

Gender Nonconforming Boys:

A Qualitative Study of Lived Experiences in High School

by

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Abstract

This study examined the reflections of gender nonconforming men on their lived-experiences as boys in the heteronormative environment of high schools. Participants self-selected for the study based on their perceptions of being othered as boys in high school due to their nonconforming expression of gender. The study targeted men who had graduated with a Manitoba High School Diploma within the last 5 years. The methodology of this study was underpinned by an interpretivist theoretical perspective. The purpose of the research and the positioning of the researcher were influenced by the socially critical research paradigm. Narrative methods were utilized for the reporting; the lived experiences of the participants while in high school. The study found that high schools continue to be heteronormative environments that present difficulties for gender nonconforming boys. Although participants felt that the situation in high schools may be improving, all felt that much more can, and should, be done to improve conditions for gender nonconforming youth. Findings suggest that policy and practice at the school, district, and provincial levels need to be examined and, where necessary, changed to address the treatment of gender nonconforming boys in high schools.

Keywords: gender, gender nonconformity, heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, queer theory

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Gender Nonconforming Boys: A Qualitative Study of Lived Experiences in High School

Chapter One: Introduction

Schooling in Canada, as well as many other nations, continues to perpetuate social attitudes and normative expectations for students around ideas of gender. Students who do not conform to these expectations are often silenced, marginalized, or even overtly harassed within the system, with little recourse to have their lived experiences affirmed during their high school years (Bortolin, 2010; Kosckiw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010; Taylor et al., 2011; Town, 2002).

Policymakers, at all levels of government in Canada, have attempted to ameliorate the environment of schools and society in general for those who are marginalized. They have attempted to do so by drafting nebulous legislation that aims to codify the rights of all students and citizens to feel included: *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, provincial human rights codes, and anti-harassment policies at the school district/division level. Although well-intentioned, the mandate of these various pieces of legislation is to limit, or eradicate, discriminatory acts that target identifiable groups in society. However, to a large degree, legislation is unable to influence peoples' social attitudes and normative expectations for how these same identifiable groups should behave. By their very nature then, these legislative acts function as reactionary tools to confront discriminatory acts, but not as means of teaching young people an appreciation for sexual and gender diversity in a pro-active manner. Teachings around gender and sexual diversity are still largely left as the domain of the family and thus, socially constructed expectations for what is normal behaviour are inculcated within young people.

There is an abundance of research that suggests that schools continue to be organizations that perpetuate heteronormative environments that create expectations for gendered behaviour (e.g., Depalma & Atkinson, 2010; Ferfolja, 2007; Garcia & Slesaransky-Poe, 2010; Kosciw et al. 2010; Renold, 2007; Sweet & DesRoches, 2008). These expectations for how students will perform gender are organized around the normative belief that students are heterosexual and thus, boys will conduct themselves in a traditionally masculine manner, and girls will perform traditional femininity. As a result, gender nonconformists are systemically othered by the very institutions that are supposed to nurture both academic and social-emotional learning. Boys who do not match these traditional expectations for masculine behaviour are faced with a difficult choice: compromise their natural performance of gender and conform to the traditional expectations for masculine performance in order to be socially accepted in school; or, assume their natural, comfortable gender performance, and risk being socially othered by the institutional practices of schools and those individuals within them.

There are several reasons why the experiences of gender nonconforming boys in school merits further attention and research. First, there is ample research in several national contexts that suggests that heteronormativity maintains a hegemonic presence in schools (e.g., DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Ferfolja, 2007; Short, 2008). Second, this heteronormative culture in schools is manifested in overt harassment or more subtle systemic othering of gender nonconforming boys (Ferfolja, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2010; Meyer, 2008; Sweet & DesRoches, 2008; Taylor et al., 2011; Vicars, 2005). Third, there is a growing body of literature that suggests that for a variety of reasons, educators and school systems in general, are not intervening to ameliorate conditions for gender nonconforming boys and are frequently complicit in perpetuating a limited, heterosexist definition of masculine gender performance (Kehily, 2001; Meyer, 2008; Schneider

& Dimito, 2008). A more purposeful and comprehensive analysis of the aforementioned variables may benefit in the development of future educational systems, policies, and curricula that combat the hegemonic heteronormative culture in schools.

The purpose of this study is three-fold. First, the study illustrates through reference to the existing body of research, the hegemonic presence of a heteronormative culture in Canadian schools. Second, it demonstrates how heteronormative expectations prescribe a very narrow, essentialized, and limiting definition of masculinity for boys to perform in schools. Finally, the study contextualizes the lived experiences of young men who have recently completed their high school education and whose performance of masculinity did not conform to the prevailing heteronormative expectations.

Although all participants in the study will share the commonality of gender nonconformity, this research is not meant to pathologize their stories. Conversely, the intention of this qualitative study is to honour and accurately recount men's perceptions of their school experiences utilizing a narrative inquiry approach.

The intention of this study was to examine, via the perceptions of the boys who experienced them, the role that schools as institutions and the employees who work within them play in creating and perhaps perpetuating masculine gender expectations for boys. Moreover, the study illustrates how challenging high school environments continue to be for gender nonconforming boys, and that policy and practice must be informed by its findings so that the lived gender experiences of boys in high school becomes less normative. Despite the fact that the findings of this study are not meant to be generalized, I believe that the findings have potential utility for a variety of constituents in a variety of contexts.

First and foremost, as a critical theorist, it is my hope that in some way this research project, and the opportunity to examine men's lived experiences as high school students, is in some way beneficial for the young men who agreed to be participants. Furthermore, I believe that the study could potentially benefit young men who choose to read the findings and can in some way connect their own experiences to those of the participants. I hope that the mere fact that this study is being conducted provides encouragement and optimism for men who have had the unfortunate experience of being othered because of the ways in which they perform gender.

Secondly, all employee groups that work in schools could potentially benefit from reading this study. Given the systemic nature of heteronormative expectations in schools, it is likely that all employees including teachers, administrators, secretaries, etcetera, potentially play a role in perpetuating the socially constructed gender expectations for both boys and girls. This study may provide insight into the difficulties that are faced by a group of students who are often silenced and marginalized within schools. Certain school practices and policies may be examined and potentially amended as a result of this research.

Thirdly, the province of Manitoba, and more specifically, the Ministry of Education should be particularly interested in the findings of this study, given that constitutional jurisdiction for education in Canada is given to the provinces. The findings of this study provide evidence of the need for legislation/policy change at the district/divisional level within Manitoba schools. It is important to re-iterate that as an educator with many years of experience working in schools, I do not believe that legislation/policy alone related to human rights has the power to adequately improve conditions for students who are othered due to their gender expression.

Having said that, I do believe that legislation/policy is a key component in an overall comprehensive approach necessary to confront the issues illuminated in this study.

Outside of the sphere of public education and public schooling (elementary and high school), there are other organizations within the local and national community that could gain insight from this study: Education faculties at post-secondary institutions throughout Manitoba and across Canada may gain valuable insight that could inform teacher training practices; The Manitoba Teachers' Society and other teacher associations across Canada may incorporate the issues raised in this research in both their professional development planning and codes of ethical behaviour that are outlined for teachers; The Rainbow Resource Centre, which is a Winnipeg-based organization that provides support and advocacy for LGBTTQ individuals, may gather further insight into schooling and gender, and thus be able to better support high school students who seek its support.

In summary, I believe that the potential impact of this study is far reaching. Although the participants were limited to the Manitoba context, the relevant literature suggests that the issues that have been raised by their lived experiences are not unique to high schools in this jurisdiction alone; on the contrary, the literature illustrates that these are issues relevant to schools both nationally and internationally.

Research Questions

This research was designed to understand, through narrative analysis, the high school experiences of men who resisted heteronormative gendered norms perpetuated within the school system. Both semi-structured and unstructured questions were used in the interview process with

the participants, and collection and analysis of the data were conducted with the following research questions as a guide:

- 1) To what extent did the men perceive that heteronormative expectations existed in Manitoba high schools while they were students?
- 2) How did the men's expression of gender reflect or resist heteronormative expectations?
- 3) What were the lived-experiences of participants as gender nonconforming boys in Manitoba high schools?
- 4) What can be done in schools at the individual or systemic levels to foster a gender-inclusive environment for all students?

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the above research questions served as a framework for the approach to the interviews with the participants. As expected, the responses of the participants took me away from certain issues that I deemed important above, and towards other issues that the participants felt were of a more compelling magnitude and significance. Each interview followed the above framework of questions but diverged into areas where the participants seemed to recall their most vivid memories of being othered due to their gender expression.

Definition of Terms

Sex, Sex Category, and Gender

For the purpose of this study, a clear conceptualization of the terms sex, sex category, and gender is essential. Frequently, the terms gender and sex are used in a manner that suggests that

they are interchangeable or synonymous. It is common-place in Canada, as well as many other nations, to encounter categorical distinctions made based on gender, referring to female or male. Applications for schools, jobs, passports and several other bureaucratic documents ask individuals to check off a box as either female or male under the heading of gender. Since the 1970's, sociologists have made distinctions between sex, sex category, and gender. In general, sex refers to the biological (chromosomal) and anatomical (genitalia) differences that exist between females and males, sex category refers to the identificatory displays and characteristics that place individuals in categories of girl/boy or woman/man based on observable traits and norms for appearance, and gender refers to the socially constructed expectations for behaviour for girls/females and boys/men within society (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Thus, in a general sense within the context of this study, the term sex is used in reference to the biological and anatomical distinctions between males and females, sex category is used to reference the categorical placement of humans into binary categories of woman/man or girl/boy based on normed expectations for physical appearance and character traits, whereas gender refers to the socially constructed norms for behaviour that society has for women and men. The researcher is not proposing that the aforementioned distinctions made between sex, sex category, and gender suggests that the terms are mutually exclusive. Conversely, one of the basic premises of this study is that the heteronormative nature of schools creates a binary and limiting definition for gender performance based on the biological differences between females and males and the sex categorization of woman or man.

Gender Nonconformity

The term gender nonconformity is used in this study as a means of describing individuals or individual behaviours that do not conform to the socially constructed expectations for heteronormative gender performance. As stated in the abovementioned definitions of sex, sex category, and gender, the term gender nonconformity does not reference individual identity related to sex, sex category or sexual orientation. For the purpose of this study, it is used in the context of how individuals behaved or conducted their gendered selves in relation to pervasive discourses that society, and more specifically in this study, schools, held for them. The term gender nonconformity is used relative to the stereotypical normative notions of masculine behaviour that are expected from school-aged students ascribed the sex categorization of boys. Relevant literature is referenced in Chapter Two of this study to illustrate a clear picture of what the normative expectations for masculine behaviour are in schools.

It is necessary to clarify that in this study, gender nonconformists is not used in any way to categorize or pathologize the stories of the participants. Although participants may themselves identify as gay or transgender, the term gender nonconformity was not intended to place participants in any single definable grouping; with the exception of their shared experience of being “others” in schools by virtue of how they performed gender.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity, in the context of schools, and as used in this study, is defined by Donelson and Rogers (2004) as the “organizational structures in schools that support heterosexuality as normal and anything else as deviant” (p. 128). These structures continue to

define expectations for performances of gender by both females and males in Canadian schools. As Renold (2007) suggests, "...heterosexuality is embedded in the ways in which boys and girls define, negotiate, and consolidate their gendered selves" (p. 275).

A heteronormative culture in a school creates an associative expectation for masculine and feminine gender performance connected to sexual orientation. Heterosexuality is the assumed sexual orientation of all staff and students that enter school buildings on a daily basis. This normative assumption immediately demarcates typical and atypical behaviours based on one's sex/sex category. This systemic binary of female/male, girl/boy, girlfriend/boyfriend is the product of pervasive heteronormative environments in schools. Therefore, the existence of institutionalized heterosexuality in schools establishes a hegemonic position for all boys who conform to the masculine norm and subordinates all those who perform transgressing forms of gender.

Heterosexual/Hegemonic Masculinity

Masculinity in schools is shaped by the essentialist behaviors and gender traits that are traditionally connected to heterosexual boys and men (Carver, 2006; Connell, 2005; Kehily, 2001; Swain, 2004; Vicars, 2005). Carver (2006) characterizes the gender roles assigned to men (boys) as follows:

The overtly gendered roles assigned to men are in the first instance commonplace consequences of the heterosexual kinship structure: husband, father, brother, son, bridegroom, fiancé, boyfriend, etc. In the second instance these gendered roles are commonplace consequences of militaristic and economic presumptions: 'good men' are

warriors, heroes, high-earning achievers, movers-and-shakers in the public world, leaders, providers, and protectors of the weak. (p. 453)

In their work, *Boys and gender: Reaching beyond a machismo discourse*, Robinson, Park, and Burgess (2004) further delimit the expectations for heterosexual masculinity by referring to a male socialization in which males learn to behave in defined ways, framed by an expectation to be macho, act tough, and not show emotion, especially in the form of tears. These socially constructed benchmarks for how masculinity should be performed in schools greet boys as they arrive in elementary schools (Bhana, 2009; Keddie, 2006; Renold, 2001, 2007; Vicars, 2005), shape the expectations placed upon them while they engage in their school experiences, and bid them farewell as they exit the realm of secondary schooling (Bortolin, 2010; Kehler, 2007; Vicars, 2005; Wang, 2000).

The term “hegemonic masculinity” was introduced in the 1980’s and was further developed in the 1990’s in reference to a dominant form of masculinity that subordinates all other gendered performances for boys/men (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995, 2005; Swain, 2006). Theoretically, hegemonic masculinity positions itself at the centre and all other masculinities are othered by its dominance. Connell (1995) contends that in school settings, this hegemonic masculinity is situated at the top of a hierarchy of competing masculinities. Swain (2006) proposes that in many settings such as schools, the hegemonic form of masculinity is narrowly constrained and very difficult for many boys to achieve.

LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTTQ

The acronym LGBT is now commonly used to refer to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The term is frequently used in reference to academic research in the form of ethnographic study. More recent use of the term reflects a more expanded or fluid version of the acronym as either LGBTQ or LGBTTQ. The addition of the “Q” is in reference to those individuals who identify as queer or questioning which is defined below. The addition of the second “T” is in reference to individuals, traditionally of First Nations’ origin, who identify as Two-Spirited; individuals who embody both male and female spirits, traditionally honoured members of the community.

Queer/Queer Theory

Although Queer Theory traces its origins to the mid-1980’s, Teresa de Lauretis (1991) is given credit for the coining of the actual phrase. She first used the phrase Queer Theory in print while editing a journal article entitled, “*Queer Theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities*”, which was published in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. A definitive foundation for the origin and growth of Queer Theory is difficult to pinpoint. However, as Rottman (2006) suggests, “Despite multiple divergent and occasionally internal contradictory voices, most queer theorists seem to be informed by the gay liberation movement and some combination of feminist and poststructuralist thought” (p. 5). Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) further clarify the roots of Queer Theory with their assertion that:

Queer Theory has been embraced by some as a means out of the gay/straight split (given that post-structuralist thought has encouraged the dismantling of such binaries) and a

move beyond the politics of identity, in that ‘queer’ plays around with identity and refuses to be fixed or categorized. (p. 129)

To come to the point then, Queer Theory seems to have grown out of a desire to challenge old binary restrictions of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Lugg (2003) refers to the term *queer* in reference to those with a homosexual or bisexual orientation as well as those who are intersex, transgender, and transsexual. Queer Theorists propose a view of sexual orientation and gender without assumptions for normed behavioral expectations. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) claim that, “At heart queer theorists, in common with queer political radicals, are out to undermine the naturalness of gender in order to decentre heterosexuality as a privileged identity” (p. 130). Therefore, Queer Theory tends to celebrate its embedded vagaries and resists the definitive tenets that often characterize theoretical constructs. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) describe the position of Queer Theory with the following:

In principle this is a stance that denies and interrogates the privileges of heterosexuality and tries to openly question dominant ideas of normalcy and appropriate behavior. The adoption of the term ‘queer’ suggests a blurring of boundaries between straight and gay sex and validates those who would in the past have been considered sexual ‘outlaws’. It is a deliberately provocative political and theoretical stance in that it foregrounds sexual identity, pleasure, and desire, and their construction in our knowledge of self. (p. 129)

Thus, in terms of its axiology, Queer Theory demands an anti-foundational approach to accepted values systems. It argues for a broader lens through which gender and sexual orientation should be viewed. It not only challenges the traditional belief that males and females can be cast in the gender molds of masculinity and femininity, but it further questions the binary nature of gay/straight sexual identities. In essence, Queer Theory advocates for a void in defined

expectations for both gender identity and sexual orientation. It challenges the hegemonic belief that heterosexuality and masculinity/femininity deserve placement at the centre, and all transgressions should be judged relative to this core. Queer Theory espouses a limitless range of possibilities for gender and sexual orientation. Embedded in Queer Theory is an epistemology of skepticism and anti-positivism. There is no assumption of a collectivity of knowledge, behaviors, or expectations towards which all should perform.

Delimitations of the Study

There are a few delimitations that relate to the parameters of this study:

1. The participants who volunteered to participate in this study did so based on their own perceptions of being a gender nonconforming boy/man; not based on their membership in any identifiable group or a priori criteria.
2. Only men that have graduated with a Manitoba High School Diploma in the last 5 years were included in the study.
3. The participant pool was limited to Winnipeg and the surrounding area of Southern Manitoba.
4. The study examined the lived experiences of four gender nonconforming boys while in high school.
5. Interviews were conducted within a limited time frame; late April and early May 2012.

Organization of the Report

This paper is composed of eight chapters. In Chapter One, the reader is introduced to the heteronormative nature of schools and the inherent problems associated with such an environment for gender nonconforming boys. The second chapter is a review of relevant literature organized in the following categories: gender and schooling, heteronormativity in schools, heterosexual/hegemonic masculinity in schools, implications for gender nonconforming boys in schools, and initiatives schools are undertaking to address heteronormativity in the Canadian context. Chapter Three will state the methods and methodology of this study. Chapters Four to Seven of this paper will endeavor to retell the high school experiences of the participants using the research questions as a framework for the retelling. Finally, Chapter Eight will summarize the findings in relation to the research questions. This summary was done by triangulating the data with the previously referenced literature and the personal experiences of the researcher as a school teacher/administrator over the last 17 years. Chapter Eight will conclude with a discussion of recommendations/implications for further research and practice.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

The literature review begins with an examination of how gender is defined and understood. Next, the review will deal with the topic of heteronormativity and the existence of heteronormative environments in schools. Third, the review will examine literature related to heteronormative expectations for masculinity and the pressure which is placed on boys/men to perform this socially constructed and accepted gender. Fourth, I will review the literature which considers the implications of the aforementioned environments and expectations in schools for gender nonconforming boys. Lastly, literature related to attempts that have been made to address the issue of heteronormativity in schools will be discussed.

Gender

When considering the topic of gender as a focus of study, it must be noted that frequently the term sex is used as a misrepresentation of gender. The mass media commonly, and inaccurately, refer to gender issues in schools and many other organizations that are based on categories of sex or sex category; females/males or girls/boys.

Gender is not something that one ‘is’ or ‘has’; we ‘do gender’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In their seminal work *Doing Gender*, West and Zimmerman (1987) make very clear distinctions between sex, sex category, and gender. They propose the following for *sex, sex category, and gender*:

Sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males. The criteria for classification can be

genitalia at birth or chromosomal typing before birth, and they do not necessarily agree with one another.

Placement in a *sex category* is achieved through application of the *sex* criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category. In this sense, one's *sex category* presumes one's *sex* and stands as a proxy for it in many situations, but *sex* and *sex category* can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a *sex category* even when the *sex* criteria are lacking.

Gender, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative expectations of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's *sex category*. *Gender* activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a *sex category*. (p. 127)

An acceptance of West and Zimmerman's (1987) distinctions for sex, sex category, and gender, is an acknowledgement that the terms sex and gender are frequently misused in both schools and society in general. There are numerous examples in school of references made to gender that according to West and Zimmerman (1987) would be more aptly placed in the category of sex or sex category: 'single gender classrooms', 'references to gender on registration forms', 'demographic information and reports categorized by gender'. This misappropriation of the term gender which places it into a binary categorization of female/male or woman/man clearly illustrates how schools as organizations systemically other all students who are gender nonconformists in any way that places them outside of this binary. In effect, the term gender becomes a choice between one or the other and creates dissonance for any performance of gender that transgresses these opposites.

In my study, West's and Zimmerman's (1987) classification of sex category and gender is used extensively while recounting the lived experiences of the participants. All participants in this study are positioned in the sex category of boy/man by the normative expectations that society attaches to their physical appearance. Interviews with the participants investigated how their nonconforming performance of gender at school cast them outside of the accepted parameters of heterosexual masculine performance of gender and what this meant for their lived experiences due to their assignment by sex category.

In the formative adolescent years of high school, doing gender is omnipresent in the lives of students. Students are constantly confronted with expectations for how they will perform femininity or masculinity based on their sex categorization of girl or boy. Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999, cited in Ridgeway, 2001) suggest, "More than a trait of individuals, gender is an institutionalized *system* of social practices for constituting males and females as different in socially significant ways..." (p. 637). Students are faced with numerous encounters on a daily basis at school that have a normed expectation for how they will behave based on their sex category: in classrooms, in hallways, in the cafeteria, in sports' activities, in clubs. West and Zimmerman (1987) posit that sex category and gender are categorical properties for how one should conduct her/his gendered self in society and others will judge and respond to us dependent upon levels of conformity or nonconformity.

In her well-known book *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) challenges the assumption that feminine and masculine performances of gender should be inherently tied to women or men. Butler dismisses the long-held belief that gender is always bound by a social interplay of humans as naturally or essentially sexed beings shackled to their sex. Butler suggests that there is no

essentialized male or female being that dictates a script of expectations for how women or men should be assumed to behave. Conversely, Butler theorizes that gender is beyond categorization and should be conceptualized as fluid or queer. Butler discredits the notion that females or males are pre-disposed by biology to any particular gendered self. Traditional moulds of femininity and masculinity are merely two points on a boundless continuum; a continuum within which the placement of a woman or man has no predestination.

In analyzing Butler's work within the context of schools, many questions may be asked about the systemic and binary gendering of students that takes place in school environments. From the time young people first enter the formal education system, they are confronted with messages and unwritten expectations about what it means to be a girl or boy in school; more specifically, with messages about how they should perform gender based on their sex category of girl or boy. Young students will face expectations for behaviour and gendered roles into which they will be cast. Butler would suggest that these pre-determined assumptions about how students will learn, behave, and interact based on their sex category of girl or boy are socially-constructed norms that create unnecessary and harmful binaries.

In summary then, the work of West and Zimmerman (1987) and Butler (1990) bring into question many significant issues within the school system related to gender: first, the frequent misappropriation of the term gender for sex and/or sex category; second, the binary assumptions for the term gender that are manifested by this misappropriation; third, the heteronormative expectations for performance of masculinity and femininity systemically other queer performances of gender; and lastly, an overall lack of systemic recognition within schools that

gender should not be tied to sex or sex category in terms of expectations for behaviour or assumption of any situated role.

Heteronormativity in Schools

Heteronormative culture and its inherent expectations for sex category, gender, and sexual orientation are borne on the premise that heterosexuality is normal, fundamental, and natural. Although this study is focussed on the existence and impact of heteronormative cultures in schools, research advises that the process of normalizing heterosexuality begins before young people even enter the school system (Martin, 2009). Several factors influence the hegemonic position of heteronormativity in schools including parental attitudes and child-rearing, institutionalization of heterosexual norms, and the teaching and modeling of heteronormative content and behaviours by teachers and other school staff.

In her work entitled *Normalizing Heterosexuality: Mothers' Assumptions, Talk, and Strategies with Young Children*, Martin (2009) undertook an empirical study that examined how mothers normalized heterosexuality for young children. Martin argues that mothers are not only bound by the heteronormative context that they encounter on a daily basis, but that they sexually socialize their own children with these same socially constructed norms. In her study, Martin surveyed over 600 mothers utilizing both open and closed-ended questions which asked mothers in what type of discourse they engage their children related to sexuality and reproduction. From her research, Martin concluded that:

...mothers begin to construct heteronormative understandings for their children in early childhood. This likely contributes to older children's and adults' sense that

heterosexuality is natural. Mothers' ascription of heterosexuality to very young children, their discussions of love and marriage that assume heterosexuality and their prescriptions to their children that they will heterosexually marry when they grow up all contribute to early construction of heteronormativity. (p. 204)

Martin's work also found that mothers who parented for the possibility that their children may be of a transgressing gender or sexual orientation were virtually non-existent. Consequently, young children learn very little about diverse sexual and gender identities and hence normalize heterosexuality and all of its accompanying socially constructed expectations for gender performance and sexuality. Although Martin focussed solely on mothers for this study, she identifies research that suggests that men actually report more homophobic attitudes than women (Loftus, 2001, cited in Martin, 2009). It could be argued then that Martin's findings actually underestimate the scope of heteronormative parenting with young children by not including fathers in the study. It could also be argued that these homophobic attitudes of fathers may have a profound and direct influence on the attitudes and behaviours of their sons; discouraging them from expressing gender in any way that may be perceived as transgressing heteronormative expectations. Martin concludes that young children receive very little teaching and knowledge about diverse gender and sexuality and hence heterosexuality becomes acceptable and diverging gender and sexuality, unacceptable.

It is this heteronormative foundation that encapsulates young children's beliefs and attitudes about gender and sexuality as they enter the elementary school system. The elementary school is a place where much that is learned in the home is re-enforced by what children experience when they arrive. In large part, schools continue to perpetuate essentialist views of

gender for boys and girls (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Ferfolja, 2007; Renold, 2007; Vicars, 2005). By doing so, schools place heterosexuality and its inherent binary molds for performance of masculinity and femininity at the centre and judge all other nonconforming gender-roles from this core. The root of these views lies in the heteronormative culture of schools. Blackburn and Smith (2009) suggest that, “Heteronormativity is so prevalent that it largely goes unexamined in mainstream conversations about education; it is simply in place” (p. 627). These expectations are internalized by students at an early and formative stage of development (Garcia & Slesaransky-Poe, 2010; Martin, 2009) and inhibit a more fluid or queer understanding of gender. Blackburn and Smith (2010) describe the influence that heteronormative schooling has on gender performance in the following way:

Perhaps the most foundational way that schools enforce the institution of heteronormativity is through their establishment of rigid gender roles. From the time they enter school, students are systemically calibrated with “normal” characterizations of one of the two gender assignments, male or female, and these manipulations, in turn, are used to inform and enforce heteronormative school cultures, curricula, and policies.

(p. 627)

Ferfolja (2007) conducted a study that examined a variety of factors that served to institutionalize heteronormativity and heterosexism in high schools. Ferfolja based her findings on interviews conducted with female teachers who self-identified as lesbian, and questionnaires which were completed by 30 high school teachers in New South Wales. In her findings, Ferfolja identified six institutional processes that serve to, “...reinforce and perpetuate silences and invisibility in relation to non-heterosexual issues and subjectivities” (p. 160) in schools: limited

awareness of policies pertaining to homophobia; limited professional development related to this area of social justice; curricular exclusion of non-heterosexual content; misuse of promotional materials such as posters aimed at educating students about non-heterosexual issues in the school environment; restricting/vetting the use of non-heterosexual materials by those in executive positions such as head teachers; and abusive language being used and ignored. Ferfolja concludes that educational organizations need to deconstruct the powerful position of heterosexuality and strive to include and empower the currently othered non-heterosexual.

As stated, parenting at home and institutionalized processes in school systems, both aid in the formation and maintenance of heteronormative school environments. A third contributing factor is the attitudes, behaviours, and actions/inactions of the people who are employed to work with young people in schools (Blount, 2000; Goldstein, Collins, & Halder, 2008; Meyer, 2008; Schneider & Dimitro, 2008; Taylor et al., 2009). Blount (2000) made the following assertions when referring to the influence of heteronormative gender expectations as a result of the adult role models that students encounter on a daily basis in schools:

Young people learn powerful lessons about gender in schools. Gender-appropriate models greet children from the start when early grade teachers, usually women, extend motherly affection, warmly guide them through schoolwork, and attend to the countless daily details of classroom life. Men typically hold father like positions in school administration or coaching. Schools draw children into traditional gender appropriate behaviour and roles through such modeling and in an infinite variety of other ways. Cautious parents and communities thus are assured that schools will uphold this quietly expected task. (p. 83)

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of studies that have focussed on the teacher's role in either perpetuating or combating heteronormative environments in schools (Goldstein, Collins, & Halder, 2008; Meyer, 2008; Schneider & Dimoto, 2008; Taylor et al., 2009). These studies have examined a variety of factors related to teaching and heteronormative schools: teacher willingness to teach material on diverse gender and sexuality; the impact of teacher attitudes and beliefs; the influence of teacher support or lack of support for queer youth; the influence that supportive policy plays in predicting teacher action/inaction; as well as many other factors. In a more general sense, these studies have focussed on two broad areas related to teaching and heteronormativity in schools: first, teaching curricula related to gender and sexual diversity and the many factors that influence that decision, and second, teacher willingness to address both covert and overt issues related to the mistreatment of students of diverse sexuality and gender expressions in school and the variety of variables that influence their approach.

Schneider and Dimoto (2008) undertook a study with teachers and administrators in Ontario, Canada, which investigated their comfort in addressing issues related to gender and sexual diversity in schools as well as the variables that influence their likelihood of intervention. They assert that:

All teachers have a critical role to play in nurturing that safe environment. Not only can they protect students in the moment by intervening directly when anti-LGBT harassment and discrimination occur but they can also contribute to the development of a LGBT-positive climate within their school by providing LGBT-positive curriculum and other learning experiences and by advocating on behalf of these youth. (p. 50)

Schneider's and Dimito's (2008) study found that approximately three-quarters of the teachers who participated in the study felt somewhat confident that they had the ability to respond effectively to anti-LGBT incidents and that they would have the support of their colleagues and administrators in doing so. However, they also found that only 60% of the participants felt as though they would anticipate no trouble from the administration of the school if they introduced relevant LGBT material into the content of their lessons. Accordingly, if one assumes that the study participants are less likely to act when they do not sense that they have the support of their administration, then it is likely that the introduction of content in high schools that deals with gender and sexual diversity is still avoided. For gender nonconforming students, Schneider's and Dimito's study seems to validate their perceptions that their teachers are largely unwilling to confront the heteronormative hegemony in schools.

In her study on gendered harassment in secondary schools, Meyer (2008) examined not only gendered harassment of students but also the factors that influence high school teachers to not intervene when the harassment takes place. Meyer (2006, cited in Meyer 2008) defines gendered harassment as:

...any behaviour, verbal, physical, or psychological, that polices the boundaries of traditional heterosexual gender norms and includes (hetero) sexual harassment, homophobic harassment, and harassment for gender non-conformity. Common examples of such behaviours include name-calling, jokes and gestures, as well as physical and sexual assaults that are sexist, homophobic or transphobic in nature. (p. 556)

Meyer found that there were both external and internal influences that shaped a teacher's perceptions and behaviours in school related to gendered harassment.

Meyer (2008) further categorized the external influences in her study as either institutional (formal structures of the school) or social (informal structures of the school). Institutional influences on how teachers perceived and responded to incidents of gendered harassment referred to administrative structures and responses, provincial curriculum demands and teacher workloads, teacher education and training, and written policies. The social influences included perceptions of administration, interpersonal relationships, and community values (p. 559-561). Meyer concluded that although both categories of external influences seemed to impact teacher behaviour, it was the social influences that seemed to be more influential (p. 561).

The internal influences that Meyer discusses referred to the teachers' own personal identities and experiences that they brought with them to the profession. Meyer said the following in relation to the teachers in her study and the impact of their internal influences:

All of the participants talked about their experiences of having felt marginalized in society due to their identities as gay, bisexual, women, or people of colour. These experiences in their own schooling and professional life acted as very strong motivators to act out against discriminatory behaviour that they witnessed as teachers. At times, these factors also acted as barriers to consistent intervention because they felt vulnerable as minorities in their schools...They cared deeply about reducing the harms of homophobia and sexism and other forms of bias for their students, but also had to negotiate how they experienced these forces as teachers. (p. 566)

Meyer concluded that in totality, these external and internal influences function far more as barriers to teacher intervention than they do as motivators. As Meyer put it, "It is as if

teachers' eyes are covered by institutional and social barriers that tell them not to see gendered harassment and not to intervene" (p. 567). According to Meyer, these barriers are often in direct conflict with teachers' personal commitment to challenge bias in their classrooms. Meyer's findings accentuate the concern for gender non-conforming students who are often confronted with gendered harassment (Taylor et al., 2011) at school. This concern is connected to the notion that students may perceive that although teachers are empathetic to their struggle, they are unwilling to 'do the right thing' and intervene on their behalf when necessary.

In their study entitled *The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools*, one of the elements that Taylor et al. (2009) studied was student perceptions of the frequency of staff intervention when some form of homophobic harassment had occurred. They found that, half of the transgender students who took part in the survey reported that staff never intervened when homophobic comments were made which targeted their non-conforming performance of gender (Taylor et al., 2011). Partially as a result of this non-intervention on their behalf by teachers, 95% of the transgender participants in the study reported feeling unsafe in Canadian high schools (Taylor et al., 2011).

Given that students spend so much time on a daily basis with their school teachers, it is no surprise that teachers have a large influence on their students, both academically and socially. Students will often turn to school teachers for support and guidance with their school work and in negotiating the complex socialization process that takes place when students are of school-age. Therefore, teachers play a paramount role in providing support and protection for students of diverse gender and sexuality who are frequently made to feel othered (Taylor et al., 2011) in the heteronormative environment of schools.

The literature on heteronormativity in schools reviewed above strongly suggests that schools are very difficult places for many students who do not conform to heterosexual expectations for gender and sex category. The literature suggests that the process of heteronormalization begins before students even enter the school system and is perpetuated all the way through from entrance into elementary to exit from high school.

Heteronormativity and Masculinity in Schools

As stated in the previous section, the existence of heteronormative environments in schools produces expectations for how girls and boys will perform gender. For the purpose of this study, I reviewed literature relevant to expectations for how boys will perform masculinity in school settings. Literature that focuses on expectations for masculinity in elementary and secondary schools will be discussed which concludes that the basic foundational expectations for performance of masculinity are quite consistent in both settings. Although this study focuses on the lived experiences of boys in high school, the literature on expectations for masculine behaviour in elementary schools provides important background and context for the purpose of this research.

The term “hegemonic masculinity” was first introduced by Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) and has been subsequently referenced and developed by Connell (1995, 2005). The term is now used in academic study of gender and sexuality to refer to a form of dominant male gender performance that subordinates all other performances of masculinity.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that the research on heteronormative expectations for masculine gender performance in schools can be delimited by a unitary definition of hegemonic

masculinity. Having said that, there are certain hegemonic expectations for masculine behaviour that have surfaced in numerous studies related to this topic (Bhana, 2009; Connell, 1995; Garcia & Slesaransky-Poe, 2010; Keddie, 2006; Kehily, 2001; Kehler, 2007; Renold, 2001, 2007; Wang, 2000). Common threads for masculine gender performance in schools that have emerged from these studies can generally be allied with Connell's (1995) "culturally exalted" virtues of hegemonic masculinity that are referenced in his often cited work entitled, *Masculinities*. These "virtues" include a version of masculinity that is authoritative, tough, heterosexual, brave, adventurous, assertive, strong, and competitive and in possession of public knowledge. Connell (1995, cited in Swain, 2004) suggests that:

There are hierarchies of masculinity, and each setting (such as a school) will generally have its own dominant, or hegemonic, form which utilizes the main resources available. Although these may differ in each school, the hegemonic form gains ascendancy over and above others, becomes 'culturally exalted' (Connell, 1995, p 77), and exemplifies what it means to be a 'real' boy. Although it may be contested, and is often underwritten by the threat of violence, it is characterized by consent. For although the majority of boys (and/or men) are unable to practise it in its idealized form, it has the capacity to portray itself as the natural order of things, and many boys find that they have to fit into, and conform to, its demands. (p. 169)

Swain (2006) reinforces Connell's assertions by concurring that although there is no "fixed character type, hegemonic masculinity in schools generally encompasses physical/athletic skill, strength, fitness, control, competitiveness, culturally acclaimed knowledge, discipline, courage, self-reliance, and adventurousness" (p. 337).

As stated in my analysis of the literature on heteronormativity in schools, young peoples' understanding of gender and sexuality begins to take shape before they enter the school system (Martin, 2009). That being said, studies have shown that elementary schools can be primary agents in validating or perpetuating these understandings (Bhana, 2009; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Ferfolja, 2007; Keddie, 2006; Renold, 2007; Swain, 2004; Vicars, 2005). Bhana (2009) investigated the role that primary school teachers play in perpetuating or investing in this hegemonic masculinity by assuming socially constructed expectations for gender performance of boys. Bhana (2009) found that the primary teachers in her study were complicit in the 'boys will be boys' discourse, meaning that, "...the teachers in this study drew on essentialist arguments privileging boys who demonstrated male power reflected more broadly in society" (p. 337). Bhana asserts that this essentializing of masculinity by early childhood educators is detrimental for girls and boys, and, that educators should be encouraged to employ discursive pedagogical practices around gender and masculinities.

In his study of 10 and 11-year-old elementary school boys, Swain (2004) examined the resources and strategies that boys utilized in elementary school settings to fulfill the expectations of hegemonic masculinity and thus, gain acceptance in their peer group. Swain (2004) cautions that there are differentiated norms established by context from one school to another within each of the resources and strategies. In his findings, Swain (2004) codified the following as resources and strategies that boys employ in an attempt to ascend to the idealized hegemonic masculinity: being sporty and athletic, acting tough/hard, using humour and wit (including cussing), wearing fashionable clothes/training shoes, and possessing culturally acclaimed knowledge (not necessarily academic) (p. 171).

Swain (2004) concluded that the primary factor that influenced a boy's foundation in a peer group, delimited by hegemonic masculinity, was his athletic ability and physical prowess (p. 173). A boy's athletic ability may be defined by his abilities in specific sporting activities and organized games, while his physical prowess may be evaluated based on both appearance and capacity to physically dominate other boys, vis-à-vis, through physical combat or fighting. Swain (2004) concluded that, "...although the victor of a fight might have been penalized or chastised by the adult authority, these boys usually gained more status than the defeated who would generally lose an appreciable amount of respect and credibility, and even friendship, amongst their peers" (p. 173).

In her examination of one boy's (Matthew) lived experience around the negotiation of hegemonic masculinity in elementary school, Keddie (2006) suggests that boys are confused and frustrated by the demands it places on them. Keddie (2006) found that while boys like Matthew may understand the requirements of hegemonic masculinity such as acting tough, using physical force, 'fighting back' at both students and teachers, and suppressing emotions such as sensitivity, they are distressed by the emotional toll that performing these socially constructed expectations has on them. In Keddie's (2006) words, "While the discourses and storylines of hegemonic masculinity may be seen as offering Matthew a sense of agency and power, Matthew's frequent distress highlights the emotionally turbulent process of this style of masculine legitimization" (p. 528).

The work of both Swain (2004, 2006) and Keddie (2006) suggests that hegemonic masculinity is a very powerful cultural force in elementary schools. Although the defined expectations for masculine performance are somewhat fluid dependent upon the context of the

school, their research suggests that the underlying essentialized expectations for how ‘boys will be boys’ in elementary school are relatively consistent.

The ‘culturally exalted’ virtues of hegemonic masculinity that Connell (1995) established as benchmarks for socially constructed ideals for masculine gendered performance are omnipresent for boys in high school. Several studies have established that there continues to be expectations for high school boys to perform gender in a heterosexualized manner (Connell, 1995, 2005; Kehily, 2001; Kehler, 2007; Robinson, 2005; Vicars, 2005; Wang, 2000). Connell (2005) portrays high schools as places where multiple hierarchical manifestations for masculine gender performance are possible (p. 22). However, he maintains that a privileged position is carved out for an idealized heterosexual masculinity; one that is largely unattainable.

In considering the idealized hegemonic masculinity in schools, I would suggest that heterosexuality is perhaps the one foundational attribute which implicitly in expectations and practice may not be compromised. Kehily (2001) focussed the attention of her study on how young men in school constitute and consolidate heterosexual masculine identities. In her interviews with a cross-section of 14 and 15 –year-old boys, Kehily concluded that, “school processes produce sites for the enactment of heterosexual masculinities” (p. 173). Kehily found that the young men whom she interviewed and observed in school settings, viewed heterosexuality and heterosexual relations as a natural way of demonstrating masculinity; one that provided a privileged position for them within the hierarchy of their peer group. Kehily suggests that in high school, boys attempt to consolidate their social status as heterosexual males through their relationships with girls/women. These relationships provide boys with access to the prized cultural knowledge that heterosexual masculine identity privileges; sexual relations

with girls/women. Kehily notes that from a feminist perspective, these sexual relations and the resultant sexual knowledge have been interpreted as the power to control women; in the context of schools, this same experience and knowledge is a powerful tool in controlling other boys/men. However, Kehily concludes by suggesting that, "...the ethnographic evidence cited in this article suggests that the links between heterosexuality and masculinity are not natural; they have to be naturalized through practices that incorporate them into a particular version of masculinity. In this version, heterosexuality can be viewed as central to an active masculinity premised on doing and displaying" (p. 184). A limitation of Kehily's work was that one of her expressed purposes was to engage the participants in a conversation about sex and sex education and thus, the hypersexual content of the interviews. However, the participants in the study were not constricted by this area of discussion.

The findings of this study suggest that heterosexual displays and actions are paramount to performance of hegemonic masculinity in schools. For many gender nonconforming boys, who may be of divergent sexuality and sexual orientation, Kehily's findings make peer relations difficult, and virtually guarantee a subordinate positioning within their peer group; if not positioned outside of the group entirely. Nayak and Kehily (1996) suggest that an integral part of constituting heterosexuality is boys engaging in displays of homophobic actions. They suggest that these actions say much more about boys' attempts to establish themselves as masculine beings than they do about othering queer boys.

Male-male friendships in high school are complicated and delimited by the hegemony of heterosexuality and homophobia in masculine gender performance. Expectations for both physical and emotional proximity between boys differ from those for girls. In high school,

seeing two heterosexual girls in an emotional embrace would garner little, if any attention; while the same situated public display for boys would likely elicit attention, questioning looks and suppositions.

Kehler (2007) examined the friendship practices of four young high school men who were viewed as different from other boys by their teachers. They were considered different in that they were considered open, sensitive, caring, articulate and thoughtful, involved in both the arts and sports; in short, “nice guys” (p. 260). The friendship practices of these boys were examined by Kehler as a means of illustrating how exceptional their approach was; in other words, to highlight how seldom this approach to friendship making by boys in high schools is employed as a result of the hegemony of heterosexuality and homophobia. Kehler also depicts the difficulties that these boys encounter with their peer group as a result of their counter-hegemonic approach to male-male relationships.

Kehler (2007) describes the participants in his study in the following manner:

The friendships these young men shared suggest a tenuous relationship between gender and sexualized identities that, as this study and others show, are routinely policed, regulated and monitored from the boundaries of a highly problematical and dangerously valorized and unquestioned set of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities. (p. 275)

In many ways, the participants in Kehler’s (2007) study could be defined as gender nonconforming males. Although boys are not encouraged to develop intimate relationships with other boys or young men, the participants’ willingness to engage in a counter-hegemonic masculinity through such things as open displays of affection to other boys and emotional

intimacy with male friends, suggests that a negotiation of heterosexual masculine expectations is possible, although rare for high school boys. It is important to note that the participants in this study possessed social capital in their schools for a variety of reasons: captain of the hockey team, school council president, self-confidence, involvement in the school newspaper. It is difficult to measure the leverage that this social capital provided for the counter-hegemonic approach of these boys, although I would suggest that it was substantial. For gender nonconforming boys who do not possess the same amount of social capital as the participants in this study, this opting out of hegemonic masculinity likely has much more severe consequences. It may be argued that it was the situated privilege and power of the participants in this study that allowed them to opt out of the confines of high school masculinity.

Clearly, heterosexuality is the gatekeeper for boys hoping to access the privileged position of acceptable high school masculinity. However, physical prowess and athletic ability are also key determinants of entry and status in peer groups for boys in high school (Paechter, 2003; Vicars, 2005; Wang, 2000). This physical prowess and/or athletic ability may be manifested in a variety of ways/arenas in high schools: in the exercise rooms through development of muscle mass, in the gyms during physical education classes or organized sporting events, in the hallways and out on the school grounds through physical aggression and posturing, or in the change rooms and showers. Physical strength, physical size and appearance, athletic ability, ability to physically dominate other boys, and aggressive demeanour are all socially constructed attributes of hegemonic masculinity (Paechter, 2003). Those boys able to meet the normed expectations within these various contexts increase their likelihood of acceptance by their peer group; while those who do not, either by choice or lack of physical attributes, risk isolation and ridicule (Vicars, 2005; Wang, 2000).

The body of research on heteronormative expectations for masculine gender performance in schools referred to in this review is by no means exhaustive. However, the material reviewed does provide clear evidence that there is decreased likelihood of acceptance within the dominant male peer group in high schools without the ability and willingness to adhere to what Connell (1995) refers to as the ‘culturally exalted’ virtues of hegemonic masculinity. Kehler (2007) provides hope that counter hegemonic displays of masculinity in the high school setting are possible, although his findings are limited by the social capital that each of his participants possessed. The following section of this literature review will examine what the implications of these narrow definitions of masculinity are for gender nonconforming boys in school.

Heteronormativity in Schools: Implications for Gender Nonconforming Boys

There has been an increasing focus of ethnographic study on the impact that heteronormative norms in society have on individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) (e.g., McDermott, Roen, & Scourfield, 2008). Similarly, there has been a relative increase in the last 10-15 years in the attention paid to heteronormative school environments and the resultant homophobia that LGBT youth are forced to encounter (e.g., Bortolin, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Batkiewicz, 2010; Taylor et al., 2011; Town, 2002). However, there is a relative paucity of literature that specifically examines the experiences of gender nonconforming boys who may or may not identify as a member of the LGBT community; particularly on the impact that heteronormative school environments have on their perceptions of their lived high school experiences, and secondly, on the resilience factors that they may have drawn upon to assist them in negotiating the challenges to their nonconforming gender performance.

As established in previous sections of this review, heteronormative culture in schools creates an environment in which ‘real boys’ are seen as the norm and nonconforming performances of masculinity are all too frequently othered. Gender nonconforming boys are confronted daily with these social norms in schools and must draw upon resilience factors to assist them with the negotiation of these expectations for how they should behave. When speaking of gender nonconforming boys within the context of this study, no identified categories were specified for the gender or sexual orientation of the participants. In other words, participants may or may not identify as being homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, queer, etcetera. However, due to the limited research that has been conducted on gender nonconforming boys in schools, literature which focuses on the treatment of boys that identify as members of one of these identifiable groups has been referenced for context.

In the last three years, two comprehensive North American studies have examined the environment of high schools and the impact they have on LGBT youth in the United States of America (U.S.A.) and Canada (Kosciw et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2011). Although both studies focussed on the treatment of young people in schools who self-identify as LGBT, the findings related to perceived treatment as a result of gender expression were significant in creating context for this study.

In 2009, Kosciw et al., (2010) surveyed 7261 middle and high school students across the U.S.A. about their perceptions related to treatment of LGBT youth at school. The survey found disturbing levels of verbal and physical harassment, physical assault, and an overall feeling of lack of safety for LGBT youth in schools. Of significance as well were the study’s findings that students who were more frequently harassed due to sexual orientation or gender expression

reported grade point averages almost half a grade lower than for students who are less frequently harassed. Of particular interest for the purpose of my study, the survey found that 39.9% of students surveyed felt unsafe at school due to their gender expression. Once again, it is important to note that students in the Kosciw et al., study identified as LGBT for the purpose of the study, although they may not necessarily have been ‘out’ as LGBT within the school context. This is noteworthy in that it suggests that the students were not necessarily othered for an identified sexual orientation or gender identity, but rather for their performance of gender while at school. It is this presupposition of what constitutes acceptable performance of gender in schools for boys that I have attempted to interrogate in this study.

In 2008, Taylor et. Al., conducted *The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Schools* (2009). The purpose of the study was to investigate, through the survey of 1700 high school students, the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic incidents in Canadian high schools, and to examine the efficacy of measures that have been taken by schools to ameliorate conditions for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students. Similar to the findings of Kosciw et. al., (2010), the study found very concerning levels of homophobic and transphobic maltreatment towards students relative to their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

The findings of Taylor et al., (2011) are perhaps even more valid for providing context to my study as the researchers sought to isolate and draw attention to the perceived experiences of transgender students. In their words:

Separating out LGB and transgender students helps to identify aspects of transgender experience that have received relatively little attention in anti-homophobia research.

Transgender people's confrontations with social prejudice are only now being recognized as different in some ways from those of other LGBTQ people. (p. 21)

In their examination of students' perceptions of unsafe places in schools for LGBTQ students, the researchers found that while 71.8% of LGBTQ participants identified at least one unsafe place for themselves at school, a staggering 87.2% of transgender participants identified at least one place at school that they felt was not safe for them. Their overall findings related to these unsafe places were that on average, non-LGBTQ students identified 2.03 places as unsafe for LGBTQ students, while LGBTQ and transgender participants reported 3.95 and 5.08 respectively (p. 25-26). Further, when investigating student perceptions of the frequency of homophobic comments and negative comments about gender, the findings of Taylor et al., (2011) were similar in terms of the groupings: while 15.9% of non-LGBTQ participants noticed comments about boys not acting masculine enough daily, 25.3% of LGBTQ students and 33.3% of transgender students noticed the same daily comments (p.27). A further 41% of transgender students reported feeling extremely upset by homophobic comments in schools, while 24% of LGB students felt the same level of emotional trauma (p. 33).

Many other areas specific to gender expression and identity were examined by Taylor et al., (2009) in their national climate survey. Their research concludes that schools are not safe or welcoming spaces for LGBTQ and the high school environment seems to be particularly hazardous for students who transgress hegemonic gender boundaries: 33% of straight students, 60% of LGB students, and 90% of transgender students report being verbally harassed due to their expression of gender in school; a further, 20% of LGB and almost 40% of transgender participants reported being physically harassed based on their expression of gender (p. 39).

The findings of these two major North American studies suggest that gender nonconforming boys attending high schools generally find themselves in very challenging experiences. This study attempts to add to the work of these major climate surveys by further interrogating the perceptions of gender nonconforming men about their lived experiences in high school, but also adds to the research by exploring their perceptions of the resilience factors and strategies that they drew upon to assist them with challenges to their gender expression in high school.

In my search for relevant literature on the topic of how gender nonconforming boys negotiate their gender performance in school and their perceptions of their lived experiences as students in high school, there was one study that aligned fairly closely with the focus of my research. The aforementioned study by Kehler (2007) used the experiences of four young men to illustrate how compulsory heterosexual behaviour emerges when young men attempt to develop male-male friendships in high school. In the view of Kehler, the participants in this study managed to resist and counter hegemonic expectations for how male-male relationships are constructed. The boys demonstrated behaviours in relation to their male friends such as: overt affection such as hugging in public, openly expressing their love for them, and open and intimate expression of feelings. Kehler notes in his findings that although able to resist the powerful norms for male-male friendships, his participants are acutely aware of the always present hegemony of masculinity. They understood that their performance of “uncommonly affectionate” (p. 263) masculinity manifested in an underlying tension within their peer group. In other words, their counter-hegemonic performances were still othered by the centralized positioning of heterosexual masculinity.

In this work, I build upon the work of Kehler (2007) by not limiting the scope of my inquiry of counter-hegemonic masculinity to male-male friendship making. I have attempted to analyze a broader scope of counter-hegemonic practices during the high school lived experiences of my participants. My study includes participant perceptions of the ways in which they felt othered by their gendered behaviours as well as how they managed to cope with expectations for their gendered self in school and the resilience factors that they drew upon in doing so.

Attempts to Address Heteronormativity in Schools

In large part, the literature hitherto presented, illustrates that heteronormativity continues to maintain a hegemonic position in school cultures in Canada and elsewhere. Much of this literature identifies elements of schooling that continue to be very challenging for students whose expressions of gender transgress social norms. Nonetheless, it is important to note that there have been a variety of attempts made at different levels of the school system to try to deal with these challenges. The last portion of this review of literature will focus on these attempts. For the purpose of clarity, I will group these attempts into three categories as follows: formal laws (meaning laws, policies, and regulations); teacher training, professional development and individual approaches to practice; and, school-based approaches via initiatives such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs).

At both the provincial and school-district levels in Canada, legislation and/or policy have been implemented that mandates protection of student rights and freedoms. These attempts to codify anti-discrimination and anti-harassment for students frequently identify specific marginalized groups in order to explicitly protect those that have historically been targeted. It is only over the last decade or so that increasing attention is being paid to students perceived as

being of differing sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression as an identifiable group in need of such protection (Knotts, 2007; Short, 2008). In general, these recent attempts at formal law-making to protect these students, identifies them as part of the LGBTQ community. For the purpose of this study on gender expression, it is reasonable to discuss these attempts at law-making and the impact that researchers have found they have on school environments.

A study was conducted by Short (2008) which examined teacher and student perceptions of how formal laws around anti-harassment and anti-homophobia interacted with other informal regulating influences in schools. More specifically, the study examined the effectiveness of legislated attempts such as the *Toronto District School Board Equity Foundation Statement* to mitigate environments for LGBTQ youth in schools when competing against many normative orders such as gender codes, race, and religion. Short (2008) speaks of two regulatory processes that collide in an attempt to end bullying and harassment in schools: “the role of the law as an active participant in a cultural process that seeks to end bullying; the normalizing culture of the daily life of schools in respect of gender, sexuality and other norms, which complicates and interacts with formal law” (p. 32). Short (2008) used the following words to describe student and teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of formal laws in combating homophobia and other forms of harassment of youth in schools:

Almost all of the students and teachers with whom I spoke, in one way or another, articulated concerns that formal law was limited in its reach into youth culture. Formal law was viewed merely as one of a number of normative regimes operative in that culture. Most students did not use this vocabulary to describe their views, although some did. Whatever their word choice, they agreed that other normative orders—“law” in the

pluralist sense-compete, complicate, and sometimes defeat the anti-bullying and harassment strategies contained in legislation and policies of formal law. (p. 38)

Knotts (2009) analyzed the impact of two California laws: *AB 537: The Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act*, and *AB 394: Safe Place to Learn Act* (p. 597). These acts both mandated that gender identity and sexual orientation be added to the identifiable groups that are deemed to be in need of protection from harassment and discrimination in public schools. Knotts questions the efficacy of these laws and suggests that although they lay the legal groundwork to improve conditions for LGBTQ youth in schools, they do little to change or deconstruct the socially constructed norms around gender identity and sexual orientation in schools. In Knotts' (2009) words:

Explicit language in these laws demands that gender identity and sexual orientation be protected from harassment in public schools. But it is the spirit of the law that offers opportunities to move schools beyond changing mere *practices* in enforcing harassment policies (I call this the public manifestation of these laws) toward a larger transformative change in undoing our *understanding* of gender and sexuality (I call this the private manifestation of these laws. (p. 599)

In other words, these laws may well be a starting point for public discourse around changing the heteronormative environment of schools for LGBTQ youth. However, without systemic implementation of the laws and conscious attempts to 'undo' the socially constructed norms around gender identity and sexual orientation in schools, these laws have little chance of reaching their potential for change. Knotts (2009) refers to formal laws such as these legislated

acts as, "...one part of a larger strategy for social/cultural change" (p. 599); they are ineffective in isolation.

The findings of both Knotts (2009) and Short (2008) suggest that formal laws are an integral first step and can lay the groundwork in attempting to address heteronormative school environments. On the other hand, both caution that when formal laws are attempted in isolation, they can become ineffective due to the variety of competing normative processes that exist in schools.

The role of the teacher in ameliorating conditions for students who are othered based on gender identity or sexual orientation in schools has been the source of increasing research in recent years (Goodman, 2005; Macgillivray, 2008; Payne & Smith, 2011; Schniedewind & Cathers, 2003). Both the teacher's capacity and willingness to intervene and educate around issues related to LGBTQ individuals is significant. The teacher's role in attempts to address heteronormative environments in schools can be multi-faceted in both a productive and counter-productive way: They can play the role of enlightened educator who chooses curricula which embeds social justice for LGBTQ individuals and promotes understanding and appreciation for diversity; they can play the role of advocate or ally by intervening and protecting LGBTQ youths from harassment and discrimination; and they can play the role of facilitator who encourages the establishment of initiatives such as Gay/Straight Alliance Groups for students in need of support. Of course conversely, they can also play the role of perpetrator of existing norms if they choose not to assume any of the productive roles outlined above.

Similar to formal-law, it is difficult to find research that specifically examines teacher professional development and classroom practice directly related to gender nonconformity. For

the most part, professional development and training for teachers in this area normally targets the larger LGBTQ target group. Once again, the results of these initiatives around teacher training and practice have reasonable validity for the discussion of my research on gender nonconforming boys. Teacher professional development and practice intended to combat heterosexism and homophobia is key to any diversity education initiative. In their article entitled, *Becoming Allies for Each Other: An Inclusive Approach for Confronting Heterosexism in Schools*, Schniedewind and Cathers (2003) describe their qualitative research study on the long range impact of a professional development program in diversity education and teachers' practice. Their research included an analysis of how teachers and students have become allies in the fight against heterosexism and homophobia in schools. The educators who were interviewed by Schniedewind and Cathers participated in a 30-hour professional development course which focussed on issues of racism and sexism in school. The researchers specifically wanted to know whether or not teaching about heterosexism and homophobia as part of a broader diversity education program was effective. After analyzing data from the schools that have had the program in place for approximately 10 years, the researchers found that teaching about heterosexism and homophobia under the larger umbrella of diversity education was in fact effective. The educators were able to effectively combat the othering of students of differing gender expression and/or sexual orientation as the program developed their capacity to recognize all relationships of privilege and power. Schniedewind and Cathers (2003) found that teacher' perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of the program was tied to the support they received at a district and school-based level. The findings of this study indicate that heteronormativity in schools can be at least partially addressed via a professional development and practice initiative that has as its mandate the broader scope of diversity education.

Another example of an attempt to improve conditions for LGBTQ youth in schools through a professional development program for teachers is the *Reduction of Stigma in Schools* (RSIS) program. The program, which is offered through Syracuse University in New York, is described by researchers Payne and Smith (2011) as, “an innovative professional development program that aims to empower educators to create supportive learning environments for LGBTQ students” (p. 174). Payne and Smith (2011) undertook a study to evaluate the first three years of the RSIS program from the perspective of the teachers who had participated in the training workshops. At this early stage of the program’s existence, it is difficult to measure the impact of the training on school environments for LGBTQ youth. Accordingly, Payne and Smith sought teachers’ perceptions to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program. There were a few specific elements of the RSIS program that the participants felt gave the program credibility and increased the likelihood that teachers would implement the teachings of the program in their schools. First, participants appreciated the fact that the program was delivered educator-to-educator. In the eyes of the participants, educators who had teaching experience and had worked in the classroom were the best facilitators because they understood the complexities of the school environment. A second element of the RSIS program that participants valued was the fact that the training was delivered to educators inside their schools and that it was catered to the needs of the individual schools. Participants felt that educators who choose to enrol in this type of training off-campus were likely already committed to learning about LGBTQ issues in schools. By bringing the training from a faculty of education out to the schools, the participants felt that a strong message was sent to educators that their school districts and administration recognized the value of learning about and addressing LGBTQ students’ needs. Third, participants believed that the research-based content presented in the training coupled with the personal narrative of

students and educators, provided for a nice balance between quantitative data and qualitative anecdotes. Lastly, and perhaps most noteworthy, the participants believed that the housing of the program in the Syracuse University School of Education provided the program with instant credibility and allowed for the natural evolution of already established relationships between the university and local school districts. Payne and Smith (2011) summarized the participants' perceptions of the housing of the RSIS program in the Syracuse University School of Education as follows:

Since the beginning, this affiliation has eased the process of establishing the needs of LGBTQ students as an educational issue, assured school administrators that the program content would be educationally relevant and appropriate, facilitated graduate student participation in the program, and opened doors for what many school administrators perceive to be a difficult conversation. (p. 193)

Although it is difficult to measure the benefit of this program in schools at this early stage of implementation, the program review completed by Payne and Smith suggests that this model of professional development is seen as a welcome and hopefully effective approach to assisting educators in their attempt to deal with the difficulties faced by gender nonconforming students in high schools.

As previously stated, the role of the teacher in terms of her/his own individual approach to professional practice can have a significant impact on both school environments and students' perceptions of feeling welcome and safe in school. Both classroom teachers and school administrators in their roles as teacher leaders can potentially have an impact on changing the heteronormative environments in schools (Macgillivray, 2008; Goodman, 2005).

Macgillivray (2008) conducted a study which examined how high school students felt about having an openly gay teacher. Once again it is important to note that an educator identifying as gay is not the same thing as an educator identifying as someone who is a transgressor of gender norms. Having said that, the perceptions of students who have been taught by any educator who openly identifies as either a gender or sexual orientation minority are significant for the specific focus of this research. Macgillivray found that although there were some potentially negative outcomes of an educator coming out to their students, student reflections suggest that the benefits of this type of open identification with students is overwhelmingly positive. Macgillivray (2008) suggests that, "Thus, having an openly gay teacher model confidence may have helped create a more supportive school environment in which students felt more comfortable coming out" (p. 83). Macgillivray also found that a teacher openly identifying as gay and discussing it with her/his students seemed to normalize differing sexual orientation and gender as simply one characteristic of human beings and not what should define a person in totality. Macgillivray goes further by suggesting that a teacher not being public about her/his sexual orientation or transgressing gender expression may actually serve to perpetuate heteronormative, homophobic, and transphobic attitudes and practices in schools. As Macgillivray states:

Students are naturally curious about their teachers and often at least suspect that their LGBT teacher is probably LGBT. But the more important point is that if students figure out, or even suspect, that a teacher is LGBT and the teacher evades or denies it, that sends a strong message to the students that the teacher is ashamed of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. Remaining closeted does not send the message that being LGBT is okay or makes it safer for LGBT students to come out. (p.87)

It is difficult to validate Macgillivray's suggestion that a teacher's choice not to share her/his sexual orientation gives students the impression that their teacher is ashamed. This may simply be a choice of personal privacy; one that many educators in heterosexual relationships choose as well. However, it is reasonable to believe that students see their teachers as role models and that choosing not to come out sends a message to students that coming out in school is not necessarily safe. It is also realistic to believe that students who do not conform to heteronormative expectations relating to sexual orientation or gender expression would feel comforted and perhaps more accepted in an environment where their adult role models openly identify with these othered students.

As cited previously in this literature review, addressing issues of heteronormativity in schools is often contingent upon the support of school administrators as educational leaders. In her essay entitled, *Homophobia Prevention and Intervention in Elementary Schools: A Principal's Responsibility*, Goodman (2005) described how she approached two school events related to LGBTQ issues in her school; a fight between two grade 5 boys that was precipitated by one student calling the other a 'faggot', and the homophobic attitude of a parent who was irate because his grade 3 daughter had a female teacher that during a family diversity lesson shared the fact that she had a child with a same-sex partner. In both circumstances, Goodman managed to support and advocate for those who were harassed due to heteronormative thinking, while at the same time using the opportunity to confront ignorance and teach appreciation for diversity. Goodman (2005) provides support for Macgillivray's assertions by stating the following related to a gay teacher's openness, "...it is a gift to your school to have a teacher who has the courage to be a lesbian or gay role model for all students and staff" (p. 116). Goodman's essay suggests that school administrators are in powerful positions to model the behaviours that they desire from

both students and staff. In her description of a model school, Goodman includes the following allowance, “And principals have time to appreciate the fact that they’ve provided leadership to create a truly humanitarian, respectful school, where no group of people is excluded or marginalized for any reason” (p. 116).

In the U.S.A., the most commonly adopted strategy to deal with the heteronormative environments in high schools is Gay-Straight Alliances or GSAs (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer; 2003). According to Griffin et al. (2003), over 1000 school-based GSAs were active in over 47 states (p. 8). In their study, Griffin et al. examined the roles that GSAs played in 22 schools. They described four roles that GSAs played in the schools: counselling and support; “safe” space; primary vehicle for raising awareness, increasing visibility, and educating about LGBT issues in school; and, part of broader school efforts for raising awareness, increasing visibility, and educating about LGBT issues in school (p. 7). In the study, the researchers evaluated both the strengths and limitations of each of these roles for GSAs and concluded with their suggestions on what the overall impact of GSAs may be in school initiatives to combat heteronormative attitudes. Griffin et al. (2003) concluded that although there are many positive impacts associated with the formation and promotion of GSAs and their school-based roles, they may be serving helpful, yet only ‘on the surface’ purposes. Griffin et al. (2003) suggest the following about GSAs when discussing the depth of their influence on changing the pervasive heteronormative environments of schools:

The focus on the safety of GSA members, however, does not necessarily address larger patterns of heterosexism, sexism, or racism embedded in school policy, practice, and programming. Demanding tolerance and respect for gender and sexual nonconformity

among students may help to make schools safer for them, but does not challenge the norms and expectations that underlie violence, harassment, or discrimination. None of the schools or their GSAs in our study addressed such issues as how heterosexism and gender oppression privilege heterosexual and gender conforming students or marginalize LGBT students. Challenging gender and sexuality norms and their effects on all students is perhaps a next step in addressing LGBT issues in schools. (p. 20)

Thus, GSAs seem to be an important first step in providing safer learning environments for students in schools, but they require an accompanying systemic attempt at organizational change. Without this accompanying paradigm shift in thinking about heteronormative expectations for gender and sexual orientation in schools, GSAs seem to be limited in terms of their depth of overall influence in changing school environments.

The literature reviewed in this last section indicates that formal laws, teacher professional development and individual practice, and school based initiatives such as GSAs; all play an important role in addressing heteronormative thinking in schools. An analysis of the overall impact of each of these areas suggests that in isolation, these approaches can only hope to begin to improve conditions in schools for gender nonconforming boys. To truly create welcoming environments in high schools for gender nonconforming boys, a truly comprehensive approach which incorporates several of the above elements is necessary to combat the heterosexism and gender oppression that exists in schools.

Summary

An analysis of this review of the literature, provides ample evidence of academic research in many areas related to my topic of study: gender expression and identity; heteronormative environments in schools; the impact of these heteronormative environments on expectations for a performance of hegemonic masculinity for boys; the unsafe and non-inclusive climate that continues to exist for gender nonconforming boys in schools, and lastly, various attempts that have been made to address these heteronormative environments in schools.

The purpose of my study is to supplement/compliment this research in a few specific areas. First, my research specifically focusses on gender nonconforming boys in high school settings. Much of the research in the area of heteronormativity in high school environments focuses on the impact of these environments on youth who identify as LGBTQ. Although participants in this study may identify as LGBTQ, it is their own perception of being othered as a boy who did not conform to hegemonic expectations for masculinity that was the criterion for inclusion in this study. It is my hope that this focus on gender expression for boys will illustrate that heteronormativity is a systemic phenomenon that reaches far beyond the harassment and mistreatment of youth who identify as LGBTQ. Second, my research has a regional focus in the city of Winnipeg and the surrounding communities of Southern Manitoba. Although the literature review cited studies covering an international scope, my examination did not uncover any similarly focussed gender studies that have been conducted in this region. Third, many of the studies referenced in this review were positioned by a deficit model and discuss only sparingly the coping strategies that young people utilize in dealing with narrow definitions for gender expression in school. Through this study, I hope that I have accurately portrayed the

difficulties that these men faced as boys in high school, but also shared their experiences related to coping with and overcoming the difficulties that they faced.

Through my interviews with the participants in my study, and the analysis of the resultant data, I hope I have advanced and added to this body of research through my intimate study of the lived experiences of a few young men; young men who when confronted with the apparent contradiction between school expectations for gender and their own expressions of gender, managed to cope as they faced hardship during their lived experiences in high school. I hope I have provided valuable insight to this body of research with the long-term aim of creating more inclusive, appreciative, and fluid environments in schools where all expressions of gender are celebrated.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As previously stated, this study examined the reflections of gender nonconforming men on their lived-experiences as boys in the heteronormative environment of high schools. I attempted to bring forth the perceptions of men who had recently graduated from high school and who had some time to reflect upon their lived experiences related to gender conformity. As presented extensively in the literature review, heteronormative environments and thinking continue to maintain a hegemonic position in schools. Through the interpretation and recounting of the experiences of these men, I hope that I have: added to existing research that documents the othering of individuals based on gender expression in schools; elicited the perceptions of the men on what assisted them in coping with the dissonance between the socially constructed norms for masculine behaviour in schools and their own gender expression; and lastly, utilized their experiences as a potential means of influencing future policy and practice in a variety of educational contexts. The following research questions formed the basis for this study:

- 1) To what extent did the men perceive that heteronormative expectations existed in Manitoba high schools while they were students?
- 2) How did the men's' expression of gender reflect or resist heteronormative expectations?
- 3) What were the lived-experiences of participants as gender nonconforming boys in Manitoba high schools?
- 4) What can be done in schools at the individual or systemic levels to foster a gender-inclusive environment for all students?

Because this study sought to interpret and construct meaning from the perceptions of the participants, a qualitative research methodology guided the design. This interpretive/constructivist paradigm is described by McMillan (2000) with an underlying assumption that reality is a socially constructed phenomenon. McMillan (2000) describes this phenomenon by suggesting that, “Rather than a single objective reality, there are multiple realities, each related to the complexity of naturally occurring behaviour, characterized by the perspectives of the participants” (p. 4). The perceptions of the participants in this study as to what constituted their lived realities as boys in high school was interpreted through an interplay between researcher and participant in order to try to construct meaning around their experiences. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest, “The qualitative researchers’ goal is to better understand human behaviour and experience. They seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and describe what those meanings are” (p. 43). Or as McMillan (2000) puts it, “The goal in qualitative research is to understand participants from their point of view” (p. 254).

A second motivation for the use of a qualitative approach to this study was the positioning of the researcher within the conceptual framework as a critical theorist. As stated in the “Limitations of the Study” in Chapter One, I did not assume a neutral or unbiased positioning in my approach to this research. As both a classroom teacher and school administrator, I have witnessed and lived through my own experiences related to normed expectations for boys/men in school environments. Horkheimer (1937, cited in Hoy, 2008) suggests the following about the role of perspectivism and self-reference in research motivated by critical theory:

Critical theory differs from traditional theory in being perspectivistic and self-referential rather than aspiring to neutrality and objectivity. Critical theory is perspectivistic

because in social theory, the “reality” that is in question is social. In a divided society, furthermore, no single perspective can claim to be exclusively correct. A form of resistance to cooptation by the dominant class, critical theory takes up the perspective of the oppressed. (p. 280-281)

In this study, the perceptions of the men (the oppressed) were analyzed in reference to my experiences as a high school teacher and administrator (social context) and a shared meaning was created for the reader.

Throughout my career, I have attempted to resist socially constructed heteronormative expectations and create a broader definition of what it means to perform masculinity. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest, “Critical theorists would rather benefit those who are marginalized in the society because they believe that the current way society is organized is unjust” (p. 22). One of the foundational beliefs of this study, borne out by the reviewed literature, was that heteronormative school environments privilege hegemonic binary displays of gender expression and marginalize all nonconforming performances.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two illustrated that heteronormativity is a socially constructed phenomenon that precedes and transcends the school environment (Martin, 2009). The process of normalizing heterosexuality and the accompanying presuppositions for gender expression begins before young people enter the realm of public schooling (Martin, 2009). Weiler (1988, cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) suggests that, “Qualitative researchers influenced by critical theory are interested in either how social values and organization get reproduced in schools and other educational institutions, or how people produce their choices and actions in the society” (p. 23). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) further Weiler’s suggestion by stating, “Those

studies that emphasize reproduction examine how educational institutions sort, select, favour, disenfranchise, silence, or privilege particular groups of students or people” (p. 23).

Lichtman (2006) suggests that the purpose of critical qualitative research or critical theory is to change the social context (p. 29). Tripp (1992, cited in Lichtman, 2006) states that, “socially critical research in education is informed by principles of social justice” (p. 29). It would be fair to conceptualize this study in this socially critical research paradigm. It has been clearly articulated through the review of the literature in Chapter Two, that as a researcher, I believe that boys who do not conform to normed expectations for gender expression in high school are marginalized by heteronormative environments.

A third rationale for approaching this research through qualitative methods was the need for an emergent and flexible design. Although the literature reviewed in the previous chapter provided some foundation and context for this study, it is the responses of the participants during the interview process that guided the direction of the questions. I established broad research questions to frame the study, but it was the dialogue between researcher and participant that provided the direction for the interview’s areas of focus. This inductive approach to data collection and research design is a key feature of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 6).

A fourth dynamic of this study that suggested the use of a qualitative approach was the need for descriptive data. An accurate portrayal of the lived experiences of the participants in high school could not be represented through numbers; the use of narrative and the written word were vital. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe the importance of descriptive data in the qualitative research process in the following way:

In their search for understanding, qualitative researchers do not reduce the pages upon pages of narration and other data to numerical symbols. They try to analyze the data with all of their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed. Qualitative articles and reports often contain quotations and try to describe what a particular situation or view of the world is like in narrative form. The written word is very important in the qualitative approach, both in recording data and disseminating findings. (p. 5)

In other words, the best way to give meaning to the lived experiences of these men was through the use of the written word and narrative.

As stated in the introduction of this work, it was not the intention of the researcher to pathologize the perceived realities of the participants. With this in mind, the research utilized interpretivism as the theoretical underpinning for this study. According to McMillan (2000), in interpretive research, "...reality is socially constructed. Rather than a single objective reality, there are multiple realities, each related to the complexity of naturally occurring behavior, characterized by the perspectives of the participants (p. 4). Each of the participants in this study had his own perception of what the reality of his high school experience was like. Much of the research presented in the literature review presupposes that the high school experience would have been difficult for these men who did not conform to socially constructed norms for gender expression. The perceptions of the men were analyzed with reference to the cited literature and the contextual experiences of the researcher giving shared meaning to their lived experiences.

Qualitative research has the potential to produce rich data through the use of narrative and the written word. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) identify this method of utilizing

stories as data as narrative inquiry (p. 460). Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) propose the following for the positioning of narrative inquiry within the realm of qualitative research:

Thus, we argue that narrative inquiry is seen in a variety of ways and tends to transcend a number of different approaches and traditions such as biography, autobiography, life story and, more recently, life course research. In terms of locating it in the broad spectrum of qualitative research, it tends to be positioned within a constructivist stance with reflexivity, interpretivism and representation being primary features of the approach. (p. 460)

It has been noted on several occasions throughout this paper that the goal is to use the experiences of the participants as the data for analysis. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) frame the purposes of this approach by suggesting, "...narrative inquiry is used to study educational experience since it is argued by those in this sphere that humans are storytelling organisms who lead storied lives. Those who use this research method argue that stories are the closest we can come to shared experience" (p. 461-462). The unique stories that have been shared in this research become shared experiences when combined with the professional experiences of the researcher and the cited literature. As the researcher, I have interpreted the unique stories of the men in this study and after analysis, have forged some commonalities within their experiences as students in the heteronormative environment of high schools.

Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) suggest that the role of the researcher in the process of narrative inquiry is vital and they articulate that researchers need to consider the following elements: first, listen to participants' stories; second, acknowledge the mutual construction of the research relationship (both researcher and participant have a voice with which

to tell their stories); and finally, acknowledge that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect on life and explain themselves to others (p. 463).

In summary, the methodology of this study was underpinned by an interpretivist theoretical perspective. Through the process of using both semi-structured and unstructured interview techniques, I created a shared experience for the researcher and the participants in this study. Through the narrative inquiry method of reporting data, the lived experiences of my participants as gender nonconforming boys in high school has been reported as stories that have hopefully created a shared experience for the reader, the participants, and the researcher.

Sources of Data

For the purpose of this study, data were collected through the use of interviews with the participants. Because this study was an account of the retrospective perceptions of the participants, interviewing was the most logical method of data collection. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that the interview process is “...used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (p. 103). McMillan (2000) describes the interview as “... a form of data collection in which questions are asked orally and subject responses are recorded. There is direct verbal interaction between the interviewer and the respondent...” (p. 165). More detail on the interview process that was utilized in this study is provided in the section of this chapter entitled “Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation.”

Participant Selection

According to McMillan (2000) when employing qualitative research, participants are selected who will, “provide specific information needed” (p. 102). In order to provide relevant and specific information for this study, purposive sampling was utilized. McMillan (2000) generally defines the approach to purposive sampling in the following way:

In purposive sampling (sometimes referred to as *purposeful, judgment, or judgmental* sampling) the researcher selects particular individuals or cases because they will be particularly informative about the topic. Based on the researcher’s knowledge of the population, a judgment is made to include those cases that will be information-rich. These few cases will be studied in depth. (p. 110)

In qualitative studies, some form of purposive sampling is almost always used (McMillan, 2000). Because the goal of this study was to find men who perceived themselves as having been othered in high school due to their nonconforming expression of gender, I decided to solicit the help of *The Rainbow Resource Centre* (RRC) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada to assist in the process of recruiting participants for this study. The RRC is a community-based not-for-profit organization whose mission includes the statement that the centre will, “Represent and support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Intersex, Queer, Questioning and Ally (LGBTT) Individuals, Communities and Families by providing comprehensive education and outreach services, accessible counselling and other programs and services” (Rainbow Resource Centre, 2010, “*Our Mission...*”, para. 1). I discussed this proposal for research with the Education Program Coordinator/Health Sexuality Educator for the RRC, and after consulting with the Executive Director of the centre, he confirmed that the centre would welcome the opportunity to assist in

the recruitment of participants. The leadership of the RRC also confirmed that an ample sample of potential participants for my study could be found through its network of outreach programs. The RRC was targeted as a potential focal point for recruitment of participants due to its memberships' representation of a diverse cross-section of young men who suit the criteria of the study. As McMillan states, "The participants in a phenomenological study are selected because they have lived the experiences being investigated, are willing to share their thought about the experiences, and can articulate their conscience experiences" (p. 269).

Participants were invited to participate in this study through the RRC via a variety of methods. The RRC advertised this research project and invited voluntary participation of potential candidates through: the use of the RRC Facebook page; the use of the RRC electronic mailing list; and through the use of publically displayed posters at the RRC building located at 170 Scott Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The advertising campaign identified a specific period of two weeks for candidates to volunteer or self-select for the study. All interested individuals were asked to contact me directly so that the anonymity of respondents was protected. I recorded the date and time that each participant self-selected and contacted me for participation in the study. Once the specified period of time had lapsed, I contacted and selected the first 4 participants who volunteered for inclusion in the study according to the recorded dates and times. I ensured that they met the stated criteria for inclusion in the study and then invited them to a mutually agreed upon meeting place and time. Although the primary criterion for self-selection of participants was their own perception of having been othered in high school because they did not conform to heteronormative expectations for gender performance, more specific delimitations served as criteria for participation which was noted on the invitations to participate:

1. Only men that graduated with a Manitoba high school diploma in the last 5 years were included in the study.
2. The participant pool was limited to Winnipeg and the surrounding area of Southern Manitoba.
3. Participants had to be available for interviews conducted within limited time frames in late April and early May of 2012.

Although the RRC was used to facilitate the recruitment of participants, all self-selected men who volunteered for this study declared their intention to do so through a formal process of contacting me directly via email or telephone. The RRC was not involved in the actual selection of participants for the study; nor did it have any other role in the research except as helping to facilitate the recruitment of participants. As previously stated, a sample size of four participants was used in this study for the purpose of engaging in an in-depth interview.

Researcher Positioning

Within all forms of qualitative research, the researcher brings certain values and beliefs to the research process that can potentially influence the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data. It has already been articulated within the conceptual framework of this study that, I, as the researcher, am positioned as a critical theorist. I entered into this research project influenced by my professional experiences and perceptions related to heteronormativity in high school contexts. The overarching purpose of my involvement in this research project was to assist in some small way with the emancipation of gender nonconforming boys from the often oppressive conditions they face in high school.

My own personal characteristics were important considerations for my positioning in the research as well. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) provide the following explanation about the importance of researcher characteristics: “In addition to understanding general aspects of the culture you are studying, you have to understand how your personal characteristics and status might affect your fieldwork relationships with individual subjects you encounter” (p. 94). The personal characteristics that I possess that I believe may have influenced participant perceptions of me as the researcher were: age, sexual orientation, sex category, gender expression, skin colour, education level, and occupation.

I am a 42 year-old, white, heterosexual man, who for the most part perceives his own expression of gender to be socially accepted when I am judged by the privilege and power inherent in my physical appearance alone. I am in the process of completing graduate level studies in university and am currently employed as a high school vice-principal in an urban-Winnipeg school. In the early stages of the interview process, before the participants actually had some sense of “who I really was,” these personal characteristics could have made rapport and relationship building difficult. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) put it, “On the basis of such identifiers, or markers, you may be defined as dangerous, insignificant, or untrustworthy” (p. 94). The participants may have perceived me as being in a position of power and status relevant to their socially constructed positioning in society. However, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that:

There is a lot of room to break out of definitions subjects might have for “people like you” and, as with any situation, when you first meet a person their personal characteristics tend to be more important in defining them than later on in the

relationship. You may have to be more reflective in thinking about how to handle yourself and precisely what role to play if who you are has special meaning to your subjects. (p. 94-95)

I attempted to deal with this potential perceived imbalance of power and status by utilizing many techniques for rapport building that I have learned throughout my career as an educator and school administrator: reflective body positioning; welcoming smile and gracious greeting; attempting to get to know and relate to the participant on another level, through common interest, experience, or hobby; utilizing paraphrasing to construct meaning; illustrating empathic listening through facial expression and gesturing; conducting myself with a gentle and non-threatening demeanor; and being clear about my purposes and methods of the study. Throughout my professional career, I have received praise for my capacity to build relationships and rapport with students, parents, and professional colleagues. My objective was to translate these competencies to the research process in the interest of creating trusting relationships between myself and the participants. I believe that the in-depth data that I received from the participants validates that I was successful in meeting this objective with my participants.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

The term data is used in qualitative research to identify all of the materials that researchers collect from the world they are studying (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 115). This data may be collected through a variety of means including interviews, direct observation of participants, and gathering a collection of documents.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) distinguish the analysis and interpretation of data in the following way:

By *data analysis*, we mean the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings. Data interpretation refers to developing ideas about your findings and relating them to the literature and to broader concerns and concepts. Analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, and searching for patterns. Interpretation involves explaining and framing your ideas in relation to theory, other scholarship, and action, as well as showing why your findings are important and making them understandable. (p. 159)

In any form of qualitative research, data analysis and interpretation is a subjective process. Although there are certain theoretical paradigms that guide the process, qualitative research methods require an inductive approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In reference to inductive thinking in the analysis and interpretation of data in qualitative research studies, Lichtman (2006) states, “Qualitative research moves from the concrete to the abstract. Researchers begin with data and use those data to gain an understanding of phenomena and interactions” (p. 11). Framed within the context of this study, this inductive approach moved from the concrete (the situated position of gender nonconforming boys in heteronormative high school environments) to the abstract (the multiple perceived realities of these men upon reflection of their lived experiences in these settings).

Data Collection

Due to the intimate nature of the data that were collected from the participants in this study, building rapport and creating trust was integral to making the participants feel comfortable and at ease when sharing their experiences. Without this development of rapport and trust, it is possible that the men who participated in the study may have chosen not to share the complete depth of their experiences; experiences that potentially were emotionally painful and traumatic. With this in mind, I began the interview process with purposeful attempts at creating a trusting relationship with my participants. In reference to qualitative studies that rely heavily on the interview for data collection, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest the following:

Most interviews begin with small talk. Topics can range from baseball to cooking. The purpose this chit-chat serves is to develop rapport: You search for common ground, for a topic that you have in common, for a place to begin building a relationship. In situations where the subject knows you, you usually get right down to business, but in situations where you and the subject are strangers, you may have to break the ice. (p. 103)

Along with the pragmatic necessity of establishing a trusting relationship in order to collect rich and meaningful data, I believe that there is also an ethical imperative to the relationship building. I believe that conducting research that attempts to retell the intimate and at times emotional lived experiences of participants, requires, and perhaps obliges, a meaningful human connection.

Due to the reliance on interviews as the single source of data collection in this study, multiple interview techniques were necessary. Interviews lasted approximately 70-90 minutes with each participant. As previously stated, a certain amount of time in the interview was spent

on the essential process of relationship-building. Both semi-structured and unstructured questions were utilized as the emergent nature of the narrative inquiry process evolved.

McMillan (2000) defines semi-structured and structured interview questions in the following way:

Semi-structured questions do not have pre-determined, structured choices. Rather, the question is open-ended yet specific in intent allowing individual responses. For instance, an interviewer may ask, “What are some things that teachers you like do best?” The question is reasonably objective, yet allows for probing, follow-up, and clarification. It is the most common type of question in educational research.

Unstructured questions are open-ended and broad. The interviewer has a general goal in mind and asks questions relevant to this goal. Thus, there is some latitude in what is asked, and often somewhat different questions are used with each subject. (p. 166)

The interview process was framed by a semi-structured interview protocol. The primary research question framing the study was “What is the school experience like for boys who do not conform to socially constructed norms for gender expression in the heteronormative environments of high schools?” To answer this question, the following research questions were utilized to frame the basic structure of this study and the interviews:

- 1) To what extent did the men perceive that heteronormative expectations existed in Manitoba high schools while they were students?
- 2) How did the men’s expression of gender reflect or resist heteronormative expectations?

- 3) What were the lived-experiences of participants as gender nonconforming boys in Manitoba high schools?
- 4) What can be done in schools at the individual or systemic levels to foster a gender-inclusive environment for all students?

The interview protocol was organized around these four broad categories of inquiry with each category producing further sub-categories for probing. In keeping with the tradition of a narrative approach to qualitative research, these sub-categories emerged throughout the interview process and also lead to more unstructured questions which sought to clarify the meaning in the participants' perceptions. For the purpose of having a basic framework for the interviews, I loosely structure my protocol around the following three sub-categories for probing questions: Academics, relationships with peers and adults, and extra-curricular activities. Appendix A includes the interview protocol that was used with the participants.

The interview process was audio-taped and transcribed. All interview notes and transcriptions will be destroyed at the completion of this study. The school divisions and high schools attended by the participants in this study are described in general terms only (general location, population). The participants in the interviews are identifiable only by me as the researcher for the purpose of follow up and member checking after transcription and interpretation occurred.

Data Analysis

As previously stated, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe the analysis of qualitative data as involving "...working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units,

coding them, and searching for patterns” (p. 159). The process of analysis in this study was guided by interpretivism; attempting, through narrative, to bring meaning to the individual and diverse perspectives of the men who recounted their lived experiences as high school students. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) describe this focus of researchers embarking upon narrative inquiry in the following way:

Researchers describe lives, tell stories about them and write narratives of experience. Thus in telling a story the narrator takes responsibility for making the relevance of the telling clear – so that meaning is created between storyteller and listener. The role of the researcher is to be an effective listener and to see the interviewee as a storyteller rather than as a respondent. (p. 464)

Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) further clarify the focus of analysis in narrative inquiry by stating that, “In narrative inquiry we would argue that the focus of analysis is the people who tell us stories about their lives, the stories being the means of understanding participants better” (p. 464).

Given the narrative approach outlined above, it was not the intention of the researcher to establish elaborate coding and organizational structures while undertaking the analysis of the data. An inductive approach to analyzing the data was utilized in order to move from the concrete, directly quoted dialogue in the transcripts, to the more abstract, the broad categories or themes that emerged from analysis.

Data Interpretation

The data gathered through the in-depth interview process in this study were interpreted for their meaning for the participants. This interpretation took place through comparison of the data to existing literature and theories discussed in Chapter Two but were also open to inductive thematic analysis. Specifically, I have attempted to interpret how the men in this study perceived their high school lived experience in relation to the extensive body of research and my own contextual experiences with heteronormative environments in schools. However, I have not framed the interpretation solely in terms of its relationship to concepts found in the literature review only, as this had the potential to limit ideas that emerged from the stories of the men. I was also open to interpreting the results in ways not aligned with what has been previously recorded in other studies.

Although narrative inquiry has the potential to produce rich data through the multiple realities constructed by researcher and participant, Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) caution that the approach has potential disadvantages as well. They suggest that stories are at times difficult to interpret and that the transition from storytelling in the interview to story-making in the presentation of the data is challenging. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) suggest that the process can be further complicated by the fact that:

Decisions need to be made about whose story it is and how it is interpreted and reinterpreted; this becomes complicated if the participant disagrees with the presentation or she/he wishes to include data that may cause her/him more harm than she/he understands. Researchers in narrative inquiry must be prepared to protect their participants - sometimes from themselves. Yet it is also important to acknowledge that

disagreement between participant (narrator) and listener (researcher) can add depth of understanding - or at least highlight potential misinterpretation that might not otherwise be discerned. (p. 467)

As the researcher, I endeavoured to establish trusting and open communication with the participants during both the data collection and the data interpretation phases of this study. In so doing, I am optimistic that I was able to successfully negotiate the potential disagreements of interpretation that may have arisen throughout the research process and developed a shared meaning for each individual's story.

Credibility of the Research

When conducting qualitative research, it is important that the data obtained from the interview process and the subsequent interpretation of that data are considered valid. Additionally, the findings, and where appropriate, conclusions drawn from the research need to be credible. McMillan (2000) suggests that, "The primary criterion for evaluating qualitative studies is the *credibility* of the study. Credibility is defined as the extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are believable and trustworthy" (p. 272). McMillan (2000) acknowledges that it is difficult to judge the overall credibility of qualitative study, but suggests the following principles for evaluation: triangulation, reliability, internal validity, and external validity.

Triangulation of Data

Creswell and Miller (2000) define *triangulation* as, “...a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). The concept of triangulation as a validity measure is often considered in reference to multiple forms of data collection during the research process. In other words, the use of a variety of different methods in the collection of data enhances the credibility of a study. However, Lichtman (2006) asserts that the concept of triangulation as a concept measuring validity of research, “is more appropriate to traditional or positivist paradigms and should not be used in the newer forms of qualitative research” (p. 85). Because the sole means of data collection in this study was the interview process, I have attempted to give meaning and make sense of the rich data by comparing and contrasting it to existing theory and literature on this topic as well as my own lived experiences as a high school teacher and administrator. In keeping with the fundamentals of a phenomenological approach to study, I interpreted and gave meaning to the data through cross-referencing it with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and analyzing them within the critical theory paradigm that framed this study.

Reliability Via Member Checking and Thick Description

The definition for how reliability is measured with qualitative research differs from that for quantitative studies. McMillan (2000) explains the difference by suggesting that, “Rather than looking for consistency of behaviour, qualitative researchers are interested in the accuracy of their observations. Hence reliability is the extent to which what has been recorded as data is what actually occurred in the setting that was studied” (p. 272). For the purpose of this study,

reliability was established through the use of two specific procedures: member checking and thick or rich description.

McMillan (2000) defines the technique of member checking by saying that, "... the researcher gives his or her notes to the participant so that the participant can verify that the recording was accurate" (p. 273). In this study, member checking was utilized at two stages in the research process to both validate and potentially extend the research data. Member checking occurred once interviews with the participants were transcribed. I provided copies of each individual participant's interview transcript to that participant, and asked that the participants confirmed that the data had been accurately transcribed. At this stage, participants were given the opportunity to suggest changes to the researcher of any incorrect recording of the data in the interview transcript, or any changes to the data that the interviewee desired. I made minor amendments to the transcripts as necessary. Secondly, once I had completed the retelling of each individual's story, I provided them with a copy and allowed them to provide me with feedback and a sense of whether or not I had accurately reported their experiences. Minor changes were also made at this stage of the process after feedback was received from participants.

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that thick or rich description is used by the qualitative researcher to establish the credibility of a study (p. 128). Thick description refers to the process of the researcher describing the data, participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). I used rich detail and thick description when recounting the experiences of the participants in this study. Direct quotations from the participants' transcripts were utilized frequently to provide accurate and thick description and context to the

reported findings. Denzin (1989) provides a good representation of the purpose of thick description to provide support for its use in this study:

The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in the study....The process of writing using thick description is to provide as much detail as possible. It may involve describing a small slice of interaction, experience, or action; locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or an interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel. (cited in Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129)

Through the use of thick description and member checking, this study provides reliable and meaningful data that hopefully allow the reader to ‘share’ the lived experiences of the participants.

Internal Validity Via Researcher Reflexivity

Internal validity in qualitative research is a subjective evaluation of the “...match between the researcher’s categories and interpretation and what is actually true. That is, do the meanings, categories, and interpretations of the researcher reflect reality” (McMillan, 2000, p. 273). Within this phenomenological study, the perceptions of what was reality or true were drawn from the perceptions of each individual participant in the study. Potential concerns over internal validity and the matching of researcher/participant perceptions of what is ‘real’ have been at least partly addressed via the member checking process that was utilized in this study. Member checking

ensured that the researcher's interpretation of what was reality, matched the perceptions of the participants.

Researcher reflexivity is an important measure of internal validity when evaluating qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell and Miller (2000) define both the process and importance of researcher flexibility in the qualitative research process as follows:

This is the process whereby researchers report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry. It is particularly important for researchers to acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions and then to bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds. This validity procedure uses the lens of the researcher but is clearly positioned within the critical paradigm where individuals reflect on the social, cultural, and historical forces that shape their interpretation. (p. 127)

In this study, I incorporated this reflexivity in two ways. First, in two previous sections of this thesis, I have briefly, but clearly, provided for the reader an account of my own personal beliefs in this area of study. In Chapter Two, when discussing "Limitations of the Study" I established myself within the critical theory paradigm and explained the beliefs and biases that I bring to this research. Earlier in this chapter while discussing "Researcher Positioning," I once again clarified for the reader the values and beliefs that serve as the lens through which I view this research. Second, I have integrated a more comprehensive account of the social, cultural, and historical forces that shaped my interpretation of this research in my findings and conclusion. In summary, researcher reflexivity has been made explicit in this study for the reader. As the researcher, I have not attempted to convince the reader that I am able to completely suspend or isolate my

personal experience from this research process. As previously stated, the perceived realities of the men who participated in this study are what provided foundational meaning for their experiences. However, it was not the goal of this study to bracket or suspend my own positioning while interpreting their experiences; in fact, it was referenced intentionally.

External Validity Via External Audit

Unlike quantitative research which uses generalizability as a key measure of external validity, qualitative research is less concerned with replication (McMillan, 2000, p. 275). McMillan (2000) states that, “Generalizability is often weak in qualitative studies because the purpose of the research is to increase an understanding of a phenomenon, not to represent a larger population, and the methods used in any single qualitative study are unique to that study” (p. 275). For the purpose of this study, external validity was established via a process of external audit. The role of external auditor in this study has been fulfilled by the faculty advisor and the thesis committee. According to Creswell and Miller (2000) the goal of the external audit via the faculty advisor and thesis committee will be to undertake, “...a formal audit to examine both the process and product of the inquiry, and determine the trustworthiness of the findings” (p. 128).

Confidentiality and Ethics

The names of all participants in this study have been withheld from anyone other than me. I have used pseudonyms to replace the names of the participants and the schools they attended. When describing the schools that the participants attended, I ensured that only general locations were provided as descriptors (Rural Manitoba, Urban Winnipeg) to protect the confidentiality of both the schools and participants described in the study. Other than general

location, the only other descriptors that are used for the schools are population sizes and grade level span.

Interviews were held at locations and times that were mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participants. The researcher encouraged the participants to suggest meeting places that respected the private and intimate nature of the interviews, and that protected them from being public identified during both the interview and member check phases of the research process. All copies of transcripts, both audio and written, were destroyed upon completion of this research.

All ethical protocols for this study are governed by the *Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board - University of Manitoba* (ENREB). Any research that is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Manitoba must receive prior approval by the *Research Ethics Board*. Appendix B provides the ENREB Certificate of Approval for the Study.

Summary

This study analyzes, interprets, and recounts the reflections of gender nonconforming men on their lived-experiences as boys in the heteronormative environment of high schools. A theoretical framework of interpretivism and critical theory guided the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data.

Validity and credibility of the study was achieved through a variety of internal and external measures aimed at ensuring the reliability of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. A semi-structured approach to interviews was used with each participant. Participant selection took place through purposive sampling with the assistance of the *Rainbow Resource Centre*. All

participants in the study self-selected based on their own perceptions of having been othered in high school due to their expression of gender that did not conform to heteronormative expectations for boys. All participants in the study were assured that their identity and the identity of the school they attended would remain confidential. Chapter Four to Seven organize the data (stories) using a narrative approach aimed at providing a sharing of the meaning of the participants' lived experiences with the reader. The experiences of the participants are organized around the research questions that were presented earlier.

Chapter Four

Francisco: Negotiating Gender Expression at the “Football School”

The reporting of the findings begins with the retelling of the high school experiences of each of the participants as individuals. As mentioned previously, all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Their experiences are retold using the four research questions of this study as a framework.

Francisco is a 21 year-old, Caucasian man, who graduated from high school in June of 2009. The public school that Francisco attended was a grade 7-12 school that had a total population of approximately 700 students. The school was located in what would be considered an urban area of Winnipeg, as opposed to either suburban or inner-city. The high school had a mixed demographic of students, some living in upper-middle class neighbourhoods close to the school, while others commuted varying distances from the inner-city. Many of the students who commuted from the inner-city are drawn from a demographic that would be considered to be of lower socio-economic status. Francisco was enrolled in the regular English high school program at his school. Francisco described himself as someone who was not very focussed in grades 9 and 10 because he was more concerned with ‘fitting in’. He went on to say that he became more focussed in grades 11 and 12, when he decided to concern himself less with what people thought of him and more with his own academics. When Francisco was asked why he felt he was a good candidate to volunteer for the study, he said the following (all references in the retelling of the participants’ stories are taken as direct quotations from their transcripts):

I think that, well I felt like I would be a good participant for this because I definitely did not conform to my high school's stereotypical heterosexual male image.

Francisco at times chose to conform to the normed expectations for behaviour, while at other times during his high school experience he resisted these expectations. There were two distinct periods in Francisco's lived experience in high school related to his performance of gender. These periods, and the factors that influenced his choices, will be explained further in the discussion of his experience that follows in this chapter.

Perception of Heteronormative Expectations

When discussing the idea of heteronormative expectations for gender expression in his school, Francisco felt very strongly that these expectations not only existed, but that they had a strong influence on student behaviour. His experience was that these expectations permeated the lives of students in the realms of academics, human relationships, and extra-curricular activities.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Academics

When Francisco was asked whether there were expectations placed on boys in terms of the courses they should take in high school, he offered the following:

Well, when I was in high school, all the guys like they all took the gross class like science, because you get to cut up the frogs and you get to blow things up and it was like that's what all the guys in school wanted to take and they all wanted to make sure that they got into gym class. They wanted to make sure that they all got into like the history class because again you get to do all the research on... the Roman's the hunters, the warriors, the killers all that fun stuff. But god, forbid you wanted to be the guys that wanted to go into sewing class or

cooking class. You're considered a pansy for going into that cause that wasn't socially acceptable. You have to be the guy that wants to do all the stereotypical guy things.

Francisco felt that there were normed expectations for not only the courses that students would select in his high school, but also for how they would conduct themselves in those classes. The following dialogue took place between Francisco and I (Reinhardt) when I asked him about expectations for behaviour in class:

Reinhardt: How about being in class? Like let's just talk about being in English class for example in high school and studying certain literature or something, what would be expected of you as a boy in a Literature or an English class?

Francisco: You'd be expected to not pay attention.

Reinhardt: Oh, okay.

Francisco: Not to pay attention and not to understand what the teacher was talking about.

Reinhardt: And why do you believe that? What do you mean by that...not to understand what the teacher's talking about?

Francisco: Well, the stuff that we learned in high school like the classes that we took were all about poetry and Shakespeare and 99% of the guys in my class didn't get it. Why? Because they weren't paying attention and because they didn't take the time. But if you were one of the guys, or one of the select guys that understood what the teacher was talking about then you were ridiculed for that... if the class had nothing to do with physical activity or blowing stuff up, you were expected to not pay attention.

However, with further probing, Francisco suggested that these expectations for course selection and academics were not necessarily held and forwarded by teachers, but rather by peers.

Francisco felt that his teachers actually encouraged more fluid expectations for gender expression both in terms of course selection and classroom behaviour. When asked about teacher attitudes towards boys and academics, Francisco offered the following:

The teachers at my school were always like okay, just because you're a guy doesn't mean that you can't enjoy this, you can definitely do this. It doesn't make you any less of a man to like to listen to Shakespeare or like to cook. It doesn't make you any less of a man. So I think that the teachers tried to enforce that there is no general stereotype of what a guy should be like in high school.

In summary, Francisco felt that there were definitely normed expectations for boys when it came to their academic choices and behaviours in class. His perception was that boys were expected to focus their course selections around science, history and physical education, due to the dynamics of those classes that supported notions associated with hypermasculinity: gross dissection, blowing things up, conflict and war, physical prowess. Francisco further suggested that if boys attended a class that didn't reflect some of these hegemonic masculine traits, the expectation would be that they would appear disinterested and not pay attention. Francisco did make it clear however that he felt these expectations were held by his peers and not necessarily by the teachers whom he found to be more supportive of fluid expectations for gender expression for boys in the academic realm.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Human Relationships

In our conversation about human relationships, I asked Francisco whether or not he believed that there were expectations in his school for how a boy would relate to his peers and the adults who worked in the school. The following dialogue emerged as Francisco and I discussed expectations for boys' relationships with peers at his school.

Reinhardt: What were expectations like for boys when it came to relationships with their peers?

Francisco: Hmm...that's a little bit more difficult to answer.

Reinhardt: Were there expectations for how you would conduct yourself in terms of when you met with another boy in the hallway or how you just kind of went about being a boy with your peers at school. Were there expectations for how that should look or do you perceive that there were expectations for how that should look?

Francisco: It looked like you should have been part of a gang.

Reinhardt: Part of a gang? At your school? Okay...talk about that a little bit.

Francisco: Like it looked like you know that thing where they do the high five and grab each other's hand and pull each other in? And if you didn't do that you were looked at like you had the second hat, it was like what's that all about? It was just really weird. It seemed like there was to me it sort of felt like a military thing. This is what you had to do to say hi... Yah, this is how you say hi to guys in high school. You have to chest bump them or like big bear hug them and lift them off the ground or if you're joking

around you shoved them as hard as you can into the locker to see whichever one of you is the...it was like a severe alpha male thing going on in my high school .

Francisco also maintained that openly showing gentleness and affection to another boy would not be seen as acceptable in his school.

Reinhardt: What would an accepted girl greeting look like between two girls who were friends for example. Something tells me it wouldn't have looked the same as boys?

Francisco: No it would have been like hey, how are you? How was your weekend?
Twirl your hair, give them a hug.

Reinhardt: A hug would be acceptable?

Francisco: Yeah, a hug, throw your arm around your girlfriend, pull her in give her a hug; pull her away...kind of like, always joined at the hips. Those girls were always joined at the hips. I don't think I ever saw a girl walk alone in the hallway. There was always a girl next to her.

Reinhardt: And in terms of a boy, if you would have hugged a male to greet them in the hallway?

Francisco: If it wasn't like a masculine like thump back like the hard thump on the back thing...if it was a delicate like little hug, you were looked at like ummm what did you two do last night sort of thing.

When I asked Francisco whether there were expectations at his school for what a boy would do during his spare time at school, he offered the following:

I'm trying to remember if I ever had a spare. I think for spares you were pretty much expected to chill out, hang around, goof off. If you had a girlfriend at the time, try to sneak away with her...that kind of thing.

Francisco was steadfast in his belief that there were expectations for how boys were expected to relate to others in his high school.

...with the guys, it was kind of like this is how you have to talk, this is how you have to walk, this is how you have to dress, this is how you have to act to teachers, this is how you have to speak to the teachers. If you don't do this, then go away.

When I probed further asking Francisco to describe expectations for how boys would dress, he offered the following:

Earlier in the years, like grades 7, 8 and 9, baggy clothes, gangster, lots of bling as the kids now a day say, lots of jewelry, you had to have like the nicest shoes, the nicest pants, the nicest shirt, the newest hat, the coolest shades. Anything to make you or have a higher status was considered something that you had to do. In grade 12, you dropped the gangster pants, but if you didn't shop at like Hollister or American Eagle or any of those preppy clothing stores, then it was kind of like, then you're not following the rules.

I then asked Francisco whether there were expectations for the girls related to how they would dress at his high school and he suggested the following:

Yes...girls were expected to dress like sluts, and guys were expected to dress like pimps.

Francisco's description of expectations for dress for boys and girls at his high school suggest a highly heteronormative and sexualized set of norms for dress.

Francisco and I concluded our conversation about heteronormative expectations for boys and relationships by me asking whether there were any other areas of school/schooling where there were normed expectations. He offered his school's graduation dance as a forum for discussion of normed expectations.

Reinhardt: Okay, any other areas of school that you can think of that maybe we haven't touched on where there were kind of specific expectations for how a boy should conduct himself?

Francisco: Grad.

Reinhardt: Okay talk about that.

Francisco: I was the only sober guy at my grad.

Reinhardt: So boys were expected to get...

Francisco: To get loaded. And they did. They lived up to that expectation all right. They got hammered.

Reinhardt: Was there the same expectation for girls?

Francisco: Oh girls were expected to put out on grad day. If you went with someone, girls were expected to drink, but not get drunk, but drink enough so they were easy. Guys were expected to get loaded and start fights. It was an expectation. Even one of the teachers even said there's gonna be a fight and the boys are gonna get drunk and there's

gonna be a fight. I know it. And that's all he said. He did nothing to prevent it, but was like, yup, we're just gonna let this go.

Overall, Francisco felt that there were some fairly rigid expectations for how boys should behave in human relationships in his high school. He alluded to expectations for greetings, dress, language, and overall interaction with both adults and peers. His words were that if one did not follow these expectations, then one should just 'go away'.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Extra-Curricular Activities

It became very clear early on that Francisco felt strongly that this was an area where heteronormative expectations for boys were entrenched at his school. Very quickly, our dialogue became consumed by Francisco's belief that football was the school activity by which all boys would be judged at his school. There were other socially acceptable sports such as hockey and basketball in which a boy could choose to participate, but they would not give the boy as much status as being a member of the football team. Our entire conversation around extra-curricular expectations for boys revolved around their participation in sports and particularly in football. The following dialogue encompasses our conversation about Francisco's perceptions around the expectations for boys and sports at his school.

Reinhardt: Let's talk a little bit about what expectations would have been like for extracurricular activities.

Francisco: I was waiting for this one. [laughs] If you didn't play sports, you had to play a sport.

Reinhardt: Was that the most defining thing as a boy?

Francisco: Yes, you had to...and not just any sport...the football team. Boys were expected or the social norm or the, I don't know what that word was that you used...

Reinhardt: Heteronormativity?

Francisco: There we go...that one. The heteronormative expectation was you had to play a sport, preferably football, but they'd take basketball or hockey.

Reinhardt: Really? Were there extracurricular expectations outside of sports that would have been normalized for boys? Or was sports just the one that comes to mind the most?

Francisco: Sports.

Reinhardt: Okay...what extracurricular activities outside of sports can you even remember that existed at your high school? Were there clubs? Was there like student council?

Francisco: Oh yeah...no guys were allowed on student council. If you were on student council you were the gay guy. If you were on student council, that's how we classified you in high school. There were classifications. If you were in the math club you were a dork and you never got talked to. If you were on the student council or if you were in band or if you were part of the book club, then you weren't a guy. You were a dork or a geek or a nerd you weren't a guy, you were something completely different. If you played sports you were one of the guys. In my school specifically there was a strong football community. Football was the heart of that school and everything went around football.

When discussing academic expectations for boys, Francisco felt strongly that those expectations were a manifestation of the beliefs of his peers. However, when we discussed extra-curricular expectations for boys, Francisco believed that his teachers and school administration were equally responsible for perpetuating these rigid expressions of gender for boys.

Reinhardt: Did you sense that those expectations for extracurricular for boys were perpetuated by teachers and administration or did teachers and administration openly encourage boys to break those kinds of expectations?

Francisco: Not at my school. All the teachers were like if you go do football, why aren't you on the football team, why are you joining band? You should join the football team. You're a big guy. You should join the football team.

Francisco clearly perceived his high school experience related to extra-curricular activities as one fraught with expectations for boys around participation in sport and more specifically football. Francisco's perception was that the entire school community perpetuated this narrow norm for gender expression for boys in the realm of extra-curricular activity. The prominence of the football program at Francisco's school had far reaching implications for the treatment of boys who either chose to participate in the program or conversely, opt out.

Reflecting or Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

Speaking to Francisco about his perceptions of how he either reflected or resisted the expectations for gender expression was fascinating. That is due to the fact that Francisco clearly delineated two fairly distinct periods in his high school experience; the period of grade 9 and 10

where Francisco says that he ‘sold out’ or reflected/conformed to expectations; and the period of grade 11 and 12 when he shifted to his true comfortable self and thus resisted many of the normed expectations for gender expression.

Francisco and I began by discussing what it meant to ‘sell out’ and why he chose to do so; in other words, why did he choose to reflect as opposed to resist expectations for how he would express gender?

Francisco: Well at the time, it was like I’m one of the cool kids, sweet! I didn’t pay attention in class, I joined the basketball team, well I never went for football, I joined basketball. I was on the hockey team, not at my prom, but I did get liquored a couple times. I would try to do whatever I could to be socially accepted as one of the guys, so I would...

Reinhardt: That was your motivation?

Francisco: Yeah.

Reinhardt: And how did that make you feel?

Francisco: At the time, awesome, but now that I look back at it, I regret it severely.

Reinhardt: Why do you think it made you feel awesome?

Francisco: Because I was being accepted at the time and for someone in my position, it’s kind of like nice, they can accept me for being one of the guys...so at that time it was like, yes, I’m getting somewhere here but looking back at it, if I could go back to grade 9 and redo it, oh in a heartbeat...and I would do it the way I wanted to.

Francisco and I concluded this portion of the conversation by him saying that the behaviours that he chose which reflected the expectations for boys were not really behaviours with which he was comfortable, but rather behaviours that made him feel good because he felt accepted by his peers.

Francisco and I then began to discuss why it was that he began a transformation in his grade 10 year that led to him resisting as opposed to reflecting expectations in his grade 11 and 12 years. The following is the dialogue that emerged as Francisco described a very difficult event in his life.

Reinhardt: Okay, and then your behaviours began to change in grade 10...why?

Francisco: Grade 10 was when I lost my friend, and then I realized that I...

Reinhardt: Did he take his own life?

Francisco: Yes. And because of how he was in high school, because he was really, really, really feminine and...

Reinhardt: Is it okay to share with me how he was treated or is it too hard?

Francisco: He was gayer than the rainbow and he got picked on a lot for it. And especially by the macho guys because if he looked at them, they right away thought oh, you wanna get with me? What do you want, and they would push him around and he couldn't handle it anymore and some of the teachers were like no, no, you can't do this, like there were a couple teachers, those two teachers they fought for him. But the rest of them were kind of like, they would say something oh, you can't do this, but you could

hear that the authority wasn't there; it was kind of like they were just telling you to cover their own asses.

Reinhardt: How about school administration? Do you ever recall them being involved in assisting your friend?

Francisco: Not that I remember.

Reinhardt: Did he ever go to them with his concerns over how he was being treated?

Francisco: No, when I offered I'll go for you, he was like, no, no, I'll do it. Just let me deal with it myself and out of respect for him, even though, and I kind of feel responsible, because I feel like I should have done more for him, but out of respect for him I sat back and obviously if someone said something to him while I'm there I'd stand up for him. But I never grabbed a teacher a couple times when he got into a couple fights, but I never went to the principal on my own or went hey look, you know what they're bugging him about this, can you do something about it?

Francisco went on to explain that it was the combination of his friend's death and seeing his marks at the end of his grade 10 year that made him realize, he needed to stop acting like people wanted him to and start acting the way he felt comfortable. Therefore, in grade 11, he began to withdraw from the group of boys who were not engaged in their classes, he quit playing basketball, and he began to focus on his school work. In Francisco's words:

It was a combination with my report cards, my year-end report card for grade 11 and my friend's death. It was kind of like a combination of everything and I kind of had a wakening if you will, I don't know what else to call it and it was just like I woke up one

day and I looked at myself in the mirror and I was like this isn't me, I don't think that I ever wore a pair of pants that fit. I don't think that I ever owned a belt. I was like this isn't me, I don't like how this looks, like nobody needs to see what my underwear looks like, I don't buy it for other people, they don't need to see that, they don't need to see a shirt that has F with like the star and like the F word blacked out saying FU on it. You don't, this isn't me. This needs to change, this isn't who I am, this isn't who I want to be, so I, what do I do to fix it? And then I fixed it.

In grade 10, I realized that it wasn't, it shouldn't matter, I still sort of, I didn't fully break away from conformity until grade 11, so grade 10 I drew back a little bit, but still participated in some things like I went to the basketball, I still played basketball, like I've loved basketball since I was a little kid so basketball for me was a good thing because it was socially acceptable and it was something that I liked doing, but I stopped back talking to teachers, I stopped goofing off in class, like I tried to pay attention.

One element of the high school experience that seemed to be consistent for Francisco throughout his years in high school was his complete aversion to the use of either the boys' washroom or change room. When faced with the decision of using one of the two binary washrooms for students, Francisco offered the following rationale for his decision-making process:

Well, I never...whenever I was in high school prior to telling my vice principals, I never used the bathroom there. I would wait to go home. A vice principal had a bathroom found for me. Like the nurses' office. Nobody was ever allowed to go in there. She gave me the key and said if you ever have to go to the bathroom use the nurses' office. That

way I didn't have to choose between going to the guys and getting my butt kicked or going to the girls and having the girls look at me like I'm crazy.

Francisco's journey with reflecting and then resisting expectations led to somewhat different treatment by his peers. This differing treatment will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

Experiences When Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

During this portion of the interview with Francisco, I focussed my attention on how he perceived that he was treated in situations where he resisted heteronormative expectations for how he would express his gender. As already noted, Francisco's story is somewhat unique in that for two years of his high school experience he reflected normed expectations and then for his last two years, he decided do what was comfortable and resist those expectations and express his true self. I asked Francisco if he was treated differently when he decided to express his nonconforming gender performance in grades 11 and 12. The following dialogue ensued:

Reinhardt: And when you 'fixed it', were you treated differently by people?

Francisco: By the boys? Oh yeah.

Reinhardt: How so?

Francisco: They were like, again, like I grew a second head, like who are you and what did you do with our cool kid? What's that all about? You're not one of the boys now, what is this? You're a pansy at this point and it's like no no, I'm still a guy, I'm just not one of you. I'm not one of the Neanderthals, that's what I called them in high school.

They used to beat their chest over the stupidest things so I called them Neanderthals. I didn't want to be one anymore; I was like I'm done with this.

Francisco summarized his thoughts in this area in the following way:

It was like for me it was because I conformed for those couple years to begin with I was socially accepted as one of the guys, but as soon as I realized, or as soon as I pulled away from that, it was like oh, yeah, you're right you're shunned or your banned from the masculine world, but for my other friend, it was like he never conformed to it so from grade 9 and from day one to the end of my friend's life it was just like, you're not one of us, you don't do what you're supposed to and then, you know the rules, you don't want to follow them, these are the consequences.

When I asked him what the consequences were he said:

You were much shunned. You're a social outcast. You had your group of guys like in every school that were the social outcasts. They were a group themselves and the popular kids were a group themselves...if you didn't follow what they wore, cause they were the poster-child for masculinity, then you weren't part of their group.

In summary, Francisco reported being frequently picked on and ridiculed for his transgressing expression of gender for boys. He reported a variety of different ways that he was treated unfairly, ranging from being isolated by his peers to being overtly verbally and physically harassed. He maintains that this treatment when he was transgressing expectations for gender expression was less painful than his memory of 'selling out' and being accepted by his peers in grade 9 and 10. I asked Francisco to clarify why 'selling out' in grades 9 and 10 and being

accepted was more painful than how he was treated for resisting expectations in grades 11 and 12. I began by asking him how being accepted felt and he stated:

At the time, awesome, but now that I look back at it, I regret it severely.

I asked him why he thought it made him feel awesome.

Because I was being accepted at the time and for someone in my position, it's kind of like nice, they can accept me for being one of the guys...so at that time it was like, yes, I'm getting somewhere here but looking back at it, if I could go back to grade 9 and redo it... oh in a heartbeat...and I would do it the way I wanted to.

In retrospect, Francisco suggested that if he could go back to his experience in high school, he would have performed gender throughout his high school experience in the manner that he did in grades 11 and 12; a manner which was comfortable and authentic for him but resisted normed expectations.

Fostering a Gender-Inclusive Environment in High Schools

The last segment of the interview with all participants focussed on their reflections of their lived experiences as high school students who transgressed gender expectations and what they felt could be done at the individual and systemic level to foster a more gender-inclusive environment for all students in schools. When I began this line of questioning with Francisco, he was very pessimistic in his beliefs that schools could actually do anything to improve the human condition for gender nonconforming students. His initial thoughts were guided by the belief that one cannot control someone's opinion of one's self and that schools were fighting a losing battle because sometimes educators were confronting the beliefs that students brought with them from

home; the teachings of their parents. Francisco felt that the only way to deal with this would be to properly educate students about issues of gender and sexual orientation at a very young age.

As I continued to probe Francisco for ideas, he was able to offer a few thoughts on what he believed schools could do to potentially improve the situation. Francisco felt that teachers could potentially play a large role in the promotion of a more gender-inclusive environment for all schools. He felt as though people in positions of authority in schools may be able to influence a positive change in two ways: consistent enforcement of policy that protects students from harassment, and modelling behaviours that transgress normed expectations for gender expression.

During our interview, Francisco frequently alluded to inconsistent approaches and enforcement by teachers when dealing with gender harassment of students. He referred to two teachers in particular as real advocates for those who were being harassed and he said these teachers always enforced policy and protected students in need. He also made reference to several incidents where teachers merely went through the motions and addressed behaviour, but not in a way that was meaningful and helpful for the victim. He then mentioned teachers whom he perceived as having done nothing to assist students when they were harassed.

Francisco and I discussed in some length the idea that teachers or administrators modelling behaviours that transgressed the heteronormative expectations may be helpful in creating a more gender-inclusive environment:

Reinhardt: So what has to happen, because you're describing your school still being very binary in its expectation for gender?

Francisco: I think these kids need to see someone else do it in order for them to do it... bringing up that teacher again, I think if you have like an openly lesbian teacher or openly gay teacher it won't be that bad of a thing. Or if you have an openly masculine guy, but who likes to knit or sew, then I think it would be like, oh okay, maybe it's not that bad. Maybe it's not as bad as we thought it was.

Reinhardt: So expectations for gender in high school will become more fluid and less strict and rigid when it becomes more normalized. When more people in positions of authority or people not in position of authority too? Does that matter?

Francisco: I think authority does matter though... I think you'll get more of an effect if you're in authority position. Or if you're someone who is a well-respected part of that group.

Reinhardt: So the principal of a high school who as a male has lots of feminine characteristics, could that, in your opinion, change the culture of a high school?

Francisco: Yup... you can write up as many laws as you want saying this and this, but there's always gonna be those people who are like oh, it's just a piece of paper, it doesn't hold me to anything. But as soon as they see someone else do it...cause human beings by nature are followers, we do what we see other people do. So you see someone else do this, then you're gonna be like oh, well then maybe yeah, I can do that.

Francisco clearly articulated that teachers and school administrators have a potentially huge role to play in either perpetuating existing expectations for gender expression or conversely challenging the norm and creating a more fluid environment for everyone.

The last idea that Francisco offered that he felt could be helpful in creating a more gender-fluid environment was the idea of co-ed sports teams. He felt quite strongly that by allowing all students to compete on the same teams in sport, binary definitions for what being a boy or girl in sport may be changed. He thought that it was not a terribly difficult concept to implement and it could be very helpful in changing expectations for students around sports.

Like, why... like for the NBA? Why does the NBA have to be just all guys? Why can't you mix the two? Cause the girls can play just as good as the guys can. I think some of the girls can actually kick some of the guy's butts, but why not? Why have school teams that are just boys' teams, just girls' teams? Cause right then and there its saying only boys can join this and then like they're like well okay what's the definition of a boy?

Francisco saw no reason why sports' teams should be separated by sex category in high school. He felt that co-ed teams would break down some of the stereotyped gender expectations for boys and girls related to school sports.

Summary of Francisco's Experience

Francisco's high school experience was one that he feels was heavily impacted by the heteronormative environment of his school. His negotiation of gender expression in his "football school" was very difficult at times and it led him to expressing his gender in two contrasting ways. In grades 9 and 10, he describes himself as having "sold out" and he expressed his gender in ways that ensured he was accepted by his peers. Due to a traumatic experience with a friend's death, and a sense that he was not going to make it through his academics on his current path, he decided in grades 11 and 12 to express his gender in a way that made him comfortable and that

resisted many of the normed expectations for boys in his school. As a result of this shift, Francisco was treated poorly and was no longer included in the inner-circle of popular students at his school. At times, Francisco felt supported by school staff, while at other times, he felt as though he was treated differently even by the teachers at his school due to his transgressing expression of gender. Francisco felt it would be very difficult to change the environment in the school environment that he experienced, but that any change will take place only if the students choose to adopt, or are educated to adopt through teacher/principal role modeling, a belief system that challenges the existing heteronormative expectations for gender expression.

Chapter Five

Harvey: A Cautious and Calculated Approach to Gender Expression

Harvey is 23 years old and is Caucasian. Although Harvey currently does not identify as either of the binary definitions for gender, while in high school he fit into the sex category of boy. The public school that Harvey attended was a grade 7-12 school that had a total population of approximately 1000 students. The school was located in what would be considered an urban area of Winnipeg, as opposed to either suburban or inner-city. The high school had a very culturally and socio-economically diverse demographic. The majority of the students lived in upper-middle class neighbourhoods close to the school. Harvey was enrolled in the regular English high school program at his school. Harvey described himself as an “okay” student who struggled in math class in particular. When Harvey was asked why he felt he was a good candidate and volunteered for the study, he said the following:

Yeah, sure. In high school I identified as male, I just couldn’t get the boy things, but now I don’t identify as either gender, just cause it feels more natural to me.

Throughout Harvey’s high school experience, everyone around him identified him in the sex category of boy. Although, Harvey didn’t identify with either of the binary definitions for boy or girl, he publically identified as boy in high school for ease of fitting into one of the categories.

Perception of Heteronormative Expectations

Harvey felt that there were definitely expectations for how boys would express their gender in his high school. He seemed constantly aware of the different areas of the school and the different realms where those expectations may not fit his transgressing expression of gender.

Harvey seemed very insightful about his high school experience and often chose to withdraw or avoid activities or areas where he felt that his expression of gender would resist the hegemonic masculine expectations that he would face. These areas and activities that Harvey chose to avoid will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Academics

Harvey and I began our conversation about academics by discussing whether or not he felt that there were expectations for the courses boys would choose in his high school.

Reinhardt: So if you could...let's talk about course choices first in terms of boys and expectations for gender for boys, talk about course expectations.

Harvey: Well, definitely gym class. Cause guys are supposed to be more active and just kind of conscious about their, I guess the look of their body, and definitely the shop classes... cause you're working with cars and getting your hands dirty and just kind of doing typical guy stuff.

Reinhardt: And what about Phys. Ed. Class? You mentioned Phys. Ed. class.

Harvey: There was definitely a gender binary...how girls are supposed to be more into volleyball and badminton and guys are supposed to be more into hockey and basketball... And also too, the classes were separated, based on male and female for most of it.

Reinhardt: And what did you think of that?

Harvey: I think it sucked. A lot of the guys aren't very manly men, so they would feel more comfortable in say like the girls' class, or vice versa.

Harvey felt that there were expectations for boys to choose participation in the typically masculine areas of Physical Education and Industrial Arts classes; areas where boys could show their manliness, physical prowess and get their hands dirty.

Due to background knowledge, I was aware that Harvey attended a high school with a very strong performing arts program. I asked him to speak about his perceptions of boys participating in these courses.

Reinhardt: Now I happen to know just by experience, that your school has a pretty amazing drama and musical theatre program. Was that an area where a boy could openly exist in comfort or not?

Harvey: I find the guys who did it, did it comfortably, but there was definitely stigmas from the other guys, cause I've heard people talking and if a guy was in one of the triple threat classes, they were pretty much assumed gay.

Reinhardt: What's a triple threat class?

Harvey: Dancing, acting and singing.

Reinhardt: So you're telling me that if they were in one of those, there was an assumption that they were probably gay?

Harvey: Yeah. And from being in one of those classes, like there are lots of straight guys who very comfortably just express themselves and have fun with it.

Harvey describes a school environment where boys could choose whatever courses they wanted to but that there were repercussions for those who chose courses that didn't fit into the normed expectations for masculine gender expression. He went on to further elaborate that:

Baking classes... and like, you know my school has a parenting class and guys weren't really expected to be in those classes cause they're more "girl oriented."... because guys are like oh that's chick stuff they don't want to do it and even if they have an interest in it because it's not a typical boy related class, they don't take it because of the judgement within the school, or their friends.

As we concluded our conversation about academic expectations for boys, I asked Harvey whether there were expectations for boys in terms of how they would behave in the classroom.

Reinhardt: Do you feel as though there was kind of expectations in classes for your behavior as a boy from peers or teachers or not really?

Harvey: No, not really. Just certain classes guys aren't expected to answer questions with the classmates, cause the teachers want their students to participate, but... I guess in an English class, the guys weren't expected to be the sensitive soul, just kind of think that English is stupid and just kind of coast along. Whereas the girls could have the sharp mind and have the more...I guess poetic nature.

Reinhardt: Was that expectation for boys just from the other boys, or was that from teachers as well?

Harvey: I never felt it was from the teachers because they encouraged the guys to get more in touch with that area of themselves. But with the guys in the class, most of them were very against, guys being sensitive, cause they have to prove themselves I guess.

Reinhardt: And do you believe that those boys, all those boys that kind of displayed that more masculine expression of gender, do you believe that was their comfort zone? Or do you believe that they did it because it was expected of them?

Harvey: For most of them, I think they did it because it was expected. But there were definitely the one or two where that was just where they fit.

Harvey made it clear that there were definitely normed expectations for not only courses that a boy may choose in his school, but also for how he would express himself in certain classes: Physical Education, English. Harvey also expressed clearly his perception that these expectations for boys were not a manifestation of teacher behaviours or attitudes; he believed that it came from the male students specifically. As will be discussed further in the subsequent section, Harvey actually felt that the teaching staff at his high school seemed educated and supportive of creating a more gender-fluid environment for the school.

Despite Harvey's assertions that the teachers were supportive and promoted a gender-inclusive environment, when we discussed the fact that Harvey began to skip certain classes, Harvey suggested that he may actually have been treated differently by his teachers due to his gender expression and how others treated him as a result. Harvey admitted that he started to not go to class, because he felt othered by his classmates. The following dialogue emerged when we discussed Harvey missing classes and how his teachers chose to deal, or not deal, with it:

Reinhardt: Did the teachers ask you why you skipped class?

Harvey: No, they just kind of let it happen.

Reinhardt: Do you think they knew why?

Harvey: I don't know. I'd like to think they knew why, but because they never talked to me about it, it's hard to say.

Reinhardt: Was it surprising to you that the adults didn't talk to you about it at all?

Harvey: Yeah. Cause usually if somebody is not showing up for class, the teacher wants to know why or you talk to them, like "hey you missed so many days...what's going on?"

Reinhardt: But that didn't happen for you?

Harvey: No.

Reinhardt: Do you know if it happened for others? Were you treated differently? Or do you know?

Harvey: Yeah, cause all the times when people would skip class the teacher would talk to them afterwards or they'd give them detention and talk to them there.

Reinhardt: But not you?

Harvey: No.

The non-intervention on Harvey's behalf described above contradicts Harvey's suggestion that his teachers were always supportive and promoted a gender-inclusive environment. Harvey started skipping classes because of how he was being treated and the teacher did not intervene

and ask Harvey what was preventing him from attending. Harvey said that other students who skipped classes were asked and held accountable via detentions or other consequences. Harvey could not articulate why the teacher did not intervene, but the inaction of the teacher was not supportive of Harvey.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Human Relationships

In this realm, Harvey was able to make a clear distinction between what the student body and the teaching staff expected from boys when it came to human relationships. Harvey remembers the teaching staff being very supportive of a fluid expression of gender for students. When I asked him if he felt any expectations at all from teachers in terms of how he should forge relationships, Harvey could not think of any situation where he felt like the adults in his high school placed expectations on him.

Conversely, when we began to discuss whether students had expectations for relationships, and how boys should express themselves in relationships, the following dialogue ensued:

Reinhardt: So in terms of your relationships with your male peers, or even your female peers, can you talk about...did there seem to be specific expectations for boys and how they would relate to their peers in high school? And if so, how or if not...

Harvey: A little bit. I think guys are expected to have mostly male friends and hang out with the guys and they aren't really expected to have female friends. And basically, a guy and a girl can't be friends unless they're trying to hook up with one another, which isn't fair because lots of guys can be friends with girls and be respectful in that sense.

But within the peer setting, it's expected of a guy to be friends with a guy and only kind of get to know a girl or there's hidden agendas.

Reinhardt: How about as a boy or somebody who was presenting as a boy in high school, what would be expected of you in terms of, you know, your showing of affection towards others, your peers?

Harvey: Guys don't hug. At the most they'll like, slap each other on the back, shake each other's hand, do that...really awkward, I guess man hug? You know, like grab each other's hand and pull each other in and slap each other on the back. But if two guys were hugging, then they'd get made fun of or so on and so forth...

Reinhardt: And, am I wrong when I say two girls might walk down the hall holding hands?

Harvey: Oh definitely... No, it's just two girls walking down the hallway together...

Reinhardt: But two boys?

Harvey: Then some would assume that there was something going on or they're a little strange or...

Harvey's perceptions of how students expected boys to forge human relationships fits a very traditionally masculine stereotype. Harvey suggests that boys could freely establish relationships with their male peers, but that public displays of affection between the boys would be met with questions and perhaps even assumptions related to sexual orientation. However, no similar assumptions would be cast upon girls who publicly displayed affection and caring for

their female friends. Harvey also suggested that when boys forged close friendships with females, there may be assumptions that there was some sort of intimate or romantic agenda behind their actions.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Extra-Curricular Activities

At the outset of this retelling of Harvey's experience, I mentioned that he was very aware of expectations and at times chose to withdraw and opt out if he felt as though resisting the norms would be difficult, or quite frankly, not worth the hassle. The prevalent expectations from students at Harvey's school made him decide that he did not want to bother participating in extra-curricular activities. In fact, Harvey had a very difficult time recalling many of the extra-curricular activities that existed at his school and he believed that his unawareness was likely a manifestation of his decision to opt out. The following illustrates Harvey's perceptions of extra-curricular expectations:

Reinhardt: Were there expectations for boys in terms of extra-curricular and what they would get involved in?

Harvey: Yes, most boys would go for the football team or more sports orientated extra-curricular and the girls were more expected to do the artsy stuff like the drama club or the 4H club or whatever it was. And for me personally, because of these unfair expectations I didn't take part in any extra-curricular activities, just cause I didn't want the hassle of having to conform to a certain ideal. So, I just stayed away from them... I just kind of put up the blinders and ignored it all.

I then asked Harvey if he could remember any extra-curricular activities in his high school outside of sports that were safe places for boys to participate without being deemed to transgress gendered norms.

Yes, Student Council I found was very inclusive of both boys and girls. Girls could be outspoken, politically involved, same as the guys. In terms of the attitude toward it, it was very gender neutral towards boy and girl expectations.

Due to his decision to opt out of extra-curricular activities, Harvey could not recollect much about his high school experience in this area. However, he was able to identify an expectation for boys to be involved in sports.

Reflecting or Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

The title that I chose to give to Harvey's high school experience was "A Cautious and Calculated Approach to Gender Expression". This discussion of his reflecting or resisting expectations should provide meaning to the reader for the choice of title. It would be fair to say that Harvey was always true to himself and never made compromising choices in high school in the interest of meeting expectations for how he should express his gender; in other words he never really reflected expectations for gender expression. Having said that, there were situations in which Harvey did not feel comfortable due to his transgressing expression of gender and he decided that it would simply be easier to avoid or opt out of those situations.

For the most part, Harvey chose to resist expectations for academic course selection and chose the courses in which he was most comfortable and interested. He opted out of physical

education and shops classes and chose as he put it, “the more girl typical classes”. Harvey chose to take drama and art.

Harvey also chose to resist the normed expectations for peer relations in his high school as he tended to maintain friendships with girls as opposed to boys.

Reinhardt: And who were your friends in high school?

Harvey: Mostly the girls, cause I didn’t really like the guys cause they were too, I guess there was too much expectations from the guys for a guy to be a guy, and being one of the guys who didn’t really fit into the more masculine aspect of things, it was just easier to crowd around with the girls, cause they were more open to the idea. Cause guys aren’t very accepting of anything that’s outside of the gender binary where as I find girls were a little more accepting.

As previously stated, there were situations when Harvey felt it was preferable to opt out of or avoid situations because he knew that his expression of gender would not fit the expectations and may have consequences that he was unwilling to risk. Similar to Francisco, Harvey was never comfortable with the environment in the washrooms or change rooms and thus he avoided them at all cost.

Reinhardt: Talk to me a little bit about the whole change room, bathroom experience for you and how that was.

Harvey: Never went in there.

Reinhardt: Never?

Harvey: Just wouldn't...no. I tried once, but I just got the feeling that if I just slightly looked the wrong direction, like even just for a second, it would cause major problems, so I just never went in the change rooms, never went in the locker rooms, I just wouldn't. I would either change before class or wait until after school.

Reinhardt: Okay, but you would not go into the change rooms. Just didn't feel safe doing so. What about the bathrooms?

Harvey: I tried to avoid going when I could, just cause you never know, someone could be waiting for you in the bathroom, and also too because you don't identify strictly with the masculine, you're not really safe to go into the guys bathroom cause guys would be like, uh, you can't be in here even though you do identify as male.

As previously discussed, Harvey chose to simply opt out of the extra-curricular activities that his school offered because he was not comfortable with the binary expectations for boys and girls within these activities. Harvey and I did discuss however an interesting experience that he had at his safe grad that clearly illustrates the influence of normed expectations for gender expression.

Reinhardt: Did you go to school dances?

Harvey: Not in high school. I only went to my safe grad and it was kind of different.

Reinhardt: Because?

Harvey: Because all the girls were all just kind of dancing together but the guys couldn't do that because, well they just weren't allowed cause guys don't dance with each other.

So I didn't really like being there because of that. It was like everybody was sticking to a binary that I felt that I didn't identify with.

Reinhardt: So, what did you do that night? Do you remember?

Harvey: I think that I spent most of it outside of the dancing area, just kind of talking to my friend, cause I didn't feel comfortable in the dance area just because of the way that was going on. But it was not a good experience for me.

This experience for Harvey is a good example of why he chose to opt out of many activities outside of the regular classroom setting in high school. He was not comfortable with the prevailing expectations for gender expression and he was unwilling to reflect those expectations. At the same time, he was unwilling to potentially put himself in a compromised position by openly resisting these social norms. Harvey never chose to reflect the normed expectations, but he often did not overtly resist or challenge them either. He took a cautious and measured approach to how and when he would express his transgressing expression of gender.

Experiences When Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

Harvey's decision to resist normed expectations for the courses he chose in high school did not come without consequences for him. Harvey remembers that his decision to choose "typically girl" classes led to being treated differently by his peers.

Reinhardt: And in doing so (choosing girl type classes), how did people react to that?

Harvey: I got made fun of a lot, but... mostly just the other guys, they're just kind of like, oh he has to be gay cause he's doing this, he has to be gay cause he's doing that. Or he's

not really like a boy because he doesn't like doing this or like the shop class and because I'm in the drama class.

Reinhardt: So did they actually say things to you?

Harvey: A couple did, I just kind of rolled it off. Just kept going.

Reinhardt: Did they call you names?

Harvey: Not outright I don't think. But there was a lot of talking behind my back and people making judgements...

Reinhardt: And then how would you come to that information?

Harvey: My friends would come and talk to me about it, or I'd overhear somebody.

A significant portion of our conversation in this area revolved around Harvey's behaviour of avoidance and whether or not he felt excluded or isolated as a result. Harvey was able to recall numerous incidents when he felt excluded due to his resistance of normed expectations for gender expression.

Reinhardt: Did you ever feel excluded at all?

Harvey: Yes, definitely. You know when in classrooms they sometimes split the class up and they have two people picking the teams? I would usually be one of the people that was picked last, or almost last, because nobody wanted me.

Reinhardt: And were there places or spaces where you felt included, and what would those have been?

Harvey: Usually just at the lunch table, because I knew those people. They accepted me and wanted me there. Otherwise I would not be able to go anywhere else. I wasn't very well liked for most of my high school years.

Reinhardt: And you judge the fact that not being liked because people didn't befriend you or because they actually treated you badly?

Harvey: A little bit of both. I'm a very hard person to understand. Most of my high school years, it was just kind of...I just kind of floated along. I got to the point where I'd skip class because there was a lot of judging with my peers. Teachers didn't really say anything.

Reinhardt: Besides feeling excluded, which you say you did, were there no other places besides the cafeteria at lunch with your friends where you felt included?

Harvey: Not with other people, no.

Reinhardt: Did you like going to school?

Harvey: I did at first, but then it just kind of got hard for me, so I started resenting going to school every day.

Reinhardt: You did say that you were excluded and you did say that not many people said anything really directly to you overtly, but they would say things covertly and then that would come back to you. Was there any other overt mistreatment of you? Were you ever physically harmed or threatened or anything like that?

Harvey: No, not in high school. Everyone either kind of left me alone or didn't really talk to me.

Harvey's decisions to resist expectations for gender expression, although not in every circumstance, led to his exclusion and isolation in high school. Harvey felt that his decision to always consider when it was safer to opt out as opposed to resist may have been the reason that he was never physically harmed in high school. The following dialogue illustrates Harvey's considerate approach to opting out:

Reinhardt: ...you're also telling me in order to negotiate the high school environment, you also kind of just laid low...

Harvey: ...for safety reasons, for certain situations I would say, I would have to kind of go one way over the other... I guess that could be too why I never really got beat up, because I avoided the areas where I figured I would, but it was just kind of hard because I shouldn't have to do that.

When Harvey made decisions about resisting norms, he first considered his personal safety and what the potential repercussions would have been. This often led to Harvey self-excluding as he perceived it to be a safer course of action.

Fostering a Gender-Inclusive Environment in High Schools

When it came to our conversation about what could be done to make schools more gender-inclusive, Harvey was quite positive and optimistic about the potential for change. Actually, Harvey's perception was that there has already been a change since he left high school and he now knows of LGBTQ students who attend his old high school and say that there is a

much more accepting and fluid understanding of gender expression. Harvey said the following about the high school he attended:

Harvey: Of course now, like when I look at the people at that high school I went to now, it's so much more open for them, but at the time, for me, it was just, there wasn't the knowledge or the acceptance to be able to do so I found.

Reinhardt: So now it's only 5 years later, which may in your life feel like a long time, but your sense is it is more fluid and open now?

Harvey: Yeah, I can see in the high school I went to people, the way they are, or I guess the students, most of the male students, the way they express themselves now, would have never been, like it wasn't even heard of back when I went to high school. If, myself, I would have expressed myself that way I definitely would have been beat up for it. And I'm not saying if they do, or don't, get beat up for it, but it just seems more inclusive for them. So, like it's very slow, but I think high schools are starting to recognize that its being more of an...not really an issue, but something that they need to.

Educating young people about differing expressions of gender was the focal point of Harvey's suggestions for creating more gender-inclusive environments for students. Harvey suggested that there needed to be teaching early on in health or sexual education classes that created an understanding that there are many expressions of gender outside of the heteronormative binary of masculine boy or feminine girl. Harvey also suggested that a gender studies class could be offered in high schools in the hope that students would learn more about the evolution of gender and thus have more of an appreciation and acceptance of various gender

expressions. Harvey also felt that literature should be used as a means to teach about differing expressions of gender and sexual orientation:

When I was going to high school, books that were based, like if there was a gay character in the book, we never heard about it. Like books like those basically didn't exist in my high school and I think that they should have because not everybody will identify with the Romeo and Juliet type for example. Whereas if there was a character in a book, cause it would be a beautifully written book...they were transgendered or openly not straight, it might help, again it would give the students better awareness. And of course because they're reading it as a class, there would be questions about it, so the students would get to answer which would help them be more involved.

Our conversation about possible ideas for creating more gender-inclusive school environments concluded with a dialogue about teachers being openly transgressing of the heteronormative norm for gender or sexual orientation and what impact that may have.

Reinhardt: And do you believe that having a teacher who is openly transgender would have any influence on the school environment?

Harvey: Yes.

Reinhardt: That was a pretty quick answer with conviction. Why do you feel that way?

Harvey: Because for a lot of kids, if it's not right in front of them, hey don't think about it, they don't address it. But in cases like that, if there was an openly transgender staff member at a school, students would be exposed to it and it might encourage them to ask questions. Or, kind of go home and look it up on their own just so that they have more

awareness. Of course it could impact negatively as well because right now there are still the very like, heterosexist kids who are very, “this isn’t right. It’s wrong” or with the religious aspect...but over time thought it would be gradually more accepted.

Harvey was very hopeful that much could and should be done to improve conditions in schools for students who do not conform to binary definitions for gender expression. He was quite confident that change was already underway.

Summary of Harvey’s Experience

Harvey’s high school experience was not an enjoyable one. The further he went into his high school career, the more difficult he found it to continue. Harvey believes that he was surrounded by heteronormative expectations for how he should express his gender and he never felt comfortable reflecting those norms. Harvey at times chose to resist expectations, but this meant that he was treated unfairly and was ostracized and often excluded by his peers. On many occasions, Harvey simply found it easier to opt out of activities and situations where he felt that his expression of gender would not fit the expectations. This of course led to Harvey feeling further isolated in his high school years. Harvey referred to his high school years as a period of time when he lived in somewhat of a bubble.

Chapter Six

Carson: Accepted for Who He Was?

Carson is 21 years-old, Aboriginal, and lives with the physical challenges of cerebral palsy. The public school that Carson attended was a grade 10-12 school that had a total population of approximately 800 students. Carson graduated in 2008. The school was located in what would be considered a suburban area of Winnipeg. The high school had a very culturally and socio-economically diverse demographic. The majority of the students lived in upper-middle class neighbourhoods close to the school. Carson was enrolled in the regular English high school program at his school. Carson described himself as an average student who did “okay” in school. When Carson was asked why he felt he was a good candidate and volunteered for the study, he said the following:

Well, I think it was just a good opportunity to discuss like my experiences during high school. I wasn’t turned down or anything. I didn’t display the typical masculine persona. Everyone is different, and I felt that I did not fit the proper expectations of society’s view on masculinity.... I mean I don’t think I’m as masculine as most people would expect me to be, but that’s just who I am.

Perception of Heteronormative Expectations

It is important to note from the outset that although Carson felt as though he did not express his gender in a way that was typical masculinity in the eyes of many people in society, he never felt as though he was treated unfairly as a result. Carson alluded to a few situations

where heteronormative expectations for behaviour existed in his school but he maintained that he attended a school that was fairly gender-inclusive.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Academics

Carson mentioned that there were not really specific expectations for boys when it came to selection of courses at his high school. In terms of his Physical Education class, Carson mentioned that he was not terribly interested in it and that boys, "... were expected to participate, attend, and be more competitive when it came to certain activities". Carson went on to say that there was a strong drama and music program at his school and that both boys and girls were welcome to join and participate in those courses. In other words, Carson did not perceive any specific expectations for boys or girls when it came to choices for courses in his school.

When I began to question Carson about expectations for boys in class in terms of how they would behave, he began by suggesting that there were no real pre-conceived notions for how a boy should behave. However, when I dug a little deeper, the following dialogue ensued:

Reinhardt: Okay, So, let's talk about in the classroom. Expectations for how boys might behave in the classroom. Did you find that there were certain expectations for how a boy would be expected to behave or was that also wide open and there weren't really expectations for that?

Carson: I don't think there were very many expectations for how boys behave in the classroom. I mean there are some rules, like be respectful, etc., although there weren't really any expectations.

Reinhardt: Did teachers treat boys and girls the same as far as you could tell?

Carson: Yeah, well I'd say it would probably depend on the teacher, but I'd say it was pretty even.

Reinhardt: Yeah, okay. And what about if you were studying, let's say Romeo and Juliet in an English class? Would there be expectations for how a boy would react to Romeo and Juliet compared to how a girl might react to Romeo and Juliet?

Carson: Yeah, I'd say so. I guess it depends on the person who is looking at the reaction compared to...just in general.

Reinhardt: Okay, so explain that a little bit.

Carson: Okay, it's I guess the other classmates and then if somebody reacts in a way that's not that masculine, they might partake it as oh they're gay or something.

Reinhardt: Give me an example of a way a boy might react that was seen as not masculine.

Carson: Well, they could cry, but... in society if a man cries it makes him look weak.

Reinhardt: And what about if a girl cried listening to Shakespeare?

Carson: That's not really viewed as a bad thing per se.

Although Carson himself never felt bound by expectations for his expression of gender at his school, he was still able to articulate what the underlying assumptions would be for how boys or girls might be expected to react to Romeo and Juliet and how a boy may be judged if he resisted those assumptions for expression of gender. Carson went on to

clarify that he did not believe that there were set expectations from teachers in terms of how boys or girls should express their genders in class.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Human Relationships

Once again in this area, Carson felt as though there were fairly fluid and open understandings of how a boy may choose to forge and show affection within relationships. However, Carson went on to explain that he felt as though openly showing affection was an acceptable public display between two girls but it wouldn't necessarily be accepted between two boys. Carson thought that it would be seen as completely acceptable for two girls to walk down the hallway holding hands, whereas if it were two boys, the student population would question that display and wonder whether something more was going on. Carson went on to say that there is that saying, "Yeah, there's that saying that they'd rather see two guys holding guns than holding hands."

When I asked Carson for his impressions of whether or not there were any gender-specific expectations from teachers in terms of how boys would be expected to forge relationships with adults, he was steadfast in his belief that there was no difference in the expectations that teachers had for boys and girls when it came to establishing and maintaining human relationships.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Extra-curricular Activities

During our conversation about extra-curricular activities, I asked Carson whether or not he felt as though there were specific expectations for the types of extra-curricular activities in which boys would be involved at his school. The following dialogue emerged:

Reinhardt: I want to talk a little bit about extra-curricular activities. You talked about not being into sports, so if you were a boy at your school, do you think there was kind of some, were there expectations for what extra-curricular activities boys would get involved in?

Carson: I'm sure there was, but with my experience, I was in the book club and in the GSA. I was part of the Aboriginal club in school. Like with the phys. ed. thing, they had a course you could take like self-defence, and most of that was girls and one other guy and myself. It was interesting to see.

Reinhardt: And was the self-defence course supposed to be for girls?

Carson: No, just for anybody.

Reinhardt: But it was all girls and then two boys?

Carson: Yeah.

Reinhardt: Okay. Was it...did they expect boys to be involved in sports, was that a normal expectation for...even though you didn't, was that kind of a normal expectation for boys, that they'd be involved in extracurricular sports?

Carson: Yeah, typically they are.

Reinhardt: Okay, so a guy like you who chose to be in the book club, the GSA and the Aboriginal Students Club...was that kind of a normal thing for a boy to do at your school?

Carson: Not really I'd say. It just depends on what your interests are.

Reinhardt: Right, so you didn't feel uncomfortable making those choices?

Carson: No.

Reinhardt: Okay and people didn't make you feel uncomfortable making those choices?

Carson: No.

Carson seemed to allude to sports as being an expected domain of participation for boys.

However, Carson also made it clear that he felt completely comfortable making the choices that he wanted to for extra-curricular involvement and he never sensed any pressure from expectations to do otherwise.

Reflecting or Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

While discussing his high school experience, Carson was resolute in his belief that he never sensed that there were strict definitions for expression of gender for boys. Carson did say that he was one of few boys to participate in many of the activities/classes that he chose such as Self-Defense class, Spanish class, Book Club, GSA. He also said that during his spare time at school, he chose to spend most of his time quietly reading in the library and that there were rarely other boys who chose to do the same. It would be incorrect to suggest that Carson resisted expectations for gender expression at his school, because he never felt as though these normed expectations existed. Having said that, Carson noted that there were few boys involved in many of the activities in which he participated. Carson believed that his high school was fairly gender-fluid and that is why he never felt as though he was resisting expectations. However, the low number of boys who participated in the areas where Carson chose to be involved, suggests that there may have been some expectation that boys would not participate in those areas.

Experiences When Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

It is important to re-iterate from the outset of this section that Carson never felt as though he was resisting expectations for gender expression; Carson simply acted in a way that was true to himself and never felt pressure to do otherwise. He said that he was never treated badly by others due to the choices that he made to be involved in many activities, classes, behaviours, that typically involved girls. Carson did say that he spent most of his time alone while in high school; a choice that he says he made because he was most comfortable quietly spending time by himself.

In summary, Carson never really felt as though he was resisting any normed expectations. He felt that his school was open to him making whatever choices with which he felt comfortable and he was never treated differently as a result. As previously mentioned, very few boys chose to be involved in the same areas of school life that Carson did; his choices normally involved participation in activities that were frequented by girls.

As a footnote to Carson's story, he mentioned being treated unfairly at times in high school, but not due to his expression of gender. The following summarizes his experience of being treated unfairly due to his visible physical challenges with cerebral palsy.

Reinhardt: So how did people treat you? Did you ever get treated badly, or were you always treated with respect?

Carson: In general, there have been times where I've been treated unfairly just because of physical disability called cerebral palsy. People have made comments about that or

just looked at me weird or just like my physical appearance. They don't, I guess, like how I look or whatever, so I don't know. It's just their opinion.

I believe that Carson's experience of being othered at times due to his physical challenges, but not due to his expression of gender is notable. I will further discuss this intersection of physical disability and transgressing gender expression in my Chapter Eight discussion of the results of this study and implications for further research.

Fostering a Gender-Inclusive Environment in High Schools

My conversation with Carson about gender-inclusive schools began with me asking him why he felt that his school was doing so well in this area. There were two specific factors that Carson perceived as helpful. Firstly, Carson spoke about awareness and education and his perception that his school was doing a good job of teaching the student population about issues related to gender and sexual identity. Secondly, Carson felt as though the presence of the GSA group at his high school was having a positive impact on creating a more accepting environment.

Summary of Carson's Experience

Carson's experience was unique in this study. Carson was the only participant who felt as though he was never othered in his high school due to his expression of gender. Carson believes that his high school had a gender-fluid environment that allowed for him to simply be himself and make choices with which he was comfortable. These choices that Carson made often meant that he was isolated from the rest of the students or that he was involved in activities that were predominantly populated by girls. However, Carson does not believe that this was due to some overriding expectations for gendered behaviour. He simply believes that students chose

to be involved in areas of their own personal interest. Carson asserts that the only time that he ever felt that he was treated unfairly was as a result of his physical challenges related to cerebral palsy.

Chapter Seven

Tahoe: Expressing Gender in a School Environment that Exalts the ‘Ideal Boy’

In relation to the other participants in this study, Tahoe’s story is unique for two specific reasons. Firstly, Tahoe completed his high school diploma as a mature student in 2011. Secondly, Tahoe completed only two years of high school before dropping out just before the end of grade 10 and finishing his diploma via distance education as a mature student. Although Tahoe’s high school experiences date back a short period of time before the other participants, his experiences help to evaluate heteronormative environments and expectations for gender expression in high schools in recent times.

Tahoe is a 25 year-old, Caucasian man, who received his high school diploma in 2011. Tahoe completed his high school requirements via distance education as a mature student. Tahoe completed these requirements for his diploma while he was serving an incarceration in a federal penitentiary. The public school that Tahoe attended was a grade 10-12 school that had a total population of approximately 1200 students. The school was located in what would be considered a suburban area of Winnipeg. The high school had a very culturally and socio-economically diverse demographic. The majority of the students lived in upper-middle class neighbourhoods close to the school. Tahoe was enrolled in the French International Baccalaureate Program at his school. Tahoe described himself as an excellent student who did well in school. When Tahoe was asked why he felt he was a good candidate and volunteered for the study, he said the following:

When I was in high school, and this started for me, this process started for me in junior high and I would consider the coming out process, looking back now, I can identify that as being the coming out process, but at the time I didn't really see it as that. I saw it as me just sort of breaking out of my own norms and at the time I expressed myself in a way that was not heteronormative, which was not consistent with that alignment or that binary, like not at all. I mean I was a very shy student, and a shy kid, very smart, kept to himself, but was always a little 'flamier' than the average guy, always a little more feminine, always a little more soft spoken and when I started to actually express myself with my clothing I wore brighter clothes, I would dye my hair, I went through a phase I think around 14ish, 13 or 14 where I was wearing makeup, you know sort of experimenting with stuff like that. I believe, as I understand what gender non-conforming is, I think that was pretty gender non-conforming. So, that's why I think my perspective might make a contribution to your story.

In describing his experiences in high school, Tahoe used language that suggested that the heteronormative environment in his school created a very polarized positioning on the gender expression continuum for what doing boy or girl should mean. Tahoe describes expectations from his high school for performance of a hyper masculinity for boys. The language that Tahoe utilized to describe these expectations, put forward the notion that masculinity was associated with strength and power, whereas many of the attributes that he associated with femininity suggested a perception of weakness or subordinate positioning.

In his description of the 'ideal boy' at his high school, Tahoe used the following terms: alpha male, cool boys, total package, guys, strong male, aggressive, physical, 'manning up',

muscular, mature physically, stealthy. The attributes necessary to assume the persona of the ‘ideal boy’ that Tahoe puts forth align closely with Connell’s (1995) “culturally exalted” virtues of hegemonic masculinity. This ‘ideal boy’ at Tahoe’s school expressed gender in a hyper masculine manner.

When Tahoe described the boys who were unable to meet these expectations for hyper masculinity, he made reference to himself. He used language that described what he perceived to be a more effeminate expression of gender by some boys. The language that Tahoe used to define these ‘other’ boys, positioned them as subordinate to the ‘ideal boys’. Vicariously, Tahoe’s descriptions create an association between femininity and weakness or subordination. In describing these ‘other’ boys, Tahoe used the following terms: ‘flamier’ than the average guy, a little more feminine, the weaker ones, light weight, less, secondary, a light touch, sensitive.

Perception of Heteronormative Expectations

Tahoe’s recollections of his high school experience were that there definitely were heteronormative expectations for how boys would express their gender. Further, Tahoe believed that there was this socially normed persona of what would be the ‘ideal boy’, and he remembers specific boys from his high school years whom he felt fit that norm and received a very lofty status as a result. Tahoe did not fit this persona due to his transgressing expression of gender and was not always treated fairly as a result. However, Tahoe’s negative experience seemed to be mitigated somewhat due to the social status or social capital that he seemed to gain from his peers and teachers due to his intelligence and record as an excellent student.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Academics

Tahoe and I began our conversation about academics by discussing whether or not he felt there were expectations for the courses in which a boy would choose to enrol at his school. The following dialogue ensued:

Reinhardt: Did you sense that there were expectations for boys in terms of course choices?

Tahoe: Well, definitely. It seemed like my answer to that would be pretty straight forward. In high school, you have choices you can make. You can take I'm pretty sure at the time the Plastic Arts or whatever they called it...

Reinhardt: Practical Arts?

Tahoe: Practical Arts. Yeah that's it. I took it in French so... yeah, right. So that kind of stuff was like the boyish stuff to take...in high school it was drama or art that was basically the stream that you took or band and I know that band was generally a boy thing. Boys usually didn't take art class. I took art class. It was something that spoke to me more. And even in like the mandatory stuff, the courses like gym, there's a lot of stuff we could probably go into about that...but in terms of course selection...

Reinhardt: How about drama? Is that an open place for boys?

Tahoe: I remember meeting a few boys who were in drama who were, you know, who were pretty heterosexual acting and pretty strong male characters, but the majority of the

people that ended up in drama were the weaker ones, or the ones that seemed weaker compared to other people.

Reinhardt: Okay, what about areas like home economics, sewing, foods?

Tahoe: Yeah, there'd never be an expectation for a guy to pick that over something else. That was usually for obviously females to take or people who identified as female to take those classes, for sure.

Tahoe's description of expectations for course selection matched a very heteronormative definition for how boys and girls will express their genders; one that positions boys and girls at polarized ends of a gender expression continuum suggesting hyper masculinity and hyper femininity. Tahoe used very interesting language in describing the boys who entered into the realm of female classes as being perceived as the 'weaker ones'.

I continued my conversation with Tahoe about academics by questioning him as to whether or not he felt there were normed expectations for how boys would conduct themselves while in classes. Tahoe alluded to expectations in two courses in particular: English and Physical Education.

In English class, Tahoe believed that the gender expectations for boys would be to avoid activities that had to do with self-expression or revealing of emotions. According to Tahoe, in English class, boys would:

"...pass with a story that was decent, they wouldn't write good poetry...they wouldn't express themselves through their work and anything to do with creativity...for females it's the opposite...just typical stuff."

Tahoe's description of expectations for boys in his English class certainly complement the heteronormative expectation that boys will suppress public displays of emotion and/or affection. Tahoe did not believe that these expectations came from any particular source. On the contrary, he believed that these expectations were a manifestation of many sources: teachers, students, society at large.

The following dialogue evolved as Tahoe and I discussed his recollection of expectations for boys in Physical Education class:

Reinhardt: Did you sense that in any other classes there were expectations for how boys would conduct themselves? You mentioned phys. ed.

Tahoe: Oh definitely. Everybody can imagine what this is like right. But first-hand experience. There would always be two options in gym class. You could do the really aggressive physical stuff or you could go to the little gym at the other end of the school, and you could do what the girls were doing. And it would be something light weight or it would be something less involved. It would be less. There would always be two options cause they had to cater to both kinds of people, so you had the choice of 'manning' up to whatever it was and playing dodge ball or going and doing aerobics or something like that.

Reinhardt: So phys. ed., definitely then?

Tahoe: Yeah, in fact, we had a male gym teacher and a female gym teacher and the female gym teacher usually took the mini-gym activities, the less stuff, and the male gym

teacher stayed in the big gym. You know, that was usually the case, obviously some exceptions, but that was what we saw.

Reinhardt: How many of the boys in your gym class that you recall would have chosen what you describe as the less physically demanding small gym?

Tahoe: Very few. Some of our gym classes were combined, and even then it would be very few. Like out of a class of maybe 30, I'd say two or three or four at the most would choose the less active role. And even then, when choosing the less active role, they wouldn't really even participate cause it's just strange you know, it's just a bad feeling.

Tahoe's experiences in these two classes matches a very rigid definition for expectations related to boys expression of their gender in their academics.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Human Relationships

At this point in the conversation, Tahoe was compelled to describe to me what expectations were for the 'ideal boy' or the 'total package' in his high school:

Like when it comes to behavior expectations from teachers are different, expectations from peers are different and expectations from parents, from families. That has a big impact I think on the way people behave and in my high school experience, boys were expected to behave the way that they behaved, which was cocky, lots of attitude, lots of confidence. I remember some boys stood out as like being very alpha male and extremely...they had it all, not necessarily even the really cool boys, but the ones that had everything, like the total package and all the girls were sort of expected to go after that one boy and every other boy sort of was like secondary to that and I remember seeing

that really clearly, like that sort of pyramid. And there's nothing to prevent that, and there was no sort of education or you know, every once in a while somebody would come in and do some talk about like being different and accepting people and not being discriminatory, but really at the end of the day, what do these people remember? They go back to their routines and what they know, so I just remember there being a definite divide.

I asked Tahoe to describe the 'real package' in his high school.

I remember one boy who I looked up to...I looked at as being like I wish I could be that because he seemed to have it all. He was very muscular, he was very mature physically, quiet, really good family, really good Christian family, involved in the community in different ways, excellent grades, no one really bothered him because they knew he was fine. He didn't get picked on by the teachers, he didn't get picked on by the students, he didn't get picked on by anybody because he was stealthy. That was the feeling that I got, is that nobody could touch this guy. And there were few of them like that.

I asked Tahoe whether or not he perceived that there were expectations for how boys would relate to their peers and if there were, whether or not those expectations differed from how girls might be expected to relate to their peers.

Yeah...definitely. At the time, now it's different, but at the time you wouldn't see physical contact unless it was some sort of display, unless it was really cool to do that. And it only would have been cool to do that if the person who was really cool did it. But generally speaking, there wouldn't be physical contact. And there wouldn't be...there'd

be no sign of a real connection, even like a friendship wasn't totally evident because they were quiet. You know, I just remember a group of boys, the basketball players all that stuff, you knew that they had that camaraderie, but you didn't really see it. If you didn't see it then when did it happen? So, for boys specifically totally right.

I think the expectations were looser for girls. Girls, I think girls like being sort of in an expressive role, are expected to express themselves in many different ways and I think that versus where boys have limited options to express themselves, I think girls can do basically anything else. I remember it wouldn't be weird for them to be hugging or kissing even or holding hands or just being close in any way that would be fine. You would never see even one of those things between two guys. In terms of language, you know girls, there'd be less communication amongst guys and girls could communicate all kinds of ways, all kinds of time and any place.

When I asked Tahoe whether he felt these expectations were perpetuated by teachers, he said that it depended on the individual and each teacher is different. Tahoe did not perceive there to be overall expectations for how boys would relate to their peers or adults that were cast upon them by the adults that worked in his high school.

Heteronormative Expectations Related to Extra-curricular Activities

Tahoe had limited memories of the extra-curricular activities that existed at his high school. He did not participate in extra-curricular activities at school, and thus, similar to Harvey, because he opted out, he did not really recollect what the options were. There were two

particular areas of extra-curricular from which Tahoe could remember boys receiving exalted status while he was in high school: sports and partying.

Yes, I'm pretty sure my school had a pretty solid volleyball team for boys...I recall that being a really big deal. And I remember this because I remember those boys' faces. I remember the way they looked. I remember the way they walked and why do I remember that right? Regardless of my sexual orientation, I think that those are the things that I'm left with even though there was so much else going on. How come I can remember that boy's face right now and not anybody else?

Tahoe did not explicitly say that boys were expected to participate in sports, but he implied that it was a social norm in his school based on the exalted status that boys gained by being on sports teams.

Tahoe went on to discuss that the most popular boys would always be included in the big parties that took place outside of school hours. Tahoe did suggest that this would have been a normed expectation for boys in his school; be on sport teams and party outside of school hours with the popular students. He offered the following:

I know that academically, my school had some good academic extracurricular activities like pretty strong chess club or chess team, I think there was some debating going on, that kind of stuff. You'd never see the typical males doing that kind of stuff though. It was usually sports or partying... like I remember seeing the guys or hearing about the guys doing that kind of stuff. You know you'd hear about the big house party for the really

popular girl who had the big house...you'd hear about that kind of stuff and the boys who attended it and you know all that kind of stuff.

Tahoe's expression of gender did not reflect the normed expectations for how boys would perform in the area of extra-curricular activities, and thus, he chose to opt out.

Reflecting or Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

Tahoe did not see himself as a boy who aligned with the heteronormative expectations in his high school for gender expression by boys. As previously stated, Tahoe described himself as shy, very smart, kept to himself, a little "flamier" than the average guy, always a little more feminine and soft-spoken. He described himself as someone that resisted norms for dress and physical appearance, choosing to wear bright clothes, make-up, and dye his hair.

Tahoe also said that he resisted norms by becoming friends with girls as opposed to boys. He remembers attempting to befriend boys, but with very little success. He went on to further explain that he began to resist expectations for how boys would express gender and began to embrace the expectations that existed for girls because it felt more comfortable for him: showing affection to other girls, beginning to use the same language as the girls, avoiding areas where he felt at risk from the boys who reflected the normed expectations.

Tahoe's experiences in his classes were somewhat mixed in terms of the choices he made to reflect or resist expectations. He explained that he actually gave up on physical education.

Gym class for me, as I've mentioned that in the past I was always sort of different, a bit of a light touch you could say... you know, a sensitive guy, always had friends who were girls, those are the people that I got along with. My whole academic career, I moved a lot

to a lot of different schools, so I never really had a chance to make friends, but if I did, they were always girls, they were always with the less popular girls, and if like one of the really popular girls wanted to be my friend, I was pretty excited. The really popular guys never wanted to be my friend at all. When it comes to gym class you have all that stuff happening in a place where you're expected to perform physically and you're challenged. I was overweight too, like slightly overweight. So, unpopular, overweight, little bit different, a lot of issues there. When it came to gym class I didn't have what it took to challenge that. I just felt defeated, so I didn't really try. So I'd take the easier just to get it done and over with. Gym class was traumatic. I shouldn't say the word trauma, I don't really know what it means, but I just remember it being really hard. I dreaded it, I didn't care about it, I got a terrible grade. I used any excuse I could not to participate. I always had something wrong, that kind of thing. I would just sit out. And it eventually got to the point where the gym teachers were just sort of used to that and would prompt me to do as much as I could just to get the credit. I think I even dropped out of gym class once actually.

Within his academic classes, Tahoe chose to resist expectations by isolating himself from the rest of the boys for fear of being treated unfairly. Because Tahoe was a gifted student who got along very well with his teachers, for the most part he was able to simply be himself and be highly engaged in his studies. Tahoe believes that he actually gained some social status or social capital in the classroom despite his resistance of normed gender expression due to his studious nature.

Experiences When Resisting Expectations for Gender Expression

Tahoe definitely did not feel like one of the boys in high school. His expression of gender kept him outside of most peer groups and forced him to withdraw and keep to himself. Tahoe said that he faced frequent verbal harassment and was made fun of in his physical education class.

When I asked Tahoe how he was treated when he resisted norms and befriended mostly girls, he replied in the following way:

Reinhardt: And your choice to kind of hang around girls and befriend the less popular girls cause that felt like a comfortable place for you...?

Tahoe: Risk free ya know.

Reinhardt: Were you treated poorly because of it by the alpha males?

Tahoe: Oh of course, I fit right in with the losers. I was one of them. I got treated the same way...it's like being made fun of, it is hard to recall, but I can visualize the dynamic in the room. I'd be sitting with the less popular girls even in like the cafeteria, I don't know if we called it the cafeteria, for some reason I think we called it something different...but like yeah, in the hall, at lunch, outside, it would just...we wouldn't get the same kind of attention, wouldn't get the same kind of acknowledgement. We got made fun of, just for being that group. We usually hung out with the smarter girls...of course the smarter girls were the less popular ones right.

Reinhardt: Do you remember certain specific derogatory comments made to you? Or were you ever physically harmed?

Tahoe: Physically harmed? Twice, not in high school. Once in elementary school, that I actually realized recently that it was physical harm. It took me that long to really think back and be like was that physical harm or was that just, was my understanding of it left at, oh it was just some weird altercation that happened, but no it was definitely physical harm. I remember in junior high there was a threat of physical harm where I was approached by a whole bunch of them when the teacher wasn't in the room one day and it was just something really stupid, but there was a threat of it. Their hands weren't on me, but it was like I didn't have control of the situation, but not in high school...not in high school...no. I didn't see a lot of physical violence in my school, it was known to be a kind of a safer school when it came to that kind of stuff. It was more of an academic school.

I asked Tahoe whether or not the boys ever included him in anything while he was in high school.

Reinhardt: Did the boys include you in anything ever?

Tahoe: No. Unless it was a funny joke. I learned my lesson to not play into those jokes. I can't remember what they were, but I remember that being an issue. If they wanted my attention for something, it probably wasn't a good thing. Unless they needed help with their homework or school or something like that cause I was pretty smart, so if they needed the answer to a test question or something like that...

Reinhardt: They'd come to you for that?

Tahoe: For sure, and I'd give it to them too cause I wanted in right.

Tahoe's recollection is that boys would seek his assistance in class if they needed some help with their work. Although Tahoe did not choose to reflect existing norms in his classes, he still said that he tried as much as he could to help others out, even those that were not nice to him, because he desperately wanted in. Tahoe does believe that his intelligence probably gave him some social capital with his peers regardless of his gender expression. Tahoe wondered what his experience would have been like without this social capital. He believed that it gave him social capital not only with his peers but with his teachers as well.

Maybe it was good for them to have somebody that they didn't have to chase for homework or maybe it was an enjoyable experience to teach someone who actually paid attention, who engaged. I really loved French. I love the language. I loved speaking it I was good at speaking it. It just came naturally to me. I remember in my French class it was a really good thing. I enjoyed interacting with the teacher. In fact, I should mention I always had good relationships with my teachers because I was smart and because I was different.

Similar to Carson, Tahoe felt like he was usually on the outside looking in at school. Tahoe decided not to reflect expectations for gender expression and as a result, high school was difficult for him and he was often othered by the alpha males as he describes them. Although never physically harmed, Tahoe frequently faced verbal harassment and intimidation for his transgressing expression of gender.

Fostering a Gender-Inclusive Environment in High Schools

It is noteworthy that Tahoe is now employed in a position where his mandate is to go out to high schools and educate young people about the very issues being researched in this study. Not surprisingly, Tahoe felt that there were many things that schools can and should be doing to create more gender-fluid environments. Tahoe felt that there was a role for students, teachers, and policy/curriculum-makers.

Tahoe holds firmly to the belief that any true change that is going to take place in high schools is going to be driven by a grassroots movement by students. He acknowledges that students will not do this on their own, but Tahoe suggested that if school leaders really want their schools to be less heteronormative and more inclusive of all expressions of gender and sexual orientation, then they should discuss policy and education with the students themselves. Tahoe believes that student voice is crucial in changing school cultures.

Tahoe: At the time, if I could think of something that would have made a difference it would have been seeing those boys challenge themselves. If they were the ones to set a different standard, specifically them, I think it would have made a huge difference.

Reinhardt: Them, being who?

Tahoe: The boys who were the ideal person.

Reinhardt: The typical masculine?

Tahoe: Yeah, for sure, if they chose to challenge it, if they became role models it would have had a ripple effect. If they reached out to me, and said hey you're cool it's all good,

you all need to pay attention, it would have made the world of difference. Maybe I think that because in my mind that would have solved all my problems. Maybe that isn't realistic. Maybe that's totally absurd. But I remember thinking that at that time, if I could get them to just like me and people like me I wouldn't have so many problems or if they could get to know me and realize that I'm not a threatening person and that I'm really just an individual and that I'm capable of being a good friend. I think that they really set the standard.

We continued our conversation about ways to improve conditions in schools and Tahoe said that policy should be driven by students.

I think a policy that the kids came up with themselves. I think if the youth came up with a policy that they all agreed on and it was enforced by the administration or by something... there is just a lot of grass roots stuff that I think could happen, that I think could be empowering for youth, to teach them valuable skills and sort of set a precedent. And I think that the more youth lead and youth driven initiatives will have a bigger impact on the school spirit and the environment and the people that go there every day.

Tahoe also distinctly mentioned teachers as vital role models in changing heteronormative thinking.

Teachers are you know like...role models in a position of power make an impact on people they're working with. Students look up to their teachers whether they want to or not. Teachers are role models and I think teachers can really set the example and they

can act in a way and stand up for peoples' rights and model that for others. And it takes effort. It doesn't just happen on its own.

Tahoe also said that having teachers in a school who were open about their transgressing gender expression or sexual orientations may be very helpful in normalizing behaviours that fall outside of the traditional binary definitions for girl/boy or femininity/masculinity.

Due to his experiences working in various school divisions and schools for his current job, Tahoe is convinced that policy/curriculum makers can have a definite impact on improving conditions for gender nonconforming students. Tahoe believes that he has seen significant change and great strides being made in school divisions that choose to make these issues a focal point of policy and education for students.

...but I've seen personally in some school divisions great strides into making differences and it comes from policy it comes from education, it comes from teachers, it comes from different levels.

Overall, Tahoe is very optimistic that there is great work already being done and that there is much more that can be done to create more gender-inclusive environments in schools.

Summary of Tahoe's Experience

Tahoe's high school experience was cut somewhat short by his decision to withdraw from high school close to the conclusion of his grade 10 year. Tahoe maintains that his decision to leave school had nothing to do with issues at school and everything to do with issues for himself outside of school. Tahoe believes firmly that there were normed expectations for how he was expected to express his gender in high school. Tahoe chose to resist those norms, and as a

result, his high school experience was not that enjoyable. Tahoe is very thankful that he was blessed with the gift of intelligence and he believes that it gave him some valuable social capital with his peers and teachers during his high school experience; he wonders what his experience might have been like without it.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This final chapter of this paper consists of three areas of discussion. First, this chapter will attempt to address the research questions through a discussion of the broader themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts. An inductive approach to analyzing the data was utilized in order to move from the concrete, directly quoted dialogue in the transcripts, to the broad categories or themes that emerged from analysis. The themes are organized using the four research questions as a framework for the discussion. The emergent themes are presented making reference to the reviewed literature in Chapter Two as well as the personal experiences of the researcher as a school teacher and administrator over the last 17 years. Secondly, the chapter discusses implications for further research and practice as a result of the findings of this study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the researcher's point of view on the potential limitations of this study.

Discussion: Themes Emerging from Participants' Experiences

It has been noted previously in this paper that it was never my goal as the researcher to generalize the experiences of the participants. Generalization would have necessitated a much larger sample size than the four participants whom I interviewed for this study. It is for that reason that I chose to dedicate a separate chapter to the retelling of each of their experiences. Having said that, an inductive analysis of their transcripts led to the emergence of some common themes from their experiences. This segment of the paper will discuss these themes, comparing and contrasting them with the reviewed literature and the personal experience of the researcher.

Heteronormative Expectations for Gender Expression

The lived experiences of these men while in high school provide ample evidence that heteronormative expectations for how boys would express their gender were prevalent during their high school years. With the exception of Carson, all of the boys had strong recollections of the expected and accepted way of performing masculinity. It should be noted that although Carson asserted that he did not perceive there to be expectations for gender expression in his school, his recollections of the small number of boys who chose ‘typically girl’ activities, suggests that these expectations did indeed exist on some level. I believe that it is also quite plausible that Carson did not perceive there to be expectations because he never felt as though he was othered for the choices that he made as a boy in high school. One of the unique and interesting variables in Carson’s story that does not exist for the other participants is the fact that Carson has a visible physical challenge.

Sources of Expectations for Gender Expression

One of the organizing themes that emerged from the interviews was that expectations for gender expression needed to be discussed in relation to two different sources: peers and teachers. The data collected from the participants suggests that expectations may differ depending on the source.

Expectations from peers. A common theme that came out of the men’s experiences was that it was their male peers who were largely responsible for creating and perpetuating the normed expectations for expression of masculinity. The participants made almost no mention of peer expectations for how they would perform masculinity expected of them by their female

peers. This perception of the absence of female influence on cultural norms in these men's high school experiences is illustrative of the power dynamics that exist in schools and the privileged positioning of hegemonic masculinity in setting cultural norms for boys.

Consistent with Martin's (2009) study on the role that mothers play in instilling heteronormative thinking in their children, the data suggest that the participants believed that many of these beliefs from their male peers came from the teachings of the home as opposed to the teachings of the school. My own beliefs are congruent with the data and the literature. As a school teacher and administrator, I have frequently witnessed and confronted heterosexist beliefs and attitudes from students towards their peers. Upon deeper interrogation of the incidents with the students' parents, it often becomes clear that the prevailing attitudes are a manifestation of teachings in the home which are then perpetuated in peer-mediated social milieu. This will often result in a disconnect between what schools are attempting to teach and what homes continue to value as important family beliefs. Despite this notion that heteronormative thinking/beliefs for many boys originate in their homes, the data suggest that high schools/teachers continue to perpetuate these beliefs in some specific high school domains.

Expectations from schools/teachers. The retelling of the lived experiences of the participants suggested that they were of the overall opinion that their teachers or school systems in general did not present expectations for how they would express their masculinity as boys. The boys maintained that for the most part, teachers were supportive of their individual decisions to resist expectations for how they would express gender. However, a deeper analysis of the data indicates that teachers/school systems continue to perpetuate heteronormative expectations for

gender expression for boys in certain domains: physical education classes, extra-curricular involvement, student course selection, humanities courses, science courses.

The boys' experiences in physical education classes and extra-curricular sports suggest that there are still deeply entrenched expectations held by some physical education teachers when it comes to how boys and girls should express their gender in the gymnasium. Physical strength, physical size and appearance, athletic ability, ability to physically dominate other boys, and aggressive demeanour are all socially constructed attributes of hegemonic masculinity (Paechter, 2003). The data in this study suggest that some physical education teachers continue to set forth expectations for boys that align with Paechter's assertions. Three of the four boys in this study struggled with the expectations set forth for them related to physical education/sports and thus chose to opt out. The difficulty in the gymnasium was compounded for these boys due to their fears and aversion to the use of the change rooms. With the exception of one school, single use washrooms/change rooms were not made available to the students.

The data in this study suggest that course selection in high school continues to be an area that is influenced by heteronormative expectations for gender expression. Three out of the four participants in the study suggested that they felt as though they were expected to choose/not choose certain classes because they were boys. Although the data do not suggest that the schools/teachers were responsible for placing these expectations on the boys, they also do not suggest that the schools/teachers took any proactive steps or measures to mitigate these traditional expectations for gendered course selection. An analysis of the data suggests that the participants in this study did not hold their schools/teachers culpable for the expectations that were thrust upon them as boys. I would submit that they did not perceive that their

schools/teachers were responsible due to an acceptance of longstanding, systemic norms for gendered behavior. Simply stated, because the schools/teachers did not overtly tell them that they should choose industrial arts classes over drama classes, the boys did not perceive them as responsible for expectations for gender expression. However, there is an absence of data that suggest that the schools/teachers did anything to confront traditional expectations for gendered course selection.

The data suggest that there continue to be certain normed expectations for classroom behavior by boys perpetuated by their teachers. Similar to the above assertions related to course selection, the data do not suggest that these expectations were overtly thrust upon the boys by their teachers. Once again, it was the inaction or unwillingness of teachers to openly confront longstanding norms that create a perpetuation of expectations for gender expression. The data illustrated that these normed teacher expectations for how boys will behave often arose in humanities (Literature, French) and/or science (Biology, Chemistry) classes. The data suggest that teachers did not create an environment in the classroom that encouraged/allowed boys to be overt with their emotions in humanities courses when discussing sensitive content, i.e., Romeo and Juliet. Similarly, the data suggest that when in biology and chemistry classes, teachers did not create or promote environments that allowed for resistance of normed expectations for male behavior in these milieus. There was an assumption that boys would want to dissect animals in biology class and blow things up during experiments in chemistry class; expectations that relate to the notion of violence.

In summary, an analysis of the data in this study does suggest that there were certain domains where schools/teachers overtly promoted heteronormative expectations for how boys

would express their gender. In addition, the data suggest that schools/teachers were frequently responsible for the perpetuation of these norms due to their abdication of responsibility for taking proactive steps to challenge longstanding expectations for gender expression in high school. As teachers are socialized, so shall be the students.

Suppressing Sensitivity, Emotions, and Displays of Physical Affection

As a man who has worked in high schools as a teacher and an administrator for the last 15 years, I have often struggled with the expectation that boys/men will not display public affection to other boys/men and further that they will suppress their feelings and emotions in public if they are of a gentle or sensitive nature. Kehler (2007) found that boys are not encouraged to develop intimate relationships with other boys or young men. She found that willingness to engage in a counter-hegemonic masculinity through such things as open displays of affection to other boys and emotional intimacy with male friends, suggests that a negotiation of heterosexual masculine expectations is possible, although rare for high school boys. Kehler's findings align closely with the experiences of the participants as they related to each other in public, and as they performed what it meant to "be a boy" in the classroom.

Relating to peers as a boy in public. All participants in this study maintained that open expressions of affection in the form of handholding or hugging between two boys would be seen as strongly resisting expectations for masculine expression of gender. The following are thoughts of participants on this topic of public displays of affection between two boys:

Francisco: If it wasn't like a masculine like thump back like the hard thump on the back thing...if it was a delicate like little hug, you were looked at like ummm what did you two do last night sort of thing.

Harvey: Guys don't hug. At the most they'll like, slap each other on the back, shake each other's hand, do that...really awkward, I guess man hug? You know, like grab each other's hand and pull each other in and slap each other on the back. But if two guys were hugging, then they'd get made fun of or so on and so forth.

The participants suggested that these open displays of affection to male peers are one of the strongest ways that a boy could transgress heteronormative expectations for gender expression. Participant reflections indicate that boys who chose to resist social norms in this manner may well be assumed to be homosexual, which was construed as being deviant and negative. These expectations for gender expression that promote aggressive physical relations between boys but associate more gentle forms of physical affection with homosexuality, occur at the intersection of hyper masculinity and heteronormative expectations. Simply put, boys were assumed to be heterosexual if they expressed physical affection in an aggressive/hyper masculine manner, whereas boys who expressed physical affection in a gentler manner were often assumed to be homosexual.

Being a boy in the classroom. A common thread that surfaced with the participants as we discussed expectations for gender expression in the classroom was the notion that boys would not be expected to openly convey emotion or sensitivity when dealing with sensitive content in their classes. There was consensus among the participants that boys choosing to cry in response to a sad story in a literature class or express romantic sentiment when reading Romeo and Juliet,

would certainly be contravening expectations for ‘doing boy’ in the classroom. However, the participants also believed that these expectations would not have come from their teachers or female peers, but rather from their male peers. As previously stated, the data suggest that teachers perpetuated these norms due to their inaction as opposed to their action. As an educator, I have experienced first-hand this peer pressure for boys to suppress their emotions and sensitivity. I believe strongly that this continues to be a normed expectation for boys/men not only in school, but in society-at-large.

Physical Prowess

I believe that the primary conclusion that can be drawn from the participants’ experiences is that very strong beliefs still exist when it comes to a boy’s physical prowess as a measure of his masculinity and an assumption of his heterosexuality. It is noteworthy, that none of the participants alluded to the expectation for physical prowess in term of violence or ability to physically fight. Swain (2004) concluded that the primary factor that influenced a boy’s foundation in a peer group, delimited by hegemonic masculinity, was his athletic ability and physical prowess (p. 173). A boy’s athletic ability may be defined by his abilities in specific sporting activities and organized games, while his physical prowess may be evaluated based on both appearance and capacity to physically dominate other boys through physical combat or fighting. All participants referenced the masculine expectation for physical prowess in sports, but contrary to Swain’s assertions, none of the participants made any mention of there being an expectation for capacity to prove masculinity through combat or fighting. Having said that, the men all mentioned an expectation for playful physicality with their male peers; banging one another into lockers, pushing one another around, and chest-bumping. This data once again

reinforce the hyper masculine ideal that physical prowess and aggression is the heteronormative expectation for boys in high school.

Expected extra-curricular involvement in sports. In harmony with the findings of Swain (2004, 2006) and Keddie (2006), a conclusion can be drawn from participant experiences that a prevailing expectation for gender expression for boys continues to be participation and ability in sports. When participants were asked about expectations for extra-curricular activities for boys, all participants immediately responded that boys were expected to be in sports. My own perception of expectations for gender expression of boys is consistent with both the literature and the participant experiences. My experience has been that very few, if any, boys will find themselves in the hegemonic masculine group in high school without significant prowess in sports. Ability in sports continues to be a very significant gatekeeper to entry into the upper echelons of the social hierarchy of male peer groups in high school. During my interviews with the participants, not a single man mentioned any other in-school extra-curricular activity as being an expected domain for boys; sports stood alone. Furthermore, the data suggested that there was a hierarchy of sports for boys with those that were the most physically aggressive being the most acclaimed which typically co-existed with prowess in football.

The challenges of meeting expectations in physical education class. An area that arose as a situated space for heteronormative expectations for gender expression was in physical education classes. Physical education was the only high school class that participants overtly articulated in reference to normed expectations from teachers. Physical prowess and athletic ability are also key determinants of entry and status in peer groups for boys in high school (Paechter, 2003; Vicars, 2005; Wang, 2000). Two of the participants in the study, Tahoe and

Harvey, actually mentioned giving up and withdrawing from physical education classes because they felt as though they could not meet the expectations of their teachers. It is important to note that the boys felt that these expectations were reserved for the boys in the class and that there was a different set of expectations for the girls. Tahoe's experience when he tried to meet the physical expectations of his teacher and peers was ridicule and humiliation.

As a school administrator, I continue to confront these deeply entrenched beliefs and expectations that are held by some physical education teachers. I have engaged teachers in numerous conversations about the importance of not creating binary definitions/expectations for what boys/girls should be able to do in their classes. I have also confronted physical education teachers in high school settings who perpetuate gendered expectations for behavior in gyms by splitting classes by sex category and then have the man teach the boys and the woman teach the girls. The data suggest that the phenomenon of men teaching boys in traditionally male dominant classes and women teaching girls in traditionally female dominant classes is not exclusive to the gymnasium; men continue to deliver industrial arts curricula to boys and woman continue to deliver home economics curricula to girls in high schools. My experience has been that many students become disillusioned by the preconceived expectations from their teachers and thus become disengaged from their physical education classes. This study, the reviewed literature, and my personal experiences suggest that heteronormative expectations for gender expression still have a strong foothold in many high school physical education programs.

Reflecting or Resisting Expectations

As previously noted, three out of the four participants in the study felt as though expectations existed for how they would express their masculinity in high school. Reflecting

these expectations suggests that either the boys' true expression of gender met those expectations or they chose to act in a way that met these expectations even if it was not their authentic self. Conversely, resisting these expectations meant that the boys' authentic expression of gender did not match the social norm for behavior. It is notable that of the three boys who felt that there were expectations for gender expression, only Francisco admitted to having chosen to be untrue to his genuine expression of gender and reflect expectations in grades 9 and 10. Francisco referred to this period of time as him "selling out" to feel accepted.

Classrooms a Safer Place to Resist?

A common theme that was drawn out of the participants' experiences was the idea that resisting expectations for masculine behavior was safer inside the classroom than outside the classroom, at least outside of Physical Education classes. It has been noted that the participants did not feel that their teachers thrust expectations upon them for how they would do gender. It was the male peers who seemed to hold the power to perpetuate heteronormative expectations for gender expression in the classroom. Having said that, as previously mentioned, a deeper analysis of the data suggest otherwise. While all of the participants seemed to be able to be more true to their gendered selves in the classroom than outside of the classroom, the data suggest that resisting normed expectations for masculine gender expression was still difficult. The presence of the teacher seemed to provide the boys with more of a comfort level in the classroom to be shielded from overt othering due to their gender expression and simply be themselves. However, they were still othered due to the absence of proactive measures by teachers and schools to challenge longstanding heteronormative expectations for how boys would behave in the classroom.

The participants agreed that teachers play a paramount role in providing support and protection for students of diverse gender and sexuality who are frequently made to feel othered (Taylor et al., 2011) in the heteronormative environment of schools. The data suggest that teachers did provide a level of support and protection which made classrooms safer spaces to resist heteronormative expectations for gender expression than outside of classrooms. Nonetheless, the participants did overtly indicate that as boys, they would not necessarily be expected to emotionally engage to the same degree as their female peers in a Literature class. Two participants indicated that boys would not be expected to express themselves in depth in an English class, especially when that expression was in response to sensitive/emotional content. This normed expectation to disengage, or at least not engage in depth in English/Literature class poses an interesting question related to literacy levels for boys in high school. If in fact there is a gap between boys and girls when it comes to literacy levels with boys being the underachievers, one wonders what impact if any these normed expectations for boys not to engage in their English/Literature classes is having on creating/perpetuating this gap. Can boys really be expected to achieve the same advancement of their literacy skills as girls when the expected norms pressure them to not express themselves in depth?

Avoidance as Opposed to Resistance Outside of the Classroom

In analyzing the transcripts of participants, I found numerous situations within their experiences where the boys chose to avoid or opt out of activities or spaces outside of the classroom because they felt resistance was too risky, particularly in the areas of extra-curricular activities or using washrooms/change rooms. Avoidance seemed to be a common coping strategy for participants in this study.

Opting out of extra-curricular involvement. Many boys who do not conform to expectations for hegemonic masculinity in high school become disenfranchised by extra-curricular activities. I have witnessed many boys avoid extra-curricular activities entirely because they do not have the physical prowess or interest to participate in sports; they do not feel comfortable resisting normed expectations for boys and do not join other clubs or activities. Both Tahoe and Harvey chose to opt out of extra-curricular involvement entirely at their schools for these reasons. In fact, neither man could even recall what the extra-curricular options were outside of sports. These findings align with Swain's (2004) study that concluded that the primary factor that influenced a boy's foundation in a peer group, delimited by hegemonic masculinity, was his athletic ability and physical prowess: "... A boy's athletic ability may be defined by his abilities in specific sporting activities and organized games..." (p.173). Tahoe and Harvey felt that their only choice was to opt out of extra-curricular activities. The reviewed literature, the boys' experiences, and my own experiences in this area all suggest that this lead to exclusion from their peer groups who were able to perform this heteronormative expectation for doing boy.

Please don't make me use the washroom or change room. Two major North American studies cited in the literature, Kosciw et al., (2010) and Taylor et al., (2011), concluded that many students who transgress normed gender expressions in high school feel unsafe. Taylor's findings further identified several unsafe places in schools that students who are gender nonconforming avoid due to concerns for personal safety, including washrooms and change rooms. The experiences of the men in this study validate the findings of these studies. As noted in the retelling of their experiences, the boys avoided both the washrooms and change rooms in their high schools due to concerns for both personal safety and due to assumptions they

felt their male peers might have about their homosexual motives for being in the boys' washroom or change room. No other place in a school seems to perpetuate heteronormative gender binaries as much as the washroom/change rooms; these continue to be unsafe spaces for gender nonconforming boys.

In the last two years as a high school vice-principal, I have received an increasing number of requests for single-use or gender-neutral washrooms and change rooms. These requests have mainly come from students who do not conform to traditional heteronormative identities, whether that is sexual orientation or gender expression, and I believe that these requests suggest our schools still do not accommodate or perpetuate gender inclusivity to the extent that they should.

Experiences when Resisting Expectations

The experiences of the participants when they resisted expectations for gender expression seem to validate the work of Kosciw et al. (2010) and Taylor et al. (2011). With the exception of Carson, all participants reported being verbally harassed due to their nonconforming expression of gender as a boy. Of note, both Francisco and Tahoe reported being physically harmed and threatened while at school. Although there were isolated incidents of physical harm and fairly frequent incidents of verbal harassment, the most common experience that the participants shared was a feeling of isolation or exclusion from their peers.

Isolation and exclusion. My personal experiences related to the othering of gender nonconforming boys are very consistent with the experiences of the participants. My perception is overt acts of physical or verbal harassment of gender nonconforming boys in high school is

actually decreasing. I understand that this seems to contradict the staggering numbers that were uncovered in the work of Taylor and Kosciw and may be an indication of the need for better reporting mechanisms, particularly to administration. I do believe that othering is still happening in schools, but due to enforcement of policy meant to protect students from harassment; this othering has become more covert through exclusion and isolation.

Assumption of homosexuality due to gender expression. I believe the foundational expectation of boy that supersedes all other expectations is that of heterosexuality. Kehily's (2001) study found that, heterosexual displays and actions are paramount to performance of hegemonic masculinity in schools. Sexual orientation was not a criterion used to select participants for this study. However, it is interesting to note that, with the exception of Carson, all participants suggested that their nonconforming expression of gender led to assumptions that they were gay. The verbal harassment that they experienced was aimed at the assumption that they were gay due to their gender expression. The cited literature and the experiences of these boys seem to suggest that masculinity continues to be bound tightly by the expectation for heterosexuality.

Resiliency and support when resisting expectations. The data collected from participants suggest that there are a few sources for support when it comes to resisting expectations for gender expression in school: supportive teachers, supportive administrators, GSAs, school counselors, and support from peers who don't fit stereotypical expectations in some way. The one common source of support to which all participants made reference was the support of their families. The only participant in the study who withdrew from high school and then completed his diploma through distance education was Tahoe. Tahoe was also the only

participant in the study who said that he did not have a lot of support from home when it came to his high school experience as a gender nonconforming boy. Tahoe did not blame his difficulties in high school on his lack of support from his mother, and in fact, he said that she was very accepting of his transgressing expression of masculinity. He said that he and his mother just did not talk about his schooling. The other three participants in the study all spoke specifically about the wonderful support that they received from their families and how this made them more resilient and able to deal with the challenges they faced in high school as a nonconforming boy.

Support for physical challenges may supersede othering due to gender expression.

An analysis of the data drawn from Carson's experience, suggests that he may have been spared overt othering based on his gender expression due to his physical challenges related to cerebral palsy. Of the four participants in the study, Carson was the only man who suggested that he was never treated unfairly as a result of his transgressing expression of gender. Carson was also the only man in the study that had a visible and noteworthy physical disability. Carson suggested that he was often treated with kindness and caring due to these physical challenges and I would suggest that this concern for his physical challenges may have superseded expectations for and reactions to his resisting expression of gender as a boy in high school.

Fostering Gender-Inclusive Environments in Schools

In his (2009) study on the impact that formal laws and legislated acts have on the heteronormative environments of schools Knotts suggested:

Explicit language in these laws demands that gender identity and sexual orientation be protected from harassment in public schools. But it is the spirit of the law that offers

opportunities to move schools beyond changing mere *practices* in enforcing harassment policies (I call this the public manifestation of these laws) toward a larger transformative change in undoing our *understanding* of gender and sexuality (I call this the private manifestation of these laws. (p. 599)

Knotts' assertions align with both my personal view and the views of the participants in this study when it comes to what should be done to address heteronormativity in schools and create more gender-inclusive environments for fluid expression of gender. There needs to be a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. Policy and legislation will allow for the enforcement of the protection of gender nonconforming students when they are overtly othered in schools, but a more system-wide approach to educating students and teachers about gender and sexual identity is required to truly shift thinking and culture in high schools. This shift in thinking may make the necessity for codifying formal laws less and less necessary. The following sections summarize the findings of this study as they relate to what the participants felt is already being done to make high schools more gender-inclusive environments for boys as well as what they feel still needs to be done to ameliorate conditions for gender nonconforming boys in high school.

Optimism that Change is Happening and More Can Be Done

As an educator who has worked in high schools in Winnipeg and the surrounding area for the last 17 years, my experiences complement the beliefs of the participants; optimistic that conditions are improving for gender nonconforming boys in high schools and steadfast in the belief that there is a lot more that can and should be done. I was not able to find any other studies in this region that validated these suggestions. This study and the reviewed literature

from other studies (Knotts, 2009; Griffin et al., 2003; Macgillivray, 2008; Schniedewind & Cathers, 2003) suggest that there are numerous ways that individual schools and school systems can ameliorate environments for gender nonconforming students.

The Role of the Teacher

The data collected in this study affirm the notion that teachers play an integral role in combatting heteronormative thinking and supporting gender nonconforming students. The findings of this study do not suggest that teachers are responsible for overtly promoting heteronormative expectations for gender expression for boys; the one exception being physical education classes. However, as previously noted, the data do suggest that teachers are not necessarily doing enough to overtly support or promote fluid expressions of gender for boys in high school, and may not be intervening as often as they should or could when gender nonconforming boys are facing oppression and/or when normative assumptions need to be challenged. The experiences of the participants in this study suggest a level of ambivalence and abdication of responsibility in teacher behavior.

The need for consistency when enforcing policy. As a high school vice-principal, and as a classroom teacher, I have been frustrated by what I perceive to be inconsistent approaches by teachers to the enforcement of policy related to the harassment of students based on gender or sexual identity. At times, I have witnessed abrogation of responsibility by teachers, while on other occasions I have been confronted with a lack of understanding and appreciation on the part of teachers for the struggle of young people who do not conform to expectations for gender expression. Thankfully, I have also encountered many caring and knowledgeable professionals who go beyond the call of duty to advocate for the rights of youth who face challenges in this

area. My experiences are consistent with the experiences of the participants in this study; there is an inconsistent approach to the enforcement of policy in this area by teachers.

Meyer (2008) found that there were both external and internal influences that shaped a teacher's perceptions and behaviours in school related to gendered harassment. Meyer's study found that although for the most part teachers want to intervene and assist students who are being harassed or othered due to nonconforming gender expression, there are several variables at play that often stand in the way of them doing so: administrative structures and responses, provincial curriculum demands and teacher workloads, teacher education and training, written policies, perceptions of administration, interpersonal relationships, and community values. The findings of this study as well as my own personal experiences in dealing with teachers in this area seem to imply that some such barriers must be at work.

Modeling the desired behaviors. A persuasive theme that resonated from this study was the idea that having teachers who openly transgressed normed expectations for gender expression as men would have a profound impact on creating a more gender-inclusive environment in schools. Throughout my professional career, I have resisted rigid expectations for how I would express my masculinity whenever it felt like expectations did not resonate with my comfortable expression of gender. I believe that my efforts to do so have in some way encouraged both my students and my teaching colleagues to express their true gender, even if it does not conform to social norms. I also believe that my ability to confront and resist expected norms for masculine expression of gender was largely the result of my privileged positioning as a white, heterosexual man. I was able to model a more transgressing expression of masculinity without the presupposition that I was homosexual.

Macgillivray's (2008) study found that the existence of an openly gay teacher in a school had a powerful impact on normalizing attitudes towards diverse sexual orientations in schools. He found that this normalizing process created a more inclusive school environment for students who did not identify as heterosexual. All of the participants in this study agreed that the presence of a male teacher that openly transgressed normed expectations for masculinity could have a very positive influence on creating a more gender-inclusive environment for students.

The Role of the Student

The findings of this study suggest that any attempts to develop a critical path for improving conditions for gender nonconforming students in high schools should have direct input from students. I concur with the suggestion that any substantive attempt at invoking a change to school culture and student beliefs and attitudes must gather input and data from the students themselves. One theme that arose from this study was the idea that students, particularly boys, with social capital could play a very prominent role in changing prevailing attitudes. Again, it is notable that the participants in the study made little mention of the social capital of girls and the potential influence that they may have had on influencing student attitudes related to expectations for gender expression for boys. The data suggest that the boys in this study privileged the influence of boys over the influence of girls when it came to accepted expressions of gender performance.

Making use of social capital. Congruent with Kehler's (2007) study, the data from this study indicates that boys with social capital could have a dramatic impact on challenging existing expectations for masculine behavior in high schools. Social capital refers to the notion that certain boys have gained a privileged social standing in their schools whether that be because of

sports, physical appearance, etcetera. Kehler found that these boys could challenge hegemonic expectations for masculine behavior with less risk than boys who did not possess this social capital. Kehler did caution however, that the boys in her study did not do so with complete immunity from potential othering by their male peers.

Of the four participants in this study, three suggested that in their high school experience, if a boy who possessed this social capital would have challenged normed expectations for gender expression, it could have potentially made the participants' high school experience easier and more enjoyable. Unfortunately, not one of the participants could recall a single incident of a boy with this type of social standing challenging accepted norms and championing the cause for gender nonconforming boys. Unfortunately, my personal experiences are very similar to those of the participants. The boys that I have witnessed challenge existing heteronormative expectations for gender expression are not the boys who find themselves in the peer group defined by hegemonic masculinity.

Of course, there is inherent risk in looking to boys with social capital to ameliorate conditions for gender nonconforming boys. As illustrated in this and many other studies, boys receive social capital in high school due to their capacity to meet or even exceed heteronormative expectations around expression of gender. It would seem paradoxical to look to boys in positions of power and privilege due to their hegemonic masculinity to emancipate gender nonconforming boys from the rigid expectations for gender expression that they face in schools; it may serve to mask the important counter-hegemonic work being done by gender nonconforming boys who resist heteronormative expectations for gender expression.

Implications for Further Research and Future Policy and Practice**Further Research**

I believe that a research study very similar to mine, conducted as a longitudinal study with a larger sample size may produce research that would allow for greater generalizations to be drawn from its findings. In terms of a theoretical approach to a similar study, I believe that the phenomenological underpinning of this study with me positioned as a critical theorist, allowed for a retelling of the experiences of the participants that was authentic and rich. This study used interviews as the single source of data collection. I would encourage future research in this area to include other forms of data collection such as direct observation of the participants in their high schools, perhaps survey research of larger populations, and population outside of an urban or public education environment. The findings of this study do suggest that high school continues to be difficult for gender nonconforming boys and that further research in this area is important.

The intersection of physical disability and nonconforming gender expression.

Carson's high school experience differed from the other four participants in this study; further research may provide some further insight into the reasons. Carson openly expressed that he felt no pressure to conform to any expectations for how he would express his gender in high school. He stated that he was never treated poorly as a result of his gender expression. However, he also noted that he was pretty much isolated from his peers in school and the activities that he did choose to be a part of were populated mainly by girls. Carson believed that his high school was an inclusive environment and that was why he was never treated unfairly by

his peers due to gender expression. I believe further research that studies the intersection of gender expression and physical disability to disentangle effects on gender expression when it is combined with other identity categories that are themselves highly normative. As mentioned previously, Carson has physical challenges related to cerebral palsy and he is also an Aboriginal man. Further research with participants who represent a variety of identity intersections may provide more nuanced understandings of experiences like that of Carson.

Nonconforming gender expression and heterosexual boys. A study that includes participants who identify as heterosexual and do not conform to expectations for heteronormative expression of gender would be of interest in this area of research. Similar to Kehler (2007), this type of study may isolate gender expression as the variable responsible for the othering of participants. As noted in the limitations of my study, three of the participants did identify as gay, and thus, their othering in high school could have been related to their sexual orientation as much as, or more, than their expression of gender. Although none of the boys were open about their sexual orientation in high school, the findings of this study reflect the heightened presumption and denigration of homosexuality when boys express their gender in less hypermasculinized ways. Conducting a similar study with participants who were openly heterosexual in high school would alleviate that area of overlap.

A deeper look at resiliency factors such as family support. One of the themes that evolved from this study was the fact that gender nonconforming boys drew upon the support of family when dealing with their othering in high school. This study found that family support was the greatest individual variable that assisted these men with high school. Further research into how it is that these families supported these boys would be very important to assist families

who find themselves in similar situations with their boys. This study did not get into significant depth interrogating other resiliency factors and I believe a study that did so would produce findings that may be very helpful for schools.

Gender expression and the assumption of homosexuality. The findings of this study illustrate that when a boy transgresses expectations for how he will express masculinity, there may be assumptions that he is gay. This supposition of homosexuality due to nonconforming gender expression suggests a sexualisation due to gender expression. Why do people assume that how someone expresses their gender suggests something about their sexual orientation? I believe that further research interrogating that question specifically, would produce some interesting results and provide some insight into the type of teaching that needs to take place in high schools around gender expression. It is also noteworthy that there continues to be a denigration of homosexuality in high schools and perception that it is situated as ‘less than’ or subordinate to heterosexuality.

Future Policy and Practice

In terms of future policy and practice in school systems, a number of recommendations might be considered based on these men’s recommendations and experience related to washroom and change rooms, curricular and extra-curricular programming, teacher awareness and accountability, analysis of systemic staffing practices and teacher modelling, and the development of comprehensive approaches to combatting heteronormativity.

Gender neutral washrooms and change rooms. The experiences of the participants in this study suggest that school districts and/or individual schools need to immediately examine

their infrastructure related to washrooms and change rooms for students. The men in my study avoided the washrooms/change rooms at all costs when they were in high school due to the discomfort that it produced for them as gender nonconforming boys. Schools need to provide gender-neutral or single-use washrooms/change rooms for students. I believe that this was one of the most urgent findings of this study and it compels the Department of Education to give serious consideration to creating legislation that mandates gender-neutral or single-use washrooms and change rooms in all schools. Although there would be significant cost involved with retrofitting existing facilities to include said washrooms/change rooms, the emotional cost that binary boys/girls washrooms/change rooms is having on young people can no longer be ignored.

Examination of physical education and extra-curricular programming. School districts need to examine their practices related to extra-curricular and physical education programming. The experiences of the men in this study illustrate that the demands for physical prowess and athleticism in extra-curricular activities and physical education programs can make experiences very difficult for boys who do not measure up to expectations. The men did not put forth an abundance of specific ideas for what the changes should look like; however the overwhelming connection of expectations between sports and masculinity were a central theme in this study. School districts need to gather student input in these areas and start to look at how these areas of programming can be more inclusive to all students, regardless of their gender expression.

Teacher awareness and accountability. Participants made frequent mention of teacher behavior that was supportive or at least non-judgmental of boys who transgressed gender

expression. However, the data also clearly illustrated that there are many domains in high school where the teachers either overtly through their actions, or inadvertently through their inactions, continue to perpetuate or even promote heteronormative expectations for how boys will perform masculinity. The data suggest that although teachers as a professional body and high schools as a collective organization have made progress in advancing a more fluid environment for gender nonconforming youth, there continues to be vast room for improvement. Teachers must no longer be allowed to say that they are supporting gender nonconforming youth simply because they intervene when gendered harassment takes place. There needs to be a conscious effort to increase the awareness and professional learning of teachers when it comes to potential processes and practices that combat the continued perpetuation and promotion of heteronormative expectations in schools. Furthermore, if teachers consciously choose to ignore their moral and professional responsibility to advocate for a more fluid environment in high schools in support of gender nonconforming youth, they should be held accountable in the same manner as they would if they refused to support a more fluid and welcoming environment related to any other diverse identity such as race or ability.

Analysis of systemic staffing practices and teacher modelling. The findings of this study suggest that school systems need to take a closer look at how they staff their high school programs as well as how the teachers within these programs model gender expression. This study puts forth a strong argument for the importance and influence of men teaching in domains that are traditionally staffed by women, and women teaching in domains that are traditionally staffed by men. The data strongly suggest that this sort of resistance to longstanding expectations for heteronormative gender expression for the adults who work in high schools could have a profound influence on creating more fluid environments for gender expression for

students. This study suggests that teachers have a significant impact on student attitudes and beliefs. By placing men in teaching domains that have traditionally been taught by women, and vice versa, high schools can begin to breakdown heteronormative expectations for student course selection and normalize a more fluid expression of gender for boys.

The study also suggests that having teachers who are openly LGBTQ or who simply transgress expectations for gender expression, may assist the process of creating more fluid environments for gender nonconforming youth. The Department of Education and individual school divisions need to consider what processes, practices, and policies may allow teachers to be more open with their sexual orientation and/or gender identity if they choose to be. The participants felt strongly that teachers openly modelling a transgressing form of gender identity or sexual orientation would serve to normalize a more fluid environment in high schools. The persuasive nature of this finding around the importance of teacher modelling suggests that consideration should be given to creation of legislation that removes whatever barriers continue to stand in the way of teachers openly expressing their authentic gender and/or sexual orientation in schools. Can we really expect children/youth to feel comfortable transgressing norms for gender expression and sexual orientation when the role models that teach them still feel the need to stay in the closet?

Comprehensive approach to combat heteronormativity. The findings in this study are consistent with the reviewed literature in that they suggest that a comprehensive approach to dealing with heteronormative expectations in high schools is what is required. This study suggests that students should have input into what that multi-faceted approach looks like. School districts need to engage their student populations in a discourse about how they may best

approach the creation of more gender-inclusive environments in their high schools. No single approach to combatting heteronormative attitudes and beliefs seems to work in isolation. A critical path needs to be established with the input of students if any meaningful and sustainable change is going to take place in our high schools around the heteronormative environments that exist. This critical path needs to include several elements such as: policy, staffing, staff education, and student education and student voice.

Education systems at the provincial, divisional/district, and school levels need to take a close look at their existing policies and practices as they relate to the creation of inclusive environments for students and staff of diverse gender identities. Systemic policy that explicitly protects students and staff from harassment based on diverse gender identities needs to be implemented. Moreover, there needs to be a systemic audit of curricular and extra-curricular programming using the lens of diverse gender identities of all practices and conventions at the high school level that may perpetuate heteronormative expectations for gender expression and disenfranchise students who transgress gender norms. This audit needs to be undertaken with the assistance of students who experience the environment of schools on a daily basis and who may have unique insights and perceptions to offer.

The data in this study suggest that there has been progress in advancing more gender-inclusive attitudes, beliefs, and environments in our high schools. However, the data also suggest that there is inconsistent enforcement when it comes to protection of gender transgressing students and it also illustrated that perpetuation and even promotion of heteronormative expectations for gender expression continues in our high schools. The findings of this study suggest that the Department of Education should consider mandating, via

legislation, education related to diverse gender identities for all staff who are employed within the education system. All school staff must be educated about diverse gender identities and what can and should be done to promote a more gender-inclusive and welcoming environment in our high schools. This education should take place in formal training before teachers, educational assistants, and all other school staff ranging from custodians to clerical commences employment in schools. The Department of Education and school divisions/districts then need to mandate continued focussed professional learning as necessary to ensure that all schools and employees have the understanding necessary to promote more inclusive environments for diverse gender identities.

The data in this study as well as the reviewed literature, illustrate that teacher modelling is a potentially powerful variable in perpetuating or challenging heteronormative expectations in high schools. School division/districts and individual high schools must give serious consideration to the idea of strategic hiring for positions based on sex category. Assuming candidates for teaching positions have the requisite training and skills, those that are responsible for hiring teachers must consider the need to have men teaching in positions that were traditionally populated by women and vice versa. The data suggest that this would go a long way to normalizing diverse expressions of gender in high schools. Similarly, school division/districts need to create environments that allow for employees who transgress heteronormative expectations for gender identity and sexual orientation, to do so in an open and public manner if they choose to do so. The data and literature suggest that this open expression of transgressing gender identity and sexual orientation by teachers would be a powerful component of creating gender-inclusive environments in high schools.

Student voice and student education needs to be at the forefront of any comprehensive approach to combatting heteronormativity in high schools. As previously stated, the students who experience the daily environment of our high schools are the best stakeholders to both audit and provide suggestions for change in our high schools. Involvement in the process of changing the environment of our high schools will provide students with a sense of responsibility and ownership for any initiatives that are undertaken. Although this study focussed on the experiences of high schools students, the data and literature suggest that the education of students related to gender identity must take place long before they are high school age. In order for gender-inclusivity to be normalized and even celebrated in our high schools, students must be exposed to focussed education in this domain in their formative elementary years of education. The Department of Education should examine opportunities for the explicit infusion of content related to gender expression and sexual orientation into existing curricula. So long as the teaching and learning of content related to gender expression and sexual orientation remains in the domain of special events, clubs, and other extra-curricular initiatives, it will never be normalized in the attitudes and beliefs of the students. Othering due to gender expression and sexual orientation will continue to exist until it is taught to young people through the formal curriculum in safe and appropriate ways. If normalization of diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations is the ultimate goal, then it must be mandated in the curricula that we teach to our elementary school students. Students then need to be provided with continued opportunities to promote gender-inclusive environments through entities such as Gay-Straight Alliances and other student advocacy groups. These initiatives should be grassroots and initiated by the students and/or staff when they feel that the school environment is conducive for the open support and promotion of such initiatives. My experience suggests that mandating such

advocacy groups in all high schools may potentially do more harm than good. Entities such as GSAs must be established in a purposeful and thoughtful way. Such advocacy groups must have clear mandates and administrative support and need to be established once this support and direction is firmly in place. Attempting to mandate said groups in a non-supportive environment or in a haphazard manner may lead to ineffective advancement of the mandate of supporting young people who continue to be othered in high schools due to their nonconforming expressions of gender or sexual orientation; a risk that should not be taken.

This study and reviewed literature illustrate that combatting heteronormative environments should not be approached via isolated policies, programs, and initiatives. There must be a comprehensive approach that considers policy, practice, and programming in order for there to be any fundamental change of heteronormative environments in high schools.

Limitations of this Study

This qualitative study of the lived-experiences of gender nonconforming boys was never intended to be a study that could be generalized to all gender nonconforming boys in high school. The study includes a few factors that may limit the degree to which the findings should be conceived as conclusive and relational to other studies.

Qualitative researchers continue to grapple with the influence that the researcher's opinion, biases, and prejudices may have on their analyses and interpretation of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that, "Qualitative researchers, whether in the tradition of sociology or anthropology, have wrestled over the years with charges that it is too easy for the prejudices and attitudes of the researcher to bias the data" (p. 37). My own

experiences as both a classroom teacher and a school administrator over the past 17 years have certainly had an influence on my personal perceptions of the existence and influence of heteronormative environments in schools. On numerous occasions as both a teacher and a high school vice-principal, I have witnessed what I perceive to be the hegemonic presence of heteronormative expectations for gendered behaviour in schools. On a personal level, I have attempted throughout my career to resist normed expectations of how I should express gender as both a classroom teacher and a school leader. Similarly, I have always encouraged school activities and behaviors for students that resist the limiting binary definitions of masculinity and femininity that are thrust upon them. My own desire to create systemic change in schools which results in a queering of gender roles cannot be overlooked as a potential limitation of this study in terms of bias, and yet, such a bias, in my view, is one that grounds inclusive normative thinking and practice at its core to foster a better environment for all who work within or experience “schooling”. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest:

Qualitative researchers may often feel defensive when talking with peers or colleagues accustomed to the quantitative mode because subjectivity is considered a problem. When talking with feminists or critical theorists, however, subjectivity is considered a part of all research and moreover, is an important aspect of the work. (p. 38)

Lather (1988) and Roman and Apple (1990) affirm, “Some qualitative researchers (including some feminist and action researchers) who study people who have been marginalized also hope to empower their research informants” (cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 43). Therefore, the credibility of this research is not necessarily limited by, but rather is affirmed by my positioning as a critical theorist conducting this study of gender nonconforming boys/men and advocating for

social change. I believe that I was able to create a comfort level with my participants as a result of my bias and that this allowed the participants to speak freely and comfortably about their experiences.

This is my first attempt at formal academic research and thus, I did not have any experience conducting interviews for the express purpose of a graduate level dissertation. Although I had studied interview methods in two graduate-level research courses, my only previous experience with conducting an interview for the purpose of a qualitative research study was through simulated interviews with my fellow graduate students. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that, “Qualitative researchers try to interact with their subjects in a natural, unobtrusive, and nonthreatening manner” (p. 39). They go further in their discussion of the researcher and the interview process in qualitative research by suggesting that:

Similarly, since interviews in this type of research are interested in how people think about their lives, their experiences, and particular situations, they model their interviews after a conversation between two trusting parties rather than on a formal question-and-answer session between a researcher and respondent. (p. 39)

My formal training in Level 1 and 2 Cognitive Coaching provided me with a foundation and skill set to meet the outcomes for the interview process to which Bogdan and Biklen refer. Similarly, my six years of experience as a high school vice-principal have provided me with numerous opportunities to hone my interview skills with both adults and youth.

Another potential limitation of this study is the small sample size that was interviewed. Due to the desire to have an accurate and comprehensive account of the participants’ perceptions

of their own lived experiences in high school, only four participants were chosen to participate in this study. The use of in-depth interviews with each participant added to the richness of the data that were collected and analyzed.

Participants for this study were recruited on a voluntary basis. This may have excluded access to participants whose lived experiences as gender nonconforming boys was so traumatic that they chose not to participate in the study and recount their experiences. Conversely, prospective participants whose high school experience as gender nonconforming boys was overwhelmingly positive may have felt as though their lived experiences would have provided little insight and therefore may have chosen not to volunteer. It is also their own perception of being a gender nonconforming boy/man which determined their inclusion in the study, as participants were not drawn specifically from an identifiable gender and/or sexual orientation.

Another potential limitation of this study is that the sole means of data collection was the interviews conducted with participants. Due to the fact that these interviews were conducted after the participants had completed their lived experiences as high school students, observation as a means of data collection was not possible. It may also be that over time, the memories and experiences of participants “softened” or perhaps even “hardened” with time and thought, and therefore, it must be acknowledged that these self-reports of prior experiences may not completely portray all the details experienced during the time participants were in school. However, on another level, these participants all had the time to critically reflect on their experiences with time, age, maturity and in conjunction with other adult experiences, and therefore may have been able to frame and articulate their experiences in ways which they may not have been able to frame them when they were students living within those experiences.

Lastly, a potential limitation that should be considered is that I made a conscious choice to not include sexual orientation as a criterion for this study. I did so, because I wanted the study to focus on treatment due to gender expression as opposed to homophobic attitudes due to sexual orientation. I tried to, as much as possible, disentangle the assumption of homosexuality due to nonconforming gender expression. My rationale was that I did not want to validate what I believe to be stereotypes around gender expression; specifically the notion that not conforming to normed expectations for hegemonic masculinity leads to the assumption of homosexuality for boys/men. Having said that, three of the four participants in the study voluntarily shared that they were gay. However, all three of them said that they were not “out” in high school, so if people suspected that they were gay, it was an assumption. I believe that the boys in this study were treated the way that they were due to their expression of gender. However, they may well have been assumed to be gay by their peers and it is entirely possible that this may have in turn led to othering due to homophobic attitudes. In retrospect, the question mark around this point at issue may have been alleviated if I had asked the participants to identify their sexual orientation and then further interrogated their perceptions of whether the treatment they faced was as a result of their gender expression or the assumption of homosexuality. Clearly, more research needs to be done which interrogates the connection between gender nonconformity and assumptions of homosexuality: Are boys/men othered simply due to their nonconforming gender expression or are they othered because their nonconforming gender expression leads to assumptions that they are gay?

Summary

The findings in this study suggest that high schools in Winnipeg and the surrounding area continue to be environments that manifest heteronormative expectations for how boys will, or are expected, to express their gender. Although there continue to be systemic and organizational structures in place that perpetuate these expectations (physical education and extra-curricular programming), for the most part, the most powerful expectations seem to be perpetuated by the prevailing attitudes of male student peers. This study suggests that the teaching profession has made progress in its approach to dealing with and supporting gender nonconforming youth, but by no means does it suggest that the work is done. This study also suggests that attempts by schools at either a systemic or individual school level to teach about the issues brought forth in this study, at times continue to conflict with the teachings and beliefs that students may receive in their homes.

Although this research put forth ideas for future practice, I believe that much more detailed research that interrogates more deeply into some of these ideas is necessary. There is clearly much work to be done to support gender nonconforming boys despite the optimism of both the participants in this study and me as the researcher that progress is being made and school environments may be improving for gender nonconforming boys.

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**Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Participants in Gender Nonconforming boys in
High School Study**

The interview process was framed by a semi-structured interview protocol. The primary research question framing this study is, “What is the school experience like for boys who do not conform to socially constructed norms for gender expression in the heteronormative environments of high schools?” Although much of the interview was emergent and open-ended in design dependent upon the responses of the participants, the following four questions and the probing questions that are listed below each question provided a frame for the interview questioning:

- 1) To what extent did the boys perceive that heteronormative expectations existed in Manitoba high schools while they were students?

Reflecting on your high school experience, can you please discuss your perceptions of gender expectations for boys in relation to academics, relationships with peers and adults, and extra-curricular activities?

- 2) How did the boys' expression of gender reflect or resist heteronormative expectations?

Reflecting on your high school experience, can you please discuss your perceptions of your experiences as a boy who did or did not conform to gender expectations in high school? Please discuss those experiences in relation to academics, relationships with peers and adults, and extra-curricular activities.

- 3) What were the lived-experiences of participants as gender nonconforming boys in Manitoba high schools?

Reflecting on your high school experience, can you please discuss your perceptions of your experiences as a boy who did not conform to gender expectations in high school? Please discuss those experiences in relation to academics, relationships with peers and adults, and extra-curricular activities.

- 4) What can be done in schools at the individual or systemic levels to foster a gender-inclusive environment for all students?

Reflecting on your high school experiences, can you please discuss your thoughts/recommendations on what can/should be done in schools to create gender-inclusive environments for all students? Please discuss your thoughts/recommendations in relation to academics, relationships with peers and adults, and extra-curricular activities.

Appendix B: ENREB Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

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APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

March 30, 2012

TO: **Troy R. Reinhardt** (Advisor D. Wallin)
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Stan Straw, Chair** 
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2012:023**
"The Lived Experiences of Gender Nonconforming Boys in High School"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). **This approval is valid for one year only.**

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to the Office of Research Services, fax 261-0325 - please include the name of the funding agency and your UM Project number. This must be faxed before your account can be accessed.
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.