Changing spaces, changing faces:
The shifting behaviour, performativity and identification of
gay and lesbian individuals between different social spaces

by

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Abstract

This study seeks to uncover how different spaces influence the behaviour of gay and lesbian individuals. Due to the heteronormative structure which exists in many social spaces, it is important to consider how these individuals use different methods of managing their behaviour and how they consequently express or conceal their sexuality in order to fit in to this framework. By interviewing eleven participants (three females, eight males) aged between eighteen and twenty-five, the findings of this study demonstrate the varied nature of individual experiences. The results showed that behaviour management was influenced by different school environments, neighbourhoods and social venues, with many having been influenced by previous instances of homophobic assault. It was discovered that factors such as clothing, speech and bodily mannerisms were all affected by different spaces. This study contributes to an existing body of geographical literature on sexualities by depicting individual gay and lesbian narratives which take place in heteronormative environments.
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**Introduction**

‘I guess you want to be proud of who you are, what you stand for…but there’s always a part of society that won’t accept it. And it’s hard to sometimes be in a certain place or space and for you to be who you are but you also have to think “Oh, should I say what I feel or do I have to change it to make them feel better?” You make sure it doesn’t affect them when you should look at yourself before you have to worry about how it affects somebody else.’

- Brendan, 22

**How do different spaces influence the performativity of gay and lesbian individuals?**

This study will explore the ways in which gay and lesbian individuals perform their identity in different social spaces. I will argue that heteronormative institutions are pervasive and have a significant impact on queer individuals’ experiences of space. Focusing on the following spatial locations: neighbourhood, schools, spaces of socialisation and sites of assault, this research examines the way in which queer individuals encounter, negotiate and are shaped by space. This research will also examine the ways in which LGBT persons act as agents, modifying their behaviour in different situations. Subsequently, this research will also highlight how behaviour changes between different places and why.

This research draws on key theories from existing bodies of sociological and cultural theory on performativity, space and sexuality. Past research by theorists such as Goffman and Butler has been foundational in establishing ways in which individuals perform their identity. Goffman’s analysis of the ways in which each individual performs different aspects of a character for particular circumstances was instrumental in the development
and understanding of my research (1959: 208). Similarly, Butler’s assertion that identity is constructed through a series of repeated performed acts informed my own study on how gay and lesbian individuals construct and perform their identity in different places (1993b: 311). Theories on the significance of space have also been a fundamental part of my research. Previous studies of space have largely been divided into two main approaches. Many theorists have chosen to focus on the importance of queer neighbourhoods to the queer community and how individuals negotiate these spaces (Myslik, 1996, Brown and Maycock, 2005, Berlant and Warner, 1998), such as Sydney’s Darlinghurst (McInnes, 2001). Others have explored the difficulties of living in a rural environment (Lindhorst, 1997, Oswald and Culton, 2003, Friedman, 1997). As these neighbourhoods can be very traditional and family-oriented, theorists have discovered that gay and lesbian individuals feel there is a lack of support from the community and find these areas to be heterosexist and unwelcoming. Most importantly, this study has been informed by previous scholars who have investigated the way in which space has been constructed as a heterocentric institution thereby excluding homosexual members of the community (Valentine, 1996, Temple, 2005). This research therefore draws on all of these key theories to demonstrate how gay and lesbian individuals negotiate different spaces and how these spaces influence the way they perform their identity.

To conduct my research on changing behaviours and shifting performativity I used qualitative methods. In order to elicit a significant level of depth and detail on a very complex issue I conducted a series of hour-long interviews with eleven participants. I interviewed eight men and three women aged between 18 and 25 who were recruited by
purposive sampling and a passive snowballing technique. This process of recruitment was important as it allowed participants to take part in the research voluntarily and without coercion. Furthermore, this method of research is appropriate for researching the complex social realities of a marginalised group (Mack et al, 2005: 1). For this study, qualitative methods were most advantageous in exploring individual narratives as they allowed for the emergence of varied and multiplicitous data which reflected diverse human experiences.

While this study explored the individual experiences of each participant there were some significant overall key findings. Findings demonstrated that despite growing up in highly diverse areas around Australia, such as rural New South Wales, Sydney’s western suburbs and the inner city, many participants had similar experiences. In fact most interviewees felt that their home neighbourhood was highly heterocentric and subsequently affected the development and expression of their sexuality. Research also showed that many participants found that their primary school environment encouraged the enactment of appropriate gender behaviour and that they were subsequently vilified for deviating from these strictures. Additionally, most interviewees went on to experience a distinctly unwelcoming high school environment. The findings showed that homophobia and stigmatisation of alternate sexualities were rife in many high schools and often resulted in individuals managing and censoring their behaviour. When talking about their current neighbourhood and chosen leisure spaces, several participants revealed an aversion to queer-identified communities and venues. This demonstrated a distinct tension between many gay and lesbian individuals and queer venues which they
perceived as exclusive and homogenous. Finally, research showed that almost every interviewee had experienced homophobia at least once in their lives, ranging from instances of verbal abuse to serious physical attacks. Tellingly, many of these experiences took place in Sydney’s metropolitan inner city, which many participants had perceived as safe spaces. Instances of homophobic attacks subsequently influenced the performativity of many individuals as they became scared for their safety and monitored their behaviour to avoid further instances of assault. Therefore despite clearly multiplicitous experiences it is evident that many participants have been affected by living in a heterocentric society.

This research problem is important as it creates a unique understanding of individual experiences of performativity, space and sexuality. By exploring the intersection of these three important bodies of literature, this study demonstrates the unique ways in which gay and lesbian individuals negotiate these issues in everyday life. As this study focuses on participants currently living in Sydney, it also shows how gay and lesbian individuals manage their identity in a city with varied and multiplicitous social spaces. Additionally, this research is significant as it demonstrates the diversity of the queer population through their experiences of negotiating performativity, space and sexuality. Furthermore, qualitative research of LGBT participants allows for members of that community to speak of their own unique and multiplicitous struggles as they negotiate space. This is particularly significant for members of the queer community who must inhabit a heterosexist society that by its very nature excludes them. This research therefore contributes to existing bodies of literature as it demonstrates the various ways gay and
lesbian individuals manage their behaviour and identity due to the spatial restrictions they face on the basis of their sexuality.

This dissertation will include the key theories that informed this study, a detailed methodology and significant findings of this research. First, I will review the relevant literature and foundational theories of performativity, space and sexuality, as established by key theorists such as Goffman, Butler and Valentine. Then I will describe the methods and methodology that I used to investigate my research question and justify why these methods have been appropriate for this study. Following this will be four separate results chapters detailing the important findings of this research. Each chapter will explore significant social spaces encountered by the interviewees and how they perform their identity in these different spaces. The first of these chapters will uncover how participants perceived the neighbourhood where they grew up and their experiences of primary school. The next chapter will explore high school experiences, specifically, the ways in which individuals managed their identity and negotiated their sexuality in this environment. Following this will be a description of neighbourhoods where participants currently live, why they have chosen to live there and how they behave whilst in this area. A chapter on leisure spaces will demonstrate where interviewees feel most comfortable socialising and how this influences the way they express themselves. The final results chapter explores different sites where participants have experienced homophobia and the residual effects of assault. To conclude, I will identify the importance of future research on the intersection between performativity, space and sexuality.
Chapter 1: Theoretical Overview

This research draws on existing bodies of sociological and cultural theory on performativity, space and sexuality. While each of these three has been considered in much depth, the intersection of the three is still ripe for exploration. This overview will examine the current state of the literature in each of these three fields and conclude with my own exploration of performativity of gay and lesbian individuals in a variety of different spaces in both queer and non-queer identified communities. Drawing on existing literature, this study will demonstrate ways in which gay and lesbian individuals currently living in Sydney negotiate performativity and space.

1.1 The Performance of Identity and Sexuality

This section explores the ways in which individuals perform their identities, and in particular, the way gay and lesbian individuals construct identities in heteronormative societies. Current understandings of performativity focus on the ways in which individuals perform their identities in society in order to fit in with the majority or present certain aspects of themselves. To maintain a believable front and create a successful identity, individuals monitor their behaviour and censor themselves according to different situations. The roles of performance and sexuality are therefore inextricably linked when creating an identity, which may indeed be situational or established through repeated, ritualised acts over time. This section will also explore foundational theories of individual performativity in a heterocentric society. This will therefore establish how heterosexual norms influence the construction of gay and lesbian identities and what the subsequent reaction is to visible alternate sexualities. Drawing on all of these theories, this section
will demonstrate how gay and lesbian identities are performed and how sexuality is expressed within an overwhelmingly heterocentric framework.

Erving Goffman was one of the first theorists to establish notions of individual performance in everyday life. In his study, ‘The Arts of Impression Management’ Goffman introduces the concept of performativity, stating that individuals or ‘characters’ utilise specific attributes to perform or stage a character that they would like to present themselves as (1959: 208). Techniques utilized by ‘performers’ include the withholding of information (Goffman, 1959: 209), bodily mannerisms and gestures (1959: 210), facial expressions (1959: 217) and lying (1959: 234). Throughout his study Goffman refers to specific rules to maintain proper etiquette as well as to save face – or put on a successful ‘performance’ (Goffman, 1959: 210). Examples of appropriate etiquette that prevent the occurrence of indiscretions involve knowing company well before speaking about personal matters and avoiding references to negatively-valued characteristics (Goffman, 1959: 209-210). The main motivation in adhering to these rules is to avoid a scene that would cause a performer to jeopardise the image of self they are trying to project during a performance (Goffman, 1959: 209, 231). Goffman established the concept that an individual is like a performer when conducting their everyday lives, and that each performer is complicit in the staging and success of each interrelated act. Therefore actors must, and mostly do, follow the previously specified rules of etiquette in order to avoid uncomfortable incidents which will affect all involved.
Goffman also highlights the importance of checking, re-checking and self-monitoring during a performance so that performers can navigate any unexpected turns that may occur. He states that individuals must be observant and sensitive to hints in case they need to modify their performance (Goffman, 1959: 234). If a performer is not disciplined they may commit unmeant gestures or faux pas and spoil the believability of the image they are trying to portray. Furthermore, an actor could unwittingly reveal information to the audience that he or she had no intention or desire to divulge, adding vulnerability to the act as well as disrupting it (Goffman, 1959: 218). While all individuals partake in the creation of facades on a daily basis, Goffman’s study highlights the nuanced complexities of these interactions by depicting them as exaggerated theatrics. Due to his study it has also become clear that people manage their identity based on diverse situations and circumstances. Some of the most effective methods he uses to illustrate his arguments are excerpts of interviews with various individuals. For example one interviewee, simply referred to as an ‘American college girl’ states that she sometimes likes to ‘play dumb’ and pretends to be someone she is not in order to trick or manipulate a seemingly unsuspecting male (Goffman, 1959: 236). Despite this, she often wishes she could simply be her ‘natural’ self without feeling as if she, as well as her date, were not involved in a constant performance (Goffman, 1959: 237). Throughout his research Goffman demonstrates the complex interrelatedness and interdependence of each individual in conducting their daily lives in society.

Unlike Goffman, Judith Butler has developed critical theories of performativity as a series of repetitive acts which shape individual identity and sexuality. Butler asserts that
the enactment of gender and identity is not, as argued by Goffman, reliant on daily individual interactions in separate circumstance (Goffman, 1959), but established over time through repeated and therefore ritualised, performances (Butler, 1993a, 1993b, 2000). In later works she developed this theory further by highlighting the authoritative power given to these acts as established through the repetition or citation of a prior set of practices (Butler, 2000: 157). Butler also explores the concept of performativity as reinforcing established regulatory norms of sex and gender (1993a: 2). Individuals therefore begin to embody this regulatory regime and form their identity and sexuality within these rigid confines. As she investigates in her study ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination’, the constant repetition of predetermined behaviour congeals into a person’s sense of self (Butler, 1993b: 311). Consequently, individuals become so acclimatised to performing their identity that they do so unconsciously and are unaware that they are doing so. For example, a same-sex couple may feel that they as individuals do not like to be affectionate in public. Instinctively, they may be acting according to heterosexual norms to avoid possible ostracism, punishment, and violence (Butler, 1993b: 315). Throughout her work on repetitive performativity Butler demonstrates that all gender is performative, and contributes to the creation of identity within a heterocentric society. Butler’s definitive theories of performativity have become extremely influential to sociological conceptions of identity. Her work is integral in understanding how identity and sexuality is shaped, how it is performed, and how it contributes to maintaining the regulatory regime of heterosexism.
Visible sexuality

Since Butler’s work on identity, performativity and sexuality, many other scholars have further explored the relationship between these concepts and highlighted the link between visible performed sexuality and instances of homophobia. Gail Mason acknowledges the relationship between visible homosexuality and the increased likelihood of violence in her study of homophobia, violence and safety (2002: 80). Linking back to Butler’s theory of people self-censoring their own behaviour to fit into the heterosexual norm, Mason discovers that subjects assume responsibility for curtailing their actions. She states that homosexual individuals regulate their behaviour so as to conform to societal expectations of them as being in a sexual subject position and avoid possible ‘disparagement, discrimination and hostility’ (Mason, 2002: 80). Therefore many individuals not only choose to censor their behaviour in order not to appear overtly homosexual but may also conceal their sexuality altogether as they negotiate heterocentric social spaces. This notion is supported by Gargi Bhattacharyya who asserts that homosexuality is not only policed as a matter of activity but also location (2002: 154). Bhattacharyya states that the heterosexual majority in society tolerates homosexuality as a strictly private affair in order to protect itself from the depraved sexual behaviour of the other (2002: 154). Consequently, in order to be accepted and fit in with the heterosexual majority many gay and lesbian individuals may feel the need to censor their behaviour. By relegating the expression of their sexuality to private or safe spaces, as opposed to overtly displaying an alternate sexual identity in a public heterosexist space, queer individuals demonstrate the necessity of negotiating and managing their behaviour in different social spaces to avoid homophobia or assault.
The construction of a sexual identity

Moya Lloyd utilises Butler’s assertion that repetition is fundamental to daily performativity in her own study of imitative performances. She builds on Butler’s original argument by demonstrating that gender binaries are a formative part of creating normalised identities (Lloyd, 1998: 124-5). Lloyd asserts that the mutually exclusive binaries of gender generate an account of identity at the most basic level in a heterocentric society built on heterosexual subjectivity (1998: 126). Bhattacharyya further states that social identities, by their very performative nature, are mutable and malleable according to different situations and spaces (2002: 82). R.W. Connell offers a broader perspective on the construction of identities. She investigates how globalisation on a macro level influences how sexual identities are shaped at different local levels. Acknowledging an established existing gender order (Connell, 2005: 72), Connell examines how this regulatory regime is enforced through new global spaces and arenas such as transnational and multinational corporations, the international state, international media and global markets (2005: 73-4). She then explores how these global arenas influence gay men of particular nationalities. For example, in Brazil homosexual men negotiate multiple patterns of sexual practice and social identity, depending on the situation they are in and what they are trying to accomplish (Connell, 2005: 80). The same can be seen in Malaysia where most urban homosexuals move between one style to another ‘from camping it up with full awareness of the latest fashion trends from Castro Street to playing the dutiful son at a family celebration’ (Altman, 2001 in Connell, 2005: 80). Both Bhattacharyya and Connell’s studies demonstrate the fluid nature of sexual
identities. Despite living amongst a heterosexual majority, gay and lesbian individuals can modify their identity and behaviour in appropriate circumstances, demonstrating the inherent role of performativity and cultural specificity in society.

1.2 The Significance of Space

This section demonstrates the important role of space and how it influences people and the way they express themselves. The study of sexuality and space is largely divided into two major approaches. Many scholars, as mentioned, have focused on queer individuals and queer spaces, while others have chosen to investigate the negotiation of sexuality in rural spaces. Theorists have established that particular spaces and the people who inhabit them influence and often serve as an extension of each other. As humans produce space, it is they who make particular places distinctive from other regions. It is also argued that space is an important influence on an individual’s sexuality. This is especially true for gay and lesbian individuals who must operate within a heteronormative framework which, by its very nature, excludes them. Therefore, as some theorists have argued, many gay and lesbian people are dependent on queer-identified spaces that have a significant concentration of queer businesses and venues to accommodate the queer community. This section also explores the concept of heterosexism in rural communities and the limited support that is provided for gay and lesbian individuals. Due to the family-oriented and interdependent nature of these communities the construction of a homosexual identity is severely hindered. Each of these studies does not only demonstrate the inextricable link between people and space, but also the additional complexities of navigating sexuality within space.
Henri Lefebvre first theorised that the production of space could be modeled on a conceptual spatial triad. The three main aspects of constructing spaces in society include spatial practices; representations of space; and representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1974: 33). He elaborates on the notion of spatial practices by asserting that these practices must embrace production, reproduction and the particular locations that are characteristic of a social formation (Lefebvre, 1974: 33). According to Lefebvre, consistent spatial practice creates some degree of social cohesion, which implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance within that space (Lefebvre, 1974: 33). The second aspect of Lefebvre’s spatial triad is the representation of space. Representations of space are tied to the relations of production and to the order which those relations impose (Lefebvre, 1974: 33). Other elements which contribute to these representations include knowledge, signs, codes and visible ‘frontal’ relations (Lefebvre, 1974: 33). The final component of the spatial triad according to Lefebvre is representational space. This space may be coded and embodies complex symbolisms that are linked to the clandestine and underground side of social life (Lefebvre, 1974: 33). Lefebvre’s analysis of the spatial triad establishes a concept of space that is inextricably interwoven with the individuals that inhabit it. As Lefebvre states, individuals develop and express themselves in social spaces, they encounter prohibitions, they perish, and then the same space contains their graves (Lefebvre, 1974: 34). Meaning can only be derived from geographical, physical spaces through the individuals that navigate their lives in them. Lefebvre’s later work elaborates on this key theory of inter-relatedness. In the text ‘The Everyday and Everydayness’, Lefebvre and Levich explore the structures in society which create different spaces. Investigating the notion of people functioning in society according to a
set of predisposed structures, Lefebvre and Levich assert that these range from physiological (eating, drinking, sleeping) to social (working, traveling) (1987: 7). Some are natural occurrences while others are constructed, but it is these social structures that allow for each individual to perform the various aspects of their public and private lives (Lefebvre and Levich, 1987: 7). According to Lefebvre and Levich, the link between people and spaces is so strong that each influences the experience and existence of the other. For example, in order to change any aspect of societal life, it is not only people that must change it but also society itself, spaces within it, architecture, and even the city itself must also change (Lefebvre and Levich, 1987, 11). As one of the first sociologists to conceptualise theories of space, Lefebvre determined the importance of understanding different spaces in order to understand different societies. He further established how spaces are produced and how they are utilised and navigated by the people within them.

Space and its people

The work of Lefebvre spawned many further analyses of the significance of space in society. Tim Unwin acknowledges Lefebvre’s assertion that space is socially produced and constructed (2000: 11) but critiques Lefebvre’s dehumanisation of space (2001: 24). While Lefebvre gives space meaning, character and significance Unwin notes that he also fails to take seriously the role of human agency in shaping its own future (2000: 24). Therefore, according to Unwin, by treating ‘space’ as an entity in itself, Lefebvre’s argument falls short of evaluating the relationship between space and people. This indelible link between space and people, or the city and its inhabitants, was first established in Georg Simmell’s essay ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ (1950). Simmell
asserted that the city itself would influence the minds of the people who lived in it to such an extent that even the way the mind worked mimicked the way the city worked (1950: 327). For example, Simmell stated that as society increasingly relied on a money economy, the mind became more and more calculating (1950: 327). Elaine Scarry goes a step further in analyzing this link by asserting that both space and the individual are an extension of each other. She states that ‘the room…is, on one hand, an enlargement of the body…it is simultaneously a miniaturisation of the world, of civilisation’ (Scarry, 1985: 29). As the city itself is an expansion of the human body, the effects and processes of each impact on the other. Therefore according to Unwin, Simmel and Scarry, the significance of space in society is that it represents different aspects of an individual’s identity rather than simply being the area in which identity is performed.

The indelible link between space and people is also significant as it is the people within a particular place that make it distinctive. While others have asserted that modern technology has resulted in the placelessness of place (Relph, 1976 in Gieryn, 2000: 463) and the transcendence of place (Coleman, 1993 in Gieryn, 2000: 463), Thomas Gieryn argues that the inhabitants of a particular place ensure that it remains a unique spot in the universe (2000: 463). Therefore the main reason that places will categorically remain distinctive is that they are created and used by people, not technology (Gieryn, 2000: 465). Gieryn further highlights the social processes that occur which create an indelible link between a social space and its inhabitants. Social processes such as difference, power, inequality and collective action happen through the material features of society that have been designed, built and used by people (Habraken, 1998 in Gieryn, 2000: 465).
Thus these spaces remain distinctive because it is humans who impose meaning on them. Gieryn also argues that the idea of the neighbourhood ‘is not inherent in any arrangement of streets and houses, but is rather an ongoing practical and discursive imagining of a people’ (Gieryn, 2000: 472). Therefore in order to develop an understanding of how and why people use spaces in certain ways, it is important to acknowledge how these spaces are perceived and what meaning has been attached to them.

*Space and Sexuality*

Studies on communities and space are critical to understandings of gay and lesbian experiences due to the powerful role that place plays in people’s lives. The importance of space is particularly applicable to gay and lesbian individuals who often inhabit heteronormative spaces throughout their lives. It is not surprising then that many cities have neighbourhoods which are popular with the queer community, or are predominantly queer-identified, as many scholars have explored (Myslik, 1996; Brown and Maycock, 2005; Hertz, 1997). These spaces offer a sense of comfort, opportunities for socialisation, and specialised services for gay and lesbian individuals who live their lives as a part of a societal minority. Queer neighbourhoods have subsequently been the subject of many sociological studies which analyse the importance of physical space in the lives of queer individuals. Berlant and Warner state that the gay and lesbian population is more dependent on this type of area in urban space than any other social group (1998: 563). The reason queer-identified spaces are so vital is because this community would always be outnumbered and overwhelmed if they could not concentrate their culture somewhere (Berlant and Warner, 1998: 563). Christopher Reed also emphasises the importance of
queer space as it is a visual representation of the queer community, and therefore provides a visual queer culture (1996: 64). In order to identify with a community in a larger heterocentric society many gay and lesbian individuals are drawn to queer-identified communities. However, David McInnes offers an alternate explanation for the congregation of queer people in specific neighbourhoods. Focusing his study on gay spaces in Sydney, Darlinghurst and Newtown, he explores the pressure placed on young people to live in these gay precincts and be a part of the community (2001: 164). Using qualitative research, McInnes found that one interviewee lived in Western Sydney and liked living there as it was a familiar environment where he felt comfortable but felt pressure from friends and members of the queer community to relocate closer to Sydney’s gay neighbourhoods (McInnes, 2001: 164). These theorists explored the importance of queer spaces for many individuals, establishing ways in which they foster a sense of community and belonging.

Fran Tonkiss analyses how gender and sexuality affect the perception and use of urban and queer spaces. Tonkiss’ work is significant as she demonstrates how and why queer spaces occur, how these spaces and homosexuality in itself becomes the ‘other’ and how heterosexuality is such an overwhelming force in society that it is barely recognisable. She notes firstly that individuals can find spaces in the city in which to perform or express difference and to articulate identities (Tonkiss, 2005: 94). Tonkiss further establishes that sexuality in society does not have to be a physical monument which represents a queer space, such as a gay bar, but it can simply involve kissing a same sex partner on a public street (2005: 96). Throughout her work, Tonkiss also acknowledges
the pervading influence of heterosexuality within society. For example, she notes that sexuality is only marked and made public when it is not straight, unlike heterosexual which is like ‘white noise’ in the urban environment (Tonkiss, 2005: 96). Similarly, queer spaces in society are also marked as not straight, and highlight what it is these ‘other’ places are different from (Tonkiss, 2005: 96). Tonkiss elaborates by arguing that queer space

not only locates sexual dissidents, but highlights forms of exclusion, erotic spectacle and everyday practice through which dominant versions of sexuality are reproduced in urban space (Tonkiss, 2005: 96).

However, these queer spaces are still important in the visibility of queer identities, as well as giving these individuals a common form of identification. When numbers are significant enough gay and lesbian communities tend to locate or socialise in certain parts of the city ‘on the basis of common identities and cultural affinities, and in the interests of self protection and safety’ (Bell and Valentine, 1995 in Tonkiss, 2005: 106). However as urban spaces are organised around the basis of a heterosexual matrix, urban individuals subsequently adapt to, and edit themselves to fit into this dominant system (Tonkiss, 2005: 105). Encountering heterosexual norms on a daily basis influences the individuals in society whether they are conscious of these impositions or not. Both heterosexual and homosexual individuals monitor themselves and the performance of their identity in order to fit into society as they are an indelible part of it.
Queer rural space

Previous studies demonstrate that rural communities, like urban spaces, are largely heterocentric and unaccommodating of homosexuality. Lindhorst’s study of lesbian women and gay men in the country highlights the lack of help and support services that are available in rural areas (1997: 5). Also, due to the higher visibility of sexual dissidents in a small town, she notes that homophobic prejudices are more pronounced than in larger urban cities (Lindhorst, 1997: 6). Oswald and Culton discovered similar experiences of gay and lesbian individuals in rural American towns. They elaborate on the assertion that homophobia is more prevalent in rural towns and state that being homosexual is actually incompatible with living in these spaces (Oswald and Culton, 2003: 72). Due to the overwhelming influence of family-oriented homocentricity Oswald and Culton found that gay and lesbian individuals in rural spaces were forced to lead private, secretive lives (2003: 72). Therefore queer people in rural towns experiences a lower quality of life than their heterosexual counterparts as they lacked familial and community support in an interdependent society. Finally, Friedman’s study of rural lesbian mothers also demonstrates high levels of homophobia that are present in rural towns (1998: 78). She acknowledges the family-oriented heterocentricity of country towns and argues that this authoritative influence is heightened in these areas due to interdependency of family members (Friedman, 1998: 78). Therefore because rural lesbians rely on their own families as support they are less likely to be open about their sexuality, despite the difficulties this poses while living in a small town. While all these studies are useful in illuminating the precarious nature of being homosexual and living in
a rural space, they do little to add to understandings of performativity and sexuality, both of which have considerable ties to location and space.

1.3 Individual Performativity, Sexuality and Space

One of the first scholars to explore the link between the behavioural performativity of individuals, homosexuality and geographical space was British sociologist Gill Valentine. Valentine introduced the concept of negotiating lesbian identity between different spaces, in different circumstances. She focused her study on a medium-sized English town which had no specific gay areas and conducted forty interviews with lesbian participants (Valentine, 1993: 237). Valentine noted that previous research was heavily centered around queer-identified spaces and ignored the fact that 'the majority of lesbians and gay men do not live openly gay lifestyles in gay defined environments’ (1993: 246).

Valentine’s work identified the need for further research that more effectively investigates the multi-faceted experiences led by queer individuals, and the multiplicitous areas in which they conduct their lives. In her interviews Valentine discovered that many lesbian participants were fearful of expressing their sexuality due to the fact that homosexuality was negatively constructed in opposition to heterosexuality (1993: 239). Rather than being viewed as the sexually perverse, morally corrupt ‘other’, interviewees chose to be discreet about their sexuality than face rejection from family or discrimination in the workplace (Valentine, 1993: 240-1). Valentine’s 1996 study on heterocentricity elaborated on her previous theories of malleable sexual identities. Valentine introduced the concept of the street as socially constructed to be naturally and authentically heterosexual as opposed to asexual (1996: 146). She argues that the
heterosexing of space is also a performative act and is made possible through repetition and regulation (Valentine, 1996: 146). Performative examples of the heterosexing of space include heterosexual couples freely holding hands and being affectionate, advertisements depicting heterosexual couples, and stares of disapproval directed at same-sex couples (Valentine, 1996: 149). Because the street has been constructed as a heterosexual space, gay and lesbian individuals need to renegotiate their sexual identities as they navigate their lives in a society that actively excludes them. Valentine’s research has produced foundational concepts in studies of sexuality, performativity, and physical spaces. Through expansive qualitative research she has demonstrated the inextricable links between these issues, but has also demonstrated that they have largely been neglected in sociological studies.

This study will build on this previous research to further investigate the diverse experiences of gay and lesbian individuals who negotiate their identities in Sydney’s queer- and non-queer identified spaces. In particular, it will utilise Butler’s theories of performativity (1993a, 1993b, 2000) here understood as a discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names (1993a: 13). As with Butler, I understand individuals to cite the conventions of the social world by enacting them and thus create certain social realities. My research will therefore draw on Butler’s theories of citation to focus on the ways in which sexual identity, behaviour and performativity shifts between changing locations and why. This study also assumes as with Scarry (1985) and Gieryn (2000) that people and space are inextricably intertwined; therefore the behavioural shift that I will be examining will be a reaction to different spaces and situations. These spaces will not
only be Sydney’s ‘gay enclaves’ (McInnes 2001), but more broadly, spaces of living, learning, transport and leisure across metropolitan Sydney and regional NSW. Because I am interested to explore how individuals perform and negotiate sexual identity in a broad range of spaces, I will utilise theoretical frameworks to identify specifics spaces as ‘queer-identified’, ‘queer-friendly’, ‘heterosexed’, and so on. Berlant and Warner state that heteronormativity is the construction of heterosexuality as ‘unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social’, ‘marked as the natural state’ or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment’ (1998: 548). Similarly, heterosexism, like heteronormativity, is the assumption that heterosexuality is superior to all other types of sexuality (Temple, 2005: 272). In addition to areas which operate within a heteronormative framework, I will also explore the ways in which queer individuals utilise queer-identified and queer-friendly spaces. Here I appropriate McInnes’ definition of queer spaces as neighbourhoods with a predominant number of ‘gay businesses, venues, bookshops and sex shops’ as well as a significant queer population who utilises the space (2001: 167). Similarly, a queer-friendly space can be seen as ‘a sexual sanctuary, a safe-haven, a second-home to some, a hiding place to others’ without specifically being queer-identified (Nash and Bain, 2007: 48). Considering the perceived safety of queer-friendly spaces, throughout this study I will explore how queer individuals themselves perceive such ‘queer-friendly’ spaces and if feelings of safety are subsequently manifested in their everyday performance. I will use all of these key concepts, in conjunction with the language used by the participants themselves, to assess the influence of different spaces on individual performativity as well as how space is created through performativity.
Chapter 2: Data and Methods

2.1 Methodology

This research utilises qualitative methods to explore the issue of shifting behavioural performance and sexuality by individuals in different spaces. Qualitative research allows for the emergence of varied and multiplicitous data. In particular the in-depth interview allows for new and unexpected information to arise, as a predetermined set of questions cannot predict the different sets of issues that may arise (Miller, Nelson and Moore, 1998: 383). Qualitative research methods may be more advantageous than quantitative methods when studying people and society as they can illuminate data and raise questions that would not otherwise be generated, since the variety of human experience is often impossible to predict (Ambert et al, 1995: 883). Finally, one-on-one interviews result in a level of depth and detail that cannot be found in quantitative studies. With survey data a researcher may have to impute or guess the reasons for visible trends, while a qualitative researcher has the opportunity to include more complex, contradictory and changing reasons that people have for behaving the way they do (Smart, 2007: 15). As interviewers have the opportunity to verify information with their subjects, or ask them further questions about an interesting unexpected issue that arises during the interview, they have the ability to gauge more data and detail than a standard quantitative method, such as an analysis of decisive statistics.

In particular, qualitative methods have been understood as an important means of providing unique and rich descriptions of queer communities, and of illuminating the complex social realities of marginalised communities in general. Qualitative research is
used to elicit information regarding the ‘human’ side of an issue (Mack et al, 2005: 1), which makes it an appropriate method of gathering data on the complex realities of groups such as LGBT communities. This is in contrast to other sociological methods, which have been seen as regarding people as ‘units of analysis’ or ‘variables’, thus concealing ‘the structural and relational conditions which generate inequality, injustice and marginalisation’ (Lynch, 1999: 46). In this way qualitative methodologies allow for the exploration of relations between ‘the powerful’ and ‘the powerless’ (Lynch, 1999: 47). These complex social relations have a significant impact on marginalised groups, which is particularly evident in the queer community as LGBT individuals must negotiate exclusive heterocentric social spaces on a daily basis (Valentine, 1993: 238). Qualitative research has therefore also proved useful for eliciting rich descriptions of the ways in which LGBT persons negotiate spatial boundaries. In particular, Valentine utilised qualitative interview techniques to reveal the depth and range of sexual identities that lesbians manage for different situations (1993: 242). Additionally, Dwight Fee (2000) has used narrative techniques to demonstrate the richness and complexity of gay male friendships.

2.2 Methods

I utilised a purposive sampling strategy to select my interview subjects according to pre-established criteria, namely, selecting for self-identified gay and lesbian young persons between the ages of 18 and 25 (Mack et al, 2005: 5). Eleven participants were recruited using a passive snowballing technique beginning with existing friendship networks. People with whom contact had already been made then referred other possible
participants to contribute to the study, thus allowing new participants to volunteer to take part without coercion. This snowballing technique has been successfully utilised in past studies of LGBT communities, as it allows for sensitivity to community needs with regard to self-identification for example, by Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgeley (2002). The cohort consisted of 8 men and 3 women, between the ages of 18 and 25. This age range was chosen due to the mobility these individuals have between different societal spaces such as work, educational institutions, and social venues. Broadly, 7 of the participants currently live in the inner west, 1 lives in the inner city, 2 live on Sydney’s North Shore and 1 lives in the western suburbs. Four of the participants grew up in rural or regional communities, 2 in the inner west, 1 on the North Shore, and 4 in the western suburbs of Sydney.

Hour-long semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant (see Appendix A), and subsequently fully transcribed. Each interviewee was given the choice of location for the interview, with participants encouraged to choose an area in which they would feel comfortable. All interviews were structured in the same format, with a variety of possible probes and follow-up questions to verify information or elicit further detail. The interview schedule began with a series of general questions in order to make participants feel at ease. The interviewees were then asked to identify their own sexuality, in order to know how each individual labeled themselves and perceived their own identity. Throughout the rest of the interview, participants were asked questions regarding their behaviour in a range of different locations such as work, home, university, and social spaces, both in the present and in the past. By asking a series of questions
about particular locational aspects of their lives, participants were able to compare and contrast the differences in their behaviour in various spaces and spontaneously offer suggestions as to why they believed behaviour may change. The interview also consisted of open-ended questions about behaviour to promote reflexivity on the part of subjects. As Goffman notes, participants are often aware that that their ‘actions’ as interviewees are ‘highly symbolic’ and they will thus ‘give much preparation and thought’ to the ‘performance’ of an interview (1959: 225). In my study, this heightened consciousness was a positive additional complexity; it made participants aware of not only their present actions and feelings, but other circumstances in which they have censored themselves. Additionally, it allowed me to personally observe the behaviour and mannerisms of participants as they spoke about these issues.

While qualitative methodology was chosen to illicit the richest and most meaningful descriptions, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the method. It is also important to acknowledge the possibility of bias that may arise in this study. As previously mentioned, many of the interviewees were a part of already existing social networks. Knowing the participants personally may skew the data, but as Valentine found in her 1993 study on how lesbians negotiate multiple sexual identities over time and space, this familiarity was an important aspect of the research process. Valentine notes that because the study was successful because researcher had already established a level of trust and confidentiality before beginning the interview process. Because participants were comfortable and at ease during their interview, they seemed more inclined to divulge information and open to sharing personal details. However, reflexivity is an
important part of the research process, as an interviewer should be aware of the ways in which they can impact the interview process (Jordan, 2009: 6). While some scholars have argued that minimising social distance between the interviewer and interviewee is advantageous as it implies that the interviewer is within range of communication with the respondents (Ribbens, 1989: 581), there is still an issue of power evident throughout the interview process. Being part of the same cohort and interviewing members of a marginalised group, I as the interviewer am in a position of power throughout the interview process in setting the agenda and asking the questions (Jordan, 2009: 4).

Researching marginalised groups may also involve exploring sensitive issues and it is therefore imperative for the researcher to be aware of the possible tension these issues may cause (Bhopal, 2010: 189). While there will always be an unequal balance of power, it is important to attempt to equalise the research relationship by ensuring the trust and comfort of the interviewee throughout the interview process, as their well-being is of greater importance than the research question (Mack et al, 2005: 8).

The interviewees

Participants who volunteered to take part on this study had extremely varied backgrounds and living situations. Many interviewees were recommended by individuals who had already agreed to take part as they had particularly interesting experiences which were relevant to the study. Consequently, each interview resulted in unique and varying data. Two interviewees grew up in Sydney’s inner west and continue to live there. Alissa* was raised in Balmain, a fairly affluent and traditional heterocentric suburb in Sydney while Melissa grew up in Concord, a largely heterosexual neighbourhood in Sydney’s inner
west. Despite the heterocentricity of their home neighbourhoods, neither participant faced overt hostility or homophobia from their families. Brendan grew up on Sydney’s North Shore where he encountered a strong anti-gay sentiment, but now lives in Manly where he feels more accepted. The four participants from rural communities also encountered traditional and homophobic social attitudes. Mark grew up in a conventional small town near Perth but moved to Sydney to attend university. Compared to Perth, Mark enjoys the more celebrated diversity that Sydney has to offer him. Billy grew up in a small town on the New South Wales south coast and was out about his sexuality at a young age, despite facing more traditional attitudes in his hometown. Dean grew up in a similar heterocentric suburb in the Blue Mountains and later moved to Sydney after he had come out of the closet due to the homophobic reactions of some family members. Seb grew up in a suburb of Bathurst, a regional town in New South Wales. Due to his surroundings, Seb felt hostility towards his sexuality and now lives in a suburb of Sydney which he feels is more accepting. The final four participants had more turbulent experiences with regards to their sexuality while growing up in the Western Suburbs. Beth grew up in Cabramatta where she perceived the hostility towards homosexuality to be particularly acute. Aidan, who is now a drag queen, grew up in Berala and now resides in Darlinghurst. Having grown up in a hostile environment, he appreciates living in a space where homosexuality is the norm and he is not vilified. Brendan was raised in Guilford and also found this area to have a particularly strong anti-gay sentiment. Currently living in Manly, Brendan feels that his sexuality is not an issue and he can feel comfortable in this environment. Jack is from Bankstown, however he now lives in the inner city suburb of Glebe. Jack often had to contend with homophobia in his home neighbourhood and
appreciates the diversity that he has encountered in Glebe. Each participant had
distinctive experiences to share and imparted their own insight on navigating different
spaces.

* All names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the participants.
Chapter 3: Results I

This section explores the childhood experiences of participants in their respective home neighbourhoods and primary school environments. The results of this study reveal that despite the diverse range of spaces in which interviewees lived during their childhood, similar experiences of heteronormativity still prevailed. Whether they lived in Sydney’s inner city, western suburbs, or in rural communities, participants were aware of an existing heteronormative framework in their home neighbourhood during their childhood. Primary school environments were also experienced by participants largely as heteronormative spaces, with many participants taught how to behave in so-called ‘appropriately’ gendered ways through the use of space. This section focuses on the home neighbourhood and primary school in order to demonstrate how heteronormative values are enacted and enforced upon young individuals throughout their formative years.

3.1 Home neighbourhood

The home neighbourhood is an influential part of childhood as it provides children with a sense of belonging somewhere and allows them to understand themselves through their experiences in these communities (Christensen, 2003: 14). Additionally, the use of the house, streets and neighbourhood create memories and shape an individual’s identity (Christensen, 2003: 14). The majority of participants in this study were raised in what they described as a predominantly heterosexual neighbourhood which was mostly inhabited by nuclear families and subsequently fostered negative connotations of alternate sexualities. The most significant issue encountered by those who spent their childhood in Sydney’s inner city suburbs was the heterocentricity inherent in the
community. Such family-oriented neighbourhoods were found to represent homosexuality as an abnormal, unnatural ‘other’. Sydney’s western suburbs were also perceived to be heterocentric and outwardly hostile towards gay and lesbian individuals. Consequently, several interviewees felt compelled to monitor their behaviour in order to avoid explicit homophobia and acts of violent assault, both likely possibilities. Participants from rural communities experienced similar hostility, finding that these spaces promoted negative depictions of homosexuality in comparison to traditional family-oriented values. Gay and lesbian individuals subsequently relied on private, limited support networks as opposed to community support in the form of health services, organisations, and visible queer culture. The results of this study therefore demonstrate the existence of a heteronormative institution in all of these diverse spaces, despite the many differences of the respective communities.

*Inner city Sydney*

Participants Alissa, Brendan and Melissa each grew up in what they described as middle-to-upper class suburbs in Sydney. Alissa grew up in Balmain in Sydney’s inner west, Brendan lived on the northern beaches and Melissa was raised in Concord, also in the inner west. Alissa describes Balmain as an ‘affluent’ heterocentric suburb as it is predominantly inhabited by nuclear families. She further emphasises that within the family unit there was always a mum and a dad present. I can’t really recall in primary school many single parents being there. I can’t recall any gay and lesbian families.
Alissa describes her home neighbourhood as a space that operates within a ‘heterosexist’ framework. Brendan also states that his surroundings on the northern beaches were ‘definitely…predominantly heterosexual’ and mainly comprised of families and people from Anglo-Saxon descent with Christian backgrounds. Similarly, Melissa feels that her home neighbourhood was particularly heterocentric. Melissa notes that Concord is ‘just an average, middle-class community’ where throughout her childhood she can ‘never’ recall seeing ‘a gay couple around’. Each of these individuals was brought up in a community where heterosexuality was not only the projected ideal, but also the lived norm.

While unaware of it during their childhood, Alissa, Brendan and Melissa acknowledge that they were influenced by a heteronormative framework throughout their various upbringings. Alissa notes that whilst people were ‘pretty open’ and accepting in Balmain when she was growing up, this can mainly be attributed to the fact that people might be prejudiced but that it is not socially acceptable to appear to be prejudiced. She further explains that she grew up in a household where opinions on issues like sexuality and race were not expressed negatively. Brendan also found that he had little experience or exposure to homosexuality within his family and his neighbourhood. Instead, during his childhood, Brendan was mainly influenced by images of gay culture that were visible in the media as it never came up at all in everyday life. Finally, Melissa’s assertion that throughout her childhood she cannot recall ever seeing another gay couple around the neighbourhood where she lived and was never ‘exposed to anything gay’ denotes an absence of visible gay and lesbian individuals, let alone gay culture. Consequently,
within such spaces all that was seen, experienced, learnt and known was a heteronormative ideal. While Alissa, Brendan and Melissa did not find that people and organisations in these neighbourhoods were outwardly hostile and homophobic, the invisibility of homosexual individuals firmly established heterosexuality as the idyllic norm.

*Western suburbs*

Aidan, Beth, Brett and Jack grew up in Sydney’s Western suburbs. For Aidan, Western Sydney feels like a more outwardly hostile and homophobic environment than where he currently resides in the inner city. Aidan has lived in two different areas of Western Sydney. Growing up in the West, Aidan states

> I often felt a fear for my safety when I was out there. Like, a genuine fear for my safety when I was in these places. You know, you get called names, you get called ‘faggot’ and things like that when you’re out there and on top of that you might get a punt thrown at you or you might get someone threatening to do things to you…which is generally enough to make you go running scared.

Because of this outward antagonism he felt incredibly self-conscious and would go to ‘extreme’ measures in an attempt to conceal his sexuality. Aidan altered his behaviour by changing the way he spoke and the way he walked to draw less attention to himself and his sexuality. Apart from when he was ‘in the family home with mum’, Aidan was always conscious of his mannerisms appearing ‘really gay’ in his home neighbourhood as he felt it was a hostile environment. Brett also grew up in Guilford and felt incredibly threatened because of his sexuality. Brett felt that living in this area negatively influenced him while growing up:
I was surrounded by gangs and troublesome youths so I didn’t really hang out in my neighbourhood at all, I ventured outside my neighbourhood, to the city or to my friends’ suburbs where it was a lot safer and there wasn’t as much trouble…because of sexuality.

In addition to actually leaving the suburb, Brett’s physical mannerisms were affected by living in this community. Like Aidan, Brett did not want to draw attention to himself out of fear for his physical safety and became ‘a lot more guarded and less open…very quiet, kind of like a mute’. Similarly, Beth has always lived in Cabramatta and describes it as a place that can ‘get a bit rough’ where people often act without thinking. While Beth feels that the palpable hostility is not necessarily based on homophobia, she is aware of the possible threat that exists in this area. She therefore manages her behaviour in public spaces, such as choosing not to be openly affectionate with a partner when walking down the street. She also censored herself in her family home while growing up, and continues to do so as she still lives with her parents. Beth states she ‘wouldn’t speak about it [her sexuality]’ with her parents and assumes that ‘a lot of people in the area would feel the same’ as she believes that homosexuality is not largely accepted in the community.

**Rural spaces**

Billy, Mark and Seb grew up in various regional small towns around Australia and also encountered homophobia and hostility in their respective neighbourhoods. In each of these communities participants were aware of negative connotations attached to homosexuality and the lack of visibility of other gay and lesbian individuals. Billy acknowledges the overwhelming presence of heterosexual, two-parent families in his
hometown of Berry on the New South Wales South Coast. He says that while his mother and sisters were encouraging and supportive, the town itself was a negative influence:

There was a kind of repression for a little bit, you know, “it’s not the done thing”, especially on the South Coast where all the men are macho men at that. It’s very like, stuck in the 50s.

Whilst the town itself was not accepting of his sexuality and the fact that he was ‘literally the only gay in the village’, Billy says he felt ‘empowered’ by his mother as a strong feminine figure and was therefore able to feel comfortable with himself. Mark grew up in Western Australia, in a ‘large small town’ near Perth that was quite ‘traditional’, very conservative, and consisted mostly of ‘nuclear families’. Like Billy, Mark did not know any other identified gay people in his community, only ‘families all around’. However despite feeling ‘isolated’ in his home town, Mark benefited from having a supportive and accepting family. Because both of his parents encouraged him to be whom he wanted, he felt ‘safe’ throughout his upbringing and comfortable enough for his sexuality to develop.

Seb lived in a small country town near Bathurst where he felt homosexuality was not accepted. He describes the town as ‘sheltered’ and ‘rather dull’ and moved to Sydney soon after he finished school as he did not particularly ‘like the people’ in his home town. Since leaving Bathurst he has discovered that there is small gay community but this was not visible to him as he was growing up. Because of this he says he felt he was not particularly accepted.

For the participants of this study, regardless of the type of space in which they grew up (inner city, suburbs, rural area), heterosexuality was understood as the visible, accepted communal norm. For Alissa, Brendan and Melissa this took the form of the consistent
visibility nuclear families and heterosexual couples in their home neighbourhoods, and hence the absence of gay and lesbian couples. As Valentine asserts, it is the repetition of performative acts that make heterosexuality appear natural and that make space appear ‘heterosexed’ (1996: 146). Seeing a predominant number of nuclear families or a heterosexual couple performing heterosexuality by holding hands or by simply being present in an advertisement contributes to the promotion of heterosexuality as natural or authentic, subsequently relegating the concept of homosexuality as a deviant alternative to the norm (Valentine, 1996: 146). Aidan, who grew up in Sydney’s western suburbs, was particularly aware of heterosexual couples who openly showed affection for each other in public, noting that it was ‘never a problem’ for them to do so whereas his performativity was influenced as he felt the need to be extremely ‘careful’ when with somebody of the same sex. For straight couples, acts of affection are so commonplace that they are barely noticed and according to Aidan ‘wouldn’t be a problem’. However, a same-sex couple might draw significant attention, so they must censor the way they perform their identities in public. Aidan’s experience therefore demonstrates the notion that heteronormativity is an institution that marks heterosexuality as the ‘original’ (Butler, 1993: 312), the ‘ideal’ and the ultimate ‘moral accomplishment’ (Berlant and Warner, 1998: 548).

Despite all participants describing heterosexuality as the visible, accepted norm in their home neighbourhoods, there were two findings of note among that distinguished participants from the western suburbs of Sydney and those from rural areas. The participants from the western suburbs, Aidan, Brett, Beth and Jack, all felt that not only
was there a visible privileging of heterosexuality, but also an overt hostility towards gay and lesbian individuals and a palpable threat of physical violence. This explicit animosity led each subject to express concern that young queer individuals who are coming to terms with their sexuality may monitor their behaviour more carefully in these parts of Sydney than in other areas. This is explored more fully later in the thesis. Mark described his home town as ‘traditional’ and ‘family-oriented’, which Friedman argues is largely typical of rural life (1997: 78). Oswald and Culton further argue that the family-oriented nature of rural areas denotes homosexuality and rural communities as ‘incompatible’ with each other (2003: 72). Thus homosexuality is not accepted within these spaces. This rejection of homosexuality and lack of queer visibility results in gay and lesbian individuals feeling unwelcome and excluded from their home neighbourhoods, as Seb demonstrated in his decision to relocate from Bathurst as soon as he finished school. This shows the ways in which powerful heterosexist discourses oppress and exclude those who are different. As Seb feel that he did not fit in to a community which privileged and had ‘no gay culture’ he felt compelled to leave. Billy and Mark also experienced the consequences of living in an exclusive ‘heteronormative’ community where, according to Billy, homosexuality was ‘not the done thing’. In each of their respective neighbourhoods, both felt the need to retreat into their own private spheres and could only rely on a few select family members for support rather than the community at large which did not accept them.
3.2 Primary School

Primary school was another space where interviewees encountered strongly heterosexed spaces. Results showed that many participants were highly aware of appropriate gendered behaviour. Schools reinforced concepts of appropriate behaviours with the use of specific gender-allocated spaces such as the ‘home corner’ that allowed children to enact traditional gender roles. Participants were also strongly influenced by the expectations of their peers regarding gendered behaviour. Results demonstrate that deviating from early established behavioural norms may lead to ostracism and bullying, which was experienced by several of those interviewed and affected the way they chose to perform their identity.

Most participants were aware of appropriate gendered behaviours in their respective school environments, due to the influence of both teachers and peers alike. The school environment differs from the home neighbourhood as it is a site which exists primarily for educating and shaping young individuals as one entity where children learn only certain types of ‘legitimate’ knowledge, as opposed to the individual experiences which can occur in the wider community and in the home (Temple, 2005: 273). The influence of other children was one of the most important elements in the primary school environment. In this unique space, individuals were not only educated in the classroom but also by their peers, who were already becoming aware of appropriate gender behaviour and isolated those who did not fit in. Seb states that throughout primary school he was always referred to as ‘the little girl’ by his playmates, because he liked to perform dance routines and gymnastics with a group of girls at lunchtime. The dance routines and
gymnastics that the girls performed took place in an area separated from the outdoor
fields occupied by the boys, who as Seb noted, tended to play ball sports. As such Seb
had to choose which physical space he would occupy during recess: that occupied by
girls, or that occupied by boys, which subsequently influenced the way he performed
aspects of his identity. Billy endured a similar experience:

Even from primary school, I was always called ‘gay’ and ‘Priscilla’ or
whatever, because I was always camp, always feminine. So I always
copped it.

Even at this young age, other children were aware of the difference between Billy’s
behaviour and the other boys’ behaviour. As well as being ‘camp’, Billy, like Seb,
socialised with girls which he also found to be stigmatising in primary school as he was
diverging from established gendered social groups. Jack also preferred the company of
girls growing up as he did not feel comfortable engaging in the same activities as the
other boys who were ‘fairly rough’. Brett had similar troubles fitting in with the other
boys in his primary school, particularly in year six when he says he ‘started to actually
like boys’. Brett notes that the way he performed his identity changed in Year Six
because he was wanted to fit in with the other boys and was ‘trying to be one of them’:

I liked my best friend…I was trying to ride bikes on the weekend, go to
the park and play cricket, swimming…but I was more interested in seeing
them in their Speedos than actually swimming. So I think it was hard
because I couldn’t associate myself with boys in the way all the other boys
were and that’s when it started getting hard to be a normal boy.

For all of these individuals, being in a shared setting with other boys their own age
highlighted their different mannerisms. The negative treatment they subsequently
endured from their peers was as influential on their understanding of homosexuality
as the heteronormative school institution which they negotiated on a daily basis. Similarly, Melissa felt that her ‘co-ed’ school environment encouraged individuals to be straight as all her peers began ‘coupling up’. Not only was she unaware of alternate sexualities as she was growing up in primary school, but she also found that heterosexuality was the privileged ideal. Therefore it was the school system as well as the behaviour of the other children that fostered heterosexuality and encouraged a process of sexual othering.

Each of these participants became aware of heterosexual norms and appropriate gender performativity within the school environment. As Epstein, O’Flynn and Telford point out, this process of engendering appropriate behaviour for males and females begins in early sites of education (2000: 132). The introduction of the ‘home corner’ provides a space for the projection of children’s fantasies of the heterosexual family (Epstein, O’Flynn and Telford, 2000: 132), demonstrating how space can affect individuals. A home corner for example contains fake food, table settings, kitchenware, faux household domesticities (plastic irons, brooms, mops), and a range of baby doll paraphernalia. The set up of these play areas encourages female performativity in the household and an affiliation with the traditional nuclear family. From fostering an interest in cooking and cleaning to instilling a maternal instinct in girls from a young age, the home corner is an example of the complex relations which exist between people and physical spaces. As the process of heterosexualisation starts so early in educational institutions children in primary school are already aware of what ‘normal’ gender performativity should be. As Butler notes, ‘the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory
practices of gender coherence’ (1990: 33), thus because children chose to adhere to the gender norms encouraged in the sex-segregated home corner or through the heterosexual coupling that was occurring, they helped reinforce these norms. It is evident that children were compelled to enact expected gender norms in order to avoid stigmatisation and possible bullying (Epstein, O’Flynn and Telford, 2000: 132-3). This was certainly the case for Billy, Seb and Jack who all experienced taunting and ridicule from their peers because of perceived non-conformity with appropriate gender behaviour. Brett was also aware that his behaviour was different to the other boys so he attempted to cohere to regulatory gender norms by partaking in the masculine activities that they liked to do, forcing himself to perform his gender ‘appropriately’ as did his male peers.

Participants revealed that the primary school environment, much like that of the home neighbourhood, operates as a heteronormative space. Individuals experienced primary school as a series of gendered spaces, which encouraged appropriate gender behaviours for boys and girls. Therefore as young people, interviewees recalled being taught appropriate behaviours by their peers, even around sexual identity and gender. Other children demonstrated how boys and girls were supposed to behave and subsequently ostracised those who did not fit in to the established stereotypes.

In conclusion, these results demonstrate that regardless of the diversity of home neighbourhood or primary school, subjects largely experienced a feeling of existing within heteronormative spaces. In their home neighbourhoods participants were acutely aware of the visibility of heterosexual family units, while at the same time alternative
family structures or gay and lesbian couples were unseen. In some instances participants felt visibly threatened, and in others experienced a lack of services and support. In primary school participants were taught appropriate gender behaviour within gendered spaces that also promoted heterosexuality as ideal. As the home neighbourhood and the primary school environment are two spaces in which young individuals spend the majority of their time, the far-reaching influence of heteronormativity therefore has tremendous effects on young individuals, their understanding of homosexuality, and the way they conform to established performative norms in different social spaces.
Chapter 4: Results II

4.1 High School

This section examines the experiences of participants in high schools environments and the impact this had on them as young gay and lesbian individuals. Although the majority of participants interviewed described their high school environments as homophobic and unwelcoming, there was a diversity of responses as to how this was expressed. Responses ranged from experiences of overt homophobia and stigmatisation to more subtle restrictions of expressions of sexuality. Because of perceptions of their high school environments, many participants went to elaborate measures to moderate or conceal their sexuality by finding ways to censor themselves on a daily basis.

Evident in many high schools was the privileged status of heterosexuality. Mark was aware of the negative stigma attached to homosexuality in his school environment and thus he tried to stop himself from questioning his sexuality. Attributing this to the ‘restrictive’ atmosphere in the school, Mark chose to engage in performative acts that concealed his sexuality. Mark forced himself to experiment with girls and constantly monitored the way he expressed himself, stating that he ‘was a wallflower on purpose’ because it was easier than coming to terms with his sexuality in an unwelcoming space. In addition to his guarded mannerisms, Mark’s high school setting even affected the classes and extra-curricular activities he engaged in so he would not appear stereotypically effeminate:

I didn’t do drama on purpose. Which is a horrible thing to say, but I don’t know…I always wanted to, I was always curious about it. Also because my dad would not have been too – I don’t think he really would have understood… So I played a lot of sport in high school.
The privileging of heterosexuality was also evident in Alissa’s high school where she felt the pressure to have a boyfriend in order to ‘appease’ her friends. Alissa does not put this down to a particularly volatile and unwelcoming school environment, but simply ‘the high school pressure of having a boyfriend, or whatever’. However, even the ‘high school pressure’ to be in a heterosexual relationship is indicative of the privileged status of heterosexuality in the school.

Other participants found that in their high schools, heterosexuality was not only privileged but alternate sexualities were overtly stigmatised. Melissa attended an all-girls’ Anglican high school, and notes that lesbian jokes and lesbian ‘scandals’ were a ‘constant occurrence’. Melissa acknowledges that whenever two girls were known to be together, it was considered ‘such a scandal’ in her high school, which negatively impacted on the way she thought about her own sexuality. As Melissa was in a relationship with her best friend since she was fifteen years old, she and her girlfriend felt the need to conceal it from their peers and teachers:

I don’t know if it was a reaction to broader society, or the attitude within the school but I obviously felt I was doing something wrong to not, like, tell a soul. I can remember being so fearful all the time that we were somehow going to get found out…But I think the fact that I kept it quiet until I was in uni is obviously a reflection that I didn’t feel I was supported enough.

Melissa’s knowledge of the way lesbians were perceived in her Anglican high school persuaded her into keeping her relationship a secret and didn’t consider that ‘it would even be conceivable’ that she would ever come out of the closet. Seb was also reluctant to be truthful about his sexuality. Seb attended a public high school in rural Bathurst and
was aware that another gay male student was often subject to homophobic abuse and therefore chose to conceal his own sexuality to protect himself. Seb was so wary of people knowing he was gay that he made up a fake girlfriend in year ten:

> It was completely absurd. Like, I had an msn profile [online chatting service] for her, and I would talk to all my friends as her and then I’d also – because I had my dad’s laptop, and my computer – so I could be on there as me and then on there as her.

Seb created elaborate stories about their relationship which included visiting her where she lived (conveniently out of town) and telling people they lost their virginity to each other. Going to such extreme measures allowed Seb to hide behind the façade of an imaginary heterosexual relationship as he was ‘worried about being gay’:

> So when I was most confused about being gay, that’s when she would come out and then I was like “oh well, maybe this is okay” I like, killed her off.

Coming to terms with his sexuality and being impeded by a hostile environment therefore caused Seb to create elaborate performances in order to project an image of heterosexuality and fit in.

Other participants did not only feel uncomfortable in their school environment but also faced overt homophobia, which affected the way they expressed themselves. When Billy was in high school, he was encouraged by his teachers to hide his sexuality. However, regardless of the social taboo that existed in a regional high school, he came out when he was fifteen and subsequently endured homophobic bullying. During P.E. when the class was playing ‘some macho sport’, Billy’s peers mocked his performance and began throwing rocks at him until a sympathetic teacher granted him a reprieve from class.
However, she then placed Billy in another sports group which consisted solely of girls and further stigmatised Billy amongst his peers. The distinction between the boys and girls was demonstrated by the separate gendered spaces they occupied. Billy’s teacher, rather than putting a stop to the homophobic behaviour, removed him from the ‘boy’ space and put him into the ‘girl’ space, legitimating his behaviour as different from the other boys. Aidan also ‘copped a lot of abuse at school’ and he personally attributes this partly to the school being in Sydney’s western suburbs. Aidan says he was ‘always teased for being a faggot’ or ‘the gay one’. Aidan found this constant bullying particularly difficult to endure because he did not even realise that he was gay:

It hurt a lot…and the way in which I got told day in, day out for years, the negative feelings, the stigma attached to it made me think that it was a bad thing. Like there was something wrong with it. I look back on those days and still speak with a sense of hesitation.

Because Aidan was unsure whether he was gay, knowing that homosexuality had negative associations made it even more difficult to come to terms with it and endure the homophobia. Melissa’s behaviour was also influenced by her negative school environment, in that she felt the need to conceal not only her sexuality but her relationship. Melissa says that the attempt to hide her relationship was ‘a horrible, horrible thing to bear … Just thinking about it now…I’m feeling so tense!’ During this part of the interview Melissa’s body language altered. Thinking about her time in high school made her so anxious that she unconsciously began fidgeting, looking over her shoulder and re-crossed her legs multiple times. Like Aidan, Melissa could still clearly recall the stress of attempting to hide her sexuality as a teenager. The measures that each of these participants went to, such as Seb creating a fake heterosexual relationship, Mark
engaging in more masculine sporty activities as opposed to drama and Melissa concealing her relationship with her girlfriend, clearly demonstrate the ways in which performativity is an important part of queer individuals negotiating heterosexist spaces.

As many participants have demonstrated, educational institutions in Sydney can be overwhelmingly heteronormative and not accepting of diversity. However Brett, having grown up in Sydney’s western suburbs was aware of the hostility towards homosexuals which existed in his home neighbourhood. Instead he decided to attend a performing arts high school which he understood to be a safe space, stating that if he didn’t go there and went to a local public school instead he ‘would be dead’. Brett enjoyed going to school in an accepting environment because it allowed him to express who he was and simply be himself, ‘I was lucky to go there and be who I wanted to be. If it wasn’t for that schooling I don’t think I’d be as open as I was.’ Brett also notes that he was extremely extroverted and ‘camp’ in school as he was encouraged by the positive atmosphere. Brett explains the significant role that his high school played in his life:

> It was a complete turnaround from where I lived...you know, going to school I’d be really quiet and try not to get attention but then once I was at school, the flick was switched and BAM here I was. It’s like I walked out of the closet and the sparkles were on. But then once I left the gate and got on the train, it was all shut off again.

The dichotomy between two of the main spaces in Brett’s life was ‘bizarre’ as he felt like he was living two very different lives. The way Brett’s behaviour altered demonstrates the significant impact that space has on performativity. While his home neighbourhood felt threatening and hostile to Brett, and the period of traveling between home and school made him feel the need to be ‘really quiet’ and ‘try not to get attention’, inside the school,
which he perceived to be a neutral, safe space, Brett was given the confidence to freely express himself.

Many participants encountered some form of homophobia or heterosexism during their time in high school which negatively influenced the development and performance of their sexuality. Temple defines heterosexism as ‘the assumption that heterosexuality is superior to all other types of sexuality’ which may manifest itself as subtle expectations and assumptions (2005: 272). This is illustrated by subject Alissa, who discussed the ‘the high school pressure of having a boyfriend’. While Alissa’s peers may not have intentionally forced Alissa to have a boyfriend, they themselves were a product of a hegemonic Western school system which promotes heterosexuality (Temple, 2005: 273). In Temple’s study, heterosexuality is promoted through high school text books which ignore alternate sexualities and contain a near constant assumption of heterosexuality (2005: 282). Being in a heterosexist environment does not only influence the way gay and lesbian individuals think about sexuality but also how they perform their identity in a space which does not accept homosexuality. For Melissa, the effects of being in a space which enforced heteronormativity on a day-to-day basis compelled her to manage her behaviour and mannerisms to hide her sexuality.

As the results demonstrated, some school settings were not only heterosexist but particularly homophobic and hostile which also had a significant impact on the way participants expressed themselves. Mason notes that vulnerable individuals assess the danger to their personal safety posed by particular spaces and subsequently censor
performative manifestations of their sexuality (2002: 84). Seb assessed the threat to his own personal safety at school by seeing another gay student who constantly ‘copped a lot of shit’. He went to extreme lengths to avoid such hostility being directed at him by creating a fake girlfriend and putting on an elaborate performance of their relationship. Alternatively, Brett found his school environment to be welcoming and accepting which allowed him to be ‘camp’ and behave as he wished. As Butler argues, ‘gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ (1990: 33), so too can space be thought of as ‘brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power’ (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 434). Therefore it was not necessarily Brett’s school which was ‘safe’, but it was constructed as a safe space through the performance of the actors within it.

The majority of participants experienced a school environment which operated within a heteronormative framework. This caused many participants to develop negative associations with homosexuality due to the repressive atmosphere they experienced on a daily basis, such as the fact that it felt ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’ to be gay. The results also demonstrate how widespread the negative representation of homosexuality within various high school systems was, with most participants altering their behaviour to conceal their sexuality. The findings also showed how influential a positive and accepting school environment can be, as Brett’s experience of school as a ‘safe space’ where he could be himself, demonstrated. However, the majority of participants experienced high school to be a heteronormative space which stigmatized homosexuality.
As a whole, these results demonstrate the pervasive influence of heterosexism on many gay and lesbian individuals, particularly on individual performativity. Many participants in this study revealed that they felt compelled to conceal their sexuality in high school in order to avoid judgment or homophobia. Contending with a heterosexist atmosphere within the high school environment had a negative impact on most participants whose understanding of their own sexuality was affected as they were made to feel that the way they felt was wrong and bad. For most interviewees, being aware of the stigmatised status of homosexuality caused them to censor themselves and monitor the way they performed different aspects of their identity. This demonstrates the authoritative power that works through its ability to name, define and describe people as different, subsequently excluding them and restricting the appropriate ways they can perform identity (Butler, 1993b: 312). The results of this study therefore highlight the significant impact that a heterosexist environment has on individuals in a high school environment, from constant bullying to feeling compelled to appear straight and creating fake heterosexual relationships to avoid stigmatisation.
Chapter 5: Results III

The results of this section depict how individuals experience their current home neighbourhoods and spaces of socialisation and how they negotiate these spaces. The advantages of living in a queer community are revealed to involve a sense of comfort and safety where individuals do not feel persecuted for their sexuality. However, results demonstrate that most interviewees preferred to live in queer-friendly neighbourhoods. Participants felt that despite the fact that these communities were predominantly heterosexual, homosexuality was accepted and diversity was welcome. Further, findings show that queer-friendly communities were also the most commonly preferred sites of socialisation. In this section, results demonstrate that there is a negative tension between many gay individuals and gay social spaces. Many participants felt excluded from venues that cater to a specifically gay clientele and thus favour queer-friendly bars and clubs as they were perceived to have a more heterogeneous public.

5.1 Current home neighbourhood

The results of this section reveal why queer individuals have chosen to live in what have been identified as ‘gay enclaves’ such as Sydney’s Darlinghurst (McInnes, 2001: 167), or in more heterogeneous areas that are accepting of homosexuality without being queer-identified. The findings demonstrate that spaces like Darlinghurst are appealing as homosexuality is experienced as the norm, unlike many Sydney neighbourhoods which are heteronormative. It is also revealed that gay enclaves are appealing to participants as they provide a safe space where gay and lesbian individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves and their sexuality openly. Other interviewees prefer queer-friendly
communities in Sydney’s inner west which they felt to be accepting of homosexuality but more diverse than gay enclaves like Darlinghurst. The results show that those participants who lived in queer-friendly neighbourhoods perceive queer-identified communities to be exclusionary and defined primarily by sexuality.

*Queer communities*

Aidan is the only participant of this study who is currently, or has ever lived, in a queer community: a space with a predominant presence of gay venues and a significant gay population (McInnes 2001: 167). Presently living in Darlinghurst, or ‘Gay Central’ as he refers to it, Aidan chose to live here because he feels comfortable in his surroundings. Due to what he describes as the ‘negative experience’ of growing up in the western suburbs of Sydney, Aidan appreciates the perceived safety that Darlinghurst provides him. He states that he can walk ‘anywhere’ without feeling ‘threatened anymore than a normal person would’ in society. Aidan feels so comfortable that he says this is the one space in which he can be himself and not constantly monitor his behaviour:

> It’s not that I don’t need to be worried, I don’t even need to think about what I’m doing, how I’m walking, if I’m holding my boyfriend’s hand down the street, there’s no second thoughts…I feel like this is *my* little place and I *can* be me. It’s like a home on a street, I feel safe day or night.

Aidan compares his experience of Darlinghurst to that of ‘normal’ or ‘straight’ people who live in what he feels is the ‘mainstream community of the world’ who can go about living their lives without thinking “I can do that here”…it’s a decision, a thoughtfulness, a consciousness that you don’t even have unless you’re someone who feels like you have to cover up who you are.
Aidan feels that living in Darlinghurst allows him to also be rid of having that extra consciousness as well, instead of questioning the way he expresses himself. Unlike his behaviour in Darlinghurst, Aidan is aware that his behaviour changes in other places, and can be quite conscious about visibly appearing gay. For example, going back to his home neighbourhood in Western Sydney, Aidan still feels stigmatised and changes the way he behaves:

When I’m out there, even today when I go and visit family, I need to hide part of myself – or change the way that I speak, change the way that I walk, unless I’m actually in the family home with my mum.

Living in Darlinghurst therefore allows Aidan to freely express himself without having to monitor his behaviour and the performance of his sexual identity.

‘Queer-friendly’ neighbourhoods

Some interviewees have chosen to live in what participants describe as ‘queer-friendly’ communities as opposed to ‘queer communities’ as they prefer to live in an area which has a more diverse population and where they feel comfortable expressing themselves. Participants indicate that they feel accepted in these neighbourhoods and there is no palpable hostility towards homosexuality, but it is still predominantly heterosexual rather than queer-identified. Dean lives in Glebe, in Sydney’s inner west, which he describes as ‘very queer-friendly’, and which he says was an important consideration when choosing where to live. In Glebe, Dean feels a high level of comfort, which is reflected in the way he dresses:

I love scarves. And actually, all my scarves are women’s scarves, ’coz they’re prettier than men’s scarves…So I’ve got this beautiful pink scarf
with silver things in it…there’s no way I’d wear that up at my parents’ place.

As well as having the freedom to wear whatever he feels like, Dean likes the ‘variety’ that a queer-friendly suburb like Glebe offers. Dean feels that the ‘ghetto-isation’ of Darlinghurst has resulted in an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality:

Whereas Glebe…you’ve got gay people in Glebe, you’ve got straight people in Glebe, you’ve got so many different people, it’s all about variety.

Jack also lives in Sydney’s inner west in Forest Lodge because, like Dean, he likes the diversity as it allows him to feel comfortable expressing himself. He finds Forest Lodge to be ‘very open, welcoming, accepting of all the different walks of life you find around there’ which makes him feel ‘safe and secure’. Like Dean, living in a queer-friendly environment has a significant impact on Jack’s behaviour:

There’s this great diversity of people. It’s really shaped a lot of the way that I behave in general. I appreciate that diversity within a community. Going to live in what would generally be called the “gay ghettoes” of Sydney, I find you end up having just one sort of mix of people. And I don’t want to restrict myself to just being a gay person. I’m so much more than that.

Because he feels accepted in the Forest Lodge area, he doesn’t censor his behaviour to conceal his sexuality and feels comfortable being physically affectionate with male friends and partners, openly holding hands, hugging or kissing each other on the cheek. Engaging in performative acts such as wearing flamboyant clothing and being camp, it is clear that Dean and Jack feel comfortable enough in these areas to express themselves openly.
Aidan has chosen to live in a queer community because that is where he feels safe. He does not feel he has to censor performativity in his neighbourhood and therefore it is where he feels most comfortable. Gay spaces have been credited with not only enabling open displays of behaviour but areas in which behaviour does not need to be edited so as to conform to a heterosexual norm (Visser, 2008: 1345). One particularly important advantage to living in Darlinghurst is, for Aidan, the ability to openly show affection with his partner. As Myslik notes, outside predominantly gay communities or gay establishments over 80% of gay and lesbian individuals avoid performing their sexuality through shows of affection, physical contact with someone of the same sex, speech patterns or vocabulary considered stereotypical of homosexuality, for example ‘camp’ or feminine behaviour (1996: 165). Therefore many gay people, like Aidan, are drawn to living in queer spaces for their perceived ‘safety’. This is despite high instances of violence against LGBT individuals which may still occur in these spaces (Myslik, 1996: 166). Thus Myslik argues that feelings of safety may not necessarily be related to feeling safe from physical harm, but having the ability to live openly (1996: 166). Aidan for example certainly feels that he is able to be affectionate with affectionate with his partner in Darlinghurst, or simply be ‘himself’.

Other participants prefer to live in queer-friendly communities. Nash and Bain define a queer-friendly neighbourhood as ‘a sexual sanctuary, a safe-haven, a second-home to some, a hiding place to others’ without specifically being gay-identified (2007: 48). Queer-friendly communities may also provide an opportunity to experience alternative behaviours and practices through which new gay identities can come into being (Nash
and Bain, 2007: 50), as opposed to pre-existing gay stereotypes. Dean and Jack felt that their own queer-friendly neighbourhoods were diverse enough to afford them the freedom to be comfortable with their sexuality and the ability to express themselves openly without having to endure what they perceived as the insularity of gay spaces and communities.

5.2 Spaces of socialisation

The majority of participants in this study revealed that they preferred to socialise in queer-friendly venues as opposed to gay clubs and bars. While queer-friendly venues in such suburbs as Newtown and Glebe make individuals feel welcome, they do not have a specifically gay clientele. The results demonstrated that most interviewees were averse to socialising in gay venues as they found them to be exclusive and unwelcoming.

Participants also felt that gay social venues catered to a specific type of person with whom they did not necessarily wish to socialise. Alternatively, findings revealed that queer-friendly bars and pubs were perceived to be more welcoming and diverse than gay venues. In addition to their varied nature, individuals also maintained that they felt safe and comfortable in queer-friendly spaces. The results therefore demonstrated that queer-friendly venues were perceived to be the preferred and most accommodating social spaces for gay and lesbian individuals.

Throughout this study a distinct tension between gay venues and gay individuals became apparent as many interviewees were averse to socialising in a specifically queer-identified space. Dean states that he never particularly liked socialising around Oxford
Street in Sydney’s Darlinghurst because he found it exclusive and did not feel a sense of belonging. The constant ‘objectification’ he experiences when he is in these venues makes him feel awkward and uncomfortable. Past experiences at clubs on Oxford Street contribute to his wariness. Dean states everyone is ‘grabbing your ass’ and ‘you have to be really pretty otherwise you can’t get in’. Jack also chooses to avoid Oxford Street because he finds the community to be very exclusive and unaccepting of different kinds of people:

I find that gay clubs end up being very ‘scene-y’. And by that I mean, you’re there dressed exactly as you should be; as a gay man you fit all the stereotypes – the sparkly shiny hair and jeans you had to have got on with Vaseline.

Because Jack says he does not fit the ‘gay stereotype’ of people that frequent bars and clubs on Oxford Street, he feels uncomfortable and unwelcome at exclusively gay clubs. Similarly, Alissa does not like the ‘queer scene’ in Sydney. Alissa describes her past experiences at lesbian events on Oxford Street as ‘odd’ and ‘awkward’. She observes that the majority of lesbians she encountered at lesbian events ‘have this image of what a lesbian is and they’re quite try-hardy…and everyone’s just trying to hook up’ which contributed to her discomfort. Rather than not being accepted because of her sexuality, Alissa believed that she did not fit into this lesbian scene because she was not ‘the right type of lesbian’ with ‘bleached blonde hair, with their hair all over their faces, all that makeup on and moody’ and therefore felt excluded from lesbian venues. Nights out at ‘gay man clubs’, such as those on Oxford Street with a predominantly male clientele, have been similarly negative as Alissa felt overwhelmingly ‘unwelcome’ and ‘intimidated’. Therefore while gay clubs are spaces which are accepting of
homosexuality, many participants felt uncomfortable as they did not fit in this specific
group of people, highlighting a distinct tension between the queer community and some
queer individuals.

Many interviewees preferred to socialise in spaces that were queer-friendly but not
necessarily queer-identified. Venues in and around the Newtown area are perceived by
many participants to be accepting of homosexuality, while not necessarily catering for an
exclusively gay clientele. Billy feels that he is ‘kind of anti gay bar’ and would rather go
to a pub or a ‘queer-friendly’ club in Newtown as he finds them more relaxed and fun.
Like Dean and Jack, Billy finds the objectification which occurs in gay bars to be ‘really
off-putting’:

   It’s like everybody there’s trying to be…too busy being impressive with
   their perfectly manicured eyebrows and their hair and things like that…I
   feel like I’m a piece of meat put on display.

Alissa also feels more comfortable in a more mixed environment, where everybody’s
main interest does not revolve around ‘looking like a lesbian’:

   I would feel most comfortable somewhere like The Courthouse [pub in
   Newtown], where a lot of people in there are lesbians and I’m sure
everyone that’s not a lesbian is very comfortable with concept of gay
people.

An accepting, diverse atmosphere such as the one Alissa perceives at The Courthouse is
important to many of the participants in this study. Dean feels that pubs and clubs in
Glebe and Newtown are also ‘inclusive’ places which celebrate ‘diversity’. Like Alissa,
he prefers ‘a good mix of people’ as opposed to an exclusively gay crowd. Brendan also
favours places where there is a mixed group of people as he likes to ‘hang out with [his]
straight friends’ as well as other gay people. In Brendan’s case simply being gay does not exclusively link him to the queer community or queer venues and he finds that ‘different’ sorts of clubs in ‘the city’ such as ‘Oxford Street, Kings Cross, George Street’ promote diversity. Brett also primarily socialises at mixed clubs in the city and the fringing suburbs…that’s pretty much it…I can wear what I want, I can speak who I want without having to watch over my shoulder – some fat man who wants to punch me…

Brett further explains his propensity towards the city as it is a place where he does not feel threatened because of his sexuality, as venues in the city are ‘a safe house for us.’ Queer-friendly venues therefore provide gay and lesbian individuals with a safe environment which is also inclusive and diverse.

While there are many gay venues in Sydney, most participants found them to be exclusive and preferred venues with a more mixed clientele. As McInnes notes, one of the main gay spaces in Sydney is Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, due to its high proportion of gay businesses and venues (2001: 167). These venues are important to the queer community as they provide spaces for individuals to socialise and feel safe and accepted. Eves also argues that the proliferation of gay bars and other such businesses ‘has provided the material space for a diversification of identities and styles’ and increased the ‘visibility and legitimacy’ of the gay community (2005: 486). However many participants, such as Dean, Alissa and Jack felt uncomfortable in queer-identified venues as they felt a lack of solidarity with other queer individuals who frequented such places. Dean found the objectification which he encountered in gay bars to be ‘off-putting’, Jack believed that he did not fit in with the appropriate ‘gay stereotype’ of people who
frequented gay venues on Oxford Street and Alissa felt that she did not feel that she fit in
with the specific scene of lesbian bars. As Ruting notes, ‘the implicit or actual exclusion
from the Oxford Street district of those who are not stylish, young or wealthy enough has
helped facilitate the emergence of alternative, less expensive venues’ such as those in
Newtown (2008: 266), which participants of this study such as Dean and Alissa
expressed preference for as they felt they were more accepting and diverse. While gay
clubs and other venues provide a space for gay and lesbian individuals to socialise, many
participants in this study found them to be exclusive and insular due to the specific
representation of ‘gayness’ they witnessed and were expected to perform. According to
Butler, identity can turn into a regulatory regime and such norms can exist even in
subversive groups (1993b: 308). These performative norms gain power through repetition
and citation (Butler, 2000: 156), such as the repeated performance of a specific queer
identity in a particular space, which in this case is a gay club. If individuals do not
‘perform’ this specific type of queerness, as Alissa experienced in many lesbian bars,
they subsequently feel that they do not fit in to this community. Therefore many
participants favoured queer-friendly venues instead. These bars, clubs and pubs were
perceived to be accepting of homosexuality but had a more diverse and mixed clientele
than gay venues.

To summarise, the results of interviews regarding both current neighbourhoods and
spaces of socialisation show that most participants choose to live and socialise
predominantly in queer communities and queer-friendly neighbourhoods as they allowed
participants to feel comfortable expressing themselves and their sexuality. However,
while exclusively queer communities and social spaces are seen as providing space for gay and lesbian individuals to live and socialise freely and safely, many interviewees felt that they were exclusive and insular. Most participants found that queer-friendly communities and social spaces, while still being predominantly heterosexual, provided a more varied atmosphere for gay and lesbian individuals to enjoy. Most interviewees therefore enjoyed the varied and relaxed nature of queer-friendly venues as opposed to queer-specific sites of socialisation. Participants did not feel comfortable socialising in spaces that were centered around sex and sexuality as they felt restricted by the expectation to perform a specific type of sexual identity.
Chapter 6: Results IV

6.1 Sites of homophobia

The results in this section reveal that every participant has experienced some form of homophobia, which subsequently affected their performativity in social spaces. Homophobic incidents articulated in interviews ranged from verbal abuse to physical attacks that resulted in serious bodily harm. These incidents occurred in various neighbourhoods in metropolitan Sydney, from the outer western suburbs to inner city areas in which many participants had previously felt were ‘safe’ spaces for queer individuals. Participants also revealed that public transport was a common site of homophobia, therefore impeding their ability to move between different areas. Results demonstrate that the residual effects of homophobia involve individuals censoring their behaviour to avoid further instances of assault.

Inner city assault

Despite being perceived by participants as queer friendly or queer-identified suburbs in Sydney, some interviewees have endured assault or harassment in suburbs such as Redfern and Darlinghurst, as well as inner city neighbourhoods such as Kings Cross. Brendan has experienced this situation often when walking down Oxford Street in Darlinghurst. He is used to ‘people calling out’ or driving past and calling out ‘stupid stuff’, though he says he is ‘largely unaffected’ by these occurrences. However despite stating that his behaviour does ‘not particularly’ change after an event of harassment, he does admit that he never feels comfortable being affectionate with his partner in public, ‘even in the city areas as well’. Thus while Brendan states that his behaviour is
unaffected by previous verbal assaults, he clearly monitors his behaviour in public spaces, particularly behaviours such as hand-holding, kissing or other public displays of affection. In Brendan’s case, this self-censorship is almost unconscious. While he claims that his behaviour does not change in different places, he also states that he chooses not to show affection in public because he feels that it will not be accepted.

Aidan has also experienced homophobia in Sydney’s inner-city suburbs. While Aidan lives in Darlinghurst and feels safe there, ‘in the city, in the CBD…or anywhere really in the eastern suburbs’ he still endures what he calls ‘homophobic attacks’. Aidan performs drag one night a week at a pub in Redfern where one of the head chefs used to routinely refer to him and his friends as ‘fucking faggots’ and threaten them with violence. The chef was eventually fired, but Aidan is aware of the incongruity of a homophobic individual working in an environment that was not only queer-friendly, but hosted gay nights, featured a drag queen and attracted a predominantly gay audience. Alissa has also endured extreme homophobia in the inner city and feels particularly uncomfortable being in Kings Cross, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. Around Kings Cross Alissa finds boys to be ‘very homophobic’ and the atmosphere to be ‘very heterosexual’. On one occasion when Alissa caught a taxi home from Kings Cross, the driver proceeded to launch into a tirade about killing ‘all of those homosexuals’. Feeling intimidated by the situation, Alissa remained silent:

> When you’re in a cab you don’t really feel like you’re in the best position to start an argument about something. But that was awful and that’s tainted my experience of Kings Cross. Nearly every experience I’ve had there afterwards has been the same feeling.
Alissa’s psychological distress from one incident has had long-term effects and manifests itself in her altered behaviour in subsequent similar circumstances. Stating that she would in ‘no way’ feel comfortable being affectionate with her girlfriend in Kings Cross after her experience, she also believes that ‘it would almost be more trouble than it’s worth’. Alissa’s knowledge of a previous negative experience continues to affect performativity after the incident, influencing her feelings of safety and the way she performs her identity in this area.

**Public transport**

Public transport was one of the most common sites of homophobic assault cited by interviewees. Melissa has experienced multiple instances of homophobia on public transport and finds many of the attacks unprovoked and difficult to understand. On one occasion Melissa and her girlfriend were sitting side-by-side on a bus ‘just talking to each other’ before they were harassed by a middle aged man sitting in front of them:

> All of a sudden he just stood up and went “Ugh. You’re disgusting” and stood up and moved way further forward on the bus away from us… He got off the bus later with his wife and shouted through the doors “Lesbians are filth! Rot in hell!” We weren’t even doing anything! I was just sitting on the bus talking to my friend.

Since this incident Melissa has found that she is much more likely to be ‘keeping [her]self in check’ when using public transport. In doing so, Melissa admits she becomes incredibly aware of her actions, particularly when with her girlfriend:

> I do probably over-analyse it a bit too much. Like, if I put my hand on her back or something I’d be like “Oh no! People will think we’re raging lesbians!”
Due to her past negative experiences Melissa is aware of the very real possibility that she may be harassed based on her sexuality and now takes precaution by editing her behaviour around her girlfriend to avoid further instances of assault.

Brett has also experienced the effects of homophobia on public transport. After being harassed on the train home to Guilford, Brett was followed by a group of males who proceeded to physically abuse him:

They called me faggot and they dislocated my jaw and they stole all my stuff. That wasn’t fun. That was really scary…and it still hasn’t left me today. It’s one of the reasons why I hate public transport. Because of what happened, every time I do get on a train, I have that thought in my head that someone’s going to follow me.

This homophobic attack has had a lasting influence on Brett, as did the individual experiences of Aidan, Alissa, Brendan and Melissa. The fact that Brett still feels apprehension and fear when using public transport further limits the places he may access. This is evident when Brett states that he only spends time in places which allow him to feel comfortable in society:

I think I’ve disassociated myself with places that made me feel uncomfortable…I only go where I feel comfortable…which is the city and the inner city.

In addition to limiting himself to a very confined space within Sydney, Brett’s behaviour is also affected by his past encounters with homophobia. Having been in a relationship for almost four years, Brett notes that they have never shown each other affection in public, apart from in a gay club. His reasoning for refraining from overt displays of affection is because he feels that homosexuality is not accepted in public spaces:
Unless you’re on Oxford St, you’ll get a look…The only places to do that is places where straight society said it’s ok…which is Oxford St. Like, coz they’re the ones who have said “Yes. You can have straight clubs here.”

It is clear that experiencing homophobia on a regular basis, as well as a traumatic physical attack at a train station have had enduring consequences for Brett. Not only does he feel the need to monitor the way he performs his sexuality, such as avoiding open displays of affection, but he also feels confined by which spaces he can use in Sydney and is restricted in his movement.

The term ‘homophobia’ may be used to describe any form of negative behaviour or attitude towards members of the gay and lesbian community (Robinson, 2008: 2). As Ruthchild asserts, homophobia that manifests itself in violence is an individual response to signals which ‘already exist in society and are universally understood’ (1997: 1), signals that are reflected in discriminatory laws regarding same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption, amongst others. These socially legitimated examples of homophobia to which Ruthchild alludes imply that lesbians and gay men do not deserve the same degree of respect as heterosexual members of the community (Ruthchild, 1997: 1). In 1994 the first Australian research to gauge the prevalence of homophobic violence was published by GLAD. Of the 1002 participants, 11% of lesbians had been physically assaulted and 70% had been verbally abused (Mason, 1997: 16). Furthermore, 20% of gay males had been physically assaulted and 64% had been verbally abused (Mason, 1997: 16). The high level of abuse that was reported in the GLAD survey was similarly reflected in this study, as the majority of participants had experienced at least one instance of verbal or physical homophobic violence.
These results revealed that experiences of homophobia occurred predominantly in areas that were perceived to be safe as well as on public transport, which resulted in many participants censoring their behaviour to avoid further instances of assault. Brendan, Aidan and Alissa were all been victims of assault in Sydney’s inner city, which Aidan refers to as the ‘gay bubble’. These findings support Myslik’s argument that while many would view Sydney’s inner city areas as ‘safe spaces’ for gay and lesbian individuals they can often serve as destinations for ‘gay bashers’ (Myslik, 1996: 157). Ruthchild states that ‘gay bashing’ may be seen as a contemporary urban pastime for some Australian males who may, for example, deliberately stalk Oxford Street to harass queer individuals known to utilize the space (1997: 1). As Mason notes, homophobic violence does not even have to be personally experienced to have long-term emotional and psychological repercussions because individuals are aware of their vulnerability in certain situations and manage their behaviour accordingly (2002: 79). For example, while Brendan does not consciously feel that his behaviour changed since being subject to homophobia, the fact that he does feel comfortable openly being affectionate with his boyfriend demonstrates that he is aware of the possibility of assault and subsequently monitors his actions to avoid it.

Butler also asserts that the constant repetition of performed moments, such as repeatedly self-censoring one’s behaviour, may eventually congeal into an individual’s sense of self (1993: 311). This may explain why Brendan does not consciously feel that he changes the way he acts, as it has become ingrained in the way he behaves day-to-day. Similarly, acts
(whether the heterosexualised behaviours witnessed by participants such as heterosexual couples holding hands, music exalting heterosexual love in restaurants or overheard conversations amongst their peers discussing recent dates) produce a ‘host of assumptions embedded in the practices of public life about what constitutes proper behaviour’ (Weeks 1992, in Valentine, 1996: 149). Over time these acts give the appearance of the ‘proper’ or ‘normal’ production of space. The repetition of these acts within particular spaces serve to constrain the types of performances that are possible within those particular spaces. For example, the repetition of homophobic assaults on LGBT persons on public transport as experienced by several interviewees is an example of the repetitive acts that maintain the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexual productions of space. Hubbard notes it is common for many gay and lesbian individuals to steer away from using public transport in order to avoid homophobic violence (2001: 56). Therefore not only are gay and lesbian individuals ‘sexual others’ while utilizing the heterosexual street (Valentine, 1996: 146 and Hubbard, 2001: 53) but their movements are also impeded when attempting to move between different spaces. It is evident then that homophobia may have an immediate effect on an individual but it also has enduring consequences on performativity.

In conclusion, most participants experienced some form of either verbal or physical homophobic assault at some point in their lives. As many interviewees revealed, instances of verbal and physical abuse occurred in spaces that had been perceived to be ‘safe’ spaces for gay and lesbian individuals. Public transport was a frequently mentioned site of homophobia, which made individuals hesitant to use it again, therefore severely
limiting their access to different places. Instances of assault also had an enduring impact on participants, in addition to the immediate effects they suffered. Interviewees revealed that being a victim of homophobia caused them to edit their behaviour and censor themselves as they were aware of the appropriate behaviours in certain spaces and the subsequent possibility of violence for deviating from these established norms.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis explored the ways in which different spaces influence the performativity of gay and lesbian individuals. It utilised qualitative research methods including interviews of young people to critically examine the ways in which they perceived, negotiated and were compromised by space. Deploying the theoretical framework of performativity, this study explored the nature of how space is shaped and how it shaped individual performances. The results of the study indicate the ways that various locations influence feelings of fear and safety and how individuals subsequently negotiate these spaces.

The results demonstrated the different ways space could influence individual performativity and, alternatively, how performativity could influence the creation of certain spaces. While space is often thought of as pre-existing, as a place where sexualities are played out (i.e. a ‘stage’ in the manner of Goffman’s ‘performance’ theory), Butler’s understanding of performativity allows for a different understanding of space. Just as Butler argues that ‘gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ (1990: 33), so too can space be thought of as ‘brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power’ (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 434). For example, participants in spaces considered ‘safe’, such as a queer-friendly neighbourhood or social space or a performing arts high school, performed their gender differently than when in spaces considered a threat. When Brett entered the space of the performing arts school, his behaviour changed as he entered into relationship with new expectations about gender, new groups of people, and new relationships of power. Similarly, Brett, along with
participants Melissa and Brendan, experienced other spaces as traditionally heterocentric and thus performed according to these norms, expectations and power relationships. Thus each space is brought into being through the dynamic, performed relationship of the individual and others in the space, their power relationships, and expectations concerning appropriate sexualised and gendered behaviour.

The repetition of acts of violence against LGBT persons in space and place shows this dynamism at work. When spaces are marked through these repetitive acts as ‘heterosexual’, gay and lesbian persons are made to feel not only unwelcome but fearful. Participants Aidan, Jack and Brett all grew up in Western Sydney and continue to feel anxious in these areas. As they did not feel accepted in these spaces because of their alternate sexualities, they often felt fearful of being attacked or assaulted. Acts which legitimated heterosexuality in Sydney’s western suburbs, such as previous instances of homophobia, gay jokes and the visibility of heterosexual couples and nuclear families produced ‘a host of assumptions embedded in the practices of public life about what constitutes proper behaviour’ (Weeks, 1992 in Valentine, 1996: 149). Over time this appropriate behaviour is naturalised and considered normal. Subsequently, the types of performances that are possible within these spaces are constrained and individuals feel compelled to act according to these powerful pre-existing norms and avoid the negative consequences of deviating from them. However other social spaces allow LGBT individuals to feel safe and free to openly perform their identity. Many participants preferred to live and socialise in queer-friendly neighbourhoods such as Newtown, Glebe
and the inner city in general, as they were perceived to encourage and promote diversity and acceptance, without the insularity of queer-identified neighbourhoods. Interestingly, while instances of homophobia were prevalent in these spaces, participants continued to feel a sense of safety, perhaps demonstrating that the overall acceptance and prominent presence of other LGBT persons was sufficient for feeling safe.

One of the most significant findings of this study was the discovery that every individual had encountered homophobia in some form. The fact that homophobia is so pervasive in Sydney’s social spaces demonstrates that homosexuality is considered aberrant social behaviour and that gay and lesbian individuals are perceived as sexual deviants, or representing the alternative other to the norm (Valentine, 1993: 240). Experiences of homophobia by participants ranged from instances of verbal assault to serious physical harm. This affected the way individuals negotiated and performed their sexuality in certain spaces. Some participants not only curbed their behaviour and mannerisms by avoiding public shows of affection with a same-sex partner, but avoided particular social spaces such as public transport, altogether. As ‘the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence’ (Butler, 1990: 33) the measures undertaken by participants to avoid vilification demonstrates the power of heterocentric norms. Previous experiences of homophobia and the knowledge that homophobia exists therefore defines homosexual individuals as wrong and therefore excludes them from others.
Throughout this study it became evident that public policies which encourage the safety and acceptance of LGBT persons are necessary. The majority of participants have experienced homophobia at some point and encountered an unwelcoming school environment. As many participants endured some form of homophobia in spaces which they perceived as ‘safe’ it is important to closely monitor these areas where gay and lesbian individuals are specifically targeted. As well as utilisation of CCTV cameras and an increase in the number of law-enforcement officials, it is also essential that LGBT persons are encouraged to report assault and inform them that appropriate action will be taken. If queer individuals do not feel supported by the law, they will not report instances of homophobia and the issue will remain widespread. Furthermore, as most participants of this study encountered a heterosexist school environment, education and training for teachers must be implemented. In addition to examining the gender and sexual stereotypes inherent in many curricula, staff must contribute to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBT youth in schools. Additionally, an increased visibility of positive representations of alternate sexualities and posters for appropriate queer services should also be available in every school, particularly in regional areas where there is a distinct lack of support for queer individuals. Finally, educational institutions need to treat homophobia as a serious issue and act on it accordingly to make young LGBT persons feel safe and accepted in their school environment.

While this study highlight the many ways queer individuals negotiate various spaces by altering their performativity, future research on this issue is also important. As participants were part of a narrow age range, it will be useful to see how other individuals
behave in different social spaces to further highlight the multiplicitous experiences of the queer community. Similarly, due to the limited nature of this study, there remains the opportunity for a broader scope of analysis. As there were 11 participants, only 3 of which were female, it would be useful to undertake a study which more effectively explores and compares the varied experiences of a larger group sample of both men and women. It would also be important to more carefully consider the differences between specifically lesbian spaces and gay male spaces within this delimited age group. Furthermore, as each interviewee who took part in this research openly identified as homosexual, I would also be interested in the future to investigate the ways in which individuals who are not open about their sexuality perform their identity. As many queer individuals choose to conceal their sexuality it will be interesting to examine why they do so and whether they feel more free to express themselves without fear of judgment, or whether their actions are further inhibited by being in the closet.
Reference List


Appendix A – Interview Questions

How do you personally identify with regards to your sexuality?
Could you describe some of the places and areas you conduct main parts of your life? e.g. uni, work, home, etc.
Are you currently in a relationship?

**Home Neighbourhood (Childhood)**
Can you describe the neighbourhood where you grew up, who you lived with, etc?
How do you think your upbringing in this area(s) affected the way you thought of your sexuality and how you expressed your sexuality? Or did it at all?
Was there a particular time when you came out of the closet, or were you always open about your sexuality?
Probes: Why at this time?
How did your behaviour/actions/way of expressing yourself change after this point?

**Current Home Neighbourhood**
Can you describe the neighbourhood where you live now?
Do you feel safe around this neighbourhood? Any threatening feelings with regards to your sexuality?
Are you open about your sexuality when conducting your life in and around this neighbourhood?
Would you say the suburb where you live is generally accepting of gay and lesbian people?
IF YES:
Would you describe it as a queer community? (for example is it predominantly a gay and lesbian population?)
Did you have a desire to live in a place that was accepting of your sexuality?
Did you feel any pressure as a gay/lesbian individual to live in a gay-friendly community like this?
How would you describe your behaviour whilst in this suburb?
How does living in a gay-friendly neighbourhood impact on how you express yourself? (physically, verbally, etc)
What are some of the positives of living in a gay-friendly or gay-identified community?
Can you identify any negative aspects of living in a gay-friendly or gay-identified community?
How would you feel about walking through this suburb holding hands with a partner/kissing them/being clearly affectionate?

IF NO:
Do you identify as gay/lesbian amongst this community?
How would you describe your behaviour when you’re there?
How does living in a non-gay friendly neighbourhood impact on how you express yourself? (physically, verbally, etc)
Have you ever felt a desire to live in a more queer-identified community such as Darlinghurst or Newtown?
Have you ever felt pressure to live in a more queer-identified community such as Darlinghurst or Newtown?
What do you think might be positives/negatives of living in a community that is predominantly gay/lesbian?

Work
Are you currently working anywhere?
How would you describe your workplace?
Have you felt comfortable expressing your sexuality at work (currently or in the past)?
Could you describe your behaviour and mannerisms around the workplace?
Is this different than how you would act in your own neighbourhood/at home?

University (if applicable)
How long have you been a student?
Could you describe your behaviour and mannerisms at university?
Is this different than how you would act in your own neighbourhood/at home?
Are you open about your sexuality?
Do you feel comfortable expressing yourself around university?
Do you know if your university has any queer societies/events? Are you apart of them?

**Spaces of Socialisation**
Where do you and your friends like to socialize (for example types of clubs, bars, etc)?
Probes: Why these place/areas/suburbs/clubs?
Do you attempt to go to places that are gay and lesbian friendly?
How would you describe the way you act when you are out with friends?
Would you say this is different from your home neighbourhood?
Probes: How does it differ?
Do you prefer to socialize in places that are specifically gay friendly/gay identified?
Why/Why not?

**School**
Can you tell me a bit about your time at school?
Probes: Were you out while you were still at school?
   How did this affect the way you acted or expressed yourself?
   Did it change your behaviour? How?
   Did you behave or express yourself differently when you were at school than you do now? How has this changed?
   Were you comfortable with your sexuality? Why/Why not?

While at school did you ever feel uncomfortable engaging in certain activities?
Have you ever felt pressure to act more feminine/masculine?

**Family Home**
How do you feel about your sexuality when you are around family?
Do you feel free to express yourself?
Do you express yourself/your sexuality differently?
How would you feel about being openly affectionate with a partner in a family setting?
Does your behaviour change when you’re around family as opposed to other areas of your life? How?

**Sites of Homophobia**
Have you ever encountered homophobia in your own life?
Could you describe the circumstances?
How did this affect you/how did you feel?
Did this cause you to then act differently?
Have you ever been harassed based on homophobia or have you heard of someone that has been?
How did this affect you/how did you feel?
Did this change the way you acted in similar circumstances or when in the same place?

**General**
Are there places or circumstances when you feel that sexuality is simply not an issue?
Probes: Why these places?
How do you act or behave when you’re in them?
How do you feel when you are there?
In contrast, are there any places that you feel are particularly against homosexuality/make you feel uncomfortable for being gay?
Probes: How do you deal with this?
When you are in specific neighbourhoods that are predominantly heterosexual, would you feel comfortable showing affection with somebody of the same sex?
Are you conscious about visibly appearing gay?
How do you feel about expressing your sexuality through appearance?
Does this change in different places?
Where would you go if you were to have a date with someone/go out with somebody you were romantically involved with?
Probes: Why this place/area?

Would there be anywhere you might not feel comfortable taking somebody?

Finally, are there any challenges you feel that you face in your everyday life (with specific regard to your sexuality)?

Probes: How do you think this is affected by specific places/situations in society?