Many interview participants were similarly adamant that they would not let worries about safety limit their mobility or choices. The difficulty in distinguishing between

preferences for particular places and avoidance due to safety concerns is evident in the following quote from Bella: “So, during the day, I don’t have issues. I’ll go into most places. I don’t go into pubs because I’m not a pub person, but I think I could be asking for trouble in a pub.” Another strategy Bella uses to maintain her safety is awareness or vigilance. She explains, “You know, a lot of being in public spaces is sort of being aware of your surroundings... and you’re continually on the lookout for who’s around and if you think there’s somebody who might give you a bit of grief, you’re probably wrong a lot of the time, but you don’t take your chances.” Bella seemed to feel more vigilant, possibly, than many of the other interview participants. This may be because she is worried that she will be easily identifiable as a transwoman when travelling alone, whilst some others feel as though they would usually pass as cisgendered or straight.

Erin expressed similar sentiments; she thought that she wouldn’t avoid spaces, but she did feel more vulnerable, especially when travelling in a campervan with her partner. She cites both her experiences as a woman and a lesbian as contributing to her feelings in public places.

...as a woman, I think you’re always conscious in public spaces in terms of potential aggression and violence towards you by the opposite sex, that, to me, is the reality, and probably because I am a bit stereotypical dyke looking, I’m a bit conscious of that as well, so I think, if I was straight, I’d have a different response to public spaces in general, full stop.

Her comments also illustrate the difficulty (discussed above) in distinguishing clearly between preference, social reasons, and safety concerns as motivators for frequenting

particular spaces and avoiding others: “I guess our experience is because we are in a minority, it’s nice to be with other people in the same minority as yourself and it’s also safer to be.” When she was asked whether she would change her appearance, in order to look less like a lesbian in public, she replied that she didn’t think that she would want to change her appearance, but, like Bella, she would also be more aware.

Interviewer: Are there situations where you try not to look so lesbian in public?

There probably has been occasions and that would be an issue of maybe wanting to be accepted, safety, but I try and not do that, I try and live my politics. But maybe, say if I was going to a pub and it was a predominantly straight pub, I may not change my appearance, but I’d certainly be more aware. I try not to, but I can’t say I religiously probably stick to that.

Of the participants who did say that they would specifically avoid certain areas due to concerns around safety and sexuality, Sofia said that she would avoid clubs after hearing of anecdotes of assaults taking place near clubs in the inner northern suburb of Brunswick and the inner southern suburb of Prahran. She thought that, in those areas, queer people were likely to be targeted due to their sexuality. Like other participants, it was difficult to clearly distinguish personal preference motivations for frequenting an area or particular venues from safety concerns. She explains:

I do tend to avoid the *club scene* in the queer community, partly because clubbing just isn’t my thing, but also, just because the awareness is so high, there is sometimes that thing of people going there to target people exiting clubs, or whatever, and that’s been really common for a lot my friends, say in South Yarra,

and it's starting to be an issue in Brunswick, which just feels so *wrong* for me.

Brunswick is like *lesbian Mecca*, but apparently, and that's what we're hearing, is more homophobic violence happening in Brunswick.

Other participants also expressed safety concerns about exiting venues and large-scale queer events, and also fear about increased violence in Prahran and Brunswick, and continuing violence in St Kilda. The participants had heard of others' experiences of violence in Prahran and Brunswick, either directly from friends or through queer networks. Most of those who avoided St Kilda, on the other hand, did so because of personal experiences of violence or harassment in that area. Some participants responded by avoiding particular areas, such as St Kilda or Prahran. Courtney expressed concerns over safety when leaving large events such as the Midsumma festival and carnival. A local lesbian group of which she is a member booked all the chalets at an accommodation provider in Daylesford in order to avoid "hassle" and to feel safer.

...Midsumma, especially, say, Carnival, where it's contained within the garden, and it's like in that space you can do what you want to do, but you move out of that space and it doesn't feel as safe. Whereas, up in Daylesford it feels like the *whole entire town is at least gay friendly*. So there is quite a bit of difference there. The group, because I went with [a local lesbian group] too, we booked out all the chalets that were, I mean there was only four of them, so we had the entire space to ourselves as well. So that was kind of safe. Because sometimes when, I can imagine it's that thing about people speculating whether you're going to be accepted, and had we not had the four chalets and maybe there was a heterosexual couple in one of them, would we run into any sort of hassle there?

Courtney's experiences of safety in the country as compared to feeling under threat in the city may seem counterintuitive as the urban is often imagined as an accepting space, whereas rural areas may be viewed as hostile or intolerant to queer people (Gorman-Murray 2009b, p.72). These sort of perceptions are perhaps also due to an imagined homogenous and conservative rurality, whereas, at least in some areas of New South Wales and Victoria, there are particular rural communities which may not fit these images. In Daylesford, for instance the major employment sector is tourism and most common type of family structure is "couples without children" (Gorman-Murray 2009b, p.75). There is also a much higher proportion of single parents than in other areas in Victoria, perhaps reflecting different gendered and social norms (Gorman-Murray 2009b, p.76).

Women's fear, in Hille Koskela and Rachel Pain's survey and interview based research was often influenced by the reputation of places, as women had heard anecdotes of violence occurring in particular areas (2000, p.275). This is also consistent with the findings of my research, as particular areas were renowned as areas where anti-queer violence or harassment had occurred and these places were either avoided or navigated cautiously. Koskela and Pain found that if crime was lowered in particular areas then women still experienced fear of crime, but it was displaced onto other areas (2000, p.278).

### **Minimising Expression of Affection in Public**

By far the most common strategy for managing the risk of violence in public spaces was to avoid displays of affection, and holding hands in particular. Many participants discussed avoiding holding hands in public in order to avoid potential violence. In many

of the incidents discussed above the participants thought that they were recognisable as lesbians or queer women because they were holding hands with another queer person. Sometimes the avoidance of affection was in order to protect their partner from experiencing violence or feeling unsafe, rather than purely out of concern for their own safety. In some cases, participants felt that their partner(s) were more vulnerable than they were. This was the case in the incident Samantha described, in which she stopped holding hands with a partner, as she felt that her partner needed protecting.

With my ex, I can't remember where we were— we were somewhere in the city and we were just walking along holding hands and there was just like, we saw a group of guys up ahead, so we just like stopped and tried to act like we weren't together just to avoid attention, and I don't know, that just really hit me. It was just like, 'why the fuck should I have to stop that because there's the potential that you guys could like abuse us?' Like, it's just really fucked that they could have that control even from a distance. It was really gross.

Interviewer: What did you think might happen if you kept holding hands?

I didn't expect any violence, or anything. I just expected comments and snide remarks, and just like, maybe getting followed, or something. And I was just like, 'I'm not really in the mood to deal with that right now.' Like, *usually*, I don't know, most cases and stuff, I kind of wouldn't do that, like, I'd just be like '*fuck you!*' and just do whatever, but I don't know, she was a lot kind of— I felt like I needed to protect her more. She was kind of, yeah, fragile. So, I was kind of like, 'Aagh, don't yell at her!'

Interviewer: So it was more coming from your partner that she didn't want to..?

I think it was kind of coming from me that I didn't want her to have to deal with that. Like, I'm kind of not really bothered, myself...

When asked if there were things that she would like to be able to do in public, but couldn't, Sofia also reflected on the difficulty faced by queer people in showing affection in public.

Um, I certainly don't feel that I can constantly walk and feel safe holding hands, being openly affectionate and it really gives me the shits, because it's so accepted for our straight counterparts. It's not even blinked at. I would like to be able to do that and not have [that] niggling thought in the back of my head and not have it seen as purely sexual, you know, flaunting it. We're not flaunting it, we're just being, you know, just [to] be able to be.

She identifies a perception that queer people are "flaunting" their sexuality in public as a barrier to queer self expression and expression of affection in particular. If queer affection is seen as flaunting, or excess, then it is seen as improper behaviour in public, and to be restricted to the private realm. Queer self-expression and affection is seen as sexual, as Sofia says, as queer is a sexual identity. "Straight" is not marked as a sexual identity as it is so commonplace as to be invisible or unremarkable in public, unless the expression of affection is particularly remarkable, such as public sex.

One framework that helps to explain queer women's management of safety by minimising expressions of affection in public is Gregory Herek's concept of "felt stigma" (2007, p.909). Herek acknowledges heterosexism as a "structural manifestation of sexual

stigma” (2007, p.907) which is promulgated through institutions and social discourses. This process creates two assumptions, Herek argues. The first is an assumption of heterosexuality which renders queers invisible and secondly, therefore, when queers do become visible this becomes problematic (due to the assumption of heterosexuality) (Herek 2007, p.907). Working in the United States and surveying “lesbian, gay and bisexual adults,” (2007, p.98) Herek found high levels of enacted stigma, or overt discriminatory or harassing behaviours directed to people on the basis of their sexuality (2007, pp. 908-09) Victims of prejudicial or “hate” or “bias” crimes generally experience higher levels of emotional distress than victims of similar types of crimes that aren’t motivated by prejudice (Herek 2007, p.909) “Felt stigma” is the second type of stigma discussed by Herek. Felt stigma is an awareness that discrimination, harassment or expressions of prejudice can occur in particular situations or circumstances (Herek 2007, p.909). Felt stigma may lead queer people to change their behaviour in order to avoid being the target of “enacted stigma” (Herek 2007, p.909). In Herek’s survey most of the participants demonstrated some “felt stigma” (2007, p.910). While Herek admits that these management strategies can reduce risk, he also cautions that they “significantly disrupt...lives,” “limit...behavioral options, reduce opportunities for social support,” “heighten...psychological distress and increase...risk for physical illness” (Herek 2007, p.910).

Herek presents a convincing framework for understanding behavioural strategies for managing the risk of violence and discrimination. This model, however, seems to imply that prejudice is internalised by the individual from outside institutions and individuals. In a way, felt stigma is almost postulated as a rationalisation or calculation of risk,

whereas alternative formulations, such as Elizabeth Stanko's posit "safekeeping as a technology of the soul." Stanko claims that "safekeeping is performative of respectable femininities" (Stanko 1997, p.489). The "punishment" for not adhering to respectable standards of feminine safekeeping is blame and disapprobation (Stanko 1997, p.489). Queer women may flout respectable femininities purely by not being heterosexual, or by deviating from gender norms. Strategies for behaviour and appearance management in public are constitutive of the possible range of queer identities one can envisage at any point in time. Felt stigma, rather than always a conscious calculation may be an underlying concern that structures the possibilities for behaviour and the expression of identities on an everyday basis.

The structures of blame position women as "responsible" for preventing crime by taking necessary precautions. Women who take these precautions are often rewarded by being seen as "responsible" and "respectable," "good" women, and sometimes rewarded with the protection of men. Nicole Rader's research on "gender and fear management strategies" for married and divorced women showed that women often took men with them when going places, particularly at night, as a safety strategy (2008, p.42). Another strategy used is what Rader terms "fear work transference," where women displaced the responsibility of preventing crime to their husbands (Rader 2008, p.43). This reinforces men's roles as protectors who are equipped to deal with threatening situations (Rader 2008, p.43) and are therefore the natural denizens of public space. This works to create and enforce dichotomous gender roles such as in the "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p.832-33) and "emphasized femininity" frameworks theorised by Raewyn Connell.

When going to spaces of which they felt fearful, many of both the married and the divorced women would enlist a man's company (Rader 2008, p.42). Further, women in marriages with men felt that the men were responsible for fear management and safety strategies (Rader2008, pp.42-3). Without male protection, they often avoided dangerous seeming situations or acted to try to minimise risk. It must be noted that none of the women in Rader's study identified as lesbian. Rader asks

“what about lesbian women, both in and out of relationships? Do they avoid this gendered fear management strategy [male protectors] altogether, taking care of their own fear management strategies or do they depend on other women or even male friends or family members to assist in fear management?” (2008, p.49)

While this was not a specific line of questioning in my own enquiry, it seems that queer women were less likely to request male assistance in navigating spaces perceived as unsafe. Interview participants often felt fearful alone and might sometimes avoid certain places or would go there in groups or couples. They still felt at risk while in couples, however, and were often targeted by men when with a partner.

Although it might seem that there would be little resistance to women blaming men for crime, considering that the majority of crimes against the person are perpetrated by men (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010), Stanko claims that such analyses are often criticised as “reductivist” (1997, p.490). She argues that this is because the “criminology of the other” demonises particular types of men, rather than recognizing men's violence as a wider social problem (Stanko 1997, p.490).

I would also claim that this is due to an inherent conflict in liberal criminal justice and discourses of “equality” in which risk and responsibility are often portrayed as equal for all members of society when this is really not the case. It is seen as unfair to single out a particular sector of society (men) for disproportionate violence. At the same time it is often taken for granted that women are more vulnerable, especially sexually (Hollander 2001, p.85). Hollander also found that her participants saw people with a homosexual identity as more vulnerable (2001, p.98).

Sara Ahmed argues that fear is not an affect that simply passes between bodies (2004, p.63). White fear “works through and on the bodies of those who are transformed into its subjects as well as its objects (Ahmed 2004, p.62). The act of reading black bodies as menacing sets them apart from white bodies (Ahmed 2004, p.63). My interview participants revealed a racialised fear of others. Sometimes it was revealed through naming the perpetrators of violence or harassment as belonging to a particular ethnic group, and at other times the interview participants assumed that people of different cultures to theirs (the majority of the interview participants were Caucasian Australians) would be more likely to be intolerant to queer women more than Caucasian Australians, despite no evidence to support these ideas. In this way, embodied practices of social differentiation, combined with fear narratives that support and entrench social group divisions and divisions of space can engender fear or prejudice against particular social groups that are assumed to be intolerant.

## Creating Safety

Many of the interview participants were very active in voluntary or paid positions in the queer community or other organisations advocating for social change. In order to draw on their considerable experience, participants were asked which issues they thought might need addressing in terms of queer or lesbian experiences in public spaces. This generally led to a discussion of how they thought that these social issues could be ameliorated. Many participants thought that the issues of violence, harassment and discrimination needed to be addressed. While most participants considered that some actions ought to be taken regarding queer, lesbian and trans safety, their opinions differed regarding ascription of responsibility for safety and risk management.

The most common response was that they could be changed through “education,” although not all participants were certain how this education might be implemented. There were differing discourses surrounding who was responsible for instigating this social change. Responses have been divided into four broad categories: change within organisations and change led by organisations, broader social change, and change from within the queer community. There may be a slight overlap between these categories, particularly as discussion of change in queer organisations fits into multiple classifications.

The recommendations made by participants in the *Coming Forward Report* were very similar to some of the recommendations made by interview participants in this project. Like the participants in this project, they recommended “legislative reforms,” “social reforms” (Leonard et al. 2008, p.63), “inclusive policy” (Leonard et al. 2008, p.64), and

“improved reporting” (Leonard et al. 2008, p.65). Some other suggestions that interview participants in this project had not considered that were suggested by the *Coming Forward Report* were “GLBT sensitive mainstream service delivery” and “GLBT specialist services” (Leonard et al 2008, pp.64-5).

### **Changing Social Attitudes**

Some participants thought that change needed to occur on a broader social level and that social attitudes needed to be targeted. Not all participants were sure how safety could be increased or offered interventions. Some participants, such as Poppy, thought that attitudes would get better over time. Finlay, by contrast, saw violence as the major issue that needed changing, but didn’t feel optimistic about safety for queer people in the future. When I asked Finlay “So what kinds of issues do you think might need addressing in terms of queer and gay, lesbian, bisexual trans or intersex experiences in public spaces?”, she replied:

Well, the violence. Yeah. But, I think that— I think that those kinds of attitudes are fostered on a broader social level by the way that sexuality is *treated* from a very young age. And I think that if consideration of *queer* issues is ever kind of canvassed in a positive light, it’s always as an *add on*, as an extra, and as an outsider kind of point of view, rather than being integrated into, say, sex ed, or whatever. You know, if it’s covered it’s like this other thing, yeah. But I don’t know, I don’t know how hopeful I feel about that stuff.

A recent report on sexual education teaching for secondary school students showed that sexual orientation was covered by eighty per cent of teachers. However, in general, this

topic was not addressed until years nine and ten of high school. The report found that a quarter of teachers were unsure of school policies on sexual education teaching and 12 per cent didn't follow a policy (Smith et al. 2011, p.6). The faculty or curriculum area had the strongest influence on determining the content of sexual education classes rather than following a "whole of school approach" (Smith et al. 2011, p.6). While only 15.5 per cent of teachers said they didn't teach about sexual orientation or same-sex attraction, 25.5 per cent said they did not cover sexual acts other than intercourse (Smith et al. 2011, p.23). Queer students claimed that they did not find that sexual education was interesting or relevant to them (Smith et al. 2011, p.51). The Victorian Government's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's resource *Catching on Early—Sexuality Education in Victorian Primary Schools* does explicitly address sexual orientation and gender diversity and suggests that that "we begin to include and represent sexual diversity and gender identity more accurately in relationships" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2011, p.22). The lesson plans contained within this resource do not seem to include mention of sexual or gender diversity, however.

There are training programs for schools on addressing sexual orientation and preventing harassment and bullying, such as the *Pride and Prejudice* program, which is a six-week course on this issue. Such programs are taught by individual schools on an opt-in basis. The Safe Schools Coalition consists of around eighty schools in Victoria who are dedicated to making the school environment inclusive for queer students. The member schools are mostly secondary schools, but there are two primary schools participating. They have produced resources such as the *Schools Audit: Staff* and the *Schools Audit:*

*Student*<sup>34</sup> which list strategies for ensuring an accepting environment for queer students. They include items such as “Are gay, lesbian and transgender people portrayed respectfully in your subject area?” and “Can students borrow books/magazines from the library that include gay and lesbian characters or discuss sexual diversity and access websites that offer support?”, for example (Safe Schools Coalition Victoria *np*). The Safe Schools Coalition website lists a number of resources, many of which are from the United States based organisation The Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). The GLSEN also produces materials for primary school aged children, such as *Ready, Set, Respect!*, which explores social differences and primarily focuses on addressing or preventing homophobic bullying. This resource includes many detailed lesson plans on this topic.

It appears that there are a large number of in-depth teaching resources about addressing harassment and bullying for queer and trans youth and a number of organisations in Victoria involved in research, resource development and providing support for queer youth. Many of these organisations receive funding from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The Department’s own resources, such as *Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools* and *Catching on Early* only offer brief guidance in relation to education around sexual diversity and queerphobic bullying in schools. Participants in the Australian Human Rights Commission’s Consultation *Addressing Sexual Orientation and Sex/Gender Identity Discrimination* suggested that education on sexual orientation and gender identity should be built into the national curriculum (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011, p.37-38). The *Sexuality Education in*

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<sup>34</sup> A very similar resource is published by the Australian Research Centre for Sex, Health and Society as the *Sexual Diversity in Schools Checklist*.

*Australian Secondary Schools 2010* report also recommends that sexual health education should be included in the national curriculum (Smith et al. 2011, p.50).

If sexuality and gender diversity were to be addressed in the national curriculum, the integration of these issues into the sexual education curriculum should draw on the excellent resources produced by organisations such as GLSEN. Sexuality and gender also need to be addressed in other areas of the curriculum, to ensure that courses are not heterosexist and do not just provide examples or representations of only heterosexual and normatively gendered people. Further, queerphobic bullying and harassment should be addressed at a primary school level. Savin-Williams and Diamond' found that same-sex attraction emerged at the age of around ten years for their research participants (2000, p.622). If same-sex attraction and diverse gender identities begin to emerge at primary school and there is no guidance on these issues or messages against queerphobic bullying, then it is likely that young people may receive negative messages about themselves and their sexualities and gender identities.

Samantha discussed an intervention aimed at changing social attitudes being put into practice as a result of increasing violence in the suburb of Brunswick. My interview with Samantha took place in late 2009, when there had been increased concern about attacks occurring in areas of Melbourne, particularly Brunswick and Prahran. A community group was set up to combat the violence. An anti-violence working party was also initiated by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby.

...there's been a group started up, it was on Facebook, called Anti-Homophobe [sic] Violence in Brunswick Group [sic]. And we had one meeting- no, they had two. I went to one, the first one there was just a couple of people that initiated the idea, but we were just talking about kind of raising the profile of queer people in the area just to kind of start a grassroots thing of support and asking to put up signs saying, you know, that like 'homophobia is not tolerated,' 'this is a diverse community,' like 'fuck you!' pretty much, put up in all the shops in Sydney Road. I'm not sure if anyone's instigated that yet and we've just made heaps of stickers, and been stickering, like 'homophobia's not welcome in Brunswick,' 'keep it off our street' stuff like that. Just putting those everywhere and also like at nights at Orlando and Bambi [queer club nights] and stuff where the attacks have been happening. Increased security and just like letting people know what's going on and making sure people aren't going home alone and just grassroots stuff like that and they were talking about having a campaign as well, but I think that's less important, that's not as instrumental right now.

Creating and sustaining attitudinal change is a very challenging task. If transgressing heteronormatively gendered roles and behaviours results in violence and social sanctions for queer people then clearly there needs to be sustained primary prevention work undertaken. Similar to work undertaken to challenge rape myths (such as the work of Potter et al. (2011) in the United States, for example), such an intervention could focus on challenging myths about gender diversity and sexuality.

### **Organisational, Policy, and Legal Interventions**

Other responses to the question “Which issues do you think need to be addressed in terms of queer experiences in public spaces?” focussed on the strategies organisations could undertake to create more inclusive (and by implication “safer”) environments. The organisations targeted for social change initiatives ranged from local councils and local government areas, police, organised religion, queer organisations, including radio stations and media organisations, community health organisations, and schools. These were both “mainstream” organisations and queer community organisations. Some answers about safety in organisations were in response to the question “How do you feel, as a queer person/ [self-identified label] when you are in public spaces?” whilst others were mainly in response to the question “Tell me about a time when you’ve felt like there has been conflict between different types of people in the gay or queer community?”

Erin and Alisha discussed “interventions at the macro level” (Alisha). They advocated for larger scale and “top-down” interventions to address negative queer experiences in public spaces. Alisha thought that community leaders needed to combat homophobia and cited some examples of this occurring and Erin discussed an example of a queer mayor in her local government area.

Oh, look, we’ve got to do work, let’s say, from the big overall level down.

Education still needs to happen on GLBTI to get rid of underlying queerphobic attitudes. And, I mean all the evidence for the last ten years, for example, shows transpeople are ten times more likely to be physically assaulted, it’s about twenty-five percent versus two percent, or something for the average population. So, there’s the top, the big macro level, that needs to happen, and then working with

local government areas to make sure they're safe and people feel safe and that's across the board whether it's City of Moreland, or Darebin out to East Gippsland Shire, that everyone is entitled to feel safe, so there's that sort of policy level. Making sure that leaders, community leaders of all sorts stand up to homophobia. I mean, it was good recently that when- well, what wasn't good was Neil Mitchell tried to beat up on Simon Overland being pictured with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence at Pride March.

Interviewer: I didn't hear about that one.

Oh, it was 'why should he be pictured with men dressed as women?' which, as you know, what's the big deal about men dressed as women, anyway? But he was trying to beat up on it, oh, it was the same day as the anniversary of the bushfires. But, to their credit, the Premier's Office came out within an hour of him starting that and saying 'No, we are a diverse community and Simon Overland, and for that matter, Rob Hulls had a right to be there'. And they were *really* firm and assertive and put that back in its place and that's *really* positive that that's coming from the top. I think that sets a good example (Alisha).

But, it means we start to take over some of the space...*and* I guess the City of Hobsons Bay, because the Assistant Mayor is part of the GLBTI community is pushing for change and maybe we might get a rainbow flag up the flagpole... So he's very pro GLBTI, he's very open about his journey, so he's ran a night talking about how we could make the City of Hobson's Bay more queer friendly (Erin).

Other macro-level interventions included criminalising discriminatory or hate speech,<sup>35</sup> increasing awareness of the Anti-Violence Project and changing police behaviour. The Anti-Violence Project is an initiative that allows queer people to report incidences of violence or harassment online, rather than taking their concerns directly to police. Samantha brought this up as she believed that police were unsupportive of queer people's safety concerns. Samantha did not feel trusting of police and Olivia had experienced negative comments regarding her sexuality from police. In contrast, Eloise had contacted a Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer to report the threat of violence to herself and her partner as she mentioned when discussing her experience of being physically and verbally threatened in the "Threats and Verbal Abuse" section in the previous chapter. She did not mention any negative experiences in relation to her contact with the police. Finlay had stated that police had been helpful, but had thought that perhaps this was because she was a female in a fight with a male and that this was due to normative gendered assumptions that she needed protecting. Erin and Samantha's suggestions for interventions are detailed below:

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<sup>35</sup> There is much debate in queer communities internationally about the value and necessity of hate crime legislation. The US website *Against Equality*, for example, a website that argues against homonormative queer politics has published an anthology critiquing hate crime legislation. They are concerned about hate crime laws supporting "state sponsored violence" and the "expansion of the prison industrial complex" (*Against Equality np*). As incarceration is clearly racialised, gendered and classed, they argue that this legislation serves to bolster the same kinds of social hierarchies that work to sanction violence against queers (*np*). Similarly, Sally Kohn argues that "Hate crime legislation, rather than critiquing the premise of selective protection, merely argues for an expansion of the class of valued people. Rather than challenging the administration of justice by favored/ disfavored classes that is the basis for the marginalization of LGBT people in society generally, hate crime legislation in fact reinforces the hierarchy of societal valuing and privileging of certain groups over others (2001-2002, p.260)." On the other side of the debate, it is argued that it is necessary to recognise hate crimes and enforce higher penalties than other similar crimes as the effects on the victims are more severe (Herek et al. 1999, p. 951).

...a much denigrated minority by the Catholic Church, our illustrious (not *mine*) Pope. Some of the things I think someone like him [says] incites violence against us and I think he should be charged with a criminal charge personally (Erin).

...I think the *police* need changing, that people need to feel safer to... I think like the violence, Anti-Violence Project thing, that needs to be made a lot more public that that's another option to reporting to police cos [of] so many attacks and stuff. Like, I know they've been really increasing in my area and stuff like that and people just don't report them because the fucking like police and everything are just so homophobic (Samantha).

The findings of the *Coming Forward Report* and its participants' opinions on how to engender social change were similar to the opinions of the interview participants in this project as discussed previously in this section. This is perhaps because the report focuses on potential government, policing and health organisational changes that would address "*the underreporting of heterosexual violence and same sex partner abuse in Victoria.*" In addition, the report used survey methodology, so the potential options are circumscribed, although there was some space in some of the questions for answers of up to six lines long (Leonard et al. 2008, p67-74). Similar to interview participants in this project, the report suggested "legal provisions against heterosexual violence, harassment and vilification" (Leonard et al. 2008, p.63) as well as "full legal recognition" of GLBT people, couples and families (Leonard et al. 2008, p.63). On a policy level, the report recommended including "sexual orientation and gender identity" (Leonard et al.2008, p.64) in "anti-discrimination, social inclusion and diversity policies" (Leonard et al. 2008, p.64) throughout the government, the state police and agencies that deal with violence and

abuse (Leonard et al. 2008, p.64). It also recommends sensitivity training for staff in such organisations.

The *Coming Forward Report* found that eighty-three percent of survey participants had heard of GLLOs (Leonard et al. 2008, p.54). There was a very high level of knowledge regarding this program. Most people who were surveyed, however, preferred to contact GLLOs by phone, and very few preferred to report crimes face to face or at a police station (Leonard et al. 2008, p.55). While there was a high level of awareness of liaison officers, a communications strategy was recommended including greater use of online advertising of this program on relevant websites and more marketing to young people who were the least likely to be aware of this program (Leonard et al. 2008, p.65). It was also suggested that information and “referral protocols” should be developed for victims by police working with GLBT organisations and mainstream services (Leonard et al. 2008, p.65). Sensitivity training was also recommended. A final recommendation in this area was to increase GLLO presence “outside formal police settings including at GLBT organisations and at community events” (Leonard et al. 2008, p.65).

These recommendations are consistent with Jenness and Grattet’s study of “Hate Crime Policy and Law Enforcement Practice” in California. Hate crime laws are often seen to be symbolic (Jenness and Grattet 2008, p. 18) but not practically enforceable or “instrumental.” Jenness and Grattet found, however, that the distinction between “symbolic” and “instrumental” was unnecessarily framed as a binary opposition, when there were many circumstances in which these types of laws had both effects. They outlined a typology of law enforcement contexts. In the first context there was no demand for this type of action from groups, low social conflict in the local community, low

community integration with police, and no explicit policies regarding hate crimes (Jenness and Grattet 2008, p.521). In the second context, again, there was low community demand on police, but some “intergroup conflicts.” Because there was little community demand, there were no policies in this area. In this context there were some “intergroup conflicts,” and incidents are recorded instrumentally as hate crimes, despite the lack of policy in this area (Jenness and Grattet 2008, p.521). In the third condition, the community and the police are highly integrated and therefore there is a demand for more “symbolic laws.” In this scenario, however, there are no community tensions and no need to enforce the laws. In the final condition, there are strong community organisations able to voice concerns on behalf of the community, and law enforcement agencies that are “open to community influence.” There are also “community tensions” that would lead to the symbolic laws being enforced (Jenness and Grattet 2008, p.521). This fourth scenario, according to Jenness and Grattet, is the ideal scenario in which “symbolic” hate crime laws and police policies could translate into instrumental action (2008, p.521). The instrumental action particularly referred to by Jenness and Grattet is recording hate crimes as hate crimes (presumably rather than as general assaults or other crimes).

Schilt and Westbrook, in their study of transmen’s transitions in workplaces in Texas and California found that colleagues were likely to be unsupportive or hostile to workplace transitions even when they had worked unproblematically with that colleague for many years (2009, p.460), unless their transition was supported by management. Workplace transitions were more successful and accepted by colleagues when supported by workplace authority figures (Schilt and Westbrook 2009, p.460). This gives support to the need for organisational and government policies to be queer and trans inclusive and

include measures against harassment and vilification based on gender and /or sexuality as recommended in the *Coming Forward Report*. Further, it is consistent with the arguments of many of the interview participants in this project regarding both queer community organisations, who do not have policies that are accepting of sexual and gender diversity, and mainstream organisations, who may not have any specific policies regarding gender and sexuality. Erin's comments about the Assistant Mayor and the Attorney General also demonstrate the impact that can be had when those in authority create queer positive policies and speak out against discriminatory statements.

### **Spatial Interventions**

Other comments concerned specific spatial interventions. The most common issue was in relation to transpeople and safe access to toilets. The first issue regarding queer experiences in public spaces that Samantha discussed was in relation to gendered toilets (separate toilets for males and females). She described an incident where a trans friend felt that she needed to use male toilets in order to avoid harassment and found it really demeaning. Lauren recalled a similar incident when she was with a trans friend. The implicit action suggested in Samantha's interview comments would be perhaps to get rid of "gendered toilets" and replace them with unisex toilets, as she asks "Why do you need gendered toilets?"

I think toilets are a massive issue. It seems kind of petty. I know a lot of— I have a lot of genderqueer friends and trans friends and stuff and I just think it's really fucked that they have to...like, I was with a friend of who's a transwoman in Camberwell one time, and she felt that she had to use male toilets at a venue that we were out to, to not get harassed or abused and it was just *so* fucked. I just saw

how much it affected her to have to go and do that. Like it was just so demeaning and traumatic for her to do that and I'm just like, 'Why is it, why do you need gendered toilets?' (Samantha)

Like, I remember going with the last person who I was seeing who identified as trans, and we ended up going to see Monster Trucks in Ballarat [laugh]. Yeah, it was pretty funny. And just that whole dilemma. Well, like *for them* around which toilet they used in a setting like that, and all that sort of thing. Like, and it came down to, 'I'm going to go to the female toilets, because it's probably *safer*. But, at the same time, yeah, and just ended up being really conscious in that sort of environment. But, I probably would have not even considered that stuff much had I been there with different people, or on my own. But, yeah. I don't know. It was just, you know, certain places where it doesn't feel friendly (Lauren).

Erin's spatially focussed interventions were of a different nature. Her comments were in relation to the high profile queer advocacy of the Mayor of Hobson's Bay as discussed previously. She expressed an opinion that more queer people in spaces would lead to a greater sense of safety and an ability to claim the space: "I guess having more of us in a space obviously means we can claim it more or feel safer in it, and so I think that's the start and then that means that maybe some of us open businesses, not that I'm that way inclined. But it means we start to take over some of the space..."

Only one participant in my research mentioned enhanced street lighting as a possible solution, but many experienced fear in public places at certain times, particularly at night. Koskela and Pain, in their work on women's fear and modifications to the built

environment, do not favour built environment changes such as street lighting or building designs centred around women's safety as a major safety strategy. In a comparative study of Edinburgh and Helsinki, they found that women in Edinburgh were not supportive of this strategy to combat fear of crime, while there was some support in Helsinki.

Edinburgh and Helsinki have different crime rates and different levels of fear of crime, with both factors being higher in Edinburgh (Koskela & Pain 2000, p.272). They also found that the types of environments that women fear differed in contradictory ways; some were light and open, whilst others were dark and enclosed (Koskela & Pain 2000, pp.273-4). Koskela and Pain contend that spatial interventions do not address the systemic gendered issues that contribute to women's fear (2000, p.270). Although their work seemed quite unsympathetic to spatial interventions on the whole as a method for reducing fear of crime, they tentatively conceded that spatial interventions might have useful effects in some circumstances, but these effects would be "local and partial" (Koskela & Pain 2000, p.279).

Koskela and Pain's research provides a necessary caution about taking into account the social and structural causes of fear of crime and reminds one that fear structures spaces as much, or more than, spaces structure fear (2000, p.279). While this is an important issue to remain aware of, there are some arguments for local and microspatial fear reduction strategies. Wesely and Gaarder conducted a study of women's fear in a large public park with walking trails and an extended bushland area in the United States. Some of their interview participants suggested increased patrolling by rangers as a strategy for reduction of women's fear (Wesely & Gaarder 2004, p.658). They concluded that both technology and human surveillance strategies detracted from the women's feelings of

solitude in the natural environment. They claimed that this was because unwanted surveillance such as staring, whistling or catcalls, was substituted for surveillance by officials for protection (Wesely & Gaarder 2004, p.658). They argued that these safety strategies relied on “a system of social control and surveillance” (Wesely & Gaarder 2004, p.658) and, as I have previously argued, furthers “gendered constructions of fear of violence and vulnerability” (Wesely & Gaarder 2004, p.658). Nonetheless Wesely and Gaarder suggested, in their meeting with the park’s management, at the conclusion of their research project, both “traditional options” (2004, p.660) “call boxes, street lights, ranger patrols” and alternative strategies such as more women rangers patrolling the trails, female only hikes and trail runs, which would provide an orientation to the park and its safety features (2004, p.660).

The previous ideas for creating social change that would result in increased feelings of safety for queers focused mainly on generally accessed social spaces. These could be seen as spaces that are inhabited by a majority of heterosexual people, or that don’t have a history of being associated with the queer community. Next I will discuss the management of feelings of unsafety within queer public spaces. I will also detail ideas expressed by interview participants for creating a greater sense of safety within queer organisations, spaces or venues. Lauren thought that within the “gay scene” there needed to be more understanding of shared battles between people who identified differently. Alisha found that organisations that purported to be “trans-friendly” didn’t have a great practical knowledge of how a trans-friendly organisation might work and that bullying occurred within transgender groups as well.

Well, look, maybe if I start with kind of gay scene, or whatever, spaces... I think a bit more openness to understanding that there's a lot of *shared* kind of battles. Like, however people identify, there's actually a lot of shared battles kind of in all that stuff. And that, because maybe there's a bit more acceptance around someone identifying as like a gay man or lesbian woman, doesn't mean that there's not some kind of shared issues around someone who identifies as trans, or so forth (Lauren).

True understanding of diversity is critical in any setting; making sure that you consult with people from the communities you claim to represent and not assuming for them. Like an organisation that will do a survey and put transgender as a sexual orientation and say 'Oh, we're trans friendly.' Looking out for the warning signs, 'Oh, but we've got a transgender person involved with this.' That doesn't mean a thing. It depends what the dominant culture is, and organisations that value people, in a way, don't say that" (Alisha).

In fairness, there are some trans social and support groups run by people who really have bullying type attitudes- their way or the highway, they're *not* safe, either. And because there are some transgender activists like that, in a way, some parts of cyberspace aren't safe where you have to deal with them. And that's a difficult one, there's so few, but do you have a right to say 'Well, if I think someone's behaviour's poor, will I not work with them because I don't feel safe?' particularly after you've tried, as best as you can, to communicate with them?' (Alisha)

There were a range of opinions regarding queer spaces, with one participant regarding them as not necessarily safer or more dangerous than majority heterosexual spaces to others feeling relieved that they wouldn't be abused in those spaces. Samantha discussed her university queer space's "Safer Spaces Policy", which outlined the types of behaviours expected in the queer space. The university queer space was also accepting of heterosexual students, but Samantha felt safer because there were clear rules.

The queer space here is really amazing, like there's safer spaces policies and heterosexual people are allowed to come in and stuff, but there's just lots of *clear* rules about what *is* acceptable and what isn't. Yeah, I feel really safe in there and just feel like it's my space and I can just be myself.

Interviewer: So, with the safer spaces policy, is it explicit and on the wall?

Yeah, it is, which is, actually, something's really fucked about it at the moment, cause after QC [Queer Collaborations Conference] the Queer Officer was a lot more aware of gender fluidity and respecting people's genders and stuff, and sexualities, and how like they're not necessarily obvious and put on the wall 'please don't make any gender and sexuality assumptions about anyone in this room. And just the other day someone came and wrote on it in red text 'get over it', which I got really angry about. But other than that, fuck attitudes like that, like usually there's stuff on the walls that say things like that and there's lists of questions for straights, like, not to ask queer people, because it's fucked and stuff like that. So, yeah, it really is explicit and I think that makes it a good space when people respect that.

Many of the spatial interventions mentioned above by the interview participants were dissimilar to the spatial interventions discussed by Koskela and Pain, Loukaitou-Sideris and Fink and Wesely and Gaarder. The spatial interventions described by participants concerned semi-public spaces such as businesses and queer or women's spaces. Within semi-public spaces such as queer and women's spaces the informal surveillance processes discussed by Wesely and Gaarder are initiated by the queer people or women within the space. This can lead to social exclusion as discussed above, when some types of queer people are excluded from spaces, such as those which aren't inclusive of trans or intersex people. Safer Spaces policies function as both policy and spatial interventions by delimiting a set of norms for a particular space. This can also be protective, however, by allowing people to monitor others who are entering the space, to protect it from incidents of vandalism (as described above) and to initiate policies that prescribe a set of behavioural norms. The "ownership" of space described by Erin above also provides for a sort of informal surveillance of an area by either the business management, or by bystanders.

Women's spaces were also mentioned and there were differing opinions regarding safety and women's-only spaces. Sofia mentioned women's only spaces as being somewhere where she felt very safe as she wouldn't face harassment by men. On the other hand, Lauren was ambivalent about the need for these spaces, and didn't personally feel comfortable in them. These differences in response to women's only spaces may be due to positionality, and how one is aligned within the queer community. Someone who clearly identified as a woman and endorsed a binary view of sexes might feel comfortable

in such a space, whereas someone who identified as queer and took that to mean a politicised challenging of a two sex model might not feel so comfortable.

I understand the need for women only spaces and for men only spaces sometimes too, but I don't feel very comfortable necessarily within them. So, they don't fit very well for me and they feel—sorry, *I* can understand why some people feel the need for them. I don't personally feel the need for them. Like, I think that you should be able to feel safe in all sorts of ways. But I can understand, you know. But, as actually, I think a lot of people- oh, I don't know. I think it sometimes gets misused. So, I don't know- so places, like spaces like that New Year's Eve at Shebar, like, I just did not feel right. But it was really hard to put my finger on it, because it wasn't like it was really evident behaviour or whatever, but just even the mix of people there (Lauren).

...I do certainly feel safer in women only spaces, when they're created. So, some of the events we hold here [community health workplace] are women only and that just feels like you're pretty much guaranteed that you're not going to get hassled (Sofia).

### **Responsibility for Social Change**

There were also differences in the interview participants' opinions regarding responsibility for social change. They presented different ideas about who should have decision making power in addressing queer issues (such as whether governments, community organisations, or grassroots campaigns should address these issues) and perceptions of who ought to take responsibility for social change. Their opinions varied

with regard to the degree in which they thought that responsibility was more of an individual/ intragroup responsibility or a broader structural matter. A related issue that emerged in terms of responsibility was whether they saw queer people as responsible for addressing issues of safety and violence, or whether it was seen as a broader social responsibility. This raises questions similar to those raised in the literature on violence against women about “victim blaming” or ascribing responsibility for safety management or the reduction of violence to the victims of the violence rather than the perpetrators or society in general. It also raises issues concerning safety advice manuals and brochures as these may simply provide advice that queer people manage their own safety through altering their behaviour in order to be less likely to be targeted by potential perpetrators; this places the responsibility of managing the risk of violence at a personal or intragroup level. Such advice also may not draw on existing queer safety management strategies, relying instead on “commonsense” or general strategies that will not necessarily protect queer people.

Recently, debates have intensified in Australia around victim blaming, particularly in the wake of the murder of a young woman who was walking home late at night in the inner Melbourne suburb of Brunswick. The media coverage generated a series of “warnings,” particularly on social media sites, which instructed women on the correct behaviour to follow in order to avoid becoming a victim of crime. While the victim was still missing, journalists began speculating on the victim’s character and whether her lifestyle or her choices to walk home at night were justified (Ford 2012, *np*). This sparked a large scale debate, particularly online, and generated articles such as the feminist writer and social commentator Clementine Ford’s, entitled “Can We Please Stop the Victim Blaming?” I

would argue that victim blaming serves to further restrict certain groups of potential victims such as women and queers, by restricting their behaviour further. In order to feel that they will be safe, women are warned not to venture out alone at night and queer people are admonished for “flaunting” their sexuality. These attitudes can be linked back to traditional binary models of sex/gender which serve to entrench gender norms and require that those who transgress these norms are penalised.

The radical feminist criminologist Elizabeth Stanko analysed community safety information for women from sixty-six different agencies in the United Kingdom. One main theme she found in the advice given was “advice about how to walk on the street, carry one’s handbag, and how to travel by car or public transport” (Stanko 1996, p.11). Police advice, she claims tries to simultaneously, and contradictorily, reassure women that the risk of violence is not as high as they might think, and also offers advice to minimise the risk such as places to avoid, what to carry and what not to carry (rape alarms, ostentatious handbags) (Stanko 1996, pp.14-15) Stanko argues that this creates a “responsible woman” who plans and strategises daily routines and activities in order to avoid harm (1996, p.15). This “deserving and unfortunate victim is the legitimate recipient of care” (Stanko 1996, p.15). Similarly, she argues that there is a “responsible homosexual” deployed in anti-homophobic violence campaigns (Stanko and Curry 1997, p.516). Stanko and Curry claim that the safety advice produced for queer people is “strikingly similar” to advice produced for women and people of colour for avoiding men’s violence and racist violence respectively (1997, p.520). In other words, safety advice is rather generic, despite the unique contexts and different causes of different

types of violence. This advice does not tend to take into account the kinds of strategies that are already used by queer people, or, in fact, women (Stanko and Curry 1997,p.525).

The safety advice on the “Community Safety- Preventing Homophobic Violence” section on the New South Wales Police<sup>36</sup> website (2012) follows this pattern of providing quite generic advice, with the added queer specific caution “If you are going out and “frocking up” for the night (for example in “drag” or something revealing), wear something over your outfit such as a jacket or overcoat, or consider changing at the destination” (New South Wales Police 2012, *np*). They also suggest catching taxis and arranging to meet with friends and walking to the destination as a group (New South Wales Police 2012, *np*). While there are specific advice pages for different social groups or sectors of society, the information given is often of a very similar nature. For instance, the following is advice on “preventing” homophobic violence and below is advice on what to do if you experience religious or racial vilification.

### **What to do if you are attacked**

Verbal harassment may be a prelude to an attack. It can be upsetting and embarrassing to be called offensive names, and it can also be a reflexive response to return the insult. If you are a victim of assault you should:

- Be assertive, but not aggressive.
- Remain calm.
- If trouble starts, yell to attract attention to your situation.

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<sup>36</sup> The same advice was previously posted on the Victoria Police website, but the specific page about Preventing Homophobic Violence has been replaced by a page about “Prejudice Motivated Crime.”

- Create distance between yourself and danger by running to safety  
(New South Wales Police 2012, *np*).

Compare this advice with Victoria Police’s advice on preventing racial and religious vilification:

**What to do if you are a victim of serious racial or religious vilification involving threats of violence?’**

Serious vilification may involve threats of violence. This can be both upsetting and frightening. Should you become a victim of serious racial or religious vilification, you should:

- remain assertive but not aggressive
- stay calm
- if the situation escalates, yell to attract attention to yourself
- create distance between yourself and danger, by running to safety  
(Victoria Police 2012, *np*).

While generic advice may not necessarily be ineffective, it may contribute towards “responsibilising” behaviour if it is directed towards particular sectors of the population. Queer specific advice, such as noted above, about covering up visible signs of queerness may be effective, as removing visible signs of queerness may result in queer people passing or being not as likely to be heteronormatively policed as they are not standing out as much in the space. However, as well as being potentially effective, it functions to eliminate visible signs of gender deviant behaviour, at least at night time. If there are less

visibly gender deviant people in night time spaces then perhaps these spaces would be even less safe for those remaining. On the other hand, other researchers argue that those intending to target queers frequent areas where there are known to be queer people, and that queer people are more likely to be attacked in places known to be queer friendly, as there are greater populations of queer people in those areas (Harry 1990, p.355). Kevin Berrill's metaanalysis of anti queer violence in the US found that gay men were more likely to experience violence in "gay-identified" public areas, but concluded that this was not the case for lesbians (Berrill 1990, p.280). Also in the United States, Rebecca Stotzer found there were more reports of violence against LGB people in LGB neighbourhoods (Stotzer 2010, p.988) although she concluded that it was not the percentage of victims who identified as LGB in these neighbourhoods that accounted for the risk (Stotzer 2010, p.1001).

My interview participants mentioned that they were more identifiable when with others, due to either signs of affection, or partners' or friends' visibly queer appearances. The most comprehensive research carried out on the question of queer safety, the "Violence, Sexuality and Space Research Project", undertaken in Manchester and Lancaster in England, also found that their queer participants felt that they were more easily identifiable when they travelled with other queer people (Corteen 2002, pp.270-1, p.275). They might display a few signs of queerness when alone; the research mentioned short hair (Corteen 2002, p.271), for example. When alone, they might be read as heterosexual or not really stand out, but when they were with many other queer people with other signs of not conforming to heterosexist gender standards they were more recognisable as queer (Corteen 2002, p.271). On the other hand, it has been pointed out that, if travelling alone,

and recognisable because of one's own visibly queer appearance, or because of being seen leaving a club or being otherwise assumed to be queer, then one may be subject to a more serious attack, as there are no others around to defend the person or call for medical or police assistance. I would not then, argue that queer people should be cautioned to travel alone, rather that more research needs to be done on the specific circumstances surrounding queerphobic victimisation and on possible responses that go beyond individualised, responsabilising discourses.

Safety pamphlets and other advice position queers as responsible for assimilating to heterosexual norms in order to secure their own safety. The key focus of safety initiatives should be on the perpetrators of anti-queer violence. Programs should target key perpetrator demographics, such as men and schoolchildren and should emphasise the effects of violence and harassment on those targeted. Such programs should particularly target sexualised violence towards and harassment of queer women as this seems to be seen by many men as legitimate behaviour. Women's activism around sexual violence has asserted women's rights to dress however they choose and still remain free from sexual violence. The emphasis of queer anti-violence campaigns should be on queer freedom of expression and should decouple queer expression from the responsibility of avoiding violence.

Not all of the interview participants discussed responsibility for social change. However, of those who did, Eloise and Erin focused the most on what queer people could do to create social change. Eloise was the most strongly focused on queer responsibility for preventing violence and harassment. Erin was not quite as explicitly focused on queer responsibility, but she did share the attitude that queer people needed to work to create

social change: “We have to actually work towards making spaces safer and, more that we’re part of this territory we, I think, we have to do the work.” Similar ideas are reflected in Erin’s previous statements, discussed earlier, about “claiming spaces” as a queer strategy for achieving social change. Although Eloise also mentioned primarily individual and intragroup methods of achieving social change, she does not think it is necessary for queer people to create their own “safer spaces” and expresses the belief that social change could be initiated by personal self-development and group development.

..safety is one thing I think of immediately, but I think underneath that, as well, there’s the experiences for people who have a different sex, an *other* sexuality-our own experience of ourselves, and our own thoughts about ourselves, our own perceptions of ourselves, whether that manifests as internalised homophobia, all of that. I think that is the thing, that if we could empower ourselves to really disappear that stuff for ourselves, I think that would make the biggest difference, and I don’t think that is going to come from other people molly coddling it. What do you say, molly coddy?

Interviewer: Molly coddling?

Molly coddling us, or trying to provide a safe space, or something. I don’t think it’s about that. I think it’s really about *us* as, on a community level, choosing our sexuality and empowering ourselves about it. Like, getting all that stuff that comes up out of the way, and that’s what would make the biggest difference (Eloise).

Eloise's statements demonstrate the greatest focus on an internal locus of control, as she discusses changes in "ourselves," "our own thoughts about ourselves," "our own perceptions of ourselves," and "empower [ing] ourselves to really disappear that stuff for ourselves." She contrasts "ourselves" and "us" with change coming from "other people." In this interview she opines that change coming from outside would be unhelpful. A focus on individual management of safety and risk is also implicit in Bella's statement when she says "I think I could be asking for trouble in a pub."

Others saw social change as a combination of individual/intragroup and societal/structural change. As mentioned earlier in this chapter in relation to diversity and intergroup issues, Lauren claimed that "the gay scene" needed to recognise shared battles, particularly with trans people. But "in terms of broader public stuff" she admired those who were "incredibly *brave* at just putting that stuff out there," or expressing their sexual identity, but at the same time ascribed responsibility to society generally: "...it's everybody's responsibility, like, how the community and society broadly responds to things is a bit of everybody's responsibility." Alisha, who is very involved in activism sees change happening at both an individual and structural level, and works to see that change occur: "I suppose we've got a right to feel safe. We can do things at our own level and at the overall level to make that safe and obviously that's why I'm involved in all the activism that I am." Elsewhere in the interview she stated "Oh, look, we've got to do work, let's say, from the big overall level down."

## **What Can Be Done?**

The experiences described above and in the previous chapter present quite a bleak picture of everyday harassment and violent crimes experienced by queer and trans women. This is consistent with other recent studies which, although there are some methodological difficulties including increased reporting levels, have found that incidents of violence and harassment towards LGBT people have not decreased in recent decades (Tomsen 2009, p.38; Hillier et al.2010, pp.39-40) despite a greater awareness of these issues and a broader social acceptance of LGBT people. The personal narratives of the interview participants, although impressive when considering their personal qualities and resilience in the face of such experiences, are motivating to try to achieve social change. In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline possibilities for social change based on the participants' suggestions and recent research on harassment, violence and policy and legislative strategies and other prevention measurements.

### **Recommendations**

On an organisational level, it is necessary for workplaces and both mainstream and queer community organisations, as well as government departments to have clear policies in place to deal with discrimination and harassment based on gender and sexual identity. Programs should address not just discrimination toward "gays and lesbians" or "transsexuals" but also people who are transgender, gender queer or have alternative expressions of gender or sexuality, in order to ensure that no forms of gender or sexuality based harassment are accepted. Often sexual orientation is just added as part of a "diversity policy" that also addresses other issues such as sex, religion, ethnic background, disability, political preferences and other social differences. It is important

to note that employees may be targeted in different ways due to their membership of different social groups. Policies should take this into account and define harassment based on sexual orientation and gender diversity clearly and give examples of common incidences of these kinds of harassment.

Rather than simply stating that all people should be treated equally, social inclusion policies should outline common exclusions faced by queer people and identify actions to be taken in order to avoid these exclusions. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Human Resources document on "Same Sex Attracted Employees" states that discrimination "can be overt or very subtle"(2011, p.3). It provides examples such as "treating same-sex partners differently to opposite-sex partners" and "showing disrespect towards the lives and relationships of same-sex attracted employees" (Victorian Department of Education 2011, p.3). This document also provides steps to create a "welcoming and inclusive environment for same-sex attracted employees" (Victorian Department of Education 2011, p.3) such as not assuming that everyone is heterosexual and addressing discriminatory comments made in the workplace (Victorian Department of Education 2011, p.4). It also provides a list of detailed scenarios that would constitute discrimination. While workplace policies may institute positive organisational changes and address some forms of harassment and discrimination, they may not be able to address some more subtle behaviours such as avoidance, discomfort around queer people, and nasty looks that may need to be addressed through primary intervention strategies and broader social and attitudinal change. Workplaces also differ in regards to whether action is taken to implement these

kinds of policy measures, or if they're intended to serve as guidelines, or if they're not often referred to.

From my research and other research involving queer women, it is clear that sexual harassment including sexualised behaviour towards queer women is common (in fact some studies even treat this as evidence of “positive” attitudes towards lesbians, rather than discrimination (see Louderback & Whitley 1997). Workplaces should maintain a specific policy about sexual harassment towards queer women, lesbians and transpeople to ensure that they are not subject to sexualised comments and behaviours based on their sexual or gender identities. Mainstream sexual harassment policies are perhaps not enough to address these issues as sexualising queer women often seems to be regarded as a benign and usual way to interact with these women.

Organisational and community leaders should maintain personal responsibility for showing support toward such policies and countering cultures of harassment within workplaces. Workplace sensitivity training is also an option and should be necessary for organisations dealing with LGBT issues and social service organisations and law enforcement services that do not always address LGBTIQ issues adequately. Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria currently provides training for those employed in health, welfare and social services organisations as well as local councils and other community services. These sessions focus on inclusivity of GLBTI people, their health needs and particular issues relevant to GLBTI people and organisations barriers to meeting these needs (GLHV 2012, *np*) They also provide an online *Sexual Diversity Health Services Audit* for services to complete. Victoria Police also provide some cultural sensitivity training as part of their training of new recruits (Victoria Police 2009, p.42).

Sensitivity training and audits can be a powerful tool in combating queerphobia and heterosexism. There are, however, some potential issues with sensitivity training. It is difficult to find published evaluations of the effectiveness of GLBTI sensitivity training in academic journals. Many organisations have well-researched and designed training programs. Some programs, however, that are not based on research may unwittingly reinforce stereotypes about gender and sexuality by emphasising that queer people are “normal” or “just like everyone else” or by only presenting examples of gays and lesbians who are monogamous or have normative gendered self-expression. They may not focus on trans issues or present them as an add-on. Presenting some queer people as “normal” may enforce a divide between “respectable” gays and lesbians and those who do not conform to gendered and sexual norms. If organisations cannot fund all staff to attend training, then training may only be provided to staff who volunteer, and these people may already be more accepting of queer people and less likely to engage in hurtful or harassing behaviours or use discriminatory or pejorative language.

Anti-homophobia campaigns are often directed towards a general audience or focus on strategies for queer people to try to avoid being victims of crime (as is the case in the examples of police advice I gave on pages 167-168). While these strategies may possibly reduce victimisation, they place the onus of mitigating risk on victims rather than on perpetrators or on others in society. Sensitivity training and intervention programs that focus on the demographic that perpetrates the highest level of harassment and crimes, men, (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008; Leonard et al. 2008) should be undertaken. We need to create safer public spaces without reducing both access to public spaces as well as mobility and self-expression for queer women. Reduced access and mobility for

queer women would create public areas that were even more implicitly marked as straight and male and in which queer women would stand out even more and be targeted of harassment and violence as policing strategies.

Prevention strategies should therefore focus on the perpetrators or potential perpetrators of crimes and harassment. As Michau states in her article about primary prevention of violence against women: “consensus is emerging that working to prevent violence before it starts must be a priority” (2007, p.95). In Clark and Quadara’s report on sexual violence toward women, they explained that “Primary or population level interventions include identifying problematic social beliefs and representations of masculinity in sites such as the news media and popular culture and providing alternative social norms” (2010, p.55). There is also evidence from programs addressing sexual violence against women that assertive bystander responses can challenge harassment and violence (Potter et al. 2011, p.973), so programs addressing the broader public (for example school programs) should highlight social responsibility to challenge prejudicial behaviours and to stand up to the perpetrators.

Providing “information for victims” is a popular method of addressing queerphobic violence and may possibly have some potential benefits for queer people. If such campaigns are produced, they should take into account queer people’s embodied responses to “risk” and the social contexts of harassment and different experiences of harassment and violence based on social positionality within the queer community. Provision of pamphlets based on “common sense” risk management, such as not going out alone, or avoiding dark alleys at night, are not adequate for addressing harassment

and violence. They seem to also be implicitly modelled on similar advice targeted to (presumably cisgendered, heterosexual) women (Stanko and Curry 1997, p.520).

When such campaigns are felt to be necessary, they should address queer people as agentic subjects of risk, but not necessarily as cost-benefit analysis making rational consumers who weigh up the risks<sup>37</sup>of, for example, going out for a fun night out at a local club with the risk of being queerphobically beaten on the way home. They should take into account advice from queer people based on their negotiation of such incidents and their feelings and concerns as well as the most recent and relevant research on hate crimes and harassment. They should firmly place the blame on perpetrators of violence and harassment rather than the victims. Victim-oriented campaigns may still be necessary in order to provide information on reporting options for victims (which will potentially also enhance the information regarding queerphobic crimes) and to help victims to access support from relevant social service agencies and law enforcement services.

Finally, “ownership” of spaces seems to be important to many of the interview participants. As there are many spaces in society that seem to be queerphobic, the interview participants were involved in a large variety of organisations and leisure activities for and with queer people. This seems to be partly due to a queer subcultural identity, but it is arguable that this identity is partly premised on a relationship of risk and sometimes social exclusions as well as blame for victimisation. These spaces are fulfilling important roles in both respects, in any case. University queer spaces were important for younger queer people for meeting others, developing their identity and socialising outside the club scene, especially for those not interested in alcohol and drug

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<sup>37</sup> See Race 2009, pp.107-9 for a discussion of embodied ethics and health promotion in relation to HIV.

use. Universities and/ or student unions should continue to fund these spaces. “Safer Spaces Policies” seem useful in avoiding exclusion from spaces or harassment, especially for those such as bi and trans women who experience harassment in lesbian and gay environments. Anti-harassment and anti-violence programs involving bystanders might also be effective in university environments. “Safer Spaces Policies” should make sure that they attempt to provide an accepting environment for all different types of gendered expression and sexual identity.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter and the previous chapter have demonstrated that it is important to focus on safety and to attempt to find potential solutions to safety issues for queer women. This is not to say, however, that all queer women always feel unsafe, or even feel unsafe often. Fear levels varied between participants and were often higher if participants had had previous experiences of violence or harassment that had affected them significantly. While I attempted, during the process of coding the interview data, to separate “safety” and “comfort” into discrete themes, this proved very difficult. One might assume that interview participants discussing “feeling unsafe” would be talking of experiencing more intense feelings than those speaking of “feeling uncomfortable,” but this did not always seem to be the case. Use of the terms “safety” and “comfort” varied with some participants using both terms and others saying that they hadn’t had experiences where they felt unsafe. This seemed partly related to individual personality and concern for appearing to be a victim. Lauren, for example, who self-identified as having a more feminine appearance felt that her trans friends experienced “feeling unsafe,” whereas her experiences, she felt, were less intense. It seems that she wanted to avoid using this

terminology, so as not to minimise others' experiences of unsafety. On the other hand, others such as Bella seemed quite ambivalent, at times during the interview describing distressing feelings, whilst often maintaining that she wasn't much affected by her experiences in public places. Maintaining that one doesn't feel "unsafe" or have concerns over safety in such situations could be a technique for avoiding feelings of victimisation and shoring up perceptions of personal autonomy and feeling that one can move through public spaces unhindered. There was a small minority of one or two participants who had simply not had many negative experiences in public places as a queer woman and did not feel much fear related to harassment or violence and who did not mention being influenced by friends or others' accounts of victimisation. These participants did not mention concerns about safety.

It can be seen, therefore, that focusing on safety as an analytic theme, while important, does not provide an exhaustive account of queer women's experiences in public. These experiences are more complex and nuanced than always simply being about feeling "safe" or "unsafe." As was mentioned above, preference and feelings of belonging also determined whether participants felt safe or comfortable in particular places.

This chapter has begun to explore the way some spaces are implicitly marked as suitable for particular social groups while others are seen as "out of place." It has also focused on the spatial narratives and discourses that place responsibility on queers and women for avoiding violence by frequenting only suitable places and only at times that are considered safe. I have argued that these not only limit mobility and access for queer women, but also maintain those spaces as suitable only for particular types of people.

These narratives contribute to making these spaces less safe as women or queers may avoid these spaces more if they heed warnings about taking responsibility for safety. This leaves queers and women who do venture to these spaces as standing out as even more visible and perhaps more vulnerable to attacks. These forms of victim blaming serve to further entrench a heteronormative understanding of gender, as those who transgress these norms face strong sanctions. Societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality need to be addressed through primary prevention programs in order to limit the damaging gendered assumptions that underpin harassment and violence towards those who dare to deviate from these strictures. The social and spatial processes by which particular bodies come to inhabit some spaces seemingly more naturally will be explored in the following chapters.

While this chapter and the previous chapter have focused specifically on safety issues, the following chapters will explore broader social, cultural and economic processes related to queer women's experiences in public spaces. They attempt to contextualise personal experiences in relation to structures and networks of power, as well as cultural and historical trends. This is not to say that these experiences are merely the product of impersonal forces, rather that I wish to further explore factors structuring current understandings of identity, place, community and difference. The next chapter will examine "comfort." Comfort is a term which was often used by interview participants to describe experiences in public places.

## CHAPTER FIVE: COMFORT

Comfort is similar to safety, which was discussed in chapter three, and there is often an overlap between these concepts as they are used by the research participants. In this chapter, I will discuss both comfort and its negative version, discomfort. One difference between feeling unsafe and discomfort is that safety often refers to a more immediate or urgent concern, whereas discomfort can refer to feeling slightly out of place in a venue or area, or amongst certain people, or just a vague feeling something isn't right. Conversely, a comfortable space may not be felt as intensely as a "safe space" or "safer space"; perhaps there is less certainty that one will not experience harm in a place where one feels comfortable.

More specifically, the research participants used this descriptor both positively and negatively using terms such as "comfort" or "comfortable" or "uncomfortable," "discomfort" or "didn't feel comfortable." Postcolonial and poststructuralist theory can frame comfort as regressive (Ahmed 2004, p.149), as opposed to change or rupture, which is often favoured by poststructuralist theories (Reynolds 2006; Reynolds 2009). I don't disagree that claiming the need for comfort is often used to further entrench privilege by those who do not wish to be challenged. However, I will argue that it is necessary to be able to "claim comfort" for socially marginalised groups as their comfort may even act to destabilise the comfort of those more privileged. In order to make this argument I will provide a short history of comfort, attending to its variable meanings throughout time in order to explore how the term has come to have the resonance it currently enjoys. I will also demonstrate its intersections with liberal discourses of tolerance and diversity as well and explore how it is incorporated into spatial design.

From the beginning of this project, I was interested in comfort, as it was frequently mentioned by participants in previous interview-based research I had conducted. Whilst still asking open-ended questions, in keeping with my phenomenological method and commitment to allowing issues that were the most salient for the research participants to be raised, I structured one section of my interview schedule thematically around comfort. I did not use the word “comfort” in any of the questions, however, as I wanted participants to discuss their experiences using their own language and terminology as much as possible, rather than terminology I had imposed. As I had predicted, comfort was once again important in describing queer women’s experiences in public places for many of the interview participants. All the participants, except Erin, discussed “comfort” within their interviews, although some used the term very frequently as a descriptor of experience and others used this term less often. Most of the responses containing the term comfort were in relation to the following questions:

What kind of places do you prefer to go as a [self-identified label]? What kind of places do you avoid? Is there anything that stops you from using particular public spaces? Are there any things you would like to be able to do in public spaces but don’t feel that you can? Can you tell me about a time you avoided doing something in a public space because you are queer? In addition, other responses in which comfort was discussed were generated by the following question, which was intended to generate responses regarding encounters between people from different social groups: Can you tell me about a time when you’ve been in a public space with people who you felt were very different to you?

Comfort was also frequently mentioned in relation to the introductory questions, which asked about negative and positive experiences in public spaces. It also came up in response to other questions, such as those thematised as relating to space.

In this chapter, I examine meanings of comfort for queer people, and the ways in which queer women experience comfort. I explore the ways in which comfort is normalised, and societal groups marked as “other” have differential access to comfort, particularly in regards to how this manifests in different spaces. I critique liberal theories of tolerance and diversity as overlooking the processes by which minorities become marginalised and are made to feel uncomfortable both systemically and in particular spaces that reflect the politics and lifestyles of dominant groups. I will draw on Sara Ahmed’s discussion of “(Dis) Comfort and Norms” in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004, pp.146-55) as a starting point to explore comfort as operating within an economy of emotions. I employ design and architecture history to explore comfort as seen as a fit between bodies and spaces. Design and architectural history and sociology also give insight into the rise of discourses of comfort in the industrial era contemporarily with the development of human rights frameworks and modern consumption practices.

This chapter also undertakes a genealogical project, to show how sexuality has come to be organised, categorised and experienced in the particular ways that it is in late modern (mostly Western) capitalist society. In the eighteenth century the term comfort was used to refer to rest and ease within private spaces and was primarily associated with bodily comfort (Crowley 199, p.750). Following Richard Sennett, I will show that comfort came to be seen as an individual public entitlement. In this view one expects public spaces to replicate the norms of the home, so that one is not challenged or discomfited by others

who do not fit these ideals. This discourse of comfort can be seen to be at work both in smaller scale, everyday interactions in public spaces, and also when addressing an imagined broader public such as the nation. As Sara Ahmed also argues (2004, p.149) queer, cultural and social theories sometimes posit comfort as regressive (see, for example, Holliday 1999, p. 489). Ahmed claims that queer discomfort can be productive as it is about “inhabiting norms differently” (2004, p.155) It is, therefore, the citation of these norms, with a difference that works to change the heteronormative (Ahmed 2004, p.155). Based on examples from the interviews where queer women sought out and created queer communities in order to create and claim comfort for themselves, I will go further to argue that claiming public comfort for queer people is actually a challenge to heterosexualised public norms.

### **Experiences of Comfort in Public Spaces**

While most interview participants contextualised their responses in relation to particular circumstances, there were some responses in which participants reflected more generally on their experiences of comfort or discomfort in public places. Some participants said that they often or usually felt comfortable, but then went on to elaborate exceptions, or to express some ambivalence about generally feeling comfortable. Only Olivia said that she never felt uncomfortable. Finlay and Samantha both expressed feeling “defiant” in relation to implied expectations that they wouldn’t show affection or to more explicit surveillance behaviours from others such as censorious looks. Previous negative experiences in public spaces seemed to affect how one felt in public spaces, with Olivia reporting that she only felt “curious” because she was aware that other queer women had

had negative experiences when displaying public affection, whereas others felt fear or defiance, or would avoid places due to previous negative experiences.

Interviewer: So how do you feel as a queer woman when you're in public spaces?

Samantha: Um, I'm not sure. Usually I feel quite comfortable. I tend to feel defiant, kind of not so much on the defense, but kind of just, yeah, like, if someone looks at me or something, I'll be more inclined to, not be aggressive, but just kind of feel like that I have to be strong and kind of prove myself a bit.

Olivia: ... and I think for older women to be holding hands or linking arms is a lot more acceptable perhaps than for younger women who may *look* more out lesbian.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Olivia: You know we probably look like two middle aged ducks who are holding each other up to some extent, um if I'm with a group of friends I don't know, I never feel uncomfortable, I just wonder –I'm curious I think it's not, I'm not wondering in a sense of, 'Oh God is anyone going to attack me or anything', it's a curiosity because I'm conscious that people do have these issues.

Finlay: I suppose, you know, when you're seeing someone and you go into a public space with them, there's always this kind of, I suppose, process of figuring out how comfortable people feel with displaying signs of physical affection. And

most people I suppose don't. I feel a little bit defiant, like I'm like, 'I want to be able to do it anywhere' and I'm not going to allow people to stop me through that stuff.

Interviewer: So how do you feel when you're in public spaces?

Bella: Um, Usually reasonably comfortable there, there are certain places of course I won't go because of experiences...

Interviewer: And what have they been?

Bella: Well, do you want to sit sort of closer?

Interviewer: Yeah, sorry about that.

Bella: That's all right, um most of the time I'm sort of fairly comfortable I'm, I there are places that I won't go to just like any other woman wouldn't go.

Interviewer: So how do you feel as a lesbian when you're in public spaces?

Eloise: How do I feel? Well often I feel like I'll be walking down the street and like going, I catch public transport a lot, so I'm in those kind of public places, and, or I might go out to a café. If I'm with friends I feel generally fine.

Sometimes, though I do feel, stuff comes up. Like you're walking along the street and whether it's fear or my own internalised homophobia comes up, or I have these thoughts where I get concerned about what will people think of me, or I still

get those thoughts. These many, many years later I still get those thoughts. Like no I don't want to hold my girlfriend's hand right now. I still get those thoughts coming up and then I either go with that thought or don't in that moment. But, yeah. So sometimes I feel uncomfortable. Yeah. [Laughing]

### **Fitting in and Standing Out**

A key theme which came out of the interviews was that discomfort was often related to feeling that one didn't "fit in" or might not be accepted in particular places. Amber, who is bisexual, for example, said that she stood out "in a slightly uncomfortable way" with her lesbian partner, but would fit in more when she was with a male partner. Poppy didn't feel comfortable expressing affection in the outer suburban area where she lived, because there weren't many other queer people in that area. Eloise claimed that she would feel "100% comfortable" if she knew that everyone else around her accepted her sexuality.

Amber: I guess, um, I do notice a difference when I am with [...], my partner...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amber: and when I am with a guy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amber: I notice a difference in um just, I feel like I stand *out*...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amber: in a sort of slightly uncomfortable way in the lesbian coupling.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Amber: Um, whereas I feel strangely fitting in...

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Amber: when I am with a guy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amber: Which is sort of weird, um considering that my lesbian relationship means so much more to me.

Interviewer: And what about where you live now, would you see that as being safe?

Poppy: Yeah it's just your average suburban little town, not really a town, but it's different, though. I mean going to the shopping centre there I don't feel as comfortable being openly gay and affectionate with my girlfriend because there's not that many other gay people out there that are open.

Eloise: I'd like to be able to experience within myself being free to express my love and affection for my girlfriend. That's what I'd really like. Whether it just be holding hands, hugging, kissing, whatever. Not over the top or anything, but if I felt comfortable within myself 100%, and part of that for me would come from knowing that everyone around me was okay with it as well. And I think, I mean I

think a lot of people are but there's always a certain percentage that aren't, and that's always there for me.

### **Assumed Heterosexuality**

On the other hand, other participants felt discomfort at being assumed to be heterosexual in some circumstances. Shannon, who identifies as bisexual, felt that people assumed that she was heterosexual when she was in public spaces. Alisha, who also identifies as bisexual, discussed not feeling comfortable when it was assumed that she was heterosexual at work and might want to be set up with a man. Part of her discomfort seems to have stemmed from the fact that there were no other queer people at the workplace, so perhaps she didn't feel that she fit in, even though she was assumed to be heterosexual by others.

Interviewer: Are there any things you'd like to be able to do in public spaces but you don't feel that you can?

Shannon: ...even just being able to just go out and I don't know, not have everyone assume I'm straight just because you know, I'm walking down the street.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about a time when you've been in a public space with people that you've felt were very different to you?

Alisha: That I felt were very *different* to me; in a public space? Well, probably in a sense all of those examples but, trying to think if there's anything else, going backwards through time here to see if I can find them. Yeah. I suppose probably the first workplace I had post transition where someone said, 'Oh, you're single. Are you looking for a guy?' Which was a bit much and it just it really was a straight workplace, judgemental as that term might be, and it *didn't* feel comfortable.

Representation in spaces is a key factor allowing people to feel comfortable within these spaces. Sara Ahmed refers to British lesbian feminist geographer Gill Valentine's argument that heterosexuality is "naturalised" in public spaces through repetition such as imagery of heterosexuals on advertising, heterosexual intimacy and popular music (2004, p.148). She also claims that the bodies which pass through spaces work to shape the spaces themselves as well as reinforcing social structures (Ahmed 2004, p.148). In this way, displays of heterosexuality reinforce the heterosexuality of spaces. The heterosexuality of spaces also means that those passing through who aren't straight will be assumed to be straight due to this totalising effect, and others will stand out in contrast.

Gill Valentine models this process of normalisation on Judith Butler's theory of performativity, claiming that: "the heterosexing of space is a performative act naturalized through repetition and regulation" (1996, p.146). The forms of representation Valentine describes include heterosexual kissing and hand holding, advertisements and window displays, "heterosexualized conversations," and heterosexual love songs played in shopping malls (1996, p.146). Forms of regulation she cites include interpretation of laws

or rules (including “public order” laws) to exclude queer behaviour, violence and aggression (and, presumably, the threat of violence or aggression) and disapproval (Valentine 1996, p.148-9). Valentine states that “Heterosexual looks of disapproval, whispers and stares are used to spread discomfort and make lesbians feel ‘out of place’ in everyday spaces” (1996, p.149).

Most public spaces are predominantly heterosexual spaces, although certainly queer things do happen in public spaces and spaces do become queer in different times and in particular spaces. A lot of the experiences that were considered most salient by the women themselves did not necessarily happen in queer spaces, but happened in spaces seen as predominantly straight, in confrontation or cohabitation with people who they assumed were straight.

Sara Ahmed’s discussion of “Dis (comfort) and Norms” (2004, pp.146-55), in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* begins by analysing heterosexuality as a process that “functions powerfully not only as a series of norms and ideals, but also through emotions that shape bodies as well as worlds” (2004, p.146) Comfort is one such emotion. By living a life based on heterosexual norms, one feels comfort. She sees heteronormativity as a “comfort zone” (Ahmed 2004, p.147) and “a form of public comfort” (Ahmed 2004, p.148). “Comfort zone” implies that the production and reproduction of sexuality allows some people to stay comfortable by staying within certain norms (or perhaps at least appropriating or experiencing difference in ways which are not threatening).

## **Surveillance and Gender Policing**

Many of the scenarios in which the participants reported feeling uncomfortable were scenarios where they experienced sanctions due to their behaviour or appearance, or where they thought that they might receive such sanctions. These sorts of sanctions most commonly included comments or stares. These behaviours could be considered “gender policing” because they draw attention to people who are not conforming to traditional expressions of gender and sexuality. This helps to ensure that forms of gender and sexuality that are non-normative are less likely to be expressed. Such gender policing was internalised by some participants, such as Shannon, who didn’t show affection to her girlfriend in public as she thought people were shocked at her holding hands and she thought they might be alarmed if she was to kiss her girlfriend. Surveillance complements policing as, when participants’ sexualities are more visible or obvious they feel that they are more likely to experience gender policing. This is evident in Amber’s example below, where she says she wouldn’t like to stay in a B&B where she felt she would have to “look people in the eye every day,” but would feel OK on holiday if her and her partner were staying in self-contained accommodation or camping by themselves. Olivia’s example really illustrates this point; one of her queer acquaintances had actively “policed” Olivia and her partner by cautioning them that she expected them not to be so overt on the holiday. Some of the examples demonstrate discomfort at anticipating heterosexual others’ discomfort, while other examples, such as Amber’s experience (below) of being photographed perhaps demonstrate discomfort at heterosexual others’ excitement at seeing those who do not conform to heterosexual norms.

Interviewer: And have there been any negative experiences that you have had in public spaces as a bi person?

Amber: Yeah definitely, like um, just nothing really terrible.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Amber: Um, just often feeling uncomfortable, like um having people take photos of us and you know, people who don't know.

Interviewer: Oh, OK, wow!

Amber: People who just like go, 'Oh have a look at that,' kind of thing.

Interviewer: Oh, no.

Amber: I guess that was more when we were younger.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amber: Now we have a bit more of a fuck off kind of vibe.

Amber: I feel a little bit, I wish I felt more comfortable like when we were going on holidays and stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amber: Like just to... so that is was not an issue completely would be really nice.

Interviewer: Yeah. So are there places where you *would* feel comfortable going on holiday?

Amber: I guess like camping by ourselves.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Amber: [laughs] Or um, maybe a hotel, like a self contained kind of thing...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amber: but not a B&B where you have to look people in the eye every day.

Finlay's story also provides an overt example of gender policing:

Finlay: there was this one night I remember vividly, where I was standing at the tram stop kissing this person I was seeing, and these guys jumped out of this cab and started yelling at us, and they were really drunk and they didn't necessarily want to start a fight or anything. And we kind of like paid them out a bit and they seemed to chill out. But then they happily stood at that same tram stop while a man and a woman pashed on and didn't say anything and there was no kind of reaction or whatever. So those things are quite vivid, like they do exist...

Interviewer: Are there any things you'd like to be able to do in public spaces but you don't feel that you can?

Shannon: When I was with my girlfriend we didn't really show affection in public just because it was kind of not something we felt, I didn't think I could do, you know felt like I could do because everyone was sort of like "Oh my God," you

know just holding hands was bad enough and should I kiss her in public that would have been like shock horror to [a lot of people? 4:53] probably. Bit uncomfortable.

Courtney: I remember, that's what I was thinking too that the lesbian group that I belong to, we had dinner somewhere in- it was Watergardens, or somewhere like that. The whole group of us got together and because a couple of my friends were sitting there holding hands and their arms around each other and that sort of thing and I started to hear other people in the restaurant making comments. So I did feel a little *uneasy*.

Interviewer: What kind of comments were they?

Courtney: It's more that sort of thing, 'Oh, look. There's some lesos.' Like, oh my god there's a strange exotic animal sitting in the restaurant, you know, *that* sort of thing. So it was probably more the nudging and pointed staring and stuff like that that made me feel uncomfortable.

Olivia: Oh, that's an experience I did have once, which actually came from another lesbian she's very weird, I went to the snow ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: a few years ago with a group of lesbian friends and um who all had their partners with them ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: and it was just after I'd moved to Melbourne and I drove back up and my partner drove down from where she lives and we met up there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: And we hadn't seen each other for some weeks and so naturally you know we were ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: sitting on the lounge and I had my arm around her ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: and stuff like that the first night well the next evening the, the woman who'd organised the event, the event and organised the accommodation ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: because we were staying in a lodge, it was a club lodge

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: um came to see us in our room and you know I thought, 'Oh that's nice ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: she's dropped in for a chat,' she said, 'Oh look ...', you know, 'I just want to let you know that I – I don't think it's appropriate to uh, you know to be too overt in this company' ... you know ...

Interviewer: Oh.

Olivia: ‘We don’t want to offend anybody and my friends helped us get in here,’ and it made me feel *really* uncomfortable for the whole the rest ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Olivia: of the, of the time

On one hand, surveillance can produce “comfort” in a reassuring sense that nothing, or no one is out of place in the landscape, and to warn people against being in places where they might not be welcome, or undertaking actions that would be discouraged. On the other hand, it can be profoundly discomfoting feeling that one is always the object of surveillance.

An urban planning manual for “new urbanists” is entitled “City Comforts: How to Build an Urban Village.” In its own special box, in bold letters, is written “The basic technique of urban security is natural surveillance” (Sucher 1995, p.71). The author goes on to claim that “surveillance in our context does not mean formal watching but the casual observation that comes naturally, for example, when one is sitting on the front porch after dinner” (Sucher 1995,p.71). Another bolded box states “Watching other people, and being watched, and chatting, is the core purpose of the social stroll” (Sucher 1995, p.30). Of course, it may be comforting for the person to whom the book is addressed, but, not necessarily comfoting for the person who is being watched in case of potential wrongdoing, and being talked about on someone’s front porch.

### Comfort as Privilege

This leads me to another concept which is often allied with comfort, the idea of “privilege.”<sup>38</sup> It is easy to see how comfort and privilege are aligned. “Comfortable” is often used as a synonym for financially secure. The comfortable citizen of the new urban village described above talks earnestly with neighbours about any potential problems or oddities happening in the neighbourhood over a cup of tea on the porch. The comfortable citizen strolls around the streets like they own them, taking delight in watching and being watched, in complete confidence that they fit in and are not doing anything wrong. This is contrasted with what it might feel like to be watched everywhere one goes and gossiped about on front porches as one goes about one’s everyday business.

The view of comfort as privilege is aligned in some ways with the view that comfort implies stasis, or does not break with the status quo. Comfort can be seen to privilege those who are already privileged, to reinforce the present structure of society, and to continue to marginalise minority groups. In this view, feeling comfortable is a privilege, and as a way of explaining or analysing experience, is akin to reinforcing this privilege.

This would always hold true if discomfort and comfort held a mutually causal relationship. On witnessing comfort, the minoritised would feel uncomfortable, on witnessing the discomfort of others, the comfortable would feel satisfied in their comfort. Seeing those usually not comfortable in a certain context strutting around like they owned the place would (and probably often does) make others who feel like they have prior or greater claims to the space feel very uncomfortable. And witnessing the discomfort of the

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Samantha Kwan’s discussion of “Gender, Race, and Body Privilege” where she claims that “privileged groups experience a level of comfort when navigating daily life” (2010, p.145).

comfortable could enable minoritised groups to feel satisfied. Perhaps, sometimes the latter example does hold, otherwise witnessing people previously looked up to, or previously in positions of power, be ridiculed publicly wouldn't be quite as amusing as it often is.

The circumstances in which one feels comfort or discomfort in particular spaces are influenced by one's previous experiences in similar spaces, one's beliefs and the political climate and organisation that have a role in structuring life in that space. This is also linked with the layout and design of the spaces. As illustrated above, design isn't as innocent and apolitical as it often seems. Comfort also has to do with the people who inhabit these spaces. Comfort can be a part of living in privilege, or a challenge to that privilege.

### **Comfort and the Public/Private Divide**

With industrialisation and the concentration of people in towns, not only was the rural/urban divide reorganised, but the public/private divide was reshaped in the process. In England common farm lands were enclosed by landlords in the 1500s and early 1600s, due to higher food prices caused by population pressure (Wrightson, 2000 pp.134-5; Appleby 2010, pp.80-81). Improved agricultural methods meant that land did not have to be farmed so intensively, and farmers were able to work larger areas of land and generate greater profits (Appleby, 2010, pp.80-81). Tenants were displaced from the land as landholdings were enclosed and consolidated. This left a surplus population that would eventually be employed in factories. The invention of new technologies (such as steam powered devices) in the late eighteenth century (Appleby 2010, pp. 145-47) ushered in

the mass production of goods. Urbanisation increased dramatically between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (Appleby 2010, pp.139-40; Wrightson 2000, pp. 172-3).

Richard Sennett describes a rapid process of urbanisation occurring in Western countries between 1848 and 1895 (1994, p.320). The move to cities, the increased private/public divide, and the use of norms as a form of coercion meant that surveillance could function in an increasingly optimal way in these cities. Foucault discusses working class estates in the nineteenth century:

One can easily see how the very grid pattern, the very layout of the estate articulated, in a sort of perpendicular way, the disciplinary mechanisms that controlled the body, or bodies, by localizing families (one to a house) and individuals (one to a room). The layout, the fact that individuals were made visible, and the normalization of behaviour meant that a sort of spontaneous policing or control was carried out by the spatial layout of the town itself (2004, p.251).

With the reworking of the private/public divide, comfort often became associated with privacy (however, it is still possible, for example to “find people you feel comfortable around,” although perhaps even this is a function of privacy, as you are choosing to associate with particular people with whom you feel at ease, rather having to be with people around whom you may feel discomfort).

The interlinking of privacy and comfort was aided by politics as well as design. Sennett cites Baron Haussman’s redevelopment of Paris, where the boulevards encouraged outdoor seating, and the café as an institution began to no longer provide cover for

political groups, and the design of outdoor seating precluded one from moving between the tables in the way one would indoors (1994, p.345-7). Another example Sennett gives of the relationship between design and planning and the development of ideals of privacy is the new design of American railway carriages developed in the 1840s, in which patrons all faced the same way, rather than toward one another. He sees this as encouraging silence and privacy (Sennett 1994, pp.343-4). His final case study in his short section devoted to the concept of comfort is “sealed spaces.” As heating technologies developed toward the end of the nineteenth century (Sennett 1994, p.347) houses became more and more sealed from the outside world, which he describes as one of the ways in which “the geography of speed and the search for comfort led people into the isolated condition which Tocqueville called “individualism” (Sennett 1994, p.349).

Sennett also describes urban planning as furthering the development of individualism as “[t]he planning of nineteenth-century cities aimed to create a crowd of freely moving individuals, and to discourage the movement of organized groups through the city” (1994, p.323). He details this process occurring in Regent Street and Regent’s Park in London. The park was surrounded by through traffic, which deterred people making much use of the park; this was imagined as the “lungs” of the city, rather than planned as a meeting space or necessary public amenity. The narrow footpaths combined with “[t]he pressure of linear pedestrian movement” (Sennett 1994, p.328) made any meaningful group activities apart from being part of this pedestrian movement impossible (Sennett 1994, p.328).

## Comfort and the Body

Sennett's theorisation of the place of comfort is closely intertwined with his discussion of mobility and speed, and how these influence planning decisions. *Flesh and Stone* is subtitled *The Body and History in Western Civilisation*. While the previous examples drawn from Sennett's work have been used to illustrate points regarding place, without much explicit discussion on the role of the body in the construction of place, his work focuses on place as developed through different historical and political eras and experienced through the body. For example, the individualising processes Sennett describes worked in tandem with disciplinary norms that helped individuals become more visible. These were deployed through design processes and through the placemaking and political processes which made surveillance more productive from the outset. At the same time, they also functioned at the level of the individual body and in the community, where difference could become more visible.

Sennett contends, problematically in my opinion, that the body is rendered passive in the current political and temporal climate (1994, pp.16-7) through the dulling of effects of the mass media (1994, pp.16-7) and high speed transportation's disconnection from the spaces through which it passes (1994, p.18). He argues that "Both the highway engineer and the television director create what could be called 'freedom from resistance'" (Sennett 1994, p.18). Whilst it is clear that bodies are less active than in previous times because of different forms of labour, time constraints and the sedentarisation of Western culture, it is not clear to me that we experience any less sensory input.

In addition, Sennett does not demonstrate how exactly media input desensitizes people. While people may watch a violent movie and not feel upset and not go out and commit acts of violence in their life, this is quite different from assuming that they do not register any sensory input at the level of the body. Phenomenological film theorist, Laura Marks (describing Vivian Sobchak's theory of embodied spectatorship) contends that "The phenomenological model of subjectivity posits a mutual permeability and mutual creation of self and other. Cinematic spectatorship is a special example of this enfolding of self and world, an intensified instance of the ways our perceptions open us onto the world" (Marks 2000, p.149).

According to Merleau-Ponty, "Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments" (1962, p.143). The body "understands," which means experiencing "the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.144). Habits are cultivated and the body understands meanings and absorbs significances through habit (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.146). In parts of *Phenomenology of Perception*, habit is explained as almost an automatic sedimentation (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.238) and yet at other times "habit" seems to imply an effort. A related concept is the "equilibrium" which bodies return to and seem conditioned to attain. The queer body understands and absorbs meanings about the environment through habit and the day-to-day experiences of living in that environment.

The relationship between habit and comfort seems almost self-evident if comfort is seen as something not usually noticed, or if practices of comfort are seen as co-evolving within a particular environment, and with particular technologies. However, habit may also

relate to discomfort,<sup>39</sup> as having limited access to certain spaces, limited representation, and being subject to the reactions of others, may engender a feeling of habitual discomfort, or perhaps discomfort as a way of living in the world.

For some of the research participants, previous experiences in particular spaces, such as being subject to violence or harassment had led to a feeling of discomfort in some areas or situations. The rise of individualism and its accompanying increase in surveillance, as discussed above, further ingrained feelings of discomfort. The accompanying ascendance of ideals of privacy means that some heterosexual people may feel that they are entitled to experience the same comforts of privacy in public spaces as they do in home life, and do not like to be challenged by the kinds of social differences they feel should be confined to the private sphere. Some people may therefore react in a hostile manner to queer women's behaviour and self-expression in public spaces. On the other hand, comfort might involve a radical rupture from what has gone before, if the feeling of comfort has not yet sedimented and become habitual. The comfort of marching in a queer pride parade could be seen as an example of this kind of comfort, as some queer women express feeling joyous or free at suddenly being in a queer majority space.

### **Comfort and the Circulation of Emotions**

Another concept in Ahmed's work that I find constructive for thinking about concerns with comfort is the way in which emotions circulate. Rather than following work that

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<sup>39</sup> Habits such as heteronormativity, or normality, on the other hand, may not be maintained easily, or necessarily comfortably, although often their maintenance promises comfort. It can be quite difficult to meet some norms that are posited as ideals; for example, there is a lot of work undertaken to conform to ideals of feminine beauty, and waxing and eyebrow tweezing are not the most comfortable of practices.

explores emotions as contagion, such as that of Silvan Tomkins (Ahmed 2004, p.10), Ahmed places an intermediate step in her model of the movement of emotions, by attaching emotions to objects, and claiming that it is the objects that circulate and become saturated with emotion (2004, p.p.10-11). Rather than seeing emotions as primarily individual or socially constructed, or indeed “psychological *and* social,” (Ahmed 2004, p.10) she argues that the movement of emotions creates boundaries such as the individual and social (Ahmed 2004, p.10). For example, expressions of disgust in some, on seeing another type of person (a type of person who is associated with disgust), might engender a feeling of shame in the person who is the object of this gaze.

For example, in “Is Any Body Home?” Vivian Sobchak details philosopher Charles Johnson’s reactions to the “hate-stare.” He writes in “A Phenomenology of the Black Body,” “I do not see what the white other sees in my skin, but I am aware of his intentionality, and—yes—aware that I often disclose something discomfiting... Yet it is *I* who perceive myself as ‘stained,’ as though I were an object for myself and no longer a subject” (Johnson, cited in Sobchak 2004, p.198). Johnson describes this objectification process as “epidermalization” or “evisceration” and borrows Frantz Fanon’s term “pithed” to explain the way this feels. Feeling “pithed” involves a process of feeling “ultimately evicted from the transparent comfort afforded by one’s material premises,” according to Sobchak (2004, p.198). Processes of objectification must differ substantially depending on why one is being objectified (perhaps for reasons of race, class, gender, or disability, for example) and what kind of visible or behavioural signifiers are being used to identify deviants from a norm or ideal in a particular public space. However, the above

example is useful for this project as it demonstrates how emotions circulate between bodies.

Ahmed also claims that it is difficult to feel comfort (2004, p.147). When one has always had comfort, it may well be taken for granted. However, I wish to explore the experience of comfort a little more closely. When comfort is taken-for-granted, and in some way interrupted, the ensuing discomfort may point to the previous experience of comfort more acutely. In this way, for people who are used to experiencing comfort in the representation and access made possible by their conformity or normality, anyone or anything that threatens that comfort may be seen as particularly confronting. And when one is used to feeling discomfort as feeling out of place, even if this discomfort can be exciting, one may feel comfort and relief at meeting others like oneself, or respite in spaces in which there are other queers or markers of acceptance.

A confrontation with another is not always discomfoting for the person in question, and it is easy to assume that exclusion would cause the most discomfort while a politics of inclusion would enable full participation and comfort in society. However, inclusion may be, in many situations, particularly uncomfortable. This can be seen in Alisha and Shannon's comments, as discussed above in the section about assumed heterosexuality. Both Alisha and Shannon felt uncomfortable when it was assumed that they were heterosexual in the workplace and in the streets respectively. As the discussion of liberal politics may attest, inclusion may mean conforming to certain ways of imagining oneself. As is implied in Tim Edensor's article "Mundane Mobilities, Performances and Spaces in Tourism" there are ways in which one comes into confrontation with others that tames otherness (2007, p.209). In Edensor's example, which is of tourism, particularly in

developing countries, the tourists come into confrontation with otherness in safety and comfort (often on air-conditioned buses) and on their own terms (2007, pp.208-10). As Ghassan Hage has argued, in a multicultural society, where a rhetoric of tolerance is often used, white people largely imagine that they can determine the terms by which others are included (2007, p.88).

Another example of inclusion as problematic is in relations to gay marriage. Queer theorists are often against gay marriage, which is read as an inclusion into legal benefits, social approbation, and what is seen as an arcane institution. Judith Butler has shown in “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” that this form of institution (while she maintains a mostly ambivalent position towards it) comes at great costs (2002, p.40). Within the terms of the marriage debate, sexuality is positioned as either normal or pathological (Butler 2002, p.40) and in order to gain entrance to this institution one must claim normalcy on behalf of gay men and lesbians. Michael Warner also argues that recent gay and lesbian movements seek to claim normalcy “to win acceptance by the dominant culture” (2002, p.50). By claiming normalcy these gays and lesbians are therefore defined against sexual “others” whose sexuality is pathologised: “It does not seem to be possible to think of oneself as normal without thinking that some other kind of person is pathological” (Warner 2002, p.60). With this type of inclusion, with full legal equality and social sanctioning, we are not free to demand more, and must be content with the equality bestowed upon us, but not on our own terms.

It might appear that I am suggesting that queer comfort always automatically invokes discomfort in a non-queer person who is witness to this comfort. This is perhaps illustrated in Shannon’s example, where people were shocked at her holding hands with

her partner. This is not, however, always the case; it varies with each particular interaction, and is dependent on context and reception. Context is, in part, spatial, to do with the location where this interaction occurs. For example, a reaction to flamboyant queerness at a Mardi Gras parade might be different to flamboyant queerness at a job interview, for example. Or someone in drag in the inner suburbs might be received differently to someone in drag in the outer suburbs, or in rural areas. And context is also temporal: late night as compared to early morning, in celebrations around Pride, compared to another type of civic celebration.

Reception, besides being to do with context, is of course about the experience of the person who is witnessing or coming into confrontation with another unlike them. It is to do with their experiences and how these experiences are mediated by particular social norms, with norms regarding what makes one a gendered or sexed person particularly relevant in this case. For example, Bella's comments about King Street at night demonstrate that she thinks most women would have an issue with travelling in this area. Other participants also commented on avoiding some of the City streets at night. King Street is well known in Melbourne for its nightlife, which includes many strip clubs, as well as other nightclubs and pubs, and has a reputation for being seedy. As I have implied above, what makes one gendered or sexed, the particular ways in which one expresses gender or sexuality, intersect with other social norms such as race and class, to promote an ideal of which many people fall outside. These factors affect the reception of queer people in public spaces.

It is not necessarily as simple as saying that one's comfort provokes another's discomfort. Discomfort, equally, can produce discomfort in others; for example, queer people can

become uncomfortable on sensing other people's discomfort at their queerness. This is perhaps most salient in Shannon and Eloise's examples above. Both these women had internalised others' responses to their sexuality, in particular their displays of public affection. Perhaps it may even work the reverse way, in that they might even feel comfortable around people who are comfortable around them.

The only option I haven't explored yet is that someone could feel comfortable at feeling others' discomfort, which is entirely possible considering people's investments in difference or distancing themselves from others. On a larger scale, it may even be possible to label straightness, or whiteness, or middle-to-upper classness as investments in other people's discomfort. However, this would depend on whether reproducing a particular mode of living or identity as a norm, which excludes, or includes others at a price and under certain conditions, is a catalyst for a social environment that is likely to generate large-scale discomfort. Conversely, some queers might feel comfort in producing discomfort in non-queer onlookers, as a way of distancing themselves, or reaffirming an identity at least partly based on resistance.

### **Interpreting Comfort in Public Spaces**

Ahmed's spatialised metaphor of the "comfort zone" (a "sanitised space" of normativity and compulsory heterosexuality) (2004, p.147) also suggests that some spaces are shaped by the needs and wants of particular social groups. In Don Mitchell and Lynn Staeheli's research on Horton Plaza in San Diego, for example, they found that city management authorities hired safety ambassadors to dissuade the homeless, poor and elderly from congregating (2006, pp.163-4). "Public comfort allow[s] bodies to extend into spaces

that have already taken their shape” (Ahmed 2004, p.147). This could also refer to small scale spaces around a body which have taken their shape. Ahmed gives the example of a chair which may be comfortable for the owner, but not comfortable for someone else of a different height, or to whose shape the chair is not moulded (2004, p.148). As can be seen in the above example of shopping malls, larger spaces are also “moulded” so that particular bodies can occupy them more comfortably. Advertising generally shows heteronormative appearing couples, and many stores are designed to appeal to people of one sex in a stereotypically gendered way through offering particular products, and through design, colour schemes and furniture.

The design theorists Tomas Maldonado and John Cullars see comfort as a disciplinary technique that “serves to structure daily life, to ritualize conduct, especially the attitudes and postures of the body in relation to furniture and objects intended for domestic use”(1991, p.36). As they analyse comfort as promoting relaxation in privacy away from the world of work, they envision this as upholding “home” as a place for leisure and the ideal of the bourgeois nuclear family (Maldonado & Cullars 1991, p. 36). They even explicitly tie the ascendance of the nuclear family model to the move from a quite open living space used for a variety of purposes to a closed space, divided into rooms which separate the various living functions (Maldonado & Cullars 1991, pp.36-7). They point out that, as well as a house being divided into many spaces—each with different functions, there is also a whole assortment of objects and fixtures which reside in each room. These furnishings range from the more permanent and immobile, such as ovens, bathtubs or built-in robes, to smaller movable items such as oven gloves, hairbrushes, or socks. Maldonado and Cullars argue that the clear division of rooms and the provision of

associated objects regulates behaviour within these spaces (1991, p.38). Comfort as a disciplinary technique can therefore be seen to be linked to the privatisation of sexuality and to the gendering of bodily attitudes, spaces, tasks and recreation. Such habitual orientations may also be transposed as expectations toward public spaces, particularly when public spaces are semi-public spaces or partially privatised.

Although Maldonado and Cullars discuss the relationships between comfort and privacy, and between comfort, spatial regulation and the rise of the nuclear family form, I want to suggest that such divisions also permeate public space. Particular shops, for instance, such as hardware stores, or boutiques, display marked gender divisions within the imagery within their advertising and the clientele who frequent the stores. Even whole areas of cities, such as red light districts, for example, invoke particular models of appropriate maleness and femaleness. In a red light district women may be read in a sexualised way or seen as out-of-place or vulnerable, whilst a jovial, homosocial masculinity focused on a shared experience of sexual consumption might be expected for men. This can work to regulate who can traverse this area and who may feel unwilling to go there, especially, for example, at night time.

Maldonado and Cullars' example is also relevant in thinking about the public as imagined as the private's "other." This is in spite of the fact that public and private realms generally interface and interconnect with each other in various ways, such as internet connections, utilities, public housing or rental tenancies, and many other connections and "semi-publics" that make delineating the private a very difficult exercise. However, many still imagine them as separate entities, and, as such, what is seen as confined to the private may not be seen as acceptable in public. In an extreme suburban bourgeois model, if

Maldonado and Cullars are correct, the range of behaviours allowed expression within the suburban streets may be curtailed as the home comes to be seen as the ultimate and natural locus of bourgeois pleasures.

### **Queering Comfort**

Comfort is often associated with ease or warmth, equilibrium or familiarity, whereas poststructuralist and queer theory, at least on the surface, seems to advocate growth, change, rupture, breaking with old ideas.<sup>40</sup> If this generalisation is at all true, then what does it mean for queer activism founded on these ideals? And how do queer people live, express and narrate experiences of comfort, in light of what might seem like totalising imperatives toward particular kinds of lives, or particular kinds of politics?

In my research interviews, comfort (and its negative counterpart discomfort) were often mentioned as salient affective states related to experiences in public spaces, although I had expected other emotions such as fear to be more prevalent. In this case, then, I would also like to queer definitions of comfort as regressive and inhibiting (for example in the phrase “get out of your comfort zone”) by examining the multiple functions comfort has in queer lives, and queering notions of comfort and equilibrium as solely normative.

At the essence of the problem is what happens when bodies marked differently, or people with different identities and experiences meet in public spaces. It seems obvious that heterosexual discomfort in sharing space with queers might also lead to discomfort in

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<sup>40</sup> Jack Reynolds argues, in his study of learning, that the phenomenological approach of Dreyfus prioritises “equanimity and equilibrium” (2006, p.540) , whilst a Deleuzian approach, as emphasized in *Difference and Repetition*, values newness, and becoming “a nomad who is never at home” (2006, p.540). Reynolds critiques Deleuze’s emphasis on disruption and transgression for creating change (2006, p.554). In “Continental Philosophy and Chickening Out” he also refers to the “poststructuralist valorization of the future as difference, novelty...” (2009, p.266)

those queers who may well feel alienated in those spaces. It could also lead to anger or defiance. Could queer comfort, including queer occupation of spaces, such as in pride marches, university queer spaces, queer clubs, queer districts, engender discomfort in heterosexuals? And would this necessarily be a productive discomfort?

Queer comfort, rather than normative comfort, might seem a little too flagrant or defiant to straight onlookers. This is especially the case given the aforementioned liberal political context that endorses difference, so long as the difference resembles the majority, or isn't of the threatening kind (for example, queer commercial districts can in many situations be seen as a benign form of difference which enable one to consume niche or "lifestyle products"). Queer comfort might be expressed by visibility out on the streets, or in the malls, or parks; by looking different but not seeming scared or unhappy about it; not feeling out of place; actively claiming space. This would perhaps not be perceived in the same way as, for example, a straight white suburban mother in her early thirties, dressed in smart casual clothes feeling comfortable strolling around her neighbourhood in the afternoon sunshine. The latter type of comfort is endorsed, perhaps expected. The right person is in the right place at the right time. Queer comfort is perhaps a little more incongruous. Although, notice that the suburban mother is unmarked in most ways, and is strolling around in the daytime rather than the night, which is seen as acceptable for a woman: she isn't an Indigenous woman, she isn't wearing a hijab, she isn't lower class.

All this is not to say that comfort functions in a completely random way, or that there is no point surmising what role it might play in everyday lives or how it might circulate affectively in encounters in public places. It is true that different people in different circumstances may react variously with discomfort or comfort, or not explicitly register

either. It does seem, however, that discomfort felt on perceiving others' discomfort at being in one's presence is common and can reinforce a sense of not belonging in certain spaces. Discomfort at seeing people taking up space who aren't traditionally represented as being a part of that space also seems prevalent and can serve to reinforce norms in an insidious affective way. This occurs on an everyday level without even any overtly stated or written opinions or prejudices or explicit policies serving to reinforce these taken for granted and spatialised norms. As the interview participants stories in the "Safety" and "Violence" chapters demonstrated, queer people often "self-police," or manage their own appearances and behaviour in order to avoid harassment or abuse. Others' discomfort and spatial norms regarding the kinds of people who are represented in particular spaces further reinforce these dynamics.

Ahmed sees queer theory as anti-normative and suggestive of a politics of queerness in which queer lives would "not desire access to comfort" (2004, p.149). These "comforts" are the comforts of following a heteronormative lifestyle: marriage, nuclear family units, monogamy, religion, militarism and nationalism (Ahmed 2004, p.149). She argues that these "ideal" queer lives are accessible to some more than others. These include those who have the "(cultural as well as economic) capital" (Ahmed 2004, p.152) to support this orientation against normativity and those who have the support to maintain this orientation and lived politics. Following Gayatri Gopinath she provides the example of queer women in South Asia, who may not have the possibility of public queerness open to them, but may queer the home through their private eroticism (Ahmed 2004, p.151). She concludes by suggesting that a more productive (and inclusive) way of imagining and living "queer" might be "to inhabit... norms differently" (Ahmed 2004, p.155) and

thereby displace them. She gives the example of queers who raise children but “queer” the child raising process, and the concept of family, by never quite fitting in (Ahmed 2004, p.154). In this way, she maintains that discomfort (as a form of not fitting norms) is generative. This can be seen as similar to Judith Butler’s discussion of drag in *Gender Trouble*: “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself- as well as its contingency” (1990, p.175). In this case norms surrounding families and gender may be displaced, questioned or refigured. Ahmed also warns, however, against idealising this family form within the queer community.

I argue that comfort is more nuanced. I am particularly interested in “Queer Comfort.” In one respect it is because comfort as a notion hasn’t really been interrogated so much. It hasn’t been queered, where queered implies to make strange, to look at from a different angle, or to have a different take on something.

The phrase “strange comfort” is an interesting one. It seems to mean one can take comfort in something that wouldn’t normally give you comfort, perhaps a bittersweet comfort, or a comfort that is at once comforting and discomfiting. Sara Ahmed mentions in her book, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, that it is possible to feel discomfort at one’s own comfort, or one’s own privilege (2004, p.147). I want to suggest that, on the other hand, one could also feel painful discomfort at seeing someone else’s discomfort. For some queer women, as discussed above, there was a real discomfort engendered from being subject to others’ discomfort around them. Equally, one could feel comfortable when someone else is comfortable, if they can see their comfortable body language, and feel at ease around them due to their manners, tone of voice, or other relational cues. In some of the cases the participants’ discussed, a knowing smile or wink or knowing that

there were other queer people nearby helped them to feel comfortable. Presumably heterosexual comfort around queers could also help queer women to feel more comfortable in spaces.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Comfort is ultimately about more than inclusion or exclusion, and discomfort about more than just the feeling of the gaze of the other upon us. Comfort is at times radical, at times habitual, and sometimes it can be discomforting to others. As it seems impossible to live in a completely anti-normative way, some forms of comfort (even ones that go unnoticed) may be necessary to live any form of life. This is not to say that discomfort isn't productive. Perhaps for the moment it's just a starting point to look into ways we could live our lives, build more sustainable forms of queer politics, or find ways to strengthen queer communities.

This chapter has explored processes of individualisation and spatial and design changes related to Western modernity. It has placed a growing emphasis on comfort as developing within this trajectory. It also shows how the public/private divide, rather than being merely static has developed over time along with differing socio-spatial and political norms. The next chapter will expand on some of the themes encountered in this chapter. It will explore place development within a neoliberal global order. It will further examine the interrelationship between space and identity, and the impact of economic forms on social identities such as queer. Rather than maintaining the broad general focus of this chapter, the next chapter will return to the specificity of spatial experience within Melbourne and will incorporate the perspectives of the interview participants. While

“responsibilisation” was discussed in chapter three, the next chapter examines responsibilisation specifically as a mode of neoliberal governmentality.

Responsibilisation, in turn, is linked back to processes of identity development through discourses of personal development which emphasize individual agency and autonomy.

## CHAPTER SIX: NEOLIBERALISM, IDENTITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

In this chapter I will explore queer identity formation, drawing on my research participants' discussions of identity and self-expression. Identity will be examined as forming in relation to the current neoliberal capitalist modern economic and temporal paradigm. Neoliberal capitalism is characterised by market liberalisation (Le Heron 2009) free trade and an emphasis on private property rights (Harvey 2005, p.2). In such a system, the state must only intervene, if necessary, to ensure the above conditions and to create new markets (Harvey 2005, p.2). I will explore the ways in which identity and self-understanding are shaped by living in a neoliberal economic system. This chapter will also investigate the constitution of places through gentrification processes, niche marketing, and identification with particular social groups. I aim to combine a stylised, spatial embodied identity, as discussed in chapter two- the body-subject of phenomenology, with an understanding of this subject as a subject of neoliberal capitalism, to describe the way in which space is differentiated through the movement of capital and the way identification forms "communities of place." I will argue that identity formation and place formation are interlinked, and, in some ways, mutually constitutive. That is, the particular forms of queer identity are influenced by individuals' relationships to particular places.

I also claim the reverse, that particular places are heavily influenced by the identities of those who frequent and reside in those places. Flows of capital and forms of capitalism, equally, influence place formation and the types of identity formations that are possible. Queer identities are also structured by normalisation and differentiation processes that also operate both socially and spatially and are influenced by late modern western

capitalism. Queer identity and self-expression are in dialogue with normalisation and differentiation processes and with the vulnerability that comes with expression of personal differences in public, which can work to restrict available forms of self-expression.

In order to understand queer identity formation (or identity formation in any other social group) it is necessary to understand the context and culture surrounding identity formation. The interview data demonstrates participants' engagements with particular places in Melbourne and how these places have influenced identity formation. It shows participants' need for self-expression and relates this to neoliberal discourses of individuality and identity as well as exploring how queer identities are often formed in relation to a concept of resistance. Personal responsibility, individuality and empowerment were also regular themes in the interviews and I will argue that these are also linked to neoliberal ideals of selfhood. This chapter will make the case that capitalism, and normalisation and differentiation processes, structure social identities through consumption and production practices and societal organisation, which occur as an effect of capitalist methods of production.

### **Neoliberal Capitalism and Identity Formation**

Marxist arguments claim that capitalism limits identities, and limits who one can be within those identity groups (Joseph 2002, p.16). However, in *Against the Romance of Communities*, Miranda Joseph claims that these arguments are based on a Fordist mass production model of capitalism where consumer goods were relatively undifferentiated, and jobs (in first world countries) were less specialised (Joseph 2002, p viii, p.17, pp.47-

8). She claims that (re)production processes, such as identity constitution, should not be seen as taking place outside a capitalist order (2002, pp.39-40). Joseph equates this view with the common socialist feminist argument that the reproductive labour (such as housework and childrearing) that is generally undertaken by women needs to be taken into account in economic analyses as it offers a major contribution to the economy (2002, p.39-40). Here Joseph draws on Christine Delphy and Marilyn Waring's contention that neoclassical and (orthodox) Marxist economics don't value or account for forms of (re)production that are essential for the functioning of capitalist markets (cited. in Joseph 2002, p.39). These include, according to Joseph's reading of Delphy and Waring "human reproduction, housework, subsistence farming, the environment and volunteer work..." (2002, p.39). Gendered ideals and behaviours, Joseph states, are formed according to "one's relation to production' and one's relation to capitalism" (2002, p.40). These processes of identity production can take place through involvement in queer or gay and lesbian community groups, in non government organisations, through consumption, workforce participation, and through spatial practices. Queer consumption practices could include those such as particular clothing and hairstyles that represent queer identities, or alternative or resistant consumption practices such as second-hand shopping or D-I-Y (do it yourself) fashioning of goods.

Joseph has developed a theoretical basis that accounts for the influence of production processes on identity formation (i.e. identity production does not exist in a cultural realm that is outside all production processes). She draws on Marxist social analysis (to account for the impact of production processes and economic organization on identity formation) as well as poststructuralist theory. She sees the latter as holding far stronger explanatory

power in terms of the complexity of social differentiation and community or social group development (Joseph 2002, p.31). In particular, Joseph is interested in theories of performativity in shaping communities (and identity groups or social movements) (2002, p.30). This combination of Marxist theory and theories of performativity, according to Joseph allows her to explain “the performativity of production and the production of performance” (2002, p.30).

The work of Zygmunt Bauman is also useful in exploring identity construction in late modern consumer capitalist societies. Zygmunt Bauman argues that consumer society structures life so that we are “constantly finishing and beginning again from the beginning” (2001, p.12). He argues that the “history of consumerism” (2001, p.14) consists of the breaking down of the relationship between “need” and consumption. Need, according to Bauman, in the course of this history was overtaken as a driver of consumerism, by desire (2001, p.14). Desire, in its turn, has been replaced by “wish,” which means that fulfilment through consumption can completely lose its relationship to need (Bauman 2001, p.14).

This lack of indexation of consumption to need creates a social order where solidity is replaced with fluidity (or, “the only constant is change”) (Bauman 2001, p.14). Bauman concludes that consumer society is driven by the anxiety caused by “institutional erosion” and “enforced individualization” (2001, p.28). Individuals overcome a fragmented and “unknowable” social order by focusing on their own lives and “biographical solutions”, i.e. creating a coherent life narrative and some continuity in a world that seems to be constantly changing. Individuals turn to consumption to fulfil the imperative to create a stable identity (Bauman 2001, p.25). This consumerism is self-fulfilling, Bauman claims,

as it trains participants to become unable to find means to create satisfactory identifications and to narrativise their lives in other ways (2001, p.25).

Advertising and marketing's role continually reorient desire to new objects, resulting in shorter and more frequent cycles of consumption (Bauman 2001, p.22). Planned obsolescence of various technologies is one technique that may be seen to be contributing to this restructuring of desire. Modernity, in this definition, is a process of seeking the new, and throwing away the old (Luhman, cited in Bauman 2001, p.22). Bauman claims that humans are unhappy at rest, and must continually seek new challenges and remake themselves.

Arguably this conquest model presents a masculine ontology - Bauman even takes Don Juan as a case study of this type of human: "Don Juan's life is thinly sliced into separate and unconnected moments but it is Don Juan himself who has sliced it this way" (2001, p.11). Nevertheless, I am inclined to agree with Bauman that the society has changed rapidly over the last few hundred years, and that this has coincided with the rise of consumerism. However, I find that Bauman adopts a very urgent, sometimes alarmist and pessimistic tone when discussing the rate of change in society, particularly as he does not seem to take into account continuities in society and social institutions that have also persisted or even been strengthened. These include gendered norms and the institution of marriage, capitalist political formations (despite recurrent crises and reformations), education systems, representative democracy, and elements of judicial and legal systems, systems of surveillance and techniques of self-discipline, statistical methods of population measurement and governance. Some of these continuities have often persisted despite much resistance and activism.

In addition, my research interviews show evidence of reflective identity formation processes, both at the group and singular levels, which are never completely outside consumer capitalism, but also engage in a resistant and sometimes critical manner. Because there are many labels which broadly fit the category of identifying as same-sex attracted or “gender deviant”, and a woman, or someone who does not identify as a man, including “lesbian, dyke, queer woman, transwoman and genderqueer,” some participants were quite explicit about why they used a particular identity term and what it meant for them and their identity. They also discussed why they disagreed with some labels, or why they saw themselves as different from people who used these other labels to self-identify. While this sort of society influences individuals to narrate and restructure their lives somewhat compulsively and atomistically, the interviews I have conducted emphasise the power of collective social action as members of particular identity based groups for the participants.

The sociologist Suzan Ilcan’s analysis accords with Bauman and Joseph’s analyses in some key ways. Like Bauman, she believes that individuals must adapt to changing conditions under neoliberal capitalism, but she focuses on processes of production, rather than the processes of consumption Bauman elaborates upon. What Ilcan terms a “responsibilizing ethos” (2009, p.220-23) is an aspect of a (neoliberal) mode of governmentality in which individuals become responsible for managing social issues that were previously managed in welfare states (or Fordist governments) by the state. Citizens, she argues, are the ones expected to manage the rapid pace of social change, as “the durable or long term” is replaced by “the transient or short lived” (Ilcan 2009,

p.223). Following Nikolas Rose's work on neoliberal governmentality,<sup>41</sup> Ilcan argues that "privatizing responsibility" involves processes of creating ideas regarding "liberal social government" (2009, p.228) and composing solutions. She equates this description of neoliberal processes with Rose's description of neoliberal governmentality as a "style of thought" (Ilcan 2009, p.228). This can be taken to mean that neoliberalism frames the issues that come to be seen as problems and the solutions to these issues. There might be seen to be too much government spending, for example. Responsibility for social problems is displaced onto the voluntary sector and individual actors.

Each of the above theories contributes to a broader understanding of identity formation and the conditions of social change in neoliberal society. I agree with Bauman's argument that consumption is a driver of identity formation, and the move from an earlier model of consumption more closely indexed to need to one predicated on "wish" fulfilment has led to an emphasis on self-definition through the consumption of goods and services. With the erosion of social institutions and pace of social change, identity has become a process of individual self-narration, mediated through consumables. In order to augment Bauman's argument, I would also like to draw on Joseph's insistence that queer identity production processes are (re)production processes, in contrast to theories of production where identity is an "excess" and located "outside" and in the realm of the cultural. Divisions of labour and social divisions influenced by niche consumption contribute to identity formation. This helps to drive neoliberal capitalism, in which differentiation and specialisation of goods and services serve to maintain the

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<sup>41</sup> Governmentality is a term coined by Michel Foucault, which, he explained, was to be "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behavior" (1997, p.82; Rose et al. 2006, p.83).

economy. Additionally, I will incorporate Ilcan's insights that neoliberalisation works in tandem with an "ethos of responsabilisation," which displaces responsibility for social ills onto individuals. This style of governmentality may have profound effects for not only social activism, but also social group formation, as the strategies for achieving social change may be different. Who people see themselves as in relation to others, as well as how they see themselves as members or groups, may differ profoundly to strategies and identities promulgated through previous forms of governmentality.

### **Norms, Normalisation and Queer Identity Formation**

If neoliberal capitalism promotes or even requires differentiated or niche identities and individualism to drive demand and desire, then how can this be reconciled with the previous discussion of identity formation? In part, identities and communities are self-regulating, as they delimit themselves as distinct from other identities and communities, sometimes broadening the definition of who fits, and other times edging on urging sameness and edging towards a narrower understanding of who belongs. It is never possible to replicate exact identities, and on the other hand, even communities based on inclusion as an organising principle (such as some queer communities) tend to delineate the borders of the community in some manner. So norms are often generated in particular communities, and sometimes coercive normalisation processes occur as well.

There tends to be some contention both in queer theory and the rest of the queer community about the exact meaning or meanings of the term "queer." Although only four of the participants self-identified as queer, more referred to the "queer community" as an umbrella term. Nonetheless, it is necessary to understand the various meanings of queer,

as the resistance to normativity (especially sexual and gender normativity) is one of the defining features of queer according to one of the most commonly used definitions (see, for example, Jakobsen 1998, p.517). Resistance or nonconformity to sexual or gendered norms may also be a major factor in the experiences of people who identify as gay, bi or lesbian.

Challenging gendered and sexual norms through self-expression can be an important part of gay and lesbian identity, as will be demonstrated in some of the interview participants' quotes later in the chapter. One of the main meanings associated with the term "queer" is as a descriptor or self-descriptive label for people who identify with non-normative sexualities. As we have seen already, queer and transgender women are sometimes seen as out of place in public, although they may fit in with predominant norms in other ways or at other times. A related use of the term queer involves resistance to, or subversion of norms (or averages), and constellations of normativity (which are moral injunctions to be in a particular way, according to these norms). As we will see in the next chapter, participants who identified as queer generally saw queer as having a political meaning, entailing a commitment to challenging norms. In "Queer is? Queer Does?: Normativity and the Problem of Resistance" Janet Jakobsen defines normativity as "a field of power, a set of relations that can be thought of as a network of norms, that forms the possibilities for and limits of action" (1998, p.517). Norms are defined as "the imperatives that materialize particular bodies and actions" (Jakobsen 1998, p.517). Queer is often seen as bearing a relationship of resistance to heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity and homonormativity are linked to neoliberal strategies of activism and identity formation that queer tends to resist. I have claimed that "queer" identities can

never be entirely outside of capitalism, as identity formation and processes of subject formation are established through consumption practices and neoliberal understandings of the self. However, there is also a possibility for queer to resist the kinds of normalisation that are linked to neoliberal subjectivity. Margot Weiss details the resistance of queer to neoliberal strategies in her discussion of Gay Shame San Francisco's (a queer activist collective) political strategies. Weiss argues that homonormativity is "deeply informed by neoliberalism in a variety of guises" (2008, p.90). Gay Shame San Francisco uses direct action as a strategy and has protested issues such as marriage, the rolling back of welfare and social services, and gentrification in their city (Weiss 2008, p.91). These social issues highlight the privatisation associated with neoliberalism (in the example of cutting government funded social services) as well as the strategy of sameness aligned with homonormativity that is used by gay marriage advocates. Gay Shame also attempts to draw attention to inequities based on race, class, gender and other axes, which they argue are reinforced by capitalism (Weiss 2008, p.92). These pervasive, structural social inequalities are arguably ignored by a neoliberal rhetoric that focuses on individual responsibility for overcoming disadvantage. Weiss compares Gay Shame with another group, the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom, which takes the opposite approach and enlists a liberal politics of sameness or normativity to garner support for their organisation and its activities. NCSF argued that a planned BDSM (bondage and discipline and sadomasochism) conference was to consist of mostly married heterosexual couples attending lectures to try to improve their relationships (Weiss 2008, p.88).

Michael Warner explores the rise of this politics of normativity. He claims that evaluative or value-based norms are often confused with statistical norms or averages (2000 p.56).

He contends that people were not as concerned with achieving normalcy before the rise of statistics as a technology for governing people (2000, pp.53-4). This medical and social scientific model of statistical normalcy as an optimal state began to be generalised to other areas of life including sexuality. He contextualised the use of the word “queer” in relation to a call for queer people to see themselves as normal:

“One of the reasons why so many people have started using the word “queer” is that it is a way of saying: “We’re not pathological, but don’t think for that reason that we want to be normal.” People who are defined by a variant set of norms commit a kind of social suicide when they begin to measure the worth of their relations and their way of life by the yardstick of normalcy. The history of the movement should have taught us to ask: whose norm?” (Warner 2000, p.59)

Processes of normalisation do not occur simply within communities, however. In one sense, normalisation is a scalar issue. A national imaginary (similar to the “colonizing imaginary” described by Linnell Secomb in “Fractured Community” (2000, p.145)) may strongly be based on a particular dominant group (for example white people or middle class people) or a particular kinship structure, such as the oft-mentioned “working families.” Rosalyn Diprose, in “The Hand that Writes the Community in Blood” (2003, p.47) argues that the national community is often seen as requiring protection from those seen as “others.” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner claim that (in the United States) “national heterosexuality” (2002, p.189) intersects with a racialised imagination of the nation state to create a “sentimental” and “sanitized space” of “pure citizenship” (2002, p.189). This serves to privatise citizenship and distance it from public sphere critiques (Berlant & Warner 2002, pp.189-90). To the extent that the state is a liberal state, a

private/ public divide is largely taken for granted and certain issues are seen as universal (public) and others as particular (private). While there may be economic tolerance and encouragement of difference, the “us” of the nation-state is often based on particular identities and kinship models that stand in for the universal or the unmarked.

However, cities may be divided into different spaces, fractured along different lines. Each region or area may have different norms, which may conflict with or concur with the national imaginary. Different ways of imagining particular spaces can also influence how one imagines the nation— as embracing difference and composed of many communities, as reaching out to the other (Diprose 2003, p.41) or as strongly cemented by national values that cut through the differences, or as deeply divided, for example. It will be shown that the particularity of different cities and different suburbs shaped the queer identities available to participants.

### **Space/Gentrification/Identity**

In social and cultural theories of identity, identity not often thought of in spatial terms, which is understandable, given identities are often seen as “a priori” or given, and monolithic. Therefore, if one is simply “interpellated” as having a particular identity, the specificity of space hardly matters. This is particularly true in essentialised models of identity, where the identity is not seen as developing in concert with local conditions, norms and identity groups. To make a somewhat obvious point, someone who identifies as a lesbian and a woman in Melbourne, may have different understandings of what it means to be a lesbian and a woman than someone living in Delhi or London or Portland. Many of the interview participants had lived in different cities with different queer or

lesbian cultures. Finlay was the most explicit about differences, as she characterised Canberra as having a conservative queer culture, Lismore as more diverse, and Melbourne as having a stronger butch/femme social scene.

Identity is not a static construct that we somehow choose or come to identify with, or is something we are simply told that we belong to; it is processual and particular, it changes over time, between places, and depending on who we are around. Concentrations of queer people brought Joseph to San Francisco (Joseph 2002, p.75) and continue to bring young queers from Canberra to Fitzroy, from Rockhampton to Brisbane, for example. Indeed, for cultural geographer Andrew Gorman-Murray, in his study of queer mobilities, for most of his respondents “sexuality played a key role in many of their relocation decisions, shaping destination choice and migration paths” (2009a, p.446).

While this in itself does not mean all queers in his study moved to be near other queer-identifying people, one of the major patterns of queer migration he identified was termed “[g]ravitational group migration” (Gorman-Murray 2009a, p.446). This type of migration entailed “moving to be near a neighbourhood with a gay and lesbian presence” (Gorman-Murray 2009a, p.446).

Meanwhile, gentrification processes create communities of consumption, which might be aligned with communities of production divided according to where one stands within broadly painted divisions of labour. Queer communities of consumption are not limited to so called “pink dollar”<sup>42</sup> gays, often imagined as gay men with expensive fake tans, polo shirts and edgy haircuts. Some interview participants felt strongly resistant to this sort of

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<sup>42</sup> “Pink dollar” is a term used to describe the queer, or often more specifically, gay male market and products marketed towards queer people. It is also sometimes used to name a particular type of queer lifestyle focused around consumption, fashion, and beauty ideals.

pink dollar queer lifestyle, as will be demonstrated in Amber and Samantha's comments below.

Communities of identity are implicated in larger scale national 'imaginary' communities. What the geographer Edward Soja terms "cityspace" (2000, p.8) is enmeshed in relations of production and consumption. Soja claims that "Social processes, such as stratification by status and class or the formation of urban communities, are seen as shaping cities but very rarely are these social and historical processes and events recognized as being significantly shaped by the intrinsic nature of city-ness itself" (Soja 2000, p. 8-9). I agree that it is important to recognise the mutual constitutive processes of spatial and social production and have attempted to explore this within this chapter. The agglomeration of people in cities provides economic advantages (Soja 2000, p.13) and provides opportunities for growth (Soja 2000, p.14). Population densities generally peak near the centre of cities (Soja 2000, p.16) and this also affects the types of neighbourhoods that develop in particular areas of cities.

Many of my interview participants saw areas of Melbourne as expanding or limiting the expression of their sexual and other identities. Samantha, along with some of the other participants expressed a quite critical relationship to what she terms "the mainstream." Particular suburbs were seen as strongly associated with the mainstream, which in this context is also described as heterosexist, or what might alternatively be called heteronormative. The mainstream is strongly associated, by Samantha, with advertising and particular types of consumer culture that she claims encourage expectations of sameness and conformity. Samantha was particularly reflective about this, as the following dialogue illustrates:

I guess I'm kind of a 'suburbist.' Like I tend to go places that are a bit more, like Fitzroy, Coburg, Brunswick, Collingwood, places like that as opposed to like more in the suburbs where it's kind of mainstream. Gross.

Interviewer: So those are the kind of places you avoid, the suburbs?

Yeah and malls and just really heterosexist, bland, beige places.

Interviewer: So, like just general malls?

Yeah, I don't know, they just kind of weird me out. Everyone's kind of like the same.

Interviewer: Is it just the sameness of the people or is it particular, any other things about malls?

I don't know, I guess that there's so much advertising and stuff there. Like it's just so blatantly conformist and just the kind of confined space of just advertising everywhere. Pushing the same message of what is normal and what is expected and it's just intense.

Interviewer: But are there other malls that aren't like that so much that you go to or ...?

I just kind of go to like Savers and strip shopping where there's not advertising everywhere. Kind of you know Brunswick Street, Sydney Street those kind of, Sydney Road, those kind of places where it's just a different atmosphere.

The suburbs that Samantha describes are part of the inner north, which was seen by many participants as a stronghold for lesbians. Flood and Hamilton's report *Mapping Homophobia in Australia* found inner city areas of Melbourne to be the least homophobic area in the country and the outer south and east to be the most (2005, p.2). These suburbs are not generally seen as conservative. Samantha's identity as a queer woman appears to be influenced by a rejection of sameness, heteronormativity, or what she terms "the mainstream." She frequents places with less, or perhaps different, advertising with more diverse representations. *Savers* is a secondhand store, and areas like Brunswick and Coburg are known for cultural diversity, in both the people who shop there and the range of goods available. Fitzroy and Collingwood are known for being trendy and "alternative," while Collingwood retains more of a "gritty" edge and a reputation for drug dealing. Brunswick, Collingwood and Fitzroy are known for having large and visible queer populations and businesses catering especially for queer people.

Samantha is rejecting a particular kind of capitalism, whereby people self-regulate according to heteronormative ideals, which she does not believe promotes difference. As in Joseph's analysis, Samantha is still a participating consumer, but prefers consuming goods and services in areas in which there are a range of non-standard goods and services, or goods and services that are marketed differently, such as second-hand goods. Here, one might usually say, as diverging from unmarked white, male and heterosexual norms, but arguably here this would need to be white, female and heterosexual, as consumption is viewed more strongly as a women's task and leisure activity. As Samantha is of mixed ethnic background, with dark skin and does not identify as white or heterosexual, it is understandable that areas strongly marketed towards the achievement

of white heterosexual norms may not reflect her identity at all. As a Melbourne queer woman, there are places that she goes to not feel “weirded out,” or bombarded with expectations of a normality that doesn’t represent her. As I have argued for the influence of place in identity formation, these places may also help constitute her identity. As a “suburbist” she is attracted to them for their difference. She draws on their specificity and conventions, the available consumer goods there, the types of people who inhabit these places, their identity lexicons and range of queer behaviours, to continue the ongoing process of identity formation and group belonging.

There are, however, a range of place-based marketing and advertising initiatives to generate business for the various shopping strips in these suburbs. The “Visit Victoria” website, with its “You’ll love every piece of Victoria” campaign, describes “Melbourne’s gay-friendly precincts” (Tourism Victoria 2010, n.p.).<sup>43</sup> The lead photo displays two youngish looking, perhaps in their 30s, white gay men standing next to a tram. The photo is taken on a diagonal, so that the body of one man is almost wholly visible. He displays a more muscular, chiselled sort of masculinity, whilst his partner or companion is of a slimmer build and stares straight ahead. The more muscular man grins, his face turned fully toward his partner. I read his look as one of joy and anticipation.

The “gay-friendly precincts” described are “South Yarra and Prahran,” “Fitzroy and Carlton,” and “St Kilda.” The list of activities on offer includes shopping “for the fashion conscious” as well as “chic cafes and bars” in South Yarra and Prahran, an “edgy mix of alternative, artistic and trendy elements” including “young designer and retro clothes shops, bookshops, galleries, cafes... and nightlife” in Fitzroy and Carlton, and voyeurism

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<sup>43</sup> This section of the website has since been removed.

in St Kilda, “see and be seen” (Tourism Victoria 2010, n.p.). Other St Kilda options also include walking, cycling and skating, as well as cafes, designer fashion and live music. The smaller descriptions of gay-friendly precincts link to larger place descriptions, presumably for a more general audience. On the “gay-friendly” page there is a very small picture next to the heading “Fitzroy and Carlton” of two women with short dark hair wearing suit jackets and sunglasses sitting on artistic mosaic-tiled outdoor seating, leaning in close and looking at each other. When one clicks on the link to the larger description of Fitzroy and Carlton, for the more general audience, the picture changes to a streetscape.

The copy on the website reads “While Melbourne as a whole is gay-friendly, there are some precincts that are favourites for both lesbian and gay visitors and locals” (Tourism Victoria 2010, n.p.). From my interviews, it is clear that understandings of what is a queer-friendly precinct are inflected by experience and positionality. However, there was some agreement on which places participants preferred to go and preferred to avoid. St Kilda and Prahran, in particular, in contrast with their website descriptions, received frequent negative mentions by my participants. Amber, for example, described her feelings about St Kilda: “The differences, there definitely are differences. I feel like, I mean like I know St Kilda is a really queer area... but I don’t think it’s my people somehow. I think maybe there’s a lot more men and a lot more money there...”

Commercial Road in Prahran is also often mentioned as a place where participants feel out of place. Lauren describes her experiences in Prahran as feeling as though she is not the right type of woman to be there, in that she is not what she describes as a “pretty little

fag hag.” She noticed that when she was there people would be “visibly hostile” and she was sometimes shoved by people because she was there with her girlfriend.

Recent discussions of gentrification, in particular the work of Neil Smith on the “revanchist” (or vengeful) city posits that development makes way for particular bodies marked in certain ways and not for other bodies, such as people experiencing homelessness, or those on lower incomes (Smith, cited in Kern 2010, p.210). This is evident in the types of images often deployed in place-based marketing and development campaigns, which often show white, middle class people enjoying the benefits of inner city consumption, such as participating in leisure activities or relaxing in cafés (Kern 2010, p. 217). Leslie Kern explains that “edginess” or seediness are used when marketing places to draw in potential tenants (2010, pp.222-3). At the same time, potential tenants are also offered a number of security features to counteract any feelings of danger that might be caused by inhabiting an environment that is perceived to be “edgy” or dangerous (Kern 2010, p.221). I would argue that these gentrification processes do not necessarily work against queer-identifying women, as many may “pass” or fit in to the category of “desirable” residents, due to middle-classness or whiteness or other visible identities. However, not all of the participants would necessarily be able to sustain this level of passing, or at least wouldn’t attempt to. This could be because of commitments to resisting normativity, or because they don’t have the option of successfully passing.

Additionally, I would argue that the way in which queer women are often sexualized by heterosexual men is not exactly a form of exclusion; rather, it is a more malignant form of inclusion, where queer women are seen as representing a male fantasy, and are therefore incorporated into heterosexuality. As Samantha explains:

I don't know, just when I get second glances especially if I'm with like a lover or something or like the other day I was in a café down there with my lover and this old man was just like, just giving us the filthiest looks. It was just really gross and then came back to do it again and then sat so that he could watch us and grease us off the whole time. And I just feel like, fuck you. Or just like sleazy people trying to like ... stuff like that. They think for some reason, queerness makes me want them, yeah I don't know.

Other participants also detailed similar experiences. For example, as noted in a previous chapter, Erin described an experience where men at a campground were acting in a threatening way and she and her partner were scared that they would enter their tent. Similarly, Poppy narrated an experience in the City where a large group of teenage boys crowded around her and her partner.

On the other hand, some queer events or spaces are often seen as places of expression or affirmation that act to relieve the pressure of passing or limiting self-expression when in the broader community. Alisha, who identifies as bi and trans says, for example, in her description of S/M clubs: "So there's spaces there that really are affirming, ultra affirming, which is a good thing to have even if you're totally happy. It's good to get a boost." Similarly, in response to the question, "Can you describe any positive experiences you've had as a [self-identified label] in public spaces?" Samantha replied:

By other queer people, just affirmation I guess. Like just kind of knowing smiles is nice. Like the other day when I was walking with my lover in the city and this other woman, like businessy suit woman was just kind of like, like there was this

knowing smile and this little nod. It was so weird but funny, yeah just cute. And I guess just going into spaces like, I don't know, bars and stuff, queer bars and stuff, just the kind of feeling of community and like conferences and stuff, it's just like yeah, that's really positive to me...

### **Self-Expression**

Many interview participants spoke of self-expression as important to them. It is very tempting to view self-expression cynically as fully imbricated with neoliberal individualism expressed through consumption, where the tiniest gradations of difference signify membership in different groups. It would be easy to consider self-expression as part of a politics of style, where aesthetics is primary— as pretention. On the other hand, self-expression is sometimes seen as the workings of the inner soul, the expression of a fundamental authenticity, the core of one's being. This view is also appealing. Due to the violence experienced by queers because of even the most minor acts of self-expression, or gender trespass, it also becomes an act of honouring or remembering those victimised to encourage and laud all acts of personal expression. Taking into account communitarian and phenomenological viewpoints where identity is constructed dialogically, self-expression could be argued to be seen merely as replicating forms of social group expression in an unindividuated manner.

However, where self-expression is limited, through the closet, through the normalisation of space, it can be experienced as a life or death scenario. An embodied style is not merely artifice but is lived as who a person is. This does not necessarily mean that all

queer-identifying people can be read immediately as queer. Alisha, who identifies as bi and trans, describes the kinds of pressures queer and transpeople face more fully:

To be honest, at times I'd like to dress a bit more glamorously, would be one thing. Sometimes, I deliberately, for lack of better words, 'dress down,' which is frustrating, because I would prefer to be more expressive. I personally think it's one of the hardest things to deal with is how well you pass, if that's your aim.

Queer self-expression does not necessarily falls outside of neoliberal identities, consumption and self-fashioning practices, as "the freedom to express yourself" is a major injunction in the neoliberal capitalist environment. There are forms of self-expression, however, that may not fall within, or may be uneasily, or mockingly included within more mainstream culture. Individual personal development and responsibility were also themes that emerged in the interviews and these themes will also be explored in relation to neoliberal ideals of selfhood.

### **Personal Development, Responsibility and Empowerment**

Personal development was a strong theme in some of the interviews. Discussions of personal development can be seen to draw on discourses of empowerment. Alisha, for example speaks of "working on herself." She says:

I've come to the conclusion that I'm not going to go through a whole lot of expensive plastic surgery, or whatever, to change how I look. I just can't be bothered with that. To me, my mind dominates me and I've tried to work on that and honestly build my self esteem, confidence, so I'm always feeling comfortable and that exudes across.

Another participant who takes on individual responsibility for change is Erin, who says: “So I guess it’s we have to create safe spaces for ourselves, that’s my opinion. Maybe others don’t think that but yeah, it’s we have to create our safe spaces more so than straight people.” Like some of the participants’ comments below, this strategy is in line with a “responsibilizing ethos,” (Ilcan 2009) where a marginalised group “takes responsibility” for the betterment of their situation. This solution, however, is space specific (even if the creation of queer space only involves the gathering of queer people to “queer” that particular space). It also emphasizes collective management of the problem of certain spaces being unsafe or dangerous.

Those who shared a belief in self-development saw personal empowerment as part of the solution to homophobia and heterosexism. Eloise believed that displaying “negative” emotions attracted negativity back to a person, and therefore thought that “working on oneself” could be useful in working on preventing homophobia. She felt that participation in a large group awareness training course had helped her to stop attracting negative experiences, such as being a victim of homophobia. Her answer to the following question is provided below:

Interviewer: What kinds of issues do you think might need addressing in terms of lesbian or GLBTI experiences in public spaces?

Well... safety is one thing I think of immediately, but I think underneath that as well there’s the experience for people who have a different sex, an other sexuality, our own experience of ourselves, and our own thoughts about ourselves, our own perceptions about ourselves, whether that manifests as internalised homophobia,

all of that. I think that is the thing that if we could empower ourselves to really disappear that stuff for ourselves, I think that would make the biggest difference, and I don't think it's going to come from other people mollycoddling it. What do you say? Mollycoddling...?

Interviewer: Mollycoddling?

Mollycoddling us or trying to provide a safe space or something. I don't think it's about that. I think it's really about us as, on a community level, choosing our sexuality and empowering ourselves about it. Like getting all that stuff that comes up out of the way, and that's what would make the biggest difference.

Interviewer: So what do you think would be the best way to go about doing that? Would it be on an individual level or would there be...?

I would love the idea of doing it on a community level, and I've done a lot of group level transformational work through an organisation called Landmark Education, and it's really powerful when like that kind of course can be done on a group level, like on a community level, cause it's, there's the individual conversations that we have and thoughts that we have for ourselves, and how we relate to ourselves, but then there's a, you could also say that there's a conversation that exists in the community, so a particular community like the queer community, has its own stuff on a community level and I think that would be really powerful to have something on a community level.

Interviewer: So a course to address these issues?

Maybe, yeah, a course or a, like start up a new conversation about it, like some kind of discussion or I don't know exactly what it would look like but, or a campaign or something. I don't know. Something. Yeah. Where people were left feeling really empowered and whole and complete, about themselves.

She saw her own ameliorated experiences as a testament to her personal development. She expresses this in the following quote. Here she reflects on previous experiences such as the one previously discussed in the threats and verbal abuse section in chapter three:

Yeah. Remember how I was saying with when I had all those guys attacking me on public transport and stuff, eventually I got to see that I was attracting that kind of energy, and negativity.

Interviewer: So the...?

Not because of, like, just because I was afraid and fear begets fear so if someone sees someone fearful they'll go for them.

Interviewer: So how long has it changed, have you been experiencing less incidences like that, or...?

Well that was happening in, from about, let me think, 2000 through to 2001 or 2002 and then I left Melbourne and I left the city and I was away for three years up in the bush in New South Wales. I can't remember if any of that stuff happened then. Some of it did. It was less likely to cause I didn't see as many people. [Laughing] And then in 2004 was when I did that Landmark course and something really shifted for me about myself and who I am as a person and that

experience of safety for myself. Knowing myself as whole, complete and perfect, and so from then on it's been less and less and less and less and less and much less.

This seems like quite an explicit example of a “responsibilizing ethos,” (Iltan 2009) as the change needed to create safety, is to come from within, from self-reflection within the queer community, rather than action taken towards those who perpetrate violence or harassment. In this model, there are internalised conversations about how individuals relate to themselves, but also intragroup conversations that affect how people in the queer community see themselves. The action that is seen to be needed, if the way toward creating social change is framed in such a manner, is in terms of representation and self-representation, about stemming internalised homophobia, and creating positive representations that are then projected outwards. Implicit in this model is that internalised homophobia originates in an external source (as it must, indeed, to become internalised) so then a solution becomes to take this homophobia and transform it into positive self-representations; this would then presumably impact positively on the treatment of and safety of queer people.

Alisha also discussed the need for people to work on themselves, but this seemed to be more for the purposes of participating more effectively in activism. For example, she had spent time “working on herself” in the past and found it useful for dealing with the challenges of being an activist:

And, you know, look, we can all, I think, one of the things that's helped me, when I came out I knew nothing about nothing and now I know a little about nothing, or

something, I realised ooh, this could be a tough journey because, I know it's a bit clichéd but I'd led a sheltered life. There was this person just worked as an accountant, drank beer and talked football, sort of thing, and I realised that I'm getting into a world that I don't know about so I thought it was a good idea to do some personal development, etc., and then later on, even apart from my own journeys, I realised I was going to be someone who'd speak in public and I thought well, that I have a responsibility to do that better. I need to get rid of any hot buttons and all that sort of thing and so I kept going. And I think that's been a hugely helpful thing that we can all keep working on our personal development and self esteem. And that's for anyone because we've all got stuff as people, we've all got our little bits of baggage. So getting rid of that's been really helpful and that's something we all can do for ourselves in some way. And of course it benefits all of our lives, not just sexual orientation and sex and gender identity. So that's something that I think we need to push. It's understandable we're angry about prejudice and queerphobia but it's how we deal with it and in particular, I'm probably digressing a bit, but I've seen too many queer advocates and I have to say, to be honest in particular trans advocates, who are just still very angry and then go about representing us that way, either on the advocacy level or running social and support groups and it's not healthy. That's not what we need to make things safer I suppose. We need people to be very assertive but not aggressive and I think that that's something we could all at least think about. You might honestly decide you don't need to, cool, but we can all do it.

She was critical of angry people within transgender and transsexual social groups, as she felt that they were not advancing their cause and were not good representatives. At the same time she did admit that anger over queerphobia was “understandable,” but suggested personal development as a way of dealing with this anger. This seems to suggest that Alisha didn’t think that anger was always inappropriate. Nevertheless, she felt that it was not useful as a representative strategy in queer activism, and was not appropriate behaviour for those providing support to other trans people. She claimed that anger wasn’t needed in order to “make things safer.” She is perhaps implying that openly expressed queer anger could cause a backlash against queer people. Alisha is concerned anger might cause organisations working on queer safety, such as rights organisations or local councils, to be less likely to consider implementing reforms. This seems to fit with Ilcan’s responsabilizing ethos in some ways, however it also appears that Alisha is being self-consciously tactical in her efforts to create social change. While anger is seen as legitimate, it is to be policed in order to appear “appropriately assertive” to others. While this may be necessary tactically, it does limit the types of queer subjects and the types of political actions available.

Wendy Brown (cited in Oswin 2005, p.575-6) relates discourses of empowerment back to liberalism. She argues that:

discourses of empowerment partake strongly of liberal solipsism, they draw a circle around the individual, in the very same act with which they grant her sovereign selfhood, they turn back upon the individual all responsibility for her failures, her condition, her poverty, her madness—they privatize her situation and mystify the powers that construct, position and buffet her.

For some participants, personal development was related to personal spiritual beliefs and this influenced their responses to my question of what should be done about negative experiences and/or discrimination in public spaces. Beliefs that could broadly be described as “new age” were the most common religious or spiritual beliefs held by interview participants. The discussion of new age beliefs in the sociological literature has tended to either emphasise new age’s complicity in capitalist modernity, describing it as little more than an array of consumer practices, or more sympathetically, as a burgeoning new movement which is more appealing than traditional religions due to its call for individual self-enhancement (Farias and Lalljee 2008, p.278). Miguel Farias and Mansur Lalljee’s broad comparative survey-based study of new age people, Catholics and atheists, found that New Age people valued individual autonomy (2008, p.287), but also were more likely to hold “universalist” values of “harmony and egalitarianism” (2008, p.287). The authors describe this value-system as “holistic individualism” (Farias and Lalljee’s 2008, p.288).

While Farias and Lalljee expressed a relatively positive opinion regarding “personal development,” Ilcan (2009) is more wary of the “responsibilizing ethos,” that is, an effect of neoliberal modes of governmentality in which individuals and social groups become responsible for their own empowerment and the creation of social change. Responsibility for social change is arguably being displaced from the public sector to non-governmental and voluntary organisations. Perhaps as a result of this, many interview participants were involved in a voluntary capacity, or through their employment in NGOs and many expressed a commitment to social change. Ilcan further argues that: “Voluntary organizations and volunteers in many parts of the world are becoming increasingly

responsible for managing the more vulnerable members of society instead of being a dynamic campaigner that demands change for the disadvantaged and the marginal” (2009, p.228).

### **Vulnerability and the Commitment to Resistance**

Finally, I want to conclude by discussing the commitment to resistance, in the face of everyday strategies of blending in, passing, or becoming invisible. As we have seen, the interplay of normalisation and differentiation processes works to influence individual and group identity. Further, queer identity is sometimes premised on resistance to norms (particularly heterosexual norms). This section will explore participants’ physical appearance and behaviour in public. This can reflect the expression of their identities, or on the other hand, it can be linked to fear of social sanctions in regard to their sexual and gendered identities (or how their sex and gender is read by others). The interview data shows that many participants had not previously considered how, or whether, they alter their appearance or behaviour in order to avoid harassment or violence. This suggests that some of their reactions, at least might be occurring at a preconscious or automatic level. Although most participants admitted to changing their behaviour at least occasionally, it often took a long time for participants to make what seems like implicit or embodied knowledge more explicit.

I asked participants whether they tried to look more queer or less queer (or whatever term they used to identify their sexual and/ or gendered identity in public spaces). Not many participants could maintain a commitment to always looking or acting how they wanted to in public. Demonstrating sexual or gendered difference and or resistance to norms of

dress and public behaviour was negotiated in relation to the particular space, the occupants of the space, and the participants' feelings at the time. Many, if not most participants expressed a resistance towards mainstream heterosexual and gay male norms, which were often defined in relation to consumption. However, this was not a simple process of rejection of norms, as if any process of rejection of norms could, indeed, be simple. Many participants talked of wanting to "be who I am," referencing discourses of a stable individual inner core around which identity is based, although Lauren talked of "being who I want to be," which leaves more room for change and becoming within identity formation. She presents her ideas on this below, referring to a need for collective action to challenge injustice:

I think there is stuff that needs to change and I think that people's sense of safety and they can, yeah, again be who they want to be and all that sort of stuff. Like some people are incredibly brave at just putting that stuff out there and I really admire them. Yeah I don't know. I suppose like a bit more of a sense of, like, that it's everybody's responsibility, like how the community... like how the community *and* society broadly responds to things is a bit of everybody's responsibility.

Erin describes this relation to authenticity as "trying to live [her] politics," but on an everyday basis she often finds it difficult to hold her partner's hand in public. Public affection, behaviour and dress are negotiated in the context of concern about safety and vulnerability. Many of the interview participants limited their self-expression (especially in particular situations that they judged to be more risky). They were aware that visibly queer people were sometimes subject to attacks, verbal abuse, or other policing

behaviours, or they were worried about what others might think or feel about them. This vulnerability can make it difficult to resist normalisation processes, of which gender policing is an enforcing factor.

While queer identity was seen as entailing a commitment to resistance by some participants, not all participants could afford to always express themselves in the ways in which they wanted. Others, like Erin, did not identify specifically as queer (in fact, Erin did not even really approve of the label “queer”) but wanted to be able to “be themselves,” and seemed to believe that expressing oneself was important even though this could result in danger. In Lauren’s statement above, there was also an acknowledgement that self-expression of gender or sexual identity is brave as there are those who are “just putting that stuff out there,” despite the safety risks involved in “being who they want to be.”

This discussion of self-expression and vulnerability can be related back to the interview participants’ comments regarding particular suburbs and areas in Melbourne, as many participants felt different levels of safety or vulnerability in different areas. For example, in Samantha’s opinion, the inner northern suburbs had a “different atmosphere” to other suburbs which she characterised as “bland” and “mainstream.” The atmosphere in the inner northern suburbs might potentially allow for a greater degree of non gender normative self-expression. Other places, such as the city at night, tended to be associated with vulnerability, particularly for lone women.

In “Selling the ‘Scary City,’” Kern claims that vulnerability strongly shapes what it means to be a woman, and that securitisation processes draw on and recreate vulnerability

as femininity. Kern's argument is that gender is a central, but often overlooked aspect of spatial organisation in urban spaces (2010, p.225). She takes inner city Toronto as a case study, and conducts interviews with women who have chosen to move to new inner city developments, and analyses representation of women from the marketing campaigns for these developments. Such developments are often securitised through technologies such as gating, policing and surveillance (Kern 2010, p.210).

These developments, according to Kern, draw heavily on ingrained ideas about women's vulnerability by marketing these developments as highly secure (2010, p.215). On the other hand, city life is depicted in the advertisements as promoting such values as "freedom," "liberty," "stimulation," and "victory," as well as opportunities for shopping, dining, going out for drinks, exercising, romance, and friendship (Kern 2010, p.217). In Kern's interviews some of the participants seemed to enjoy the "seedier" or more dangerous aspects of living in these neighbourhoods that were previously seen as unliveable or unsavoury (2010, p.223). The promised freedom through consumption, along with the excitement of danger mitigated by enhanced security, promoted settlement in previously undesirable areas by middle class women. I would imagine that this process is also driven by the disparity in the cost of renting or purchasing residential property in gentrifying areas, as compared to previously gentrified (or always gentrified) areas. As the place-based marketing promotes images of ideal residents, people who meet this image become seen as "desirable" or "dominant" residents, and others, perhaps minority or lower income groups who previously were dominant in a particular area, become invisible or stigmatised (Kern 2010, p.224).

We've already seen, however, that there is not just an imagined threat, but a very real threat and relatively high incidence of violent or sexual assault, harassment and verbal abuse towards queer identifying and transgender women. This also holds true for queer and trans women who do not fit with ideals of feminine appearance and comportment, and in fact, there seems to be an increased threat of violence for them. It is important to contextualise ideals of resistance and processes of normalisation and differentiation in relation to the evidence previously presented, particularly in chapters three, four, and five on experiences of violence, safety and comfort for queer women in public places. This helps to supplement abstract discussions of resistance that do not always take into account how resistance and normalisation work at embodied and everyday levels.<sup>44</sup> I will briefly recapitulate the findings from the previous chapter in regards to safety and violence below, in order to underline the real sense of threat experienced by some queer women.

Many of the participants' concerns about safety are responses to previous experiences of violence, verbal harassment, or threatening behaviour. Concerns about safety and the self-policing that can arise as an effect of previous experiences, have a significant effect on some queer women's lives. For some queer women, it can limit their mobility, dress and behaviour significantly. Some of the interview participants also felt threatened when out in public, "just as a woman" or just as they felt that straight women would. Some participants presented feminist rationalisations for this, as they felt that it is dangerous for all women to go out in public at night, or to some areas alone. They were more likely to posit gender as the reason for feeling unsafe when they had experienced harassment when

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<sup>44</sup> For example, Janet Jakobsen's (1998) discussion of resistance in her article "Queer Is? Queer Does?: Normativity and the Problem of Resistance."

alone, or when there was no obvious evidence that the harassment was due to sexuality, or if it was sexualised. Older women, on the other hand, reported “hitting the invisible barrier,” and experienced less sexualised harassment. Other participants described victimisation due to their refusal to appear or behave in a way that conformed to traditional gender norms. As described in chapter two, Finlay had been in multiple physical confrontations where men attacked her, and she believed this to be due to her gendered presentation. She mused that many of her queer friends whose physical appearance was not as androgynous reported far less incidents of harassment than she regularly experienced.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In summary, many queer and some transgender identifying women maintained a relationship to subverting norms, and an ambivalence to the mainstream, particularly the gay mainstream configured through “pink dollar capitalism.” However, and completely unsurprisingly, participants did not reject the same norms, and were not able to reject normative processes and identities across the board. Even when participants did reject processes such as “fitting in” and “not drawing attention to oneself” they often framed this in relation to Western neoliberal ideals of individuality, freedom and choice, such as “expressing oneself.” This underlines the ways in which “multiple and conflicting” norms must be negotiated on a daily basis within spaces. Participants did not necessarily express singular and coherent identity narratives, or seamless trajectories through space, rather a range of terms and explanations were deployed. This suggests that they attempt to negotiate a plethora of complex and fluid, academic and commonsense articulations of queer within a particular political and economic climate.

This chapter has explored queer identity in relation to late Western modern capitalism and its attendant spatial processes, as well as its accompanying discourses of responsabilisation. It focused on aspects of identity, but did not provide a full account of identity formation. To augment this understanding of queer identity, the next chapter will draw on feminist phenomenology and political theory to explore identity as relational, as formed in communities. It will explore this through the theme of community. Queer identifications develop both in relation to the communities of one's upbringing and in relation to those construed as queer. There are, however, debates both within academia and queer communities in regards to the meaningfulness of the term "community." The next chapter will attempt to provide a model of queer community that can incorporate difference.

Much of this dissertation has examined queer women's experience in relation to the experience of those who aren't marked as different in public spaces. In the next, final chapter, I will focus on experience within public spaces that are marked as queer or GLBT. Experiences in these spaces were very salient for interview participants and many of them discussed conflict within these spaces. This was to be expected to some extent, as at least one of the questions on the interview schedule asked explicitly about these sorts of conflicts. However, I did not anticipate that conflicts within queer organisations would be a focus of some of the interviews to the extent that they were. Some interview participants reported more issues in dealing with "queer spaces" or queer groups than they did navigating predominantly straight spaces or dealing with heterosexual people. Within a broader queer community, there are many identity-based groups (as well as groups based on refusal of identity), not all of whom would identify as being part of a

queer community, or indeed as being in any way related to one another. While this chapter has focused on individual queer experience, self-expression and self-formation, the following chapter will focus on the communal aspects of queer experience and identity development.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: COMMUNITY

While conservative pundits often hark back to a mythical nostalgic community of the past, with fewer divisions, and a sense of common purpose, others deride this idealism and argue that society is essentially fragmented or atomistic (Secomb 2000, p.133). There is conflict between liberal ideals of community, which assume that community is formed through voluntary association, and communitarian models that claim that one is born into community, and one's identity is inherently defined through this sociality. These ideals are further complicated if one attempts to apply these explications to the queer community. I will begin by discussing the formation of community and identity and will then proceed to explore queer community and identity more specifically. I will draw on Linnell Secomb's (2000) concept of "fractured community" and Rosalyn Diprose's idea that "community lives *from* difference" (2003, p.36) to explore conflict in the queer community. Suzanne Fraser (2008) has used these theories of community to inform her understanding of queer community, in relation to young gay men in Sydney. I will draw on her previous interview based work on queer community to help frame my findings.

In order to explore how queer, lesbian, bi and trans-identifying women conceptualise and experience queer community, I asked specific questions regarding experiences of community, including, "Do you feel that you are part of a queer or lesbian community?," "Who do you think makes up this community?," and "Tell me about a time you have experienced conflict in the queer community." Because the majority of participants were recruited through community organisations and e-groups, they tended to be heavily involved in activism and community groups.

Conflicts surfaced when I asked participants if they felt they belonged to the queer community, as many participants qualified their sense of belonging by specifying exactly where they felt they belonged and where within this community they felt that they didn't belong. Some bi and trans-identifying participants felt particularly unwelcome in parts of the queer community. Another question I asked: "Have you ever been in a space where you felt that people were very different to you?" also helped to generate responses where participants elaborated on not fitting within the queer community, although many participants defined this difference against very conservative heterosexual people or their families.

### **Engagement with "Queer"**

"Every new wave of queer youth picks up something from its predecessors but also invents itself from scratch" (Warner, 2002, pp.51-52).

In my interviews of lesbian, queer, bi and trans-identifying women in Melbourne, I found varied responses and overall a positive engagement with queer as a personal identity and a sense of belonging to queer communities. The greater enthusiasm for queer both as a personal identity term and as a term for a broader community of people with non (hetero) normative sexualities must be partially attributed to the title of my research study: "Queer Women's Experiences in Public Places." I made it clear in the participant information sheet that the study was open to a broad range of people who identified as "lesbians, bisexuals, dykes, gays, queers, genderqueers, transpeople" or terms with similar meanings, who also identified as women. Many of the participants, therefore, who self-selected to be part of this research may have done so because they felt that the focus of

this research and the language used corresponded closely to their sense of identity. Whilst many participants did not personally identify as queer, only one seemed fundamentally opposed to the use of queer as a term to describe a broader community.

Some participants were keen to clarify their understandings of queer, whilst others were quite happy for it to be used in the sense of a broad umbrella term. Amber, when asked “Who makes up the queer community?” responded:

I guess, people who are queer are the queer community, aren't they? But like, the community I'm kind of in contact with is more like a theatre scene, and lots of writers and stuff, so how do we connect? I don't know. I mean, I've got friends who are straight who I consider queer. I think it's a mindset. A kind of [...] acceptance that things are fluid and, yeah.

[Interviewer clarified] : So, things as in sexuality?

As in, yeah, and identity and experience, and, I mean the lot, chuck reality in there as well.

Amber views queer positively, and her view is potentially influenced by poststructuralist identity critiques, which see identity as less bounded and more mobile.

While this use of queer is implicitly anti-normative, particularly in its understandings of reality, identity and experience, a small minority of participants saw queer as explicitly activist and anti-normative and these were the participants most likely to question my own use of queer. Finlay, for example, explains her understanding of queer in the following way:

Like, I would say the way in which I use queer is quite different to how the word queer is understood by a lot of people. I think queer has kind of been this term that has been taken up and used by people as just this generic term that refers to everyone. You know, whereas my understanding of queer is like a little, like my use of the term queer is associated with political beliefs.

Beth also sees queer as political. When asked “Who makes up the queer community?” she said “anyone who’s not straight,” which was quite a common answer, but then qualified this with:

Gay, lesbian, bi, trans, intersex, but I think it’s a political label. I don’t think it’s just – it’s just because I’m gay, I’m queer. I think it’s a very – I think it’s a label you choose because you actually want to ..... discard the notions of conformity and you want to all work together and that kind of stuff. And I think a lot of people don’t understand that about queer. They think it’s just the new word for gay. And it’s not that. Well that’s not how I use it anyway.

Amber and Beth both described how they had heard queer being used descriptively by others, but then went on to elaborate a normative understanding of queer. This shows that the use and definitions of queer are not universally agreed on, and that there might be conflict between different groups self-defining as queer. Amber describes queer as aligned with “political beliefs” and Beth defines queer as associated with non-conformity and alliances between different (presumably non-conformist) groups. Amber is less upfront about the necessity for queer to be used in a particular way. She explains: “I think queer has kind of been this term that has been taken up and used by people as just this

generic term that refers to everyone.” Beth, on the other hand, makes a more explicitly normative claim when she says “And I think a lot of people don’t understand that about queer. They think it’s just the new word for gay. And it’s not that.” These interviews also show that queer is being used as “a synonym for gay,” as a personal identity term that’s synonymous with gay (or presumably lesbian) identity, or as an umbrella term that doesn’t necessarily carry activist or anti-normative connotations.

While these participants who described queer as activist and anti-normative were in the minority, there was not, overall, much active disagreement about the use of the label. On the other hand, Erin’s response to my question about the makeup of the queer community was:

Well I suppose I like the term GLBTI because I guess it tries to include everybody, but I think there’s another word now isn’t there, GLBTI... I’ve forgotten what the next one is, so I suppose it’s to try and use words for a start that you try and include everybody. So I probably like GLBTI rather than queer, yeah and maybe that’s a generational thing too, probably.

This response is interesting to me, because it illustrates the popular contention that wasn’t upheld in Suzanne Fraser’s work with young gay men: that the use of queer as a descriptor is closely related to age, with younger people being more likely to employ this term (2008, p.246). Erin is in her earlier fifties and identifies as a lesbian. While many others used GLBTI and queer quite interchangeably, she saw queer as being a non-inclusive term that only described one type of person. Erin was not unaware, however, of the academic arguments surrounding queer, as although she felt like GLBTI was a good

term as it includes everybody in its title, she also added: “And I mean they use terms like you know, fluidity in sexuality and stuff and yeah I mean yeah they’re arguments in themselves, yeah.” She seems unwilling to subscribe to these arguments as queer still comes across to her as non-inclusive. Overall in the interviews, there seemed to be more ideals of community based on difference, rather than those based around an inherent commonality. Only one participant expressed that queer community only had instrumental value for her as a source of support, rather than feeling a sense of belonging premised on identity, and I will discuss this case later in this chapter.

### **The Boundaries of Queer Communities**

While there is broad agreement about diversity within queer community/ies (however defined), there is also a general agreement that it is somehow bounded. Many participants delineated the boundaries as including all non-heterosexual people, although some were quite unsure of the role of straight allies in the queer community. This is in comparison to those such as Amber, who asserted above that she has straight friends who she sees as being queer and she considers queer as “a mindset.” Participants drew the boundaries quite differently, with some seeing non-normative sexual cultures such as kink and BDSM and sex workers as part of the community, whilst others defined the community as excluding straight or heterosexually coupled people who might be seen by some as part of the community (as they were in Amber’s quote towards the beginning of the chapter).

Poppy presented the broadest definition:

Oh, I think anyone who, yeah I think anyone who feels like they identify that way want to hang around those sorts of spaces and people, preferably in a friendly kind of fashion. Yeah and I think people can kind of opt in and opt out because that's how sexuality works as well. Or you know, that might fit in that community and other communities. Yeah. So I would see it as really broad, yeah.

Alisha, on the other hand, would not include heterosexual people at kink events as part of the queer community (responses along these lines were common): “Yeah. I guess within the kink community a lot of people who I wouldn't necessarily see as queer identify as queer. And they might be heterosexual, so I don't see them as queer.”

In her study of young gay men in inner city Sydney, Suzanne Fraser sees queer as providing potential for a gay community that acknowledges difference and overcomes totalizing processes which work to exclude some on the basis of a very particular group identity (2008, p.257). Many of the young men Fraser interviewed felt excluded from what they saw as the gay community, particularly as many of these young men described community as premised on “likeness” or “similarity.” Fraser represents these men's descriptions of community as following liberal and/or communitarian models. Some participants saw the gay community as very homogenous for various reasons. One man, who felt excluded, for example, saw the community as narrow and centred around the club scene (Fraser 2008, p.252), whilst another saw it as a very heteronormative (or homonormative) “white picket fence” culture (Fraser 2008, p.253). Fraser suggests that: “Queer would seem to offer useful alternatives to the impasse evident in many of the

interviews presented here, that is, a persistent understanding of community as necessarily about likeness, combined with a feeling of exclusion based on a self-perception of difference” (2008, p.257). She defines queer as being potentially productive as it has at least three common meanings, including: “non-normative sexual practice,” “a politics of inclusion,” and “anti-essentialist formations of sexuality” (Fraser 2008, p.257). It seems that Fraser is arguing that because of queer’s multiple meanings, and broad definition, it has a potential to be productive and include new sexual identities and practices, as well as a wide variety of existing identities and practices (2008, p.258). It therefore limits the processes of exclusion that are inherent to more narrowly defined identity-based communities. Young gay men in her study, however, were very reluctant to embrace queer, despite media assumptions (Fraser 2008, p.247) and anecdotal evidence that gay was now passé, and that all the young men were embracing a more fluid conception of identity.

### **Models of Community**

In community studies, political science and the sociology of community, both liberal and communitarian models are invoked in order to explain social organisation and conflict, and to inform debates about social cohesion and social exclusion. Liberal communities are seen to be constituted voluntarily, through reason, will and choice (Friedman 1995, pp.187-9). In this model communities cohere in order to achieve shared goals (Secomb 2000, p.135). Communitarian models, on the other hand, see individuals and identity as a product of community and sociality; people cannot form an identity outside of their embedded social attachments (Friedman 1995, p.189). Marilyn Friedman claims that communitarian models of community are based on traditional social models, in particular,

“family, neighbourhood, school and church” (1995, p.194). An additional criticism is that communitarian models, whilst valorising the inherent sociality of subjects, may see the needs of the community as overriding the needs or claims of the individual (Secomb 2000, p.136) and therefore have a tendency to be conservative. They tend to promote the community’s existing norms over new and challenging norms or models of subjectivity.

In comparison to these models of community, Secomb and Diprose both propose a model of community based on difference. Diprose explains that “community is about the sharing of meaning, but not at the expense of difference; community is not a unity of shared meanings that at best tolerates difference, but rather community lives *from* difference” (2003, p.36) Both Secomb and Diprose draw on Jean-Luc Nancy’s seminal work *Inoperative Community* to frame their models of community. Like in communitarian theories, singularities or “human existences” (Secomb 2000, p.140) come to be within communities. However, in this model, coming to existence within community does not necessarily lead to homogeneity or conformity. Coming-to-be within community means defining oneself relationally, finding one’s uniqueness in relation to the difference of others, finding one’s limits in relation to others (Secomb 2000, p.141). Totalitarian impulses are limited, therefore, by the difference that inheres in this relationality (Diprose 2003, p.44).

Recognising the “otherness” of the other means that one is always defined against others, and through the “otherness” of others one finds or creates the limits of oneself. However, as Secomb and Diprose both argue, when one fails to recognise the others’ difference, and treats the other as the same, the possibility for difference is closed down. This may happen interpersonally, or between groups of people:

denial of the paradox of expression finds political support in policies that would conquer ambiguity by insisting on social unity through the exclusion or denial of differences...A politics that, as a matter of policy, makes the other identical or absolutely Other, whether evil or divine, no longer appreciates the paradox of expression, the separation and merging of bodies at the origin and circulation of meaning, and hence the singularity of the other as meaning, as a unique belonging to the world that I cannot grasp (Diprose 2003, p.47).

Diprose argues that the relationality of “coming-to-be” takes the form of shared horizons of meaning, cultural sedimentations and modes of belonging (Diprose 2003, p.41). This “shared horizon” is similar to the “interpretative horizon” discussed by Linda Alcoff, and previously explained in the methodology chapter of this thesis (2006, p.102). Alcoff’s “interpretative horizon” is drawn from hermeneutics, but she has adapted this concept of horizon to function primarily on an embodied level, rather than on a textual level (2006, p.103). A horizon is one’s unique viewpoint on the world from a particular location. Alcoff argues that location, in terms of “locatedness” of knowledge, in terms of disciplines, or “standpoint” is a metaphor for an embodied location (2006, p.103). Shared horizons, therefore, may be discursive or figurative as well (Alcoff 2006, p.103). While not all members of a community or group will share the exact same horizon, they will share “aspects” of the horizon (Alcoff 2006, p.102). A horizon helps to form the self, as it “represent[s] the point of view of the self” (Alcoff 2006, p.102). Diprose’s horizon is a “horizon of social meaning,” (2003, p.38) and this social meaning is also embodied. She employs the work of Merleau-Ponty to make the claim that meaning is “inherited” and “pre-reflective” and that arises through “habituated dwelling” (Diprose 2003, p.38)

Diprose describes social meaning as “culturally sedimented” (Diprose 2003, p.38). This does not mean that one merely inherits one’s way of being from one’s originary community or location. One may be marked as different even in a community of origin because of physical appearance, habits, beliefs, or other factors.

Within Diprose’s model of community, there is an implied spatiality, an originary background in which an original differentiation occurred, “the community closest in.” Secomb’s analysis of community is at the level of the “body politic,” the sovereign territory of Australia (2000, p.143). However, this means that communities are often defined against this assumed norm. It becomes necessary to consider whether this slippage of scales is generally productive.

In her essay “Grids of Difference: Place and Identity Formation” Geraldine Pratt argues that, originally in social geography, cities were seen as being divided into separate “enclaves” where different types of people lived in different manners (2008, p.26). However, since the postmodern turn in social theory, she argues, identities have come to be seen as mobile, rather than bounded and as “de-territorialized” (Pratt 2008, p.27). Pratt claims, negotiating the two contrasting positions detailed above, “that borders in space and place are tied up with social boundaries (the formation of identity and its complement, the production of difference) but that there are multiple grids of difference and complex and varied links between place and identity formation” (2008, p.27). While it is true that populations are more mobile, there are still some types of people who are more embedded in local networks, such as the lower classes, those with disabilities, and those with heavy domestic responsibilities (Pratt 2008, p.29). While some individuals may be more mobile, and some communities may be more global, locality and

community still influence identity formation. As I discussed in the previous chapter, queer communities in different places were inflected by local norms and had different emphases and interpretations of sexuality.

### **Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion within Queer Communities**

I will now explore processes of inclusion and exclusion within the queer community, as experienced by my interview participants. Participants felt excluded from particular spaces or aspects of the queer community for many reasons, including sexual and gendered identities, in particular bi, trans, femme and female identities. There were also other aspects of their identity (or others identities) that they felt were not recognised or were treated unfavourably by others within the community. These included disabilities, sex worker status, and race and ethnicity.

Lauren, for example, doesn't feel comfortable in women-only spaces. She explains:

I understand the need for women only spaces and for men only spaces sometimes too, but I don't feel comfortable necessarily within them. So they don't fit very well for me and they feel – sorry, I can understand why some people feel the need for them. I don't personally feel the need for them.

Although she clearly wants to come across as understanding and non-judgemental of people who want women-only spaces, to me she seems quite ambivalent about the appropriateness of these spaces because they sometimes exclude people who identify as women, but who weren't born with female genitalia. While she has expressed that she can understand a need for these spaces, she personally feels most comfortable in spaces that encourage or welcome a broad range of gendered and sexual identities and

experimentation with gendered expression. This contrasts with others like Sofia who is less ambivalent about women-only spaces. When discussing her work environment in a women's health organisation she expressed that: "some of the events we hold here are women only and that just feels like you're pretty much guaranteed that you're not going to get hassled." For Sofia, there was clearly a personal value to women's only spaces, as well as a political commitment to the necessity of such spaces. It seemed that, in general, those with more fluid definitions of sexuality and gendered identity felt more comfortable in spaces that openly encouraged gender diversity and playful experimentation with gender, whilst those who had more traditional identities or more traditional attitudes to identity were more comfortable in spaces with more usual or fixed gendered expression.

Many of the participants were outraged about the treatment of transpeople in the queer community and trans inclusion came up very often as an issue around which there was a lot of conflict. When participants raised this issue it was generally because they had friends or partners who were trans and had witnessed them being excluded or facing prejudice or harassment. The two participants who personally identified as trans had quite different views about the queer community.

Bella felt ambivalent about the queer community as she found it to be good for moral support as a member of a small minority group, but ultimately wanted to be recognized just as a woman rather than a transwoman and to be able fit in to the mainstream. For Bella, while she identified as a lesbian and a transwoman, the queer community was of instrumental value as they were also minorities, but she did not express a sense of belonging. Alisha who identifies as bi and trans was more vocal about trans exclusion and found many organizations in the GLBT community (her term) to be insufficiently

aware of anything but gay and lesbian sexualities. She noted an instance where “trans” was listed under the options for sexuality on a form, rather than under sex or gender. She felt that this was an incorrect classification as she identifies as “transgender,” which she thinks should be an option under sex/ gender, and bisexual which is an option that, when it is listed, is listed under sexuality.

Another issue she discussed was the “Same Same 25” award for the “25 Most Influential Gay and Lesbian Australians.” This award was spearheaded by the popular gay and lesbian website [samesame.com.au](http://samesame.com.au). When she contacted the organization, they told her that trans and bi were “included in gay and lesbian”. She felt strongly that these awards should not just be called “Most Influential Gay and Lesbian Australians,” as some of these awards were given to bisexual and transgender or queer Australians. In the most recent awards, for the year 2009, transwoman Stefanie Imbruglia was named as one of these “most influential gay and lesbian Australians.” She received the award for her advocacy for transgender rights. Similarly, the singer Sia Furler, was named. Sia dates both men and woman as is explained on the website. Alisha also felt that some of the saunas are confronting places for transpeople as they involve nudity, and attributes this discomfort to bodyphobia (and I take this to include its internalised and externalized varieties) which she sees as being very widespread.

Participants who identified as femme, or more feminine in appearance or personality also expressed feeling excluded at times. Beth, for example, felt that she belonged to a butch and femme community, and the queer community, but not a lesbian community. For these two participants, femme identity seemed to be more closely related to quite subversive attitudes toward traditional gender roles and less associated with what some

participants saw to be a traditional lesbian community that doesn't include gender diversity. When Lauren described feeling uncomfortable in a space that included mostly what she considered traditional or older style lesbians she said: "It could have been twenty years ago in that room." Like some of the other women I interviewed who identified with or as femme or "girly," she felt that her gendered expression and identity was not understood by some types of lesbians. She explained: "It's hard because I don't think queer femme-ish kind of stuff necessarily gets identified by most people as something kind of as discrete sort of identity. Like I think it's just like 'Well, you're conforming.' I think a lot of people just see it as conforming to what a woman should look like."

Beth also elaborated on feeling out of place in particular parts of the community. She said:

In terms of queer stuff I don't really go to gay and lesbian venues, I don't feel comfortable. I've been ostracised as a femme and told that I don't belong there and all that kind of stuff so if I go to places I go to ones that are more explicitly trans or queer friendly or poly community so that's the kind of venue I'll go to.

It seems that, in these circumstances, particular sections of the queer community are enacting surveillance and policing gender norms to ensure that others fit in with their ideals of a unified community. Similar to "the heterosexualisation of the street" discussed in chapter five, the gay and lesbian venue and its norms provide a background and embodied meanings against which "femmes" stand out. In the above quote, it seems Beth is defining "gay and lesbian" against "trans or queer friendly or poly." However, she

introduces the sentence by saying “In terms of queer stuff.” This indicates that gay and lesbian as well as “trans or queer friendly or poly community” are included under the broader rubric of queer. Perhaps the initial use of queer is as an umbrella term, similar to GLBTI and the secondary “queer friendly” refers to a subsection of this broader group of people.

Issues to do with physical appearance are often minimised or trivialised as being merely issues of “aesthetics.” The expression of gender and sexual difference assumes importance, however, due to the policing of identifiable gendered and sexuality differences, as explained above, and in view of a politics of resistance to these norms that was described by some participants. Expression of physical differences can become central to this politics in some cases. The importance of what could be trivialised as “merely style” is well-illustrated by Rosalyn Diprose’s explanation of belonging and social meaning, in which social significances are grasped materially in the interplay between different bodies:

This sense of belonging is located not in a table of shared values that I hold in my mind, that I can list off at will, or that I use to identify with or recognise in others; rather, this familiarity is located in my body as an atmosphere that informs my perception of the world and of others. For Merleau-Ponty, for example, meaning is inherited, incarnated, and expressed pre-reflectively such that every body is a style of being, a signifying and signified expression of comportment toward a world (Diprose 2003, p.38)

Both participants who identified as bi had been subject to negative attitudes to bisexual people. One of the younger participants, Shannon who is twenty-one years old, was frequently told by a gay male friend and one lesbian friend that bisexual people didn't exist; consequently, she didn't always feel part of a queer community. Alisha, who I discussed earlier, went to a queer social group in Gippsland and was asked, "You're not one of those bisexuals, are you?" This is consistent with the findings of Kirsten McLean's recent work on the perception of bisexuality in Australia (2008a, pp.67-69; 2008b, pp.160-63) and also with research from France (Welzer-Lang 2008, p. 83-89). Both studies showed that bisexuals still experienced frequent discrimination within the queer community.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It is clear that the queer community in Melbourne is continually fracturing along multiple lines. A central conflict surrounds how gender is conceptualised and performed. Other conflicts surround the inclusion (or lack thereof) of bi and trans people, rather than having groups that are solely labelled "gay and lesbian." There are also conflicts between queer women and lesbians and gay men, and about disability inclusiveness in events. Closely related to conflicts about gender are attitudes toward other non-normative sexualities such as kink, BDSM, and sex workers.

While many participants agreed that they did feel that they belonged to some sort of queer or GLBTI community, some identified more with particular aspects, for example a lesbian community, or a butch femme community, or a trans community, more than a broader community. Others identified with subcommunities, but also felt part of a wider

community. Nearly all respondents (apart from one who said she hadn't noticed any conflict in the community) could elaborate in great detail about conflict, and often would express feelings of anger or frustration. Some saw this as natural or inevitable and a very many saw community as inherently diverse. Many also saw this diversity as positive. There was still some evidence of community being seen as commonality, expressed as "like-minded people" or perhaps even as people with similar political goals, but in general a liberal ideal of community did not come across strongly.

The participants themselves felt excluded from particular aspects of the community according to their intersecting axes of identity. Trans-inclusion and women's only spaces were of particular concern to some participants, whilst the other most common conflict that was expressed was with femme-identifying queers or lesbians feeling unwelcome in the lesbian community.

To me, this presents a clear picture of the "unworking" of community (Secomb 2000, p.143). There was an appreciation amongst participants that conflict would occur within communities, and particularly there was an understanding that came across strongly within these interviews that diversity is positive. Whether this is a liberal sort of diversity closely tied to ideals of tolerance is something that will need to be explored further.

While community inherently "fractures" and forms differences as part of its process, it is also formed through shared meanings, as Diprose explains, or through recognition.

Diprose sees differentiation as occurring through different bodily styles. While community is continually fracturing, as there will always be some resistance, totalising narratives regarding community and the refusal to recognise others' claims can ensure that some are excluded, or included on the terms of dominant groups.

Queer seems to provide a model of community that allows for a range of identities that are drawn together through loosely shared or closely interweaved meanings about gender and sexuality. This can be contrasted with gay and lesbian politics, in which gender and sexuality are more fixed (even if they are still not conforming to heterosexual norms).

While queer allows for difference, it should not necessarily be seen as solving all problems. Although queer ideally allows for a range of expressions of difference, it can still be subject to the same processes of policing and surveillance as discussed in relation to heterosexuals and gays and lesbians and comes to resonate with some bodies rather than others. I think that this is in part due to the “bodily styles” Diprose describes as creating meaning and difference, and also to the shared political goals that some of the participants described queer as entailing. While queer is broad and incorporates difference into community, an orientation towards difference or against normative sexualities may not be attractive to some gays, lesbians and transpeople— they may not recognise themselves in it, or feel that it provides shared meanings.

I have critiqued ideas of community as sameness and I have advocated more open understandings of communities that allow for difference. While I have recognised that there are some issues with queer communities, I think that “queer” provides a model for a community built on openness, and links people defined through their sexual and gendered difference, even if these links are sometimes tenuous. While people were active in what they considered “the queer community” to various degrees, most of the interview participants recognised the sustaining role of queer communities in connecting people and creating diverse and welcoming spaces where queer comfort could be “claimed” and where participants felt safe.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis was born out of an urge to understand whether I was alone in experiencing harassment, then spurred on by anger that these issues frequently seemed to be trivialised or explained away as “oh, that happens to everyone.” While discourses of equality have often driven forward positive social change, I am convinced that sometimes the phrases “We’re equal” or “We’re all the same” are being used to challenge those who might speak out about being treated badly due to their differences, the same differences that are no longer meant to matter. Just the spectre of difference is used to label those who are different as being against “equality.” I am not sure what I would have done had my interview participants not reported harassment or discrimination or sexual harassment or assault. I imagine the ensuing thesis would have looked much different. Perhaps it would have explored how far we’ve come, or have been celebratory of our achievements. It might have lauded our ability to move freely through space, celebrate our identities, openly express affection and dress and present ourselves in the ways that best express our identities and tastes. I have interviewed queer women who felt that they had experienced very limited harassment and prejudice and generally felt very safe and comfortable going about their daily lives. In this study, I would say that only one of the interview participants matched this profile, although she, too, had some stories of uncomfortable incidents.

This is not to say that the story that comes across through the entirety of the thesis is one of unmitigated fear and danger at every corner. Rather, this thesis tells of a pervasive alertness and awareness of safety concerns, structured by previous negative experiences, and the negotiation of risk through behaviour and appearance change, and through

frequenting some spaces and avoiding others. It presents a map of a city where some places are seen as safer and others as to be avoided.<sup>45</sup> The interview participants' narratives tell of processes of navigation of the city and negotiation of spaces that is not always pre-calculated and rational, but is part of an inculcated embodied awareness that arises as an element of living in a queer body.

This project has demonstrated the specificity of queer women's experience in public places by drawing on the interview data and the relevant literature. As in previous research, such as Gail Mason's project, my research participants were subject to particular forms of sexualised and gendered harassment and violence based on their visibility as queer women (Mason 2001, p.43). These forms of harassment varied depending on their particular gendered embodiment, with, in general, more androgynous women and trans women facing more physical violence and more feminine women facing more sexualised violence. The types of harassment and violence closely paralleled findings of other research projects such as Mason's previous research undertaken in the 1990s (2001, p.28). Many of Mason's explanatory repertoires (2001, p.43) were also applicable to the findings of this research project, with the exception of the "butch" repertoire, as "butch" does not seem to be an insult currently levelled often at queer women. My research findings also serve to provide rich and detailed personal narratives that complement the findings of large mainly quantitative projects and provide details on the context surrounding violence and harassment. As there has not been much recent

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<sup>45</sup> However, harassment towards queer women often occurs in places seen to be queer friendly. This does not necessarily seem to lead queer women to avoid these spaces, for example some participants experienced harassment or violence in Fitzroy and when questioned they said that they still felt safe in Fitzroy. There are some other suburbs, such as Prahran and St Kilda which many participants named as unsafe or unfriendly for queer women.

qualitative research based on this topic undertaken in Australia, this project addresses a lacuna in the literature.

I have argued throughout this thesis that liberal political ideals of separate private and public spheres inform gender norms and self-expression. As the interview data attests, there is still a lingering sense that queerness ought to be confined to the private sphere and demonstrations of queerness through affection, physical appearance and self-expression are met with sanctions from members of the general public. Gendered norms of female vulnerability also shape queer women's experiences of spaces, as there are particular places, for example areas of the City at night, which are seen as masculine spaces and unsafe for women.

Self-expression is often seen as trivial and a capitalist form of aesthetic expression. Self-expression in public spaces was seen by the interview participants, however, as important for queer people. Many wanted to "be able to be who I am" and expressed a desire to be free from harassment when expressing their sexual identities through affection, behaviour or appearance.

This story is also one not only of queer negotiations with the mostly heterosexual world, but of queer negotiations within majority queer spaces. It details the triumphs of queer communities, the "fractured communities" (Secomb, 2003, p.143) that welcome diversity and are open to new ways of being. It shows the community organising and activism and discusses the queer clubs and night-time spaces that sustain queer networks and provide spaces of reprieve from queerphobic environments. It demonstrates the ability of "queer" "to embrace different identity groups sometimes tenuously bound together and to provide

a sense of belonging and support. Conversely, it tells of queer communities where transphobia and biphobia persist, where differences in sexuality are not accepted, and where gendered expression is strictly policed.

Finally, the thesis is concerned with what might be done about the abovementioned issues and offers suggestions based on the experiences and expertise of the interview participants as well as drawing on recent research into homophobia and hate crime prevention. This thesis takes the perspective that while individuals may be able to avoid becoming victims of harassment and crime by restricting their movements and making themselves appear more heterosexual, *it is not the responsibility of victims to ensure that they are not victimised*. It does not condone theories that place the onus for prevention of violence on the potential victims. I contend that such theories come close to ascribing blame to victims for not conforming to social norms that work to limit non-heteronormative gendered expression.

Potential solutions proffered are aimed, therefore, at creating structural, social and organisational change and targeting the perpetrators rather than the victims. It is also shown that many queer women do feel responsible for avoiding victimisation and that this is due to discourses that place blame on those most vulnerable. When we take the perspective that those marked as different and potentially vulnerable are responsible for their own safety, we limit their mobility by restricting them to certain areas and certain times. I argue that this then creates a flow-on effect of minimising sexual (and sexed) diversity within public spaces. This contributes to gender and sexually diverse people standing out even more in particular places and potentially becoming subject to more policing and harassment in those areas.

### **What Has Been Demonstrated**

My methodological decisions and theoretical choices structuring this project were integral to justifying why “experience” was privileged as an analytical category in this project. Queer women’s accounts of their own experiences, in their own words, opens analysis to an affective domain of self-surveillance and internalised regulation of behaviour that cannot easily be accessed by merely looking at the discursive conditions that structure such experiences. I drew on the work of feminist philosophers and cultural theorists to argue that experience is embodied. “Positionalities” and interpretive frameworks mean that one’s particular identity and embodiment influence the way one sees the world and the standpoints and knowledges one develops of that world. This is why queer women’s accounts of their experiences are necessary to augment or counteract the knowledges and experiences of dominant social groups.

Embodied experience relies on the sedimentation of norms at an embodied and habitual level. This process occurs in particular locations and contexts and is therefore a spatial process. Members of particular social groups feel “out of place” in environments where they do not fit in with the spatial norms. I claim that subjects are formed in particular contexts, rather than being autonomous liberal subjects who always exercise rational freedom and maintain full intentionality.

Much research focuses on criminal violence, and there were certainly incidents of criminal violence discussed by the interview participants. However, this study also illuminated queer women’s experiences of “everyday violence” and its influences on the research participants’ lives. It demonstrated how everyday violence works to police

gender conformity and limit the mobility of those who do not conform to a binary model of sex/gender.

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Quantitative studies show that violence towards queer people has increased or remained the same during the previous twenty year period (Tomsen 2009; Hillier et al. 2010). The research findings on the prevalence of violence and harassment towards queer women are contradictory. Different projects undertaken in Victoria and New South Wales have produced different results on this issue. While generally, violence towards women occurs disproportionately in private by known perpetrators and violence towards men in public by strangers, it is not known if violence towards queer women follows these patterns. Much of the research on anti-queer violence is focused on men or does not distinguish between violence towards queer men and queer women; I have argued that violence towards queer women is an underexamined issue. This thesis opens a space to correct this neglect.

As shown in chapter two, the interview participants' experiences in public spaces varied. Those with very non-normative gendered presentations faced the most violence and harassment. Many interview participants became more identifiably queer when they were with other queer friends or partners and therefore experienced more harassment or violence. Previous incidents of harassment and violence (sometimes from many years ago) continued to affect queer women and shape their experiences in public spaces through self-policing, behaviour change and avoidance of particular places. Incidents experienced many years ago continue to affect queer women and constrain their lives.

Chapter three detailed the types of harassment and violence experienced by interview participants, ranging from the very subtle such as odd looks or stares, to more violent examples such as physical assault. The participants' stories provided an insight into the types of violence experienced by queer women along with the situations in which the violence occurred and how the exchange with the perpetrators of the violence played out. Their narratives provided rich detail which could serve to complement statistical studies that demonstrate the prevalence of violence against queer people and to provide an update of and a comparison to studies undertaken on the topic of violence against queer women in previous decades. There are still not many qualitative accounts of violence and harassment of queer women, particularly in Australia. Some of the incidents detailed in the research may seem vivid, intense or harsh to the reader, and indeed some accounts are quite brutal. It is hoped that this research will help to make others more aware of harassment and violence to which they perhaps remain oblivious or of which they are not fully informed.

While each account is valuable in itself as it represents each participant's experience, there are also some commonalities that can be traced from entirety of the accounts. In particular, it seems that those with strongly expressed non-normative gendered presentations often face more harassment and violence and this harassment and violence is often quite intense. In contrast, those with more feminine appearances often faced more sexualised harassment. Differences of gender presentation influenced the way others related to queer women, so it is not as simple as might be expected to generalise about queer women's experiences. Differences of positionalities were explored in order to illuminate patterns.

In general, the participants seemed to feel safer in familiar areas and areas where there was a significant queer population. This was case generally even when participants had had very negative experiences of harassment or violence in these same places previously. Some areas that were popular for gay males, such as Prahran, did not necessarily inspire such feelings of safety. While participants often felt safer when there was a significant queer female population, queer women were often easily identified when out with queer friends and subjected to harassment. These spaces were not necessarily safer, however the established relationship with the place and previous positive experiences may account for the continued perception of particular spaces as “safe,” despite negative encounters. The presence of other queer people also seemed to contribute to feelings of safety. This suggests that relationships to place are complex and multifactorial and built up over time.

I have argued that, against a heterosexualised background, queer women stand out due to their appearances or affection for each other and therefore are subjected to policing such as harassment. This, in turn, works to enforce a feeling of being out of place and often an increased self-awareness or internalised self-disciplining towards norms. Consequently, such spaces become more heterosexualised while others with a queer appearance stand out more. It might also mean that queer women tend to avoid particular spaces, also contributing to the heterosexualisation of spaces. Negative experiences in spaces and subsequent avoidance can work to limit mobility and restrict queer women (and also heterosexual women) from frequenting particular areas. Discourses of responsabilisation and vulnerability to violence often contribute to those who might venture into particular spaces and face sanctions for this action feeling that their conduct leaves them open to reprehension. Expressions of queer sexuality and sexual identity can be relegated to

private or semi-public spaces as they are deemed inappropriate. This is often the case even though heterosexual displays of affection such as hand-holding, standing close together, looks of affection and affectionate touch may be not noticed, or might be accepted or even celebrated (even if very overtly sexual heterosexual displays are still generally confined to private spaces). This works to further distinctions between a public realm, which is implicitly heterosexual as well as implicitly normative in other ways, and a private realm in which differences are tolerated due to the assumption that they are contained within.

### **Safety**

In chapter four, I explored issues surrounding safety further. Like previous researchers such as Gail Mason and Karen Corteen, I found that queer women use strategies to manage feelings of safety and vulnerability (Mason 2001, pp. 91-5; Corteen 2002). The main strategies were minimising affection and avoiding particular places at certain times, followed by changing one's appearance. Participants changed their appearance and behaviour to different degrees and were reflective about the political implications of safety management strategies and behavioural change; however most participants mentioned situations in which they would change their behaviour.

There was some difficulty in reflecting on these practices. Some participants were quite hesitant in their speech, suggesting that these behaviours were mostly not conscious or well thought through. Rather they occurred as an interaction between themselves and the environment at an, not always reflective, embodied level. This suggests that potential prejudice is often negotiated as part of one's routine engagement with the environment and therefore studying this issue from a phenomenological perspective that forefronts

embodied experience has provided detailed responses that shed light on this issue. Many participants expressed a preference for attending or avoiding particular venues that was articulated in terms of choice rather than safety. However, in practice, I surmised that preference and safety are intertwined as participants may have felt more comfortable in queer clubs, which also offer the opportunity to socialise with other queer people.

Drawing on a theme first discussed in the chapter three, I argued that public safety advice contributes to responsabilisation discourses. This serves to entrench beliefs that women should remain in private at certain times to ensure their safety and that queers should not be so publicly visible. The solutions proffered to improve queer women's safety depend on who is seen to be responsible for ensuring their safety. This determines whether interventions are targeted towards the perpetrators or the victims. Ideally, public safety campaigns would draw on queer experience and embodied knowledge to determine safety strategies, while acknowledging that the context in which such strategies are necessary is structurally determined and needs to be subject to social change. Queer affection is sometimes positioned by non-queers as flaunting or excess, as what is normal for heterosexual people, such as holding hands, for example, may recede into the background due to its very normalcy.

Most participants seemed to think that harassment and discrimination should be addressed and many suggested that it should be addressed at a structural level or through broader social and attitudinal change. Education initiatives and organisational and legislative change were among the most common suggestions, and spatial interventions were also mentioned. I developed a series of recommendations for social change that were based on the participants' suggestions and on the hate crimes literature.

I suggested organisational policy changes supported by organisational leaders. I called for clear policies detailing unacceptable harassment and discrimination taking into account differences in positionality that might often be ignored. Sexual harassment of queer women needs to be acknowledged as inappropriate, rather than seen as friendly banter. Sexual harassment policies need to explicitly address this issue. Whilst well-meaning, many organisations anti-discrimination policies include discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in a one line statement that also precludes discrimination on multiple other grounds such as gender, ethnicity, religion and disability. Separate policies should address the specificity of discrimination and harassment on each of these grounds as discrimination on the basis of religion is likely to be quite different to discrimination or harassment due to one's ethnicity or disability status. Policy statements should be specific and detailed and elaborate on common types of harassment and discrimination and positive actions workplaces can take to be inclusive of difference and avoid common forms of harassment. I also recommended workplace sensitivity training. Rather than placing the blame and onus for avoiding harassment and violence on queer victims, I suggested primary prevention for groups most likely to perpetrate these sorts of offences. I also argued that any advice regarding queer safety should firmly place the blame on perpetrators rather than victims. Further, such advice should acknowledge the wide range of strategies queer women already employ to avoid violence in their everyday lives.

Primary prevention strategies, such as programs targeted at young men attending educational institutions should focus on queer women's experiences of violence and how they limit queer women's lives. Similar to sexual assault prevention initiatives, they should dispel myths such as "queer people are always flaunting their sexuality," "lesbians

are ‘hot’ and just waiting for a man to come along and show them a good time” and trans people are “really” the “other” sex” to the one as which they identify. “Safer Space” policies seem to be effective and they should be retained and implemented in other situations and queer spaces should continue to be funded.

There are many excellent initiatives by organisations that work with youth to bring attention to bullying and discrimination against queer young people. Rather than only addressing sexual orientation and gender diversity cursorily in sexuality education in the middle years of high school, sexual orientation and gender diversity should also be explored in primary school programs. As the provision of sexual education was inconsistent across Australia, sexual orientation and gender diversity should be incorporated into a national curriculum on sexual education. Other subject areas should also include an exploration of relevant issues of sexual orientation and gender diversity into their curriculum (rather than only presenting examples of heterosexuals and gender conforming people). The United States based organisation GLSEN’s resources provide an excellent starting point for incorporating sexual and gender diversity into the Australian curriculum.

It is only through a combination of interventions designed to target the attitudes that normalise harassment, violence and derogatory comments that queer women’s safety can be addressed. Such interventions should begin by addressing queerphobic bullying and harassment at a young age and continue through into high school. Prevention initiatives should be designed to address societal myths around queer people and challenge attitudes around gender and sexuality that normalise the policing of women’s femininity and that limit their access to particular spaces and times (such as late night entertainment areas)

and assign blame for behaviour that falls outside of prescribed feminine norms. These interventions should work alongside clear and detailed policies that work to create environments that are accepting of gendered and sexual difference and are promoted and put into place by clear direction from organisational leaders.

As safety concerns may be a usual and unremarkable part of queer life and perhaps to some extent part of queer identity, it is difficult to disentangle safety from preference or choice in attending venues or frequenting particular spaces. Some participants also maintained ambivalent or contradictory positions, sometimes maintaining that they generally felt invulnerable and other times in the interview betraying quite different positions about safety. I surmised that this is perhaps to do with avoiding feelings of vulnerability and wanting to feel like one can occupy spaces and move about freely.

Avoidance of particular areas is not always discussed in terms of safety issues, but rather in terms of preference or choice. While safety was discussed, I found that terms such as “comfort,” “discomfort” or “uncomfortable” were often used by all except one of the interview participants. A key finding was that the word “discomfort” was often used to describe experiences where the participants didn’t feel as though they fit in or felt out of place. Participants often reported feeling uncomfortable when they faced “gender policing” such as receiving comments or stares. Comfort was also linked to representation. Queer women felt more comfortable if they felt that the place represented them, if, for example, they saw other queer people, depictions of queer people, or even felt that the place represented cultural or social alternatives.

People who are normative in particular ways, for example those with normative sexual identities, may expect to feel comfortable in their access to space and their representation in space, feeling that others are similar and that places are accommodating to their needs. Discourses of comfort as a public good circulate in such a way that suggests that people ought to feel comfort almost as a right. Others who stand out or are different may be seen to threaten this comfort. For queer people, sensing discomfort in others, who may feel uncomfortable upon seeing them, may initiate discomfort in the queer person.

Conversely, queer people's comfort may also engender discomfort in some heterosexual people, due to the feeling of a loss of privilege of being the majority represented in the space. On the other hand, some participants reported feeling uncomfortable when they were assumed to be heterosexual.

I argued that gender "policing" worked in tandem with surveillance to create an environment where queer behaviour or appearance did not fit in. These social norms were then internalised by queer women. Comfort and discomfort can act as disciplinary forces as they mould their environments in particular ways.

Ideals of privacy have changed over time and have increased along with the growth of individualism. Many public spaces are becoming more like private spaces or being privatised and ideals of bourgeois privacy and closely associated ideals of comfort are pervading public spaces. The public/private divide, which underpins liberalism and also gender roles, is not static but always in a process of being renegotiated. It is for some of these reasons that comfort is sometimes positioned as regressive and not an ideal to be strived for. As my interview participants' stories showed, comfort is often claimed when queer people come together to create their own spaces where they can feel comfortable

and at ease. Occasions such as Pride Marches are a good demonstration of this “claiming” of comfort. Many participants had been involved in Pride Marches and some expressed fond reminiscences of these occasions. Queer clubs often also functioned as spaces of queer comfort. Going out together and taking up or claiming spaces also challenges entrenched patterns of privileged comfort for those who fit seamlessly into spaces designed for people whose sexuality is seen as belonging to that of the majority.

Drawing on phenomenology, I argued that comfort or discomfort can become habitual. Feeling generally comfortable in spaces and like one fits seamlessly can engender a relationship of comfort towards the world. Conversely, feeling as though one may be subject to disapproval and sanctions on deviations from normative gendered behaviour may engender a way of being-in-the-world that is uncomfortable and/or wary.

In chapter six, the relationship between place and identity formation was explored. Place and identity were found to be mutually constitutive. The interview participants found some areas of Melbourne to be limiting to their expression of sexual or gendered identity and others to allow them to expand and express their sexual identities. It was clear that some interview participants drew on the resources available in particular places such as conventions, consumer goods, identity practices and the types of people who frequented the places to inform their personal identities as queer people. Not all participants agreed on which areas were “queer friendly,” as each queer woman was drawing on her own previous experiences in particular places and her own positionalities.

In this chapter, I also discussed the finding from the interviews that queer identity was, at least in some ways, related to a commitment to resistance to gendered and sexual norms.

This commitment to resistance was also evident among some of the participants who didn't identify as queer as such (although they may have identified as belonging to, or being involved with a queer community). Some participants who identified as bi or lesbian also discussed subverting norms as being part of their identity. Those who self-identified as queer saw this identification as an explicit political commitment to challenging norms.

Some participants maintained ideals of resistance by not changing their appearance or behaviour in particular situations. Many, however, admitted that they would sometimes change their behaviour or limit their self-expression due to knowledge of violence or verbal harassment against queer people. They also limited behaviour or self-expression due to fear about what others might be thinking about them. This meant that they would sometimes conform to norms, making normalisation processes difficult to resist due to their own perceived vulnerability. As the interviews showed, participants felt different levels of safety or vulnerability in different areas and might be more likely to alter their behaviour dependent on the location, time and the other people inhabiting the space. Not all interview participants felt that they could always maintain a commitment to resistance. It is important for queer theorists to take into account empirical evidence and stories of queer experience, as abstract discussions regarding resistance do not always consider these factors.<sup>46</sup>

When some participants spoke of resistance they framed this in relation to heterosexual or gay male norms, and sometimes in relation to cultures of consumption. I argued,

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<sup>46</sup> For example, Janet R. Jakobsen's (1998) exploration of queer resistance in her paper "Queer Is? Queer Does?: Normativity and the Problem of Resistance is very convincing, but it would be useful to explore the dynamics of queer resistance by augmenting abstract discussions with empirical findings.

however, that social norms are often conflicting and therefore it is impossible to resist all norms. Interview participants who rejected the need to fit in or “not draw attention to oneself” often drew on neoliberal discourses of choice, individuality or freedom when justifying their self-expression. While self-expression often involves participating in consumer culture, and is sometimes derided as a superficial pursuit, self-expression was found to be very important in this research project as being able to “express oneself” or “being who I am” or “who I want to be” were often brought up as salient in the interviews.

As the neoliberal state seeks to displace responsibility, this results in what Suzan Ilcan has termed a “responsibilizing ethos” (2009, pp.220-23), where social responsibility is individualised and individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their own predicaments. I saw this at work in some of the discussions of “personal development,” where some participants claimed that personal development was important for queer people in fighting homophobia or queerphobia.

The final discussion chapter investigated the meaning of queer community for queer women. While only a minority of the participants personally identified as queer, most discussed their engagement with a queer community, although one participant stated that she preferred to term it a GLBT community. Queer has often been seen a polymorphous signifier, meaning that it can allude to a range of different meanings (Walters 1996, pp. 831-5; Jakobsen 1998, p.512). This was evident in this research project. Various ways queer was used included explicitly in an activist way or as anti-normative and political, as an “umbrella term” for a community or communities composed of sexual minorities, and sometimes as a synonym for gay and lesbian. I concluded that as “queer” is being used in

a number of different ways. This could lead to conflict between different groups or individuals identifying as queer or as part of a queer community or communities if they felt that others were not using the term correctly, or were not really queer. Some of the participants in the research felt that others were using the term queer incorrectly to mean gay or using it without a political commitment.

Slightly more contentious was discussion over whether people felt that they belonged to a queer community or “the” queer community. This highlighted the “fractured” (Secomb 2000, p.143) nature of queer communities as not everyone answered yes in an unqualified manner. Some felt that they belonged to some aspects of a queer community, such as the kink or BDSM communities, for example, and didn’t feel at home in other parts of the queer community. Most had some engagement with what they saw to be a queer community, and only one felt that she drew on the queer community for support as needed but didn’t really feel a great sense of belonging. The vast majority of participants found that there was conflict between different groups or different queer communities. Queer community according to most of the participants were seen to be based on diversity, rather than a liberal understanding of community as commonality. Most participants, however, did agree that the community was somehow bounded, although they couldn’t agree on the conditions for membership or where the boundaries ought to be drawn. The community was constantly in the process of “unworking” itself (Secomb 2000, p.143) and expanding its boundaries, redefining conditions for membership, or conversely recreating itself with stricter membership conditions. It was continually being contested. Overall, queer was a positive way of conceptualising community, as it allowed

for a range of sexuality and gender related differences under a broad rubric and wasn't too constrictive in terms of membership criteria.

A major finding of this thesis was that gender policing also occurred *within* queer spaces and communities, with participants experiencing or having friends who experienced discrimination in the form of harassment or comments based on having a different gendered or sexual identity to others. This was particularly the case with trans women as there were many incidents discussed where trans participants or the trans friends of other participants did not feel included in spaces or were subject to such forms of discrimination. Bi women also were subject particularly to comments regarding their sexuality and were made to feel unwelcome in some majority queer spaces. Femmes, or women with a feminine self-presentation (even if this often means relatively feminine within queer contexts) felt that they were not accepted in some traditional lesbian venues and by other lesbians. Some of them thought that they were assumed to be imitating heterosexual norms and complying with heterosexual feminine models of presentation. It is clear that the participants who discussed this femmephobia actually held quite subversive beliefs about gender identity and were very open to gender diversity within queer communities.

### **What Has Emerged as Worthy of Further Investigation**

There are many findings in the thesis that emerged from the interview data that were intriguing and suggest new directions for future research. Below, I will discuss some of the areas that I believe would be most productive if further investigated.

## **Safety**

While I have explored safety in some depth in this thesis, particularly as it relates to queer women's feelings and experiences in public places, there were many issues related to safety I felt could benefit from a more detailed exploration. One finding from the interviews produced a quite mixed or ambivalent result. Some participants, for instance, discussed previous negative experiences in places as colouring their expectations of future experiences in an area, and accordingly they might avoid an area or frequent it less. On the other hand, particularly in areas that were seen as particularly friendly to queer women or lesbians, participants were more likely to dismiss negative experiences, even if they had been quite violent or traumatic, as aberrations and continued to frequent the areas and to feel relatively safe doing so. Any future research that would explore feelings toward supposedly "queer friendly" places after experiences of violence and their impact on feelings of safety within those places would be particularly interesting and useful for understanding queer women's experiences of safety.

Possibly the issue that frustrated me the most throughout writing this thesis was the safety recommendation that queer people should be venturing out in large groups. As discussed in the body of the thesis, previous British research (Corteen 2002) suggested that some queer women (particularly those in a small town) did not feel safer travelling in groups as they felt that they were more easily identifiable due to the combination of "signs" of gender deviance (2002, pp.270-71) (or, as the article suggested, even signs of not enthusiastically embracing a very feminine gender identity (2002, p,271), such as not wearing jewellery or feminine shoes (2002, p.271)). I attended some meetings (in 2009) run by the Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby and attended by interested local

activists, other members of the queer community and police liaison officers. The meetings were called in order to find solutions to combat violence towards queer people after spate of attacks had occurred. There was a strong insistence at these meetings that one of the best ways to deal with this issue was to give out advice cards to queer people out at clubs or bars stating “common sense” ideas to avoid becoming a victim of crime. Travelling in groups was one of these ideas. As the previous research I referred to was British-based (from the north of England) it would be great to see more research in Australian contexts about personal safety among queer people, and queer women in particular in order to see if the same results were obtained. More quantitative research should explore patterns of attacks, including whether queer people are alone or in groups when attacked. To me, because an idea is seen to be common sense, or it is thought that it might work, is not a good enough reason to include it in advice.

The dissemination of safety advice is concerning to me. As I discussed in chapter four, when the criminologist Elizabeth Stanko reviewed police safety advice for women in Britain, she found that the advice was seen to be perpetuating stereotypes about women’s vulnerability (1996, p.20). It also placed the main burden of response to men’s violence onto women by individualising responsibility for violence prevention (Stanko 1996, pp.17-18). Such advice comes across as patronising, given such advice is meant to be based on common sense (Stanko 1996, p.18). Are we saying that queer punters have taken leave of their common sense, or is it sensible to assume that people out for the night and possibly affected by alcohol might need handy reminders? As I stated previously, such advice was seen to place blame on the victims of hate crimes and harassment, and made them primarily responsible for avoiding victimisation (Stanko 1996, p.18). These

warning often imply that people must do whatever it takes to secure their own security, even if it means personal losses (of some freedoms, for example). Kane Race has developed the idea of “counterpublic health” in relation to queer HIV prevention (Race 2009, p.110). This is a public health practice that takes into account the interests of resistant “publics”, or as Race puts it “the cultivation of viable ethics and modes of embodiment that contend not only with the challenges of HIV infection, but also the mass mediation and medico-moralization of pleasure and health” (Race 2009, p.110). He has successfully shown how AIDS campaigns have drawn on queer understandings of experiencing AIDS to promote health in a way that does not belittle, patronise or scare health consumers; he also shows that literature should be easy to relate to (Race 2009, pp.128-34). I have suggested that perhaps a similar approach could form the basis of new queer public safety campaigns, in place of the previous commonsense ideas suggested. A review of safety advice in Australia and of queer anti-violence campaigns and their methods would be an excellent start to such a campaign, and in my opinion, is overdue and necessary.

I would also like to see program evaluations of some of the safety recommendations I suggested in chapter four, if those recommendations were implemented. While I provided recommendations based on a reviewing the literature, from the interview data, it would be necessary to ensure that such recommendations were generating positive results and if not to explore why they were not working and if not, how, in future they might be changed to ensure that they created positive social change. This, of course, is most applicable to the recommendations for policy change. For example this might include a review of the effectiveness of workplace anti-discrimination policies with specific clauses regarding

queer discrimination— how and whether they were being implemented, and whether these measures were being used and how successfully. Anti-homophobia campaign effectiveness might be reviewed by measuring attitudinal change in target groups, using measures of subtle discrimination and quantifying behaviours queer people would count as discriminatory. While I have heard many extol the virtues of safer spaces policies, and I have had positive experiences myself in deliberately created safer spaces, I would like to see more research exploring the effectiveness of safer spaces, their meanings to those using them, and whether they might be feasible to implement more broadly and in other sectors of society.

It has become clear from my research and the research of others like Andrew Gorman-Murray that comfort is a term that queer women often use to describe their experiences (2009, p.446). Analyses focusing on comfort could complement safety-driven spatial analyses as they show that experiences are not neatly divisible into safe or unsafe. There are a whole range of factors that may make spaces unappealing or awkward or less than habitable for queer people without them necessarily being described as unsafe.

## **Violence**

There has been an increasing interest in documenting and attempting to address violence against queer people through research conducted particularly in Britain and the United States, in the last few decades. Activism for LGBT rights and freedom from violence has taken place in “developing” countries such as Brazil and Mexico, South Africa and India, for example.<sup>47</sup> In Australia, Gail Mason and Stephen Tomsen, along with Lynne Hillier and the research team at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La

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<sup>47</sup> See De la Dehesa (2010); Achmat and Raizenberg (2003); Dave (2011), for examples.

Trobre University have been the most prominent researchers in this area, this field could hardly be characterised as large. As I discussed in chapter three, there has been previous qualitative research in this area but not many studies focusing specifically on queer women where the data was disaggregated and accounted specifically for violence towards queer women.

This thesis has shed light on the contexts in which violence against queer women occur: who was there, what was said, what happened and how events escalated. I predict that such data could be useful to those attempting to address violence against queer women, such as police, particularly if data collection in this area was undertaken on a larger scale. While not all attacks or incidents of harassment follow a typical pattern, it might be good for those seeking to combat this violence to know how these sorts of events typically unfold. More quantitative research on violence against queer women would also be very helpful in crime prevention initiatives as there is very little research available and some of the research, as mentioned in chapter three, contradicts the findings from other states. I would also like to see research focusing on the perspectives of perpetrators of anti-queer violence. This might take the form of psychological research into attitudes and values of those who commit crimes against queer women, as well as broader research into attitudes about queer women in Australia. Focusing on the perspectives of perpetrators would help to understand what drives them to offend and how they feel towards queer women. Research into bystander violence prevention has recently become more prominent. If bystander violence prevention initiatives and methods prove helpful in reducing violence in general and violence against women, perhaps they could be applied effectively to combat violence and harassment of queer people as well?

Finally, on the topic of violence, more research from an intersectionality perspective, one that takes into account intersecting identities, could be very useful in understanding why and how violence against queers happens. Doug Meyer's (2008) US accounts of intersectionality and violence against queers demonstrated how intertwined race and class were with the types of violence some queer people experienced. More research in this vein would shed light not only on why some people experience more violence, but also the kinds of violence they experience.

### **Limiting Self-Expression**

A prevalent theme in the interviews was the limiting of affection and the restricting of self-expression in public places. This thesis described many examples of limiting one's behaviours in order to avoid feeling uncomfortable, or to avoid stares, harassment or violence. I would be very interested to see more research focusing on the topic of self-limiting of affection and self-expression among queer women. I have not read much other work (although see Corteen 2002, for an example) that deals with this issue. I contended that queer women seemed to sometimes minimise incidents that happened to them (that didn't seem trivial to me). Sometimes indicated that they felt fine in public spaces and the sorts of incidents described didn't affect them much, whilst in other parts of the interview they seemed to give the opposite impression. I think that it is often normal to give slightly contradictory accounts as framing incidents becomes part of a narrative process of making sense of identity and experience. In some of the interviews, however, I discerned that perhaps some queer women were minimising their experiences. Further research should explore this issue and establish whether it is a common occurrence. I would be also interested to see whether this functions to allow them to go about their

everyday lives without worrying as much about potential incidents that might occur or previous negative experiences. It might be protective of one's identity and feelings of autonomy not assuming a position as a "victim." My ideas on this issue are tentative, and further research is required to explore this finding.

### **Discourses**

As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis and reiterated at the beginning of the conclusion, I feel angry when discourses of equality are used to mask concrete and/or structural inequalities. In practice this often works when one person speaks out about a particular injustice and someone else denies their experiences by saying something similar to "we're all the same, everyone experiences some sort of discrimination" or "we're all equal now, so actually that group is just treated the same as everyone else." It frustrates me because it is often used in clear denial of someone's statement of their own experiences or those of someone close to them. It also frustrates me because these are usually painful kinds of experiences and not the kind that is easy to shrug off if one is told that their experiences don't matter. Perhaps idealistically, I think that if more researchers in the area of equality and social inclusion could examine more deeply how "equality" is being used to justify inequality, then more counterarguments could be mobilised.<sup>48</sup> Or maybe this sort of move could be made to become unfashionable? Perhaps the sorts of people using these statements are genuinely uncomfortable that they don't have full knowledge of social realities and that there are negative social trends of which they are ignorant.

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<sup>48</sup> There are some authors who have formulated critiques of "equality", such as Michael Warner, Lisa Duggan, Jasbir Puar and the Against Equality collective.

Another set of discourses that were prominent were those surrounding self-help, empowerment and personal development. Chapter six showed how such discourses were strongly tied to neoliberal ideals and the “responsibilisation ethos” (Ilcan 2009, pp.220-23) discussed in previous chapters. While I did find papers that explored the meanings of New Age philosophies for queer people (such as the work of Prior & Cusack 2010), these ways of framing personal experience and responsibility for social change are so prevalent that I would like to see more academic analysis in this area.

Finally, I think that research that takes embodied experience into account is very important in addressing queer women’s experiences, particularly those of violence and harassment. Often research in queer theory and in criminology tends to be abstract. The body becomes a general queer body, abstracted from its conditions and the contexts in which the incidents occurred. I have detailed the particularities of queer women’s embodied experiences within in particular spaces. There is research that focuses on queer women’s embodied experience (Probyn 1995; Ahmed 2006; Ahmed 2004; Corteen 2002; Mason 2001) but I think much more research should start from the space of the body. While I have focused on queer women, I think there is more scope for studies of many public spaces, particularly those that consider issues of representation in spaces and which types of people feel included/ excluded. I have read these sorts of articles in the area of cultural geography.<sup>49</sup> I think it would be ideal if more civic authorities “audited” spatial representations and inclusion; just imagine the possibilities for spaces that that could generate.

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<sup>49</sup> for example Mitchell and Staeheli on homelessness in San Diego (2006, pp.143-67).

This thesis has contributed to the scholarly literature on queer women's sexuality and space, by providing in-depth, qualitative accounts that are rich in detail and shed light on the contexts of queer women's encounters in public spaces and their affective elements. It has shown that gender and sexual non-conformity are policed through 'everyday violence', which leads queer women to feel 'out of place'. I have argued that popular framings of queer sexuality as associated with the private realm add to increased surveillance practices and queer women's avoidance and management of both signifiers of queerness and same-sex affection. Within neoliberal responsibilisation discourses, queer women are positioned as responsible for avoiding the risk of violence. The removal of queerness from the public realm adds to the heterosexualisation of public space.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Schedule

#### *Areas of focus/ topics/ themes*

#### **EMOTIONS**

How do you feel, as a queer person/ [self-identified label] when you are in public spaces?

(Prompts- How did you feel when [X happened?])

Can you tell me about any negative experiences you've had as a [self-identified label] in public spaces?

Can you describe any positive experiences you've had as a [self-identified label] in public spaces?

#### **COMFORT**

What kind of places do you prefer to go as a [self-identified label]? What kind of places do you avoid?

Is there anything that stops you from using particular public spaces?

Are there any things you would like to be able to do in public spaces but don't feel that you can?

Can you tell me about a time you avoided doing something in a public space because you are queer?

## **SPACE**

Can you describe a space that you think is designed to be more queer friendly?

(Prompt: What do these spaces look like? What kind of features do they have?)

What kinds of issues do you think might need addressing in terms of queer and GLBTI experiences in public spaces?

In your opinion, what would be the best ways to address these issues?

What things do you think make you more visibly queer/ GLBTI in public spaces?

What things do you think make you look less visibly queer in public spaces?

Are there situations where you try not look so [self-identified label] in public?

Are there situations where you might try to look more [self-identified label] in public?

## **COMMUNITY**

Do you feel you belong to a queer community?

Are there places which you feel have more of a queer community? (If so, which places?)

Do you know of any particular neighbourhoods that are known as being queer-friendly?  
If so in what ways are they queer friendly?

Can you describe the kinds of things you think make a place have more of a queer community?

In your opinion, who makes up the queer community?

Tell me about a time when you've felt like there has been conflict between different types of people in the GLBT or queer community?

## **ENCOUNTERS**

Can you tell me about a time when you've been in a public space with people who you felt were very different to you?

[prompt]

If so,

How did you feel/ react?

How did they feel/react?

What space were you in?

End- Is there anything else you'd like to add to the discussion or anything you said before that you'd like to clarify?

## APPENDIX B

### Participant Descriptions

**Amber** is a twenty-six year old bisexual woman who has been living in a lesbian relationship for ten years. It has been an on/off open relationship. She describes herself as having looked quite feminine when younger, but says that she has changed to look more dykey. She used to wear skirts and bosom revealing tops, but no longer does. She grew up in “a white, middle class suburb halfway to Frankston.” She currently lives in the inner north-west, and has previously lived in Collingwood. She is currently unemployed, but has previously completed an Arts/Science degree at a prestigious university, and has also trained as a gardener. She is involved in the creative writing and theatre scene and likes to celebrate at parties by dressing in masculine and feminine drag. She describes herself as “not really out and proud.”

**Samantha** is “queer and a woman as well.” She is nineteen years old and is undertaking an undergraduate degree at an inner city university. She also works as a sex worker and teaches dance. She comes from a lower class background. She grew up in public housing and was raised by a single mother who received welfare benefits. Her father was an unemployed musician. Her family are fundamentalist Christians and her grandmother is a minister, but she is an atheist. She was born in Australia to an English mother and she isn’t sure about her father’s ethnic background as he is adopted. He is black and had an Australian mother and possibly a father of African-American or Samoan descent.

**Finlay** is twenty-nine years old, queer, and works in community services. She lives in the inner north, but is originally from Canberra and has also lived in Lismore. She often

wears “clothing that would be identified as masculine” and doesn’t “tend to conform to dominant ideas of femininity.” She describes herself as assertive and says that she doesn’t conform to gendered rules. When describing her gendered/ sexual self-presentation she says that she might, in some situations, agonise over her appearance, for example, if attending a wedding, “but ha[s] to confess that [she] just can’t do it any other way.” She says that she definitely identifies as a feminist. She is white and her father’s side of the family is Dutch, while her mothers’ side of the family have been in Australia for generations and were originally from Ireland. She comes from a middle class background and was raised Catholic but doesn’t “subscribe to that or any other” religions.

**Poppy** is a twenty-three year old lesbian who lives in an outer eastern suburb. She previously lived in St Kilda. She works as an administrative officer in the community sector. She has undertaken some undergraduate university study at an inner city university and some TAFE study as well. She prefers to go out with her partner in the city and in the inner suburbs, in places like Smith St, or Brunswick St in Fitzroy where “you just feel part of the community...because it’s such an open gay scene out there.” She thinks that there are stereotypes of “the butch lesbian” and “the girlie lesbian,” but says “I think I just look like *me*, I don’t feel like I fit into a different stereotype.” Although she says she dresses in a “pretty girlie” manner she also has short hair, which she describes as a “dyke cut.”

**Bella** is a sixty-three year old transwoman and lesbian. She has lived in Melbourne since 1956. She came out and began the process of transitioning in the early nineties. She lives on bushland acreage in an outer suburb. She is now retired and had a long career as an electrical engineer. She is not religious, but was baptised into the Church of England. She

has done both paid and volunteer work for many years in community radio and television. She has been very involved in transgender advocacy and support and anti-violence activism.

**Shannon** is a twenty-one year old environmental science honours student at a suburban university. She also works part time at a sweets shop. She is very involved in the university queer club. She likes to hang out in the uni queer space and go on uni outings with the queer club to inner city pubs as well as helping to organise on campus events and attend citywide events such as pride marches. She has also been involved in a queer youth group in her local area and is being trained to take on a leadership role within that group. She goes out to straight clubs and pubs with her straight friends and gay or queer clubs and pubs with her queer friends. Some of her gay and lesbian friends haven't been very understanding of her bisexual identity as she says they don't think that someone can be attracted to two sexes. She lives in the middle to outer north-eastern suburbs and comes from a middle class, background and is of Irish and English Australian descent.

**Erin** is a fifty-six year old lesbian who lives in a mid-ring Western suburb. She worked as a social worker for twenty years. She is currently completing a doctorate at a suburban university that focuses on her experiences working in that field. She comes from a working class background and is an atheist who sees herself "as a humanist." Her ethnic background is Anglo-Saxon. She identifies as a feminist and says that that interplays with her identity as a lesbian. She says that she prefers "an androgynous look" and looks like a "70s, 80s dyke, really." She has previously lived in the northern suburbs and was involved in lesbian social groups there before moving to the west and setting up a social group for lesbians in the western suburbs. She is also involved in a local landcare group.

**Alisha** is a forty-four year old transwoman who describes her sexual identity as either bisexual or pansexual. She lives in a northern suburb and works as an accountant in the not-for-profit sector and as a queer community advocate. She describes her background as Caucasian, liberal Jewish and middle class. These days she describes herself as more of a “humanist wiccan” with a “belief in karma.” She has worked in community radio for many years and has been very involved in a large number of trans and queer community organisations. She enjoys taking part in stand-up comedy, character based performance and improvisation. In her leisure time she enjoys attending sporting events such as football and wrestling, but has recently stopped attending the football due to the queerphobia, racist and sexist statements often made by other spectators.

**Eloise** is thirty-one years old and identifies as a lesbian. She lives in central Melbourne with her partner. She has also lived in the bush in New South Wales. She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and now manages a store in the inner southern suburbs. She described herself as having been a “feral” during the time she was at university, but now dresses more conservatively. She says that at different times she experiences different senses of queer community; at times in her life she has “experienced such an *amazing*, strong network of lesbians or queer community” and other times she has been busy and realised that she has lost touch with that community and has made an effort to get back in touch with it. Over the last several years she has been involved in personal and professional development activities. Her background is middle class and her mother is Welsh and her father is Australian of Irish descent.

**Lauren** is thirty-five years old and queer. She lives in a mid-northern suburb and works in a social organisation. She completed a Bachelor of Arts/ Bachelor of Social Work at

university. She comes from an upper middle class Anglo-Caucasian background. She doesn't always feel that she fits in at more mainstream gay and lesbian events like Pride March, but really enjoyed going to a (no longer running) alternative club night where "you could be whatever, do whatever and just play out whoever you are and that that was okay." She also described another club night she enjoyed where people were "toying with different notions of gender and sexuality, rather than, I don't know, like some other events that you go to and it's all pretty much saying the sameish kind of thing." While she says she dresses conventionally, has long hair and wears make-up, she also says that even when she was younger and identified as straight people "picked up on something" because she "didn't really conform to some of like the really girly gender stereotype kind of stuff." The way she feels about the queer community is that she and they have "got some things in common but not heaps."

**Sofia** is twenty years old and identifies as a lesbian, although she says that she doesn't think that "people pick up on it" because she doesn't look "like a stereotypical lesbian." She lives in an inner eastern suburb and works in community development and women's health promotion in the northern suburbs. She has completed some TAFE studies in community development and has just started a social work degree. She has been heavily involved in activism ever since she was in Year Nine when she helped to start a Gay-Straight Alliance at her high school. She currently runs sexuality and diversity education programs in schools in the northern region. She is of Polish and Irish descent and grew up lower class, but her parents became more middle class during her childhood and she now describes her family as "firmly planted in middle class." She says that the public activism she has been involved in "has been, for the most part, really, really positive."

**Courtney** uses several terms to describe her identity: lesbian, dyke, and bi. She is forty-nine years old and lives in an outer Western suburb of where she grew up in a “working class Westie family.” “[Her] father worked in the factory up the end of the road for most of his life so... very much working class.” She has previously lived in the north and east of Melbourne. She has long hair and people tell her “You don’t look like a lesbian.” She has completed an honours degree in Professional Writing at a suburban university, and has previously worked as an artist. She is currently looking for work and hopes to be employed as a writer. She participates in a gay and lesbian dance troupe and is a member of a social group for lesbians in the western suburbs.

**Beth** is thirty-seven and describes her sexual identity as queer or lesbian, although “If one goes, it’s lesbian, not queer.” She works in the mental health field and has completed a bachelors degree in Arts and Social Sciences. Although she comes from a middle class background she describes herself as currently “poor.” Her ethnic and religious background is Anglo-Caucasian and Catholic. She lives in an inner southern suburb and has previously lived in Queensland. In her gendered presentation she has “become more and more outwardly femme,” whereas when she was younger she “had a shaved head and looked more outwardly dykey.” She says that “by and large I’m assumed as straight which I really *don’t* like.” She is involved in the Butch/Femme and kink communities. She has been very involved in community groups and helped set up a queer parenting group, a queer mental health group and a butch femme and trans group among other initiatives, and also worked for a women’s phone line and a gay and lesbian phone line in Queensland.

**Olivia** is fifty-one years old and lives in an outer south-eastern suburb. When asked to describe her sexual identity, she said “I struggle with this one a bit because I don’t really like labels.” She said that if she uses any labels she uses “lesbian” and doesn’t mind dyke. She has previously lived in the inner northern suburb of Parkville and in the Central Northern Coast of New South Wales and has a long term partner who lives in New South Wales. She has two young adult daughters. She is a doctor and has completed postgraduate degrees in medicine and public health. She is involved in a professional organisation for lesbian medical practitioners and also networks through a lesbian social networking site.

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