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The Social Construction of Femininities in a Rural New Zealand Community

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Abstract

In considering gender and sexuality in rural geography, the focus has frequently been on women in the family farm unit, masculinity as a rural gender identity, and homosexual and lesbian experiences of rural space. Little research has considered the creation of rural femininities within rural communities and the heteronormativity of rural space. This dissertation explores the construction of feminine identities in a rural South Otago community. It draws on feminist and poststructural perspectives recognising identities as diverse and socially constructed. Rurality, as a discursive construct that helps to create women's identities and experiences, is considered, in association with the construction of femininities through discourse and performance.

Data was collected using one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions and field observations. An analysis of the data led to three key femininities, and two overlays that influence the femininities, being documented. These are discussed in relation to how they are constructed, reinforced, and negotiated, through discourse and performance. Spatial variations in performance of identities are considered, as well as discursive constructs that continue to create space as gendered, reinforcing hegemonic femininity.
Figure 1: Welcome Sign at Northern Entrance to Owaka

Source: Personal Collection - January 2007
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Chapter 1:

Introduction

In New Zealand the number of women working outside of the home has increased steadily since World War II. This change, along with a growing awareness of feminist issues, has seen changes to gender relations, and gender identities within New Zealand society. Although the notion of the 'good woman' at home was initially part of middle class ideology, it has been influential in the construction of a New Zealand feminine identity (Park 1991). Women are expected to be responsible and put other people first, although not all women fit this imposed identity (Park 1991). The influence of second wave feminism, which began in the 1960s in New Zealand, sought to create greater choice, and equity, for women in New Zealand.

The rural, as a specific imagined space, has influenced the construction of particular gender identities (Bell 1993, Davidoff et al. 1976, Hughes 1997, Little and Austin 1996). Images of rurality are constantly created and recreated through popular discourse. In this way meanings are shared, often reflecting dominant power relations. The concept of the rural idyll influences the way gender identities are perceived. A dominant image of New Zealand is that of a 'clean, green' and rural country, and this romanticism of the rural continues to provide an image of happy, healthy rural life. In the nineteenth century the idealisation of rural life became associated with the idealisation of home and family (Stebbing 1984). Little and Austin (1996) argue that belief in the naturalness of gender roles, is central to the creation of gender relations in rural communities; the rural idyll shapes gender relations as it incorporates expectations of gender behaviour (Little and Austin 1996). Femininity is aligned with the family and community; masculinity with the outdoors and the physicality needed for work in tough conditions. Traditional gender identities are continually reinforced, in part with the rural idyll as an explanatory factor. Masculine roles are strong and dominant, enabling the reinforcement of power, and constraints on women can be felt.
more strongly in rural areas. As a conservative space change is less likely to occur, and the changes that do occur are negotiated differently.

Changes to women’s standing in the community that are evident in urban areas have been slower to occur in rural communities. This study seeks to look at one aspect of gender as it is negotiated in a small New Zealand country community, specifically how femininity is created, reinforced and performed. In so doing it will consider dominant discourses of femininity. Are these discourses defined by men, the community or women themselves? Are the recreations of identity overt or subtle and are the identities uniformly expressed over time, and over space?

Rural restructuring has changed the structure of rural New Zealand, but the rural imaginary is still strong, and influential (Bell 1993). Although romanticised views of rural life influence the perception of New Zealand as a whole, the practice of the ‘cult of domesticity’ is stronger in rural space than in urban areas. Women in rural communities are still perceived to be the good woman at home, and helping within the community, as well as on the family farm (Hughes 1997). Conventionally, rural women have been associated with the reproductive sphere of the household (Little 2002). An image of rural women as caring and nurturing, as well as capable, is held by urban and rural communities alike (Bell 1993). How this is reinforced is considered in this research as well as how change affects the everyday experiences, and the discourses that construct gender identities in rural New Zealand.

Little (forthcoming) suggests that rural imagery creates women as responsible, nurturing and natural, and the construction of masculinity and femininity in rural communities is bound to traditional associations between sexuality, nature and environment. Maintenance of traditional values in rural society, and a sense of belonging, are fostered in the rural community. The natural surveillance that occurs in a small community is a powerful disciplinary tactic that ensures the continuing and unchanging reproduction of understandings of rural nature that inform dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, i.e. masculine controls nature whereas feminine is part of nature (Little forthcoming). Rural women are perceived as able to care for the house, stray lambs – and cook for the shearers. Therefore, rural femininity
is giving, caring and strong, stable, down-to-earth. But how is this feminine identity recreated in practice, and what role do women play in the creation of it?

This research used the themes of gender, sexuality and rural geography to consider the construction of femininity in rural South Otago; how it is created, reinforced and performed. These themes are discussed in section 1.1. Section 1.2 discusses the research questions and aims, with the scope and methodology of the research considered in section 1.3. Finally the organisation of the dissertation is noted in section 1.4.

1.1 Gender and Rural Geography

In the last 50 years the influence of feminism has increased the interest in gender within geography. The feminist movement of the 1960s brought to the fore women’s everyday experiences. This began by putting women into the landscape, and into geography as a discipline. This was followed by consideration of not just the tasks, but the power relations that continue to produce and naturalise the beliefs. More recently the importance of gender and sexuality in the construction of identities has been considered (Panelli 2004).

In geography gender differences have been recorded since the 1970s (Panelli 2004). Critical theory later came to explain the disadvantages experienced by women through gender relations, by considering the uneven power relations (in particular patriarchy), according to the current ideas about each gender. More recently gender identities have been under consideration, both as social constructs and having dominant and other forms. The consideration of gender identities has expanded to include sexual identities.

In rural geography the research on women’s lives has grown, with much attention being given to women’s work on family farms. Traditional roles of rural women are now being challenged and women’s work is becoming more visible. Along with this increased visibility is the desire to explain the gender relations that occur and often disempower women. More recently, rural geographies consider the construction of gender identities. Cultural constructions of the countryside assist the reinforcement of sets of ideas about rural gender identities (Little 2002).
Due to the interconnections in conceptualisation of gender and sexuality they are often considered together (Barnes 2000, Brickell 2006). Earlier work on sexuality in geography looked at difference (Bell and Valentine 1995), but now heterosexuality is also being considered. However, this is often from the masculine viewpoint, of the farmer searching for a wife (Little forthcoming).

Research on rural marginalisation has begun to show a sensitivity to difference, an awareness of the danger of seeing rural women as a single category, to acknowledge difference within the rural community (Little 2002)

That identities are discursively constructed, and that situations and places have multiple meanings is an important change in theory for geography (Whatmore 1993). Through discourse and performance identities can be created, reinforced, and contested. Masculinity has been considered, as has the role of women on the farm, but there has been little work on the construction of femininity, especially in rural communities in New Zealand. Campbell’s (2000) discussion on the discursive construct of masculinity within a rural community raised questions for me about the construction of rural femininity. What part do women play in constructing femininity, what are the femininities and how are they performed? Through performance is a femininity reinforced or does contestation of the hegemonic femininity occur? Is control subtle or overt within a community? What role do women have in maintaining community, and in so doing, maintaining traditional feminine identities?

Previous work in rural geography has employed a number of different methodologies and epistemologies to investigate gender issues (Bock 2006, Little 2002, Little and Panelli 2003, Phillips 1998, Shortall 2006, Whatmore 1993). Investigations into gender in rural geography have focused predominantly on women’s experience of gender roles, gender power relations and gender identity (Little 2002) within studies of community, work, environment and sexuality (Little and Panelli 2003). Research on rural communities as well as work on sexuality informs this dissertation. Drawing on the literature on gender, rural geography and identity, this dissertation considers how this has informed research in the area.
This work is based on previous studies in the United Kingdom and Australia that have focused on gender relations and identities (Little 2002, Little and Panelli 2003). A key feature of these studies is the discursive construction of gender identities and performativity of femininity. The work of Butler (1999), Gregson and Rose (2000) and Nash (2000) is used as a basis for the research, to reveal how construction is created through everyday performances, as well as documenting how gender identity is socially constructed, created and learned.

1.2 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this dissertation is to address two research questions on the construction of femininity in a rural community.

1. What key forms of femininity are recognisable in Owaka?
2. How and where are these feminine identities performed in Owaka?

The first seeks to establish what the key feminine identities in the community are. This includes consideration of the extent to which some identities are dominant and others subordinate (Jackson 1992). How, and where, particular femininities are performed is examined by way of the second research question, by observing the actions of women, their performances of femininities and the materialities used to reinforce their performance and embodiment of femininity. The study considers how femininities are constructed by discourse and performance by the community, and the role institutions play in this construction, employing the following propositions as a question frame: Butler (1999) argues that gender and sexual identities are social constructs, diverse and multiple; Gregson and Rose (2000) argue that identities are performed, and also include the relevance of space to this process; Stebbing (1984) argues that the femininities are purposefully maintained and reinforced through the performance of local women; Little’s recent research considers that rural space is often perceived as heterosexual (Little 2003; Little 2006; Little forthcoming) which suggest consideration of how heteronormativity is included in the construction and performance of feminine identities in the South Otago community.

In New Zealand Campbell (2000) has discussed the performance of rural masculinity observed in a pub in rural Canterbury, and noted that it is defined by what it is not – it
is not feminine. This discursive construction is reinforced through performance of the hegemonic masculinity in the pub. Leyshon (2005) in England, Campbell and Phillips (1995) in Australia, and Campbell (2000) in New Zealand have all discussed the reinforcement of hegemonic gender identities, roles and relationships, focusing mainly on a masculinity. The present research, in contrast, has sought to document the reinforcement of hegemonic practices as they engage femininity.

1.3 Scope and Methodology of the Study

This dissertation follows recent trends in the literature by adopting poststructural and feminist approaches. Little (2002) notes a feminist perspective is important as feminist theory prioritises gender relations, ‘seeking to understand the nature of gender difference and the production and operation of gender inequality’ (Little 2002, p.18). Poststructural research builds meanings from the premise that discourses construct realities and the performance of gender identity is part of the discourse of identities (Butler 1999; Gregson and Rose 2000).

Figure 2: Location of the Study Area
A case study approach has been used to consider the feminine identities in a specific place. The region of the research is Owaka, a small rural community in South Otago, New Zealand (figure 2).

Owaka is situated on the Southern Scenic Route, a road that traverses some of the scenic reserves from Dunedin to Invercargill. This has led to some tourism in the area. Backpacker hostels, bed and breakfasts, internet cafes and a significant Department of Conservation Information Centre reflect changes this new economic focus has brought to the community. Yet primary industry, mainly sheep and cattle pastoralism, still dominates the local economy. There is an area school teaching years 1-13, Playcentre, doctor, pharmacist, large church community, grocery store, golf club, garage, motels, veterinarian, police station, museum and craft shop. Pragmatic reasons influenced the choice of site, including prior knowledge of the district and proximity to Dunedin.

This is an heuristic research project, aiding learning and knowledge by investigation. As Campbell (2000) and Leyshon (2005) each looked at masculinity in the local pub, participant observation was undertaken in the Catlins Inn, Owaka. Observation was also undertaken in the main streets, together with interviews, and focus groups with female members of the Senior Citizens Group, Playcentre parents, and an informal Craft Group.

1.4 Organisation of Discussion

This dissertation is set out in six chapters, including this Introduction. Chapter 2 discusses the literature that has informed this research, and critiques some of the prevailing research, stressing the need to acknowledge the contextuality of research. The concept of the rural idyll, as an influence on the identity and performance of identity (Bell 1993, Little and Austin 1996, Gregson and Rose 2000), is examined.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology for the research. It considers how the data collection process draws on Pini’s work on feminist methodology, taking into account the difficulties with facilitation into the community described by Bennett (2000) Campbell (1993) and Pini (2002, 2003a, 2004). Positionality is important
when going into fieldwork (Pini 2004) and in this section I also discuss my own positionality. Chapter 3 also introduces the region of study, placing the study in context.

Chapter 4 addresses the first research question, describing the key femininities in Owaka. Chapter 5 considers how these femininities are performed and, through performance, are recreated, reinforced and contested. Spatialities are considered through where the performances of femininities occur.

Finally Chapter 6, the conclusion, draws together the findings on the construction of heteronormative femininity in Owaka, and highlights the importance of this work to future academic research and a further understanding of the lived experiences of rural women, documenting the heterogeneity of women in New Zealand.
Chapter 2:

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

To support the study of gender identity, this chapter reviews key elements of relevant theory currently employed in social science relevant to this study. Drawing on geographic, sociological and philosophical writings over the past three decades, predominantly from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, this chapter considers how notions of gender, identity, and rural society can inform this research. The aim is to identify previous approaches and to document the relevance of these perspectives when considering the construction of femininity in a rural community.

This chapter considers recent academic literature relating to four debates in gender and rural geography: geography and gender analysis; theories and geographies of gender and sexuality; rural geographies and the emergence of gender analysis; and recent rural approaches to gender and sexuality. It then suggests how their findings inform the present research.

2.2 Geography and Gender

Jackson (1992) states that gender and sexuality are rarely regarded as central to human geography. He argues that changing ideas about gender and sexuality represent a fundamental social change, forcing a recognition that the distinction between public and private is not fixed, but socially constructed (Jackson 1992). Within geography, gender studies have evolved from feminist geography and began initially by putting women into the picture, acknowledging women, where previous studies had concentrated on men. This involved 'mapping and analysing uneven spatial patterns and conditions' (Panelli 2004, p.65) describing the roles that are ascribed by gender. Gender roles involved static assumptions about male and female characteristics.
Gender roles were considered, yet through gender roles gender relations are formed, and recreated (Bowlby et al. (1986) cited in Little 2002 and Panelli 2004). Gender relations consider the social processes that ensure male power over women (Panelli 2004). Accordingly, drawing on Marxist theory, power relations were analysed through explanations of inequality. However, gender relations are also influenced by social, economic, cultural and political aspects of place (Little 2002). These more individual experiences of gender, including diversity and difference within genders, revolve round the notion of gender identity (Little 2002). The interest in gender identity has followed feminist approaches, influencing geographical theory. How gender and sexual identities are currently considered in rural geography is the subject of section 2.5, but firstly contemporary theories of gender and sexuality are discussed in section 2.3.

2.3 Contemporary Theories and Geographies of Gender and Sexuality

The terms gender and sexuality are frequently combined within lay discourse. However, gender is a socially constructed concept that indicates difference between men and women in terms of femininity and masculinity, i.e. not involving biological characteristics (Panelli 2004). Gender involves 'the social relations within which individuals and groups act' (Connell 2002, p.9).

Often sexuality has been considered in conjunction with gender due to theoretical links (Valentine 2000) and because 'these two spheres of social life are inextricably intertwined' (Brickell 2006, p.106). Sexuality was earlier thought of as sexual behaviour and practices; now, however, it is considered a heterogeneous category based on behaviour and identity (Panelli 2004). Research previously considered 'deviance', for example, prostitution and homosexuality (Jackson 1992). More recently, studies have considered the use of space, the oppression of, and expression of, identity (Bell and Valentine 1995, Cloke and Little 1997).

2.3.1 Gender and Sexuality as Social Constructs

In recent years gender and sexuality have been widely understood as social constructs (Butler 1999, Connell 1987, 2002, Jackson 1992). 'Social construct' entails
knowledge being constructed relative to social setting, dependent on the social beliefs of a time or place (Barnes 2000). As social constructs, both gender and sexuality are created discursively within society, naturalising ideas of gender and sexuality. Jackson argues that the ‘important lesson to be drawn from the study of gender and sexuality is that neither phenomenon can be understood in isolation from the wider social context’ (Jackson 1992, p. 128).

Connell (2002, p.2) notes that ‘ideas about gender appropriate behaviour are constantly being circulated’. However, Connell stresses that they are not purely imposed from outside by social norms, but are also actively constructed by the way we conduct our everyday lives (Connell 2002). As Panelli (2004, p.244) states, ‘...masculinity and femininity are constructed notions that have both dominant and other forms’. The dominant form is able to exercise subtle control over subordinate groups that accept social constructs as ‘natural’, and can be referred to as hegemonic. Connell (2002, p.6) emphasises that conforming to hegemonic gender identities and definitions is not without personal cost as the definitions can be both ‘sources of pleasure, recognition and identity’, and ‘sources of injustice and harm’. There is a diversity of gender identities, and subordinate and subversive gender identities exist as well as a dominant, hegemonic identity.

Connell (2002, p.82) critiques the socialisation model that claims gender identities are learned and internalised, arguing that this ‘fails to address agency and ability to contest identity, or the heterogeneity of identities that can be learned gender projects’. Sustaining gender categories also leads to the sustaining of gender relations, and gender inequalities

According to Butler (1999) not only gender, but also sexuality, is multiple, rather than dichotomous. In a similar way to masculinities and femininities being multiple, it is possible for sexualities to be neither gay nor straight, but bisexual, or positioned along a continuum in the grey area between gay and straight (Butler 1999).

Sexuality has originally been observed through consideration of difference (Bell and Valentine 1995, Jackson 1992, Valentine 1997). However, more recent work has
begun to question the all pervasive power of a hegemonic heterosexuality (Ingraham 1999, 2005; Little 2003, forthcoming, Valentine 1993). As the dominant form of sexuality, heterosexuality is frequently defined as institutionalised, and normalised (Brickell 2005, Ingraham 1999). For Ingraham (1999), heterosexuality is an ideology, an institution, and the tradition of the romantic, white (heterosexual) wedding in popular culture is the result of effective marketing campaigns.

As with Connell’s (2002) discussion of gender, the hegemonic sexual identity disempowers some people. For young people in rural Australia there are different constructions of meanings of sex and sexuality (Hillier, Harrison and Bowditch 1995). Hillier et al. (1995) documented different experiences of sexuality dependent on gender, concluding that girls see sex as a symbol of love, whereas for boys, sex involves more physical gratification.

Jackson (1992) argued that gender and sexuality were important areas for consideration in cultural geography. The cultural and social construction of gender identities is an important element in recent work in the area of gender and rural geography, and the performance of gender identity and sexuality are interlinked with discursive constructs of femininity.

Poststructural geographical studies focus on ‘how meanings and choices surrounding sexuality [and gender] are constructed socially and spatially’ (Panelli 2004, p.113). Poststructural and queer geographies of gender and sexuality reflect the broad understandings discussed in this, and the following, section. Likewise section 2.3.2 briefly reviews more recent geographies of gender and sexuality as performance.

2.3.2 Gender and Sexuality as Performance

Gender and sexuality can be understood as co-existing, multiple, and diverse identities that are discursively produced. Some identities are dominant and others are marginalised, so a critical reading of discourse is important. But gender and sexual identities are also understood to be enacted and performed, involving embodiment, learning and action. Butler (1999) understands gender and sexuality as performative, with identities brought into existence through actions. This research aims to employ a similar approach, investigating not only a discursive construction of gender and
sexuality (in this case femininity and heterosexuality in Owaka), but also the way it is actively performed and embodied.

Spaces and places are gendered and sexualised through processes that convey meanings about gender and sexuality. Spaces affect gender and sexual identity and the way we negotiate and experience space (Panelli 2004). The negotiation of space involves the performance of identity, the potential of performance and performativity as conceptual tools for a critical human geography are considered by Gregson and Rose (2000).

Identity has been conceptualised as a product of conscious performance (Nash 2000). Therefore it is important to consider the performance, as well as the discursive construction of gender identity. Within geography, Butler’s discursive construction of gender that describes ‘discourse as multiple and contradictory but always productive’ is also utilised (Gregson and Rose 2000). Gregson and Rose (2000) argue that as well as gender being performed, as theorised by Butler, spaces need to be performative too, that is, brought into being through performance. Gregson and Rose (2000) stress the need to consider space. This research considers the construction of femininity within a rural space. A different space may produce different performance, as considered when talking about the sexuality of spaces, and the acceptable sexual practice within space (Johnston and Valentine 1995, Valentine 1993).

Hubbard (2000, p.211) states that ‘different heterosexual performances occur within different contexts of moral regulation, permission and encouragement’. Although the importance of heterosexuality in reproducing geographical order (in particular domestic space in the desire for ‘family values’) is noted by Bell and Valentine (1995), few geographers have considered how heterosexual identities are spatially constructed and negotiated (Hubbard 2000).

The spaces that identity is performed through include bodies. Embodiment of gender and sexuality has influenced work such as that by Longhurst (2000) on pregnancy. Longhurst (2000) exemplifies how ideas of femininity include meanings about bodies, and expectations on how femininity will be performed through spaces. Therefore, the social and spatial context is important for the form of sexuality performed, as some
forms of sexuality are more acceptable than others in specific spaces, or considered deviant (Hubbard 2000, Little forthcoming). Both the spaces in which gender and sexuality are enacted, and the identities performed are considered in this research.

2.4 Rural Geography and the Emergence of Gender Analysis

Rural geographical thinking has been strongly influenced by writing in the social sciences (Bock 2006; Little 2002, 2006; Little and Panelli 2003; Phillips 1998; Shortall 2006; Whatmore 1993) and, like other sub-disciplines, it reflects a number of cross-disciplinary conceptual approaches. In 1998 Phillips explored ‘the extent that rural social geographers have drawn on, or distanced themselves from, ideas of the social’ (Phillips 1998, p.123). Adjustments to rural geography have progressed from descriptive land use studies in the 1960s and 1970s, to reflect the influence of political economic perspectives in the 1980s and 1990s, through to the more recent use of poststructural approaches when researching constructions of ‘rurality’ and identity (Little 2002).

These broad theoretical changes are also reflected in the study of gender, which emerged first as a descriptive account of different roles undertaken by men and women (Stebbing 1984). Marxist theory opened up the capacity to study access to resources and services, as well as debates on fairness and equality (Panelli 2004, Phillips 1998), and political economy studies encouraged a critical paradigm committed to change, which recognised different groups and interests, and unequal power relations (Phillips 1998). This also supported the growth of socialist feminist critiques of unequal gender relations. For example Whatmore (1991, p.84) critiqued gender relations in productive and reproductive labour on farms, arguing that women lack control over their production primarily due to their ‘gendered position as wives’. More latterly, wider gender theory and poststructural approaches have encouraged a cultural reading of gender in rural societies.

2.4.1 Gender Roles

Gender role theory was commonly used in the early 1980s in relation to family farming studies. It was argued that people ‘learnt appropriate roles from adult role models and norms of behaviour which were observed, inculcated and internalised’
Role theory maintained that socialisation prepares men and women to fulfil different roles and live up to societal norms, values and expectations (Bock 2006). This contrasts with later argument by Connell (2002) that people have agency and can contest dominant roles. In the 1980s, rural gender role research was focused on women with little attention paid to men or power relations between women and men.

Work by Bouquet (1982, 1984), Davidoff et al. (1976), and Stebbing (1984) considered gender in rural society in relation to gender roles. Stebbing (1984) explored gender roles as an outcome of socially constructed definitions of reality that can vary with locality. Stebbing argued that the performance of roles is dependent on the acquisition of knowledge through socialisation. According to Stebbing (1984), women are a unifying element in society, reinforcing and reproducing preferred ideas of a rural and domestic idyll. For instance, she argued:

‘if it [Women’s Institute] reproduces an ideology which keeps women in a subordinate, domestic role it is because the women themselves want it that way in accordance with their perception of the reality of the female role.’ (Stebbing 1984, p.204)

Stebbing (1984) further argued that isolation and insulation from alternative definitions of women’s roles reinforced the hegemonic roles of women in rural society.

2.4.2 Gender Relations

In the 1980s, a Marxist influence produced a critique of modernisation, its agricultural policies, and the distinction between productive and reproductive labour. Geographers began to investigate patriarchy, and women’s subordinate positions (Little 2006, Bock 2006), and the different social conditions of genders were highlighted in analyses of the family labour processes (Whatmore 1993). A gender relations approach emerged to explain women’s inequality, arguing that the ‘experiences of women were determined … by the division of labour in the family and in rural society and that this reflected the patriarchal power of men over women’ (Little 2002, p.28). Women’s

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1 This argument by Stebbing also reinforced the continuing importance of the rural idyll as described in Davidoff et al. (1976).
actions as lynchpin for community and family, involving gender relations dependent on family and community, on sexuality as heterosexual and passive, was theorised (Little 1987, 2002, 2006). Research such as that by Little (1987), highlighted that institutionalised values and practices empower men and disempower women. Little (1987) and Hughes (1997) contend that the domestic tasks undertaken by women within rural society reinforce, and are reinforced by, aspects of dominant rural ideology. Rural ideology and space influence gender role and gender relations leading to the need to go beyond the study of gender roles – to gender relations – to explain inequalities that exist between men and women.

2.5 Recent Rural Approaches to Gender and Sexuality: Identities and Performance.

Presently, geographers' understandings of gender and sexuality as socially constructed influence recent rural studies that consider rural forms of masculine, feminine and sexual identities, and some of the spatial particularities of gender and sexuality. This section considers example of recent research in rural geography, beginning with rural identities, then considers work on embodiment.

2.5.1 Rural Identities: Masculinity, Femininity and Heteronormativity.

Analyses of rural gender have shifted from examining inequality to exploring the cultures, values and meanings underpinning gender identities (Little 2002, Little and Panelli 2003). For Whatmore (1993), identifying gender as a social construct was an important theoretical achievement as researchers no longer needed to fit women in and define them by men's perspectives. An approach using gender identities as a framework facilitates understanding of the dynamics of gender inequalities as a product of coercion and consent (Little 2006). Consequently dominant identities can be contested and transformed as well as sustained (Butler 1999, Connell 2002, Whatmore 1993).

Influential in the construction of a rural identity has been the concept of the 'rural idyll'. Davidoff et al. (1976) and Bouquet (1982, 1984) recognise this to explain the sustained naturalisation of gender roles that place women within the house and as nurturers. This theme is continued by Little and Austin (1996) and Hughes (1997)
who argue that the rural idyll influences feminine identity in rural communities (Figure 3). Landscape influences lifestyle, and within that context ideas of appropriate gender and sexual identities are formed (Little forthcoming). Gender, as a social construct, is affected by different forms of environment, notions of male husbandry, and masculine dominance and control of wilderness settings (Little 2002, 2003).

Figure 3: The Rural Idyll - Owaka.

Source: Private Collection – January 2007

(Looking east from the corner of Bell St and MacAndrew St, Owaka.)

The rural context is considered further in the way it influences gendered identities (Little forthcoming; Little and Austin 1996, Little and Leyshon 2003, Little and Panelli 2003). These perceptions of appropriate activities create an anti-idyll rurality for some (Bell 1997, Hubbard 2000). Who determines the appropriate identities is
discursively constructed through a variety of media, including community and formal institutions.

‘Discourse is a useful medium for studying how gender is socially constructed within media’ (Liepins 1998, p.371). A wide variety of research into the discursive construct of rural gender identities has been considered in recent years. Liepins (1998), Brandth (1995) Bell (1997) considered the discursive construct of rural gender identity in the media. In contrast Bennett (2005), Hughes (1997), Saugeres (2002a, 2002b) and Pini (2003b) considered the construction of gender identity through community. By considering how gender is portrayed in the media, or everyday conversation, as well as how it is enacted, a discourse analysis can reveal the construction of rural gender identities, and how they are maintained.

For example, in a discourse analysis of tractor advertisements and the image of masculinity, Brandth (1995) looks at the creation and reinforcement of gender identity. By researching the gendering of agriculture through media and organisational discourses, Liepins (1998) showed how discourses enable the maintenance or modification of gendered power relations.

Liepins (2000) revealed the discursive production, and the diverse nature, of rural societies by using a poststructural approach to research communities as fluid and negotiated phenomena. Work by Campbell (2000) and Saugeres (2002b) found that masculinity was discursively defined as not femininity and vice-versa. Saugeres (2002b) looked at the performance of gender identity, including contestation of gender expectations.

Poststructural approaches since the 1990s have examined how gender identities are produced, maintained and sometimes contested in community settings. As research into rural gender has embraced culture and identity, an interest in sexuality grew (Little 2002). Originally sexuality was researched in the context of rural marginality, such as lesbian experience of the country (Bell and Valentine 1995, Valentine 1997). More recently geographers have come to recognise that it is also important that heterosexuality is not ignored (Little 2003, Little 2006).
Little (2003) discusses the relationship between sexual identity and the social construction of rurality. She argues that hegemonic heterosexuality is sustained, reinforced and reproduced in rural communities through gender relations. Like Campbell (2000), Little argues that performance of sexuality reflects assumptions about appropriate femininity, gender identity and gender relations. In rural regions the nuclear (heterosexual) family is promoted as a model of social and community organisation (Bouquet 1982, Stebbing 1984, Hughes 1997). Previous research in gender and rural geography has often concentrated on otherness, ignoring the space in the middle and ensuring that heteronormativity remains unseen (Little 2006, Little forthcoming, Little and Leyshon 2003). Gender identity, including sexual identity, is sustained and recreated 'through a series of tactics and strategies' (Little forthcoming p.23). Bennett (2006) argues that these strategies include the materialities of everyday spaces, for example, kitchen furniture.

2.5.2 Embodiment

For geographies of gender and sexuality the body is seen as a key space for identity formation and politics. Little and Leyshon (2003), Little (forthcoming) and Brandth (2006) consider embodiment and gender in a rural context. The rural masculine is embodied in the physically fit, powerful and rugged masculinity (Liepins 2000, Little and Leyshon 2003). Rural feminine embodiment encapsulates women as requiring less 'upkeep', more in tune with nature, and fertility, than urban women (Little forthcoming). Embodiment is also part of performance (Gregson and Rose 2000, Nash 2000), and for rural women the connection between women’s gender identity and the body at work is important (Brandth 2006).

Embodiment is used by Bennett (2006) when considering the performance of gender in a farming family – not just the bodies, but also the materialities such as furniture and food. Furthermore, as Little and Leyshon (2003, p.260) observe, 'consideration of the materiality, fluidity and performance of bodies has highlighted the relationship between space and embodiment'. Little and Leyshon (2003) discuss the linkages between the concept of the rural idyll, heteronormativity and rural sexuality, including the desexualisation of women (i.e. women are not considered sexual beings) and the rural body and masculinity.
How dominant constructions of rural masculinity and femininity incorporate highly traditional assumptions about the body and reflect conventional attitudes to sexuality and gender identity has been documented by Little and Leyshon (2003). They argue that focusing on the body provides insights to key themes in recent rural research. Little (forthcoming) notes the appearance of country women versus urban women is influential in the construction of opposing identities.

2.6 Spatial Particularities: New Zealand Studies of Gender and Sexuality.

Much of the literature thus far reviewed has considered cases situated in the United Kingdom. New Zealand, as a different space, may hold different constructions of gender and sexuality. Bell (1993, p.ii) argues that rurality is a 'central motif of New Zealand (pakeha) cultural identity', and thus the influence of the rural idyll in the construction of gender identities in New Zealand is not limited to rural dwellers.

Park (1991) considers the construction of femininity in New Zealand and identifies strong articulations between a rural identity and women’s education, socialisation and identity. Femininity in New Zealand still requires an element of domesticity, as exemplified in the long-standing tradition of ‘ladies a plate’. The associated allocation of tasks by gender reflects a particular cultural take on gender (Park 1991). In this way the feminine identity is conflated with a cult of domesticity, similar to that of rural women in England and described by Hughes (1997).

The ongoing influence of rural idyll is the focus of Bell (1993) who argues that ‘mythical rural imagery persists in both rural and urban imagination’ (Bell 1993 p.233). Not only is this influential in constructing identity, it also marginalises some identities. The nostalgia for a romanticised view of life was influential in the earlier creation of a masculine identity (Law 1997). Law (1997) describes a masculinity that is place specific, arguing that ‘the Southern Man’ identity used in beer commercials is discursively reinforced, influencing, as well as being influenced by, the environment. The Southern Man identity is influenced by the landscape (rugged, tough, harsh), and a rural idyll where men exercise benign control over the land and animals. Similarly, Kraack and Kenway (2002) identify the construction of a masculine identity through
performance in public space that is specific to a time and place, in particular, a contemporary construction of rural youth influenced by rural restructuring.

Hunter and Riney-Kehrberg's (2002) work on the historical discourses of young women and farming in early New Zealand, Australia and United States, also consider these constructions of femininity to be time and space specific. Furthermore, a feminine identity in relationship to the Southern Man masculine identity is currently being discursively constructed in New Zealand. This is a feminised version of the masculine identity; one that can perform the same activities as the men. Reinforcement occurs through an annual ‘Perfect Woman’ competition held in Wanaka, a rural town in the South Island (The Perfect Women Competition 2006, 2006). This construct continues to have the domestic attributes noted by research into rural femininity in the United Kingdom, yet contests this by appropriating masculine attributes. However, this performance and construction of identity does not go so far as to alter perceptions of sexuality that are often related to gender identity.

Gender and sexuality, and the construction of identity in New Zealand are considered by Guyatt (2005). Performance of gender identities is also discussed by Guyatt in her work on gender identities in public bars in Christchurch (Guyatt 2005). In an urban setting in New Zealand, Guyatt found that gender identities are often linked to presumed sexualities. The ability to contest hegemonic forms of gender identity often lead to an assumption about the sexuality of those not performing stereotypical gender identities (Guyatt 2005).

Brickell (2005) uses discourse analysis to reveal the heterosexism in New Zealand media that constructs homosexuality as both the subordinate other, and a threat to heteronormativity which is construed as neutral. Similarly Johnston and Valentine (1995) use New Zealand examples of lesbian contestation of the heteronormativity of space to show how space is constructed as heterosexual.

The construction of New Zealand space as heterosexual, strongly influenced by the media, is also prevalent in Lovelock’s (1995) work on Mataura, a rural community in Southland near to Owaka. Reinforcement of rural heterosexuality was found to be institutionalised by Campbell and Phillips (1995). Campbell and Phillips documented
how organisations such as rugby clubs reproduce and reinforce the discourse of heterosexuality within rural communities in New Zealand and Australia (Campbell and Phillips 1995). Institutional reproduction and reinforcement of heterosexuality within rural New Zealand is also noted in Little’s (2003) study involving the Middlemarch singles dance.

These studies discourses, and their analysis, highlight the construction and naturalisation of gender identities and performances in New Zealand. They suggest the appropriateness of employing discourse analysis to study the interplay of gender, sexuality, and identity in small rural communities in this country.

2.7 Conclusions

The influence of feminism and the changing status of women have stimulated growth in gender related academic research in geography (Little 2002). Early work had made great strides to highlight women in rural geography, inserting them into the landscape, often by recognising and describing women’s roles on the family farm and within the rural community (Bouquet 1984, Davidoff et al. 1976, Stebbing 1984). In current research by Little (forthcoming), rural femininity is defined as ‘not urban’, in a similar way that Campbell (2000) and Saugeres (2002b) discuss the formation of rural gender identity as binary. Approaches to gender and rural geography have described rural femininity through the roles performed by rural women, the relations between rural women and men (usually with the feminine as subordinate to the masculine), and through a dichotomy with a masculine identity (Saugeres 2002b).

This literature at least suggests that the construction of a feminine identity in Owaka is partly place specific, notwithstanding the broad discourse that creates rural women as a whole as, caring, nurturing, community centred, hard working and capable, desexualised, not frivolous, and not urban. This study seeks to establish if this is so through the addressing of two research questions: (i) what are the key femininities in Owaka and (ii) how and where are these identities performed?
Chapter 3:

The Research Process

3.1 Introduction

Building on the theory examined in Chapter 2, this Chapter begins by outlining the theoretical background to the research process for this dissertation. The physical location of the study and researcher positionality can influence data collection and analysis, and are discussed in sections 3.3 and 3.4. Section 3.5 then outlines the research process in more detail explaining the data collection techniques used; focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observation. In section 3.6 the data analysis process is examined.

3.2 Theoretical Approach to the Study

Previous literature has informed not only the research questions, but also the design and practice of research for this dissertation. This section outlines some of the theoretical works that have underpinned the research decisions taken.

Through the 1980s 'the sub-disciplines of human geography came to be conscious of the 'cultural' dimensions of their field of study' (Shurmer-Smith, 2002 p.2). This reduced the popularity of quantitative approaches and increased interest in qualitative ones. The change in research approaches validated and created an increase in qualitative research methods. Traditionally methodological practices in geography were based on deductive ideas of (social) scientific method. With a rise in 'cultural' interests these practices changed so as to attempt to understand ideas and performances of identity that are constantly changing (Shurmer-Smith 2002).

By using a qualitative approach and an interpretive paradigm this research aims to 'understand and describe meaningful social action' (Davidson and Tolich 1999, p27).
In doing so the underlying belief is that social interactions are fluid and create meanings. The aim of this report was not to search for a metanarrative, but instead provide a critically informed analytical reading of the topic of rural women, and the research questions posed in Chapter 2. Poststructural and feminist methodologies have been employed to achieve this purpose.

3.2.1 **Poststructural Research**

The cultural turn in geography created an arena where meaning, symbols and geographic meaning are analysed, not merely the materialities of the rural space (Little 2002, Phillips 1998). Within this arena there is a focus on difference and discursive constructs, recognising the heterogeneity of society, power relations, otherness and processes of marginalisation (Panelli 2004). Subjectivity and identity are highlighted through poststructural approaches. This includes the reality that researchers also have subject positions and that research requires reflexive thought (Little and Panelli 2003). The challenge with poststructural approaches, and a concentration on difference, is the possibility of focusing on extremes and so miss the importance of the centre and the everyday.

The poststructural approach employed in this research led to the collection of qualitative data to explore and highlight everyday experiences, not to predetermine identities. Poststructural approaches foster the ability to 'read and deconstruct how gender identities and performances are constructed, contested and sometimes reinvented' (Little and Panelli 2003, p. 281).

3.2.2 **Feminist Approach to Research**

Following Hughes' (1997, p.127) argument that a feminist epistemology 'highlights the subjective nature of knowledge', this research also uses a feminist approach to data collection and analysis. Feminist research is important 'for the legitimation of women's subjective experiences as a valid way of knowing and understanding the rural' (Hughes 1997, p.127). Women's experiences of rural life are a form of knowledge that is as valid and deserving of academic study as that of men.

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2 This reflexivity is also an important part of feminist research practice, as discussed by Pini (2003a)
As feminist research investigates social inequalities, experience and empowerment are central issues (Alice 1999). Feminist methodology uses qualitative research techniques as these empower participants through the validation of their knowledge and experiences (Pini 2003a). Pini (2003a) contends that using a feminist methodology also includes an agenda for political change. It requires openness between researcher and participants to create an equal relationship (Alice 1999, Bennett 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Davidson and Tolich 1999; Pini 2002, 2003a, 2004); this openness facilitates the sharing of information, and reduces the power distinction between researcher and researched. Openness and honesty are an important part in the practice of ethical qualitative research as they help avoid exploitation (Israel and Hay 2006). Honesty within the research process will help ensure validity of the data collected, as the performance of the participants will be candid and sincere.

Feminist approaches are concerned with the social distinction between men and women with the attention initially on documenting and describing the inequality of women’s lives (Panelli 2004, Pini 2003a, 2004). Rural research has engaged with and responded to debates emerging from feminist geography. Rural feminist studies have frequently focused on gender, sought to create an equal partnership between researcher and participants, and acknowledgement of the participants’ own knowledge (Hughes 1997; Pini 2003a). Studies have contributed to an understanding of daily lives of rural women, and awareness of needs and problems in rural communities (Little 2002). This research considering the daily lives of women in a rural South Otago community continues this work.

This research utilises observation to see the everyday experiences of women and focus group discussions to hear their experiences in their own words. For this research I have not attempted to change or belittle any situation that is present in Owaka. My aim has been to empower women by giving them a voice, and by acknowledging the diversity of feminine identities that exist within the community, not to alter, or to impose any of my beliefs on them.
3.3 The Study Area - Owaka

This research has used a case study approach, rather than a comparative study. This is a valid in-depth approach that compares with broader, often quantitative, survey approaches. A single case study at depth was used for two reasons. Firstly, a single in-depth study was more feasible when pragmatics such as time and finances available were considered. Secondly, Herbert (2000) argues that more cases may not necessarily yield any greater depth or insight than one. Unique cases are contingent on interdependent phenomena (Herbert 2000), such as the rural idyll and the construction of a Southern Man identity. Accordingly, they can be related to, and can highlight, understanding at a wider level.

The selection of Owaka as a case study for this research was based on a number of factors, primarily proximity to the University, prior knowledge of the area, and size of population. Situated in the Catlins, coastal South Otago, Owaka is on the Southern Scenic Route. It is a 25-minute drive from Balclutha, the nearest large town, and an hour and a half drive from Dunedin City (figure 2).

The driving distance between Dunedin and Owaka made the area accessible for research, and after many holidays nearby, a fondness for the region also helped in the decision. These holidays had led to some familiarity with the area, and a feeling of not being out of my comfort range. Having accommodation for myself in the area also played a role.

Owaka has a range of groups, clubs and service organisations and an active community life exists (Clutha District Council n.d.). Owaka is the main service town for farming, forestry, and rapidly growing tourism in the Catlins. Services in Owaka include a garage, medical centre, pharmacy, school, Playcentre, and a supermarket. The Catlins district offers a range of walking and tramping tracks, fishing, waterfalls and coastal scenery, boating, and some rare and interesting wildlife, encouraging tourists to visit the area.
The geographical boundary of the area was not precisely defined other than the township of Owaka and including nearby Pounawea. More important was the fact that the research participants identified with being from the area.

The 2001 Census gives the population of Owaka as 366 (table I). The population is almost equal by gender, and half the population have no formal qualification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Age Distribution - years</th>
<th>Highest Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males 186</td>
<td>0-14 22.3%</td>
<td>No qualification 48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females 180</td>
<td>15-64 64.5%</td>
<td>School 29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 366</td>
<td>65+ 14.0%</td>
<td>Post-school 23.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics New Zealand

3.4 Researcher Position and Reflexivity

The personal reasons for choosing Owaka as a location for research have been discussed briefly in section 3.2. However, researcher position also influences research undertaking and data interpretation, so it is important to note this here. I am a mature pakeha student, married with two teenage children. I was born and raised, and still reside in Dunedin so do not have a rural background. My mother however was born and spent her childhood on a farm at Curio Bay in the southern Catlins region, and this ensured we experienced rural New Zealand (and some of her childhood experiences) in our holidays. We often camped at Tautuku, Pounawea and Tawanui, and visited the scenic attractions of the area. I now occasionally take my children to the Catlins for holidays.

Working part-time as a tour guide at the Speight’s brewery during my years of study, I formed an interest in the Speight’s marketing campaign that created and reinforced the Southern Man identity (Law 1997). This then encouraged me to consider the
nature of rural femininity, as opposed to the rural masculinity portrayed in the advertising discourse.

As a mature student my background has often been a hindrance to my study. In contrast it was hoped that being married with children might facilitate my study of gender in a rural area. Gender issues are considered ‘radical’ in rural areas, generally understood to be conservative, so my married and maternal identities were named to assist an entry to the field. Because ‘no researcher exists in a vacuum from the social roles ascribed to academics’ (Campbell 1993, p.93), I downplayed my position as a researcher and emphasised my personal background as married with children. My limited knowledge of farming was not stressed either, nor was my position as an environmentalist and feminist. I have had reservations about the use of the word feminist within this study. Feminist is a term about which I have some ambivalence; the word often conjures up an aggressive anti-male image, and like Pini (2004) I did not mention this during the research. For me, feminism means a belief in gender equality, where tasks need not be assigned by gender.

Throughout the research process a diary was kept to assist with reflexivity, and reinforce the need to consider that this was my reading of the situation, from my multiple positions (Bennett, 2006, Pini 2003a, 2003b, 2004). This reflexivity helped within data collection by acknowledging the performance of research, as discussed in the following section.

3.5 Data Collection

Theoretical approaches influenced the methods employed in the practice of this research. Choices and decisions about data collection methods were related to and affected by qualitative, post-structural and feminist considerations. Three forms of data collection were used to address the research questions: focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, and observation. To understand the experiences and the discursive construction of femininity in Owaka, focus group discussions and interviews were conducted (section 3.5.1). Observation was carried out at two sites to record the performance of feminine identities and identify any spatial variations in
that performance (section 3.5.2). These methods followed a feminist approach and enabled women's voices to be heard and the collection of data on lived experiences.

3.5.1 Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Focus group and key informant interviews are an effective way to gain an insight into the opinions, beliefs and values of a group of people, and the structure of the culture and group (Davidson and Tolich 1999). Focus groups are appropriate for feminist research, assisting participation, reduction of researcher 'power', thus enabling women to gain confidence on sensitive topics by sharing (Pini 2002).

One-on-one interviews were conducted with some of the participants due to their reticence to speak in a group. By interviewing the women separately, the openness of discussion was ensured, empowering them by demonstrating that their voices had been heard at the outset and enabling them to participate in the research.

Employing these methods, the data collected are those deemed by the respondent to be worthy of telling. Nevertheless, it is possible to read between the lines of the performance, depending on the skills of the researcher. The interaction between the interviewer and interviewee is described in Bennett's (2000) work to show that this practice is not a straightforward pattern of asking and answering questions. It involves the performance of identities that are flexible for, and exchangeable between, participants. This reveals the difficulties within research in gaining trust to enable the exchange of information, including the need to have an unstructured approach to the interview processes. By gaining the confidence of the interviewee through sharing personal information a relationship is formed that involves trust, and improves the quality of data collected. Pini (2004) discusses the multiple identities that she was able to use to integrate into the community, and facilitated openness in the interview process with the women. It is for this reason my position as a mother was emphasised during some of the focus group discussions and interviews.

Focus groups were organised by sourcing participants associated with the Playcentre, Senior Citizens Group and a Craft Group through the Clutha District Council website of community contacts. The contacts were approached and a focus group was developed with their assistance. The focus groups consisted of three women from the
craft group and eight from the Playcentre. In addition, interviews were held with four women from the Senior Citizens Group, and one from the Craft Group. Two participants from the Seniors Citizens Group were also members of the Craft Group. These fifteen women covered a range of ages and life stages.

The Playcentre focus group discussion was conducted during a Playcentre session. This enabled the women to participate without needing to find childcare. They were able to attend to children as need be, providing a relaxed, informal and open environment for discussion.

One-on-one interviews were conducted in the interviewee's home, allowing individuals to feel comfortable and in control of the setting. Before each discussion or interview began, consent form was signed, and for focus groups, ground rules were verbally reiterated to maintain anonymity and help facilitate discussion (Appendix A). To maintain the flow of the discussion, and to prevent sidetracking, a set of topics were developed (Appendix B).

By using information sheets and consent forms during data collection, there was an assumption of literacy of participants. This was overcome by verbal reiteration of the information contained in the sheets. The discussions and interviews were recorded, with the participants' permission, and later transcribed to prevent loss of information through memory lapse, or researcher bias (Pini 2004). During both interviews and focus groups, observation notes on the performance of femininity were made.

3.5.2 Field Observation
Discursive constructs of femininity occur in both cultural representations and everyday social interactions. In contrast to past media-based studies (Brandth 1995, Law 1997, Liepins 1998) this research undertook observation in the community to document how identities of femininity are embodied and performed. Observation allows for the viewing of social phenomena including the interaction of people with their surroundings, and helps reveal the extent to which the performance of a gender identity is space and place specific.
Observation sites were chosen based on Campbell's (1993, 2000) work on the construction of a rural gendered identity and the findings of Campbell and Phillips (1997) that institutions reinforce gender identities. In these cases, the local pub and golf club were key sites for observation, and integration into the community. The golf club was considered for this research but due to the timing of data collection could not be used. However, the Catlins Inn, was used as a location for observation of informal leisure. The site on the corner of Ovenden St and Main Rd was chosen because of its centrality to amenities, enabling the observation of identity performance across a key public space (figure 4).

**Figure 4: Location of Key Sites**

![Map of Key Sites](https://example.com/figure4)

Source: Wises Maps

In requesting permission for my presence in these sites, phone calls were made to the manager of the Catlins Inn, and to the Owaka Golf Club. A media release was sent to the local reporter for the Clutha Leader community newspaper (Appendix C). A similar notice was placed on the community noticeboard of the Foursquare store.
stating when observations would be undertaken (Appendix D). This informed the community, and enabled them to opt out of the research if desired.

Observation periods were an hour long. At the corner of Main Rd and Ovenden St they occurred each week day and occurred at 8.30am, 12noon and 4.30 pm. For the Catlins Inn one observation period was on a Wednesday evening, and two observations were made on Saturday evenings. A checklist of key points was constructed to facilitate recording of observations (Appendix E). Notes were written up promptly afterwards in rich text.

3.6 Analysis Process

Butler argues, as discussed by Gregson and Rose (2000), that the practice of discourse disciplines and produces subjects. Thus, through discourse identity is produced, and a poststructural approach allowed the reading of these discourses and identities. Using a poststructural approach the data have been considered as a text, and capable of multiple readings. By observing and listening to everyday experiences I undertook a discourse analysis to record how these created a feminine identity.

Transcripts of the interviews were analysed with a number of central themes emerging. These themes were then compared with the concepts identified in the literature review in order to draw comparisons and contrasts and identify similarities with previous research. Quotes from the interviews are used to illustrate the argument and my reading of them. To ensure anonymity pseudonyms are used in the presentation of all data.

An analysis of a small sample of local community newspaper articles and photographs taken during the research timeframe was undertaken to consider the discursive construction of femininity as expressed in the media. Similarities between the reinforcement and recreation of feminine identities in the media, and the findings from content analysis of observation notes, interview and discussion group transcripts were considered.
During the research process a personal diary was used to note my observations and thoughts. This enabled me to reflexively consider my results and my reading of the data during collection, as discussed by Pini (2004). The research diary enabled awareness that any conclusions resulting were my reading of the situation. A reflexive consideration of the data was conducted, with the influence of my mindset at the time being considered\(^3\). The diary keeping highlighted some of the limitations to the research, discussed in Chapter 6.

### 3.7 Conclusion

Attention to what counts as knowledge and who produces it is an important part of feminist and poststructural research. This research has been undertaken using feminist and poststructural methods to record the everyday experiences of women in a rural community. By undertaking focus group discussions and interviews, the experiences of women in their own terms have been considered. Reflexivity during data collection and analysis process has emphasised that this was my interpretation of the women’s voices and actions. As noted by Alice (1999, p. 67) ‘assumptions about gendered power relations within a research project must avoid making the analysis deterministic or prescriptive’. Through the use of reflexivity researcher bias has been reduced and the influence of my subjectivity on appropriate gender identities acknowledged.

There will always be limitations to data collection, but utilising methodology based on previous research helps with comparison and building up a background of the area of interest and context of research. In this Chapter I have discussed the data collection, and how it leads to results. Over the next three chapters I discuss the findings reached after analysis of the data collected.

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\(^3\) Appendix F is a consideration of my experiences and reflexivity in relation to Chapter 5.
Chapter 4: 

The Key Forms of Femininity in Owaka

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I address the research question ‘What key forms of feminine identity are recognisable in Owaka’. Three facets of identity, observed within the community and two attributes that have a major influence across them, are identified and discussed. These femininities involve women’s professional and domestic work, how they purport to reflect the community thinking, and how the women define femininity itself.

4.2 Key Femininities in Owaka

Through observations of identity performance in every day situations, and analysis of interview transcripts, key themes have been noted that enable three overlapping and inter-linked specific feminine identities to be ascribed to women in the Owaka community. To facilitate description I have named the feminine identities ‘Provider/Supporter’, ‘Educated/Educator’, and ‘Capable/Adaptable’, and each can be conceptualised as an intermittently experienced layer of female identity. Furthermore, these layers are modified by two attributes that work across them; the assumption of the role of upholder of community thinking about what is appropriately feminine, and the issue of origin.

4.2.1 Identity #1: Women as Provider/Supporter

The first identity established, and that predominating in Owaka, is that of the provider and community lynchpin. Davidoff et al. (1976) refer to the cult of domesticity as a major part in the identity of rural women and this is readily apparent within Owaka. This category of femininity accounts for the major part of care giving for children, for
providing food, support and having a strong belief in the need to support others within the community.

Women are observed assisting children crossing streets and going to school. They help with the selling of raffle tickets for the Playcentre, and care for others’ children. Some males are observed with children, but, more frequently, women are seen incorporating children into their day to day actions.

Food preparation is an important element of this femininity, not just providing sustenance for children and family but also for social events, thereby supporting the community. Food preparation is predominantly undertaken by women. They frequently refer to cooking for their families, or the desire to have another form of food available quickly that, in the words of Emma, is not ‘greasy fish and chips’. The discussion between Diane, Paula and Sandra shows how they perceive food as a distinguishing feature in a rural femininity:

*Diane:* I think, I reckon, like, the people who are on farms, you know, the rural women type thing, always seem to have, when they do do a meal, there is always plenty. There is always more than enough

*Paula & Sandra:* Yeah

*Diane:* Whereas if it’s in the town it’s the bare basics sort of thing. Whereas there’s always a big spread with the rural women. They go outa their way to …

*Paula:* Yeah

*Sandra:* Do lots

*Paula:* They’re probably used to having to

*Sandra:* Yeah, yeah

*Diane:* Yeah, but if you go somewhere, its sorta everyone brings a plate its not…

The prestige of this identity is apparent through this conversation. As it develops, the women present a pragmatic view as to the loss of skills such as knitting, sewing or baking, acknowledging reasons for the decline. However, they still value these skills, affirming this identity as prestigious:
Diane: But there is some people out there that don't even know how to bake
Sandra: Yeah
Diane: I mean especially school things and that. You'll, you know, quite often people will ring up and say look will you do this because so and so can't couldn't cope with that. They just can't, can't do it. I mean, and the Plunket are finding it hard [...] to get ladies to cook for them.

Emma: I don't bake as much as CWI women in the past would've. Now only a small percentage [of women in Owaka] can bake...the ones that we rely on to make a dessert tend to be in the older age group, or the ones in the younger community that I know can. The others we say oh you can peel the spuds, or you can dish it up on the night, that sort of thing. (original emphasis)

Catering, as referred to by Emma, is still a form of fundraising used by women for community purposes, providing food for cake stalls, for the school, and for the Senior Citizens Group. The Plunket\(^4\) committee caters for the Lions\(^5\) and has raised funds to provide a play area for children in the community (Clutha Leader, 7 December 2006, p.6).

Many of the women interviewed and observed still follow the tradition of having home-baked biscuits and cakes in the house, emulating their mothers actions. Some had pride in their voices when referring to the baking their mothers did in earlier days:

Kate: A lot of the women worked very hard but the cake tins were always full.

Rachel does not bake for herself, but likes to keep her tins full for others (even providing a variety of biscuits and cakes for me when I carried out the interview). Kate also referred to baking for her adult children when they come to visit, and Rose

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\(^4\) Royal New Zealand Plunket Society is an organisation to help mothers and young children, commonly referred to as Plunket. The committee is a group of volunteers in the community, but are not necessarily all mothers with young children.

\(^5\) Lions is a voluntary organisation that aims to raise funds and provide help within the community. In Owaka the group members are still all male.
passed on her ‘secret’ to me; that she does a large batch of baking and freezes it, to bring out and thaw in the microwave for her ‘unknowing’ visitors. The importance of fresh baking is apparent in her sharing this secret, in her not admitting to people that she does not necessarily make the pikelets on the days they are consumed.

The providing of food in this way is a continuation of a New Zealand tradition of bringing a plate (Park 1991), not just for social gatherings, but also when mishap or a tragedy occurs:

Connie: If you’ve been sick or in hospital there’s always somebody up the hill with a casserole or a batch of scones or pizza, a bowl of soup.

Kate: But that was just how the district pulled together. That showed how the rural people pulled together. I bought some food up for the fire brigade at that time.

Along with supporting each other in need, there is a desire within this group to be friendly, ‘nice’, providing social support. They are open and approachable, so this is not a form of femininity that could be described as spiteful or disparaging. This is apparent in the way women wave to others when in the town, and with their approaches to me when I was undertaking observation on the corner of Main Rd and Ovenden St.

Providing support to the community does not detract from providing support to family for this feminine identity, with three of the widows interviewed discussing nursing their husbands before their deaths, in addition to their community roles. For some the act of supporting those within the community and family also extends to work, either on the farm to support the husband⁶, or in paid employment to help with financial support:

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⁶ The women who lived on farms were not referred to as farmers, but as farmers wives, and they did not work on the farm, but were referred to numerous times as helping their husbands on the farm. This is worthy of more consideration (especially when compared with Bennett’s (2005) work) that is beyond the scope of this study.
Kate: Now a lot of them have gone to work, I think because the high mortgages, and, well, school fees, all those sort of things

Rose: But when they went to boarding school I went and worked over at the hospital and then I had a job up at the drapery shop, just to help pay the money towards putting them through the school. Which I felt was quite a good idea.

This quote from Rose highlights not only the provider identity performed by women, but also attitudes to a self-imposed moral standard through her framing of the fact she undertook paid employment; by emphasising that her children were all at school, and therefore they no longer need her to be at home full time to care for them. The paid employment undertaken is qualified by social understandings of what work is deemed appropriate for women. In this way, the identity affirms the social reproduction of the community.

There are, however, sides to this feminine identity that are less positively outward looking. The provision of support within the community can even be an isolating experience. A woman voices concern that her daughter stays home to care for a family member rather than having a ‘normal’ teenage life. The importance of family, and the corresponding concentration of socialisation within familial groups (husband and/or children) has led to some widows not socialising as much as previously, and an acknowledgement by others that they only socialise with their partners. If there is neither partner nor children then socialisation can be constrained. This observation was not dependent on age, but noted across all groups.

Hughes (1997) and Little (1987) refer to how traditional feminine identities such as this are maintained by women who are perceived as the upholders of moral standards. Little (1987) has discussed the part that women within the community play in maintaining this identity, and maintaining moral standards, as discussed in the section 4.3.1.
4.2.2 Identity #2: Women as Educated/Educator

Connie: There's a lot of educated people here, definitely.

Field research for this study began at the end of the school year, when schools were holding prize-giving ceremonies. Results for the Catlins Area School were published in the Otago Daily Times. The absence of boys on the list contrasted with the abundance of girls gaining formal, educational recognition for their achievements. This affirmed informal conversations in which the identity of women in Owaka as educated was proposed.

Within the community many of the important and informative roles are held by women. These include teachers at the school, and imparters of information through businesses in the community such as the Department of Conservation, Information Centre and Library. The majority of other businesses, including the cafe, pharmacy, diner, supermarket, Playcentre, doctor, hairdresser, gift shop and inn, have women in major roles.

Informally, as the first teachers of their children, women tend to involve themselves in early childhood education, both as primary caregivers at home, and through the Playcentre. This educative process does not stop when their children reach school, but continues through support of school trips, and through the teaching of life skills in the home.

Paula: I'm just teaching my husband to make a few things

Sandra: ...and I was trying to teach [my daughter]. She was helping me because... and I said, you know like and... the boys love getting into them you know too. And so I'm going to make them a recipe book each

But education is not just for children, or for husbands learning to cook. On-going education is also appreciated by the women themselves. The Adult and Community Education classes run by the school were referred to by many participants, as were talks held by community organisations that improved knowledge or skills.
Female engagement with education, and the roles they adopt, is not reflected in major differences in the level of formal education for women in Owaka, according to the Statistics New Zealand, 2001 Census (table II). What is significant, however, is that the educational qualifications of males and females, notwithstanding the school results.

**Table II: Formal Education Qualifications in Owaka.**

![Chart showing highest education qualifications by gender and age group.](chart.png)

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The percentage of women with no formal qualification is 40%, and for men this is 42%. The only school qualification where women are more highly represented in terms of highest achievement is 6th form certificate – 9% of women, and 8% of men. These are insignificant differences. Of note however is the disparity between attainments of a tertiary level bachelor degree where 4% of women and no males stated this as their highest educational level. Although the numbers involved are small, female graduates play key roles in education in Owaka, almost to the exclusion of males, and may account for the perception that women in Owaka are relatively more highly educated. In practice, however, the women with no tertiary qualifications take a lead in promoting education within the community.
Education is important, both in and as a feminine identity, mainly for those under forty years old. Older women acknowledge the importance of education for their daughters, but also reflect on the fact that education is one of the reasons many of the younger women leave the community. Typically women in Owaka go to school locally, then on to further education and work outside the district, and return when they marry someone from the area:

Debbie: You go away for further education.

Rose: Yeah, because they go into different Varsity and all that sort of thing.

4.2.3 Identity #3: Women as Capable/Adaptable

Debbie: You have to be capable and adaptable.

One of the perceptions of rural women that has strong acceptance in New Zealand is that they can do almost everything – help on the farm, care for children and cook and clean. Many interviews began by my asking if this perception of rural women was accurate. The majority agreed that it is still, although some added the proviso that it depends on where you are, suggesting a distinction between the Owaka women who live on farms and those who reside in the township. This quality is primarily ascribed to women who live on farms; in Owaka the identity is affirmed and performed in a provisional manner by rural town dwellers. Whether this identity is a rural generality, requires further study, but those from farms spoke of both helping on the farm and doing domestic tasks:

Rebecca: If you are on the farm then you are helping out [...] running after your husbands ...
Sarah: And looking after the kids
Rebecca: ...and looking after the kids and doing the housework, washing their smelly clothes. It's different in town.

Emma: Feed lambs, pick up in the shearing shed, lend a hand if needed.
This feminine identity can be compared with the ‘Southern Man’ construct considered by Law (1997). Where the Southern Man is rugged and tough, the Southern Woman is capable and adaptable. A ‘perfect woman’ not only maintains the household, but shears the sheep too. The Southern Woman is one who can help on the farm if need be, while continuing to care for the children.

This more masculine femininity can do much of what a man can do, and more. Women who perform this identity are as likely to have dyed hair, wear clothes that accentuate hips and waist, as do the other categories of femininity. It engages both the Provider/Supporter and the Educated/Educator identities above, but suggests the potential for more.

Discursive reinforcement of this femininity is apparent in an annual competition held in Wanaka for the ‘Perfect woman’. This is an adaptation of the Speight’s Southern Man advertising that claims it is a hard road to find the perfect woman. The Perfect Woman website lists some of the attributes the perfect woman needs to have that exemplify this feminine identity, including being able to dig in a fence post, and sing (The Perfect Women Competition 2006, 2006). Women within Owaka who perform this femininity are younger, possibly more influenced by the Southern Man and Perfect Women discursive constructs, that are relatively recent.

The adaptability prestigious to this femininity is a necessary skill over a lifetime. Rural southern women need to be able to adapt to a different school, and a different lifestyle when leaving Owaka, suggesting that rural women need to be more adaptable than urban women. For those moving into Owaka, they need to adapt to a different lifestyle as an ‘Import’:

Debbie: The women that come and marry somebody or come and live here, they learn those skills. You just have to be able to do things.

7 The television advertising campaign began in 1992 and the first Perfect Woman competition was held in 2002.
Those who come from the area (returnees or having not moved away) also need adaptability within the everyday activities that they are expected to undertake. In fact she must be adaptable as she goes where her husband lives:

_u Ursula_: We’re all here because our husbands are here.

In adapting to the community there is a need for the women to conform to community expectations. These are constructed discursively through everyday practices, and serve to affirm values and maintain cohesion within the community (section 4.3.1).

### 4.3 Attributes that Apply Across the Identities

The three identities described have two common threads through and across them: would-be moral voice and status as an insider or outsider (referred to as Import/Outsider). These threads influence the definition and performance of identity, but are not independently existing identities in themselves. They act as an overlay to other identities, like a coloured lens altering a picture but not fully distorting it (figure 5). Notwithstanding this last point, these threads can take centre stage and appear dominant at a particular time. The Moral Upholder and Import/Outsider overlays superimpose attributes of a version of place specific femininity on the predominant femininity. All three key identities are affected by these overlays, sometimes positively, at other times less so.

Liepins (2000) has noted that groups within a community have different social powers. Its suggested here that the two (thread) overlays identified in Owaka are, in part, employed to mediate power relations as they are staged out in feminine identities. However, the data collected and time frame of collection are insufficient to go into detail about the power relations within Owaka, although during research it was noted that the discursive construction of identities involves empowering one identity over others. This was achieved by the hegemonic Provider/Supporter identity through its ability to define what is an appropriate femininity (section 4.3.1), and to ascribe to players the quality of being an Import or Outsider (section 4.3.2).
4.3.1 The Upholder of Appropriate Values Lens

In a similar way to the findings of Hughes (1997) and Stebbing (1984), this suggested overlay expresses ideas about what is suitable employment for women; not by prescribing what women can do, but by proscribing options, comment on what is deemed appropriate women's employment. Occupations that are considered feminine, or suitable for women, are predominantly service orientated, and do not include labouring:
Rose: Yeah, they're all young ones, they've moved in because the freezing works is handy. Umm, some work at the hotel, some work in shops, some are helping out at the school.

Paula: ...But I mean once upon a time there were jobs on the telephone exchange and we had a local hospital. The girls, there were more, probably more jobs in the shop, there was a post office. All those things are gone now. [...] 'bout the only things really, unless they're working on their own farms is rousing for shearing, shearing gangs. And that's alright for sort of temporary thing. To earn a bit of money.

Here Paula is constructing women as not suitable for working in shearing gangs over the long term due to the style of work, and subculture mentioned in a different interview by Florence. However Florence had no problems with this as an occupation.

Not only is the occupation of women influenced by the upholders of moral standards, but so are the style of dress and daily activities accorded prestige. Affirmed are a restrained style of dress, and the image of rural woman as good and with conservative views on lifestyle. Traditional tasks such as crafts and preserving, even if no longer undertaken, are deemed prestigious, and not simply useless hobbies.

This overlay reinforces the viewpoint of women as a lynchpin of the community through doing good deeds for neighbours, and for those outside of the community too:

Rose: Now to me, I think that's what we should be doing. And be eligible to help anybody. (original emphasis)

These good deeds involve helping with community organisations through skills such as cake icing and, importantly flower, arranging. Flowers are organised for funerals in the community by an informal group of women.

For the younger women in the community, marriage is not as essential. However, older women are influenced by this attribute more:

Jane: Are most women here married?
Martha: We’d hope so.

Some of the Playcentre mothers are not married, they are in de facto relationships with the fathers of their children. Indeed, one participant had not considered what would happen if you didn’t marry and expressed surprise at the possibility:

Rose: My mother got married again and I went home and house kept for my brother and then I got married.
Jane: So if you hadn’t got married what?
Rose: I never thought of that. I never thought of that.
Jane: It was just
Rose: Just happened.

Marriage, for the majority of those interviewed, is the reason they reside in the area. They have married and adapted to their husbands lifestyle.

4.3.2 The Outsider/Import Lens
The second lens that colours the way identity categories are understood is based on women’s perceptions of the length of time they have spent in the community. It qualifies the feminine identities, even colours the perspective of the moral upholder, especially as so many women living in Owaka come from outside the district. The concept of Outsider or Import proved to be an on-going theme raised by the women, with no prompting during interviews. One elderly respondent did not recognise the term ‘Outsider’, or ‘outside’, as being a regional linguistic term that may need clarification:

Rose: So I sent her away to school but she’s still marrying a local!
Jane: […]and it’s probably the way it’s just supposed to be.
Rose: Yeah, exactly. Yes, the other two, they didn’t. They married outside.

Here, Outsider does not refer to one who is outside of the community in a social way, similar to an outcast, nor to one who does not fit in. Rather, in Owaka an Outsider is a person who has moved into the community, or who has come in from ‘outside’. The physical distance involved can be minimal; for example the term ‘over the hill’ is used to describe a conceptual barrier that surrounds the community. The hill is Tunnel
Hill just north of Owaka. Many women feel stigmatised as not being from Owaka, even after years of living there:

*Paula:* It's taken nearly fifty years to feel as if you're accepted as a local.

Significantly, all of the participants spoken to live in the community because of their husbands' work there, and only two were not Outsiders or had not moved away at some time in their lives.

By continuously describing themselves as being 'Outsiders' or 'Imports', women revealed how time plays a part in describing the ways in which they take part in performing femininities. The length of time in the community is a qualifier to feminine identities.

As an overlay this attribute has an influence on the three femininities already described. This overlay has little apparent effect on the hegemonic domestic supporter and provider identity. However it seems to empower some women through their length of residence in the community. Their willingness and ability to act as moral upholders and definers of feminine attributes that are suitable may be more acknowledged. There were times during the research when it appeared that an unspoken bond existed between Outsiders – especially younger women who had moved more recently to Owaka.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has identified three categories of femininity in Owaka, and raised the concept of two overlays or lenses across those identities. These identities were contested by some of the women, not in speech but through the performance of femininity, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The discursive construct prevalent in New Zealand society that romanticises the rural, reinforces the rural idyll, and places women in the position of nurturer, as found in previous research (see Bouquet 1982, Davidoff et al. 1976, Hughes 1997, Little 1987, Little and Austin 1996, Lovelock 1995, Stebbing 1984) has influenced the
construction of femininities in Owaka. As Little and Austin (1996) and Hughes (1997) note there is a traditional rural femininity that values and reveres domesticity. This is apparent within Owaka. Owaka women are also capable and adaptable, with the younger women frequently identifying with a feminine version of the Speight’s ‘Southern Man’. An advertising billboard for Speight’s depicts two Southern Men (figure 6). The younger ‘apprentice’ is saying that he ‘got a new ute for my girlfriend’. The older one replies, ‘Good swap boy’. However, if the woman could meet the expectations the community has of women in Owaka then it was not a good swap. If you have someone who is capable and adaptable, who can cook, is domestic, who is intelligent, supportive, friendly and outgoing, then why would you trade her in for a ute?

Figure 6: Speight’s Advertising Billboard

"Got a new ute for my girlfriend."  
"Good swap, boy."

Source: Speight’s Heritage Centre, Speight’s Brewery, Dunedin
Chapter 5:

How and Where Femininities Are Performed in Owaka

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 has identified the key femininities constructed in Owaka. This chapter discusses how these are socially constructed through discourse and performance, and where performance occurs. It follows on from earlier work that argued ‘discourse is a useful medium for studying how gender is socially constructed within media’ (Liepins 1998, p.371). By considering how gender is portrayed in the media and everyday conversation, as well as enacted, a discourse analysis can reveal the construction of gender identities, and how they are maintained, implicitly or tacitly. Performance is the focus of the second research question because, as Butler (1999) argues, men and women gender social practices and actions. The social practices construct, reconstruct and reinforce gender identities. I will consider how, through performance, feminine identities in Owaka are produced and reproduced.

This chapter builds on the ‘what’ from Chapter 4 to consider ‘how’ identity is played out through the ‘where’ observed. Nash (2000) argues that performance needs to consider space. The place, time, and situation of performance affect identity performed and its social acceptability. As Jackson (1992) argues, identities are multiple.

As a female researcher acting within the community, my experiences may have coloured my perception of occurrences, yet they are a valid source of information, helping reveal the experiences of women within the community, the performance of identity, and how these affect the way women feel (Pini 2003a, Bennett 2000). These have been included in Appendix F.
5.2 Performance of Gender Identities

Gender identity is constructed through discourse and performance. Butler (1999) understands gender as performatively, and gender identities as being brought into existence through actions. Performance also includes ‘props’ such as dress and other materialities in everyday life (Bennett 2006). This section considers the reinforcement of gender identity in Owaka through performance, considering the dress, embodiment, and speech of women in the community.

5.2.1 Dress
Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992, p.1) define dress as ‘an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body’. They argue that dress includes ‘direct modifications of the body’, for example hair, piercings, tattoos, perfume, as well as clothing, jewellery and other accessories. Because of the symbolism involved, dress is able to be used as self-expression - as an individual or belonging to a particular group - or an expression of job function (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992, Storm 1987). Identities formed through social interaction, and communicated by dress, are socially situated (Kaiser 1993). This leads to an expression of identity through appearance management.

Meanings emerge from interaction in cultural contexts. Kaiser (1993) defines cultural context as the system of knowledge more or less shared by members of a society. Culture may lead people to think differently about clothes because of varying social backgrounds and experiences (Kaiser 1993). Thus while dress is a means of communicating identity, the identity communicated is mediated by cultural context (Kaiser 1993, Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992). For the feminine identity in Owaka, similarities in dress means that a specific identity is performed by the majority of women.

During empirical research, a predominant form of dress for women in the community was noted: casual, usually trousers or a form of long shorts, short trousers. The colours were primarily a blue, pale or brighter, but seldom navy. Very few women were observed in shirts that were low cut, the exception being on one extremely hot day when some singlet style tops were noted. In general the clothing was conservative,
in muted colours, similar to the male clothing, but with a feminine twist such as lighter and/or brighter colours. Jewellery was minimal, as was the use of cosmetics, nail polish and multiple visible piercings or tattoos. Hair was usually short, although for some of the younger women longer hair was worn, usually tied back from the face. The hair was not highly styled with products such as gel, but colouring was not always natural. Overall, dress was somewhat asexual, although trousers often accentuated the hips and bottom. Foot wear was less predictable, often practical, but differentiated from men’s dress through the frequency of strappy, delicate sandals.

For the women who performed the Provider/Supporter identity, or the Capable/Adaptable identity, practical clothing was necessary for the physical work implied. Even those educating children stressed there was no need to dress up; that they wouldn’t find it easy to carry out day to day tasks in anything but casual wear. During interviews many of the participants emphasised this need for practical clothing:

*Ursula:* Rural towns are more about comfort instead of fashion.

*Emma:* Wearing a short skirt with this lifestyle wouldn’t be practical.

*Jane:* Nothing low cut?

*Emma:* No. I mean when people go out they tend to go the opposite though; they tend to make an effort.

This comment on dressing up to go out was reiterated by other participants. However, dressing up was only for going out, not everyday events. It was common to have a skirt, described as a ‘wedding and funeral skirt’. During the interview process, only one participant wore a skirt, and she had dressed in preparation for an appointment in Balclutha after the interview.

To determine how this dress form was socially reinforced, I asked what would happen if the participants were to wear a short skirt and high-heeled shoes:

*Ursula:* You’d be a hooker. Unless you’re going to a fancy dress.
Florence: Unless you’re going to a hens do\(^8\) or something like that. Otherwise that’d be frowned on.

How this was reinforced was displayed later when Agnes mentioned she wore dresses:

Agnes: I’ve got a mini-dress. If it’s a hot day I’ll wear one at home.
Ursula: But would you come into town like that? Would you?
Agnes: Yep
Sarah: Would you?
Agnes: Yep. They’re not tight ones or anything. They’re just loose summer dresses.
Ursula: Really?
Florence: Fascinating.

Here Agnes needed to convince the others that she did wear an item that was not accepted by the dominant feminine identity. Ursula questioned her choice of dress, placing Agnes in the position of ‘other’. Florence reinforced Ursula’s questioning and disbelief. The wearing of a dress was justified later as her partner likes them. This confirmed that wearing a dress is considered sexually provocative, and an identity that is infrequently performed in public:

Agnes: [partner] loves them. He thinks it’s great.
Florence: Easy access
Ursula: I bet he does
Laughter
Agnes: No. I have to wear the right underwear. Don’t wear that underwear.
Laughter

For the women identities are managed through their appearance, and influenced by their male partners:

Sarah: Three of us mothers went out one night to the strippers in Balclutha. And I had jeans on but when I was getting ready to go he said

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\(^8\) A ‘hens do’ is a pre-wedding party for the bride and her female friends; the female form of a bachelor party.
I'd change those shoes, was the first thing. And then the second one was are you wearing a g-string and I was

Florence: What he's saying is go put on your gym shoes and your ugliest pants.

Once more, like Ursula, Sarah's partner has inferred that some (sexually provocative) clothing is acceptable at home, in private, but not in public. Florence has clarified his meaning, and insinuated that this is in some way a form of control over Sarah. The women were dressing up to go out, which is noted as something women do, making a special effort.

Of note, however, is the change in place that occurs – women go to Balclutha for a 'hen's night' or other activities that are not appropriate for women to perform in Owaka. In doing so they are performing a femininity that contrasts with the norm. This alternative femininity is acceptable so long as it is performed away from town, local men, and local comment.

However, contestation of the casual, conservative dress is possible within Owaka. Kate wore a low cut top, and jewellery to our meeting, and a woman in the service sector of the community, recently moved to the township, consistently wears clothes that do not conform to the majority style. Her clothing is not loud in colour, but is quite 'alternative'. In an informal discussion during an observation period she stated that she is being herself, and the community would see right through her if she pretended to be something else. For her, such honesty is a way of facilitating entry into the community.

5.2.2 Actions

As Connell (2002) notes gender identities are not purely imposed from outside by social norms, but are also actively constructed by the way we enact our everyday lives. Through this re-enactment social expectations are interwoven into identities. For the women in Owaka, social norms are influenced by the dominant domestic identity, and

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9 Sarah was thankful for changing her shoes to more comfortable ones, but did not change her underwear.
by the ability of some to define appropriate femininity. As the majority of the women participating in the research describe themselves as ‘Imports’ it is notable that many performed the dominant identity of Provider/Supporter:

*Agnes:* We’ve got more responsibility [than the males]. I think we take more responsibility.

Supporting and providing for the family is predominantly enacted through domestic tasks, in particular providing food. This involves most meal preparation and, for some, the preserving of fruit and vegetables, baking, and jam production. Tasks such as sewing are also included by some.

The production of preserved fruit is viewed as a fading craft, but still holds some prestige. Paula, Sandra and Diane reflected how Sandra makes jam, and that this will encourage her daughter to make it. They did not consider that her sons might make jam, although did discuss her sons’ consumption of the end product. During this conversation an exchange occurred that highlighted the value this skill is still perceived as having:

*Sandra:* Like it’s a dying art
*All:* Yeah
*Sandra:* of making pickles. I was making pickles-
*Paula:* I love home made pickles.
*Sandra:* -tomato, apricot sauce and bloody-
*Paula:* Have another scone
*Sandra:* -you know chutneys and everything all nice. Worked all day

Paula had been discussing how she no longer makes jam, but when Sandra discusses her achievements, not to be outdone, she interrupts quietly to offer a scone, reinforcing her baking achievements. As a way of providing for those outside of the home many of the women interviewed who do still bake give the end result away for fundraising, or provide only for guests in order to emphasise their continuing provider role. Rose and Rachel both give away produce from their gardens:
Rose: If anybody’s around and says oh I like beetroot pickle but never make it, I say oh look take this one home.

Rose described this as what women should do:

Rose: A southern woman, to me, would be a person that was eligible to go and help those in need. To me I recognise those sort of people as a step above the average

Such observations support Little and Austin’s (1996) assertion that women act as the lynchpins of the community. According to Stebbing (1984) women have the role of a unifying element in society, reinforcing and reproducing preferred ideas of a rural and domestic idyll. However Little and Austin (1996) also refer to membership of community organisations as part of the construction of femininity. Some of the women in Owaka use community organisations and voluntary work as a reason to go out:

Sarah: You get away. That’s the only reason I go to meetings is to get out of the house.

Although the Lumberjack Café provides a social evening for women each month, it is not an uncomplicated event:

Emma: We have a ladies night dinner once a month and I make a point of going to that and, oh God, you’re gadding about doing something social. You’re not supposed to do that. Not so much from him, more my mother likely to say that. Probably something she wasn’t able to do you know. She’s quite happy for me to do catering and things, she really likes me doing that, but, um, yeah, more social things …

The quote from Emma highlights a number of points: the construction of femininity through discourse, the performance of femininity, and the social expectations that recreate and reinforce the feminine identity construct. By discussing her behaviour in this negative manner, the inference is that ‘inappropriate’ behaviour is reinforced. Emma’s mother seeks to influence her behaviour, and in doing so encourages Emma
to perform the role of Provider/Supporter, thereby emphasising that women, as well as men, continue to recreate this feminine identity.

The performance of the Provider/Supporter identity leaves little time for the women for themselves, especially when children are younger. Socialising is either with partners, or the whole nuclear family. This affirms previous research that argues in rural regions the nuclear (heterosexual) family is promoted as the model social sub-unit in the community (Bouquet 1982, Stebbing 1984, Hughes 1997). Indeed, having children was the most mentioned reason the women gave for no longer going to the pub or out socialising:

_Diane:_ Prior to having kids yes I used to go to the pub.

_Emma:_ [I don’t go to the pub] now that I’m a family person.

Others associate the pub with, in Emma’s words, ‘old soak boozer guys’:

_Rose:_ I can’t be bothered going there and seeing people flopping all over you and dribbling and going on.

This comment from Rose highlights the perception of the pub as a place not suitable for women, an issue discussed later.

The dichotomy between those who consume alcohol and those who do not was exposed in a television documentary in the mid 1990s that described Owaka as consisting of ‘knee benders’ and ‘elbow benders’ – those who kneel and pray and those who bend their elbows to get their glass to their mouth (*Journeys in the New Zealand Heartland* 1995). These labels are still spoken of by those in the community, some identifying with both groups and others suggesting that neither category applies:

_Debbie:_ And if you don’t fit into either one it’s terrible! No […] if you see someone that is a church goer, they’ll still stop and say hello.
Debbie’s comment exemplifies the performance of community membership. It is not unusual to wave at passers-by, an aspect the Clutha District Council has used for their marketing (Enterprise Clutha n.d.). During observations on the corner of Main Rd and Ovenden St (figure 7) this was noted as a common occurrence, and one in which I participated. However a number of participants also referred to groups and cliques within the community that divided it. The public display of waving does not reflect some of the more private divisions experienced by women.

Figure 7: Ovenden St and Main Rd Observation Site

This photograph is looking north along Main Rd. To the right is the Four Square supermarket, and Ovenden St. To the left, directly across from Ovenden St is the Catlins Diner. The Hair Salon is on the northern corner of Main Rd and Ovenden St.

Support for the community, as part of the feminine identity, is exemplified in Lil’s Lunches, a cheaper lunch at the Lumberjack Café offered to local people during the winter months. This practice stemmed from one woman’s concern about some elderly men not eating properly, and about others in the community needing to get out and socialise. This ‘mothering’ of the community appears to occur once children are
grown up and no longer need such attention. In doing so the women create an identity for themselves, linking with the morality overlay discussed in Chapter 4.

Bennett (2006) refers to the materialities of everyday life and how they can be used in the performance of identity. Some are evident in the women's homes. Those who are members of the craft group are inclined to have doilies, antimacassars and other embroidered items out. Family photographs are prominent in all places, and flowers on the table. For some the act of providing a cup of tea or coffee involves rituals of tea pots or trays, even the addition of a slice of lemon to a cup of hot water.

Providing for the family extends to providing financial support through part-time or full time paid employment. Whereas Little and Austin (1996) found that paid employment was discursively discouraged in rural villages, in Owaka paid employment for women is acceptable, even expected:

Paula: Out where I used to live in the country there's not many there that don't have work outside the home.
Sandra: Yes. Sometimes I feel that I. This is just really personal. I think, am I just a bit slack or a bit odd that I don't work you know. That I aren't kinda bringing in a, you know. It's quite often that I think that.
Paula: You're almost made to feel guilty.

This expectation to have paid employment, and care for children helps reinforce femininity in the community as Capable/Adaptable. Women are educated, and have worked away from the area gaining further experiences. Once they have a family, if the farm/family needs extra money the woman adds paid employment to her tasks of raising the children and helping on the farm (Park 1991).

The feminine identity of Capable/Adaptable is performed in numerous ways, but is less visible away from the farm. During the study period women were observed filling the car with petrol, carrying heavy bags out to cars from the supermarket, and of note one was seen to carry a sack from PGG Wrightsons to a car for an older male. Florence describes her first experience of lambing when she was eight months
pregnant and still riding on the back of a farm bike. Rachel, in her 60s, had unassumingly spent the morning helping stack firewood.

This is a rugged form of femininity that involves use of power tools and mechanical equipment. However it is engaged with by women like Ursula who wears eye makeup and has dyed hair but describes her gardening as ‘[every] 6 months with Roundup \(^{10}\) and a chainsaw’, and who uses a tractor in the garden to remove stumps. This contrasts with Saugeres (2002b) work discussing rural femininity that does not include tractor driving, and Brandth’s (1995) publication on tractor advertising images that exclude women.

It was not unusual for respondents to talk of sharing their knowledge (in one case cross-stitch skills) with others. During the research period a card-making weekend was organised by a woman willing to share her skills with the wider community. Information is shared at evenings, Adult and Community Education classes run by the school are attended, or known about, by the women. Foucault argues that power is knowledge (O’Farrell 2005), and those in the community who educate have the ability to reinforce discursive constructions of gender. While it is not within the scope of this research to consider the wider power dynamics within the community, the performance of femininity has revealed some of the ways that the discursive construct is maintained, and the power of hegemonic identity to reinforce itself through actions.

5.2.3 Speech

Although discourse involves more than verbal communication, utterances play an important role (Tyler 1978). However, the unsaid, what occurs before and after an utterance, also help define meaning (Tyler 1978). During interviews in Owaka, a particular style of speech was noted that can be referred to as ‘the unspoken’. Tyler (1978, p.15) articulates this as ‘what is not said, either by way of implicitness or in silence itself, is often more important than what is said’. This can be seen in the following quotes about women going to the Catlins Inn:

*Connie:* There’s one or two women that go there, but they’re there every night

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\(^{10}\) Roundup is a chemical weed killer.
Paula: There’s a few women who go regularly.

Jane: Are there any unspoken rules about where you go, where you don’t go?

Martha: I wouldn’t go to the pub (laugh)

In this way the speakers imply that the behaviour is inappropriate, but do not say so outright. Martha says she wouldn’t go to the pub, and uses laughter to make light of the topic and express reserve about talking on the topic. This ‘unspoken’ is part of the performance of women as supporters of the community; not wishing to cause trouble, of being nice, of not gossiping openly. For niceness and goodness are perceived as appropriate feminine attributes. This involves an amount of Foucauldian self-surveillance, with individual women constantly monitoring their own behaviours. If something negative was said during an interview, it was followed by a balancing statement. For example, Sandra, when discussing how some social cliques are present in the area, noted that ‘they are all really nice ladies’.

Discourse has power, and speech as part of that can empower and disempower different individuals and groups. Within the community, utterances are a way of reinforcing social expectations; where comment is not elaborated upon, ‘the unspoken’ defines what is inappropriate. Talk ensues when a performance that is different from social expectations occurs:

Connie: They might not say anything to your face but there would certainly be an awful lot of talk.

Emma: It’s a small community. Anybody different stands out.

Jane: Talked about, shunned?

Emma: I wouldn’t say shunned, but talked about… it would be noted, not ostracised, but noted.

This occurred when the new owner of the Catlins Diner changed the menu, and method of measuring the quantity of chips.
Rachel: Word spreads like wildfire around here. [...] I can see that lady doing a real starve over winter time because the locals just won't go.

When asked what would happen if women did something that was not the norm, Martha appeared uncomfortable communicating verbally. In performing a version of 'the unspoken' she made a chatting motion with her hand, and moved it from her body to her full arms length. Asked if difference would be talked about, she nodded. The movement of her arm as well as her hand indicated the amount of talk that would occur.

Martha was not the only woman reticent to speak openly with me about other women. I was unable to arrange a focus group meeting with women from the Senior Citizens group, although had no difficulty in arranging individual interviews with members. This may relate to Rachel's comment:

Rachel: And then, you be very careful about .. what you say about anybody because they're nearly all interbred.
Jane: Ahh. You might be talking to their cousin.
Rachel: Yeah. Everybody is related to everybody else around here.

This reticence was not just in speaking openly to me, the researcher, but also reflected a wider need to conform – for example, to not be caught in their dressing gown, and to not be seen visiting the Catlins Inn. If speaking of an activity they undertook that would be noted by the community, the women felt the need to explain their actions in order to render them acceptable. This hedging in speech helped indirectly to reveal attributes of the feminine identity. In a similar manner participants from the Playcentre reinforced the community’s focus on heteronormativity, including the social expectations of marriage, in their speech. When asked if they are married, some seemed comfortable stating they are not married, but subsequently referred to their partners as hubby, or as their husbands.

5.2.4 Challenge through Performance
The feminine identities described in Chapter 4 are those that are dominant, and hegemonic. However, challenges to dominant constructions occur in a number of
ways (Butler 1999, Jackson 1992). This contestation may be in small, non-evident ways such as not getting changed from nightwear into clothes until just before going out, to the more obvious going to the Catlins Inn. An example of challenge to hegemonic identities is Florence, a younger woman who continues to go to the Catlins Inn, even though she has children:

*Florence:* I go to the pub. I don't care if they call me a slapper.

Significantly, this was also the only time that any of the participants was forthright in stating why woman don’t go to the pub, which itself constituted a challenge to hegemonic identity.

Another challenge became evident when Ursula initially claimed she could not bake, yet, when later questioned she admitted she can, but doesn’t. Other small challenges occur through performance such as admitting baking had been frozen, or the wearing of a low cut top and necklace. Sandra does not conform to the conservative dress style, but is aware that some people may consider her ‘unusual’, and accepts the label lightly. Others similarly explained that if you do something socially unusual (challenging) there is talk, and your behaviour is noted, but for some this is not a problem. Indeed, one participant considered her Outsider identity gives her more ability to do as she pleases.

5.3 Spatial Dimensions to Gender Performance.

Gregson and Rose (2000) argue the importance of considering performance as well as the discursive construction of identities. They stress the need to consider space, as differences can mediate performance; identity is performed in a cultural context, culture being place specific. For example, Johnston and Valentine (1995) discuss space in relation to performance of sexual identity. Here I discuss the performance of feminine identity in relation to Owaka, a specific space, and to different spaces and places within Owaka.
5.3.1 Public vs. Private Performance of Sexuality

During discussions many participants referred to having a few drinks or wines at home, but to not drinking in a public place, such as the Catlins Inn. Younger women referred to sexuality as a private thing when speaking about underwear, or wearing a dress, as previously discussed. Drinking is part of socialising in heterosexual couples and overt female sexuality is for the home. The only public display of physical affection during the observation period was between a teenage heterosexual couple seen holding hands while walking along Main Rd and Ovenden St. The display of teen sexuality is acceptable, but that between married couples is not. Homosexuality is not acceptable in public, nor at family occasions. When some participants made reference to a lesbian in the community, she introduces her partner as her flatmate, an observation consistent with findings by Johnston and Valentine (1995). In Owaka context is clearly important for the form of sexuality performed, as some forms of sexuality are more acceptable in specific spaces, others considered deviant (Hubbard 2000, Little forthcoming).

5.3.2 The Main Streets as Public Space

During the observation period there was little difference between the performance of men and women in the two main streets. Both genders were viewed carrying loads, with children, talking to the opposite gender and interacting. The women communicated with were confident, polite and helpful. In the street they would approach me to discuss my work. None of the interview participants mentioned feeling uncomfortable around the community (except for some at night times).

5.3.3 The Catlins Inn

The Catlins Inn provided an observable display of gendered space, and performance of identity based on gender. A different performance of femininity occurs here. The image presented in interviews is one of a space where men would go in their dirty clothes, unwashed, to have a drink, to drink to excess. However, the Catlins Inn was being renovated during the research period. These renovations were mentioned positively by many participants as potentially re-gendering spaces in the Inn. Because the renovations occurred over the holiday and tourist season, however, it is not yet clear whether changes will become permanent or the pub will remain a place that women feel uncomfortable going to. To clarify, I will first discuss the performance of
femininity before the renovations, and then reflect on the changes evident following renovation.

The Catlins Inn is situated one block away from Main Road. There is a large area for parking outside, where there is often a number of vehicles parked (figure 8).

Figure 8: The Catlins Inn

![Image of The Catlins Inn](source: Private Collection – January 2007)

During the first observation period, the entrance was directly into the bar, with a to be renovated bar to the left of the entrance. The bar was clearly a work in progress with signs of building around. That part in use, yet to be upgraded, had cream walls, a stained Axminster carpet, several ‘leaner’ tables and bar stools, a pool table, gaming machines and flat screen television. The bar was small, poorly lit, with an old fridge, and two taps for beer. Unusual was the toy box, which gave the impression of the place being family friendly (figure 9).

The area occupied by women was by the fireplace. The whole time I was there I did not see any women play pool. To get to the bar, the women had to walk past the men at the leaners. Emma spoke of walking in self-consciously, and I witnessed this happening. A women entered the bar exhibiting extreme uncertainty: her eyes down, shoulders up, collar of jacket up, chin tucked in, and her hands in her pockets. She relaxed slightly once it was made clear she was there to pick up some take-away food, and that her order was ready.
Not only did women congregate in the vicinity of the fireplace, but so too did their male partners. An older lady, there with her elderly husband and adult sons, was bought a drink but she did not participate in the conversation. Younger women came in later, walked directly to the bar, not making contact or greeting the men. They bought a bottle\textsuperscript{11} each, but unlike the men did not sit it at a table in the foreground, but took a table to the side, or placed their bottles on the mantelpiece, and stood alongside. They did not talk loudly, in contrast to the men who continued their discussions across the room, using the entire space.

\textsuperscript{11} This is the term used for a 750ml bottle of beer, in Owaka the brand was Speight's who utilise the ‘Southern Man’ marketing campaign.
Once the newly decorated bar opened, the atmosphere was much fresher and cleaner. The pool table was removed from centre stage to the rear of the bar, near the door to the veranda. In the corner was an area with a coffee table, couches and the television. There were high tables and stools throughout the bar, more than before the renovations. I did not observe the toy box (figure 10).

A larger number of people were eating meals. An advertising flyer had been sent out and women spoke of going to try the new menu:
Once the newly decorated bar opened, the atmosphere was much fresher and cleaner. The pool table was removed from centre stage to the rear of the bar, near the door to the veranda. In the corner was an area with a coffee table, couches and the television. There were high tables and stools throughout the bar, more than before the renovations. I did not observe the toy box (figure 10).

Figure 10: The Renovated Catlins Inn.

A larger number of people were eating meals. An advertising flyer had been sent out and women spoke of going to try the new menu:
Paula: I went on Saturday night and I had dinner there (laughter) because I heard got such a good meal.

Jane: It is.

Paula: I insisted on being taken

Diane: laughter

Sandra: Well good on you

Paula: I put my foot down about cooking tea. I said I'm going to the pub to try out the new menu. I quite enjoyed it.

Paula uses the new menu and a meal as a suitable reason for going to the pub. The laughter around this was used as a form of social etiquette, deflecting whatever misgivings might have been felt. Sandra’s comment let Paula know it was alright to talk about going to the pub in this group of people, and to prevent Paula from feeling ‘othered’ and disempowered by her ‘confession’. This reflects the fact that the renovations have not altered the views of all women about eating there:

Emma: I don’t like going to the local\textsuperscript{12} pub. I don’t feel particularly comfortable there. Although they’re revamping it at the moment and it’s starting to look a bit more friendly to, you know, not just the old soak boozers guys that, you know.

Indeed, although the space has been modified, many of the performances of gendered identities remain the same. For example, women still come in quietly and stand self-consciously when waiting for take-aways, and younger men congregate around the pool table. Diane referred to slinking into the renovated pub when she went there for fish and chips.

Women’s lack of confidence when within the Catlins Inn was enacted by a former class member of the researcher who arrived with a group of younger males. She was unwilling to talk to me, unlike her boyfriend who introduced himself, mentioned she recognised me from lectures we shared, and questioned me on my research. The young woman remained in the background until she apologised for his behaviour, correcting his actions. She continued to perform the hegemonic femininity when she

\textsuperscript{12} I have emphasised Emma’s use of the word local. She did frequent bars when living out of the area.
ordered food, and took this out to the whole group. She monitored her partner’s behaviour. She also maintained the performance of sexuality as being for private space only, slapping his hand away from her when he placed it on her bottom. The bar staff also assumed this role, helping another male customer with his money and informing him to curb his language.

The act of visiting the Inn was always justified as being within a socially acceptable frame: I went for a meal, there was a band, I went with my husband, went with others when I was single. Those women who do go are ‘known’ and noted in a manner that does not outwardly speak badly of them, but the tone employed makes it clear that this is an activity that is not entirely acceptable, especially on a week night:

*Diane:* And you never drink during the week

*Connie:* There’s one or 2 women that go there, but they’re there every .. every night.

*Paula:* There’s a few women who go regularly. You sort of almost know who is going to be there.

### 5.3.4 Lumberjack Café

In comparison to the Catlins Inn, the Lumberjack Café (figure 11) was discussed in positive ways, with no stigma attached to women who use it as a meeting place.

The Café décor is different from that of the Catlins Inn. Participants referred to it as ‘a nice place’ that they want to keep open for somewhere to go. Socialisation of women in Owaka is in a more restrained, tidy manner than that perceived to occur at the Catlins Inn. The Lumberjack is used by female groups such as the netball team, and teachers from the school. Although this provides a space in which women feel comfortable, the Lumberjack reinforces gendered identities and difference:
Paula: I think a lot more ladies would be much more comfortable going to the Lumberjack than they would be going to the pub.

Diane: mmh mmh. And at the ladies night they always have a speaker or something you know a fashion parade or entertainment as well.

Wine tasting is considered appropriate here. When I mentioned beer, the owner said that that would be good for the nights the husbands came. This reinforces the image of beer as a man’s drink, whereas women drink wine; constructing the Catlins Inn, where beer is consumed, as masculine, and the Lumberjack, where wine is served, as feminine.

5.4 Institutional Reinforcement of Gender Identities

'Socially derived concepts are believed in part because of powerful reinforcing institutions' (Barnes 2000, p. 748).

As discussed in Chapter 2, research by Little (1987) highlighted that institutionalised values and practices empower men and disempower women. There are many institutions from national scale such as the government, to small volunteer
organisations and social groups, that create discourses that empower or disempower women. This section discusses how they reinforce gender identities in Owaka, naturalising them in the process.

5.4.1 Media
Brandth (1995) and Liepins (1998) considered media representations in agriculture, identifying their influence on the social construction of gender identities. A local community paper, The Clutha Leader, is delivered to homes in Balclutha and surrounding towns, including Owaka. Consulting this free newspaper before observations and interviews created for me an image of women in Owaka as domestic, and craft orientated due to predominant writing and photographs about women in these activities.

The Clutha Leader also reinforces the views of the Moral upholders in relation to gender and employment. Two separate businesses advertised for ‘waitresses’, not waiters, or, as more commonly in the Otago Daily Times, wait-staff. In the rural community, waiting on tables is a feminine occupation, related to the domestic tasks at home.

The Clutha Leader also reinforces heteronormativity, and marriage as part of heteronormativity. By referring to women by their title and surname, men by their surname only in articles, the marital status and importance of marriage is emphasised. An exception was a sportswoman who was referred to by her surname only (which differed from that of her husband). My media release was adjusted to refer to me by title and surname, not first name, by the local reporter (Appendix G).

5.4.2 Community and Educational Organisations
Women play a large part in maintaining gendered identities, in part through their organisations (Stebbing 1984). Many of the numerous organisations in Owaka have a majority of female members:

Paula: I don’t think we’ve ever had a guy in the craft group. We’ve had the odd guy. I shouldn’t say odd, there was nothing odd about them (laughter). In the garden club there’s been a few men over the years.
The attendance of a man at the card-making weekend was a source of humour:

*Diane:* God help him.

Laughter

*Sandra:* He'll be popular.

Laughter

*Paula:* A very brave man.

Laughter

Although Owaka has four churches the presence of ‘knee-benders’ in the community was not obvious until Sunday morning. The observation times during Sunday also revealed more families travelling together, and the expression of identity through dress changed. Women were more likely to be wearing a skirt and blouse instead of jeans and a t-shirt. Some of the participants referred to church ministers, one to a prayer group she attends weekly. Socially, the church affirms the belief that you care for your neighbours.

The Playcentre recreated the identity of mothers as nurturers. The only father observed was made welcome, but he was the only one observed in this feminine space. This compares with my experiences at an urban kindergarten where it was common for fathers to drop off and pick up their children.

Expectations for women and education are created by the formal education received at the school. In the education system children are asked what career they wish to have, and overseas travel is a topic of conversation between teachers and pupils. For many women further formal education involves leaving the area to attend tertiary education facilities in larger urban centres, unlike the men:

*Debbie:* The expectations are, once you finish school, that you go away to do further education. Or get a job.

*Florence:* The men don’t leave, but the women do.[...] Even the single men don’t. [They] don’t go past Tunnel Hill.

*Ursula:* It’s quite true.
This reinforces the Outsider/Import identity, and highlights the expected adaptability of women to new experiences and situations.

5.5 Conclusion

Women perform, reinforce and recreate femininity. This chapter has examined how this occurs in Owaka, through speech, actions and dress. Performance reflects and affirms the dominant discourse(s) that create gender identities. Public performance of femininity in Owaka is in the form of three key femininities: Provider/Supporter, Educated/Educator and Capable/Adaptable. These identities are not independent of place, that is, where the identity is performed helps in its construction. The construction of femininity as a moral upholder, as well as a supporter and provider, ensures that the Catlins Inn continues to be an inappropriate place for women to go on their own. Heteronormativity is reinforced, empowering women who are in a heterosexual relationship, disempowering those who are not:

Martha: It was nice when you had a husband to go with you.

Within the community, the construction of hegemonic femininities disempowers some and empowers others. This construction can be through speech that ‘others’ some femininities and gives other femininities higher status, encouraging the performance of the privileged femininities. However challenges to the dominant construct and contestation also occur through performance. Some women go to the pub no matter what the community may think, and others dress in a manner that is outside the norm.

Women in Owaka are supportive of each other, and act as a lynchpin holding the community together. Some identities have a stronger role to play in this process, and those who are not Imports have a stronger voice. Many were reticent about talking to me because they had lived in Owaka for only a short time (including ten years as a short time). Female solidarity is not enough, however, to make the community welcome every new person. The power of women within the community is noticeable in the way talk influences who goes to the Catlins Diner, exemplifying how women reinforce hegemonic feminine identity through performance. The new owner of the
Diner does not perform the feminine Provider identity in a manner that the community assess to be appropriate. This is widely discussed in the community, and the Diner is not viewed as an appropriate place for women to patronise.

The preferential status of one identity within a community raises questions about power. Challenges to power can lead to change. The influence of the media is important in that change. Increased access to examples of different femininities through media such as television and internet may change the rural femininity. However, in a close-knit community, the need to conform is strongly felt. This encourages the re-creation of conservative identities for a longer period of time, yet already younger women are less likely to emulate their mothers’ daily experiences. Some members of the community see this as evidence of its decline. Others simply note that their feminine identities have changed from those of their mothers, and will change during their lifetime - even in Owaka.
Chapter 6:

Conclusion: The Social Construction of Femininity in a Rural New Zealand Community

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study has been to observe and analyse the construction of feminine identities in a rural community. Research on rural women has often focused on those living on farms, or the gender relations in the community, but without emphasising the role of feminine identities. This research has sought to address two research questions. Firstly, what are the key feminine identities in Owaka, a rural community; and secondly, how and where are these femininities performed?

6.2 Findings in Retrospect

A review of previous literature has enabled this investigation to be placed within the wider context of rural geography. Rural geography has utilised multiple theoretical contexts over time to consider rural space and gender. Little (2002) explains the processes by which gender research has moved away from gender roles and materialities to imagined gender identities. Little (forthcoming) now calls for a revisiting of roles, and how they relate to sexuality and gender identity. Little and Austin (1996) earlier suggested that gender identities are influenced by the concept of the rural idyll, and it is suggested here that gender roles and relations are similarly situated.

Little (2002) emphasises the necessity for a feminist paradigm, and the need to consider diversity of the experience and conceptualization of rurai(ity (the rural idyll). Diversity of experience, and the influence of the rural domestic idyll are both apparent in the performance of femininities in Owaka.
Many earlier references to gender were via the roles women perform in family farm units. This later changed to research that considered gender and power relations. More recently research in rural geography has taken a poststructural approach to consider the gender identities and the multi-faceted experiences embedded within rural spaces that construct and reconstruct gender identities.

Little and Austin (1996), and Panelli (2000), argue that there are powerful, resilient concepts within communities that affect feminine identity, including gendered roles, the rural idyll, rural community and sexuality (figure 12).

**Figure 12: Influences on Gender Identity**

In Owaka, gendered roles are recreated through the actions of caring and providing, through being capable and adaptable in respect to tasks and situations, and through educating those in the community. The rural community is important in defining
appropriate roles of femininity, and in identifying places for the (appropriate) performance of femininity. Women act as the lynchpins and moral upholders maintaining community, but are also constrained by this role. The rural idyll, that romanticised image of rural space as continuously natural, peaceful and pleasant, defines perceptions of appropriate femininity. Sexuality is linked to the rural idyll (Little forthcoming). It is heterosexual, for reproduction, and cannot be ‘deviant’. All these factors link to form gender identities in rural communities.

Three key feminine identities were noted in Owaka: Provider/Supporter, Educated/Educator and Capable/Adaptable. These three identities were further influenced by attributes that overlay them: Moral Upholder and Import/Outsider status. Employing this framework, this study has considered the heteronormativity of the Owaka rural space, and contestations to hegemonic identities there.

These identities are reconstructed discursively in the community through performance and, furthermore, spatial aspects affect the identities performed and constructed. Little and Panelli (2003) discuss employment as a key theme in gender and rural geography research and Little and Austin (1996) earlier noted that paid employment for women is constructed discursively by rural women as an inappropriate activity. Women’s employment in rural communities is constrained by the distance to travel, and limited employment vacancies, but also ‘through moral and social orders’ in community life (Hughes 1997, p.131). The moral and social orders discursively construct a nurturing femininity influenced by the rural idyll (Bouquet 1982, Davidoff et al. 1976, Little 1987, Little and Austin 1996). The Provider/Supporter identity performed in Owaka is equivalent to this feminine nurturer. However, the Owaka femininity is involved in the workforce, even expected to. Whether this is particular to Owaka, or New Zealand, is not apparent from this research, but the contrast with findings from the United Kingdom that paid employment is not consistent with rural femininity is notable. The perception of types of employment appropriate for women was, however, reinforced discursively by women.

Stebbing (1984) and Little (forthcoming) suggest that isolation and insulation from alternative definitions of femininity reinforces hegemonic roles of women in rural society. This study has shown, however, that while hegemonic roles are evident,
Owaka experiences a continuous infusion of ‘Imports’- women from outside the area. One possible explanation for this is that a number of these Imports actually move only short distances, from Balclutha, Mataura, and Kaka Point; and from places where the discourses of the Southern Man and rural idyll are also strong influences. They perform a similar femininity and thereby reinforce rather than challenge hegemonic discourses. Research focusing specifically on the Import: community interface could be expected to further inform this debate.

Within New Zealand, the heteronormativity of rural areas has been considered by Lovelock (1995) with respect to Mataura, and studied by Little (2003) through the staging of the Middlemarch Singles Ball. This latter event was mentioned frequently in Owaka, with similarities between the experiences of the two communities being drawn. It was suggested that a similar event in Owaka would be beneficial, highlighting a common understanding of the pressures of rurality and heteronormativity across rural communities (at least in New Zealand and the United Kingdom) (Little 2003, Little forthcoming, Little and Leyshon 2003). Discursive constructs such as the Middlemarch/Owaka comparisons, are affirmed by the local newspaper, which also emphasises heteronormativity in common with the wider New Zealand media (Brickell 2005).

Little (forthcoming) argues that in rural space women are desexualised; that they are not meant to be overtly sexual beings. This is evident in Owaka, with women typically going outside the community to perform alternative femininities such as ‘hen parties’ and other socialisation. For those in the community who are in long term relationships, or who have completed child bearing, sexuality is related to reproduction. This raises the issue of what constitutes femininity for women who do not have families, for those who do not engage in physical reproduction as well as social reproduction.

Performance of feminine identities is considered through dress - a place specific style was noted; actions - what tasks the women undertake, providing, caring, educating and maintaining community support and organisations; and speech - in particular the ‘unspoken’ that involves a reticence to speak to me, and not mentioning topics considered socially inappropriate. By use of tone, women could imply that a
behaviour was unacceptable, but in not stating the case they could not be accused of gossiping and judging (perceived to be negative feminine attributes).

Spatial influences on other performances were noted, with women expressing discomfort in the Catlins Inn, yet showing confidence in other places in the community. The Inn is recreated as a space unsuitable for women through speech, by not approving of those who go there, and by justifying intermittent presence there by emphasising a socially acceptable practice such as dining.

As observed in the introduction to this chapter, little research has been undertaken in New Zealand on women in a rural community, as opposed to rural women as farmers. This is significant because women in rural communities have constraints on life different from those of both farming women and urban women. Women in Owaka face the same problems with transport, childcare and employment opportunities as those in urban centres. In addition, however, they experience the difficulties of living in a small community, such as the self surveillance of behaviour that occurs when everybody knows everybody, news travels fast, and therefore little is able to be kept secret. In small communities, talk is used as a means of maintaining community structure and 'moral order'.

Femininities in Owaka are actively performed and embodied, not just learnt and internalised. This reinforces current literature on performance and space (Gregson and Rose 2000, Nash 2000), and the construction of heteronormative gender identities (Butler 1999, Hubbard 2000, Little 2003, Little forthcoming). Discursive constructs of Owaka as a rural idyll, sexuality, community, and gender appropriateness, combine with the performance of heterosexuality, rurality, community support and belonging, and tasks perceived as appropriate for women, to create and reinforce socially constructed feminine identities (figure 13). Each component of identity influences the social construction of others; they do not stand alone. Through discourse each femininity is constructed, then reproduced through further performance and discourse, affirming hegemony and creating a semblance of order and conformity.
6.3 Research Limitations

In conducting this research a number of limitations were experienced. First was the size and scope of the study. As a postgraduate diploma exercise, there has not been the time, nor the skills required, to address fully all aspects of the research questions. For example, there was not time to consider the power relations that occur in the
community. Second, my age and life experiences may have been a help in talking to women, but may also have been a hindrance because I do not fit the stereotype of the postgraduate student. Many were genuinely surprised to note the age of my children. Some were reluctant to talk to me when contacted by telephone, but in person were forthcoming with information because they then realised my age. Third, the research period covered the seasonal summer holidays during which daily routines and activities of those observed may have been modified. Tourists may also have skewed some of the observation of women’s performance at both sites, especially once the Catlins Inn was renovated and more people dined there. Fourth, planned observation at the golf course could not be undertaken as ladies’ golf does not run over the Christmas/new year period. Fifth, class and ethnicity are two potentially significant social dimensions not considered in this research.

Furthermore, comments made during research about farmers’ wives having money (‘those up the valley’), and cliques within the community reveal that this is an area worthy of further consideration. Cloke and Thrift (1987) discuss class in relationship to incomers to rural communities, and the possibility of change to the Owaka area brought about by the rise of Kaka Point real estate prices, and inhabitants of Queenstown purchasing holiday homes or moving into the area, was noted by participants. This further emphasises the importance of research into the characteristics of Imports into the community, as suggested earlier in this chapter.

The choice of observation and interviewing sites was made from a distance, and a more detailed knowledge of the location may have led to sites that would be more beneficial and provide more accurate data that explicitly highlighting the performance of feminine identities (for example the sports club on a Saturday, where mothers supervise their children).

To undertake the research ethically, it was necessary to inform the community when and where observation would be undertaken. This (rightly) gave people the ability to opt out, and not be observed if this was their wish. However, it may also have led people to change their behaviour in the locations where I was observing. This is an ongoing dilemma for observation research.
With more time, then, the following might have been considered: the Lumberjack Café as a feminine space; power relations that occur between women; more subtle differences between women on farms and women in the rural township; a more thorough consideration of age in the definition of identity; and an even broader target population. Although I spoke to some 10 percent of the female population of Owaka, there are two groups in the community I did not talk to; women who are in full time employment; and those with school age children. Due to the tight time frame and extra work required in an application for ethics approval from the University of Otago Ethics Committee, women under 18 years were not included. This removed the need to gather parental consent, but limited the age range of women. A further focus group with women from Owaka (but who no longer live there) might have been beneficial in highlighting dominant gender expectations that some women find oppressive and lead them to leave the community.

In such a short time span for data collection, the full extent of researcher integration into the community was inevitably limited. Any research, no matter the length of time, is only of that time, and always influenced by the researcher’s subjectivity – their reading of the situation. That this dissertation represents my reading of the situation needs to be acknowledged. My feminist background, however, was not an issue during data collection. I tried not to appear judgemental (even when spoken to about physical disciplining of children), nor to put answers into respondents’ mouths, whilst at the same time trying to facilitate communication. Did I influence the answers to questions by using such terms as Southern Women? People usually thought of the Southern Man construct and this may have encouraged descriptions of particular identity.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This dissertation only begins to delve into the gendered social relations in small rural communities in New Zealand. It has already been suggested that more research into the experiences of Imports is needed. Several other potentially fruitful areas of research also suggest themselves.
Consideration of the ongoing meaning for the performance of femininity if women continue to leave for educational (and subsequent employment) opportunities would be valuable. The educational attainment statistics employed in this study are from the 2001 Census and changes to formal qualification achievements may have occurred due to nationwide changes in education. If young women continue to leave the district for tertiary education and work, and to be replaced by Outsiders, exactly what are the implications for the continued reproduction of the community?

The influence of the church might also be considered as a number of respondents perceive a dichotomy between ‘elbow-benders’ and ‘knee-benders’ in the community. Utilising the church as a site of observation, and consideration of the influence of religion (as well as the rural idyll) on discursive constructs, would expose another dimension to the re-creation of feminine identities and heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity has only been touched on in this study. Further research considering Little’s (2003, forthcoming) work on the perceived necessity of heterosexuality for rural communities could be significant given the need for women to continue the family farm unit, and their role in cementing the community. Comparisons made between Owaka and Middlemarch by residents highlights a common understanding of heterosexuality as necessary for maintaining not just the values of the community but its very fabric.

Urban and rural women in New Zealand face similar demands on their time, and similar constraints. Some problems voiced in Owaka echo comments of urban women such as complaints about not being able to go out as easily as their husbands, the changes occurring with women working, and there being fewer women available for voluntary work. However some of the constraints faced by rural women may be more significant, suggesting a heterogeneity of femininity in New Zealand. The effect of living in small, close knit communities alters use of space, and performance. Further work considering Foucault’s concept of self-surveillance, power and control, and how
these are used within a rural community to maintain hegemonic identities, would lead to a greater understanding of the recreation and reinforcement of identities.

Further research into the construction of masculinity in small rural communities could complement this study. Campbell (2000) found masculinity constructed within the local pub, often in terms of what it was not – that is, not feminine. In so doing men actively construct a feminine identity. This was also evident in the Catlins Inn. Exactly how this affects women and their perception of their identity has not been considered by this study, but is worthy of further consideration, specifically, differences in the feminine performance of sexuality were noted across the generations in Owaka. Is it just that women in New Zealand are looking for everlasting love, while men are seeking physical sex, a housekeeper, and someone to fulfil the obligation to carry on the family farm?

The reproductive role of women has been touched on in this study in relation to the social reproduction of identities. Corresponding to Little and Austin (1996), feminine identities in Owaka are tied to identities as rural women and their understandings of rural society, including expectations about motherhood and belonging in a rural community. This suggests another potential area of research into the disempowerment that occurs when women are unable to fulfil the role of mother - and the effect this has on perceptions of feminine identity.

This study has explored the construction of femininities in a rural South Otago town, revealing spatial complexities in the constructions of identities through discourse and performance, and contributing to existing scholarship on rural feminine identities. The influence of the rural idyll on femininity is evident in this case study, as in previous research. This study provides confirmation of previous work on the heteronormativity of rural New Zealand, but contrasts with findings on the performance of rural femininity and employment in studies of United Kingdom cases.
References


Appendix A

Consent Forms
and Focus Group Ground Rules
THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage. I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.

3. All information collected in the form of audio-tapes or interview notes will be retained in secure storage for five years after the conclusion of the project, after which they will be destroyed.

4. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.

5. The project does not foresee any potential risk to the participants.

6. No payment or reward will be offered for participation. However a summary of results will be available upon request at the conclusion of the research project.

7. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the library but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

8. I understand that reasonable precautions have been taken to protect data transmitted by email but that the security of the information cannot be guaranteed.
I agree to take part in this project.

(Signature of participant) (Date)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee
THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage. I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

2. My participation is based on my acceptance of the written ground rules (attached).

3. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.

4. Personal identifying information in the form of audio-tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed.

5. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.

6. The project does not foresee any potential risk to the participants.

7. Refreshments will be provided during the focus group interview but no payment or reward will be offered for participation. However a summary of results will be available upon request at the conclusion of the research project.

8. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the library but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.
9. I understand that reasonable precautions have been taken to protect data transmitted by email but that the security of the information cannot be guaranteed.

I agree to take part in this project.

............................................................................................................................

(Signature of participant) (Date)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee

[University of Otago logo]
Written Ground Rules for Focus Group Discussions

To ensure the smooth running and safety of all focus groups it is necessary for participants to agree to the following ground rules. Additional ground rules can be added by focus group members, with discussion and consensus at the beginning of the event.

- All participants' contributions are valid.
- There are no right or wrong answers, each participant's contribution is valid.
- All participants are to be encouraged by the group to contribute to dialogue.
- Only one person should speak at a time.
- No side conversations amongst other group members should occur whilst one person is speaking.
- Participants will introduce themselves when speaking, for voice recognition in transcribing.
- Confidentiality and anonymity of focus group members and dialogue should be respected. Personal details and views should remain within the room and not be discussed with any third party.
Appendix B

Focus Group and Interview Topics
Guidelines for interview/discussion topics and questions:

Describe Owaka women
1. When I mention my research, people come up with an image of a rural woman as cooking, domestic, capable on the farm, a community lynchpin, homely in her actions and looks. Do you think this image is true/false?
2. Most people know of the 'Southern Man'. Is there a female southern Woman in Owaka? What is she like:
3. Looks Like?
4. wears? Is there clothing that is inappropriate for women to wear? – Please describe what it is why it is inappropriate, and conversely what is appropriate
5. behaves – with women, with men, with children
6. does in the home (is she married, does she have children?)
7. does outside the home (is she in paid work, what leisure activities does she do, does she volunteer in the community)

Where?
8. Where does she feel most comfortable, where wouldn't she go,
9. Are there some places in Owaka that you feel more comfortable in than others?
10. Are there unspoken 'rules about when/where you go? For example, as a nice girl do you go to the pub on a Friday night? Why/why not. What would it mean if you did?

11. Are you typical of women in Owaka? In what way – clothes, pass-times, aspirations.
12. What do you do for fun? Is this the same as males?
13. If you do something that is different from the normal behaviour in Owaka are there any consequences?

Expectations of women in Owaka
14. What was it like growing up in Owaka – do you think this would have been different if you were a boy?
15. Growing up in a rural community, were you expected to marry? Did you assume you would get married?
16. What paid employment do women undertake in Owaka. Are you happy with these options?
17. Are you in paid employment? What is the job? Full time or part time? What childcare arrangements do you have? What does your husband think of this? What do other people in the community believe about this? Is it socially accepted?
18. How well do women moving into Owaka fit into the community?
19. Do you relate to this identity?
Appendix C

Media Release for Clutha Leader
Finding the 'Southern Women' of Owaka

Owaka has been chosen as a site for research by Otago University student Jane Gill. Jane is a mature-age student, married mother of two, who lives in Dunedin. She has often spent family holidays in the Catlins area and is now studying for a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts. As part of her studies, Jane is undertaking research on the women in a rural community. Her project will address some aspects of everyday life for women in Owaka. As a human geography student, Jane is especially interested in the social and spatial factors affecting women's experiences of femininity.

The fabled ‘Southern Man’ is well known in New Zealand, but less is known of the real southern women. Using several different research methods, Jane will document how feminine identity is expressed in Owaka. Her study focuses on adult women (18+ years old) living in the Owaka area but she recognizes their lives overlap with many others (children, men).

Jane's research will consist of three focus group discussions (currently being organized through local groups) and a series of observations of general social interaction. The observations will occur for approximately an hour at a time over selected times at three community sites: the Catlins Inn; the corner of Ovenden St and Main Rd; and the Owaka Golf Club. Specific details of times and dates of observation are: Catlins Inn Wednesday 6th and Saturday 9th December, 7-8pm; Owaka Golf Club Tuesday 5th December; and the corner of Main Rd and Ovenden St Monday 4th through to Thursday 7th December, for approximately an hour at 8.30am, 12noon and 4.30pm. A further period of observation will occur in the week 22-28 January. These details will also be listed on the community notice board at the Owaka Four-Square Supermarket.

Jane's research has been approved by the University Ethics Committee and her supervisors greatly appreciate any assistance the community can give to Jane. If you have any questions about the project either now or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Jane Gill Tel: 479 8788 email: giler411@student.otago.ac.nz

Or her supervisors

Dr. Ruth Panelli (in 2006) Tel: 479 8773 email rp@geography.otago.ac.nz

Dr Richard Welch (in 2007) Tel: 479 8772 email rvw@geography.otago.ac.nz
Appendix D

Information for Community Noticeboard
Finding the 'Southern Woman'

Owaka has been chosen as a site for research by Otago University student Jane Gill. Jane is a mature-age student, married mother of two, who lives in Dunedin. She has often spent family holidays in the Catlins area and is now studying for a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts. As part of her studies, Jane is undertaking research on the women in a rural community. Her project will address some aspects of everyday life for women in Owaka. As a human geography student, Jane is especially interested in the social and spatial factors affecting women's experiences of femininity.

Jane's research has been approved by the University Ethics Committee and her supervisors greatly appreciate any assistance the community can give to Jane. If you have any questions about the project either now or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Jane Gill  
Tel: 479 8788  
email: giler411@student.otago.ac.nz

Or her supervisor

Dr Richard Welch (in 2007) Tel: 479 8772  
email rvw@geography.otago.ac.nz

Thank you all for your assistance and patience whilst I was undertaking research last year. I will be back in Owaka during the week 22-28 January 2007 to carry out a further series of observations of general social interaction. The observations will occur for approximately an hour at a time over selected times at three community sites for approximately an hour:

Thank you

Catlins Inn, 8-9pm Saturday 27th January;

The corner of Ovenden St and Main Rd, starting 8.30am, 12noon and 4.30pm Friday 26th through Sunday 28th January.
Appendix E

Observation Checklist
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Time: Male</th>
<th>Site: Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities Undertaken</td>
<td>Involving children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nurturing/caring/serving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>Draped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fitted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bright colours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dull colours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Makeup</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jewellery/accessories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hair styled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialisation</td>
<td>Within gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between genders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Space</td>
<td>Confident/loud/dominant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertain/quiet/shy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Physical contact with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stance bold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Soft spoken</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swear words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loud laughter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giggle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display of heterosexuality</td>
<td>(e.g. hand holding, kissing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display of homosexuality</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Reflexivity
Appendix F:

Reflexivity

Researcher position is important as this is my reading of the situation. My life experiences will influence how I read a situation, and the importance I place on certain actions. There will be other readings of the discourse and how it constructs femininities. The relationship between myself as a researcher and the participants will have influenced the data collection. As a researcher an identity needed to be performed that would facilitate entrance and openness, as more information is likely to be forthcoming if there is a good relationship between researcher and subject.

The following sections relate to my performance, and experiences of performance, of gender identities during the study. They can be read in conjunction with Chapter 5 on the performance of identity, and illustrate performance of femininity in relation to section 5.2.1 dress, section 5.2.2 action, section 5.2.3 speech, and section 5.2.4 contestation. Also included are my experiences with performance of femininity in a specific space - the Catlins Inn (section 5.3.3), and the media construct of my identity (section 5.4.1).

5.2.1 Dress

As the researcher, I used my dress during the research period to help facilitate acceptance by the community, and therefore aid openness during discussions. In doing so I was presenting a particular identity, and emulating the hegemonic femininity of Owaka.

On one of my observation days I returned to my accommodation. I had, as usual for observation days, dressed in a manner that I had seen women wearing – jeans, a pale blue polar fleece, and my hair was not as constrained by product as normal. The polar fleece was one that I wear infrequently in Dunedin, around the house or under a jacket on winter walks. As I returned from an observation hour, the owners of the house I was staying in were at home. When I walked up the path, at a glance they thought I
was a friend coming to visit them. We found it amusing that I had been mistaken for her, blending into Owaka after such a short time. I was secretly pleased and hoped it would help facilitate acceptance and encourage openness during interviews, but also amazed that wearing something I would prefer not to be seen wearing in Dunedin was acceptable. I had, earlier that week, been out in my more normal attire, wearing pink and beaded slip on shoes. On that day I stopped to help change a tyre, and felt conscious of the inappropriateness of my footwear, especially given the capability of the person I stopped to help. During the interviews and discussion groups I endeavoured to dress in a conservative style, wearing minimal makeup, jeans and conservatively styled and coloured jerseys.

5.2.2 Actions

‘Butler suggests men and women learn to perform [...] gendered social practices that become so routinized as to appear natural’ (Nash 2000: 654). I had difficulty recognising the performance of femininity as it has become naturalised for me. Through keeping a journal, and practising the reflexivity discussed by Pini (2004), I was able to take a step back and consider that for many it would not be ‘daily practice’ to offer drinks to a guest, or discuss their families. I had to consciously note the way the participants acted, for example how they sat, to compare this with the way a man may sit, and decide if it was an embodiment of femininity, and further more if it was place specific. I did not have trouble observing and noting masculinity in action. The focus group at the Playcentre made me also consider the performance and my proximity to the feminine identity. Participants discussed the difficulty they have going out, getting their husbands to look after the children for them. This is not unique to a rural setting, but on consideration I realise it may be more profound due to travel time as a constraint on ability to go, limited childcare options, and the long hours of men’s labour.

5.2.3 Speech

The manner of speaking by participants made meaning quite clear during the interviews, but when it came time to transcribe them, the transcript of the interview did not illuminate the underlying meaning that had originally been evident. The women were saying that these other women did this, but... and here they did not say it was bad. It was difficult to get them to say outright why women do not go to the
pub, until Florence came out with her comment that they could call her a slapper, she didn’t care.

My own style of joking had to be restrained in case I said something inappropriate; to say something that was not socially acceptable was often on my mind. For an Import, feeling your way around conversations must take some practice. Although they didn’t have the same conversational cockfighting Campbell (2000) describes, care was needed, and insider knowledge was helpful in contributing to, and understanding of, the conversation. For example, or the frequent comment that began there’s one woman… who drinks, who goes to the pub, who is a lesbian, and a conversation with the Playcentre women on nicknames involved local knowledge, – everyone knows, but as an outsider I didn’t know. As women they were unwilling to ‘gossip’ and tell me.

5.2.4 Contestation

Did I contest the feminine expectations? I purposefully tried not to, but felt constrained, and often on edge in my efforts to conform, constantly worried I may make a step wrong. I was conscious of both observing, but also as an Outsider, of being observed. There was a certain amount of security in knowing there were people there, but also a feeling of needing to behave in a manner appropriate to the community to facilitate my acceptance, and the participants’ openness with me. I was more comfortable consuming the landscape as a tourist, unobserved by the community.

5.3.3 The Catlins Inn

Connie: A woman on her own going to the pub, they look sideways at. It’s almost as if she is looking for a man.

I made a mistake on my first observation period at the bar. After walking in confidently I sat by the poker machines, not realising that it was hinted I go by the fire, but I thought it was too far around the corner and placed some of the bar out of sight. The second time as I arrived I greeted some men who had been there on the Wednesday observation period, and was ignored. Obviously this was not the right thing to do, yet one had waved to me on the street. I was very visible in my
observation spot under the television, but was able to see the whole bar. I was immediately approached by males, asking my age and if I was married. It seems that Connie’s comment on single women in the bar was correct: I was considered to be open to be propositioned. I was offered a bed for the night, even once they knew why I was there (i.e. not looking for a date), and my marital status.

In the new bar I sat at the bar to ensure the whole space was visible. Once again I was approached by males as soon as I sat down. Once again I was asked if I was married, and references made to the similarity to Middlemarch with few single women. Many of the men were offering to tell me about the women. This shows again how in this space the men are confident and in charge- of who, and what, information is shared. I was pleased to see the control the female bar staff had over the men. However, the 2:17 ratio of women to men (after staff and tourists discounted) ensured this was a masculine space.

5.4.1 Media
The media construct of me as ‘Mrs’, a title I don’t use, was thought provoking. I was informed by my accommodation providers that this was probably a good occurrence, and would make the women feel more comfortable around me. I would not be perceived as a man hunter, and would gain a responsible persona.
Appendix G

Clutha Leader Article
Rural study

BY CAROLYN DEVerson

OWAKA has been chosen as a research site by Otago University student Jane Gill.

Mrs Gill is a mature student, a married mother of two, who lives in Dunedin.

She has often spent family holidays in the Catlins area and was studying for a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts.

As part of her studies, Mrs Gill was undertaking research on women in a rural community.

Her project will address some aspects of everyday life for women in Owaka. As a human geography student, Mrs Gill was interested in the social and spatial factors affecting women’s experiences of femininity.

Using several different research methods, Mrs Gill will document how feminine identity was expressed in Owaka. Her study will focus on women (18-years-old and over) living in the Owaka area.

The observations will occur for about an hour at a time over selected times at three community sites: the Catlins Inn; the corner of Ovenden St and Main Rd; and the Owaka Golf Club.

These details will be listed on the community notice board at the Owaka Four Square supermarket.

Mrs Gill’s research has been approved by the University Ethics Committee and her supervisors greatly appreciate any assistance the community can give to Mrs Gill.

For more information about the project, contact Jane Gill on 479 8788 or e-mail giller411@student.otago.ac.nz

Deverson, C (2006) ‘Rural Study’ Clutha Leader November 30, p.15