

The Cultures of Cool and  
Being a Man:  
Getting in early to prevent  
domestic violence

By

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21 December 2009

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ISBN 978-0-478-32377-1 (Print)

ISBN 978-0-478-32376-4 (Online)

This publication is available on the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse website

[www.nzfvc.org.nz](http://www.nzfvc.org.nz)

## Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the wonderful support of the young men who participated so willingly and who were happy to share their ideas, intelligence and experiences with us. I am so grateful for their help. Two people provided invaluable support throughout this study: David Neilson and Ala'imalo Lua Maynard provided outstanding assistance with recruitment and the focus group discussions. Dave Neilson's lovely style of interviewing allowed the young men to take part with confidence and Ala'imalo Lua Maynard's work behind the scenes with the Pasifika community allowed recruitment and participation to proceed with ease. Thank you to all those members of the Pasifika community who quietly assisted behind the scenes. The encouragement and support of Brain Gardner and Garth Baker of the National Network of Stopping Violence Services in the early stages of this study and as it was progressing allowed me to proceed with confidence. I am grateful to the youth organisations who worked with me and others to recruit young men from their organisations. A special thanks to the Māori Advisory Group Sue Ngawati Osborne, Vi Wolfe and Tania Cargo for their on-going guidance and support. Hazel Scott was always available to provide encouragement when needed and also assisted with recruitment as required. As always, Lou Renner provided encouragement and support throughout. Thank you to Toni Chase for her faithful transcriptions. The work that Sophie Scott-Elvidge did for me on the bitches and hos music lyrics for the young women's study continued to be of great relevance to this study and I thank her again for her help with this research. Finally thank you to the two peer reviewers for their positive comments and very helpful suggestions for improvements.

This study was funded and supported by the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), Wellington, New Zealand. Views and/or conclusions in this article are those of the author and may not reflect the position of ACC.

*Alison Towns, 21 December 2009*

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## Executive Summary

The prevention of men's domestic violence towards women is an imperative given the extent of such violence in New Zealand. Prevention requires knowledge of the social and cultural influences that inform some men's ideas about their entitlement to control and dominate women. Previous work suggests that these ideas are likely to be imbedded in New Zealand culture (Adams, Towns & Gavey, 1995). High risk factors for lethality through domestic violence are the offender's excessive control of his victim and his extreme jealousy.

If violence is understood to occur on a continuum from controlling behaviours to extreme physical violence then one formulation for prevention is to get in early and prevent controlling behaviours as young people are starting out in their relationship careers. Some research on dating violence has shown an association between emotional expressions of jealousy or controlling behaviours and violence. However, little research has been carried out on the social values and beliefs that contribute towards controlling behaviour by boyfriends or girlfriends.

This study explored young men's ideas about control, power and equality in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships and the social and cultural values and beliefs that contribute to these ideas. Thirty young men aged 18-25 years were recruited from youth groups, youth organisations and tertiary institutions. Young men were only recruited if they were comfortable speaking English. About half of the participants were of NZ European descent and about half were of Pasifika descent. All names and identifying features of the participants were changed. Young men were asked to describe what they understood by control and equality in relationships, and the social and cultural influences that contributed to these ideas. The discussions were recorded using audio-recordings and the recordings were transcribed. Transcriptions were then analysed using discourse analysis.

### Controlling practices

The controlling behaviours towards girlfriends that young men described in this study appear to be informed by contemporary cultural influences associated with what it is to

be a man in New Zealand today. These controlling practices were consistent with those described by young women who had experienced such practices by boyfriends (Towns & Scott, 2008). They involved monitoring and limiting their choices, controlling the girlfriend's contacts, controlling her dress, isolating her and using dominance and entitlement practices including violence. Young men provided a sophisticated understanding of control, recognising that control was fluid for young men, changing depending on the context rather than static and consistent. Some young men described such control as informed by historical or traditional ideas about women's roles and women's status compared to that of men. Some young men described control as simply pragmatic and designed to limit the potential for other men to take their girlfriend away.

## Social and cultural influences that produce control

### Being 'The Man'

Controlling practices appeared to be supported by language associated with being The Man within a culture that privileged being cool. Participants portrayed constructions of The Man as encouraging one-up-manship in young men: *competition* between young men to achieve a desired end. What was considered to be cool was constructed as dependent on the young men's group varying from becoming engaged in a church group to performing a great sports move in a rugby group. For most groups having the hottest girlfriend was also considered to be the making of The Man although there was recognition that one man's hot girlfriend might not be another's. Having the hottest girlfriend was portrayed as potentially problematic as other young men might compete for her. The potential for the loss of a girlfriend to another man was portrayed as producing controlling or ownership practices.

Achieving a desired end was constructed by young men as providing *status* within the group and status was a desired outcome within this culture of cool that promoted being The Man. Telling stories allowed young men to position themselves as The Man, so long as these stories were considered to be valid, otherwise some young men positioned such story-tellers as pretenders or mockingly represented them as The Man. Despite pretender status most young men were not inclined to challenge such men, their justification being that such a challenge might cause emotional harm, or even eventuate



in violence if the man challenged had drunk alcohol and returned to take on the challenger.

Within this culture young men promoted *loyalty* to one's mates by using a number of disparaging phrases to refer to men who preferred to spend time with their girlfriends rather than spend time with their mates. Terms such as "bros before hos" emphasised the importance of loyalty to the mates over girlfriends. "HBB" or "hos before bros" was a phrase used to disparage men for putting their girlfriends first as were phrases such as "she wears the pants", "on the chain", "locked down" and "under the thumb". Some young men described these disparaging comments as influencing them to look at their girlfriends critically, and as killing any equal relationship. Some young men described these phrases as about losing a mate rather than about any attempts to promote male dominance or control, although the impact was to question the man's dominance within the relationship.

Some language was described as not being language that would be said in front of a girl and this secret language, available only to men, is likely to limit young women's choices about how to act and how to represent their identity. For example the term ho was a word that young men said would not be used in front of a girl. Tellingly, young men distinguished between girlfriends and hos, hos being described as young women available largely for sex: "uncomplicated intimacy". Music videos and media influences associated with consumerism, and with pornography and the Hugh Heifner world, were portrayed as promoting an ideal for young men that informed the construction of certain representations of the cool man.

#### The binge drinking/ boy racer culture

Some young men positioned themselves within the binge drinking culture, which they described as characterised by doing "skids" and "funnels". The term "skids" refers to the actions of the boy-racer culture involving skidding their cars and the term "funnels" refers to the pouring of alcohol down the throat of another member of this group. "Doing stupid things" was privileged in this group and provided fodder for telling better stories and gaining status. Alcohol was portrayed as creating risky situations for these men that contributed to better stories.

Within this culture there was evidence of young men's practices of policing dominance and control of the man over his girlfriend in order to ensure loyalty to the binge drinking group. At times women were spoken of as dogs who needed to be kept "on a leash". Socialising was portrayed as split along gender lines with the young men's interests being with their cars and drinking and their girlfriends' interests elsewhere. Some men within this group were able to represent differences with their girlfriends as more influential than the hard time given to him by his mates for failing to show at a drinking session. Nevertheless, there were concerning indicators of the extent of pressure placed on men within this group to stay loyal to the drinking group. Alcohol advertising, which disparages girlfriends, promotes the binge drinking mates' culture by diminishing women and trivialising intimacy. Alcohol was described by some young men as killing a relationship.

#### The gangster culture

Language associated with the gangster culture also emerged from the texts of the young men. Within these gangster cultures competition was portrayed as for territory or status and status was gained by having a reputation through fear. A reputation could be gained by doing risky, or frightening things. Within this culture girlfriends were described as having little choice but to go along with the gangster world: control of them within this culture was portrayed as complete. Some young men described the women that associated with these gangs as "hood rats" capturing the territory association with neighbourhood and the gangster association with the American word for gang member, *hood*. Hood rats were described as sluts who provided sex on demand. Some participants described girls as having a strong influence on whether young men entered the gangster world: young women's reactions to a man's violence could either promote his movement towards more violence and the gangster world or discourage it. This gangster culture was described as influenced by the media representations of bad being good within gangster music videos, on TV and in movies.

#### Equality

Equality in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships was less well articulated by young men than was control. Some young men were able to describe certain practices of equality

including democracy involving shared decision making, compromising, sharing chores and discipline of children, and trust. Young men described obstacles to equality including traditional ideas about male dominance in relationships and the status of men, consumer notions of self-sufficiency that promoted men needing no-one except themselves, the temptation to allow male dominance that comes with being in a privileged position, having to compromise and the lack of a firmly formed identity. Other obstacles described included government policy that did not promote equity, and the work culture that required work outside hours and did not promote family life.

## Recommendations

### *Youth Culture*

1. That the prevention of youth boyfriend/girlfriend violence is recognised as a priority for the prevention of men's domestic violence towards women. That gender transformative strategies are developed that address the social and cultural influences that work to promote masculinities that privilege the dominance of men over women, which is contrary to the prevention of men's domestic violence towards women. That these gender transformative approaches promote those masculinities that value women and that privilege equal and ethical or fair relationships. That an implementation plan be developed alongside these strategies.
2. That the Ministry of Social Development open up the It's Not Okay campaign to young people and work towards the prevention of domestic violence by getting in early with young people.

### *Binge Drinking Culture*

3. That more funding is provided to address the binge drinking culture and men's dominance and control of women, the associated alcohol industry practices that encourage young people to use alcohol and do 'stupid things' and that discourage young men from intimacy with young women through the diminishing of young women.

### *Gangster Culture*

4. That more funding is provided to New Zealand youth arts and culture in order to counter the American gangster music video culture (the bitches, hos and pimps music videos) that has become a dominant influence in some young men's cultures. This influence promotes "bad is good" and promotes misogynistic representations of young women.

### *Accessing young people*

5. That the Ministries associated with the prevention of violence provide funding towards workforce development of those who engage in health promotion and social and community development with a view to integrating the promotion of young people's emotionally healthy, ethical and democratic relationships *with* the promotion of healthy lifestyle decisions associated with sexual practices, masculine identities and use of alcohol and other drugs.
6. That trainee teachers, youth practitioners in health and youth development are educated about the ways social and cultural influences can impact on young men's ideas about control in relationships and about alternative egalitarian relationships. That teacher trainees and youth practitioners are made aware of the impact of young men's ideas about being cool and being a man on their relationships with girls and on the potential for controlling practices. That they are informed about the association between these practices and the potential for the denigration of young women through the construction of them as hos as well as the potential for positive constructions of women through egalitarian practices. That young people are engaged in prevention work in this area and that information is made accessible to young people in accessible ways.

### *Future Research*

7. That further research is conducted on the ways in which to get in early with young people and effectively reduce men's domestic violence towards women.

# 1. Introduction

This research project emerged out of recognition of the need to address men's domestic violence towards women by getting in early with young people. The prevention of men's domestic violence towards women is imperative given that more than a third of New Zealand women experience such violence within the life-time of their heterosexual relationships (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004). If prevention approaches are to have an impact on such large numbers, population-based interventions need to be used. Getting in early with children has driven early intervention work on mother-child attachment with women at risk, but children's healthy development and wellbeing may still be subject to significant disruption through witnessing men's domestic violence towards women in the home (Graham-Bermann & Edleson, 2001; Rossman, 2001). Witnessing such violence has been identified by New Zealand young people as one of the most disturbing forms of violence they experience contributing to depression, anxiety and high levels of suicidality (Fleming, Watson, Robinson et al., 2007) and is also implicated in the intergenerational transmission of such violence (Ehrensaft, Cohen, Brown et al. 2003).

Another place for intervention is with young people as they are entering their early heterosexual relationships. Addressing the gendered nature of such violence through prevention programmes has been promoted as a useful approach to prevention (WHO, 2007; WHO 2008). Controlling and jealous behaviours by the male partner or ex-partner have been identified as risk factors for lethality of women (Campbell et al., 2003; Johnson, 2006), and have been associated with violence in young people's dating relationships (Cano et al., 1998; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987). Getting in early with young people and addressing such behaviours early in their relationship careers through gender transformative programmes is recognised internationally as a place for the prevention of domestic violence (WHO, 2008).

A central thesis of this study is that prevention may be addressed by focussing on men's control of women and the social and cultural supports for such control. Men's domestic violence towards women may be understood as part of a continuum of controlling behaviours from minor controlling acts that have the effect of producing some limits on a woman's choices, to more extensive control by limiting financial and social contacts, to physical, sexual or emotional violence to enforce control and finally to severe

physical and sexual violence that causes significant physical and emotional harm, deprivation or disability<sup>1</sup>. By getting in early with young people when controlling behaviours are surfacing in their relationships domestic violence may be prevented.

This project began following discussions with young women about ways to develop early domestic violence prevention strategies. During the course of these discussions young women said that researchers should be investigating young women's experiences of "ownership" by their boyfriends as young women disliked being treated as though they were the property of their boyfriends: they disliked possessive and jealous behaviour and controlling practices. While some research with young people had involved looking at the *emotional* response of jealousy among young people involved in dating violence, and there had been some research on controlling *behaviours*, there had been very little research that had examined the *cultural influences* that might produce jealous or controlling behaviours. Jealousy and excessive control and the cultural influences that inform these reactions have relevance as potential points for prevention.

The term "ownership" captures the cultural influences that might impact on young men to behave in controlling and possessive ways towards young women – the historical construction of wives within Western cultures, as men's property. Earlier research (see Towns & Scott, 2008) identified the traditional underpinnings of men's ownership practices in Greek mythology that promoted misogyny (Holland, 2006), the Western legal history of men's property ownership, the marital privileges accorded men (MOJ, 1999), and traditional Western ideas of men's right to political dominance: both private and public leadership. We noted that these historical underpinnings were not present in traditional Māori culture, which did not accord leadership according to gender and did not promote gendered practices as a right within heterosexual relationships (MOJ, 1999). Leadership was attributed through leadership qualities rather than through gender. Māori women, through colonisation and the application of gendered British laws, lost much of their previously assumed rights and privileges in marital relationships available through traditional Māori leadership and customary practices (MOJ, 1999).

In the first part of this research project we asked young women who had experienced control, possessiveness or jealousy from a boyfriend (Towns & Scott, 2008) to describe their ownership experiences of boyfriends. Findings revealed a number of

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Associate Professor Peter Adams for this formulation of such violence as a continuum.

ownership practices that affected young women: acts of entitlement in which the young men assumed the right to make decisions that affected the young women without consulting with her; surveillance in which the young man engaged in activities that involved monitoring and controlling the young woman's activities; isolating her by controlling where she was and whom she was with and through constructing her as engaging in sexually inviting behaviours with other men; control of the young women's expression of her identity by, for example, criticising the way she dressed, putting her down and undermining her decisions; and physical violence. These behaviours have parallels with domestic violence in the heterosexual relationships of older people. The findings support the thesis that controlling behaviours by boyfriends in young people's relationships are part of a continuum of violence – from minor controlling acts to physical violence - that make up men's domestic violence towards women.

Young women were asked to identify the social and cultural influences that they thought contributed to these ownership practices. They were able to give accounts of the influences that pointed to the gendered values and beliefs that informed them. We collapsed the language they used to explain these influences into three groups: the 'culture of cool' which drew on advertising or media representations that portrayed young women as devoid of identity and that portrayed an ever-changing unattainable ideal for young women's bodies that was impossible to achieve - these representations supported the treatment of them as "disposable objects" by boyfriends; The 'bitches and hos culture' which was portrayed by referring to certain music videos that promoted explicitly only women's sexuality and sexualised beauty and which was evident in the misogyny that was explicit in the lyrics of some music genre - these references portrayed young women's sex as the only point of interest for young men and portrayed young women as contemptible or even harmful; and the 'mates culture' that drew on language used to de-masculinise men who were not considered to be dominant enough in their heterosexual relationships or loyal enough to certain masculine values that privileged male dominance and entitlement in relationships with women.

In the study reported here I looked more closely at young men's understandings of control, power and equality in relationships within New Zealand youth culture. I was interested in the ways young men in the general population made sense of control and equality and how these understandings might operate as power practices. I wanted to

capture what they understood to be control and equality, the practices of control, equality and power within boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, and the social and cultural influences that informed these practices. If these early practices of young men and the social and cultural influences that contributed to them could be identified then one way to prevent the progression into more controlling behaviours associated with domestic violence would be to intervene early to disrupt these practices and to counter the social and cultural influences that contribute to them.

In the following I will describe the methodology used in this research and present the findings. In the first section of the findings I will describe the various ways in which young men made sense of control within boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, and the controlling practices they described. In the second section of the findings I will lay out some of the cultural influences that emerged from their accounts and that contributed to controlling practices. These influences have been grouped into four sections: The cultures of cool, the cultures of cool and being The Man, the cultures of cool and the binge drinking culture; and the cultures of cool and the gangster culture. In the third section I will describe some young men's accounts of equality, and in the final section I will provide recommendations for ways to promote equal, healthy and ethical or fair relationships in order to prevent domestic violence.



## 2. Methodology

Qualitative research was used in this study to investigate young men's understandings of control, power and equality in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. This approach allowed the researcher to seek answers to the following research questions:

- What is the language employed by young men to make sense of control, power and equality in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships?
- What are the practices of control that young men are able to identify?
- What are the social and cultural influences or the values and beliefs that encourage young men to engage in controlling practices or practices of equality with their girlfriends?
- How can these understandings inform work towards the prevention of domestic violence through interventions with large population groups?

In order to address these research questions the aims of this research project were to identify young men's understandings of control, power and equality in relationships with young women:

- to identify the language of control and power evident in the young men's texts that pointed to their understandings of control or power and practices of control;
- to identify the social and cultural influences that appear to contribute to young men's practices of control power or equality; and
- to identify the implications of these findings for the prevention of men's domestic violence towards women.

### Safety and Confidentiality

The study received ethical approval from the Northern Regional Ethics Committee. Participants were informed that safety procedures would be followed if there were any concerns about the immediate safety of anyone<sup>2</sup>. The principal investigator and the interviewer were available at the end of the focus group in case any of the participants found the discussion distressing. All participants received information about local

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<sup>2</sup> New Zealand Standards Guidelines on Family Violence (NAS 8006:2006).

support agencies at the end of the session. The principal investigator (AT) was present at all groups to assist with consent procedures and Lua Maynard was present with the groups of Samoan young men to ensure cultural safety and to provide cultural support. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the focus group discussion at any time. In reporting, the results names and some minor details have been changed to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Events, locations and other details, which might identify the participants, have not been included in the analysis.

## Participants

Participants were thirty young men aged 18-25 who took part in a total of seven focus group discussions. Two seventeen year-old young men also showed with their friends and were not turned away. Most participants were groups of young men who were known to each other. Fifteen participants identified as of NZ European ethnicity the rest identifying as of Pacific Island ethnicity, predominantly Samoan (see Table 1.)<sup>3</sup>. Young men were only recruited into the study if they were able to speak English in order for them to participate comfortably in the focus group discussions. The young men were not recruited for any controlling practices: they were young men from the general population. The researcher did not limit recruitment to tertiary institutions hoping to generate a wider point of view from young men whose experiences came from other parts of the community. All participants were provided with a \$20.00 petrol voucher to help with their transport costs.

## Procedure

Young men were recruited through youth organisations, youth groups, universities and other tertiary training institutions and through word of mouth and snowballing. Following receipt of the information sheet and informed consent procedures (See Appendix A) focus groups were formed with up to five young men. Sometimes more

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<sup>3</sup> A Kaupapa Māori Youth project on this topic is currently being conducted.

young men showed than had been expected, coming with friends, and young men were not turned away in these circumstances.

With one exception the focus groups were conducted by Dave Neilson, who is of NZ European and Fijian ethnicity. One focus group was conducted by the researcher, AT, for unavoidable logistical reasons. The researcher is a clinical psychologist of twenty six years with research expertise in the area of men's domestic violence towards women and discourse analysis and the primary interviewer (DN) is an experienced counsellor with particular expertise in facilitating men's groups using a narrative social constructionist approach informed by feminist theories on power and in domestic violence programme provision for men. Consistent with cultural advice Ala'imalo Lua Maynard (LM), an experienced Samoan youth and health promotion worker, was present to welcome and provide cultural support to those Pasifika young men who participated in focus group discussion. A discovery focussed approach was employed consistent with the research conducted previously with young women (Townes & Scott, 2008). In this approach the interviewer takes the perspective of a naive inquirer accepting that the participants are likely to hold more expertise in this area than the researcher and the interviewer, as older people, do.

A semi-structured interview format was used to maintain the focus on the research questions (see Appendix B). The primary interviewer received training in the approach to be used, using the semi-structured interview questionnaire as a guideline, prior to the focus group discussions being held. A break at the centre point of the focus group discussion allowed the interviewer and researcher to discuss progress and maintain the focus group discussion on track. Young men were asked to describe their understandings of control in relationships, their understandings of the social and cultural influences that might contribute to controlling behaviours by boyfriends, their understandings of equality in relationships and the influences that either provided encouragement towards equality or provided obstacles to equality. Finally they were asked for their ideas about the best ways to intervene to encourage healthy boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. The focus groups were audio recorded using digital recording equipment and recordings were transcribed. Transcriptions were then analysed using discourse analysis. Various forms of media, which might have contributed to the language in the texts, were read, observed and listened to in order to inform the analysis.

## Analysis and influences

A form of discourse analysis which has been described elsewhere (Towns & Adams, 2000) was employed here. The approach is informed by Potter and Wetherell's (1987) use of interpretative repertoires and Wetherell's (1998) later work on linguistic resources and positioning. Edley's and Wetherell's work on masculine identities and on masculine psycho-discursive practices (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Wetherell & Edley, 1999) were also influential. The approach in this study was informed by Gavey's (2004) work on critical realism and feminist post-structuralism (Gavey, 1989), which provides for an analysis of power informed by Michel Foucault's theories on power and governance, and for the distinction between real events and constructed accounts through talk. Antaki, Condor and Levine's (1996) work on identities and the ways identities are represented in talk and the work of Davies (Davies & Harre, 1990) on positioning and agency were also influential.

The approach used here involves a fairly broad-brushed discourse analysis rather than a finely focussed rhetorical analysis. The texts of the focus group discussions were read and re-read for common forms of language or linguistic resources (metaphors, contradictory ways of talking, figures of speech, phrases, messages), which allowed the researcher to cluster these forms of speech into common over-riding conglomerates of language known as discourses. These over-riding discourses are understood to be informed by participants' realities while also informing the ways in which their realities are constructed. The language associated with such discourses is informed by and contributes to cultural values and beliefs, which are also evident in everyday representations such as the media, advertising, music videos etc. Some conglomerates of language, some discourses may be more influential than others. This dominance sometimes marginalises the talk of those who are less able to influence these ways of speaking. Talk from people of their practical experiences – the constructions in talk they represent as their experiences – can help to identify dominant influences. The texts were also read for the ways in which young men positioned themselves and girls or girlfriends. The language employed to describe their actions or those of others can indicate expressions or positions, within associated discourses, which work to produce identities.

## Transcription protocols

The following transcription protocols were used:

- to denote a break in speech
- , to denote a pause in a flow of speech
- . to denote the end of a speech phrase
- (.) to denote a pause which each dot indicating a second of pause
- ? to denote an upward inflection in speech
- [ ] within a stream of speech to denote overlapping talk or laughter from other participants
- (?) to denote unidentifiable speech content
- Bold text** to denote emphasised speech
- ... to denote that a portion of the text has been cut

Table 1. Participants' Background Information

Group	Name	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation	Relationship Status	Children
1	Aaron	23	NZ European	Armed Services	Engaged	None
1	Ben	22	NZ European	Armed Services	Girlfriend	None
1	Caleb	18	NZ European	High School Student	Single	None
1	Dylon	21	NZ European	University Student	Single	None
1	Euan	21	NZ European	Retail worker	Girlfriend	None
1	Frank	20	NZ European	Teacher Aide	Girlfriend	None
2	Gary	23	NZ European	University Student/ Barista	Single	None
2	Harry	24	NZ European	University Student	Girlfriend	None
3	Afi	17	Samoaan	High School Student	Single	None
3	Keoni	18	Samoaan	High School Student	Single	None
4	Jeff	25	Samoaan	Electrician	Married	3
4	Kyle	24	Niuean	Storeman	Engaged	2
4	Luke	21	Samoaan	Factory worker	Single	None
4	Mike	25	Samoaan	Driver/Labourer	Engaged	1
5	Ned	18	Samoaan	Tech Student	Single	None
5	Owen	18	Samoaan	Tech Student	girlfriend	None
5	Phin	22	Samoaan	Tech Student	Single	None
5	Regan	26	Samoaan/Cook Islander	Tech Student	Girlfriend	None
5	Sione	18	Samoaan	Tech Student	Single	None
6	Anton	20	NZ European	Boat Builder	Single	None
6	Brandon	18	NZ European	University Student	Single	None
6	Zak	24	NZ European	Builder	Girlfriend	None
6	Xavier	17	NZ European	Trainee Police	Single	None
6	Warren	18	NZ European	Graphics displayer	Single	None
6	Victor	24	NZ European	University student	Girlfriend	None
6	Tom	22	NZ European	Flooring Contractor	Married	None
7	Dante	18	Samoaan	Tech Student	Girlfriend	None
7	Clint	17	Samoaan	Tech Student	Single	None
7	Sefa	19	Samoaan	Tech Student	Girlfriend	None
7	Maru	22	Samoaan	Tech Student	Single	None
7	Lelei	18	Samoaan	Tech Student	Single	None
7	Ioane	19	Samoaan	Tech Student	Single	None

### 3. Making sense of control in relationships

In previous research we argued that control can be understood to be part of a continuum of violence from minor controlling acts to excessive control and extreme physical violence (Towns & Scott, 2008). Young men's ideas about control in these relationships are therefore essential to develop this understanding and to contribute to ways to develop appropriate intervention programmes with young people. In the first part of this section we describe young men's ideas about what is meant by control in relationships and in the second we describe some of the controlling practices young men were able to detail.

#### Discourses of Control

In this analysis we were interested in the language that participants used to describe control as language reveals the values and beliefs that inform people's practices. There were various forms of language which young men used to represent control. In the following I will describe the language associated with ownership more fully and list other ways in which the language of control was articulated. The utilization of most of these other representations of control will be evident in the later analysis of practices of control and in the analysis of the cultural influences that support control.

#### Control as Ownership Pride

The young women who suggested this study said that ownership acts by boyfriends were experienced as controlling and were distressing for young women. Many of the young men used phrases that indicated a boyfriend's ownership of his girlfriend e.g. "She's mine", "No touchie." The following excerpt was the most explicit and clearly articulated of such references. It emerged following a question by the interviewer about the relationship between control and pride:

Dante: Like if you see a guy looking at your- looking at your girl- that's like your pride kind of like- [Clint: Takes over.] yeah and you get like a little aggressive over that fact cos like- [Maru: And you sassinate.]  
Dante: Yeah.

Dave: So what does that mean when you see a guy looking at your girl.  
 Maru: That's like he's checking out. [Clint: You get jealous.] That's your property. [Clint: You get jealous.] [Dave: Yeah?] He's looking at your property? [Clint: You can't touch my girl.]  
 Dave: Yeah. He's looking at your property.  
 Maru: You can't eat my burger. [Prolonged laughter]  
 Dave: You can't eat my burger. Right. Right. [laughter]  
 Dante: I like your burger. [laughter]  
 Dave: Right. So you get jealous and ah he's looking at your property. When does um- when does ah- when does she become your property.  
 Maru: Um when she said 'I do'. [laughter]  
 Dave: Yeah? You're not talking about just marriage though eh.  
 Maru: No.  
 Lelei: No once she says she loves you.  
 Dante: But you never want to say that in front of a girl eh. That 'You're my property', Oh my gooosh. (laugh).  
 Dave: Why-why wouldn't you say that in front of a girl.  
 Maru: Cos then she'll look at you like 'What the hell!'  
 Dante: That's [Clint: 'You ain't my dad!'] like social suicide man.  
 Maru: 'You ain't my daddy!' [laughter]  
 Dave: So there's um- Cos I'm just thinking um- Don't eat my burger, that's a new one for me, I'll take that one away [laughter]. So when- when- you said that it's okay to say that here eh. But you wouldn't say it in front of-  
 Dante: Yeah  
 Dave: -her.  
 Maru: Yeah.  
 Dante: That's like boxing her. Like. You're just jumping the gun by saying that.

In this excerpt there are a number of references to the girlfriend which suggest the young man's ownership of her:

- Your girl
- My girl
- That's your property
- 'You can't touch my girl'
- 'You can't eat my burger'

The reference to the girl as "your" and "my" girl is perhaps understandable in the context of the discussion but the use of the pronouns "your" and "my" may be used to indicate an item that belongs to a person. This idea of ownership is more explicitly represented in the phrase "'You can't touch my girl'". Support for the interpretation that constructing the young girl as *his* suggests that the girl is the boyfriend's possession is clear from Dante's



statement, that to see another young man “looking at your girl” produces “pride” and aggression. Maru evokes the idea of aggression when he said “And you sassinate.” a phrase that suggests the word assassinate: killing someone who is your enemy. If a young man understands a girl to belong to him then another man looking at her becomes a threat to his ownership of her. More explicit reference to the young women as his possession is clearly evident later in the excerpt “That’s your property”.

Underlying this representation of the girlfriend as the young man’s property is the possibility that she may get taken off him. The phrase “You can’t touch my girl.” suggests protection of this possession from others who might steal her while the humorous phrase “You can’t eat my burger” suggests property ownership and suggests protection from those who might consume her. The term burger suggests that the girlfriend is a tasty morsel, an edible item that others desire, or something that fulfils a hungry appetite suggestive of fulfilling sexual desires. The phrase suggests that the young man holds exclusive rights to a desired consumable object and that he will act to prevent others from taking her away. Other men looking at her are portrayed as “checking out” “your property” and it is this “looking at your girl” that is portrayed as producing “pride” and “a little aggression”. That other men’s attention is portrayed as producing pride suggests that the boyfriend has a valued possession that other men desire. The reference to an aggressive response suggests he may have to counter a potential threat to his ownership and might need to employ aggression to do so. The possibility that other men may take a valued girlfriend away was a strong explanation for control throughout the focus group discussions and will be explored more fully below.

Alongside these references to the young woman as the man’s property there is reference to an unstated signal to the young men that the girlfriend is now their property. Maru and Lelei utilized the young woman’s statements of her love for her boyfriend as the point at which they should understand her to be their property. Maru raised the idea of marriage as this point of ownership with his statement “When she says ‘I do’.” The phrase ‘I do’ is so associated with the affirmation of the marriage vows that there is little need for any other words to evoke marriage or long-term love and commitment. The interviewer’s challenge to the idea that marriage alone is what signals that she has become their property occurs within the context of an age group where marriage is the exception rather than the rule. This challenge allowed Lelei to broaden the scope that

young men use to signal their assumption of ownership to a girlfriend's statement that "she loves you". This reference to an explicit acknowledgement by the girlfriend of love as the point of ownership for the boyfriend came as a surprise to me (AT) and while accepted and unchallenged within this group more research is needed to determine how widespread this idea is among young men.

While the young men in this group portrayed a clear point at which they assumed the girlfriend to be their property, they were also explicit in the gendered nature of this idea and the need to hide it. The girl was not to know about his assumption. There is a strong emphasis given to hiding this idea from the girlfriend by Dante's use of the exclamation "Oh my gooosh!" Any explicit reference to her as his property was "social suicide". The term "social suicide" evokes the idea that depicting his girlfriend as his property will be unacceptable not only to the girlfriend but much more widely: it is socially unacceptable. The phrase "social suicide" suggests that should this idea get about amongst young women the young man's standing within his social group will be killed. The phrase "boxing her" suggests that the girlfriend might experience this construction of her as containing her or limiting her freedom to choose. There are also references to her as the property of her father among the young men when constructing her response: "'You ain't my dad'" or "' You ain't my daddy'". These phrases evoke traditional ideas about the girl as the property of her father until she is handed her over to her new husband at the marriage ceremony. Alternatively they could also be interpreted as suggesting that the young woman would not want to be the man's girlfriend if depicted as his property: in this interpretation the term "daddy" is a colloquialism for boyfriend, just as babe or baby is a colloquialism for girlfriend, and more recently, girlfriend. Of interest here are the conscious gendered distinctions that the group acknowledges. There are values and beliefs within these young men's cultures that drive the construction of the young woman as his property. These ideas are represented here as quite distinct from those values and beliefs that are acceptable to the cultures of the young women with whom they associate. This distinct difference explains why they must remain hidden.

#### Control as personality driven

In this interpretation control was represented as related to a person's personality: those with dominant personalities were likely to be more controlling than those without.

However this representation was also questioned by some young men in that people were not usually controlling in all situations.

#### Control as men's entitlement

A number of representations alluded to men's natural entitlement to control:

##### *Control as just nature*

In this interpretation control was represented as a natural desire for control over one's circumstances and situation and likely to occur even subconsciously through manipulating people. In some representations of control as just natural, men were represented as the naturally dominant ones, the ones who had always been dominant "since about the stone-age type of thing" and therefore entitled to control the relationship and run the day. This latter representation has been identified in research on men who had been violent to their women partners as a means of justifying and excusing their dominance over their partners (Adams, Towns & Gavey, 1995). The following representation of control was also used in this way by such men (see Towns, Adams & Gavey, 1998):

##### *Control as strength*

In these accounts the person with the greater strength was considered to be the one likely to have control and, for some participants, because men had the greater strength they were considered to be the natural source of control. For some young men being the "stronghold of the family" was a given and the role of protector from harm provided the entitlement to control or dominance within the family or the boyfriend/girlfriend relationship.

##### *Control as historically male*

Some young men spoke of controlling practices as being driven by history where women in the past "couldn't vote and were kind of like lower class". In these accounts women had little control but had worked to gain greater control "ages ago". Other young men argued that controlling practices continued in some contemporary societies: in those more traditional churches, in gangs and in contexts that continued to expect women to

wait on men and do the kitchen work. Some young men represented women in such contexts as like “slaves”.

#### *Control as entitlement*

Some participants represented men as historically being the breadwinner and therefore entitled to control. Some spoke of the man assuming entitlement to be waited on by his wife or women generally, one participant describing the difficulty for his mother that this sense of entitlement created. She would work late two days a week and then be expected to come home and cook when her life would be made much easier if his father carried out this task on these days.

#### *Control as the “easy life”*

Some young men described handing over control because “it means you don’t have to make decisions”. In this account allowing young women control was a good way to avoid responsibility: “it’s the easy life”.

#### *Intergenerational Control*

Some young men portrayed control as intergenerational and these patterns influenced young men’s behaviour today: witnessing men behave in controlling ways towards children and others and taking roles that were not practiced by women while women worked in the kitchen. For some young men these intergenerational practices provided unspoken rules that young men were expected to conform to but, because they were unspoken, their prejudicial nature might not be recognised by young men. Other young men countered this construction by arguing that men had access to media representations that provided models of other ways of being and could no longer justify the use of control by referring to past generations’ practices.

#### *Control as expectations*

For some young men the term control was described as representing coercion and provided a value-laden depiction of relationship practices. They preferred to talk of expectations which they considered to be less likely to evoke ideas of coercion. Other young men considered that expectations could be as limiting as control.

### *Role expectations*

Some young men argued that the expectation that men and women had a particular role in the family could limit women's control and make life difficult for those women who were expected to conform to these roles. In these role expectations men might legitimately cook on a barbeque or cook up fish that they had caught but the day to day cooking role remained the woman's role.

### *Perfect picture expectations*

In this account young men were described as having a "perfect picture", a "dream" that they want for themselves and their relationships. If the reality did not match this dream they "try to mould a girl into their perfect picture and stuff".

### Control as pragmatic

In these accounts young men described control as either negotiated or assumed for separate tasks due to the competencies of the boyfriend or girlfriend. Some young men described paying the bills as stressful and preferred their female partners to carry out these tasks. Some talked of their girlfriends assuming control when the children came along in order to ensure that they helped at home.

### Control and love

Whereas some young men described assuming the entitlement to control once the young woman had declared her love for him, other young men spoke of handing over control when in love. In some young men's accounts "you love her too much to argue". Some young men described allowing their girlfriend's control if she was someone they desired or about whom they felt strongly.

### Control as conscious/unconscious

Some young men described control or expectations of men as so engrained that young men may be unconscious that they are controlling practices. Other young men contested this construction arguing that young men move around and see other ways of being. They see TV, movies and other media where there are healthy relationships and their actions are therefore conscious. Some men spoke of their consciousness that they could

be dominating and of trying to temper this inclination. One young man spoke of consciously playing around with control, letting go control with their girlfriend to see what happened then resuming control again.

#### Control as fluid rather than fixed

In some of the young men's accounts control was considered to be "not so black and white anymore": no longer assumed from historical practices. Control was determined by context, a "time and place trait" rather than a personality trait, fluid and changing depending on the circumstances. One young man described how he had been controlling early in the relationship by putting pressure on his girlfriend to attend activities with him although she would have preferred to be with her girlfriends. As the relationship has proceeded control went from being "basically all me" to "now it's pretty close to being balanced." Another participant portrayed men as well able to determine when they needed to be controlling: they might be controlling on the sports field but this did not mean they were socially.

#### Practices of Control

When asked about control the young men were able to describe a number of controlling practises that young men might use with their girlfriends. These practices of control were evident in the young men's talk and the various ways of making sense of control described above were employed by the young men to explain or justify these practices.

#### Monitoring and limiting choices

Some young men were able to describe quite articulately the controlling practices that might be seen in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships:

Harry: Well I mean if a- if one of them was constantly checking up on where the other person was or asking about some subject because they are jealous about another guy or just- yeah just making their decisions, any decision [Alison: Mm.] no matter how small they are, they can- as long as they are repetitive, constantly made by that one person, then it makes the other person feel like they are under control.

Alison: Ok. And would that be how you saw it too?  
 Gary: Yeah, well I'd say it was also restricting their decisions, not just making their decisions cos sometimes I'd say in a relationship the other person sometimes expects the other person to make more decisions than- depending on what kind of personality you have. But I'd say it is exerting some sort of power to restrict the other person's decision or ability to make those decisions.

Alison: Okay.  
 Gary: Yeah.  
 Harry: The power could be subtle eh?  
 Gary: Yeah, mm.  
 Alison: So ok tell me about that.  
 Harry: Oh yeah, just ah, just the small sort of emotional, um, what do you call them? Oh like you know the cold shoulder type thing- that someone might use to get their own way.

In this account a number of practices of control were identified:

- "Constantly checking up on where the other person was"
- "Asking about some subject because they are jealous"
- "Making their decisions"
- "Making any decisions .. constantly"
- "Restricting their decisions"
- "Restricting the other person's.. *ability* to make decisions" [emphasis added]
- Using "the cold shoulder"

These young men's identification of the controlling practice of surveillance, "checking up" on the "other person" is consistent with the accounts of young women who had experienced surveillance as an ownership practice (Towns & Scott, 2008). This practice is placed in the context of the restriction of decisions as a controlling practice. Surveillance works to control people's actions and decisions by making them accountable to another who will scrutinize and criticise their actions.

While Harry initially used a gender neutral construction of these practices by referring to "the other person" rather than the boyfriend or the girlfriend his reference to jealousy of "another guy", in this discussion of boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, suggests that these practices refer to those of the boyfriend. Gary continues with a gender neutral construction of these practices and suggests that there may be an expectation that another will make more decisions. Historically in Western cultures significant decision-making was the domain of the man and Gary's lack of reference to gender means he must

seek another explanation for this expectation. He then draws on “personality” to explain decision-making practices.

The two young men then work up these controlling practices as practices of power and in doing so demonstrate that power may be exercised by the employment of “subtle” “emotional” practices. By using the word “subtle” they distinguish these practices from those more obvious exercises of power such as physical violence. Harry’s employment of “the cold shoulder” provides a fine example of such a controlling practice. The phrase cold shoulder evokes such practices as not talking to another because they are not doing what you want them to, being emotionally cold in any rejoinder, withdrawing any warmth or emotional support. One interpretation is that this representation allows these young men to continue with this account of power practices as gender neutral – giving the “cold shoulder” is a practice that might be employed by both men and women. This construction also allows these young men to suggest that “subtle” practices of power may be gender neutral practices. Another interpretation is that “the cold shoulder” draws on gendered ideas of women as frigid and may therefore reference a practice of control that is used by women more than by men.

Controlling her movements and contacts

In the following the group described other controlling practices:

- Dave: So given that you guys are, you guys are a bunch of young men, what kind of things are you in control of in your relationships or what kind of things would you like to control?
- Owen: Where she goes.
- Dave: Where she goes?
- Phin: (Laughs) I’m in control of everything.
- (Laughter)
- Dave: Yeah so where she goes and like how would that happen?
- Owen: It’s usually-
- Ned: Checking up.
- Owen: Checking up with one of her friends [Dave: Yip.] just ask- if friends are generally girls she says she’s out with I let her go ‘Okay’ she says ‘Guys’ ‘Na you gotta stay home.’
- Dave: Right, right. What other stuff?
- Owen: Um, that’s pretty much it.

This group identified the following controlling practices that boyfriends might use with their girlfriends:



- Controlling “where she goes”
- “Checking up on her”
- Controlling who she sees.

Phin’s statement “I’m in control of everything” is said with humour and he may have used this humour either to mask the extent of control that he has in relationships or to create a joke for his group of friends. That this group was able to be quite explicit about the practices that they used to control their girlfriends suggests that they are well aware of the way controlling practices are employed. Each of the above three practices was also identified by the young women interviewed in a previous study as practices of control that they found limiting and that impacted on the pleasure in their lives (Towns & Scott, 2008). In the following Phin described the extent that some young men will go to control their girlfriends:

Dave: Yip. Can you um- can you tell me more, you mentioned your cousin, can you tell me more about what you’re kind of seeing there or witness- or you know-

Phin: Oh yeah. N- Oh yeah um. For instance like for her to go um out places or meet people its- he doesn’t find that um to his liking, he’d rather him be there or else it’s a no-no, sort of thing. Um like for example she had a job. Um. She ended up quitting the job because he was too controlling, he was always over there, always ringing her to see what she’s doing, how she- you know what she’s doing or who she’s talking to. Stuff like that and then he gets a little bit um psycho in the head really. [Dave: Right.] You know thoughts go running round in his head then he just acts on it. That was an example.

In this account control of the girlfriend’s contacts was to such an extent that she was limited in whom she could see socially unless the boyfriend was present. The control is portrayed as so extensive that the girlfriend’s ability to work at her job was affected. In this account constantly checking up on the girlfriend leads to the girlfriend taking drastic action to avoid these controlling practices – she leaves her job.

Phin draws on ideas of mental disturbance or loss of control to account for the man’s actions: the boyfriend is portrayed as “psycho in the head” suggesting that such behaviour is psychotic and therefore uncontrollable rather than a rational controlled action to limit her choices. In this account his actions are brought about by “thoughts

running round in his head” that “he just acts on”. Research with men who use violence towards women indicates that such men commonly use language associated with loss of control such as ‘I just snapped’, or ‘I exploded’ to account for their violent control of their women partners (Adams, Towns & Gavey, 1995). The account here suggests that this idea of lack of control is held more widely by men, not limited to those who have been violent towards women.

### Controlling her dress

Other practices of control emerged during a discussion about boyfriend’s reactions to their girlfriend’s dress:

Lelei: Like- sometimes you see couples roaming around the mall and the bros just keeping an eye on his girlfriend cos she’s got a miniskirt on.  
Dante: Mm.  
Lelei: She’s hard out (?) making sure that everybody sees that.  
Dave: Right.  
Lelei: Fuuck.  
Dave: So what do you reckon he’s keeping an eye out for.  
Maru: For his girl [Lelei: For another guy.] [laughter]  
Dave: For another guy.  
Sefa: He’s protecting his-  
Lelei: For another guy that’s got his own-  
Dante: Yeah cos he-  
Dave: Sorry-  
Dante: He’d probably um- be real jealous if like she ended up eyeing someone out eh.  
Dave: Yep.  
Dante: Maybe that’s where he’ll probably like step in like- you knows- put his foot down and say something eh. Like ‘The next time you go out you better not wear these kind of skanky clothes.’  
Dave: Right.  
Dante: Yeah. [laughter]  
Dave: Right. When um- you’re talking before I think you said ah you said something about protecting- protecting his girlfriend?  
Clint: Yeah some is a bit too over-protective eh. Some guys going overboard. Like they end up smashing her just to stop her from putting clothes like that on.  
Dave: Yeah and I um- I’m not sure if I asked who he was protecting her from?  
Maru: From another man.  
Dave: From another man.  
Dante: So in other words he sh- like the guys just protecting himself you know his insecurities.

Controlling practices identified in this account were:

- “Keeping his eye on his girlfriend cos she’s got a miniskirt on” when out in public

- “Putting his foot down.”
- Telling her ““The next time you go out you better not wear these kind of skanky clothes.””
- “smashing her just to stop her from putting clothes like that on.”

In this account a range of controlling behaviours by boyfriends towards their girlfriends emerged concerning the ways young women dress. In the first of these the boyfriend is constructed as keeping a watchful eye on his girlfriend because of the nature of her dress. This first phrase portrays his constraints on how she is to be when in public and when under the gaze of others. The phrase suggests that if she was not wearing a miniskirt the boyfriend would not have to be so watchful. That this watchful gaze is not only of her dress but of her behaviour can be inferred from Lelei’s comment that “She’s hard out (?) making sure that everybody sees that.” This phrase evokes the idea that through her dress and in her actions the girlfriend is seeking the attention of others. Lelei’s following exclamation may be interpreted as an expression of disapproval. There is an interesting difference in the young men’s responses when asked to describe what a boyfriend might be keeping an eye on her for. In one representation the boyfriend’s watchful gaze is in order to ensure that she not be found to be “eyeing up” someone else and causing jealousy. In the other account he is keeping his eye on other men suggesting that there may be other men who might actively seek to invite her attention. In the former construction, there is the implication that the girlfriend is someone who is untrustworthy and who has the potential to seek out the attention of another man rather than remain loyal to, and loving of, her current boyfriend. In the latter, other men are not to be trusted when in the presence of his girlfriend, particularly when she is dressed in a certain way. In these accounts having a girlfriend dressed in a way that does not meet his approval is a potentially dangerous situation.

In the third of these practices the boyfriend actively tells the young women that she is not to wear “skanky clothes”. In another excerpt the interviewer asks the participants to explain what the difference is between “skanky” or “slutty” clothes and “nice” ones:

Mike: Oh its just revealing like showing a lot of cleavage and real short mini skirt or shorts what ever you know, or those tank tops its like – you know what a tank top is?  
Dave: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [Laughter]  
Kyle: I mean that sort of stuff you know even- that is what turns your eye, even if you're driving you know. [Dave: Right.] If you see something nice it's just the way the man's eye is.

In this portrayal “slutty” clothes are clothes that a show “a lot of cleavage” or are very short. Such clothes may be understood to reveal the young women’s sexuality. Although in these young men’s accounts girlfriends were challenged for dressing this way, Kyle’s use of the phrase “something nice” suggests that a young woman who is dressed this way is actually attractive to young men. This construction appears contradictory to some of these young men’s constructed disapproval of their girlfriends for dressing in “skanky” ways. If young women dressed in such ways are “something nice” why would they not want their girlfriends to look this way?

In Kyle’s account such sexualised clothing “turns your eye” – young men look at women dressed in this way: their attention is turned away from their existing activities towards such women. His portrayal that this occurs “even if you’re driving” suggests that, for young men, the need to look at women dressed this way is irresistible: it occurs while they are attending to something that ought to require their undivided attention. Kyle’s final statement “it’s just the way the man’s eye is” draws on ideas that men’s reactions to women’s sexuality is ‘just nature’ or that men have a sexual drive to be drawn to look at women that is genetically imbedded in them, irresistible and uncontrollable. Controlling young women’s dress becomes about controlling the impossible: the sexual drive of other men to look at their girlfriend. Unspoken in these accounts is the potential loss of the girlfriend to another man’s roving eye.

In the following account the group works up the ways in which boyfriends might actively seek to control such dress but in this account control is informed by pragmatics – it is for practical reasons - rather than by ‘just nature’. The discussion follows Luke’s construction of “slutty” clothes:

Luke: Showing too much.  
Kyle: Mm.

Mike: Like my missus never wears like mini skirts or anything. She wears skirts but not the real short ones you know but if she did I would tell her to take it off.

Dave: Right right.

Mike: Well just when- like you see it all the time eh walking through the mall eh all the girls they are wearing basically just strings over their breasts and stuff [Dave: Right] it could easily just jump out.

Unidentified Participant: Oohh!

Mike: You know sometimes when- like you know how they've got the V?

Dave: Yip.

Mike: Sometimes its too low [Dave: Right.] and like it could just [Dave: Right, right, right.] just fall out.

Dave: What do you reckon um what do you think drives young women to dress like that?

Kyle: Fashion these days eh.

Mike: Attention.

Luke: TV.

Mike: Yeah.

Kyle: Yeah. That's the way they are going. Soon they are going to be all going to be walking around in bikinis and stuff. And then I don't know what these- [laughter].

Following Mike's accounts of what his "missus" wears he draws on ideas of his right to dominance or authority through his statement that if she was to wear a really short skirt he would "tell her to take it off". The construction of such dress provides legitimacy to, or justifications for, the boyfriend "putting his foot down" a phrase that draws on men's entitlement to dominance or control of their women partners. By drawing on expressions of his authority Mike suggests that young women may not always make rational decisions about what they wear and that in such situations men will need to assume authority and control. The fourth bullet-pointed practice above - "smashing her just to stop her from putting clothes like that on" - clearly articulates the extent of the use of control as a strategy of dominance. The phrase "smashing her" evokes the use of violence to prevent the young women from dressing in ways that the young man finds intolerable.

In the excerpt above Mike goes on to construct an alternative explanation for the restrictions he places on his girlfriend's dress that draw on pragmatics – if girls wear "basically just strings over their breasts and stuff it could easily just jump out" and "just fall out". In this account his limitations on the dress of his girlfriend are related to the practical effects of wearing too little. His description of scanty dress and his reference to an ambiguous "it" allows an interpretation to be made that young women's bodies might

accidentally escape from their containment. These comments suggest that it is just commonsense that young women not dress in this way and therefore young men's control over their girlfriends' dress becomes in their best interest. Another interpretation is that in this account he is also drawing on his judgement of the best interests for both of them. The account allows one to surmise that if "it" "just jumps out" then he and the girlfriend might be embarrassed by this escape of her bodily parts and by controlling her dress he is helping her to avoid the humiliation and ridicule of such a public display to them both. In the final statements, in which the young women's dress is attributed to media representations and fashion that could lead to them walking around in bikinis, an impression is given that young men are fighting a losing battle for modesty against bigger players – the media, fashion - and that women's skanky dress might ultimately prevail.

#### Isolating practices

The participants identified isolating practices as practices of control which they depicted as associated with the boyfriend's jealousy. For example, Kyle gave an account of a man confronting him after he had been dancing with a girl as part of a group "party bus":

Kyle: .. not long after that her man came and sat next to me and he was like really serious and 'Hey are you alright' and he just stood there and I went and saw him outside and he said 'Hey! Don't dance with my missus!' Yeah. [Dave: Right.] Mm. So. I was pretty out of it, didn't look at her for the rest of night eh.

Dave: Right, right.

Kyle: But she apologised for the stuff cos what he said that was a bit-

Dave: What do you reckon was going on for her?

Kyle: I think he thought I might be stealing his missus or something.

Dave: Right.

Luke: Pretty insecure eh.

Kyle: Yeah.

In this account the man who approached Kyle is represented as actively working to disconnect her from the contact of other men. While his actions were constructed as out of fear that Kyle "might be stealing his missus or something" the effect on the girl was to isolate her from any pleasurable actions with this young man.

Other young men portrayed isolating practices as part of the relationship practices of some young men:

Keoni: Like um I know, I know a girl that wasn't allowed to talk to any of us-  
 Dave: Oh right.  
 Keoni: Cause her boyfriend didn't like us [Dave: Right.] so she couldn't talk to us kind of thing. [Dave: Right.] And yeah that's all cool cos that's like between them two but yeah, I don't think she saw it- I think she thought it was normal kind of thing so-  
 Dave: Was that surprising for you? Or how was that for you [Keoni: Oh Yeah.] when you realised she couldn't talk to you?  
 Keoni: Oh yeah. Yeah, that was surprising but then um we all knew it wasn't his fault and it wasn't the issue with her it was the issue with him um her partner. So we all knew it was like 'Oh cool as like um that's not your fault really it's mainly him' and the least that we can do is probably support him and respect it because us (?) coming out of that and yeah and her getting hurt is what we didn't want.  
 Dave: Right.

In this account Keoni constructs the boyfriend's isolating practices and an issue "between them two" drawing on constructions of relationship issues for men and women as private, or 'their business'. His use of the word "but" before "I think she thought it was normal kind of thing" allows him not only to describe his interpretation of her boyfriend's actions but also suggests that being told she had to cut off her contact with her male friends was not a normal practice for boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. This interpretation is reinforced by Keoni's representation of this action as surprising. He then goes on to depict the responsibility for this action somewhat ambiguously, eventually settling on the use of an active account '..that's not your fault really it's mainly him' to attribute the responsibility for her becoming disconnected from them with her boyfriend. By this construction he absolves her from any blame, which commonly occurs for women isolated from friends and family members by boyfriend's actions. By using this active account he portrays a conversation that he might have had with his girl friend, which was designed to reassure her of his continuing friendship. He provides a rational for his compliance with this isolating practice, which suggests that should her male friends not support this isolation she might get beaten up by her boyfriend.

#### Dominance and entitlement practices

Language that draws on practices of entitlement and dominance was also evident in the young men's texts:

Regan: Yeah well me um- my partner asks me um more or less what we doing today and- um- yeah what not. Sort of like I run the day and [Dave: Yip.] whatever I say you know it goes. Um whereas otherwise she puts in her two cents as well.

In this account Regan's description of "like I run the day" may be understood as a practice of entitlement in which he makes decisions about the activities that he and his partner engage in during the day, while his statement and "whatever I say you know it goes" may be understood to reference his right to dominance in the relationship. His following statement: "whereas otherwise she puts in her two cents as well" tempers these earlier statements by suggesting that his girlfriend will make a small contribution. His use of the phrase "two cents worth" suggests the value of this contribution. His authority remains the over-riding portrayal in this account.

In the following account Mike described the impact of practices of dominance and entitlement in the home:

Mike: .. man he does nothing eh and then he's the one who starts the argument and he's the one that's doing nothing as well.

Dave: Does he- was he- when you say he was going on about doing nothing was he-

Mike: Oh like he just comes home from work and 'Oh honey I'm hungry.' And she goes 'Well make yourself something, dinner's not cooked yet.' And he gets angry and like that. But they have a lot of troubles and man mostly because of him.

In this account Mike begins by alluding to the extent that this man does around the home: "he does nothing." He then links the man's statement of being hungry, and his girlfriend's comment that dinner is not ready yet to the man's anger. These links suggest that the man's assumed entitlement to have his meals on the table when he comes home from work, and the inference that this is not his role lead to his anger that his meal is not ready when he wants. There is an implication in this excerpt that if he would just get himself something to eat and do more around the house there would be no need for "a lot of troubles". The final statement that these troubles are "mostly because of him" appears to draw on this man's sense of entitlement as a cause of the troubles between him and his partner.

The link between anger and entitlement is worked up in the following account:



- Dave: So the um- the control and the anger- there is some kind of connection between the two of them?
- Phin: Yeah I reckon cos I mean you can just imagine someone being in control of someone else's life and you're telling them to do something you're not doing it fast enough, so you're building anger [Dave: Right.] in which telling them again over and over again so- you're just going to build anger and then you're going to explode aren't you.

The account allows the interpretation that, for some men, male entitlement to gendered control provides a legitimate avenue to anger if the girlfriend is not complicit with this control. Underlying this portrayal is the construction that this anger is unnecessary, that without a sense of male entitlement he would avoid unnecessary tension. The representation of anger leading to explosions suggests that anger can become uncontrollable violence. This depiction of violence as explosive has also been found in accounts by men who use violence (Adams, Towns & Gavey, 1995) and, that it is also present in these young men's accounts, suggests that it is more widely held than among men who are attending men's stopping violence programmes.

The following account occurred after the group described a man's excessively controlling and dominating practices. Dave asked the group to explain what might be the maintaining the dominance and entitlement practices of some men:

- Dave: I mean is there something that keeps them that way is there a pay off for their behaviour.
- Anton: Yeah what they say happens.
- Brendon: They're bound to get some kind of satisfaction from everyone doing what they want.

In this account such practices have instrumental value: for the men who use such practices "what they say happens" and there is "some kind of satisfaction from everyone doing what they want". This account draws on a simple reinforcement theory to explain the continuing dominating control of some men. Such men are rewarded for their dominating practices because they can get others to do what they want.

### Controlling the money

We were interested in the young men's accounts of the control of money in young people's relationships because such control has been identified as a strategy of control employed by men who use violence towards women partners. A number of the young

men who were living with young women described handing control of the money over to them. This seemed to run counter to a controlling strategy. Some of the young men drew on pragmatics to describe these actions – she was better at the financial management than he was, or, he had incurred a fine for late payment and she had taken over the financial management to prevent further unnecessary loss of money. These constructions allow an alternative interpretation: they draw on ideas of ‘the easy life’ the avoidance of the responsibility of managing money. Managing money requires getting bills paid on time, ensuring that there is enough money to pay the bills, avoiding overspending. Such financial management holds a level of responsibility and some young men were uncomfortable with this responsibility, preferring to have the girlfriend hold responsibility for finances. Under this scenario, however, the girlfriend can be subjected to criticism for spending money unwisely.

In Mike’s account below understanding the way money is controlled in young people’s relationships takes on a further complexity:

Mike: Don’t want her to know the whole truth you know [Dave: Oh yep, yep.] so- [Dave: Yep.] like if you got paid so much you’d- you’d take a couple of hundred off that- ‘That’s all I got paid.’ [Dave: Right.] [laughs] Mm.

While earlier this young man described handing over the control of the money to his girlfriend, in this account he described hiding the full amount that he earned from her. Initially he had portrayed his girlfriend as controlling the money but the above account indicates that by holding back the full amount that he earns he maintained his control. The money was then available for him to spend on activities or items that he might want.

#### Controlling the ending

The break-up of a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship can be a very difficult time for young people and some young men spoke about the ways they controlled the end of the relationship by ‘getting in first’ or by ending it when they thought that the girlfriend was about to:

Dave: Can you say a little bit about how that protects their pride like- getting rid of their relationship early or-

Dante: Cos you don't want to get shat at do you [Dave: Right] [laughs]. You don't want to be the one that's labelled as the dumped one.

In this account ending the relationship early avoids getting "shat at" or "labelled as the dumped one". The term "dumped" suggests that the person who is the one left by the other partner is the one who is discarded like rubbish. By ending the relationship early young men avoid this humiliation and maintain their pride. In addition this account indicates that there will be knowledge by others of the ending of the relationship in the construction by Dante that you would be "labelled as the dumped one". In this account he suggests that there is a stigma or reduction in status associated with being "the dumped one" that young men will avoid by ending the relationship early.

In the following account the young men elaborate further on their reasons for ending a relationship early:

Dave: So who d- who d- who um- what do- like when you talk about pride what does your pride made up from.  
Clint: Fuuck.  
Dave: How do you- or how do you get it.  
Sefa: Trying to prove the girl wrong.  
Dave: Trying to prove her wrong.  
Sefa: Yeah. You're the last man standing. You still-  
Maru: Like she can't get another you.  
Dave: She can't get another you.

Now ending the relationship early becomes about taking the moral high-ground: "to prove the girl wrong", that "she can't get another you". In the latter phrase there is the suggestion that in ending the relationship early young men want the girl to know that he is someone of value rather than someone to be dumped. Sefa's comment that "You're the last man standing" suggests that this is a battle to the end and that the one who leaves first is the one who wins.

In the following the young men provide a different interpretation of why they prefer to control the end of a relationship:

Dante: Yeah. Like nobody likes rejection eh. Mm. That's probably why I- that's how I feel about that.  
Dave: Does that ring bells with the rest of you guys.  
Lelei: Yeah.

Dave: Yep?  
Dante: Mm.  
Dave: So um (..) when ah- who does the guy do that for?  
Lelei: Himself. [Dante: Himself. Unidentified Participant: Himself.]  
Dave: He does that for himself.  
Dante: Mm.  
Dave: Yep. Because of the way- cos of the way he'll feel about it.  
Clint: Doesn't want to be known as [Dante: I think it's just how guys are-] the one who'll be dumped, than the one that fucked up.  
Lelei: It's sore eh.  
Dante: Far eh?  
Lelei: It stinks.  
Dante: Rejections sucks [Lelei: Soooo sore man.].  
Clint: It lead you to um-  
Maru: -to the grave. [laughs]  
Clint: -suicide.

In this account being the one “dumped” is experienced as rejection and rejection is painful, indeed so painful that it can lead one “to the grave” or “to suicide.” In this account ending the relationship early is to control painful emotions associated with rejection. By ending the relationship early the boyfriend avoids the strong feelings associated with rejection.

### Violent Control

Violence is a final form of control. In the following the young men discussed violence in relationships:

Kyle: Yeah cos when I was brought up my mum showed me how to wash clothes and do the dishes and cook and [Dave: yip] yeah and the one thing she always stressed is was never hit women [Mike: Mm.] [Dave: Yep.] so that's they way I think I really don't like guys who hit girls [Mike: Yeah same.] it's a really bad thing.  
Mike: Its like you're treating them like a man you know.  
Luke: Yeah.  
Dave: Oh yeah tell me about that Mike.  
Mike: Oh I've never hit her but [Dave: Yep.] I've come close so many times [Dave: Yep.] just I've held it you know just-  
Dave: I was just thinking about that treating them like a man.  
Mike: Yeah oh you know like roughing them up and stuff, shouldn't be doing nothing like that to them.  
Dave: Right, right.  
Luke: That's the power of women aye they can push you so far.  
Unidentified Participant: Yeah.

Kyle: Yeah and keep going as well (?) she takes joy in it you know cos she knows I won't hit her. [Dave: Right.] But I told her 'One of these days I might not hit you in the face but I might punch you in the arm and you gonna cry' [Dave: Right.] so it stressed to her that you shouldn't really push me that far [Luke: There's a limit.] you know. Yeah [Unidentified participant: Cos they know.] because she knows I'll never hit her.

In this account the following justifications are made for young men to use violence towards women:

- Women have power too
- Women can push you too far

Kyle begins by positioning himself as someone who was raised to be comfortable with the household tasks that were traditionally considered to be women's role, and raised to understand that he was never to hit a woman. By making these initial statements he is protecting himself from any interpretation of his subsequent statements that he is chauvinistic or supports violence towards women. In addition, in placing this issue of chores and violence towards women alongside each other he appears to be acknowledging the gender-based nature of men's violence towards women. These statements suggests that he has a reasonably sophisticated understanding of violence against women as not gender neutral, as requiring an acknowledgement of the gendered cultural imperatives that drive violence towards women. These early statements, alongside his statement of the morality of men hitting women – it's a bad thing - position him as opposed to violence towards women, not aligned with men who use violence towards women, and as comfortable with gender equity.

Mike then opens up the gender difference associated with violence towards women and violence towards men that must be negotiated prior to the exercising of violence towards women. Men who use violence towards women are "treating them like a man." This construction suggests that in order to use violence towards a woman a man has to reconstruct her as a man. If he maintains his construction of her as a woman his actions, in using violence against her, are going counter to the values engrained in young men by their mothers. By reconstructing her as a man he is able to legitimately exercise violence towards her. Treating her like a man is "roughing her up and stuff", and men "shouldn't

be doing nothing like that to them.” In an interesting example of the ways some men might go about reconstructing the woman as like a man, Luke then goes on to position women as having power and this power is to “push you so far”. Whereas earlier there was an acknowledgement of men’s physical ability to use violence to hurt women and the need for them to refrain from such action in order to be ethical men, now, women are positioned as powerful emotionally.

This language act allows this group of young men to more readily justify violence towards women. In this contradictory account Kyle accepts Luke’s construction that “there’s a limit” which suggests that his girlfriend can push him beyond this limit: that even in someone who holds values that are contrary to violence towards women a woman can provoke a man beyond his limit. In contradiction to his earlier account, Kyle states that he has threatened to punch his girlfriend. He justifies this action by stating that his position as someone who does not hit women has allowed his girlfriend to “keep going” on at him “because she knows I’ll never hit her.” The issue of women’s provocation is now opened up and allows Kyle to lay out his response. In Kyle’s account his use of the threat of force is employed to control his girlfriend’s behaviour but his willingness to openly describe this threat suggests that he does not see threatening violence as a form of violence that limits a woman’s choices or actions. By distinguishing between punching her face and punching her arm, he suggests that punching her arm is less harmful than punching her in the face. There is the implication in this account that Kyle’s threat of violence achieves the end that he wants, which is that she stop going on at him. While this process of justification was apparent in this group of young men who were not selected because of any association with violence, it has also been found in men who use violence towards women to silence talk of it (Towns, Adams & Gavey, 2003).

In the following the young men work up other justifications for men’s violence towards women by employing recent accounts of violence between the music celebrities Raihana and Chris Brown. In police records purported to be released at the time, Raihana was travelling with Chris Brown to be at the Oscars. An argument ensued and Chris Brown repeatedly beat Raihana in the face to the point that her face was extensively bruised and swollen.

Dave:                   What do you guys think of the fact that she got beaten up?

Dante: I'm pretty jealous eh. (laughs)  
 Lelei: The story was that she was sleeping around with some other celebrity.  
 Dave: Right.  
 loane: She was sleeping with XX. [laughter]  
 loane: She put that in the clip she made of (?) it was nasty eh?  
 Unidentified Participant: Oh.  
 loane: The rehab.  
 Dante: Yep.  
 Dave: So would- would that be a reason to beat her up? If she was sleeping around? [Overlapping talk.] Oh. [Unidentified participant: Yeah I think so.] Yeah. Cos.  
 Dante: Depends on how you feel about that girl eh.  
 Dave: Yep.  
 Dante: Like if you really really really really really showed it, I reckon that that will be- like that will be his reason.  
 Dave: Yep.  
 loane: But then again it does say in the Bible does it? Like you know- oh- just get stoned. Stoned to death like-  
 Unidentified Participant: Mm.  
 loane: [Overlapping talk] in the Bible.  
 Dave: Yeah what do you- what do the rest of you guys think. Like if you are- if you're really shattered is that a- is that a good enough reason?  
 Maru: [Overlapping talk] I would just get my family [Dante: No- I would never-] to give her a hiding. Yeah- I'd get my girl cousins to give her a hiding.  
 Clint: No I would just leave it.  
 Dave: You would just leave it? [Overlapping talk]  
 Clint: Yeah. [Dante: I gotta real tight- like- girl mate. ]  
 Dante: She's like a sister to me. Even if I tell her not to she still give her a hiding eh.

In this account the following justifications and excuses were made for men's violence towards women:

- She was sleeping around with some other person
- If you had really strong feelings for her and she slept around
- The Bible says to stone a woman to death who commits adultery.

A common strategy employed by men who use violence towards girlfriends or wives is to justify their violence through employing the excuse of provocation brought on by the woman's sexual activities with other men. It is noteworthy that in this group of young men, not selected for any use of violence, Lelei quickly references the rumour of Reihana "sleeping around" as a justification for Chris Brown's violence. loane's reference to her putting this information in a video clip allows the young men to work up the idea that her

“sleeping around” has validity. His later statement that “it [the video clip] was nasty” works to position Reihana, the victim/survivor of Chris’s assault, out of the position of victim and into the position of provoker or perpetrator. In this account the young men fail to identify the possibility that public relations consultants associated with Chris Brown might be putting the idea about that Raihana had slept around in order to provide a legitimate excuse for his violence. Raihana’s video clip moves from being an enacted performance to being a representation of reality in order to support their justification that she provoked him to violence.

The young men are asked to consider further whether sleeping around is a justification for violence. Dante’s statement “depends on how you feel about that girl eh” opens up the interpretation that if a man has few feelings for a girl her sleeping around will be meaningless, whereas if he has strong feelings her sleeping around would be a justification for violence. Of interest here is that these young men consider that strong feelings of attraction to a girlfriend provide a justification to hurt her rather than to treat her well. There is an unstated assumption that if you have strong feelings for a girl and she treats you badly the emotional hurt that you experience justifies a man’s violence towards the girl. Further justification for men to beat women who are constructed to be sexually unfaithful is provided by Ioane’s reference to the Bible: “it does say in the Bible does it? Like you know- oh- just get stoned. Stoned to death like-“ Men are entitled to beat women for unfaithfulness because the Bible makes reference to stoning women to death who commit adultery. This selective use of the Bible as a justification for men’s dominance and violence towards wives and girlfriends has also been found in the language of men who use violence towards women (Gavey, Adams & Towns, 1994). There is no reference here to the often quoted phrase made by Jesus to those who had brought a woman accused of adultery to him for stoning “Let he who has not sinned caste the first stone.”

The young men were asked to consider whether “being shattered”, a colloquialism for having their strong feelings hurt, was a good enough justification for violence. There follows an interesting interchange as the young men work up a way in which to ensure that such a girlfriend suffers a physical hiding for her indiscretion while maintaining themselves as violence free. Maru and Dante talk of friends and family who could be recruited to beat her up or who would beat her up for them. Maru spoke of actively



recruiting family members to beat her up “I would just get my family to give her a hiding”. Dante portrays himself initially as non-violence “no I would never” but later as more passive in this context: he would not actively recruit someone to beat her up, but rather, her indiscretion would be sufficient to involve a “a real tight- like- girl mate” who would “give her a hiding”. His statement “even if I tell her not to” positions him as someone who is potentially against such violence but powerless to stop it if his girl mate takes it upon herself to act. In this way Dante is able to protect himself from any interpretation that he might be violent while still colluding with violence towards such a girlfriend. Clint affirms that he would “just leave it” and appears to be the only one of the group who positions himself unequivocally as someone who would not hurt his girlfriend or see her hurt in these circumstances.

In another except the young men work up further justifications and excuses for using violence towards a girlfriend:

Lelei: If she’s hard out disrespect your family. Like in front of their face that would be normal- they’d probably just smash you right there.  
Dave: Yeah.  
Lelei: Yeah?  
Maru: And after they’ve smashed you your mum smashes you. [laughter].  
Dave: So disrespecting your family might be another reason.  
Lelei: Yeah. That would be probably the only reason.  
Unidentified Participant: Oh.  
Lelei: Fuck! (.....)  
Dave: Okay.  
Lelei: Or probably getting pregnant to another guy and-  
Maru: Still hard out sleeping around.  
Lelei: Oohh. That would be hard out.  
Dave: So there are some situations eh? Or some reasons that w-  
Maru: Or lying to you that she’s pregnant.  
Dave: Lying to you that’s she’s pregnant.  
Dave: What do you other guys reckon about that one.  
Dante: What’s that?  
Dave: Lying to you that she’s pregnant.  
Dante: And it’s not yours? If it’s yours ors- I reckon it’s alright. But if it is- or like it’s not- or like- [laughs]  
Dante: Like if it’s yours it’s alright but if it’s not yours or-  
Dave: Do you mean “Oh I’m pregnant we need to bet married.” Or- when actually she’s not pregnant, what do you mean.  
Maru: No it’s one of those- [Clint: She’s trying to hold on.] she doesn’t want you to leave her.  
Dave: Oh.

- Showing a lack of respect of his family
- Getting pregnant to another guy
- Lying to you that she was pregnant
- Lying to you that she was pregnant with your baby when it was not yours
- Lying to you that she was pregnant in order to keep you in the relationship

These justifications are significant given a case that occurred in recent years in New Zealand when a young rugby league player was informed that his girlfriend had become pregnant. He and a group of male friends severely beat-up this young women, kicking her as she lay on the ground in the body region in an attempt to get her to spontaneously abort. The boyfriend had been led to believe he was destined for a professional rugby league career and was afraid that his girlfriend's pregnancy would interfere with this dream.

## 4. Social and Cultural Influences that Produce Control

The young men were asked about the social and cultural influences that produce control of a girlfriend by a boyfriend. In the following we detail the dominant social and cultural influences that emerged from the texts of the focus group discussions: the first of these influences is the culture of cool which remains ever present in the language of these young men, the second concerns young men's ideas about being The Man when influenced by this culture of cool, the third concerns the binge drinking culture influenced by the culture of cool and the fourth is the gangster culture, also influenced by the culture of cool.

An important social influence that emerged from the research with young women who had experienced controlling boyfriends was their constructions about what was considered to be "hot" and what was considered to be "cool" amongst young people (Towns & Scott, 2008). Media depictions of the idealised woman in television, advertising and music videos were represented as contributing to these "cool" ideals of young women. Some young women argued that young men wanted a "hot girl" and a "hot car" and these representations had become the normative ideals for the teenage culture in New Zealand. These young women argued that media representations of an idealised young woman, stripped of her identity, had contributed to them being treated as disposable objects, there for their boyfriends to control rather than to treat as human beings. As we analysed the young women's texts we were struck by the overarching influence of this idea of being cool within each of the major social influences that we identified. We represented the language and actions associated with being cool or being hot as the 'Culture of Cool'. Discourse analysts influenced by Foucault's work have argued that when language employs apparently contradictory terms or turns of phrase (e.g. cool, hot) such contradictions may indicate an overarching language based influence that shapes the ways people interact and is, in turn, influenced by the language interchanges in conversations and discussions (Gavey, 1989). The Culture of Cool appeared to us to be one such overarching discursive or language-based influence for young people in New Zealand.

## A. The Culture of Cool

The focus groups with the young men revealed a similar strong recognition among these young men of what was considered to be “cool” and what was “hot”. The discussions revealed a fluid cultural influence rather than one that was static, one that was adaptable to the context that the young men were in so that which might be considered to be cool or hot in one group might not be in another. This fluid nature of the culture of cool was articulated in the following excerpt:

Dave: What makes a cool group of - what makes a group of 18-25 year-old men cool?  
Ben: Oh-  
Unidentified Participant: Moustaches. [Laughter]  
Ben: That very much depends on the um the group you could say, you know like what makes someone cool in the church on a Sunday compared to what makes someone cool in the workplace on a Monday [Unidentified Participant: Yeah that's true.] can be two totally different things you know.  
Frank: I hated the cool group thing at my school you know I just ignored it [Ben: Mm.] and just talked to anybody and they thought it was a little weird me talking to them cause I didn't think I was in the cool group but they got used to it eventually.  
Unidentified Participant: Did what you want. Be ill-filtrated.  
Frank: Yeah.  
Unidentified Participant: 'Hey guys!'  
Caleb: But like when you get to uni and stuff like no one really cares like about things like that anymore.  
Dave: Right.  
Caleb: It's just gone.  
Euan: However other stuff becomes important eh like um- [Unidentified Participant: Drinking.] if you get like real well paying job suddenly you are earning huge dollars you know it might be seen as cool you know?  
Ben: Success yeah.  
Euan: Yeah this person is successful and so oh this person has got a house and only 24-years-old you know.  
Dave: Got you.  
Caleb: Yeah.  
Unidentified Participant: That's cool.  
Euan: Or this person is like already got their own business or what ever.  
Caleb: Yeah like there is an expectation for people to like just get rich and like that's like the- like what life is about is to get rich and get like fancy stuff and [Euan: Mm.] yeah.  
Dave: Does that ring any bells with you guys when Caleb says that?  
Unidentified

Participant: Yeah.  
 Frank: I think I'll be cool once I'm married. [Laughter]  
 Unidentified  
 Participant: Yeah.  
 Dylon: Yeah, that's pretty cool in the church group.  
 Unidentified  
 Participant: Yeah yeah.  
 Dylon: Someone says: "Oh I'm going out with this person," "Oh I'm actually engaged," wow. [Laughter]  
 Unidentified  
 Participant: You're pretty cool.  
 Euan: Yeah whereas um, you might have someone who might be cool cause they um, because they are not worried about money or they might- it depends on the context and where you are.  
 Ben: Mm.  
 Unidentified  
 Participant: Yeah.  
 Ben: See in the armed forces you are cool if you can drink two litres of bourbon in one night and not spew you know [laughter] those sort of stories.  
 Unidentified  
 Participant: Quite similar to church. [laughter]  
 Dylon: Or if you use big words. [laughter]

The early response of "moustaches", to Dave's question about what makes young men cool, is a reference to the charitable work that these young men were involved in or aware of: Mo-vember, growing a moustache for a charitable cause in November. While the response is humorous it immediately signals that what is considered to be cool amongst this group of young men is dictated by context: that in November moustaches are cool for this young man but they may not be any other time of the year. Ben goes on to elaborate on how being cool is context driven. His initial statement "that very much depends on the group" might be interpreted as suggesting that the group holds an idea of what is cool and that this remains stable for the group in different contexts. However, his next statement suggests that even when a group member holds an idea of what makes someone cool in a particular group this ideal may change "in the church on a Sunday" and may be different from "in the workplace on a Monday". By articulating the changing nature of what makes a young man cool Ben captures a sense that being cool is fluid and malleable, shifts from context to context and is not easily articulated as a single consistent concept.

Frank then described his experience of "the cool group thing" at his school. His account suggests that there was recognition within the school of a "cool group", that he

was not considered to belong to this group and that those who engaged with the cool group and were not part of it were considered to be “a little weird”. This account suggests a more rigidly held idea of who was considered to be cool within this particular school environment. Frank’s account may be interpreted as suggesting that to be in the cool group was to have status within the school and that the group and others treated intrusions from outside the group as “a little weird”. His portrayal draws on the idea that this status was recognised not only by the group that was considered cool but by others within the school community. His statement that “I just ignored it” suggests that he was acting outside the accepted unspoken normative behaviour by talking “to anybody” regardless of their cool group status. There is a suggestion in this account that within this school context being in the cool group holds a privileged position that allows the group to determine who will be accepted into the cool group and that determines who will or will not be allowed to interact with the group. Frank’s insistence on talking to those within the cool group is portrayed as tolerated but somewhat marginalised - “they thought it a little weird” - and while he stated that “they got used to it eventually” there is a portrayed recognition in this account that Frank was not part of “the cool group” nor was he invited into it by his interactions. His initial statement “I hated the cool group thing” suggests that he recognised the exclusive potential and privilege of such a group within the school environment and his subsequent statements suggest that he worked to subvert this status by deliberately breaking down the boundaries of it. Even had he been accepted into the cool group his representation of his dislike of the “cool group thing” suggests that he would not have wanted to be associated with the privilege and prowess accorded this group. His subversive actions are nicely captured by the next participants who described his actions with the words “ill filtrated” and who parody his boundary breaking interaction with the cool group with the statement “Hi guys”.

The participants then go on to reinforce the shifting and fluid nature of what is cool outside the school environment: “like when you get to uni and stuff like no one really cares about things like that anymore.” In this account the more rigid rules and regulations that accord the cool group privileged status in schools are not the stuff of importance in other settings such as at university. Caleb’s statement “It’s just gone” uses an ambiguous pronoun “it’s” to allow the listener to infer that he is referring to the notion of a cool group and the privileges and norms associated with this group in school.

Euan's statement "other stuff becomes important" negates the possible assumption that being cool is gone altogether once a young man leaves school and draws on the contextual fluidity of being cool. His statement allows one participant to state that drinking might be considered cool in other contexts, while Euan, with prompts from others, lists other activities that might take on cool status in other contexts: having a really well paying job, earning huge dollars, being successful, being young and owning a house, having your own business. Caleb's reference to these cool practices as expectations and his use of "just" provides an underlying criticism of the coolness of these practices within the existing group: "there is an expectation for people to like just get rich". The term expectation allows Caleb to suggest that to earn a lot of money can become less of a choice and more of an enforced direction. His next statement "and like that's like the- like what life is about" opens up the interpretation that, while to some groups getting rich might be what life is about, there are other possibilities for young men that don't involve the pressures of earning a lot of money and getting "fancy stuff".

A further prompt from the interviewer allows the young men to talk about what might be cool in a church group of young men. Frank's statement "I'll be cool once I'm married" is described as "pretty cool in the church group" as is becoming engaged. There is a suggestion in this account that, for young men in the church group, being married or becoming engaged provides a legitimate sexual status to these young men that is not present in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships that are uncommitted. The discussion of what might be cool in the church group allows these young men to continue to reference the fluidity of being cool. Caleb's statement that someone else might be cool for not worrying about money allows him to indicate once again the contextual nature of being cool – "it depends on the context and where you are." The young men then go on to have a bit of fun with this idea of being cool as context driven: Ben references the culture of cool in the armed forces - "in the armed forces you are cool if you can drink two litres of bourbon in one night and not spew" while another participant creates a laugh by suggesting that drinking a lot without spewing is also cool in the church. Dylan continues with the list of what might be cool in the armed forces by using humour with his statement "or if you use big words".

## Being a cool guy in a relationship

Of importance for this report is how this culture of cool or the language of cool impacts on young people's intimate heterosexual relationships. In the following the interviewer begins to draw out what it means for young men to be cool in these relationships:

- Dave: Is there a cool guy in relationships?  
Dylon: In between the guy and the girl?  
Dave: Yeah.  
Ben: Yeah the guy with the hottest chick is probably the coolest guy.  
Dave: Right.  
Frank: Yeah I'm the coolest guy.  
Dave: Haha what's on your mind there?  
Frank: Oh I don't know I just ah- I don't know I crave my girlfriend eh so I sort of just look at everyone else's girlfriends and I'm just like yeah I feel like I've got the hottest girlfriend so maybe I'm the coolest I don't know? [Laughter]  
Frank: But yeah I'm just going to put it out there.  
Ben: You are alpha male at the moment there.  
Dave: So what's the cool guy in the relationship in the armed forces then? Is he the guy with the hottest chick or-  
Unidentified Participant: He's the tank.  
Ben: Um- no- he's probably the guy with more than one girlfriend whose girlfriends probably don't know he's got other girlfriends and that he is probably having a lot of sex all the time. Is probably the coolest. [Laughter]  
Unidentified Participant: Must be a cool guy yeah.  
Aaron: Boy do I want to be him. [Laughter]  
Aaron: That was sarcasm. [Laughter]  
Unidentified Participant: I wasn't going to point it out.  
Dave: And how about on the work site?  
Euan: Probably the same thing.  
Dave: Yeah.  
Euan: Yeah. Plus um got the coolest car. [Dave: Right.] As well.

Following Dave's question about whether there is a cool guy in relationships Ben statement's "the guy with the hottest chick is probably the coolest guy" extends the interviewer's language to draw from ideas about what is considered to be cool or to be hot to describe the "cool guy". Having not just a "hot chick" but the "hottest chick" is what makes a cool guy in a relationship. This depiction of the cool guy indicates that the perception of a cool guy is not driven in isolation from his social context: there must be a sort of consensus about what makes the "hottest chick". Frank statement, however, contests this interpretation by indicating that the interpretation of who has the "hottest"



girlfriend, for him, is driven by his own desires. “I crave my girlfriend”, “I sort of just look at everyone else’s girlfriends and I’m just like yeah, I feel like I’ve got the hottest girlfriend”. He then draws on Ben’s interpretation of what makes “the coolest guy” to argue that this logic means that “maybe I’m the coolest”. Frank’s comment, however, again opens up the possibility that who is the cool guy is again dependent on context, that if a man considers that he has the hottest girlfriend that this consideration is sufficient for him to construct himself as the coolest guy. Ben’s following statement “you are alpha male at the moment there” points to the social relationships that might be involved in determining who is the coolest guy – the coolest guy is the alpha male, the man who holds status above other men. This statement raises questions about who is the alpha male in a group and suggests that, at least for some groups of men, having the hottest chick makes him alpha male. The statement draws on ideas about masculinity and relationships that will be explored more fully below.

The idea that what makes the cool guy is context driven is supported by the response to Dave’s question about what is a cool guy in relationships in the armed forces. One participant argues that this is the man who is “the tank” leaving the interpretation of what constitutes a tank as somewhat ambiguous. One interpretation is that “the tank” is someone who is built like a tank: solid, muscular, and impervious to assault. There is the implication that someone of this physique is attractive to women. Ben disagrees with this construction, claiming more knowledge in this area, and provides another construction of the coolest guy in the armed forces. He is “probably the guy with more than one girlfriend whose girlfriends probably don’t know he’s got other girlfriends and that he is probably having a lot of sex all the time.” In this account prowess is given to the man in the armed forces who has many girlfriends, has a lot of sex, and keeps his conquests hidden from each of his girlfriends. In this group of young men the idea that these actions make a cool man are contested by their sarcastic responses “must be a cool guy yeah”, “boy do I want to be him”, “wasn’t going to point that out”. These comments point to the contradictory and contextual nature of being cool: in this particular group such actions are not considered to be cool.

The construction of the cool guy as promiscuous and deceptive points to a certain separate gendered account for the cool man in this context: one that is provided by the men in the man’s life that affords him status despite his unethical conduct and one that is

provided by the women in the man's life that constructs him as behaving ethically when he is not. This construction depicts the deception of this double world, this world in which he can have his cake and eat it too. It is an account that draws on a certain disregard of women's entitlement to trusting relationships and as such points to a certain disdain of women. In this world the coolest guy is living dangerously, always at the risk of his deception being found out. Euan, who stated that such an account would be consistent with that which makes a cool guy "on the work site", contests that this depiction of the coolest guy is limited to the armed forces.

There is an added rendition to the account of the coolest guy on the work site, however, and that is that this idea of the coolest guy having heaps of girlfriends is also linked to him having "the coolest car". We were interested in what the young men's construction of a cool car was. In the following account the young men portrayed a cool car by describing what it was not after Dave asked if his Toyota Corolla station-wagon would be considered to be cool:

- Phin: Yeah you can just imagine us- [Overlapping talk] you can just imagine us in your [Toyota Corolla station-wagon] driving down in town [Dave: laughs] and and you see these mean as rides going past and all these girls are just not even taking a second- not even taking a look not even a glance. And then if you pulled in with something you know like a Skyline or something with you all packed in there yeah hell yeah they'll be like straight 'Oh hi guys.' [with falsetto] [laughter]
- Ned: 'What are you up to tonight.' [Overlapping talk] [laughter] 'Want to come to a party?'

Cool cars such as Skyline's are depicted as attracting the girls whereas uncool cars, such as Toyota Corolla station-wagons, have no effect on girls at all. This account suggests that young men are competing for the attention of young women, and that an uncool car does not stand out amongst the "mean as rides going past" when "driving down in town." The young men use examples of what the young women might say to them if they pulled up in a Skyline "all packed in there" to indicate the immediate response that young women might make. Hot cars open up the opportunities for contact with young women, invitations to parties etcetera, that are not available to those in cars that are not considered to be cool.

Other participants described hot moves on the sports field as contributing to the attraction of a "dude":

Phin: But that's what girls always look for in a dude.  
 Ned: The stars. They're looking for the stars.  
 Phin: And if you are like shining of course they're going to notice you. "Oh damn he's mean." Then they're gonna go "Oh yes can I have your number?"  
 Dave: Where do you think that comes from?  
 Ned: What do you mean by that?  
 Dave: Where do you think that idea that the guy whose the star on the field-  
 Owen: -always gets the girls?  
 Dave: Yeah.  
 Regan: Just- Reputation.  
 Owen: It's just commonsense. Once they shine girls will definitely look at them. They don't want a look at the dude dropping the ball, knocking it. [laughter] They'll just look and laugh. [laughter]

In this account men who are stars on the sports field are attractive to women. When asked where the idea that men who are stars on the sports field are attractive comes from the participants have different takes on this. Regan's statement "Just- reputations" draws on the idea that stars develop a reputation and this reputation gives them a status that is attractive toward women. Owen has a different take. In his account, young women's attraction to stars is "just commonsense". Owen provides a graphic illustrative example to support his position, which is difficult to counter within culture of cool discourses.

This idea that it is just commonsense that being a star attracts women points to the ways in which being cool has become embedded in young people's language and conversations. This entrenchment in language is usually signalled by contradictions and Ned's comments below provide an indication of the ways young men negotiate these contradictions within this culture:

Ned: Some guys are not good at sport but they still get the best girl you know.  
 Dave: Yeah how does that happen?  
 Ned: It's the personality it's like- how you treat the girl and you take care of her it's like- it's not always about what you're good at. It's just how you treat the girl. Sometimes you ask girl what do you look for into a guy? 'A guy that cares for me. Um. Support me when I want and- [Owen: She just lies.] just always be there when I need you know.'  
 Owen: She just lies. [Phin: They all like- Hugh Heifner girls.] It's a lie. All just lying.  
 Ned: But they still get them.  
 Owen: Cos ah yeah cos I mean my cousin- he's like a fat dude- he's um texting this chick he was saying he was skinny and shit [laughter] telling her he tell her what you

look for in a guy 'Umm personality and shit' don't say nothing about weight, then after that they met up and it's- [laughter].

Ned: Yeah. Oh some girls are like that though. Not always. Not always.

Owen: Like 'I don't know you!'

Phin: Some girls are. Some are.

Ned: Oh it's because he was lying too. Some dudes [Regan: Think it depends-] are idiots.

This account points to the difficulties young men encounter when they attempt to contest the dominant cultural representation of boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.

In this excerpt, Ned becomes a lone voice protesting against the idea that being a star – essentially being a cool man – attracts women. In his account what is important to attract “the best girl” is not sport prowess but personality. The use of the word personality might suggest that he is referring to some form of theoretically understood idea of personality but his on-going statements suggest that he is referring to a more lay understanding: “how you treat the girl and you take care of her”. His ongoing attempts to describe what a girl wants in her boyfriend are interrupted, however, by Owen who strongly contests this construction by his statement: “She just lies. It's a lie. All just lying”. Such repetition provides emphasis to his disagreement. Phin's statement that “They all like- Hugh Heifner girls” is ambiguous in that whether he is referring to Ned's depiction of girls or those who seek cool men is not clear. In this statement he is referring to the sort of girls that might be in the magazine *Playboy* – Hugh Heifner being the founder of the *Playboy* empire - there for their explicit enhanced sexualised looks and for sex and not much else. Owen provides a narrative to illustrate his depiction of women seeking cool men by giving an account of an interaction with a girl and his cousin: a “fat dude”. He portrays the girl as duplicitous: saying she wanted personality but in reality being driven by looks. While Ned and Phin acknowledge that some girls do seek only stars, Ned continues to provide a contradictory position: “Not always.” Ned depicts his cousin's lack of success as because he had lied about his weight. He then constructs men who use lies to attract women as idiots. “Oh it's because he was lying too. Some dudes are idiots.” Despite Ned's statements, Owen's repetition of girls as liars and his use of this story to support his position provides a strong counter to Ned's construction and the over-riding impression remains that women are attracted to stars and that if they say they are not they are liars.

In the following Dave asks where this idea of the cool man comes from:

- Dave: Where do those ideas come from? [Ben: Movies.] Just thinking work site and armed forces like and the coolest guy has got lots of women who don't know about each other um, where do the ideas come from that support them being the coolest guy?
- Caleb: Just media. Movies and stuff.
- Dylon: C4, MTV.
- Euan: Oh yeah.
- Dylon: It's a killer.
- Euan: MTV aye. The rappers with just bowls of honeys around them.
- Dave: Right.
- Dylon: Yeah and all those piles and piles of crap-as dating shows.
- Euan: Yeah 'Flavour of Love 2'.
- Dylon: Yeah one guy going through at least 20 different girls.
- Euan: This guy is so cool he's got girls competing for him.
- Unidentified Participant: Yeah.
- Dave: Right.

This account strongly situates the influence on young men of what is the coolest guy within media depictions of men. In this account those men who consider that the coolest man is the man having heaps of girlfriends are those influenced by "rappers with just bowls of honeys around them" and those TV programmes that have "one guy going through at least 20 different girls". In this account these programmes portray such men as "so cool he's got girls competing for him."

In the following account young men are told by media representations "what's hot and what's not". When asked to describe where the idea that having a hot car was important comes from this group described the influences:

- Dave: So where does that come from? That idea that um you know your car is important?
- Phin: Stereotypes.
- Dave: Stereotypes yeah.
- Phin: TV. magazines. See it everywhere, it's part of life. It's-
- Owen: It's what tells [Phin: It's what-] you what's hot and what's not.
- Phin: Yeah it's what everyone's put on TV put in magazines made everyone think that they're ugly but they're not. And they change- try and change their personality their appearance, their outlook towards things on what someone else said about- I reckon. Well that's what I reckon.

In this account being cool is part of the discourse of what is fashionable at the time, driven by the media and marketing practices. Phin goes on to describe the effect of these

marketing practices as having “made everyone think that they’re ugly but they’re not.” With this phrase Phin captures the effects of marketing strategies on young people who are developing a sense of their own identity. His use of the phrase “made everyone think they’re ugly” suggests that marketing strategies are deliberate attempts to shift people’s perceptions of themselves to one of dissatisfaction. He then draws on these media representations to account for the ways people act: “they change- try and change their personality their appearance, their outlook towards things on what someone else said”. This phrase captures the effect of media constructions on people – they work to make them “change their personality their appearance and their outlook towards things.” There is a sense in these statements that the media creates an imperative for people to shift their beliefs and change their thinking to what is marketed as hot at that time. His use of the phrase “on what *someone else* said” suggests a movement from the media representations into wider acceptance of these depictions that then provides pressure to conform.

#### The Hot Girlfriend

We were interested in the ways these media portrayals worked to influence the constructions of a girlfriend for young men given the above juxtaposition of hot girlfriend with hot car. This association suggests that young women were being constructed as if a desirable object, a representation that young women had said contributed to them being treated badly, as if disposable (Towns & Scott, 2008). In an award winning Vodafone advertisement shown frequently on NZ television a young man folds up his desirable possessions and puts them in his pocket as if collecting those items he wants to take away with him. After folding several objects he reaches the door and turns around to look back into his apartment. On seeing his girlfriend asleep on the bed he folds her up too, places her in his pocket and leaves the room. Later he is seen to be using his cool new mobile phone to access these items. An initial interpretation of this advertisement is that the mobile phone provides a convenient way to continue to have images and access to loved ones and other items of value when away from home. Another reading, however, provides a more problematic interpretation. Of interest here is the clear association of the girlfriend with the objects he is collecting to take with him. She is constructed as a desirable object, but his collecting of her as the last of the desirable objects represents

the value he places on her. Not only is she made into an item to be collected by her boyfriend, but she is the least important of the desirable objects: almost forgettable. The boyfriend, on the other hand, is represented as someone with status - he needs to travel for his work - and he has access to the latest technology.

In the following the young men describe what they consider constitutes a “hot” girlfriend:

Dave: What makes a hot chick a hot chick?  
Afi: What like um physically or mentally?  
Dave: Yeah, yeah, you name it.  
Afi: Oh looking good obviously.  
Dave: Yep.  
Keoni: Someone that gets along with your mum.  
Dave: Someone that gets along with your mum?  
Afi: Yeah.  
Keoni: Yeah that’s what I can say.  
Dave: What’s looking good?  
Keoni: Do you want us to specify?  
Dave: Yeah, yeah.  
Keoni: Ok I’m talking on all guys um a nice body [Dave: Yep.] um nice hair [Dave: Yep.] um good facial features um pretty much a girl that can dress- I’m only going for what the guys talk about you know.  
Dave: Yeah, yeah. Yep that’s cool.

Using the language of the young men the interviewer opens the discussion by asking the young men to describe what makes a “hot chick”. Afi’s response immediately portrays the appearance of the girl as important: “looking good obviously”. His use of the word obviously suggests that good looks in a girlfriend are a self-evident asset. Keoni uses a list to elaborate on what is meant by looking good: “a nice body”, “nice hair”, “good facial features”, “a girl that can dress”. All of these itemised details are those that might be promoted by the media as part of the package of good-looking features in young women, that might change with fashion and that might be massaged according to marketing strategies. In contrast Keoni’s statement points to the relational importance of a girlfriend: she needs to get “along with your mum.”

In the following excerpt being a hot girlfriend is portrayed as having relational qualities too. This account emerged following a discussion about control over what girlfriend wear:

Xavier: Fuck if she's hot and gorgeous man show her off!  
 Victor: Exactly.  
 Warren: Fucken show her off!  
 Xavier: Hell yeah.  
 Victor: What other guys looking at you. Fuck. [laughter] Shame. [laughter].

In this account being “hot and gorgeous” allows young men to “show her off” rather than limit her dress. This account portrays the status that young men gain by having a girlfriend who is considered to be hot. The statement “show her off” suggests that to be a “hot girlfriend” is to be one that is recognised by other men as “hot”. One does not “show off” something that others would not appreciate. Victor portrays the idea that other men would recognise that the man’s girlfriend is “hot” in the last statement: “What other guys looking at you. Fuck. Shame.” His comments generated laughter amongst the group. There is the portrayal in this comment that “other guys looking at you” because you have a “hot” girlfriend is a point of status for young men. These ideas will be discussed more fully in the next section.

Other participants contested the idea that the physically attractive young woman was the best girl:

Dave: So with men of your age what makes the best girl.  
 Lelei: The pretty one.  
 Dave: The pretty one.  
 Maru: [laughs] Sexy.  
 Dante: Oh not me eh. Not me. [Dave: The sexy one.] I don't really like the looks or like the- like girls that think they're pretty they think they're- they're shit roses, [Dave: Yeah.] like- no offence but they do. They're like that personality like they're enormously, hard eh?  
 Sefa: They know it all and stuff. [Dante: They're enormously-]  
 Dante: -hard. Yeah.  
 Sefa: They just- they just use guys eh. [Dante: Mm.] Real pretty ones they use the guys man-  
 Maru: X's [Sefa: -for money.] a good example eh.  
 Dave: What a- um- so you said they use them for money- what else would you-  
 Sefa: They use them for a lot of things. Security.  
 Dave: Security. What- security from what?  
 Maru: Like look of dude.  
 Dave: Yeah? In what way.  
 Clint: Oh- Gosh.  
 Maru: Brother-sister look.  
 Dave: Oh like safety, like physical safety security.  
 Sefa: Yeah.  
 Lelei: Yeah.



Dante: But- Like they lead them on in some ways. [Maru: Yeah. Sefa: Yeah.] Yeah like there could be a chance but really in their mind they no-

Sefa: There is no chance [Dante: -that. Yeah] of hooking up with them so-

Dave: So do you reckon there's pressure- there's pressure on girls to be that way?

Dante: Not really. [Sefa; Just to-] Why would there be like-

Maru: It's not good to play around with your head eh.

Dante: Hard up.

Sefa: That's what lead to like- a- arguments, you know.

Whereas Lelei and Maru initially name being pretty and sexy as the qualities they would associate with the best girl, and in doing so support the earlier comments about appearance making a girl "hot", Dante contests this depiction as the one that makes the best girlfriend for him. His use of the phrase "shit roses" beautifully encapsulates his dislike of these young women. The association of shit and roses may be interpreted as suggesting that while they might appear like roses they produce "shit". This interpretation is supported by Dante's following comment that "they're enormously hard eh", the use of "eh" inviting agreement from other participants. Sefa's comment supports him "they know it all and stuff", "they just use guys, eh." "for money" and "security". Maru further supports these comments by providing an example of a young woman who treated young men this way. Dante and Sefa build on this idea of such women as "shit roses" by producing a list of other difficulties with such women: they lead young men on to believe that there is a chance of hooking up with them when there is not. Maru portrays the effect of such behaviour on young men "It's not good to play around with your head eh." suggesting that the effect on young men is emotional mind games, while Sefa states that such actions "lead to arguments".

The young men's accounts suggested that who young men considered to be a hot girlfriend very much depended on context. For example Gary was a university student:

Gary: I think probably you know most of them you know if you had a- most of my friends if you had a highly intelligent and a very attractive girl you know you'd definitely- girlfriend- you'd probably have a lot of prestige or the higher status anyway yeah definitely.

Alison: So attractiveness is a point of-

Gary: Attractiveness- but a lot of my friends are really into girls who are very charismatic and you know determined and (?) yeah.

Alison: So attractiveness bundled up is just intelligence and other things not just physical attractiveness.

Gary: Not well- physical attractiveness I guess is always an important thing but it's more like physical attractiveness with a you know independent identity rather than just you know a ho sort of thing you know.

In Gary's account attractiveness alone does not provides status and prestige in his group. Rather the girlfriend would need also to be "highly intelligent". Gary continues to add to the description of the girls that his friends "are really into" by describing them as "charismatic" and "determined". In this account prestige and status are attributed to men who have girlfriends with these ideals beyond being good looking alone.

The way a girlfriend is portrayed here is articulated descriptively by what she is not. In Gary's final statement he goes on to identify the girls his group would like as having an "independent identity" and makes a distinction between such girls and girls who are just "a ho" (see below). The word "just" suggests that a ho does not have the status of someone with the features he idealised for a girlfriend. With the phrase "more like physical attractiveness with a you know independent identity" he portrays a ho as someone who may be physically attractive but who does not have an independent identity. In the gangster rap music genre described in our earlier research with young women hos were the many women surrounding a single male rapper, there only for their sex. Young women described media representations of such women as stripped of any identity except their sex (Towns & Scott, 2008). In the following section we describe another social and cultural influence that emerged from the young men's accounts.

## B. The Culture of Cool & being The Man

In the above there are indications of the ways in which the representations promoted by the interaction of the culture of cool interweave with young men's ideas of what it is to be a man. The phrase The Man was spoken of repeatedly throughout the focus group discussions by most of the groups. I use title letters to denote this construction as it was given special emphasis by the participants who were not referring simply to being "a man" but rather to being an "alpha man" or "top dog". In the following I unravel the way

in which young men made sense of being The Man by portraying their representations of “one-up manship” and of having status within young men’s groups.

### One-up manship

Many of the groups spoke of the competitiveness amongst their group of men. For these young men having the hottest girl gave status as The Man:

### *Competition for trophy girl*

In the following the young men discussed what happens for young men around the hottest girl:

- Phin: Because for an example right there is this really nice girl- really nice girl in our course and she is fine and everyone’s like thinking to themselves, everyone’s talking, all the boys are talking so oh [Ned: Whoever taps that is The Man.] yeah see?
- Ned: Who ever taps that is The Man.
- Dave: Right, right, right.
- Ned: She’s like Jessica Alba looking, oh fuck!
- Owen: No, she’s too much boy. [laughter]
- Dave: So tell me about when you talk about being ‘the man’ [laughter] you know who ever has sex with that girl that will be the guy eh?
- Owen: Na that would be- [Overlapping talk]
- Phin: You would say he’d be lucky.
- Ned: He’s a lucky bastard!
- Phin: Real lucky!
- Dave: He’s a lucky bastard? And what will that- what will that mean to you other guys, if this you know this imaginary guy went and did that what would that mean.
- Ned: I’d go up to him and shake his hand and go ‘How did it feel’. [Laughter] He just had a awesome time.

Phin and Ned work up what happens in groups of young men when a “really nice girl” presents. Phin portrays the effect on the young men as a talking point “everyone’s like thinking to themselves, everyone’s talking, all the boys are talking”. These comments capture a level of excitement amongst Phin’s group of young men about the presence of this girl. Ned’s statement “Whoever taps that is The Man” draws on young men’s ideas about masculinity, being The Man, to capture the implications for young men of successfully getting together with such a girl. His repetition of this statement provides

emphasis to this construction. His use of the phrase The Man suggests a construction that provides status to such a man for achieving this desired goal. The Man is the “alpha male”, the “top dog”, the one other men hold in esteem. The facilitator, Dave then attempts to clarify the construction of The Man for this young group of young men: he is someone who “has sex with that girl” and would be “the guy”. Owen’s statement “Na that would be-” appears to negate Dave’s construction. By using “Na” Owen appears to signal that the use of the term “the guy” and the reference to sex does not appear to capture their construction of The Man. Ned’s and Phil’s subsequent statements suggest the status conferred on any young man who gets together with this girl: “he’s a lucky bastard”, “I’d go up to him and shake his hand”, “he just had a awesome time”.

In the following the group continue to work up the idea of what it is to be The Man in the context of a relationship with such a girl.

Regan: Reputation.  
 Phin: Reputation?  
 Dave: Yep.  
 Owen: Yeah, reputation that’s basically it.  
 Dave: And what’s the reputation that comes with it.  
 Regan: Girls and probably more girls.  
 Phin: It depends really eh I reckon. It depends really on the outlook- overlook of someone. Like- you know if they look at it in a different way that’s their perspective of it but, you know we’re just talking about our perspective of it.  
 Dave: Yep.  
 Phin: I reckon if you- yeah you’re The Man. I reckon if- na everyone sort- of all guys I reckon they see a hot- hot as chick with a dude, ‘Damn you’re lucky.’  
 Ned: Oh there’s always another dude.  
 Phin: But yeah there could be another dude at the back that’s the back of him going ‘Hey watch yourself.’  
 Ned: Yeah that’s what I mean.  
 Dave: So is it like a um- is it like competition?  
 Ned: Yep.  
 Owen: Always, always, always.  
 Phin: In our age [Owen: It’s always-] [Overlapping talk] yeah always competition.

In this excerpt there is reference to the interlinking of the culture of cool with being The Man. A man who has a *hot* chick with him has status amongst other men “Damn you’re lucky”. His use of emphasis on the word damn evokes a level of regret from the speaker that he does not have this young woman. Regan’s construction of The Man employs the word “reputation” to suggest that within this group of young men being The Man is about

status, and that status comes from having “girls and probably more girls”. Phin’s questioning repetition of “reputation” and reference to other perspectives allows him to represent a point of view that suggests that being The Man is not for some men about having “girls and probably more girls” but about seeing “a hot as chick with a dude.” The young men evoke the idea that for young men maintaining the position of The Man with a “hot chick” is a “competition”. Owen’s statement “always, always, always” emphasises the acceptance of this construction. In one group this aspect of being a man in young men’s groups was constructed as problematic: Maru stated “I hate competition eh? Wah! I hate it.” and Dante agreed. This notion of competition evokes the idea that there will be a winner, a “top dog” or an “alpha male”.

The young men work up the idea of being The Man and competition more in the following:

Ned: Always a competition.  
Dave: What’s it competition for?  
Ned: For the girl.  
Owen: The girl is the prize, the trophy.  
Dave: The girl is the trophy.  
Owen: Yeah. Some guys will do anything just to try and get to that one. It’s just like a race you gotta drive, doesn’t matter how the road goes you want to get to the finish. That’s how some guys do anything just to get to that girl.

In this account the competition is about getting the girl and the girl is constructed as “the prize, the trophy”. Again this construction portrays the girl as an object to be won. The construction of the girl as the prize and the trophy suggests that the young men’s competition is not just for any girl but the real winner is the one who gets the best girl who may then be displayed as if a trophy. Owen’s statement that “it’s just like a race you gotta drive” once again draws on the idea of competition to portray the mind set some young men have towards getting the best girl. His statements that “some guys will do anything just to try and get to that one” and “doesn’t matter how the road goes you want to get to the finish” opens up the possibility that the actions of these young men may be potentially unscrupulous to get to their endpoint of the trophy girl.

### *Contesting one-up manship as competition*

While getting the girl was one aspect of competition the young men associated with being The Man, some young men contested the idea that being the top dog by bringing down the current one was always what being The Man was about:

Keoni: Um, oh its different, yeah, it could be competition or couldn't be, it really depends on the group itself and how they talk with each other. Cos I can't really speak for them, like every male, [Dave: Yep.] but I can sort of generally talk on what I know, what I've seen. And it- so meaning that its different it could mean like: so I'm a basketball player, he's a basketball player, he makes the team and there is two ways I can respond: I can say 'Shot bro you're The Man can you show me how you got in the team?' or I can be 'Man I can do better than you and blar blar blar blar' and we could probably be like that or be like 'Yeah man you know show me'. So um, yeah at times it can be competition and at times it can be um, uplifting.

In this account Keoni affirms the construction that Phin provided above of The Man for his group. Finding a member of the group had achieved something is depicted in his account as "uplifting" as opposed to promoting competition. A group member who makes such an achievement is congratulated "Shot bro" and the use of the term The Man is depicted as congratulatory. In Keoni's alternative account other team members can learn off The Man "show me how you got in the team" and the alternative is portrayed as oppositional by its juxtaposition alongside this statement: "or I can be 'Man I can do better than you..'" The use of the repeated "blar" portrays this alternative account as a bit of a rant by men who take this track. They must promote themselves in order to represent themselves as capable of unseating The Man's achievements.

### *May get her taken off you.*

Ned's statement above "Oh there's always another dude" and Phin's "But yeah there could be another dude at the back.. going 'hey watch yourself'" portray the problems for a boyfriend with a "hot as chick" when being The Man is about competition. He could lose her to another man. These ideas of other men potentially competing for the man's hot girlfriend raise the issue of how a young man holds onto her when another man could take her off him. The following excerpt occurred after some men spoke about showing a "hot" girlfriend off:

Brendon: That's kind of like [Unidentified participant: You know.] you're building up your own self-esteem again it's like yeah I'm awesome look at what I scored.

Xavier: Yeah. Pretty much.

Zak: Other guys don't like that they like to keep her for herself and just- don't want to feel that she could be taken from them?

Victor: I think it yeah it's more like-

Zak: By displaying them like that [Xavier: Yeah some of them-] that-

Xavier: -can be overprotective, and over um- what's the word for it um-

Brendon: Jealous.

Xavier: Overbearing that's it yeah.

Victor: But there usually ones that a little bit more worried that they could actually get taken off them.

Xavier: Yeah. Pretty [Unidentified participant: Yeah.] much.

Victor: And if- if you're worried that they could be then [Xavier: Yeah.] obviously something's not quite- not quite that comfortable.

In Zak's depiction some men are concerned about "displaying" the girlfriend they have "scored" for fear that "she could be taken from them". This construction, once again draws on the idea of competition described above, the knowledge that young men have that some men will "do anything" to get to a girl, and the potential for loss of the girl.

The young men then go on to portray the impact that this concern might have on such men. Such men were described as wanting "to keep her for herself", "some of them can be overprotective", "jealous", "overbearing". In these renditions the young men capture the control that some men might take upon themselves to exercise over young women in order to avoid other men taking her off him. Along with the construction of such men as concerned about "displaying" her one inference that can be taken from this account is that such young men will avoid her being seen too much by other men, will keep her close to them and will react negatively when other men are about. This representation is consistent with the ownership practices described by young women in the earlier study (Towns & Scott, 2008) and that were experienced by young women as limiting and controlling.

*"That can cause violence"*

In the following the young men work up one potential outcome for young men of competition for the girl. This account emerged following a discussion about the doors that having a "hot girlfriend" could open for young men including easy access to nightclubs:

Owen: That can cause violent to eh.  
 Dave: Oh yeah tell me more.  
 Owen: Because there will be always a guy that might step up for her you know and they you not gonna take it, they're just-  
 Dave: Right, right so you're talking about guys maybe hitting on her [Owen: Yeah.] or what ever and-  
 Owen: Not all guys but there's always someone there that's gonna- there's always someone that'll do-  
 Regan: Gonna try it on.

In this account competition for a girl is represented as potentially causing violence amongst men. This account occurred following mention of nightclubs and the following on of this comment opens up the interpretation that such violence is linked to the inevitable use of alcohol that goes along with this scene.

#### Having Status/Pride

Being The Man was portrayed by many of the young men in the groups as providing status or pride – part of being cool. In the following we will list some of the various ways young men gained status as The Man.

#### *Hooking up with the hottest girl*

Keoni: Mm, and I think it's more of a pride thing when all the guys know the girl especially eh? If we all know her- [Dave: Yep.] if we all know this girl and we're all like 'Man she's like one of the hottest girls' and then Sione gets with her [Dave: Yep.] Sione like ends up hooking up with her and then he comes and he's like 'Oh look who I've hooked up with' kind of thing and then its like 'You're The Man' kind of thing.  
 Afi: Buzzing out.  
 Dave: So he'd be The Man if he did that.  
 Keoni: Yeah, he'd be The Man like hands down like Sione take the crown kind of thing.

Hooking up with the hottest girl was portrayed as promoting the status of The Man in most of the groups of young men. However, what determined the hottest girl varied across groups.

#### *Engaged or married first*

Some young men constructed getting married or engaged first as giving a man status when the group he aligned himself with was a church group. There is an implication in this construction for these young men that being engaged or married, in the church



context that would encourage abstaining from sex until after marriage, provides such young men with a legitimate sexual status not afforded others.

### *Better sports moves*

Some young men who played rugby described how girlfriends helped them to gain pride and the status of The Man:

- Ned: I reckon girls gives us confidence too. Because with some groups- to be honest- when you're playing a rugby game and you- some dudes is- you see a girlfriend out- out the line it makes you want to go hard and more. It's like confidence- [Dave: Right.] and energy to you too. You know. I reckon.
- Dave: Yeah, where where- does that confidence come from I mean you look over and-
- Owen: Pride.
- Dave: Pride? Yeah?
- Owen: You don't want to look stupid in front of your girlfriend.
- Phin: Yeah especially in front of your missus.
- Ned: Yeah.
- Owen: Not in front of your missus.
- Ned: Just like when you're playing and you're no good when she's not there you just play all shitty you know. But when she's there you're like- Oh fuck!
- Phin: -You play- I reckon you play your bestest you know he's right you play your best but you just have that extra sort of ah-
- Ned: Extra strength.
- Phin: Yeah. You want to push yourself even more cos she's watching. [Unidentified participant: Yeah.] You want be The Man.
- Ned: You want her to give you a hug and all that shit.
- Owen: So after the game you can get a hug.
- Phin: Yeah. After the game she can come up to you. 'You're [Owen: Your're The Man] The Man. I love you.' [laughter]
- Owen: 'I knew you were my man.'
- Phin: 'I knew I went out with you for a reason.' [laughter]

In this account the young men portray the presence of their girlfriends as motivational enabling them to play better on the rugby field and enabling them to be constructed as The Man by their girlfriends and to retain their girlfriend's affections. In this account, verbal rewards from their girlfriends after the match, in which they are constructed as The Man, gives them "pride" and "confidence."

*Better ho/sex stories*

Some young men portrayed the telling of better stories as one way to gain the status of The Man. The following excerpt was from a group that identified themselves as belonging to the binge-drinking culture:

- Warren: If it's a relationship no-one talks about it, if it's a fling-  
Zak: Yeah.  
Warren: -you talk about it for about six [Xavier: If it's a one-] months.  
Xavier: -one night stand fuck every guy talks about that.  
Brendon: It's not really relationship its more like- [Xavier: How far you got, who did it whatever.] sexcapades.  
Zak: Yeah just getting laid.  
Brendon: Like 'last night I had sex with three chicks.' And then [Victor: 'And eight guys!' [laughs]] someone else says 'Oh I had five!' [laughter]  
Dave: Right. And that's the sort of one-up-manship you're talking about eh? [laughter]  
Tom: Yeah.  
Zak: Yeah.  
Dave: Yeah. And what is that- um- what is that- like- I always think in- I often think in terms of pay-offs, where's the pay-off with that amongst your mates?  
Brendon: It's going to make YOU look more awesome than they are.  
Victor: Shit yeah. [laughter]  
Tom: Pretty much.  
Warren: If they believe you.  
Victor: But you think it's going to make you more awesome- [Dave: You think it's going to make you more awesome] and if they go along [Anton: You feel good in saying it.] nodding with it that's good enough.  
Brendon: Raising your own self-esteem.  
Victor: [laughs] Exactly.  
Anton: You feel cool even if it's obvious that no-one believes you. [laughter] It's like 'Yeah, yeah, yeah!'

In this account gaining status through better stories, believable or not, was one way the young men were able to “feel cool”. These stories were portrayed as part of the process of “one-up-manship”: one of the ways to gain status and “make you look more awesome than they are”. In this account young men work at providing better stories than their mates that allow them to be positioned as superior. Warren’s statement “if they believe you” portrays the making of The Man as dependent on credibility. Anton’s comment “You feel cool even if it’s obvious that no-one believes you.” situates young men’s reactions within the realm of the culture of cool.

In this construction girlfriends do not provide the fodder for better stories, whereas “sexcapades” with “chicks” did. Brendon constructs a new word to capture the sort of story that provides status: “Sexcapades”. The young men then work up some

examples of the sort of stories that might be examples of sexcapades. The reference to “chicks” appears to draw on the construction of hos described above. These are not girlfriends but rather girls used for sex or to provide better stories to their mates concerning their sexual prowess. In the following the young men work up the gender differences associated with sexual promiscuity between young women and young men and the status gained by such activities for young men:

- Dave: Is that- like- you know- In my generation when you say a slut you know those girls they were kinda looked down upon. Is it the same with the guys.
- Dante: Not really.
- Lelei: Not really for guys it's like- 'Yeah you're The Man!'
- Dante: Yeah- like if a girl hears her girl mate saying something like they cheat the girl would probably be like 'Oh my gosh!' eh just [laughs] like that. But it could be different. Sometimes the guy- he'll probably think that's dumb but he'll never say it. Because they're a guy. That's like- how they are.
- Dave: Yeah like I'm wondering if you guys are thinking the same- when you say that's a guy that's how they are- what do you mean- what do you mean by that.
- Clint: That's part of being a man.
- Dante: Yeah their genes that's just- once you're a guy- I guess like-
- Clint: It's pride. It's your pride.

In the account given by this group sexual promiscuity gives the status of The Man to young men in this group although Dante is able to support this construction while also portraying some young men as not accepting such behaviour “he'll probably think that's dumb”. Other groups stated that whether a man was given status by such activities depended on the group. In the above account young women's sexual promiscuity remained problematic. This problematic construction was portrayed by the comments a girl might make if she had heard her girlfriend had cheated “Oh my gosh” whereas young men's reactions were portrayed as approval or silent disapproval. Dante explanation for men's positive reaction to cheating was “Because they're a guy. That's like- how they are.” And Clint's statement “That's part of being a man” positions such activities as just naturally male. In this portrayal, men are sexually promiscuous because they are made this way. Dante's on-going statement “their genes” draws on the idea that men cheat way because they are genetically predisposed to be promiscuous. Clint's final statement appears to contest this construction “It's pride. It's your pride.” suggests that men's sexual promiscuity is encouraged by the status that it is given amongst other men. By

using the phrases “It’s pride. It’s your prides.” Clint conveys the standing that such men gain by behaving in sexually promiscuous ways.

### *Contesting better stories makes The Man*

In the following the participants contest the idea that better stories makes a man:

- Dave: All of the groups I’ve talked to have talked about being The Man. And I kind of want to know what that means to you guys.
- Warren: Having one-up on others.
- Dave: Having one-up on others.
- Zak: Yeah very much one-up manship game. [Unidentified Participant: Yeah.] Being The Man is.
- Dave: So is it a- is it a changing- you know can y- once you’re The Man do you stay the man [Unidentified Participant: No.] or is it a changing idea [Unidentified participant: Yeah] ....
- Zak: I know a guy who talks himself up quite a bit and sort of lots of stuff that he knows is that we don’t quite know about? [Unidentified Participant: Mm.] And so you think he’s awesome and stuff and then you actually get to see him try and do stuff and he always fails.
- Dave: Right.
- Zak: Time after time after time.

In this account Zak contests the idea that a man is someone who simply “talks himself up quite a bit”. His portrayal of this man as doing “stuff and he always fails” implies that talking oneself up without real evidence of being awesome does not make The Man. In his account there has to be evidence of genuine ability or achievement.

In the following excerpt the use of better stories to promote one’s status as The Man is also contested:

- Kyle: Or the ones who- oh those are like those people who tell stories, [Mike: Mm.] [Luke: Just pretenders.] and they just tell you like useless stuff but it’s all rubbish.
- Luke: Mm.
- Mike: Oh unless they don’t trust their mates [Kyle: Yeah.] and they don’t tell them everything.
- Luke: Yeah.
- Kyle: Tell you like some other stuff. Going on about some stories about all these things and you know- [Luke: It’s bull.] But you just go along with ‘Oh yeah, yeah true true, whatever man’.
- Luke: Shut up.
- Kyle: Mm.
- Dave: And what is it that gets you to go along with it?
- Luke: Oh just like- for a laugh.
- Mike: Cos everyone else is [Luke: Yeah. [laughter]]

Kyle: Just to amuse them.  
 Mike: So you just kind of join in. [*Overlapping talk*] See where we're going. [Dave: Right, right, right, right.]  
 Jeff: And we just all look at each other 'He's top man!' [laughter] 'He's The Man!' [laughter]  
 Luke: He's The Man!  
 Dave: When you said that I thought when- and it's a little bit kind of like he's the man but really he's not?  
 Jeff: Yeah like-  
 Mike: Yeah. Like sarcasms.

In this account the group constructs those who tell stories to promote their status as “Just pretenders”. The use of the word pretenders to denote such men is employed to depict the idea that there is no legitimacy to their claim to the status of The Man. In this excerpt their stories are constructed as “useless stuff” that’s “all rubbish” and “bull”. Through the use of these words the young men convey the impression that the stories have no reality or legitimacy and therefore do not give legitimate status to the man telling them. While this group portrays themselves as well able to identify the “pretenders” to the status of The Man and the lack of authenticity of their stories they portray their response to the stories as “going along with it”.

Not challenging other men was portrayed as a common practice among mates. The phrase “going along with it” captures the lack of challenge that these young men gave to others who worked to improve their status by telling “bull” stories. The use of the words “true, true” suggests that, in this group, these young men convey to the other that they believe the story when they do not. By using the word “whatever” Kyle portrays their indifference to the man’s stories while Luke’s use of the phrase “shut up” suggests that they would rather that he stop going on. In this account the young men portray “Going along with it” as a kind of herd response by young men “Cos everyone else is” to “see where we are going”. There is in the latter statement the suggestion that there may be benefits to the group in a story that takes them along with it. The young men then go on to portray their mocking response to such a man: - “He’s Top Man”, “He’s The Man”. In this group there is a knowing recognition of such “pretenders”, which elicits a response that promotes such a man as “The Man” when the group thinks otherwise.

## Challenging the man

Young women who had been in a relationship with a controlling boyfriend had said that they were concerned that other young men did not challenge the bad behaviour of other men (Towns & Scott, 2008). One implication of the telling of better stories being part of some men's culture is that telling the difference between a story and what is real can become problematic. Challenging a man about his story or his recounted actions becomes difficult when telling tall stories is valued. In the following the young men described their reasons for failing to challenge the man's stories.

### *You don't want to make them feel stink*

For young men criticising other men has consequences:

Kyle: Yeah they- they go 'Oh they think I'm The Man' but really-  
Mike: Yeah there is a lot of guys where we just act on and go 'Oh yeah you're The Man' you know but [Luke: Yeah and they're like-] but - but not you know we just go 'Oh yeah, yeah' you know but just didn't want them to feel stink.  
Dave: Right, right.  
Jeff: It's a bit sad in a way but [Luke: We wouldn't want to-] it's better for us to tell them that then tell them he sucks.  
Luke: He's stink.  
Dave: In what way is it sad?  
Luke: You're just hurting them.  
Mike: Yeah, yeah.  
Luke: Putting them down eh.  
Mike: Yeah putting them down and stuff.  
Jeff: Could terrorise his next few years. [Laughter]

In the first of these accounts, criticisms of a man are portrayed as telling him "he sucks", putting him down, "hurting" him and making him "feel stink". In this and other accounts a general unspoken rule appears in these young men's groups: that criticism of another man is unnecessary and painful and should not be done. Jeff's last statement "could terrorise his next few years" is a light-hearted reference to the harm that could be done by such criticism, portrayed in this excerpt as a consequence that young men do not want to cause. In this rendition, young men's self-esteem is fragile and other men need to be careful of it for fear of doing unrepairable damage.

*Something might go down like trouble*

The consequences for those who challenge were also of concern to some young men:

- Dave: So there's a um- I'm wondering in those- in those kind of conversations is there some pressure just to kind of nod and-
- Jeff: Mm.
- Mike: Yeah.
- Kyle: Yeah.
- Jeff: Cos if you tell them they're not The Man you know something might go down like trouble or-
- Mike: Or like [Jeff: Something (?)] if he starts drinking and that and then he remembers it 'Oh you know how you said' pretty much you know start a fight or something and-

In this account young men who challenge another man are constructed as vulnerable to attack from him. In a vague reference to the possibilities that might occur following a challenge Jeff stated "something might go down like trouble or-". His use of the word "trouble" suggests that possibility that the challenge is not the end of the matter and that "trouble" may develop as a consequence of the challenge. In this construction young men's failure to act is constructed as one involving fear of such consequences. Mike constructs this possibility of "trouble" as one that might occur when alcohol is involved: "Or like if he starts drinking and that and then remembers..". In this rendition, the threat to the challenger may not be immediate and might occur sometime after the challenge. The use of the word "drinking" constructs this problem as associated with the disinhibition that alcohol brings and the potential for remembering that someone had challenged him earlier. In the context of a construction of masculinity involving status and competition for who will be the top dog such a challenge has the potential to diminish another man and might not go unanswered.

*Can lead to awkward situations.*

Not all young men said that they would not challenge others. In the following the young men talked about the implications of a friend challenging another friend.

Dave: Right. So why don't- why don't um- why don't guys kinda front them and say that is just bullshit you're talking about.

Zak: Lack of alcohol. [laughter]. I always tell people off when I'm tanked [laughter] (?).

Brendon: If they want to talk themselves up then go for it.

Xavier: Unless they're like straight up which is pretty much the same as me it's like 'Shut the fuck up.' and they sort of look at you and 'Wow, okay. Never realised that but.'

Brendon: That can lead to pretty- some pretty awkward situations though [Xavier: Yes it can.] especially if they're your friend.

Dave: Right.

Anton: Pretty well if they are talking crap at least you get a decent yarn out of it. [laughter]

Zak: Yeah. [laughter]

Victor: I mean it's just a story is it going to effect you if it is any different? No. What's the point of confronting them about if it's not going to make that much of a difference.

Zak portrays alcohol as the necessary lubricant to allow him to challenge a friend whereas Xavier portrays men who are "straight up" as the ones who challenge others. He provides an example of how he might challenge: "Shut the fuck up", which draws on a certain forthright approach devoid of tact. Others in the group work to counter the idea that a challenge of a friend in this form is constructive. Brendon's statement that such comments can "lead to some pretty awkward situations" and Xavier's uncompromising agreement - "Yes it can." - continue to portray the difficulties young men have with such challenges. In this portrayal such challenges are constructed as problematic for groups of friends.

In light of the constructed difficulties that such challenges produce, Anton and Victor work to minimise any harm associated with not challenging: "at least you get a decent yarn out of it." "I mean it's just a story is it going to effect you if it is any different? No." The construction of the men's stories as "just a story" portrays the accounts as largely fictional as unlikely to be based on reality. If a story is "just a story", or fictional, there is no point to challenging the story-teller. Challenges of other young men are portrayed as unlikely to change him whereas confrontations were portrayed as creating some "awkward situations". In this group there was no contesting the assumption that challenging a young man by a group of other young men was unlikely to change him. This construction was a taken for granted assumption and this construction allowed Victor to conclude: "What's the point of confronting them about if it's not going to make that



much of a difference.” In this account, challenging another young man, especially a friend, is portrayed as not the way to bring about change.

*We like it*

Getting a “decent yarn” out of a story was promoted in the above excerpt as a reason to avoid a challenge, whereas in the following the young men provided other reasons for avoiding a challenge:

Dante: Mm. There’s sometimes, there’s a point where they can take it a bit overboard?  
Dave: Oh yeah.  
Dante: And yeah- us being guys we don’t really like- try to stop them from doing it.  
Dave: Oh.  
Dante: Cos. I dunno.  
Sefa: Just wait for the “Jake the Muss” moment. [laughter]  
Dave: When- when you say take it overboard do you mean sometimes you can see a guy whose- whose taken it a bit too far?  
Dante: Yeah.  
Clint: Mm.  
Dave: So you sit back and you wait for the “Jake the Muss” moment?  
Dante: Mm.  
Lelei: Its- its- most- yeah- most relationships are like that. I reckon here yeah. [Dave: Yeah?] Big time.  
Dave: When um- when you’re talking you said that ah- you said that because we’re guys ah- we can’t- we don’t- I can’t remember did you say that we can’t or we don’t do anything.  
Dante: No yeah we don’t.  
Dave: We don’t?  
Dante: We tend not to eh.  
Dave: What do you reckon stops us from doing-  
Dante: I guess- I dunno.  
Sefa: Probably just cos we like it.  
Dante: No. It’s more like um- too shy.

In this construction the young men work up the idea that allowing a man to go on rather than challenging him provides entertainment value. The use of the phrase “Jake the Muss” employs a famous New Zealand movie “Once were warriors” and the main character Jake, who was violent to his wife, to portray the entertainment value associated with watching a man and his wife in a fight rather than intervening. The statement “cos we like it” also draws on the idea of watching the unfolding drama as providing entertainment value. Dante’s statement “us being guys we don’t really like- try to stop them from doing it.” portrays the lack of action of the young men to such events as part

of being a man - "us being guys". The lack of challenge to a man is portrayed as a part of the man's natural makeup. Dante offers a different rationale for men's failure to challenge: "No. It's more like um- too shy." This construction opens up the possibility that it is how to intervene that is difficult: the problem becomes what should be said.

In an apparent contradiction these young men later revealed that they had intervened with a man who was beating up his wife in a main street. Of note here was that the man involved in the violence was not part of the group:

Dave: Bit of a- bit of an odd question- why did you pull over. Cos [Lelei: Not good to see eh?] there were lots of people driving by eh, so why did you pull over.  
Lelei: Not good to see. Not good seeing a guy smash up a lady on a main road. Not like do it somewhere else and least not in front of a whole- yeah everybody man. You know. Don't show the whole world mate.  
Dante: That's Just dumb.

In this account the intervention was portrayed as a reaction to the public action of the man towards the woman "on a main road" "in front of a whole- yeah everybody". The impression given by this account is that beating up "a lady" should be done behind closed doors - "do it somewhere else" - and not shown to "the whole world". This construction draws on notions of the privacy of a man's relationship with a woman. Public displays of violence promote bystander involvement in a climate that says "It's not okay" to beat up your intimate partner. Conducting such violence in private allows others to portray such violence as nobody's business: intervention would not have been necessary.

### *Man this is wrong*

In the following Keoni constructs the quality of the male friendship as integral to the ability to challenge another.

Keoni: .. there is going to be times when we clash, like I won't agree like I'll be like 'Man, you know, this is wrong' and he'll be like 'No this is wrong' but at the end of the day its [Afi: The friendship.] still strong and that's what I've noticed with males our age is yeah we've got friends but we don't really have brotherhood or trust [Dave: Right.] in the friends to sharp each other up. Like um when you see a group of guys and, and one won't agree with the other but he still won't bring it up.  
Dave: Got you.  
Keoni: He still won't be like 'Man what you are doing is wrong to whoever or whatever' or 'I don't agree with this'. Where as we need more people- like we just need that- that way of like just being real with each other and being open and

transparent where they can really talk. Yeah. And I keep- that's why um, that's why we have rising crime in terms of abusive um relationships and domestic violence is because the males these days they don't know what they are doing you know.

Keoni begins by describing the ability he and his friend have to challenge each other while maintaining their friendship. Keoni portrays friendships between young men as requiring "brotherhood or trust" if young men are to be able to challenge each other. In his account "being real", being open", and "transparent" allows young men to talk and to challenge each other. The use of these phrases opens up the interpretation that young men struggle with trusting other young men. When one-up man-ship is part of being The Man, disclosing private concerns makes the young man vulnerable to being put down or being made the focus of jokes or teasing by those whose motives are to be the top dog.

### Loyalty

In the following the young men disclosed a number of forms of language employed by young men to pressure others to remain loyal to the young man's group.

### *Bros before hos*

The term bro before hos was a phrase well known to the young men in this study. In the following we asked the young men to clarify what was meant by this phrase.

- Harry: Pussy whipped, bro before hos.  
Alison: So tell me about what bro before hos means.  
Harry: Oh you know your brothers, your mates should come before um girls. [Gary: Yeah.] But then it's just a thing people have picked up from American movies and it doesn't necessarily apply but people throw it about. Whether it's for a laugh or whether they mean it we're not always sure.  
Alison: Does that- how much is that sort of- how much does that happen? Is it kind of done is a light-hearted way or does it have a genuine sort of edge to it do you think?  
Harry: I think the people that I know it's a- it's a light hearted way.  
Gary: Yeah it's light hearted in my social groups. But then when- you know it's- it depends how much pressure was put on one person as well. That you know if there was a massive- well if there was a group and there was a lot of pressure put on one person continuously then I'm sure that they would feel the pressure and you know act differently towards the girl that they were in a relationship with [Alison: Yeah.] because of it.

The phrase bros before hos was well known amongst the young men's group and here it was portrayed as "your brothers, your mates should come before um girls". In this portrayal the association between brother and mates indicates the close relationship expected of a man with his mates. Harry portrays the phrase as emerging from American culture and employed either in a light hearted or serious way. His construction of the use of the phrase as ambiguously serious or not depicts young men as not always certain about the inference given to the phrase. In Gary's construction the phrase can be used to bring pressure on a man if used continuously and can impact on a man's relationship with a girlfriend.

Harry described the ways in which loyalty to the mates might work in relations to hos and to girlfriends:

Harry: So of course I mean there should be a bro before a ho if this girl, the ho, is a one night stand thing then yeah you should- you know you have - your mates are more important but if ah the ho happens to be you know a girlfriend you've been with for a year or something then you have some kind of commitment with her and its not necessarily the bros will become- [Alison: Mm.] will come before the ho. But people chuck it about and use it in silly situations.

The distinction between a girlfriend and a ho was not uncommon in the participants in this study and we were interested in how the young men constructed a ho. One young man used the phrase "Hugh Heifner girls" to evoke the idea of a ho. In the following Gary and Harry work up their construction of a ho:

Alison: Do you know ho is an interesting one isn't it?  
Gary: Yeah I was just thinking about that yeah yeah.  
Alison: So what does that mean for you.  
Gary: Well I guess it really kind of implies that the girl is lesser so you know it really implies a sort of a element in that.  
Alison: Because it is sort of a derogatory term would you see it as being a bit of?  
Gary: Yeah, well you wouldn't say it in front of the girls [laughs]. Na you wouldn't eh.  
Harry: Yeah I know I wouldn't say it in front of a girl.  
Gary: [laughs] Yeah, yeah.  
Harry: But at the same time its one of those things you think yeah it's not necessarily derogatory. I mean to me it just means a girl who likes to sleep [Gary: Mm.] around and that's not necessarily a bad thing that's- some people decided that's what they want to do.

In this interesting account hos are portrayed as “lesser. A ho is described as “a girl who likes to sleep around”. While there is an acknowledgement in this account that there might be a certain male construction of such women by the use of “ho” these young men are able to hold the potentially derogatory nature of this term – “you wouldn’t say it in front of the girls” while also contesting that it is derogatory - “it’s not necessarily derogatory.” In this portrayal Harry removes any moral judgement about such women’s sleeping around “that’s not necessarily a bad thing” thereby countering what has been a long history of denouncing and punishing the sexual promiscuity of women. His final statement de-genders this construction by referring to people rather than women: “some people decided that’s what they want to do.” In his use of the word “people” he takes the problem away from the construction of women that goes along with the term ho – their sexual availability – by associating such activities of women with those of men for whom the sexual promiscuity has no such historical or judgemental ramifications. Once again, in this account, there is a presentation of a language about young women that is solely for men and an implication that to use such language in front of girls is not considered wise.

This construction of a man’s language that is not allowed into the realm of young women’s worlds evokes a kind of brotherhood of men that retains a patriarchal knowledge that diminishes women while holding a construction that it does not. There are ramifications for young women in this kind of depiction: would young women dress and take on the bodily image of a young woman that young men construct as a ho if they were aware that young men consider that such a body formation represents only sexual availability? The separate male knowledge of this construction, unavailable to women, does not allow young women a choice about the way they might want to represent themselves to the male world. I was interested in other ways young men distinguished between relationships with hos and girlfriends as this distinction has been noted by others (Carmody, 2009; Senn, 2009). Some of these distinctions emerged within discussions about the ways pornography representations influenced young men’s relationships with young women. The construction of women in these pornography sites produces an image of women that values only their sexuality.

- *Hos as uncomplicated relationship*

The construction of ho as a woman who is there simply for her sex is most obviously represented in pornographic magazines, pornographic internet sites and pornographic movies, which were described by some young men as being used to educate themselves about how to engage in sexual activities. In the following Frank described the distinction between the attraction to a ho through pornography compared to a relationship with a girlfriend:

- Frank: Yeah I reckon the girls are after actual intimacy and ah that's why they are willing to read long stories about you know, I don't know, you know, it sort of gives you a whole background but I think a lot of the guys are just like just give me what I want and give me it now you know like its 'I don't need no background story I just need some sex' you know.
- Dave: Right.
- Euan: And ah, yeah and it means that you don't have to sort of like fight for what you want as well so like um a relationship requires a lot of effort and a lot of time and so but this means you skip all of that.

In this account Frank draws on certain representations of male sex drive to make a distinction between what girls want and what guys want: "girls are after actual intimacy" whereas some guys "just need some sex." His use of the word "need" portrays young men's desire for sex as different from girls' requirements – the phrase girls are "after intimacy" suggests that girls want a close relationship whereas young men have a "need" that must be met. His use of the phrase allows him to suggest "a lot of guys" that this construction does not apply to all guys. Others in this group described pornographic depictions of ho as providing sex "when you want it" and "how you want it", as having the benefits for young men of being able to dominate and control the relationship and as making young men "feel ah powerful as in you know it's all in their control". One young man gave an example to illustrate the control: "maybe a guy is attracted to busty blonds so he searched up busty blonds. So it's what he wants on demand."

Further distinctions about the level of intimacy required of a girlfriend compared to a ho relationships emerged from the above excerpt. For example, Frank represented the guys who don't want intimacy, which would be part of relationship with a girlfriend, as wanting instant gratification: "just give me what I want and give me it now". He indicates

the lack of intimacy required by such men in his comment “I don’t need no background story”. Euan elaborated on the difficulties for young men with boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, which are not present with a relationship with a ho, especially one available through pornography: “you don’t have to sort of fight for what you want”. In this statement he evokes the difficulties in having to reach compromises or in having to negotiate in a relationship with a girlfriend as an unwanted battle, with the use of “fight”, that is not part of a relationship with a ho. In the following he portrays the idea that relationships with girlfriends are hard work whereas relationships with hos through pornography are easy: “a relationship requires a lot of effort and a lot of time and so but this means you skip all of that.” Dylan described a relationship with the women depicted in pornography sites as “intimacy without attachment”.

- *Hos as commodity*

In the following account Ben situates young men’s relationship with hos in pornography within a particular contemporary socio-cultural context:

Ben: I think again hugely our culture um really feeds the you can have what you want um right now you know it’s very much a self centred, self focused or self gratifying um age that we live in and you know you look at um- you can buy things you can get almost anything you want um for paying almost nothing and you know get it at 12 months interest free and no deposit, this sort of thing and so it’s so available to you and its encouraged, it’s really encouraged and plus its um- I think our culture very much feeds a um- an attitude that it’s about you, everything is about you, you know and um and so if you are in a relationship where things are hard or not enjoying it you’re not happy hey get out do what makes you happy you know please yourself. Um and so I think all of that largely feeds you know a pornography addiction because it’s like well you know if it makes you feel good and you see nothing wrong with it then you go for it you know.

Dave: Yep.

Euan: Same as the fast food as well [Unidentified Participant: Mm.] you can have fast food now you can have sex now, you can um- you know and the here I am entertain me type mentality as well, you know I’m just I’m here to be entertained.

Ben begins by introducing the idea of culture as the driver for the production of young men’s relationships with hos through pornography. He then begins to position this culture as driven by a marketing consumer focus with his statement “you can have what you want” and elaborates on this construction later with other such statements “you can buy things you can get almost anything you want”, “paying almost nothing”, “get it at 12

months interest free and no deposit". With these statements he portrays the marketing strategies that are directed at young men and constructs these targeted strategies as influential in suggesting that young men can get what they want largely free of any immediate cost. His use of the terms "self centred", "self focused" self gratifying" and the later phrases "it's about you, everything is about you" portrays this marketing strategy as setting up an ideal for young men that they do not have to consider others when making any decisions about what they want. His account evokes the idea that this marketing strategy focussed on the "self" works to negate the influence of others on the person's life. With this construction he evokes the idea that by isolating out the influence of others the marketers are more likely to successfully promote their consumer item.

Having described the cultural influences for young men he portrays the impact of these influences when a young man's relationship becomes difficult. In his account the message from these influences becomes "hey get out do what makes you happy you know please yourself". In this representation he portrays media influences as working to negate solving difficult relationship problems by encouraging young men to "get out" and "please yourself". He portrays these media constructions as promoting "a pornography addiction". Ben lays out the marketing influence as part of the social fabric that promotes pornography: its depiction of women, its lack of intimacy and its immediate gratification becomes a legitimate consumable because "it makes you feel good" and "you see nothing wrong with it." The consumer imperative provides a license to "go for it". Euan's employs a simple comparison with fast food "you can have fast food now you can have sex now" to reinforce the immediate gratification that a relationship with a ho through pornography promotes. Relationships with girls do not need to be restaurant meals that require work.

Of interest in this account is the lack of any reference to the women portrayed in pornography. Pornography itself becomes the item of interest to young men rather than the women represented in the pornography. The women themselves are made invisible: they are simply an item for immediate gratification to be consumed like fast food. In this unstated construction the representation of a ho is complete. This sort of diminishing of women into sexual objects allows the other important intimacy aspects of relationships to remain with the mates thereby preserving loyalty.



Another group of young men problematised the use of pornography for young men:

- Dave: I-it's funny cos um- in these groups porn always comes up at some stage. And um- I always ask- there's ah- um- how much influence does pornography have on guys your age.
- Sefa: Er nothing. Just being reckless. [laughter] It's like- the more porn you watch I reckon the influence [prolonged laughter] (?) guys. Like I reckon the more porn you watch like- [laughter] as you grow up you see like little girls you wanna get stuck in there- like being rapists and stuff. [laughter]
- Dave: So what's the mess- message in pornography for guys your age.
- Sefa: Make sure you don't watch it. [prolonged laughter]

Sefa constructs the influence that pornography might have on young men as potentially promoting rape of children. His representation of seeing "little girls" and the potential to "get stuck in there- like rapists and stuff" portrays a merging of adult pornography with child pornography and the influence on young men that such material can have.

#### *Policing other men's loyalty*

The young men were able to access a number of phrases that were employed to imply to men that the young woman was the dominant one in the relationship and to question his loyalty to his mates.

- *HBB*

- Clint: Sometimes missus telling you opinions pretty much mean heaps.  
Two participants: Yeah.
- Clint: More than like most people's opinion.
- Sefa: Spending your whole life with the boys you know then some girl just comes and takes you away.
- Ioane: And like start calling you-  
Clint: HB.  
Ioane: HBB.  
Dave: HBB?  
Maru: Yeah.  
Dante: Hos before Bros.  
Clint: Hos before Bros.  
Dave: Hos before Bros.  
Ioane: Yeah.

HBB or hos before bros, as the antithesis of bros before hos, captured the image of the woman being in charge in the relationship and was employed by young men to denigrate the men who spent time with their girlfriends. The phrase suggests that the young man is being disloyal to his mates by associating more with girls or his girlfriend than with his mates.

- *Locked down*

The phrase “locked down” was employed to represent those men who were unable to get out of the house and out with their mates. This restriction was constructed as either due to the man’s girlfriend, her dominance over him, or due to family commitments.

- *Whipped*

“Whipped” or “pussy whipped” was used by men to represent the man as under the control of his girlfriend rather than dominant.

- *On the Chain*

This phrase was employed to suggest that young men were shackled by their girlfriends - not free to do as they wanted.

- *Wife wears the Pants*

Men’s dominance of their partners was challenged by this phrase, which was employed to construct the woman as the dominant one in the relationship. The statement “wears the pants” suggests that the legitimate authority was the one who normally wears the pants – the man.

- *Under the thumb*

This phrase was employed to imply that the man was under the control of his girlfriend.

Victor: Yeah relationships are pretty- I dunno, guys don’t talk about them.  
Tom: No- No not really relationships are more like-  
Brendon: Unless [Tom: -relationships- ] you’re all like ganging up on one person like laughing at how- like- under the thumb they are.

Dave: Right.  
 Anton: Yeah.  
 UP: Yeah.  
 Zak: I suppose that's the extent the relationship talk [Tom: Yeah.] goes, how under the thumb you are.  
 Tom: So you're not coming out getting on the piss.  
 Victor: Yeah. We all have a bit of a [Anton: Why aren't you out with the boys?] laugh about it.  
 Anton: Oh you're under the thumb you are. [laughter]  
 Tom: Yeah. See the red print on your head.

These phrases suggests that there is a plethora of available rhetoric for young men to use to challenge a man who is not considered to be dominant enough or who is not placing his allegiance with his mates. The extent of the rhetoric, and young men's ready access to it, suggests that the use of this rhetoric to criticise young men in New Zealand youth culture is not exceptional.

The language listed here suggests that young men are policed by other young men about their allegiance to their mates and their dominance in the relationship. The language listed above was portrayed by many of the young men in the groups as a means of bringing young men back into their mates' group. Young men must work to resist this policing and the constructions of them as disloyal if they want to spend time with their girlfriends or to move away from their mates and their activities.

### *Impact – self-scrutiny*

In the following Dante described the impact of these criticisms on young men:

Dante: Once your boys say "Man you've been whipped!" You know your pride takes over then man. Oh no that's the one that kills the equal relationship thing- it's mostly your boys eh. [Dave: Yep.] Farr! Once your boys say something like "You- you being whipped." Or my gosh- that kind of kills it for you.

Dante employs the use of the phrase "Man you've been whipped!" to describe the impact on a young man. In his account the young man's "pride takes over". His use of this phrase evokes the idea that when a young man receives such criticism his status as a man is questioned. In his account "that kills the equal relationship thing". By using this phrase Dante opens up the possibility that questioning the young man's dominance in the relationship moves a young man away from an equal relationship and into critical scrutiny of his authority in the relationship. His construction of this criticism as killing the "equal

relationship thing” suggests that the impact on young men is to destroy any equal negotiation. His final statement “that kind of kills it for you” implies that as a result the relationship itself may be ended.

- *Loss of a mate*

In the following the young men suggest that the death of an equal relationship is not the intention of the use of such language:

Dave: And is that cos they’re trying to um- is that cos they’re trying to stop you from having an equal relationship or-  
Dante: No they just want you to check in with the boys.  
Clint So you stay with the boys.  
Lelei: Yeah.  
Dave: Right.

In this account the young men construct the use of terms such as “whipped” as being employed to maintain young men’s loyalty to the group rather than being employed to avoid equal relationships. In the following Zak portrays the irritation young men feel about the intrusion of a girlfriend into the mates’ world:

Zak: Although a couple of my mates [Tom: It’s not even drinking-] they put themselves under the thumb. Like they’d rather go to bloody [shopping mall] sl- their girlfriends. [*laughter*] Even if they’ve been going out with them for a week and just lived there, [*laughter*] and not seen any of his mates for a couple of months and complained that we never text him [*laughter*].

In his statement “they put themselves under the thumb” Zak constructs “a couple of my mates” actions as voluntarily “under the thumb”. In this account being dominated by the girlfriend becomes the young man’s choice and this choice is denigrated by the comparison between going to a shopping mall and seeing his mates.

In the following account Jeff described how he got around the pressure placed on him to be loyal to his mates:

Jeff: But they didn’t know it was me you know I wanted to spend time with her not [Dave: Right] not them, they just thought it was her.  
Dave: How come they didn’t know it was you?  
Jeff: Oh I wouldn’t tell them.  
(*Laughter*)

Kyle: Na, na it's all her.  
Mike: Got a soft spot eh!  
Jeff: She wants me to meet her for lunch and um.  
Mike: There is no soft spot at school eh.

Jeff employed deception to account for the way in which he organised time away from his school mates and with his girlfriend. Rather than tell his mates that he wanted to be with his girlfriend he allowed them to believe that "it was her". Mike portrays the vulnerability that Jeff would have created for himself if he had let his mates know that he wanted to be with his girlfriend "Got a soft spot eh!" He then portrays the difficulty young men have with having a "soft spot" at school: "There is no soft spot at school eh."

- *Hiding vulnerabilities*

Having a soft spot was portrayed as making young men vulnerable to others. Many of the young men said that they did not talk about relationships with other young men. In the following the young men describe how they have to hide who they are from other men:

Dante: .. like if you show your true self eh-  
Dave: Yeah.  
Dante: -then some people like that don't really know you [Dave: Yeah] like- if they say something bad about your true self, that will hurt you-  
Dave: Right  
Dante: -it's like that's you. And like- that's probably why you don't really want to let them know it til you really trust them.  
Dave: Yeah.  
Dante: Yeah actually brother trust.  
Dave: Yeah.  
Clint: Some people actually use you  
Dante: Yeah. That what-  
Clint: That's when you make yourself be more (?) by yourself.  
Dave: Yeah.  
Clint: Cos you know you got something how you like- they like it, they will keep on coming up and mostly use you.  
Dave: So- you gotta keep that mask on.  
Clint: Mm.  
Dave: Yeah?  
Dante: You don't got to.  
Dave: You don't got to.  
Dante: But you just choose to.  
Dave: You choose to.  
Dante: Mm.

In this account portraying “your true self” is constructed as making a young man vulnerable to being hurt by others. In this account a distinction is made between the friendships that provide a place for disclosure “brother trust” and those that do not. In the emphasis on “brother” Dante portrays the extent of trust that must occur prior to disclosure about personal relationships. The term brother portrays the notion that the relationship must be as strong as a relationship with a blood family member. Keeping a mask on is portrayed as something that these young men “choose to do” to avoid being hurt by others. In this culture of The Man loyalty to one’s mates does not necessarily mean that a man can trust his mate to be sensitive to his vulnerabilities should he raise his concerns. For trust to be present a man must have an even deeper relationship one that is represented as “brother trust”.

### C. The Binge Drinking Culture

In the following the young men were pressed to identify the culture that they considered they belonged to:

Brendon: We don’t have much of a culture. [Dave: Yeah.]  
Xavier: We do have a culture at some point [Zak: The New Zealand binge-drinking culture.] [Unidentified Participant: Mm.] though.  
Victor: Pretty much.  
Dave: The binge-drinking culture?  
Anton: For our group of mates like [Xavier: Binge-drinking is huge-] pretty much- [Xavier: Yeah it’s definitely part of our culture.] A lot of our mates and people we hang out with and see on weekends and stuff is just really cruisy with their relationships seem ta- You say to their missus “Oh what are you up to tonight oh coming with us sweet.” And um- if their missus comes to a party you kind of separate off and all the girls go and have a chat and all the guys [Victor: Yeah pretty much-] go and [Tom: Look at a car.] do skids. Funnels.

As a group of young men who identified themselves as of Pakeha or of NZ European background Brendon’s initial comment “we don’t have much of a culture” evokes the idea that these young men consider that they are the norm – that a culture is something that

others are part of but they are not. Brendon's emphasis on "don't have" is employed to strengthen his point given that the group had held to this position when previously asked.

Skids, funnels and girlfriends

Xavier, Zak and Victor work up an alternative construction: that the group belongs to the "New Zealand binge-drinking culture". Anton elaborates on this notion of the NZ binge drinking culture by bringing in how relationships are weaved into the activities of this group. In his construction the young men in this group are "really cruisy with their relationships". By using the word "cruisy" he constructs the idea that boyfriend/girlfriend relationships do not impact on the young men in this culture and that they group is fairly relaxed about their relationships. The group portrays the way young men in this culture maintain their male activities while including their girlfriends in their social events: "all the girls go and have a chat and all the guys go and do skids. Funnels." This construction portrays the women and the men in this group as having distinctly different interests that do not allow them to socialise in a way that does not bring about a division along gender lines. The use of the word "skids" evokes the boy racer culture, in which young men take their cars out and spin the car on oil on the road. The use of the word "funnels" is employed to evoke binge-drinking.

In the following the young men were asked to describe what was meant by "a funnel":

Anton: A funnel- [laughs] -is you get a funnel [Unidentified Participant: Yeah.] like just normal you pour paint or petrol through and you put a piece of hose on the bottom of it and hose clamp it on pour one or two or six beers in it-  
Dave: Yeah.  
Anton: And someone holds it up and you just yeah drink it as quick as you can. Drink [Brendon: There's so much- so much-] it down.  
Zak: As [Brendon: And as it goes-] the gravity forces it down.  
Dave: Gotcha.  
Anton: And then in his case spew.  
Dave: Right.  
Zak: I didn't spew last time.  
Unidentified Participant: Yeah.  
Zak: Or the time before.

In this construction of “a funnel” the young men capture the essence of this binge-drinking culture: alcohol is gorged. In this construction the word “funnel” is evocatively described as involving simply pouring alcohol, through a funnel, down the throat of a young man and the use of force generated by gravity is described as assisting in the binge. The activity is constructed as a group activity, one that involves others who do the pouring. Anton’s construction of Zak’s response “in his case spew” presents his response as ‘other’ than that of the rest of the group and implies a criticism. Zak’s responses “I didn’t spew last time” “Or the time before” evokes the notion that not spewing and holding the alcohol down after this forced consumption is privileged in this group. There are parallels here with the practices portrayed above as being cool within the armed forces.

In the following the interviewer continues to explore the part that alcohol plays in young men’s culture and the impact on young men’s relationships.

- Dave: So how much does alcohol play in um- that culture of [Unidentified Participant: It’s about-] guys your age.
- Tom: If we’re not drinking we go to bed. [laughter]
- Warren: If you can afford it you’ve got a box pretty much.
- Dave: If you can afford it you’ve got a box.
- Tom: Yeah.
- Zak: Mm.
- Dave: Yeah.
- Tom: Or a bottle.
- Warren: That’s the only time I don’t get one on the weekend.
- Dave: Right.
- Warren: Or during the week. When I don’t have any money.
- Dave: And ah- so how does that affect your relationships. What effect does it have on your relationships.
- Anton: Drinking’s a good way to cancel a relationship. [laughter]

These young men portray alcohol as a constant presence in their lives, so long as they are awake and can afford it.

In Anton’s final comment “drinking’s a good way to cancel a relationship” there is the construction that relationships with a girlfriend and alcohol are not compatible. In his book *Fragmented Intimacies* Adams (2007) described the harmful effects alcohol has on intimate relationship. There are indications that the alcohol industry is aware of the incompatibility between intimacy and heavy use of alcohol and works to diminish the influence of women’s relationship with men through advertising. For example, in a



recently viewed alcohol television advertisement a man put's his coat around the shoulders of his girlfriend in what appears to be a caring act. He then goes on to continue taking off his clothes and placing them over her until she is completely obscured by them and he is in his underwear. Finally he is pictured holding a bottle of the alcohol being advertised. The impression is that the woman is treated with disdain and her presence is diminished to the point of nothing, while the man is now freed from encumbrances, sexually available and able to enjoy a drink.

Some other aspects of this binge drinking culture were described by the young men in this group:

Status is through doing stupid things

The young men stated that "doing stupid things" was part of this binge drinking culture. In a recent well-publicised case three young men, NZ European from privileged parts of a city, were arrested after assaulting a Sikh taxi driver by knocking off his turban. They had been drinking and had tried to get the taxi driver to drive down a one-way street the wrong way. When he refused they knocked his turban off. These "stupid things" were constructed in this binge drinking culture feed into the culture of being The Man.

Competition is for better stories

The context for telling better stories in the binge drinking culture is sitting around with a group of mates and a few drinks. Part of the one-up-man-ship for these young men is about telling better stories and the various escapades that the young men engage in were portrayed as good fodder for these stories.

Zak: One-up-manship yeah.

Dave: Yeah. Yeah. Does that happen a lot with guys your age? I mean have you seen it or-

Zak: Yeah quite a bit I reckon.

Tom: Yeah.

Dave: Yeah. Can you give me some examples of how it could happen?

Anton: Like [Unidentified participant: Oh right.] he does a squid in the ute [Unidentified participant: Yeah.] and get's third gear on the spot and [laughter] [Dave: Right.] someone else is saying "Oh yeah I did a skid in care- in my car and got fourth!" and then I come along and I say "Well I got in my car and got sixth gear in a five speed car!" [laughter]

Dave: Right.

Zak: Better stories.

Anton: Exactly.

Telling stories would provide a point of conversation and a few laughs for this group while also allowing young men to build themselves up to being The Man. There was recognition amongst this group that in the telling of these stories sometimes they might be “jumping on the gullible train”.

Dave: -the gullible train. Tell me- tell me [Xavier: They're talking about shit.] about jumping on the gullible train.

Tom: It's like-

Anton: Oh no- Just getting sucked into it and listening to them talking all their tough stories and that.

Xavier: It's like Muslims-

Anton: Knowing it's all crap.

Having “tough stories” does not mean that they will be authentic.

Xavier's reference to Muslims is ambiguous but in the context of this account, in which the young men were criticising some men for “talking about shit” the reference to Muslims appears to be racist and opens up the association with racist values within this binge-drinking culture. In another account a man who made a reference to boyfriends rather than girlfriends was quickly challenged about whether he was gay.

### *Gaining status*

In this culture escapades with cars and with girls were portrayed as the fodder for telling stories that allowed a man to gain status. In the following the participants portray the exaggeration associated with better stories within this binge drinking culture:

Zak: That [Brendon: Each time the story changes though.] [Unidentified participant: it's more-] happens everywhere though. [Bendon: They're always- ] [Unidentified Participant: Yeah] [Brendon: They're always changing-exaggerating-] With every story.

Brendon: And trying to make themselves sound more tougher every time. [Warren: 'There was this babe.' No-] Whereas they might have done one thing that's happened to doing three things or something-

Dave: Right.

Zak: I think everyone likes to talk themselves up to some extent.

Victor: Yeah.

Anton: 'Oh yeah Jerry jumped off the back of the ute eh.' 'Oh yeah it's only 600ml high.' 'Na, na he jumped off (?) it's two metres high.' [laughter]. 'Na. He

- jumped his pushbike off the bloody roof [laughter] and landed in the rocks at the cliff below.' [laughter].
- Dave: Where's the pay off in that like when guys are doing it where's the pay off for them.
- Anton: Oh it's when everyone gets on their knees and goes 'You're so cool!' [laughter]
- Brendon: Pretty much. So people'll think they're big.

Once again the reference to sounding "more tougher every time" suggests that within this binge-drinking culture there are certain group members for whom being tough is valued. Warren's reference to a certain sort of story "There was this babe-" suggests that the stories described by this group above as "sexcapades", and the values associated with these sexual encounters, are also privileged within the binge drinking culture. One young man from this group described these sexual encounters as providing "another notch on the belt." The final reference to the status that these stories provide to such men draws on the language associated with the culture of cool "You're so cool" to capture the status that men gain from engaging in such stories: "So people'll think they're big." Of note is Zak's statement that "everyone likes to talk themselves up to some extent." In this statement he positions the young men in this group as not exceptional, as simply doing what others do. This statement suggests that the young men in this group draw on the one-up-man-ship that is part of young men's culture generally and use their stories to provide status.

#### Being The Man of the relationship

In the following the young men who identified with this binge drinking culture discuss the nature of being a man in their relationships and the place for dominance and control:

- Warren: That could also cause like [Xavier: Spark.] fric- friction in public. Like, you know, everyone- you've told all your mates that you're The Man but you're pretty whipped and then when it comes to a public situation and you're expected to exert some control-
- Zak: And then you don't dare! [laughter]
- Xavier: Both you and your partner who thinks they're The Man of the relationships it's like shit there's going to be a spark- an explosion sometime.
- Zak: You realise getting shit [Xavier: Just wait til it builds up.] from your mates is better than a beat down from the missus. [laughter]

In this contradictory account the young men work up the expectations for dominance within their boyfriend/girlfriend relationships in this culture. Warren portrays the contradiction between the stories that a man might have told his mates about his dominance and the public rendition of his dominance. He employs the phrase “The Man” to indicate dominance and control in contrast to the phrase “you’re pretty whipped”, which is employed to suggest that his girlfriend is dominating him. He lays out the difficulty for a man who has raised public expectations that he will “exert some control” when he doesn’t. His use of the phrase “you’re expected to exert some control” suggests that within this group, where being The Man is privileged and being “whipped” is not, there is an expectation that young men will be the dominant one in the relationship. Zak’s statement “And then you don’t dare!” runs counter to this depicted expectation and opens up the notion that there will be men who prefer not to be dominant. In this phrase he evokes the possibility of consequences for some young men if they assume dominance of their girlfriends in public.

Xavier’s use of the phrase “The Man of the relationship” suggests that the term The Man can be used interchangeably with being the dominant one for some men within this culture. Xavier constructs dominance as a potential point of conflict between a man and his partner and portrays the outcome of this conflict as “a spark- an explosion.” In this construction dominance is a taken for granted assumption in a relationship: an either/or for him/her. There is no construction here that a relationship can be democratic and without a partner having dominance. Zak’s final comment, once again, appears to run counter to the construction of male dominance as the expectation of the group.

In the following the young men were asked about the pressure by other men, within this culture, to have control of their girlfriends:

- Dave: So is there- like is there pressure- There’s pressure to show that you kind of have control in public [Xavier: There’s always going to be pressure-] in your relationship.
- Xavier: -when you’re round you’re mates when you’re with your missus cos you wanta prove to your mates yeah sure I’m The Man of the relationship, you can get her to do what you want her to do when you’re around your mates but then- I think that’s when it sort of fucks things up.
- Victor: I think that’s also why a lot of people don’t talk about it with the people they’re in the relationship with because they don’t want to talk about it too much just in case it all sort of- you know your mates see your missus need and-
- Dave: Right, right, right.

Unidentified  
Participant: Comes back to bite you.  
Victor: Exactly.  
Dave: Right.

In a group where drinking is part of the mates' culture having a girlfriend who is dominant will be a threat to the group as she can pull a man away from his drinking mates. Xavier's comment's portray the influence of the mates' group in this context: the man wants to "prove to your mates" that he is "The Man of the relationship". In the statement "prove to your mates" there is an implication that the men will be watching to see if the man is able to exert dominance. For such men the man needs to be able to demonstrate that he "can get her to do what you want her to do". Xavier explicates the difficulty with this objective: "that's when it sort of fucks things up." Victor articulates the difficulty for men in talking about their relationships: "your mates see your missus need" is somewhat ambiguous. One reading is that it suggests that there may be a problem if the vulnerabilities of a man's girlfriend are brought into the domain of his mates. Another participant's comment that it "comes back to bite you" portrays the possibility that disclosures to mates about intimate matters may result in repercussions from them. There is an implication in this statement that a man's mates are not to be trusted with matters that might reveal vulnerabilities.

### *Woman as Dog*

In a world where heavy alcohol consumption is privileged others who might stand in the way of alcohol consumption are not. The ways in which the young men who associated with this culture constructed the girlfriend were of interest. In the following another group of young men spoke of those men who were associated with parties they attended:

Mike: Yeah, I reckon some guys want um- just look like The Man you know in front of their mates.  
Dave: Yeah that's come up a lot actually in these groups that idea of The Man.  
Mike: Oh I was thinking you know you're shit hot and stuff. But really like- I've probably been in that situation a couple of times but I've been watching you know, and don't know about these guys but- you know and they think it's funny to us, but I'm thinking in my own mind you know 'Oh hullo' you know 'They're treating her like a dog' sort of thing you know [Dave: Right.]. But I think in their eyes they think it's funny, it's cool.

Dave: Right right, when you talk about The Man I just want to make sure I'm on the same - on the same page as you guys. Can you describe what that is to me?

Mike: The dominant one eh?

Kyle: Yeah like [Mike: 'I rule.'] they tell their partners what to do and like when they talk to them they don't like even listen [Mike: Yeah.] and 'Yeah why don't you just shut up' and yeah they won't be very nice.

Dave: Right, right and that- that's something you've seen a few times?

Mike: Yeah yeah. I um - when I used to go a lot of partying and that you'd see a lot of that you know.

In this account Mike constructs the misogyny of some men who he describes as wanting to "look like The Man in front of their mates" when to be the man is to be "the dominant one" who believes that "I rule" in his relationship with a girlfriend. In this account such men are portrayed as thinking the way that they treat women is "funny to us" "it's cool". In this reference Mike employs the language of cool to evoke ideas about what it is to be cool for such men. Mike and Kyle depict the way that some men treat women as like "treating her like a dog" "tell their partners what to do". With these phrases they reference the man's dominance of his partner and this dominance extends to treating her as an animal. In other phrases they reference further ill-treatment of girlfriends by such men "when they talk to them they don't like even listen" and "they won't be very nice." Kyle actively uses an example "'Yeah why don't you just shut up.'" to demonstrate the treatment by these men of their girlfriends. In their construction such men seek to have other men collude with their behaviour towards women.

Kyle and Mike position themselves in this account as other than these men and their treatment of women as other than the way in which they would treat women. They achieve this distinction by referring to this group of men as "some men" rather than using an inclusive pronoun such as "we men". For example by using the phrase "I've been watching" Mike construct himself as outside this group looking in. Use of a counter phrase also evokes a distinction between them and the groups of men they are talking about: "they think it's funny to us" "but I'm thinking in my own mind".

In the following the young men who identified themselves as belonging to the binge drinking culture speak of one of their mate's girlfriends:

Anton: You get the guys who think their missus is absolutely gorgeous and he spends every minute he can with her and then certain friends come back from overseas

and tell [*laughter*] [Xavier: Say she's a dog.] him what he thinks of her and [Zak: Oh yeah.] yeah-

Zak: 'Your missus is fuck ugly you should dump her.' 'What!' [*laughter*]

Anton: This is the same guy we were talking about before- [*laughter*]

Dave: Oh right. Did he stay with her?

Anton: Yeah he's still with her.

The rendition of the girlfriend in this account by the young man suggests a certain representation of women that is highly misogynist. In this account the woman is represented as a dog that should be dumped. In the following account the group talked of the ways men needed to act to retain a balance between the friendship the young men had with their mates and the relationship with the girlfriend:

Warren: Yes. Keep her on a leash.

Xavier: Yeah, keep her on a leash to a certain point or find for yourself it's the other way round.

Dave: Keep her on a leash? [*laughter*]

Xavier: Oh how the fuck can you explain that?

Dave: I'm full of questions you know. Keep her on a leash what does that mean.

Warren: I dunno just- you know well not, being like- in a way it's sort of controlling-controlling but-

Xavier: I- to a certain point cos a leash you can expand on.

Zak: Oh depends if it's a choker chain [*laughter*] or a bloody runner [*laughter*].

Dave: You know what I mean, so- so how do you keep her on a leash?

Xavier: Put [Tom: You gotta keep her interested I suppose. ] [*Overlapping talk.*] a limit on what she can do but then that's getting too [Victor: That's the fun way.] overcontrolling and too overpowering.

Zak: You can't do that in the first couple of weeks anyway.

Tom: Shit no.

Zak: Cos she'd go and tell you to fuck yourself.

In this account the phrase "keep her on a leash" was employed to portray the control that young men should have over a girlfriend. Xavier's statement "or find it's the other way around" portrays dominance in the relationship as a central part of it. A man needs to have control in a relationship or find that his girlfriend controls him. Warren, Xavier and Zak work up just how to explain what keeping her on a leash means. There is no critical reflection from this group that the way in which they are talking of controlling women is demeaning of them suggesting that such disparagement is not uncommon amongst this group and is an understood part of the values that some members of this group hold and accept. Of added interest is that this account occurred in the presence of an older

woman (AT). There was no attempt within this group to temper the construction of women in my presence. This factor suggests a concerning level of male entitlement, held by this some members of this group, to talk of women in disparaging ways.

There were other positions taken by some of the men to suggest that men were able to control women in other ways in for example, Tom's statement "You gotta keep her interested" and Victor's "that's the fun way", but these other possibilities appeared to be drowned out in the over-riding construction of male dominance through control. Xavier's comment "Put a limit on what she can do" followed by "but that's getting too over-controlling and overpowering" suggests that he was able to argue for male dominance while also critically reflecting on the impact of such behaviour. Zak's and Tom's final comments portray a worrying level of calculation, in this binge drinking culture, about how to control women. There is the implication in these statements that a man should wait until the woman is emotionally involved before introducing controlling practices, otherwise she would "go tell you to fuck yourself."

Alcohol, being the man, the value of women and violence

In the following account the young men who associated with the binge-drinking tell of a drunken comment from a man in their group that had ramifications for the group's safety:

Zak: Some guys will get really shit when you have a perve at their missus eh but- I remember- [laughter]  
Warren: What?  
Zak: He was like- I was at the window 'Hey mate, I'd really like to nob your missus.' [laughter]  
Warren: 'What is that!' [laughter]  
Dave: You're talking about an example of someone who got upset- [laughter]  
Zak: Like I dunno what you're doing the guys are running away but she was like 'Fuck you!'  
Tom: Yeah! It was on X Road eh? [laughter]  
Zak: No it was down bloody Y Street. [laughter] He was fine he curled up in a cubbyhole? In the back of my van and fell asleep. [laughter] He didn't even remember it. [laughter]

Zak sets the context for this account by constructing some men as potentially aggressive "some guys will get really shit" when others look at "their missus". In this account the word "shit" is employed to evoke a harmful response: it evokes the adage "when the shit



hits the fan” - a colloquial saying used to denote trouble erupting. The word “perve” captures the notion of looking at the girlfriend while also providing an idea that this act is illicit by reference to the word “pervert”. By using the term “their missus” Zak denotes ownership of the girl by the boyfriend, the word missus suggesting intimacy. Once again this is a phrase that might not be acceptable to some young women but was commonly used in this group to refer to the girlfriend or wife of a young man.

Zak then actively employs the language that his mate used to describe the comment his drunken friend made “Hey mate, I’d really like to nob your missus.” This statement suggests a real breakdown of conventional behaviour towards a man and a disregard of any moral integrity towards the man’s girlfriend – an act that is unlikely to have occurred without the disinhibitory effects of alcohol. The use of “to nob” is employed to suggestively portray sexual intercourse. Without reference to the target of this comment, the boyfriend of the girl, Zak describes the impact of this statement on his friends “I dunno what you’re doing the guys are running away”. By using his friends’ response in this context, he portrays the potential threatening situation that emerged. That his friends ran away is utilized to suggest that the comment elicited an aggressive and fear provoking response from the man. The reference to the women’s response “Fuck you” supports this interpretation of an aggressive reaction. Zak’s makes reference to his drunken friend being safe “he was fine he curled up in a cubbyhole? In the back of my van and fell asleep.” There is an unspoken counter comment to this statement: that Zak was not fine and that he was left to get the van out of there and keep his friends safe.

## D. The Gangster Culture

Another socio-cultural influence that emerged from the texts was the gangster culture. In the following the values associated with this cultural influence will be laid out.

Cool to be bad

The way in which the culture of cool works alongside the culture that glorifies being bad is worked up in the following:

- Ben: Its interesting though like it seems like um cool is you could almost substitute for the word um like rebellious you know or doing something wrong you know like you don't often hear- or depending on the social setting I suppose but very rarely would you hear that guy has got what it's at cos he always does what he is told. [Laughter] He's really nice to people you know you hear he's cool oh why? Oh cause he smokes and he drinks and he sleeps a lot you know [Dave: Right.] and so in a lot of ways you know other than fed by the media stuff its like if something is bad or wrong or dangerous it can be often construed as you know that making you cool or-
- Dave: Yeah.
- Euan: And you kind of see that as well when you know you hear about the girl's that go after the bad boys.

In this account the construction of what is cool is developed by comparing actions to those not considered cool. Ben portrays "cool" as interchangeable with "rebellious" or "doing something wrong". In a construction employed to evoke what is cool by what is not Ben draws on an example: a man is unlikely to have "what it's at" because "he always does what he is told." This example draws laughter from the group suggesting a level of agreement amongst the participants. Ben further develops this unlikely construction of being cool: being "really nice to people" is given as another representation of someone unlikely to be depicted as cool. In Ben's account a man is considered cool if he "smokes and he drinks and he sleeps a lot". With these euphemisms Ben evokes being cool as associated with smoking cigarettes, marijuana or other illicit drugs, drinking alcohol and having sex a lot. He further goes on to portray being cool as being associated with something that is "like if something is bad or wrong or dangerous". In this elaboration, for some people, being cool is not just associated with what society would consider to be illicit or unhealthy activities but with immoral, risky or dangerous activities. Euan positions the men who engage in these activities as attractive to some women: "you hear about the girl's that go after the bad boys" and he later states "like the bad guy is the cool guy or something".

Some of the young men made reference to the ways in which the media had promoted this idea. For example in the above group reference was made to the movie "Grease" where Sandy went after the leader of the gang. Another group portrayed their concern about the ways in which the media promotes being bad. The following emerged when the young men were discussing the influence of the media on young people's idea

about what it is to be cool and how people try to change to fit in with these constructions:

Owen: Yeah just like gangsters how they says bad is good. Like that's bad.  
Dave: That's bad.  
Ned: Mm. Really means-  
Regan: -means good. Not in bad itself.  
Dave: When you say gangsters are you talking local or TV what are you talking?  
Ned: Local.  
Phin: TV.  
Owen: Mostly local.  
Ned: Just commercial.  
Owen: Stereo. [laughter]  
Owen: Large stereo games. Kinda.

In this context Owen's reference to "they" is ambiguous but appears to refer to media constructions. He portrays the representation of gangsters by the media as constructing "bad is good". Regan supports his construction. In this account the young men make problematic the morality of representing bad as good. They go on to locate these constructions within local media.

In the following Keoni described the complicated relationship between young men and young women when being bad is represented as good:

Dave: What's a hard dude or the you know the street dude?  
Keoni: Na um, I think like with guys sometimes- cos guys we assume things and sometimes we assume that a girl wants a tough streetwise guy that, that, that is um intimidating [Dave: Oh yeah.] you know so a guy would always try and change for a girl, that's what we've seen so um in some cases some guys try and be gangster in order to get girls' attention [Dave: Right.] then it all goes wrong from there cos they end up living that lifestyle and then the whole intention in the first place doesn't end up like getting what it [Dave: Yep, yep.] oh you get what I mean aye so like they're trying to get the girls attention and then they end up living that life [Dave: Yep.] and they end up going the wrong path and that's- that's the problem with young men these days is um there is no one there to guide them and tell them straight up like what's right and what's wrong.

In Keoni's account the assumptions some men make about what a girl wants is that she wants "a tough streetwise guy" "that is intimidating". In some urban areas such a man may be considered by some young women to offer them protection from unwanted attention by others. In Keoni's account "some guys try and be gangster in order to get

girls' attention". This construction suggests that being a gangster is an identity choice for a young man and this choice occurs for some men in order to be attractive to girls. Keoni, however, goes on to portray the difficulties for young men in depicting an identity of gangster for themselves. "they end up living that life" and "going the wrong path". In this account simply taking up the appearance of a gangster dude, represented in music videos on TV, is not the endpoint for these young men. This identity is not simply about dressing a certain way and taking a particular stance when walking or talking. Taking up the appearance of a gangster dude becomes "living that life" and that life involves "going the wrong path." The latter phrase evokes an alternative moral position that occurs when making a choice to take on a gangster image.

Ned provides an example that places the influence of girls on young men as paramount to any gangster identity they assume:

- Ned: There was this guy in my- like I said- he wasn't a fighter he was like real quiet. He got in- it wasn't his fault there was another guy's fight somehow this other guy just tipped him by mistake and he punched him he knocked him out. And then all the girls came up to him and go 'Oh man you're- I never knew you can fight like that.' Right now he's want- going higher fight- he wants to fight more and more just by that girl just went up to him and said 'You're The Man'.
- Dave: So-
- Ned: So I think it was mostly Tongan girl.
- Dave: So fighting's another way to get some reputation.
- Ned: No but like if he had a fight and the girl go up to him 'You're stupid what did you punch him for' he'll- he wouldn't want to do it again [Dave: Right.] but they go up and say 'Oh man! You're The Man.' [Dave: Yeah.] he- he will want to do it again and again. But if the girl goes 'Oh you're- that's pretty sad stupid if you ask me', he doesn't want to do it again.
- Dave: Cool.
- Ned: Just that- that guy now's is one of the big dudes in the school just because of that one little thing that he did and all the girls- now he's going higher and higher.

In this account the outcome of an aggressive act by a man is portrayed as producing the construction of him as "The Man" by the girls who saw or heard of his actions. The use of the term The Man makes reference to the man, as discussed above, as the top dog or the alpha man, the dominant one, the one to be admired. Ned portrays young women as having considerable power to influence young men. In his account if girls said "you're stupid what did you punch him for" or "that's pretty sad stupid if you ask me" a young man would not "want to do it again". In Ned's depiction the identity young men take up

will be influenced by the judgement that young women make of his actions. In his final statement “now he’s going higher and higher” Ned evokes the idea of status that some men gain through aggressive acts in the context of the gangster world.

Being The Man is being ruthless

Whereas in the binge-drinking culture the young men portrayed doing stupid things as a way to have status in the gangster culture other actions were depicted as providing status:

Ned: He’s just gonna try to be ruthless just ah- that’s his main point of being a gangster.  
Dave: Right.  
Ned: Ruthless.  
Dave: Ruthless.  
Ned: Yeah. Doing something that people who damn don’t- Man I’d be dropping if I tried to do that. That’s what he’s going to try to do.  
Dave: Did you say I’d be dropping if I did that.  
Ned: No I’d be- I’d be scared.  
Dave: Yeah yeah yeah.  
Ned: And he’s like- He’s going to do something to amaze other people. Something stupid eh? That’s what gangsters all about.  
Dave: So he’s going to take risks eh?  
Ned: Yeah. That.  
Dave: And will that- will that get him- will he be The Man if he takes risk.  
Owen: No he’d be a big dick.  
Phin: No he’d be an idiot.  
Ned: But to other gangsters he is eh.  
Dave: Other gangsters yeah.  
Phin: Oh yeah. To some people he’d be-  
Owen: To other idiots.  
Ned: Oh you’re The Man.

Ned constructs being “ruthless” as the “main point of being a gangster” and attempts to describe what he means by being ruthless. He portrays being ruthless as doing something that would make him scared, as something “to amaze other people” or “something stupid”. In this construction ruthless activities are frightening activities designed to inspire awe in others while also considered by others to be stupid. The latter construction is reinforced by this group who go on to construct a gangster who engages in such activities as “a big dick” or “an idiot” while also holding that to other gangsters “to other idiots” such risky activities might allow him to be constructed as The Man.

Competition is for fear

If doing something ruthless or frightening is part of being a gangster then the way in which competition, which is part of being The Man, works in this culture is of interest:

Dave: -in guys your age is fear a good thing.  
Unidentified  
Participant: Yep.  
Dave: You said yeah.  
Maru: Not girls fearing [Dave: Not-] you.  
Dave: -girls fearing you.  
Dante: Yeah.  
Maru: Other gang rivals.  
Dave: Other [Dante: If you're-] gang rivals.  
Dante: -talking about gangs yeah fear is good.  
Dave: Yep.  
Dante: But in other ways it's also bad. Cos like fear- like people want fear too eh. And if they hear about another gang being more ruthless-  
Clint: They would wanna take them down.  
Dante: Yeah they would want to take them out.  
Dave: Right.  
Dante: A game of competition eh.  
Dave: Yeah so that's about competition and ah- who's top of the ladder [Clint: Mm.] eh or whose top of the heap or-  
Dante: Mm. Cos everybody wants to be feared like on ah- if it comes to gangs. Mm.

Gang rivals fear was portrayed as being “good” in the gang culture although “girls fearing you” was excluded from this construction. In a contradictory account Dante portrays fear as “in other ways it's also bad”. With Clint he works up the problem with fear. In this construction fear is productive of a perception by other gangs that a gang that is “more ruthless” should be taken down. According to this construction fear works to produce “a game of competition” for “who's top of the ladder”. This account draws on the construction of The Man described previously to explain the impact of fear in the gangster world. A culture in which fear is valued - “everybody wants to be feared” - produces rivalry and gang competition.

Having status is having rep[utation]/respect

In a culture that values fear some young men depicted status as conferred through reputation and reputation was granted to the gang that was the toughest, the one with

the most numbers, through control of territory and through getting “your gang name up there” by “being the most feared.” In these young men’s portrayal such status gained a gang “respect” or “street respect” from the neighbourhood. In the following respect was described:

Dave: So how would you know if you had respect.  
Dante: If like- [Sefa: Your name. Like-]  
Sefa: -if they treat you like [Dante: I remember like-] how they treat you.  
Dante: Cause like my cousin married into this family and they were always something else whenever they used to drink into that house they would live in now they all got kicked out of cos it was too like noisy- roudy and stuff. [Dave: Yeah.] but like they used to tell me all the time that people used to cross the road and not walk in front of the house yeah cos they were too like you know- [Clint: Scared.] [Dave: Yeah.] yeah scared to walk and that made them feel like- dunno- [Mara : Like the (?) that keep it too proud eh.] powerful. Strong.

In this account status and power were gained by the fear engendered in the neighbourhood by the gang. Dante employed the actions of the people in the community to demonstrate gang “respect”. Fear is depicted by the use of the phrase “people used to cross the road and not walk in front of the house”, and by Clint and Dante’s working up of the reasons for these actions” “cos like they were too like- you know- yeah scared to walk”. That this family gained status from the community’s actions was depicted through the use of the phrase “made them feel ... proud”, “powerful” and “strong”.

#### Gangster girlfriends

In the gangster culture portrayed by the groups of Pasifika young men fear of the man by the girlfriend was portrayed as wrong:

Dante: I think gangsters like- ike put on a mask eh like that hides their true like you know-  
Clint: True selves eh?  
Dave: Yeah?  
Dante: -their true selves cos they wanna be feared. But yeah- but once it comes to a girl eh-  
Lelei: Their soft side comes out.  
Dante: Mm. Yeah their soft side comes out.

In this construction the gangsters are depicted as having two faces: one that they show to others and one that they show “to a girl”. A girlfriend is portrayed, in this account, as the one to whom a gangster can expose his soft-side.

In the following Dave asked the participants to describe how girls fitted into the gangster life:

Dave: What place do they have?  
Keoni: Um pretty much close to nothing, cos I think the girl is, I don't know, you'll probably have to ask the gangster but what we've seen is like um, yeah she has no choice but to get caught up in it too.  
Dave: Right.  
Keoni: Yeah so-  
Dave: Right.  
Keoni: And that's what makes it harder for everyone cos here is these two people, they are in a relationship and one leads the other or-  
Dave: Right and so his job is to be - in that role is to be hard and intimidating.  
Keoni: Yeah.  
Dave: And um, her job is to be?  
Keoni: Probably the supporter the one that is there to try and ease him up when the guy is feeling low or what ever but-  
Dave: Yep. The supporter.

In this account the girl in the gang is portrayed as without choice, as “pretty close to nothing” in the gangster world and as caught up in the gang culture whether she likes it or not. Her role, is portrayed as a supporter to her boyfriend. This account depicts the gangster world as highly hypermasculine with a girl who gets herself involved drawn along in it. With her major role depicted as the gangster's supporter she is constructed as having little influence other than repairing any harm to her boyfriend that occurs through his involvement.

### *Women are hoodrats*

Some young men portrayed the gang girls as little more than animals:

Phin: If you have a lot- if you are known as this ah- big knock-out king you know-  
Ned: Got a back belt for Karate. Oohh!  
Phin: You get girls hanging over you but those are not girls those are more like rats.  
Ned: Rats. Ratus.  
Owen: Rats.  
Phin: Yeah hoods is what we call-  
[Overlapping



talk]: Hood rats.  
 Phin: Yeah hood rats. [prolonged laughter]  
 Dave: So that's another new one for me. So tell me about hood rats.  
 Phin: Sluts.  
 Dave: Sluts?  
 Ned: Like sluts. [Regan: Oh it's like- Yeah. Yeah.]  
 Phin: Yeah like they'll do anything and anything to be recognised. And if they want to be recognised hard and fast they probably just go and get this really tough guy.  
 Dave: Right. So it's about- for them it's about recognition.  
 Ned: Yeah.  
 Regan: Yeah.  
 Dave: And the recognition comes through the guy.  
 Phin: Yeah. In some ways yeah. Or she already had a rep as being a rat. [cough]  
 Regan: Mm. If she's got a rep herself just by being herself- as being a hood rat so- Hood rats are normally known for one thing. With boys it's just sex.  
 Dave: Sex.  
 Regan: Yeah- And a lot of it.

The description of the girls who associate with gangs as “rats” was portrayed here with a level of spoken contempt suggesting that the women who seek a reputation by association with gangs evoke are not held in any regard by the men who do not identify with the gangster culture. In Phin’s account these are “not girls” and “more like rats”. These phrases dehumanise such girls by labelling them as an animal. The term “hood rats” may be read as a reference to young women who work the hood or territory (neighbourhood) of the gang. In the past the term “ship rats” was used to describe the women who hung around ships as the docked and provided sexual services to sailors. The term “hood rats” seems to be a contemporary version of this phrase, applied to young women who were portrayed in another account as providing largely oral sex to men and who seek recognition by their association with gangsters. The word “hood” was, in the past, American slang for gangster. Another interpretation is that the word “hood” refers to the hooded sweatshirts that these young women wear and evokes an image of a young woman who slinks around with her hoodie up and her head down.

### *Sex is thug love*

In the following the young men portray the life that a “gangster chick” can expect:

Dave: So how's he, how's he gonna treat that gangster chick?  
 Phin: Umm.  
 Ned: Swears a lot. You know.

Phin: Thug love.  
 Dave: Thug love.

Dave: Yeah that phrase thug-love stuck kind of with me and I was wondering what it was.

Owen: What what was?  
 Dave: Thug love.  
 Phin: Oh gangster love.  
 Regan: Yeah gangster love.  
 Phin: Ah. Hard love like like *Once were Warriors* love.  
 Dave: Oohh. [laughter]

In these accounts the portrayal of the treatment of a “gangster chick” by a gangster as “thug love” evokes the brutish experiences that these young women are likely to receive at the hands of the gangster men. The use of the movie *Once were Warriors* was employed to evoke this brutish violent experience in such boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.

#### *Contesting gangster love is thug love*

Other participants contested the idea that girls are treated badly in gangs with members from the Island cultures:

Maru: You get a hiding for giving your girl a hiding.  
 Dave: You get a hiding for giving your girl a hiding.  
 Maru: Yeah.  
 Dave: Oh right. (...) In the gangs that are out there.  
 Sefa: Not in their Island culture eh.  
 Lelei: It depends on the gangs.  
 Clint: Oh yeah.  
 Lelei: It’s probably like the Black Powers and Mongrel Mob- like- the way they treat their ladies that ain’t fair eh. They get hard ‘n smashing them.

Dante: Yeah they’re real harsh eh.  
 Lelei: The gangs that we know you still know where you stand. With a lady.  
 Sefa: Where the boundaries are.  
 Dave: Yeah so why is- why is that different.  
 Maru: Oh.  
 Ioane: It’s just like beating up your sister.  
 Maru: Cos we know how to treat women.  
 Dave: Cos you know how to treat women. Yep.  
 Dante: And there’s- oh- I reckon all of us here- like the same background- brought up the same way like old school Samoan style.  
 Maru: Yeah the hiding.

In this account gang cultures vary with some gangs treating women badly whereas gangs from the Island culture did not. These young men refer to such violence as like “beating up your sister” and as young Island men knowing “how to treat women. The reference to the “old school Samoan style” upbringing suggests that good treatment of women is promoted traditionally in these cultures and that violating these traditional rules has consequences “the hiding”. In contrast the young men portray the men in other gangs “The Black Powers” and “Mongrel Mob” as violent towards women: “the way they treat their ladies that ain’t fair eh. They get hard ‘n smashing them.”

### Being a Player

While some traditional island practices were depicted as protective of women or girlfriends some contemporary cultural influences were portrayed as influencing young men towards the gangster lifestyle.

In the following the interviewer asks the young men to describe the messages portrayed by the typical gangster music video that has the gangster pimp with heaps of “bitches and hos” around him:

- Dave: Is there- are there- I know I’ve already asked you guys this question- so the messages for young men- you know when you got two guys there and you got twenty girls around them- what are the messages there.
- Dante: To [ Maru: Oh- that’s what you wanta be.] be a player.
- Dave: To be a player.
- Dante: Mm.
- Dave: Yeah.
- Dante: Like they could influence you into like- how to be a gangster. Or- Just- Like- sex is the number one like- priority for men.

In this account Dante’s association between “gangster” and “sex is the number one priority for men” portrays this message as the dominant one associated with the gangster music videos. In the following the interviewer asked the group to explain what was meant by the word “player”.

- Dave: That- that um- that word player- I just wanta make sure we’re on the same page with it eh. Can-can you tell me what that- what that word is?
- Lelei: It’s [Sefa: Being a player] being a pimp.

Dave: Being a pimp. Yeah. There's another word can you tell me- [Unidentified participant: Going around]  
 Clint: Going around.  
 Maru: A slut.  
 Clint: Fucking girls.  
 Maru: A slut.  
 Clint: Being a slappers.  
 Dante: Slappers! Yeah.  
 Dave: Is that- like- you know- In my generation when you say a slut you know those girls they were kinda looked down upon. Is it the same with the guys.  
 Dante: Not really.  
 Lelei: Not really for guys it's like- "Yeah you're The Man!"

In this account the player is "a pimp", "a slapper", "a slut": a man who is sexually promiscuous and this promiscuity is portrayed as privileged by men. Promiscuity provides him with status as The Man.

### *Their plastic world*

The gangster rap music videos were constructed by young women as influential in the production of men as "pimps" and as women as purely available for sex. One young men's group portrayed the music influence as largely from America with the New Zealand music scene too small to have an effect on young people. In the following some participants described the way the men are portrayed in these gangster music videos where beautiful barely clad women surround a large man rolling in money:

Dave: What do those guys look like.  
 Owen: Dickheads.  
 Dave: They look like dickheads?  
 Phin: Oh. Some of them.  
 Dave: When you say that I- why's everybody trying to look like them then! [laughter]  
 Owen: Oh I duuno. They thinks it's cool them are.  
 Phin: That's their plastic world.  
 Owen: Yeah. That's their world.  
 Ned: Oh they're thinking oh he's got a car we don't have a car. What you trying to- That's what he is cos he's a dickhead.  
 Phin: But it's just- If like people are into it then they'll be into it and wanting to be- to be it.  
 Regan: Just makes them stand out, you know, from- from other people more or less. Different. They've got it set for them. [Dave: Right.] And money's not a thing. Problem's not a thing. You just- You do your thing every day, instead of worrying about expenses and wot not.

The constructions in these music videos are portrayed as evoking a utopia for those young men who do not have heaps of gorgeous girls at their beck and call, who have little money and who cannot afford any car let alone one with “manly muscle” (see Towns & Scott, 2008). The catchy rhythms and the dance segments in such music videos appeal to young people but the lyrics can be highly misogynist (see Towns & Scott, 2008). In the above account being the gangster guy is portrayed having no worries about money and having status. In the above account these portrayals provide a dream, “a plastic world” for young people that takes them away from their existing worries and concerns and allows them a pathway to status within their communities.

## 5. Equality

Many of the young men were less able to articulate what would constitute equality in a relationship. Some linked being happy to having equality in a relationship:

Dave: What- what- what would- what would you understand- what would an equal relationship look like?

Kyle: One where there both happy, both partners happy like- you don't want to go with too much of your freedom cos then you won't be happy.

Some young men described the sort of interactions that they would understand as being equal occurring when the family has to work together for example when funerals occur. In such situations the young men observed that family members were listening to each other rather than "telling" or being controlling. Some young men described equal relationships as more obvious in elderly people's relationships where the man would do caring acts such as helping his wife with her walker or opening doors for her etc. In the following one group articulated their ideas about equality in relationships:

Dave: How do you tell the difference between those couples that have equal relationships and those that don't.

Dante: Some [Clint: Cos they get on really well.] couples like- yeah.

Ioane: You can tell by the way they talk- the tone. Yeah and also some couples are like if the guy sees something- it's like has to be done like oh- I would really say Samoan relationship eh but sometimes when a guy says something eh the- the girl will go do it even though she doesn't want to.

Dave: Right.

Ioane: Yeah she will still do it.

Dave: Right.

Ioane: Yeah. You know- That's not equal man. That's-

Lelei: Like some relationships it's focused on one person and some they both work it out. You know what I mean?

In this account equality is worked up and contrasted with unequal practices. Couples with and equal relationships are constructed as getting on "really well". This phrase suggests that equal relationships allow a couple to relate to each other positively. This idea is further worked up by Ioane who described equal relationships are evident in the "the way they talk – the tone". His employment of the word "tone" suggest that equality allows a

way of talking to the other person that is not present in other relationships. Ione's reference to dominance practices as a counter to this tone

## Practices of Equality

The following were the identified practices of equality that some young men were able to identify:

### Democracy

Consulting with each other about decisions and sharing the responsibilities were constructed as democratic practices that would occur in equal relationships:

- Frank: Maybe um you know ah both- both people feeling like they can bring things in you know. I've got an issue, I feel like this is a safe enough- this is an equal relationship where I can express these views and um you know we can talk about it, we can both come to a decision rather than this is the way it is you know or-
- Caleb: Like being able to compromise and work things out, like without it turning into a fight or something like that. Like being about to like do it like democratically.
- Frank: Yeah there is not a dictator in the relationship it's a democracy, so to speak.
- Euan: Yeah when making decisions together not one person making the calls.
- Dylon: This all could be like encompassed into good communications.
- Unidentified Participant: Mm
- Dave: Right.
- Ben: Mutual respect.

In this account the young men work up the idea of equality as being about democratic decision making that involves "people feeling like they can bring things in", that the relationship is a safe place to "express views", and that a conversation is possible that allows them to "both come to a decision". Frank's use of the phrase "rather than this is the way it is" provides a contrast to this democratic equal relationship. His use of the phrase "this is the way it is" is employed to represent an authoritarian relationships in which rules are laid down and others are expected to carry out these rules. Other qualities associated with an equal relationship were "good communication" and "mutual respect" both suggesting mutual contribution to the relationships.

## Sharing the Chores and Discipline

Chores were described as shared in equal relationships, as was the disciplining of the children.

- Euan: Um maybe ah you know balancing out the- balancing housework to an extent depending on- depending on-
- Unidentified Participant: Sharing roles.
- Euan: Yeah, obviously if one of them is home all day you would expect them to be doing a lot of the housework.
- Unidentified Participant: Yip.
- Dave: Sure. Okay.
- Euan: And also maybe um sharing the discipline as well. [Dave: Right.] Cause it yeah- if one becomes the sole disciplinary then they're seen as the bad guy or something.
- Frank: Is that with kids?
- Euan: Yeah with kids yeah, with kids. Not disciplining each other. [*Laughter*]
- Euan: Only I discipline you [*Laughter*]
- Frank: I was like where is he going with this? [laughs]
- Euan: Yeah with kids.

Euan depicts equality as about “balancing out the housework” suggesting that the chores around the house should be shared, however, he tempers this by drawing on ideas of pragmatics, that if one person is mostly at home they would be “doing a lot of the housework.” Alongside this idea of shared chores around the house Euan portrays equality as about “sharing the discipline” of the children. In his construction such shared discipline would avoid a person who is the sole disciplinarian being “seen as the bad guy”. There is some ambiguity about what is meant by the disciplinarian in this construction, however, Euan appears to be constructing discipline as being about punishment, and appears to draw on traditional ideas that the father would punish a child who had been naughty when he got home from work. An alternative construction of disciplining children might be teaching them through praise, encouragement and natural consequences which would require the attending parent to be the one who is predominantly involved.

## Trust

Trust was considered by some young men to contribute to equal relationships.



Mike: Yeah and I think trust too you know [Dave: Oh yeah can you talk-] oh just hundred percent trust them you know then I think you have no issues. Oh with me anyways I find most of our arguments is about trust: me and her [Dave: Oh yep.]  
Kyle: Yeah trust is a issue. My missus don't trust me.  
Dave: Doesn't trust you?  
Kyle: Sometimes no.  
Dave: How do you know?  
Kyle: She tells me [laughter] 'I don't trust you'.

Mike does not elaborate here on what he means by trust. Some young men talked of negotiating time with their mates by lying about where they were going rather than being honest. Some young men spoke of their fear of losing their partner to another man. Such concerns suggest that how young men negotiate trust in their relationships: how they develop a trusting equal relationship, will in part depend on their ability to discuss their fears with their girlfriends and to negotiate time with their friends openly and honestly. Some young men considered that if a man treated his girlfriend well that she would not cheat on him.

### Compromise

Some young men considered that being able to compromise and to negotiate were part of an equal relationship. This might require each to give way on some things. However, Kyle's representation of compromise suggests that some work will need to be done to ensure that compromising does not fall into game-playing:

Kyle: Like um to compromise? Like you know you don't give up everything but then if like you give up something they're expected to give up something too like that I think if I'm going to give up some stuff you best be giving up some stuff too.

While Kyle appears to be promoting compromise as an aspect of equality his construction of compromise as involving "giving up something" allows him to represent compromise as an authoritarian expectation "you best be giving up some stuff too" rather than as a position reached amicably through negotiation. Another interpretation of this excerpt is that compromise must involve both people, that it should not involve one person being the one who makes all the sacrifices in the relationship.

## Being Practical

Some participants considered that the division of tasks should be done sensibly by playing to each person's strengths and competence. For example Jeff stated that if one person's strengths were in one area and the others in another then each should be dominant in their area of strength.

- Dave: Is an equal relationship a good thing to have?  
Jeff: I think in certain ways and certain things that you do with your partner it is good but in- there is other areas she should be dominant in that area [Dave; Yep.] so I'm not saying- it's good to be equal but it's always good to be dominant in your own areas as well you know.
- Dave: Yep. I'm quite interested in that Jeff like what um- what the different areas are?  
Jeff: Oh just mother- motherly things you know she will be dominant in that sort of area. [Dave: Yep.] House work and that around home we should be dominant- we should be teaching our son- oh you know how I should be teaching and that [Dave: Right.] and she should also be teaching the little girls, my two little girls you know respect and values in life.
- Dave: Right. So some of that um some of that kind of male to male [Jeff: Yeah.] education [Jeff: Yeah.] and female to female education.  
Jeff: And the kitchen area I don't mind you know, if I have time but I get home too late so I would help her out but [Dave: Yep.] she has to be dominant there. [Dave: Yep.] Yeah but I don't know other stuff you can be equal.

In this excerpt Jeff appears to be representing a 'both and' position: holding to both the notion of equality and to the notion of dominance with his statement "it's good to be equal but it's always good to be dominant in your own areas as well". His representation of dominance, in this construction, appears to situate such dominance as something to be valued when it is in "your own areas." This representation of dominance may be interpreted as suggesting that men and women will have their own strengths that they bring to the relationships. For example he portrayed motherly things as his partner's strength: she might be better teaching their daughters "respect and values in life" whereas, in a co-construction with Dave, he agrees that he might be better teaching his son such values. In this account he is happy to share the household chores although the practicalities of his work life meant that he was home from work too late to help with the "kitchen area".

## Obstacles to equality

The young men described the following obstacles to equality:

Dominance - 'That's how a relationship should be.'

For some young men the assumption that the man should be in charge came from their father's behaviour and laid the ground for their own behaviour in their boyfriend/girlfriend relationship:

Dante: I think it's also the way you been brought up. If you've been brought up and you see your dad was always the one that was in charge and in control you kind of like go around thinking that's how a relationship should be. You think you should be the- the stronger one. The- the more manly one. And like once you see that the girl is starting to take that away from you- yeah- I think that's when you step back and you know tell them to slow it down. You know.

In Dante's account being in charge was linked to being "manly", the "stronger one" and in the statement "once you see that the girl is starting to take that away from you" there is the inference that should the girl challenge the man's dominance she is also taking his manliness away from him. This interpretation is deeply problematic for any promotion of equal relationships as it represents any attempts at sharing the decision making and shared authority in the relationship as an attack on the man's identity and his masculinity. Consistent with this notion of masculinity, in Ben's account some men's ideas about their girlfriend can create an obstacle to equality:

Ben: Um, yeah well you know, if ah- if I think I'm all that then you know I don't think my girlfriend is as good as me in some way then there is not really going to be equality in the relationship you know. I'll be always sort of talking down to her or treating her like she is substandard or not as good.

In this account ideas such as "I don't think my girlfriend is as good as me" are constructed as not promoting equality and as eliciting behaviours such as "talking down to her" or "treating her as substandard" or "not as good".

“I’m all I need”

Some young men constructed the values that promote a man being “all I need” as being an obstacle to equality:

- Ben: I can’t remember the tune. Bit it- I think it’s like I am my island- I am my own island or something and it’s talking about a man, you know, being completely self-sufficient and not needing anyone or anyone else just him- him alone.
- Caleb: Yeah like society tries to impose that we, like, should all be like totally independent from each other [Unidentified participant: Yeah.] like that’s just-goes for like any relationship within like everything pretty much we have to be independent and be able to support ourselves.
- Euan: That’s European culture.
- Caleb: Yeah yeah.
- Dave: Is that men and women or-?
- Dylon: I think so.
- Dave: Yep.
- Dylon: It’s becoming so.
- Ben: It’s becoming so yeah.
- Euan: It’s becoming so eh. Hence um, women becoming much more career orientated.

In this account the young men draw on the movie *About a Boy* to portray the values that are portrayed within certain consumer driven depictions of the world represented by the advertising media. These values are portrayed as promoting total self-sufficiency and independence for young men: “not needing anyone else” and in this account are depicted as obstacles to equality. For some products, such as alcohol, limiting the influences of others in the consumer’s life will more effectively promote their products. The movie *About a Boy* was a comment on this self-sufficient male identity. In the above excerpt self-sufficiency and “not needing anyone else” are portrayed as European values situating them in contrast to those represented by other ethnic groups within New Zealand such as those that promote family relationships within Māori, Pacific and Chinese communities. Values that promote selfishness are portrayed as providing obstacles to equality.

Temptation to sit back

One young man portrayed the obstacles to equality being much more nuanced and related to power practices:

- Ben: I just had a bit of thought when you talk about all males or you know majority of males wanting equality um and I suppose like in theory probably a lot of us really

do but I'm just I suppose thinking of like you know what happened in World War Two with Hitler and that and when people are presented an opportunity to do something or presented with position of power or, you know, control or something, it's interesting is suppose how we react. Sometimes not the way we would think that we would have liked to you know. [Dave: Right.] Um and so as much as, you know, we probably generally do want equality, if there was some chick who came into our lives and said 'Hey' you know 'I'll do everything and anything that you want and you can do whatever the heck you want and I'll just be the perfect woman for you [Dave: Yep.] and you don't have to do anything in return.' we'd all say 'Wow, that's a sweet deal, awesome', you know, instead of saying 'Well no, no, no I won't accept that cause I want equality' you know. [Unidentified participant: Mm.] And so in theory you know, yes but then depending on the situation we may react or think differently yeah.

In this interesting construction Ben portrays young men's reactions as much more complex than simply adhering to particular values relating to equality and simply practicing equality. By opening up the power dynamics of World War II and Hitler he positions young men's responses within a context of power relations. By employing the evocative image of Hitler's world and of people being "presented an opportunity to do something" he opens up the possibilities for the exploitation of a person's position within a relationship of power. He takes interviewer's statement that "when you talk about all males or you know majority of males wanting equality" and uses this construction to portray this position as one men might hold "in theory" while contrasting this with what might occur in practice "it's interesting is suppose how we react. Sometimes not the way we would think" or "we would have liked to". In Ben's construction young men might hold the idea of equality as an ideal, but when presented with the easy life some young men might prefer to accept such a life rather than challenge the practices that work against equality and act ethically. Equality becomes theoretically ideal but contextually problematic.

This account portrays the importance of young men being able to reflect on power practices, the ways in which they might incorporate an understanding of gendered power practices by reflecting on power practices in other contexts, and the importance of distinguishing between what might be held to be ideals and how these might be translated into ethical practices (see Carmody, 2003).

## Having to Compromise

Some young men described having to compromise as requiring sacrifices that were not required when a man was single.

- Kyle: Just the giving up of stuff, like how you have to make compromises and stuff [Dave: Right.] that usually comes with sacrificing a lot of stuff [Luke: Mm.] [Dave: Yep.] And that's probably just- you know I keep telling myself 'Oh yeah it's gonna get better just- you're gonna get used to this cycle of how everything works you know, I'm not single anymore, can't, can't just do- do what I want anymore.'
- Dave: So you had to give some stuff up.
- Kyle: Yeah had to get really used to it, keep telling myself yep this is how it's gonna be and if I don't get used to it then I won't be happy and that won't be good so-

Kyle's reference to "sacrificing a lot of stuff" portrays boyfriend/girlfriend relationships as involving a shift for young men from doing what they want to not being able to "just do what I want anymore". The use of the vague word "stuff" may be interpreted as making reference to the compromises and negotiation around time, place and actions that must occur in an equal relationship. "Stuff" may also be interpreted as referring to aspects of the young man's identity that they have to date valued, for example, ideas about male dominance in a relationship. Kyle spoke of having an internal conversation with himself in order to get used to this new situation: "keep telling myself yep this is how it's gonna be and if I don't get used to it then I won't be happy and that won't be good". This construction suggests that the gains associated with the relationship must be strong in order to withstand the compromises young men have to make and if being equal and the compromises associated with equality mean giving up too much "stuff" then young men may prefer to remain single or may leave the relationship.

## Don't really know yourself

Not being clear about one's identity was also described as an obstacle to a successful equal relationship:

- Afi: ..it's sort of linked with identity as well cause um, if we get two people that really know who they are and stuff and then they form a relationship there will be a high chance of it being successful. Whereas you get (?) like teens and young adults they don't really know themselves and um so they're not secure of who they are [Dave: Yep.] and then um, they end up hooking up with someone else who is probably not secure of who they are in terms of identity and that's what

lead to breaking up too because they both want different things or they both desire different things. Well no it's not bad- it's not bad being different with each other but it just [Dave: Yep.] it's what can lead to being broken up.

In this account Afi contrasts people who “really know who they are” with those who “don't really know themselves”. In the former he constructs the relationship as having “a high chance of it being successful” whereas the latter “it's what can lead to being broken up.” In this account young people who are still forming their identity may link with others who are “not secure” in their identity and can result in a dis-connect between what the two want: “they both want different things” leading to them “being broken up” whereas those who know themselves are more likely to make a success of the relationship. The inference in this account is that those who are clear about their identity will know what they are looking for in a relationship and will seek out people who want or value similar things. Young people entering relationships before their identity is secure will be hampered by a lack of clarity about values and what they want in a relationship.

This account suggests that assisting young people to reflect on their values and the identities that support these values may assist young people with successful egalitarian relationships. The analysis in previous sections has pointed to aspects of young men's identity associated with discourses relating to what it is to be cool and to be a man. The positions young men take up in relation to these discourses orientate the depiction of women and their relationship to them. Some associated identities or positions within these discourses of what it is to be cool and to be a man would present obstacles to equality.

### Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol, as described in the binge-drinking culture, were considered to produce obstacles to the development of equal relationships. As outlined in the section on binge-drinking, if male dominance is valued in the binge-drinking culture as it allows young men to have control in their relationship and therefore to avoid intimacy and drink when they want, then this culture works against equality in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships by promoting male dominance and control of the woman. Furthermore, it would be in the interests of the alcohol industry to continue to promote male dominance and to discourage intimacy through strong equitable intimate relationships in order to maintain

a heavy drinking culture. As described above, there is some indication that the alcohol industry is using advertising to diminish women in the context of men's intimate relationships.

### Work culture

Some young men described most work cultures as working against equality especially those that promoted people for working outside work hours.

Ben: If I could talk about the armed forces I don't know if they would be aware, but they certainly- um the lifestyle that they encourage doesn't- it is- it is almost an obstacle you know, cause they are so- well though they sort of talk about you know good work life balance and look after your family [Dave: Sure.] really they- the dude who comes in his weekend and spends the extra hours at work and, and goes the extra mile gets credited and you know well-looked upon and so that sort of sends a different message of hey the more time you spend working for us, the less time you spend with your family, the happier we will be. You know.

Dave: Right.

Unidentified

Participant:

Mm.

Frank:

I don't think there would be hardly any careers or jobs that would push family. I mean I reckon a lot would say 'yeah yeah hard out' but you know family over work but whether or not they really mean it you know.

In this account Ben and Frank work up the contradictions between the spoken adherence to work-life balance that organisations promote compared to the actuality for those who work outside work hours. In this construction the realities of potential promotion for those who work outside work hours counter the potential for equal relationships and act as an obstacle to family life.

### Government policy

Some young men argued that government policies that did not promote gender equity worked against equality.

Caleb: But if you like look at like the government like if you like look at the laws that they pass and things like that, not all of them, like say the woman can get like get more um what do you call it? Like maternity leave but a man wouldn't- like the father would be able to get as much just cause like well she's had the baby and so of course she has got to have quite a lot of time off, she's the main care-giver but still like the father- should the father get the same amount? I don't know maybe?



That doesn't seem like- that could be seen as inequality and the government imposing inequality.

Caleb points to the potential contradiction in government policies that promote equality while providing parental leave for only one of the parents of a new-born. His reference to the mother as the one who usually has leave "maternity leave" suggests that he might not be aware of the non-gendered nature of this leave provided by current government policy. The idea that giving leave to only one parent promotes "inequality", particularly when this means that one parent loses out on the early parenting of a new born child should not be discounted. As commonly the mother remains the one who takes parental leave Caleb's portrays the father as being the one who experiences a loss of contact with the new-born child. Caleb represents this lack as a problem with equity that is produced by government policy.

Other young men spoke of the failure to include education about intimate relationships alongside school sexual education as a problem for the promotion of good boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. They described the emphasis on sexual relationships as promoting sex without intimacy. Some described the lack of understanding of the emotional impact of intimate heterosexual relationships as causing young men much emotional pain. Some saw education about intimate relationships as more important or requiring as much attention as education about healthy sexual practices.

## 6. Conclusions

The controlling behaviours towards girlfriends that young men described in this study appear to be informed by contemporary cultural influences associated with what it is to be a man in New Zealand today. These controlling practices were consistent with those described by young women (Towns & Scott, 2008) who had experienced such practices by boyfriends. They involved monitoring and limiting their choices, controlling the girlfriend's contacts, controlling her dress, isolating her and using dominance and entitlement practices including violence. Young men provided a sophisticated understanding of control, recognising that control was fluid for young men, changing depending on the context rather than static and consistent. Some young men described such control as informed by historical or traditional ideas about women's roles and women's status compared to that of men.

Controlling practices appeared to be supported by language associated with being The Man within the 'culture of cool' (see Towns & Scott, 2008). The culture of cool refers to young people ideas about what is considered to be 'cool' or what is 'hot'. Participants portrayed constructions of The Man as about one-up-man-ship in young men: competition between young men to achieve a desired end. What was considered to be cool was constructed as dependent on the young men's group varying from becoming engaged in a church group to performing a great sports move in a rugby group. For most groups having a hot girlfriend was also considered to be the making of The Man, although there was recognition that one man's hot girlfriend might not be another's. Having a hot girlfriend, however, was constructed as producing competition amongst other men for her. A boyfriend might lose his girlfriend to another men. Ownership practices by boyfriends towards girlfriends were portrayed as a product of this possibility. Loss of a girlfriend was portrayed by some young men as painful and to be avoided.

Achieving a desired end was constructed by young men as providing status within the group and status was a desired outcome within this culture of cool. Telling stories allowed young men to position themselves as The Man, so long as these stories were considered to have validity, otherwise some young men positioned such story tellers as pretenders or mockingly represented them as The Man. Despite pretender status most

young men were not inclined to challenge other men their justification being that such a challenge might cause emotional harm or even eventuate in violence if the man challenged had drunk alcohol and returned to take on the challenger.

Within this culture young men promoted loyalty to one's mates by using a number of disparaging phrases to refer to men who preferred to spend time with their girlfriends rather than spend time with their mates. Terms such as *bros before hos* emphasised the importance of loyalty to the mates over girlfriends. *HBB* or *hos before bros* was a phrase used to disparage men for putting their girlfriends first as were phrases such as "she wears the pants", "on the chain", "locked down" and "under the thumb". Similar language was identified by Flood (2008) to be associated with promoting bonds between young men and with promoting gender inequity associated with sexual violence. Some young men described these disparaging comments as influencing them to look at their relationships differently, and as killing any equal relationship. Some young men described these phrases as about losing a mate rather than about any attempts to promote male dominance or control, although the impact was to question the man's dominance within the relationship.

Within the culture of cool associated with being The Man some language was portrayed as only for men: language that would not be said in front of a girl and this provides a separate knowledge for young men unavailable to young women. Such knowledge is likely to limit young women's choices about how to represent their identity to young men. For example the term *ho* was a word that young men said would not be used in front of a girl. Tellingly, young men distinguished between girlfriends and *hos*, *hos* being described as young women available largely for sex: "Hugh Heifner girls". Music videos and media influences associated with consumerism, and with pornography and the Hugh Heifner world, were portrayed as promoting an imaginary ideal for young men that informed the construction of certain representations of the cool man.

Within the culture of cool some young men positioned themselves within the binge drinking culture, which they described as characterised by doing "skids" and "funnels". The term "skids" refers to the actions of boy-racers in skidding their cars and the term "funnels" refers to the pouring of alcohol down the throat of another member of this group. Doing stupid things was portrayed as privileged in this group and provided fodder for telling better stories. In these accounts young men competed for telling better

stories and such stories contributed to gaining status within the group. The practices described within this culture suggest that other men within this group policed the dominance and control of the man over his girlfriend in order to ensure loyalty to the binge drinking group.

Within the group that identified with the binge drinking culture women were at times spoken of as dogs that needed to be kept “on a leash”. Socialising was portrayed as split along gender lines with the young men’s interests being with their cars and drinking and their girlfriends’ interests elsewhere. While some men within this group were able to represent differences with their girlfriends as more influential than the hard time given to him by his mates for failing to show at a drinking session there were concerning indicators of the extent of pressure placed on men within this group to stay loyal to the drinking group. Alcohol advertising that disparages a man’s girlfriend promotes the binge drinking mates’ culture by trivialising intimacy. Intimacy has been described as protecting people from alcohol related problems (Adams, 2007). Alcohol was described by some young men as killing a relationship.

Language associated with the gangster culture also emerged from the texts of the young men. Within these gangster cultures competition was portrayed as for territory or status and status was gained by having a reputation through fear. A reputation could be gained by doing risky or frightening things. Within this culture girlfriends were portrayed as having little choice but to go along with the gangster world: control of them within this culture was portrayed as complete. Some young men described the women that associated with these gangs as “hood rats” capturing the territory association with *neighbourhood* and the gangster association with the American word for gang member, *hood*. Hood rats were described as sluts who provided sex on demand. Some participants described girls as having a strong influence on whether young men entered the gangster world: young women’s reactions to a man’s violence could either promote his movement towards more violence or discourage it. This gangster culture was described as influenced by the media representations of bad being good within gangster music videos, on TV and in movies.

Equality in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships was less well articulated by the young men than was control. Some young men were able to describe certain practices of equality including democracy involving shared decision making, compromising, sharing

chores and discipline of children, and trust. Young men described obstacles to equality including traditional ideas about male dominance in relationships and the status of men, consumer notions of self-sufficiency that promoted men needing no-one except themselves, the temptation to allow male dominance that comes with being in a privileged position, having to compromise and the lack of a firmly formed identity. Other obstacles described included government policy that did not include education about intimacy alongside sexual education, government policy that did not promote equity through combined parental leave, and the work culture that did not promote family life.

These findings suggest that there is substantial room for work with young men on developing gendered notions of democratic or ethical relationships (Carmody, 2009; Senn, 2009) or relationships that are thoughtful about gender influences (Senn, 2009). Promoting respectful gender relationships through young men's contemporary cultures is likely to protect young men from using domestic violence towards women (WHO, 2008).

## The limits of the Report

Funding provided a number of limits to this study. A literature review was not funded and therefore the introduction is limited. There was only sufficient funding to resource the principal researcher and while I worked alongside excellent men familiar with the communities the analysis was limited by the time and resources available for greater research assistance. This means that the interpretations here are largely those of a Pakeha, middle-aged woman, albeit well informed by the participants and assisted by Brian Gardner, David Neilson and Ala'imalo Lua Maynard. More time and resources would have allowed more layers of meanings, ambiguities and subtleties to be captured in the analysis through, for example, the greater research assistance of a male and of a Pasifika researcher.

The participants came from diverse backgrounds and this is a strength of the study given that much of the research on young people of this age group is conducted with college or university students. There were a number of limits to the range of participants included in the study all the same. Young Māori men were not included in this study as a separate Kaupapa Māori project was to be funded for Māori youth on this topic. The findings of this study were drawn from New Zealanders of European and Pacific Island

descent, particularly of Samoan ethnicity. While Pasifika peoples are commonly spoken of as if they represent a single ethnic identity there are many different ethnic identities associated with these islands. In New Zealand Samoans represent the largest group of Pacific Islanders but others come from the Cook Islands, Tonga and Niue, for example, each with different cultural practices. While attempts were made to recruit young Asian men there were difficulties getting these young men together to attend a group. Recruitment of these groups was attempted through tertiary institutions but the times that these young men were free of exams or study was also the times when they were not readily accessible, some going home to family overseas and others involved in family activities or working out of the Auckland region. "Asian" refers to wide and diverse ethnic groups and it is appropriate that a separate study of young Indian, Chinese and Korean men is conducted by researchers of these ethnicities.

## 7. Recommendations

### Youth Culture

1. That the prevention of youth boyfriend/girlfriend violence is recognised as a priority for the prevention of men's domestic violence towards women by ACC, MSD, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Pacific Affairs.
  - a. That gender transformative strategies are developed that address the social and cultural influences that work to promote masculinities that privilege the dominance of women by men, which is contrary to the prevention of men's domestic violence towards women.
  - b. That these gender transformative approaches promote those masculinities that value women and that privilege equal and ethical or fair relationships.
  - c. That an implementation plan be developed alongside these strategies.

#### *Justification*

This research project identified certain practices of control and certain discourses associated with being cool and being 'the man' which privileged men's dominance of women and men's denigration and disparaging of women. Certain representation of men that privilege male dominance and control of women have been associated with men's domestic violence towards women. Discourses that privilege male dominance and that identify women as a ho, a dog or a hood rat work to denigrate and degrade women and run counter to the values that are required for the prevention of men's domestic violence towards women. These discourses emerge from conversations young men have with each other and from media representations of what it is to be a man and the ways women are represented in music videos and other media. The prevention of such violence will require work on gender equity, on ethical and just relationships and on the social and cultural influences that inform gender representations. International research indicates that gender transformative approaches have been found to be effective in the prevention of gender-based violence.

2. That the Ministry of Social Development open up the 'It's Not Okay' campaign to young people and work towards the prevention of domestic violence by getting in early with young people.

#### *Justification*

This research project demonstrates that young men are working on the development of their masculine identities during their formative young adult years and that the masculinities with which they identify will impact on the ways they value women and their practices towards women. Those attitudes and values associated with traditional male dominance of women have been associated with men's domestic violence towards women. The 'It's not okay' campaign has not targeted young adults to date, yet much domestic violence occurs in the younger age groups. A gender transformative population-based approach that focuses on these age groups is likely to have more impact on young people as they are forming their identities and their gender practices and is likely to be more effective than one that is trying to shift already established masculine identities and practices.

### Binge Drinking Culture

3. That more funding is provided by ACC, MSD and the Ministry of Health to address the binge drinking culture and men's dominance and control of women, and the associated alcohol industry practices that encourage young people to use alcohol and do 'stupid things' and that discourage young men from intimacy with young women through the diminishing of young women.

#### *Justification*

The young men who identified as associating themselves with the binge drinking culture, within culture of cool discourses, and who identified this culture with doing stupid things, spoke of women in most concerning ways; speaking of them as dogs and privileging male dominance of them. Male dominance in this context appeared to be associated with maintaining the mates' drinking culture. Some alcohol advertising appears to promote



men's drinking by diminishing women and working against men's intimacy with women – intimacy has been found to protect against problem-drinking. These representations of women and young men's relationships with women promote the values that are conducive to men's domestic violence towards women. More funding needs to be available to work to counter binge drinking and the cultural influences that support it among young people and more needs to be done to counter the associated values that denigrate women and promote men's control of women. There are likely to be cross-benefits to such an approach, for example, on the associated boy-racer culture and car crash injuries and on the associated health impact of binge-drinking on the health of young men and young women.

## Gangster Culture

4. That more funding is provided to New Zealand youth arts and culture in order to counter the American gangster music video culture (the bitches, hos and pimps music videos) that has become a dominant influence in some young men's cultures. This influence promotes "bad is good" and promotes misogynistic representations of young women.

### *Justification*

The gangster culture was identified in this research as one that provided status to men through fear and that promoted competition for fear. Within this culture young women were "nothing", were described as "hood rats" who were largely available only for their sex and were described as having little control over their lives. Young women in the study that informed this research spoke of the bitches and hos music videos as representing women as only available for their sex. The music lyrics and videos that represent "bad as good" and that privilege the gangster image as cool for young men are largely imported from overseas. The misogynistic images of young women in these videos and lyrics at times actively promote violence towards women. A much stronger New Zealand youth arts and culture presence would prevent such overseas gangster influences, which promote misogynistic representations of women, from filling a void in New Zealand youth culture.

## Accessing young people

5. That the Ministries of Social Development and Health and others associated with the prevention of violence provide funding towards workforce development of those who engage in health promotion and social and community development with a view to integrating the promotion of young people's emotionally healthy, ethical and democratic relationships *with* the promotion of healthy lifestyle decisions associated with sexual practices, masculine identities and use of alcohol and other drugs.

### *Justification:*

This research is ground breaking in that very little research has been conducted on young men from the general population, not selected as a clinical population, and on the social and cultural influences that support men's domestic violence towards women. The findings from this research can be employed by health promotion workers and social and community development workers who are familiar with ways to work with population based interventions, but the workforce must be available for effectiveness. The findings in this research identify similar issues associated with masculinity and dominance practices to those that provide the cultural supports for sexual violence, and to the associated issues with alcohol and gang cultural influences. Funding for workforce development of those involved in health promotion and social and community development will allow these workers to develop population-based interventions designed to address the social and cultural supports for such violence and associated practices thereby limiting harmful practices across associated sectors.

6. That trainee teachers and youth practitioners in health and youth development are educated about the ways social and cultural influences can impact on young men's ideas about control in relationships and alternative egalitarian relationships. That teacher trainees and youth practitioners are made aware of the impact of young men's ideas about being cool and being a man on their

relationships with girls and on the potential for controlling practices. That they are informed about the association between these practices and the potential for the denigration of young women through the construction of them as hos as well as the potential for positive constructions of women through egalitarian practices.

- a. That the Ministry of Education and other ministries associated with the prevention of domestic violence work on the ways critical reflections on young people's contemporary culture, in relation to gender and the associated prevention of domestic violence, can be incorporated within the existing education curriculum activities.
- b. That Ministries of Social Development, Health, Youth Development and Education engage young people in population based approaches to the prevention of boyfriend/girlfriend violence through approaches designed to inform and involve young people in prevention.
- c. That the Ministries provide funding to youth organisations such as the NZ University Students Association to allow this organisation to further disseminate the findings of this research to young people through student radio or other ways that will reach large populations of young people.
- d. That real people with relevant life experiences are made available to young men to act as mentors and to provide leadership to counter the media representations that promote "Bad is Good" and that promote the Hugh Hefner lifestyle as the ideal lifestyle for young men.
- e. That youth workers are readily available to young men to allow them to talk about their concerns, especially following relationship breakups, and to counter the lack of trust that exist among many young men's mates groups.
- f. That health promoters and others work with young men to promote trusting relationships that allow young men to be vulnerable with other

young men without fear of repercussions or damage to their status amongst men.

- g. That funding is provided for a Pasifika reading of this research that allows this research to be translated into resources that can be used by the Pasifika health promotion workforce for their work on the prevention of violence and alcohol misuse.
- h. That funding is provided for the translation of this research on young people and their relationships into resources for social and community workers and other health promotion workers.

#### *Justification*

Effective use of this research will require it to be translated into effective strategies for action that are accessible to young people. Alongside the social and community development workforce and the health promotion workforce the education sector has a valued part to play in prevention activities as it has ready access to young people through schools. Resources that summarize these research findings will need to be developed for this workforce. This research was strongly supported by the Pasifika community and resources developed for this community will ensure that the information is accessible to this community. Engaging young people themselves in prevention activities will ensure that the prevention activities meet their needs, that the messages are effectively targeted and that they reach their audience. Many of the recommendations here emerged from the focus group discussions with the young men as some ways to access young men effectively, especially when talking about such issues may not be safe with their existing peer groups.

## Future Research

7. That further research is conducted on the ways in which to get in early with young people and effectively reduce men's domestic violence towards women.
  - a. That a fully funded Māori youth research project be funded by ACC on youth aged 18 to 25 aimed at identifying the social and cultural influences that might stand in the way of the prevention of domestic violence and those that might effectively work to counter those influences.
  - b. That ACC and the MOH provide more funding for more research on the relationship between the binge-drinking culture, alcohol advertising and young people's intimate relationships, the ways women are constructed within these cultures and the potential impact on boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.
  - c. That ACC and the MOH provide funding for research to exam more fully the harmful effects of alcohol and the binge drinking culture on the intimate relationships of young men and women.
  - d. That more research is conducted on young men and the impact of the gangster culture on heightened ideas about masculinity, toughness and status, and the impact on young men's intimate relationships with women and on the impact on women and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. That more research is conducted on competition, within this culture, for reputation and status through fear and the associated impact on intimate relationships with women.
  - e. That a fully funded Asian youth research project be conducted to complement the findings in this project on Pakeha and Pacific youth.

### *Justification*

A research project such as this often opens up more questions that require further research. As described in the conclusions there were limitations in this research that require attention. In particular a fully funded kaupapa Māori research project on young people of this age group is required. Māori have a significantly different cultural history from those of European ethnicity and their position as indigenous peoples, within a colonising context, may well provide different cultural influences from those described here. Māori are disproportionately affected by domestic violence. There is a need for more research to determine whether population-based interventions with tamariki are potentially useful. This research project did not include Asian young people and there is potential for more research with these young people to determine the cultural and social influences that might work to prevent domestic violence with these young people.

This research project found two cultural influences that are likely to impact on violence towards women: the binge-drinking culture and the gangster culture. More research is required on these cultures and the associated influences that promote binge drinking, gangster practices and the associated controlling practices towards girlfriends and denigration of women. The ways in which ideas about masculine identities, and how these are exploited by vested interests associated with consumer items such as alcohol and youth music in ways that impact on gender-based violence, needs further investigation.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A.

### Information and Consent Form

#### Exploring ownership issues in youth relationships – Young men Participant Information Sheet<sup>4</sup>

*Principal Investigator:* Dr Alison Towns, PhD Dip Clin Psych, Tel: 021 846 939,  
Freephone 0800 021 934, e-mail: [atowns@pl.net](mailto:atowns@pl.net)

#### Request for Participation

Hi. You are invited to take part in a research study on young men's ideas about equality, control and power in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. This study will help develop education programmes on healthy relationships.

#### Description of the Study

The main aim of the study is to discuss with 30 young men their ideas about equal relationships where the boyfriend and girlfriend share decisions and about control and power in relationships. We are very interested in their ideas about the social and cultural influences that support equal relationships and those that support control in relationships. We are also interested in the obstacles to young men having equal relationships with girlfriends and what young men consider would be useful for preventing problems associated with controlling behaviours in relationships.

Potential participants in the study will be young men who are between the ages of 18 and 25 years and are fluent in English. You have been invited to participate in the study because you meet the requirements for this study.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will take part in one two hour focus group discussion with up to four other young men. The discussion will involve questions about equality and about control and power in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. The focus group discussion will be arranged at a time which suits you and at a suitable place for the purpose. The interview will be audio-recorded, and the recording will be transcribed into a typed text. The data collected will be stored securely in the office of Mt Albert Psychological Services Ltd.

#### Benefits, risks and safety

You may find the chance to talk about equality, control and power in relationships stimulating and interesting. You may be pleased to contribute to education programmes on healthy relationships. You will receive a \$20.00 petrol voucher for your costs. The discussion may,

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<sup>4</sup> Participant Information Sheet, Version 3, 15-8-08

however, touch on issues that you find distressing. You will be offered information about local support services at the end of the focus group discussion and the researcher will be able to talk to you about these. For free help you can phone LIFELINE Auckland 522 2999 or 0800 111 777.

### Protection

In the unlikely event that matters arise which concern your immediate or imminent safety or that of anyone else the researchers will immediately take action to ensure the safety of all concerned. If you are at immediate risk of suicide or self harm we will, in consultation with you, refer you to the mental health crisis team.

### Participation

Taking part in the study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study and you can say no without giving a reason. You can take a week to consider your participation. If you would like to participate, please contact Dr Alison Towns to arrange a time to meet.

If you do agree to take part you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and this will in no way affect your future care or any future relationships with Mt Albert Psychological Services or associated agencies. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, and, if you choose not to take part this will not affect any future relationships or care or treatment with the Mt Albert Psychological Services Ltd or its associates.

More information is available from the Dr Alison Towns (see above).

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study you can contact an independent health and disability advocate. This is a free service provided under the health and Disability Commissioner Act.

Telephone: (NZ wide) 0800 555 050

Free Fax (NZ wide) 0800 2787 7678 (0800 2 SUPPORT)

Email (NZ wide): [advocacy@hdc.org.nz](mailto:advocacy@hdc.org.nz)

### Anonymity and confidentiality

No material which could personally identify you will be used in any reports on this study. To protect your identity, an alternative name will be used on the transcripts and when referring to information from your interview. The interviews will be transcribed by a clerical assistant who is bound by this signed confidentiality agreement. The funder, Accident Compensation Commission, has the right to audit records associated with this research. All records and transcriptions will be stored securely so that all details and information given during the study will be kept confidential. Audio-recordings will be destroyed on completion of the transcriptions. While confidentiality will be encouraged in focus group discussions it cannot be guaranteed. In the unlikely event of an imminent and immediate safety issue arising confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

### Results

You will be given a summary of the results and a copy of the report. The results of the research will be written into a report and published on the Family Violence Clearinghouse website. This report will then be further written into an article for publication in an appropriate academic journal. Information from this study may also be used in seminar and conference presentations. Please note that there will be a delay between data collection and publication of results.

The study has received ethical approval from the Northern X and the Northern Y Regional Ethics Committees.  
Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any questions about this study.

<sup>1</sup> Participant Information Sheet, Version 3, 15/8/08

## CONSENT FORM<sup>5</sup>

### Exploring ownership issues in youth relationships – Young men

- I have read and I understand the Information Sheet dated 17 July 2008 for volunteers taking part in the study: Exploring ownership issues in youth relationships – Young men
- I have had the opportunity to discuss the project with the researcher and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.
- I have had the opportunity to use whānau support or a friend to help me ask questions and understand the study.
- I understand that taking part in this project is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that this will in no way affect my future health care or my relationship with the Mt Albert Psychological Services or its associates.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material which could identify me will be used in any reports on this study.
- I understand that no identifiable information about me will be accessible to persons other than the researcher and the transcriber.
- I understand that my participation will be stopped if it appears harmful to me.
- I also understand that confidentiality will not be guaranteed in the unlikely event of any imminent and immediate safety concerns.
- **I am aware that the exception to confidentiality will be if the interviewer has significant concerns about the safety of myself or others.**
- I also understand that the research data will be stored securely at the premises of the Mt Albert Psychological Services Ltd.
- I know who to contact if I am distressed by the study.
- I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study.
- I understand that I can have access to the finished research report.
- **I have had enough time to consider whether I want to take part in the research.**

**I agree to an approved auditor appointed by either the funder, the ethics committee, or the regulatory authority or their approved representative, and approved by the**

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<sup>5</sup> Consent Form, Version 3, 15/8/08

**Northern X Regional Ethics Committee reviewing my relevant records for the sole purposes of checking the accuracy of the information recorded for the study.**

**I give consent to my interview being audio recorded**

**YES/NO**

**I wish to receive a copy of the results**

**YES/NO**

I \_\_\_\_\_ [full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Project explained by \_\_\_\_\_

Project Role \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

date \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers: Dr Alison Towns, Tel: 021 846 939; 0800 021 934  
Hazel Scott, Tel: 360 4933, 021 189 4691

The participant should retain a copy of this consent form.

The study has received ethical approval from the Northern X and the Northern Y Regional Ethics Committees.

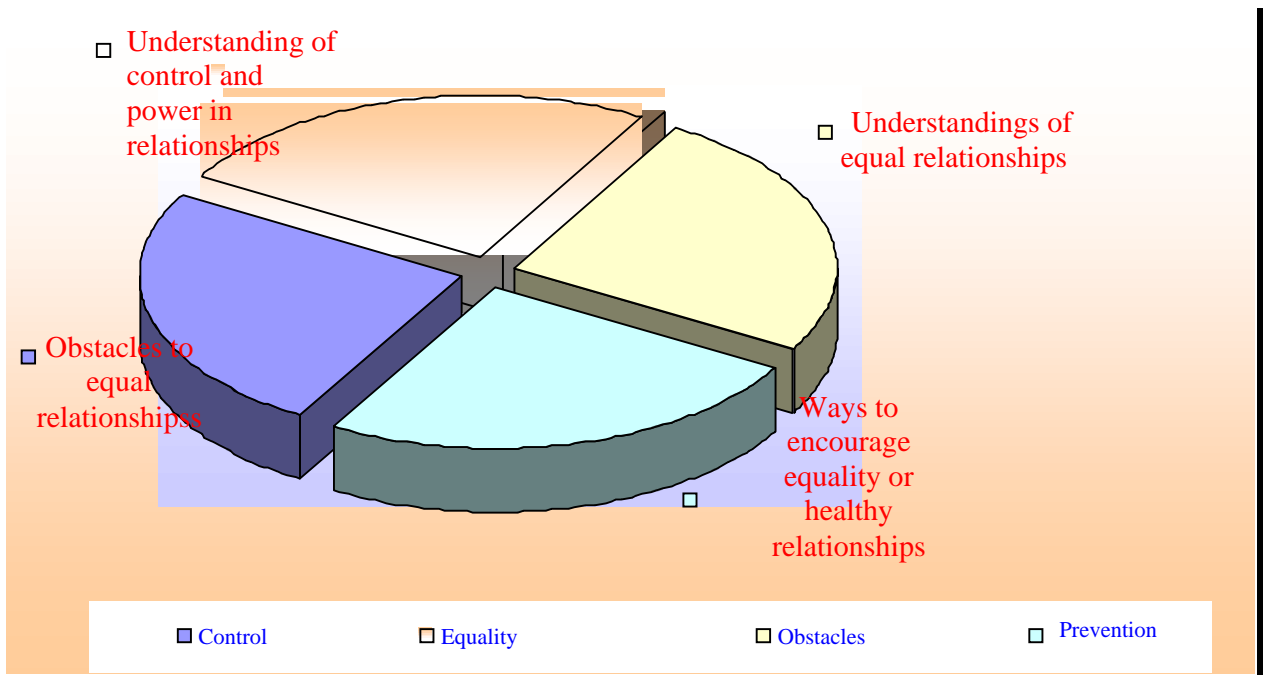
Consent Form, Version 3, 15/8/08

## Appendix B

### Exploring ownership issues in youth relationships – Young men<sup>6</sup>

This study is designed to determine how young men make sense of control and power in relationships with girlfriends. The research project will inform the development of programmes with young people aimed at building healthy relationships.

The focus groups discussions will be semi-structured around questions relating to ownership. Questions will begin open ended and become more targeted. They will be loosely structured around the following areas:



Meanings and understandings will weave throughout the study

UNDERSTANDINGS OF CONTROL

<sup>6</sup> Version 1 21/5/08



- i. A guy wants to watch his favourite sports team, his girlfriends wants to spend time with her friends. They want to be together. Who do you think would have the final decision about what they do together?
- ii. Who do you think should have control over decisions in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship?
- iii. How would you identify that someone has more power or control in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship?
- iv. Do you think a guy should have control over what his girlfriend wears?
- v. Do you think a guy should have control over when she meets her friends? Her male friends?
- vi. Where do you think ideas about control and power in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships come from?
- vii. Do you think there are social or cultural influences that have contributed to ideas of power and control in relationships? Can you describe any of these?
- viii. Do any of these produce a sense of ownership in relationships? That his girlfriend belongs to him?
- ix. Can you describe the language that supports these social or cultural influences?
- x. Are there particular practices young men and women are expected to engage in that contribute to ideas of who should be in control in relationships? Can you describe any of these?
- xi. What social or cultural pressures are placed on young men to engage in these practices?
- xii. What is the language used to pressure young men into engaging in such practices?
- xiii. Do you think there are social pressures on young women to allow boyfriends to be in charge? What are these?
- xiv. Are their institutional practices that support ideas of control and power in relationships?
- xv. What do you think is the impact of differences in power and control on a boyfriend and girlfriend relationship?

## UNDERSTANDINGS OF EQUALITY

- i. What is your understanding of equality in a relationship with a girlfriend?
- ii. How would equality show in the things a boyfriend did with his girlfriend?
- iii. Are there social and cultural influences towards equality in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships? What are these?
- iv. Are there institutional practices that support equality in relationships? What are these?
- v. Is there a language used to support equality in relationships for young men? What is this?

## OBSTACLES TO EQUALITY

- i. What obstacles do young men come up against when they try to have equal relationships with young women?
- ii. Are there obstacles from other young men? Are there obstacles from older men?
- iii. Do you think most young men want equal relationships? Why? Why not?
- iv. Are these obstacles to equality brought about by social and cultural influences? What are they?
- v. Is there a language associated with these obstacles?
- vi. Do you think our institutions recognise these obstacles for young men?
- vii. How do you think young men should navigate their way through these obstacles towards equality?

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION

- i. What do you think out to be done to assist young men and women to have equal or healthy relationships?
- ii. What do you think could be done to assist young men to address social and cultural values and beliefs that stand in the way of healthy relationships?
- iii. Are there ways that we talk of control or power or ownership in relationships that could be different?

- iv. How could these ideas for change be supported by institutional practices?

Thank you so much for your participation.