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“THE FIRST FIFTEEN”

UNDERSTANDING THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE OF GAY RUGBY PLAYERS IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

To date, only three gay male athletes have ever come out publicly during their professional sporting career in team sports. This reflects the pervasiveness of homophobia in sport and its power to silence and render invisible gay athletes. Moreover, it leads to a number of important sociological, political, moral and philosophical questions. Research that seeks to understand the gay athlete’s perspective on the existence of silence and invisibility is made all the more pertinent as gay rights and equality are currently manifested within social institutions other than mainstream sport.

In order to fill the void of knowledge regarding the silence and invisibility of gay men within mainstream sport, the questions: “What meanings from their perspective do gay rugby players give to their experience of participating in mainstream rugby?” and “How do these meanings create barriers or opportunities for their survival in rugby?” directed this social phenomenological study of gay rugby union players in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The data arose from in-depth interviews.

An emergent analysis of data found that players’ meanings of silence were predominantly informed by the fear of public opinion. The players’ negotiation of fear emerged as they strategically integrated all aspects of their identity into their everyday worlds.

The key findings of this study transpired when the participants’ meanings of silence were located using a Conspiracy of Silence model which guided the research. The reconstruction of these meanings generated a better understanding of the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon surrounding gay rugby players.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank the people and the country of New Zealand for sharing their land and its splendours. Of all the seventy-three countries I have visited and lived in on earth, it is truly the most beautiful.

To the staff, other post grads and particularly the University of Otago School of Physical Education ‘Tech’ team for their enormous assistance. Hamish is the Word©!

My Dad, pal and soul mate, is the only person who really ever understood me. I guess because he is also the only one who ever knew I was different from day one. Besides the fact he told my Mom I was the most beautiful baby he had ever seen ☺, he also became the first president and organiser of our local figure skating club. I guess he really did have the foresight that I would not have the privilege of making it to the NHL as a professional ice hockey player and I love and thank him dearly for his respect.

My daughter Stéphanie in forgiving me for being sometimes physically and emotionally absent during the writing of this thesis. MERCI BEAUCOUF!

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Finally to the ‘First Fifteen’: Gay Rugby Players in New Zealand who participated in this study by sharing their personal experiences and trusting my ability to be their voice.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

ESPN: Entertainment Sports Network

GLAAD: Gay and Lesbian Association Against Defamation

GSNZ: Gay Sport New Zealand Inc.

IGRAB: International Gay Rugby Association and Board

LGB: Lesbian Gay Bisexual

LGBT: Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered

LINZ: Life in New Zealand

NPC: National Provincial Championship

Nud*ist: Non-Numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorising

NZRU: New Zealand Rugby Union

QN: Queer Nation
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“There are a lot of gay athletes in the world who are too scared to come out of the closet … because society and the sports world won’t let them.”
Dennis Rodman

(Rodman and Silver, 1997, p. 5)

It is often argued that sport is the one cultural arena that transcends social divisions associated with class, gender, race, religion, and sexualities, and on one level, there is no question that there has been a widespread integration of minorities in sport. However, there is considerable evidence that sport not only fails to break down, but also actually reinforces stereotypes associated with class, gender, race, religion, and sexualities (Andrews, 2000; Birrell and McDonald, 2000; Cahn, 1994; Coakley, 1986; Dawson, 1992; Genasci, Genasci, and Griffin, 1994; Griffin, 1998; Grossman, 1995; Jackson and Hardiman, 1988; Krane, 1997; Lenskyj, 2003; McKay, 1991; Messner, 1994; Pronger, 1990b; Rhoads, 1995b; Sabo, 1989; Woods, 1992). For all its rhetoric and grandiose emancipatory possibilities, sport remains a social institution and cultural site that maintains the position of the power elite (Coakley, 1979). This is particularly true for most gay athletes today for whom a life of honesty and openness within mainstream team sport organisations seems impossible. Indeed, the fate of the contemporary gay male athlete may be the most striking example of the exclusionary nature of contemporary sport. Consider the fact that in the history of world professional sport, only three gay male athletes have ever shared their sexual orientation publicly during their sporting career. For example, veteran National Football League running back David Kopay turned 62 in 2004, twenty-nine years after being the first major team sports player in the United States to identify publicly as a gay athlete during his career. In 1975, thinking he might crack a hole in what he termed the sports world’s “Conspiracy of Silence”, Kopay became the key public name in reporter Lynn Rosellini’s December 9th 1975 ground breaking Washington Star (now defunct) newspaper series about gay athletes. Today, Kopay, former
European footballer Justin Fashanu and Australian Rugby League Player Ian Roberts have been the only visible gay male athletes from professional team sport to have voluntarily shared publicly their sexual orientation during their careers as athletes. “It’s so sad in this age of so many productive gays, of such progress in the courts, in human rights, that sports should lag so far behind, [especially when] sports could be leading the way,” said Kopay, “I feel frustrated because I still haven’t figured out how to help make more change” (Lipsyte, 1997 p. 34).

Although being gay has gained increased visibility and perhaps even some level of acceptance in other areas of cultural life such as: the entertainment industry, movies (e.g., ESPN’s “Playmakers” and Russell Crowe in “The Sum of Us”), music, the visual arts and television sitcoms (e.g., “Ellen”, “Will and Grace”, “Spin City”, and most recently “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy”) sport, and other areas such as teaching and the armed forces, remain very hostile and oppressive (Heyman, 1987). Curiously, the backlash against gay rights is swelling at the same time that we are witnessing the widest visibility, empowerment, freedom and legal rights and benefits gay and lesbian people have ever experienced (Vaid, 1995). At its height in 1999, the gay and lesbian association against defamation (GLAAD) reported in a survey that gay or lesbian characters represented just 22 of the 540 lead or supporting roles on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, WB, UPN, and original cable series in the United States (Walters, 2001). However, the gay-visibility trend might also be overstated. The recent debates surrounding the legalisation of gay marriages and the ordainment of gay priests and ministers are evidence of major social change. Yet, public opinion is still deeply divided about how to respond to gay emergence from the shadows of mainstream society in general and in sport in particular. As stated by Walters (2001), gay visibility in the media is a best of times/worst of times situation: "Never have we had so many openly gay elected officials, or so many antigay initiatives" (p. 10). Pop culture may be replete with images of gay life, but hate crimes are increasing, discharges of gays and lesbians from the military have risen
precipitately since ‘Don't Ask, Don't Tell’ was enacted and state legislatures all over America are rushing to pass laws banning same-sex marriage. This is also apparent in New Zealand society judging by the current invisibility and silence of gay rugby players within mainstream sport organisations.

Despite increasing awareness of the need for accommodating diversity and equality in mainstream society, since the beginning of the gay liberation movement and the landmark New York Stonewall Riots in 1969, little has changed within sport. While more than three decades have passed since the introduction of human rights legislation in Western nations, sport continues to be plagued by serious problems of homophobia (defined as the irrational fear/intolerance of lesbians and gays) and homonegativism (overt intolerance of lesbians and gays) (Krane, 1996). In competitive team sports such as rugby union, being or appearing to be gay is simply not tolerated and viewed as bringing shame to the team and the sport (Schwartz, 1997, p. 56). As Jim McKay (1991) reveals: “the most insulting accusation a coach can make about a player’s performance is to say that he played like a ‘Sheila’ or a ‘poofter’” (p. 55). For these reasons, gay athletes fear the consequences of coming out, and for most younger gay athletes, sport remains a part of growing up with pain, living in secrecy, and feeling shame.

Poignant examples of homophobia exist in the New Zealand Rugby Union’s (NZRU) history. For example, the media controversy surrounding the death of Auckland Rugby Union manager Lewis Pryme from AIDS, and the comments from All Black coach Alex Wylie on Christchurch’s commercial radio immediately prior to the World Cup in 1987 when he said: “Rugby is not a game for poofters” (Star, 1992, p. 133). In 2000, Jeff Wilson’s legal action against Rugby News won him a defamation suit for the magazine’s misguided effort to dispel the rumours of him being gay. His lawyer, David Howman, said in a public statement that the rumours of his sexual orientation were ‘malicious and hurtful’ and made Wilson ‘most angry and furious’ (Johnstone, 2000, p. 1). These and many more examples of homophobia are prevalent in New Zealand rugby today.
Because of its important role as a socialising agent, and the elevated hero status of elite athletes, the problem of homophobia is reified, exacerbated and highlighted in the world of sports. According to Dawson (1992), homophobia “stands in bold relief” (p. 1) because of the conspicuous public absence of elite athletes who acknowledge their being gay during their sporting careers. This is reinforced by the unfounded belief, often perpetuated by heterosexual players, coaches, sports administrators and even spectators, that gay male athletes do not exist, and if so do not belong in the world of sport. “Silence is the proof of the limited reach of the law and of the defeat of gay liberation in sports culture” (Pronger, 2000 p. 224). Understandably, in disciplines such as sport, which have long histories of prejudice against gay individuals, the coming out process (visibility) may be especially difficult to initiate. Social and cultural factors are assumed to be the primary reasons for making disclosures painful, especially for athletes in sport, where being gay remains virtually invisible and ‘positive examples’ (role models) almost non-existent, particularly for gay male athletes. For many gay athletes, sport is a site of constant fear; fear of being rejected and ridiculed (Griffin, 1993).

While many of us would like to believe that prejudice and homophobia in society is a problem of the past, this is not the case. One particular incident in recent mainstream American football highlights the problem. Dwight Slater, a college football freshman, quit his team during the 1998-99 academic year after coming out to his coach. The real shame is the fact that his coach, Tyrone Willingham, seemed relieved when Slater told him he was quitting the team. Indeed, the coach had his retraction papers prepared in advance (Jacobson, 2002). Who knows what would have happened had Slater just been allowed to be himself? Perhaps he would be preparing for the National Football League (NFL) draft.

We may never know if there were other gay players on Slater’s team. Likewise, we may never know how many gay players are now playing pro sport. Most importantly, we do not know what the consequences of this enforced silence have on both gay and heterosexual men.
To date, no study has attempted to: (a) explain the phenomenon of silence surrounding gay male athletes, (b) understand the range of factors, including public opinion, that influence the coming out process, and (c) identify the roles and responsibilities of mainstream sport organisations such as the NZRU in eradicating homophobia within the New Zealand context.

**Research Question**

The focus of this research is directed by two questions: “What meanings, from their perspective, do gay rugby players give to their experience in mainstream rugby?” and “How do these meanings create barriers or opportunities for their survival in the mainstream sport context of rugby union in Aotearoa/New Zealand?” Although this inquiry represents an attempt to answer what and how gay men experience mainstream rugby, subsequent questions are equally fundamental to this study:

1) Do gay male athletes see themselves as an oppressed group? How is that oppression manifested, (eg: fear, isolation, abuse)?

2) How do they conform to, or resist, conventional heterosexual norms in different contexts?

3) How do they interpret public opinion of gay males in sport?

4) At which stage of the coming out process do they situate themselves? How do they manage their sexual orientation in different contexts? (In public? In sport? With friends? With family members?)

5) What are the essential structures (tenets) that permit the understanding of the silence of gay men in sport?

Using a socio-phenomenological approach this study aims to provide an understanding of the experiences of gay male team sport athletes. The social phenomenology method of collecting and analysing data from in-depth interviews enables us to address questions of
experience and as such answers “how” questions (rather than “why” questions although it is certainly hoped that by understanding how, we will have greater insights into why gay male athletes remain silence and “in the closet”). In doing so it will help us understand: (a) how they encounter and manage homophobia, (b) how sport impacts on their well-being, (c) how sport empowers and disempowers them, and (d) the need for inclusive policies and new programmes related to diversity and homophobia within sport.

Given that sport is an institution that operates on a wide range of organisational levels (international, national, regional, local, school) it has a dramatic impact on the culture and regulation that affects us all. Therefore, this study gathers detailed information on gay rugby players’ meanings of their experience within the sport of rugby union while locating where, when and how the silence of their sexual orientation is manifested and managed within the mainstream organisation, the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU).

In part, my work is a response to the lack of empirical research related specifically to the overwhelming silence, concerning sexual identity, of gay male athletes within mainstream team sport organisations. The increasing amount of research available on gay men and homophobia in sport has done little thus far to examine gay athletes’ meanings of their experience in sport, or to explain the power relations shared amongst the stakeholders and/or perpetrators of the silence. The athlete’s voice is largely missing from literature on homophobia.

Significance of this Study

While this study focuses on one sport (rugby) in one country (New Zealand), I believe the key tenets of this thesis may have implications for other sporting organisations in Aotearoa/New Zealand and elsewhere.

The players’ reflection on their personal experience of rugby, personal philosophies about being gay, roles in the community, involvement and concerns about aspirations for the
younger gay players and closeted gay players provide an inside view of gay men in rugby. These views and the subsequent analysis may provide some understanding of the players’ meanings of playing rugby and illuminate the ways in which meanings manifest silence and invisibility. It is hoped that the findings of this study will: stimulate further research, inform future organisational policy, encourage the implementation of diversity awareness programmes and guide resource development.

For too long, gay men have been silent and invisible in rugby in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Nevertheless, their contribution to sport is significant as participants, coaches, administrators and supporters. What occurs in the lives of gay rugby players is important if we are to believe in the potential of sport. By inference administrators, coaches, managers and supporters influence the lived experiences of gay male athletes and consequently impact on the role and nature of sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand society in general.

We can learn valuable lessons about social discrimination by considering the experience of particular oppressed groups and individuals. For example, in 1947, Jack ‘Jackie’ Roosevelt Robinson became the first African-American man to play a professional team sport (baseball). In 1948, then President Harry S. Truman, signed an executive order prohibiting racial segregation in the American armed forces. Working together Truman and Robinson’s white manager and agent supported his inclusion in sport. Jackie Robinson has come to symbolise a moment of extraordinary social change contributing to greater integration of organisations for all African-Americans in the USA. Although gay men do have limited civil rights in the United States today, the same parallel of rights and liberties cannot be drawn for gay men in professional team sports worldwide. There is yet to be a gay Jackie Robinson in mainstream sport; a gay sportsman who is overtly accepted by all stakeholders; a gay sportsman who opened the door for all others to follow. Although Dave Kopay, Justin Fashanu and Ian Roberts did come out during their sporting careers, no one else has been encouraged to follow their example of courage. In sum, gay men are not welcomed to participate openly (visibly) as
gay men in professional team sport in general and in rugby in particular. This study attempts to uncover the interrelated mechanisms associated with, and contributing to, the phenomenon of silence surrounding the experiences of gay male athletes in mainstream team sports. Making their experiences known, as silenced (invisible) gay men, is important for several reasons.

First, examining their experience provides insights into a largely overlooked and as yet unexplained problem in sport, leisure and social science research. Homophobic attitudes, beliefs and actions are often fuelled by hatred, hostility and bigotry. Describing the lives of gay male athletes will provide important information about a context within which homophobia may be most severely experienced. This study also provides much needed insight into the relationship between sport, gender and sexualities, generally ignored because of the nature of sport as a conservative, patriarchal institution. Arguably, the academic community has been distant from, and silent about this topic long enough. Research on gay male athletes is only a first step toward eradicating the existing silence. The majority of notable empirical studies into homophobia in sport have been conducted in North America (e.g.: Anderson, 2002; Bennett et al., 1989; Bryant, 2001; Cahn, 1994; Connell, 2000; Crosset, 1995; Flintoff, 1994; Friend and LeUnes, 1989; Garner and Smith, 1977; Genasci et al., 1994; Greendorfer, 1997; Griffin, 1984, 1989; Grossman, 1985; Guthrie, 1982; Krane, 1997a; Le Blanc, 1997; Lenskyj, 1989; Lenskyj, 2003; Locke, 1970; Messner and Sabo, 1994; Nelson, 1995; Pronger, 1990a; Riemer, 1995; Rotella and Murray, 1991; Sabo, 1989; Vealy, 1997; Wellman, 1997; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morphew, 2001; Woods, 1992; Young, 1995; Zipter, 1988), a few in Europe (Elling, De Knop, and Knoppers, 2003; Hekma, 1998; Price and Parker, 2003), some in Australia (McKay, 1997; Plummer, 1999; Wright and Clark, 1999) and a few in New Zealand. Notably, the majority of New Zealand studies of homosexuality have focused on lesbians and the issue of hegemonic heterosexuality (cf. Cox and Thompson, 2000; Star, 1992). One exception is Cotton and Jackson’s (1992) study of
homophobia and the role of the media and coaching Aotearoa/New Zealand though this was not empirically based. From a theoretical point of view, relatively few studies have been conducted on gay male athletes, and none have attempted to explain the **Conspiracy of Silence Phenomenon** surrounding them. In fact, studies that do exist on being gay in sport deal mostly with female athletes and homophobia in general. The few existing studies on gay male athletes focus primarily on their sexuality specifically, rather than on the consequent social injustices. According to Messner and Sabo (1994), a major concern with past research, theories and writings on being gay and homophobia in sport is that the concepts involved are often used singularly when they might better work when used in combination with others. They define the combination of concepts as “inter-textual causalities”, and have reiterated the need in sport sociology to find ways of conceptualising varied and shifting forms of domination and concomitant oppression in such a manner that one form of domination is not privileged at the expense of distorting or ignoring the others. Therefore, this study recognises and is cognisant that ranges of oppression as well as different forms of silence exist within social groups. It also acknowledges the multifaceted nature of oppression and silence, especially with regard to Māori culture in Aotearoa/New Zealand that may influence the rugby experience of some participants in this study. References will be included where appropriate but the focus of the research remains limited to gay men in rugby.

It is clear that the issue is a pressing one in New Zealand and other countries since no guidelines to address homophobia in sport exist in general and in the NZRU specifically. The existing silence is sufficient proof that not enough is done politically and administratively to support gay athletes at every level. The NZRU officials do not recognise the complete diversity of players or the total diversity of rugby experiences. Club manuals and player handouts (see Appendix A) do not address homophobia specifically. Also, the collective employment agreement adhered to by professional rugby players in New Zealand contains a public relations act section relevant only to sexual harassment cases directed towards women.
There are no references to sexual harassment acts among men (NZRU, 2002). This clearly indicates the lack of understanding of gay rugby players, whose needs and rights are not met. Such examples of omission add to the tacit agreement about gay men in rugby. By acknowledging some of the negative effects of rugby on the lives of certain men, a fully informed NZRU and other such organisations can then address these issues appropriately and transform rugby into a truly New Zealand sport for all to enjoy and participate. Understanding the experience of gay male athletes, as well as the impact of those experiences, can lead to the development of appropriate strategies needed for combating homophobia in sport organisations such as the NZRU.

Research also shows that prejudice and acts of discrimination have negative effects on human capital, productivity, economics, creativeness and the general morale of members of any organisation. All of these elements determine the degree of competitiveness of an organisation. Homophobia and all other forms of genoisms (e.g. racism) negatively affect all members of an (sport) organisation regardless of their gender or sexual orientation (Roosevelt, 1992). Being gay in men’s sport is rarely discussed openly; instead accusations and denials are typical. This silence may intrude on the quality of professional relationships between gay male athletes, their administration and coaches as well as their spectators. Carnevale and Stone (1994) see sexual orientation within any organisation as a diversity management issue. They argue that sexual orientation, like other social constructs, should be viewed “not as an us/them kind of problem to be solved, but as a resource to be managed” (p. 33). Hence, managing diversities within any type of organisation could be a process that taps the potential of all members (players, coaches and administrators). However, this study serves as a significant tool in showing the need to eradicate homophobia in sport organisations mainly because of the social injustices caused to gay male athletes. Why, in this land of freedom, will the public not accept a gay male athlete doing anything in rugby but remaining silent? They call organised rugby a national pastime, the game for all New Zealanders, but how can it be
when one needs to be heterosexual or silent to play and be productive? Therefore, improving
social equality for gay men through sport may also prove beneficial to organisational
productivity. By presenting positive arguments for sexual orientation equity policies within
sport organisations, this research may also assist organisations in answering to government
legislation and social justice issues for gay men in sport.

Eradicating homophobia within a sport organisation is not about making best friends out of
team mates, it is about changing behaviours as a first priority (then beliefs and attitudes) and
then answering to the legal rights and responsibilities of the organisation in order to foster
greater cooperation and respect among its members. Krane (1996) adds that “athletic teams
that acknowledge and embrace diversity among team members are much more likely to
develop a positive atmosphere and free the participant to focus their energies on their sporting
performance” (p. 243). The intent of coming to terms with being gay within a sport
organisation, according to Rotella and Murray (1991), is to help enhance team cohesion,
confidence, concentration, composure, self-motivation, and/or healthy adjustments in the
competitive world of sport. Administrators and coaches of organisations who refuse to
submit to bigoted practices and encourage acceptance among team members will provide the
foundation for the development of a positive and more productive environment.

Second, most governments recognise the contribution of sport to the physical, mental, and
social well-being of their citizens (New Zealand Sport and Leisure Act, 1992) and therefore,
under human rights legislation, are responsible for providing a positive experience for
everyone regardless of individual identifying social factors including sexual orientation (New
Zealand, the Human Rights Act, 1993). Therefore another fundamental need for this research
is to encourage men’s health promotion (mental and physical) dedicated to objectives similar
to the International Ottawa Charter of Health Promotion (World Health Organisation, 1986)
which includes building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments,
strengthening community action and developing personal skills for all. These objectives are
equally applicable to all athletes, coaches, administrators, and in particular to the individuals among them who are gay. Likewise, health issues for gay men need to be managed in relation to the environment that influences their state of well-being. Homophobia is a huge part of this, including the internalised homophobia that exists in all gay men to greater or lesser extents. Health for gay men is not just about what is not right about their bodies or minds; it is at least as much about what is not right in the world around them. Giving gay male athletes a voice provides an opportunity to better understand and break the silence surrounding them.

Third, the current discussions about at-risk youth and suicide rates (especially in New Zealand) are also very significant to this study. Although comprising an estimated 10% of the population, lesbians and gay males make up almost one third of all teen suicides and are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Otis, Ryan, and Chouinard, 1999). Suicide is the leading cause of death among gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, according to the American Association of Physicians for Human Rights (Henderson, 1997). Athletes are not disassociated from suicide either. For example, one longitudinal study has indicated that 69 known professional athletes in the United States have committed suicide. An intervention program to prevent potential athlete suicide may be informed by the results of this study. Another study indicates that high school students hear anti-gay epithets like “faggot” and “dyke” an average of nearly thirty times a day (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1994). According to the Centre for Disease Control in the United States, one in six gay and lesbian teenagers is beaten up so badly during high school that they require medical attention (Gibson, 1989). These statistics serve as a testimonial to the fact that younger gays and lesbians are more at-risk because of the additional numbers involved in youth sport organisations compared to adults in general. Tim Barnett (1997), the labour spokesperson on human rights and one of several openly gay Ministers of Parliament (MP) within New Zealand, states that one of the side effects of increasing gay and lesbian visibility in society is that young people recognise their sexual orientation at a younger age than ever
before. He suggests that the support services required for gay youth have not developed at the same rate as gay community identification. Barnett (1997) also argues that sexuality has not appeared at the top of suicide factors because there has not been any credible research done, yet information going to parliamentary offices from gay groups around the country suggests that “very many youth suicides are young people who are in some kind of crisis about their sexuality” (p. 32) or have identified as gay. Many within the lesbian and gay community argue that the number of gay and lesbian youth suicides is higher, and that social alienation and lack of family support lead many, if not most gay youth, to think of, or commit suicide. Deborah Morris, former Youth Affairs Minister, also believes that sexuality is a significant factor in youth suicide (Barnett, 1997, p. 32). Many studies also indicate that there is a very high risk of suicide in youth who are in a sexual orientation crisis and are unaware of any resources where they could get affirmative messages (Otis et al., 1999). Sport may be another potential factor that contributes to suicidal tendencies given its powerful role as a socialising agent in reproducing the ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality. This simply is one of the many negative effects of sport that is widely overlooked. However I propose that, despite its negative connotations, sport has the potential to be very proactive in creating social change and social justice. Thus, sport may play an important role in transmitting the much-needed sense of meaning, purpose and belonging to gay athletes within their sporting codes as a preventative measure and strategy in fighting alienation and depression related to suicidal tendencies among youth in particular. Although suicidal thinking is not a sport-based problem, it is, nevertheless, something that sport leaders can do something about. This problem of at-risk youth is especially magnified when rural gay youth in particular are dropping out of school (and sport) and running away from home, then finding themselves in urban centres with no support and no means of sustenance (Otis et al., 1999). By addressing homophobia, sport institutions such as the NZRU may not only be improving the quality and popularity of rugby and other sports, but they could also be saving lives.
Fourth, isolation and bullying causes physical and mental health problems for a number of lesbian and gay athletes in physical education classes as well as in school sports (Berry, 1998). Gay male athletes learn to feel shame and self-hatred and hide their identities at great psychological and physical cost. Use of alcohol and drugs is also a major problem for gay youth and has a direct impact on rates of HIV transmission (Otis et al., 1999). They become at risk individuals because the Health and Physical Education Curriculum (Education, 1999) does not overtly mention homophobia or sexual orientation, and even if some anti-homophobia campaigns exist in New Zealand most teachers and coaches still do not intervene or know how to when acts of homophobia arise in the sporting context (Otago Daily Times, 1998). Coaches and physical educators are among the most important and influential positive examples in the lives of their athletes, and the lessons they teach are as important and frequently longer lasting than those imparted elsewhere. It is critical that athletic personnel and teachers work to reduce sexism, heterosexism and all other prejudices that limit the opportunities of athletes in general and rugby players in particular.

In view of these gaps, an understanding of the experience and silence of gay male athletes, represents an important theoretical contribution to the field of sociology of sport. Therefore, the research needed to be honest and open about sexuality issues, and the ability to address them, when they present themselves in physical education and sport programs, is of great importance to the well-being of all athletes. The findings in this study may provide evidence to all stakeholders in sport on reasons why they should properly address issues of being gay within their sport organisation.

**Limitations of this Study**

The participants chosen for this study were limited to adult gay male athletes in Aotearoa/New Zealand who have played mainstream rugby. Because of social and cultural factors, as well as the epistemological and ontological assumptions of phenomenology, the results of this study cannot be generalised or extrapolated beyond the population studied. I
also acknowledge the bicultural nature of Aotearoa/New Zealand society and the influence of Māori culture. However, out of respect for the tangata whenua (the indigenous people of the land) I recognise that it is for them to speak or to write about themselves. Therefore, this study limits its debate to the participants’ identities as gay rugby players.

The qualitative analysis has been limited to a minimum number (n=15) of gay male athletes because it was deemed that the interpretive value of the information given by a small sample would be more important in this research than limited information gathered from a larger number of participants. Initial participants were identified through the use of a national umbrella sport organisation named Gay Sport New Zealand Inc.

Gay Sport New Zealand Incorporated (GSNZ Inc) was created and used for the purpose of this study in order to network with lesbian and gay athletes who participate in various sports organisations catering predominantly to the gay community. Because of the use of the GSNZ Inc network, those who have participated may differ systematically from those who did not choose to be included in the research or those who are not part of the GSNZ Inc. network. Other gay athletes who were hesitant or do not identify themselves as gay did not want to participate in this study. Therefore, only gay athletes who identify as such could be selected as interviewees. Self-identifying means that they may have chosen to divulge this information to very few people, or to many, depending on which stage of their coming out process they have achieved. Thus, information furnished in this study comes from those who experience the phenomenon of silence some of the time during their current participation or who have experienced it at some point in their athletic career in the past. There are, undoubtedly, other factors in addition to being gay that may affect one’s experience as a gay athlete. For example, factors such as education, social status, age, race, and income, are considered in the analysis of data gathered in this study when they are relevant to the participants’ experience of homophobia.
The use of an in-depth, open-ended interview schedule is also limiting. Interpretations, are always located in time and space, are never complete, closed or final. It was possible for participants to have unintentionally omitted or forgotten information. The study may also underscore the relativity of human knowledge because of the Eurocentric character of Western thought and the cognitive bias produced by factors such as class, race and ethnicity (Johnson and Christensen, 2004; Tarnas, 1991).

Nevertheless, using an interpretive method is the most useful instrument for collecting the necessary data in order to answer the phenomenological research question put forth in this study.

The Production of Silence: Assumptions and Meanings

As a physical education teacher, a coach, a seasoned athlete, an advocate and a gay man, I believe in the value of inclusion of gay men in mainstream sport organisations and I know of their existence and their silence.

Yet, there has been little open discussion of gay male team sport athletes in the media or sport organisations, except for a few reports such as ESPN’s “Outside the Lines” programme segment titled ‘The World of the Gay Athlete’. Only recently have sport sociologists been interested in the study of experiences involving gay athletes in general, and gay male athletes in particular.

A number of theoretical articles have addressed the topic and academic inquiries have suggested several factors associated with the silence of gay male athletes (Clarke, 1995a; Genasci et al., 1994; Griffin, 1992; Klein, 1989; Krane, 1997a; Lenskyj, 1986; Messner and Sabo, 1994; Nelson, 1991; Pitts, 1997; Pronger, 1990a; Rotella and Murray, 1991; Sparkes, 1994). Although individual, structural, situational and social variables related to the silence of gay males in general have been examined, it seems that these studies have done little to explain the phenomenon of silence and invisibility of gay males in sport. Although problems
remain for all gay and lesbian athletes, philosophical arguments would suggest that social organisations such as sport catalyse the silence of gay men (Friere 1972a). For this reason, this study focuses solely on gay men in relation to a team sport organisation rather than on gay men in individual sport. Specifically, gay players within the team sport of rugby have been selected for this inquiry within Aotearoa/New Zealand sport because of rugby’s significance as a national icon and its popularised culture of hypermasculinity.

The ontological stance (the nature of being) of this social inquiry is that there is no single way of knowing, and furthermore, that knowledge is always mediated and socially constructed given that research is a social activity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Saukko, 2003). The study subscribes to the ontological notion which views reality as being fluid. Also this research draws on an epistemological framework (the nature of knowing) that suggests that research creates, or socially constructs, the realities it studies rather than describes those realities (Saukko, 2003). Working within this paradigm, according to Saukko (2003), enables me to create an ‘alternative’ reality that may contradict accepted truths as well as giving a voice to silenced knowledge. This constructionist epistemology views knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, as contingent upon human practices. “Knowledge is constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world, and is developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). This definition places emphasis on the participants’ (gay rugby players) views, ideas, biases, traditions and bodies as being an integral part of the process of knowledge. In claiming that gay rugby players are silenced within mainstream rugby organisations today, I adopt a socially critical stance by drawing upon constructionist theories of knowledge and assumptions. Kincheloe and McLaren, (1994) believe that researchers doing critical inquiry must accept the following assumptions:

- That all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social in nature and historically constituted;
That facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from ideological inscription;

That language is central to the formation of subjectivity, that is, both conscious and unconscious awareness;

That oppression has many faces, and concern for only one form of oppression at the expense of others can be counterproductive because of the connections between them;

That the mainstream research practices are generally implicated, albeit often unwittingly, in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression;

That certain groups in any society are privileged over others, constituting oppression that is most forceful when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable (p. 139-40).

This way of knowing provides a theoretical perspective through which the world of gay men in rugby may be described and interpreted. Drawing from these assumptions, initial inferences can be made as to why gay rugby players remain silent. In light of this, and drawing on an interpretive perspective, I have devised a research framework that will allow me to both understand the meanings the participants of this study make of their experiences in mainstream rugby and reflect on the reasons for their experiences.

How gay male athletes survive in silence within mainstream team sport organisations is a problem that can be best understood using phenomenology as a philosophy and a methodology. Insufficient attention has been given to the phenomenological, experiential and interactional features of the silence of gay male athletes. As a result, little is known about the phenomenological properties (essence of the experiences) of such silent behaviour and several philosophical questions related to the production of silence are yet to be answered. An interpretive phenomenological methodology using thickly contextualised data will provide an
initial understanding of the complex problem of the silence of gay male rugby players. My use of social interpretive phenomenology is therefore intended as a contribution to the body of literature related to the understanding of such a problem. The epistemology, which informs and directs the theoretical perspective of this research and its methodology, is further outlined in Chapter III. In the following section I introduce the **Conspiracy of Silence model** used in this study as a tool to assist in understanding the silence of gay rugby players in New Zealand Rugby Union.

**The Conspiracy of Silence Model**

For the purpose of this research study, it is important from the start to distinguish and define the terms **conspiracy** and **conspiracy of silence**, as the two terms differ greatly. They are two separate concepts. According to the Webster's English Dictionary (1989) a conspiracy is an act of working against something or someone; especially in joint secrecy with others for an evil purpose or plot. Conversely a conspiracy of silence is a [tacit agreement](https://www.dictionary.com/browse/tacit) not to discuss something or someone. A tacit agreement is usually an implied but not stated purpose, a “raison d’être”. These terms should not be confused, as this study does not seek or expect to uncover an actual conspiracy but endeavours to understand the silence and fear of gay male athletes and to document their lived experiences in sport. In order for me to explain and for the reader to understand the phenomenon of silence in mainstream sport organisations, I specifically examine how gay male athletes remain silent and invisible in the sport of rugby in New Zealand. While the focus is more upon how versus why gay male athletes produce silence during their playing career it is intended that by the end of the thesis the readers will have also grasped the reasons about “why” gay men remain silent and invisible in mainstream team sport.

As such my focus on understanding the experiences of gay men within mainstream sport organisations from a social phenomenological perspective offers an initial explanation of what
many authors and academics have referred to as a **Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon** (Clarke 1995a; Genasci, 1994; Griffin, 1992; Klein, 1989; Krane, 1997a; Lenskyj, 1991; Messner, 1994; Nelson, 1991; Pitts, 1997; Pronger, 1990a; Rotella, 1991; Sparkes, 1994). Although people other than gay male athletes influence the phenomenon, this study looks at the experiences of gay male rugby players in mainstream organisations where a conspiracy of silence is predominantly manifested. My study represents a first attempt to outline and explain the mechanisms that constitute the **Conspiracy of Silence Phenomenon**, as well as filling the void of phenomenological accounts of the lived experiences of gay male athletes. Overall, I examine the manner in which gay male athletes interpret, act, and give meaning to the survival of self in the sporting context of mainstream team sport organisations.

The interpretive and social phenomenological analysis of thickly contextualised materials provides an initial understanding of the complexities of the problem that is the silence of gay male athletes. Using an interpretive and social phenomenology has both theoretical and applied implications. For the purpose of understanding the specific silence of gay men in sport, the Conspiracy of Silence model put forth in this study is based on four tenets that form the research framework to be used in the analysis of the phenomenological findings of this inquiry. The four tenets relevant in addressing the problem of silence are posited in the following order as features relevant to the experiences of gay male rugby players:

**Hegemonic heterosexuality**: examines how sport serves as a site of contested terrain and why society’s dominant patriarchal and masculine ideals are reinforced in the lives of gay rugby players. Hegemonic heterosexuality is the form of oppression in sport organisations that grounds homophobia and heterosexual privilege. It equates to an ideological system of dominant values and beliefs. This feminist perspective frames the experiences of gay male athletes in the context of a patriarchal society.
**Oppression theory**: assists in understanding how gay rugby players feel within a homophobic environment or one that is perceived to be, such as sport. Oppression and identity management theories are used to understand the processes by which the silence of gay male athletes is actualised; that is, how are gay male athletes silenced and how do they cope/manage the problems silence and invisibility create?

**Identity management strategies**: assists in understanding the stages of the coming out process of gay male athletes and how their behaviour (actions) can be defined and interpreted within the context of sport. Like oppression theory; which assists in examining the participants as subordinates within the dominant heterosexual culture, the concept of identity management strategies focuses on the process-oriented issues, and in addition to oppression theory specifically explores and situates one’s sporting, sexual and social identities during the coming out process. It may act as a form of self-imposed control and/or coping mechanism for gay male athletes within sport organisations.

**Noelle-Neumann’s “Spiral of Silence” theory**: examines why the public opinion process becomes problematic for gay male athletes. Noelle-Neumann’s “Spiral of Silence” theory is based on the fear of this oppression and stigmatisation because of public opinion and its influence on one’s social behaviour. This is a form and a process of social control. Specifically, both theories are used to explain the power of hegemony and to explain: why gay male athletes are silenced.

These concepts form the **four important tenets** of the Conspiracy of Silence Model (see Figure 1) and are equally significant to the understanding of how gay male athletes survive within mainstream team sport organisations. Using a model is a way, as Messner and Sabo (1990) argued, to conceptualise varied and shifting forms of domination. In adopting Messner and Sabo's (1990) comparisons to a wheel, I espouse the following explanation of the Conspiracy of Silence model used in this study to show the relationships between the four
tenets, homophobia and the phenomenon of silence. This permits a further illustration of the mechanisms underpinning the production and manifestation of the gay athlete’s silence.

“At the hub, constantly keeping the wheel in motion is the existing [homophobia in mainstream sport organisations]. The spokes of the wheel represent links to each social theory [tenet of the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon]. The rim of the wheel represents links from one social theory tenet to another in such a way that connected to the spokes; the hub can move the wheel. The fact that the spokes of the wheel are linked to one another at the hub and at the rim of the wheel shows that all forms of [human behaviour and actions], although relatively autonomous, are still dynamically interdependent. Finally, because we should see the wheel [silence] always in motion, it is clear that at any given moment one or two spokes may carry the majority of the weight of the entire system, yet they retain overall interdependence with other spokes (pp10-11)”.

FIGURE 1:
Conspiracy of Silence Model

The use of this model (1) helps organise key concepts and research emerging out of previous literature as they relate to the study’s focus, (2) helps in the clarification of assumptions, (3) contributes to the development and formulation of interview questions and
framework, and (4) gives greater clarity of the phenomenon and serves as a guide for data analysis. This process of diagramming is intended to help readers understand my interpretation of reality and how I view the world of gay men in rugby by linking previous research and literature on the topic. The model is simply intended to serve as a tool for organising and summarising my perception of the phenomenon of silence and to present it holistically (as opposed to an attempt to develop a grand theory). The use of diagrams is specifically helpful for visually oriented readers and learners (Johnson and Christensen, 2004).

The research framework used implies an integration of the four tenets that form the Conspiracy of Silence Model stated. According to Woods (1990) “a research framework forms the foundation from which a researcher proposes, conducts, analyses, and reports the research”, (p. 12).

It is assumed that most gay male athletes remain silent (closeted) within mainstream sport organisations and that remaining silent poses enormous threats to their overall well-being. Moreover, based on existing interdisciplinary research the basis of a Conspiracy of Silence is likely to be a multi-factor issue. Therefore, it seems crucial that attempts be made to improve the understanding of the overall mechanisms that invoke the silence by using a conceptual model, which not only guides the research, but assists readers in understanding the dynamics of a gay rugby player’s silence.

The tenets of hegemonic heterosexuality and the Spiral of Silence theory set the context for examining the experiences of gay male athletes within a patriarchal society dominated by a perceived ‘public opinion’. Situated on the left hand side of the model, they represent the public and organisational politics that form the bases of power in the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. These are used to explore the reasons why gay male athletes remain silent.

The tenets of oppression theory and identity management strategies describe the process by which the experiences of gay male athletes in team sports can be understood. They are situated on the right hand side of the model and represent the policies by which gay male
athletes abide within the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. They are drawn upon to examine how gay male athletes feel and act when silenced.

The combined four perspectives form the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon and represent the organisational politics and policies that subordinate gay men in the world of sport. They are presented briefly in this chapter and addressed in-depth within the review of literature in the following chapter. They are illustrated individually at first, and finally as ‘inter-textual causalities’ which form the Conspiracy of Silence model. The model is intended to help the reader better understand influential issues surrounding the marked silence of gay male athletes in sport in general and in team sports specifically.

Although the research framework is an integration of all four tenets of the model, only oppression theory and identity management are used in the analysis section because the study focuses on the processes by which gay male athletes survive within a mainstream sport organisation and not specifically the causes. Overviews of these theories are presented in the following chapter along with the rationale for selecting the Conspiracy of Silence Model as the primary framework.

**Chapter Summary**

In summary, this research project brings together a scholarly search for knowledge, social concern and personal politics. Its sociological focus is to understand possible forms of social injustices caused by the discrimination and oppression that exist within the sporting experiences of gay male athletes in team sports such as rugby. The purpose of this phenomenological study is: (a) to gain a better understanding and to describe, from their perspective, the meanings gay rugby players make of their experience within New Zealand Rugby Union, and (b) to interpret how these meanings create barriers or opportunities for their survival in rugby.

Specifically this research study focuses on understanding the problem of silence surrounding gay rugby players in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Using a critical interpretive
phenomenological approach it is designed to explore and examine how the participants in this study feel and act (behave) as gay rugby players. In addition, reasons for their silence are also explored. A research framework has been introduced in relation to the conceptual **Conspiracy of Silence model** presented. This study intends to provide a better understanding of the **Conspiracy of Silence Phenomenon** surrounding gay men in sport. My wish is that the knowledge gathered will take us one step further towards eradicating the prevailing silence of gay male athletes and encourage social change by better understanding the meanings they make of their experience in rugby.

In this initial chapter, I have presented the potential contribution of this study in the field of sociology of sport as well as in other fields, such as physical education, cultural studies and gender studies. I have also highlighted its significance and potential contribution in mapping governmental, social and organisational policies. I outlined the main question, which my inquiry is designed to answer and delineated the limitations of such an inquiry.

Throughout the following chapter, I continue to reiterate the existing problem of silence by providing a review of literature with regard to homophobia in sport. Chapter II also offers a critical analysis of the sociological writings regarding the phenomenon of silence of gay male athletes. The analysis of studies related directly and indirectly to the phenomenon is necessary not only to assist in explaining the issue but also to identify elements needed to fill the void in the literature that surrounds it and assists in the understanding of the silence of gay male athletes in mainstream team sport organisations.

Chapter III outlines the constructionist philosophy, the methodology and methods of inquiry adopted for this study.

Chapter IV introduces individual and general player profiles. The players’ voices are honoured and recorded as data and provide the focus of this research. The focus then shifts, directing the readers’ attention to the players’ narratives, by categorising emerging meanings they make of their experience into themes related to the data gathered during the interviewing
process. These recurring themes are essential properties of the phenomenon under investigation. Guided by phenomenological ‘reduction’ I offer multiple instances of the rugby players’ experiences; the true ‘essence’ of their ‘life world’. This implies reducing the meanings they make of their experience with the intent of identifying emerging themes that arise through the abundance of data supplied by the rugby players. The commonalities of their experiences are used to make a broader social analysis of the phenomenon. Numerous quotes are categorised (clustered) in relation to the meanings participants make of their experience.

Chapter V presents an analysis of the players’ narratives and the data gathered from the constant comparative cross case analysis of the emerging themes. The findings from the contextualised data are reduced and interpreted within the Conspiracy of Silence model in order to generate a better understanding of the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. The constructionist discussion theorises the emergent meanings through their relationship with the tenets of the model drawing attention to issues that may create barriers and possibilities for gay rugby players’ participation within mainstream rugby organisations.

The conclusion presents a summary of the key findings and their implications for all players, coaches, administrators and spectators involved in mainstream team sport organisations. Possible areas of further inquiry related to the phenomenon of silence of gay male athletes in sport complete this study.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section is a review of the literature relevant to the study of gay male athletes. This literature includes five separate topics, beginning with:

1) Literature on the historical, social and cultural context of gay male athletes offers an overview of the emergence of homophobia in society in general and in sport in particular.

2) Literature on homophobia and homonegativism in sport today offers a comprehensive description of research and current definitions of homophobia specifically related to sport.

3) Literature on research studies and publications related specifically to gay male athletes offers both a critical perspective on other works and an overview of the existing knowledge related to the silence of gay men in sport.

4) Literature on masculinity within Aotearoa/New Zealand culture offers a description of the social context in which the phenomenon of silence is produced.

5) Literature on other phenomenological studies informs my research. Parallels drawn from each study are highlighted as they assisted in the selection of my theoretical framework, my methodology and methods, as well as my group sample.

The second section of this chapter initially presents literature relevant to the research framework used in the study, that is the Conspiracy of Silence model. In turn, it reviews the literature relevant to the four tenets of the Conspiracy of Silence model presented in the introductory chapter.
The Historical, Social and Cultural Context of Gay Male Athletes

Historically, there is evidence to suggest that there have always been gay men present in sport (Papalas, 1991; Woods, 1992). Even though the terms \textit{homosexual} (gay) and \textit{heterosexual} have only been used since the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the sexual desirability of athletes by same gender individuals has been documented through the arts and literature since the Greco-Roman era. The appearance of naked athletes in athletic contests at the end of the seventh century B.C. contributed greatly to the visibility of gay men, which by the early sixth century was conspicuous in Greek life (Papalas, 1991, p. 172). Being gay was tolerated and practically sanctioned at Olympia, where in ca. 470 B.C. a terracotta statuette of Zeus carrying off a Trojan called Ganymede was erected. In classical mythology, gods fought over the youthful Ganymede (Halliday, 1998, p. 14). Thus, in 5\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. Greece, there was an appreciation and enjoyment of male physical beauty and open displays of same-sex attraction. Indeed, men enjoying sex with other men was widely practiced in the \textit{palaestra}, where male spectators visited male athletes and often received sexual gratification. Undoubtedly, these events raise questions when comparing contemporary homophobic attitudes and behaviour with that of the more inclusive Hellenic world. In particular, which sources of social power and knowledge permitted and often celebrated such public acceptance of gay men in sport? Tarnas (1991) offers a potential explanation suggesting that the culture of Greeks established the basis of contemporary civilisation. However, this does little to clarify the prevalent social resistance to gay men in sport today.

It was some twenty-five centuries ago that the Hellenic world brought forth that extraordinary flowering of culture that marked the dawn of Western civilization. Endowed with seemingly primeval clarity and creativity, the Ancient Greeks provided the Western mind with what has proved to be a perennial source of insight, inspiration, and renewal. Modern science, medieval theology, classical humanism – all stand deeply in their debt. … Our way of thinking is still profoundly Greek in its underlying logic, so much so that before we can begin to grasp the character of our own thought, we must first look closely at that of the Greeks… they were originators of intellectual values (p.2).
Such practices also constituted an accepted fact of early Roman life. In fact, no ancient source ever claims that indulgence in or approval of male homoerotic attractions or activities was learned, borrowed, or imported by Romans from Greece (Williams, 1999). Therefore, such acceptance of gay men in Greek popular culture persisted within the Roman era. Whilst excavating a Roman villa, which belonged to Emperor Hadrian, archaeologists have discovered what they believe is a temple dedicated to Hadrian’s lover Antinous. The villa is situated twenty miles east of Rome and the temple is part of the complex. Antinous was noted for his beauty, athleticism and hunting ability and he drowned tragically in the Nile River at the age of 21. The temple was built four years after his death and dates back to 134 A.D. Hadrian was so devastated by Antinous’ death that he declared the former slave a god and named a city in Egypt—Antinopolis—after him.

Christian iconography during the Renaissance as well as the athletic, heavily muscled gods of classical Greece repeatedly mirrored the strong presence of gay men in sport during those times. For example, in early Christian images, Adam was depicted as a lithe naked athlete. Even if in the middle ages he had become a figure of shame, sin and despair, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, and other gay male masters of the Italian and the French renaissance, gave him, and other models in subsequent pieces, heavenly, muscular, athletic bodies. Also, apart from giving us their name to denote a particular sexual activity, “the Greeks also left a legacy of heroic sculptures and painted ceramics with male athletes’ figures, gods and lovers frozen in compromising positions” (Blue Not Only, 1997, p. 112). The invocation of an almost hypermasculine sexuality is frequent in the literature of this period. In fact, the term ‘athletic love’ became a coded allusion for men engaging in sexual acts with other men (Fone, 2000). In light of this evidence, it would be difficult to deny the historical existence of gay male athletes.
What is important to translate from ancient times to modern times is the shift in ideologies, where in ancient times, effeminacy and being gay were mutually exclusive. Effeminacy was frowned upon compared to sexual acts between men, which were not. In modern times, sexual acts between men are frowned upon because they have been considered effeminate since the early Victorian era (Williams, 1999). It was during this era that effeminacy and being gay were intertwined as one, and convicted sodomites given the death penalty in Europe because it was not only justified as being criminal but especially because it was considered a ‘disease’. This belief stemmed from the fear that the social conduct of gay men, rather than their sexual behaviours alone, “disrupted the social, legal, political, ethical and moral order of society, a contention supposedly supported by history and affirmed by religious doctrines” (Fone, 2000, p. 5).

The continued widespread social disapproval of being gay in the early 1900s was fuelled largely by medical (psychological and psychiatric) beliefs of abnormality and religious/moral beliefs of deviancy and sin. However, being gay and other sexual orientations are socially constructed categories of meanings that are constantly changing. For instance, the term homosexuality (being gay) itself did not exist before it was believed to be a threat to the social order in the late 1800’s (Otis et al., 1999). Being gay during this period became shameful in most western societies because it challenged the order inherent not in nature, but in approved gender roles and therefore, social relations (Ryan, 1988). Notions of male intimacy were markedly different 100 years ago than they are today. In such, Ibson (2002) for example provides photographic evidence for what Foucault (1990) has described as the changing meaning of being gay from the sodomite, which was viewed as a temporary aberration, to gay men as a species. From an academic perspective, Ibson (2002) clearly shows that prior to the representation and labelling of being gay as a deviant identity, men were free to be intimate with each other. His photographs show men lavishly dressed, provocatively undressed, arms wrapped around each other, embracing, lying in piles, sleeping in the same beds, holding
hands, and sitting on each other’s laps. Ibson’s collection of photos shows that as Western culture became increasingly aware of same-sex attractions, and particularly the notion of the gay man as a distinct kind of person, that the resultant fear of being thought “one of those” put a wedge in-between the intimacy that men once used to cherish as the ultimate – fraternal bonding. Since then, gay men have been largely persecuted, stigmatised, isolated and ultimately silenced because of their perceived threat to hegemonic control and ideological domination. The image of the sick, feminine, and sexual predator and his disassociation with sport has persisted into the 21st century. The power of these images to control and intimidate gay male athletes is as strong today as it was in the past, because many perceive them to be accurate:

The creation of a feminine gay male as a pathological condition by early 20th century medical experts provided an effective means to control all gay males, neutralise challenges to the heterosexist status quo and conserve social heterosexual dominance and power. (Griffin, 1992, p. 241)

The interests of white heterosexual Anglo-Saxon males are still served by the stigmatisation and silence of gay males. The participation of gay male athletes (especially in team sport organisations) continues to be perceived as a threat to the social and cultural order. In recent years, very few sporting codes have responded positively to the presence of gay male athletes among their ranks. Many authors and members of the gay community have identified the last quarter of this century as the “Golden Years” of Western lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) visibility and economic momentum (Lukinball, 1995, p. 180). But despite twenty-five years of groundbreaking lesbian and gay liberation in other areas, the locker room door remains firmly shut against any outside liberating influence. The result is that the world of sport, fitness and leisure activities is probably one of the last bastions of old-fashioned institutionalised homophobia (Short, 1996). In the twenty first century there are no examples of a culture that completely embraces men who are gay in mainstream society and men who are gay in sport are even less accepted than in other social institutions.
Nevertheless, many famous individuals have raised the profile of gays in sport. Besides David Kopay, English soccer player Justin Fashanu and Australian rugby league player Ian Roberts, who publicly acknowledged their being gay during their athletic careers, others have come forward as well, but only after their careers as elite athletes were over. In the wake of Roberts’ coming out, there’s been a notable absence of other gay sports stars scrambling for the keys to their closets. The most recent player to come forward after his playing career from team sports is former Hawaiian-born Samoan NFL player Esera Tuaolo. He played for five teams in his nine years, mostly for the Minnesota Vikings. Others, who have also come out after their sporting careers were over, include former ex-major league outfielder Billy Bean, who played for the Detroit Tigers, Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres from 1987 to 1995, came out in 1999 four years after his retirement, New York Giants tackle Roy Simmons, one-time Redskins general manager Dave Slattery, former University of Pittsburgh lineman Ed Gallagher; and deceased athletes such as Jerry Smith, the two time Pro Bowl tight end with the Washington Redskins, New Zealand rugby administrator Lewis Pryme and former Dodger outfielder Glenn Burke (who is credited for popularising the ‘high five’), each of whom died of AIDS in 1986, 1989 and 1996 respectively.

Those who have come forward from individual sports include well-known Olympic diver Greg Louganis and another Olympic diver, David Pichler, 1984 U.S. Olympic swimmer Bruce Hayes, former bodybuilders Mr Universe Bob Paris and Mr Olympia Chris Dickerson, Ironman champion Chris Bergland, Canadian Olympic diver Scott Cranham, American Olympic figure skaters Dick Button, Rudy Galindo and John Curry, Canadian figure skaters Toller Cranston, Mathew Hall and Brian Orser, Canadian Olympic silver medallist swimmer Mark Tewksbury; Canadian curler and world silver medallist Rick Feeney, Canadian stock car champion driver Billy Innes, professional snowboarder Ryan Miller, English power lifter Chris Morgan, 1992 Olympic Silver medallist boxer, Mark Leduc, professional wrestler Pat Paterson, Canadian Olympic high jumper, Brian Marshall, ex-world ranked New Zealand
equestrian, Peter Taylor, Japanese martial artist and political activist, Yukio Mishima, two openly gay U.S. divers David Pithier and Patrick Jeffrey and deceased athletes such as 1968 U.S. Olympic decathlete and founder of the Gay Games, Dr Tom Waddell, who died of AIDS in 1987, and American tennis player, Bill Tilden.

Various articles and primary sources, such as autobiographies, have been written about some of these gay male athletes, including: Billy Bean (Bean and Bull, 2003), Greg Louganis (Bull, 1995; Louganis and Marcus, 1994), Brian Marshall (Newman, 1995), David Kopay (Kopay and Young, 1977, 1980), Ian Roberts (Roberts and Freeman, 1997; Vadasz, 1995), Tom Waddell (Schaap, 1987; Waddell and Schaap, 1996), Glen Burke (Burke and Sherman, 1995), Bill Tilden (Baumer, 1985; Williams, 1994), Peter Taylor (Baragwanath, 1997), Yukio Mishima (Scott-Stokes, 1995), and body builders Rob Jackson and Bob Paris (Jackson and Paris, 1994). Dave Pallone has also written an autobiography about his life as a gay umpire in professional baseball (Pallone, 1990). Every autobiography gives evidence of the many difficulties gay male athletes must learn to deal with. Although the stories differ in many ways, they do show commonality by expressing the fear and isolation experienced by each individual. For example, Roberts and Freeman describe the situation faced by Australian Rugby League star Ian Roberts;

All around him were images of the ‘right’ way to be. Adolescence was like being on a ‘down’ escalator, and having to walk up, while everyone else seemed to be relaxing on the ‘up’ one. Ian knew he wasn’t alone, but he was alone in struggling to be the Ian Roberts that only he was expected to be. (Roberts and Freeman, 1997, p. 62)

These initial accounts of gay male experience within sport organisations are extremely valuable to this research by showing existing degrees of oppression, prejudice and discrimination within sports governing bodies. They also informed the composition and application of the Conspiracy of Silence model as part of the research framework used in this study.
Many other gay male athletes, unknown to the public, participate in mainstream sport organisations. Bruce Hayes said he knows of as many as four other gay Olympic gold medallists. Author Brian Pronger says one male figure skater told him 70 to 90 percent of male figure skaters are gay (Bohls and Wangrin, 1993). Pronger also said he knows of one NBA player and “a handful” of NFL players who are gay. “There are plenty of lesbians and gay men in baseball, from the commissioner’s office to the minor leagues,” said gay umpire Dave Pallone, “I know that there are enough to have an all-star team, a general manager and an umpire” (Bohls and Wangrin, 1993). Kopay (1998) agrees:

When I joined the Redskins there was a player who became all-pro, Jerry Smith, who was gay but wasn’t out. The assistant general manager of the team came out after he left the team. So yes, there are definitely gays in the front offices, and on the teams in the NFL. Gays have always been a part of society at every level; of course, in some areas they excel [are visible] in greater numbers than others (p. 1).

Admittedly, obtaining an exact figure is impossible at this point. However, a conservative statistical analysis shows a large representation of gay athletes that may be presently affected by homophobia. In fact, numbers show that the vast majority of gay athletes remain silent. Based on the 10% figure of the (Kinsey, Pommeroy, and Martin, 1948) landmark study, one may estimate that there are more than 250 million gay men worldwide (10% of 2.5 billion). For illustrative purposes, let us consider the potential implications of those numbers. According to the Life In New Zealand (LINZ) report (Wilson et al., 1990, p. 12), 28% of men from North America, Europe and Australasia participate in mainstream competitive sport. When we consider that gays and lesbians are represented in every sphere of society, this translates to a considerable number of the gay athletes worldwide. Therefore, with regard to these statistics, a reasonable estimate of the gay male athlete populations in some Western nations today is listed in Table 1 below. Given these numbers, the potential social consequences to issues of health (mental and physical), management (organisational), and the sports industry (economics) are worthy of attention.
TABLE 1:
Estimated population of gay male athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated Number of Gay Male Athletes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>255 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>350 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>750 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1 000 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>49 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>800 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>3 200 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Equation based on the assumption that 10% of total competitive male athletes are gay and that 28% of populations are competitive male athletes.

Specifically in New Zealand of the NZRU’s 129,480 members nation-wide in 2000 (Ernst and Young, 2000, p. 3), 124,851 were men. Statistical likelihood and common sense would suggest that there must be more than just a few gay men playing mainstream rugby in New Zealand. With 260 men playing at the NPC (National Provincial Championship) level (10 teams participated in 2002 with 26 players each) then theoretically there could be 26+ gay rugby players at that level of play and an added 13,000 gay players at all other levels combined. These numbers are based on the 10% estimate (Kinsey et al., 1948). This figure does not include those players who are bisexual, who represent an added 10-15% of players for a possible total of 30,000 gay and bisexual rugby players in New Zealand (see Table 2 below for additional values).

TABLE 2:
Estimated potential population of gay male rugby players in New Zealand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NZRU</th>
<th>Total Average</th>
<th>(-) Female (Avg)</th>
<th>(=) Male (Avg)</th>
<th>(x 10%) Gay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division 1</td>
<td>8652 x 10 teams</td>
<td>3080</td>
<td>83440</td>
<td>8 344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 2</td>
<td>3416 x 9 teams</td>
<td>1125</td>
<td>29619</td>
<td>2 962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 3</td>
<td>1527 x 8 teams</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>11792</td>
<td>1 179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NZRU Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>129 480</strong></td>
<td><strong>4629</strong></td>
<td><strong>124851</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 485</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In their survey, Garner and Smith (1977) found that there is a lot more gay behaviour among college male athletes than generally perceived by public opinion in most societies. They found that on average 20% of male athletes in team sports between the ages 20-25 have had frequent sexual experiences with other males. These findings varied between 14%-35% depending on the sport and the university surveyed. Although not considered a landmark study, these figures suggest that gay athletes (or at least sexual acts with other men) are over-represented in college sport. Surprisingly, the survey did not address sexual orientation or sexual identity as causal factors of behaviour. Nevertheless, it does suggest that a considerable number of athletes deny their being gay by living in silence or are bisexual, or “experiment” when they are in an all male setting.

To date no NZRU members have come out publicly during their mainstream participation, yet gay teams exist in Auckland and Wellington where most of the players have participated in schoolboy rugby, club rugby and representative level rugby. Plainly, there is no questioning the existence of gay rugby players within the NZRU since the rugby players from existing gay teams are or were members of the NZRU. Additionally, since the King's Cross Steelers in London became the first predominately gay rugby team in 1996, the number of gay rugby teams around the world has grown rapidly. Currently there are gay teams in Australia, the United Kingdom, Argentina and Canada. In addition to those international teams, in the US there are gay teams in Boston, New York City, Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Austin, Houston, Dallas, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Six new teams are currently forming in Atlanta, Chicago, North Carolina, Portland, San Diego and Tampa. Notably, most teams (600 players) have registered to attend the Bingham Gay Rugby World Cup to be held in London England in May 2004.

Not surprisingly, some have argued that gays are less likely to be attracted to sport and as such the use of percentages is misleading. However, Bryant's (2001) study indicates that the supposition that gay males are absent and/or incapable of participation in contact team sports
to be untrue. In his paper, Bryant shows that between 65% and 75% of the 115 self-identifying gay male athletes interviewed were either the best players on the team or better than average players competing in high school or collegiate levels. “Best” was defined as the team’s leading scorer, MVP or team captain, while “better” meant being a starter and major contributor. These findings imply physical and sporting similarities between gay and heterosexual male athletes. It also implies that differences between both groups may be limited to the gender to which they are attracted. Similarities also exist between gay men and lesbians in terms of their lived experiences in sport as a minority group.

Pat Griffin (1992) reports that throughout the history of Western culture, restrictions have been placed on women’s sport participation in general and lesbian sport participation particularly. I suggest within this section, that the social and cultural aspects related to gay male athletes’ involvement in sport is similar to the restricted participation of lesbians and women in general. Because sport in Western society is a cornerstone of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, the common presumption is that male athletes are heterosexual. Hence, gay male athletes’ sexuality may not seem to be under as much scrutiny as lesbian athletes’ sexuality. However, having said that, it may also be true that what men do is more valued (important) than what women do, especially in sport, and that this may have a greater impact on the experiences of gay sportsmen.

In summary, gay male athletes have always been present in sport. They were commonplace and well accepted in some societies during the Greco-Roman era until strong social taboos restricted their visibility. Their visible participation in mainstream sport has since declined in all societies, and has remained practically non-existent world-wide until the last two decades because of legal and/or criminal sanctions imposed on them. Hence, centuries of tolerance and acceptance of gay men in sport have given way to intolerance and bigotry. Today, gay males in mainstream sport organisations are intimidated by the fear of losing social approval even if most Western nations have decriminalised being gay. Having provided at least one cursory
estimate of the number of potential gay male athletes, I now review some of the relevant literature associated with homophobia in sport. This section provides important insights into the many reasons why gay male athletes live in fear, and why so few are visible within mainstream sport organisations.

**Homophobia and Homonegativism in Sport Today**

Griffin (1989), Krane (1996) and Lenskyj (1989) agree that the sport environment is even more hostile towards being gay than non-sport areas. As more acts of discrimination towards gay men in sport are documented (Cahn, 1994; Nelson, 1995), one must address the issues of homophobia and homonegativism in sport organisations, their policies and practices. Homophobia and homonegativism are the common underlying factors affecting gay male athletes within all interrelated components of the Conspiracy of Silence model outlined in this study.

Homophobia (the irrational fear and intolerance of lesbians and gays) in sport is referred to by numerous scholars (Anderson, 2002; Bennett *et al.*, 1989; Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983; Bryant, 2001; Cahn, 1994; Catalano, 1982; Clarke, 1995a; Coakley, 1990; Cotton and Jackson, 1992; Crosset, 1995; Deware, 1990; Flintoff, 1994; Garner and Smith, 1977; Genasci *et al.*, 1994; Greendorfer, 1997; Griffin, 1992, 1993, 1998; Griffin, 1998; Grossman, 1995; Guthrie, 1982; Heyman, 1987; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 1997a; Lenskyj, 1991; Lipsyte, 1997; Locke, 1970; Markwell, 1998; Messner and Sabo, 1994; Moses and Garfinkle, 1977; Nelson, 1995; Price, 2000; Price, 2003; Pronger, 1990a; Pronger, 2000; Rhoads, 1995a, 1995b; Riemer, 1995; Rogers, 1994; Rotella and Murray, 1991; Sabo, 1989; Shallenberger, 1988; Short, 1996; Smith and Markson, 2000; Smith, 1994; Steele, 2002; Vealy, 1997; Wellman, 1997; Wolf-Wendel *et al.*, 2001; Woods, 1990; Young, 1995; Zipter, 1988). The term homonegativism (the purposeful negative attitudes and behaviours towards non-heterosexuals) was more specifically used in sport by Krane (1996) based on her argument that the social context in which homophobia is developed is “consciously” maintained and
“purposefully” incorporated, but never discussed openly within sports organisations by those in power. Therefore, the use of the term homonegativism, rather than homophobia, better reflects Krane’s perspective of the experiences of gay male athletes within mainstream sport organisations. Homonegativism should be viewed as an overt and hostile attitude used against gays, such as the case with the Christian Promise Keepers and other extremist groups that specifically promote intolerance of lesbians and gays. Both terms exist to better explain different sources of anti-gay bias. They are not mutually exclusive as initial levels of homophobia guide homonegativism, and homophobia, for most individuals, is encouraged by public opinion acceptance of homonegativism.

Because of these views, some gay male athletes, or those perceived to be gay, are being physically abused and vilified, as well as being economically and socially oppressed. Others who are less visible (closeted), especially in competitive, elite and professional sports, live in fear of being excluded from participation altogether.

In sport organisations in general, attitudes and lack of anti-discrimination policies protecting gay male athletes indicate a lack of awareness of prejudice and discrimination. For example, many professional organisations do not even admit to the possibility that there may be gay male athletes on their squads. Dallas Cowboy scout Wallie Juliff said: “I have never heard and to my knowledge it’s never even been brought up in a (scouting) meeting… I’m 100 percent sure that there aren’t any (gay athletes) on our team because you’d know about it” (Bohls and Wangrin, 1993, p. 4). The Scottish soccer/football team manager, Craig Brown, took a rather Victorian approach by thinking that gay [athletes] did not exist: “I can honestly say that in all my years of [being an administrator], I’ve never heard of it [gay players], certainly in Scotland it’s never been an issue at all” (Kershaw, 2001, p. 2). The negative stereotypes of gay men in society are “widespread, reproduced and reinforced through major socialising agents such as sport” (Krane, 1996, p. 240).
Homophobic and homonegative practices within sport are common and often go unpunished. This type of atmosphere is exacerbated when bigotry is tolerated and accepted by people in powerful positions (e.g., coaches, staff and administrators) (Griffin, 1984). The lack of retribution and justice for discrimination and vilification against gay athletes reinforces that homonegativism and homophobia are acceptable in sport organisations and sport in general (Krane, 1996, p. 241).

Two of the field’s most renowned scholars specialising in homophobia, Pat Griffin (1993) and Helen Lenskyj (1991) agree that the problem in sport reflects the problem of intolerance in our society in general. Even if the civil rights movement helped remove aspects of institutionalised discrimination, the social disease itself continues to grow in perhaps more subtle but equally insidious ways. Incidents of prejudice and discrimination occur every day (e.g., anti-marriage laws for gays), even in societies where being gay is now legal. Reports of gay bashings and overt anti-gay vilification are all too common, including sport (Woog, 1997). In fact Wolf-Wendel et al., (2001) assert that the hostility towards gay men in sport seems above and beyond that found in other areas. Sport lags behind the rest of society when it comes to accepting gay men. Professional athletes across a range of sports have survived substance and even spousal abuse scandals, yet gay male athletes suffer in silence because their perception is that there would be little understanding and forgiveness within sport.

Therefore some gay, lesbian and bisexual people may be moving away from mainstream sport organisations, in favour of safer, inclusive and more welcoming environments. Lesbian and gay organised events offer homophobia free environments in which they can compete. The popularity of the Gay Games is an excellent example. However, since not all gay athletes participate exclusively in gay sports organisations, one could easily argue that a greater percentage of lesbian and gay athletes, especially elite and professional ones remain closeted (non-visible) within the confines of mainstream sport organisations. This lack of visibility may suggest that gay male athletes do not really exist at all in mainstream sport organisations.
As a means of taking away the common argument that “maybe” gay people “avoid” sport or certain sports, it would be worthwhile at this point to state that there is no substantial evidence to indicate this. Most competitive gay male athletes who do participate in the Gay Games also participate in mainstream sport organisations (Symons, 2002). The myths and stereotypes that gay males do not participate in mainstream sport are fuelled only by the visible few (i.e., David Kopay, Justin Fashanu and Ian Roberts) that have shown courage enough to be identified as gay in the sporting context. The advent of the Gay Games, the growing numbers of gay-identifying sport organisations worldwide and their participants suggests that gays do participate in sport (Pitts, 1997). What is unique about being gay is that it is the one subculture that transcends all other social categories such as: age, gender, race, social class, nationality, religion, ethnicity, and the able/disabled. There is no evidence that suggests it has barriers to other social groups nor have any substantial over/under-representation in any of these groups and that includes sport. It is a subculture that operates within others and where different individuals from different backgrounds and cultures do show commonalities of understanding of what it is to be gay. Some of these commonalities are shared within the readings of primary sources such as the biographies of gay male athletes.

In their autobiographies, athletes Ian Roberts (Roberts and Freeman, 1997), Dave Kopay (Kopay and Young, 1977) and Glen Burke (Burke and Sherman, 1995) found self-disclosure of their sexual orientation within sport very difficult. Likewise, in his biography *Breaking the Surface*, American diver Greg Louganis (Louganis and Marcus, 1994), four-times Olympic gold medallist, explains in detail his isolation, fear and the intolerance of other Olympic athletes towards his being gay and gay men in general.

It was right after I’d told Scott Cranham that I was gay that I got called a Commie fag. I assumed he’d broken my confidence and I was mad at him for years, although I never asked him about it until I visited with him recently in Canada. Scott told me that the only other person he told was his girlfriend and that she didn’t tell anyone. He also told me that the reason he ran away from me
was that he couldn’t accept the fact that he himself was gay. It terrified him when I first went to him to talk about being gay. It was the last thing he wanted to deal with. (Louganis and Marcus, 1994, p. 72-73)

Louganis suffered immensely. Nevertheless, he succeeded in an individual sport and was one of the best divers in history. In their quest for acceptance, these elite athletes found solace in their performances and were strongly motivated in hiding their being gay behind the supposed oxymoron of gay-athleticism. In other words, their invisibility within mainstream sport organisations because of the public perception that gay athletes do not exist along with their elite levels of performance may have assisted in their acceptance within mainstream sport organisation.

In this section, I have explained the relevance of homophobia to this study and its negative impact on the sporting world, particularly on the experiences of gay male athletes. Clearly, homophobia has a devastating effect on gay male athletes in mainstream sport organisations. This study examines and explains the consequences of homophobia by exploring the phenomenon of silence of gay male athletes in sport in general and in team sports particularly. To facilitate our understanding I will use the Conspiracy of Silence Model. The model will serve as a research framework in order to acknowledge: (a) the range of factors that contribute to homophobia in sport organisations and, (b) the difficulties faced by gay male athletes and the consequences of homophobia and homonegativism in sport organisations.

Research on Gay Male Athletes

Although some insights have been provided into the sport experiences of gay men, (Anderson, 2002; Bryant, 2001; Garner and Smith, 1977; Hekma, 1998; Klein, 1989; Pronger, 1990b; Rotella and Murray, 1991; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001), and some have alluded to the phenomenon of silence as either a ‘culture of silence’, (Pronger, 1990, 2000; Hekma, 1998) or a ‘circle of and/or continuum of silence’ (Griffin, 1998), none have attempted to explain in detail the tenets of the phenomenon or produced data to verify the silence as a tacit agreement by all stakeholders who maintain the status quo of gay invisibility within mainstream sport.
To date there is no research that specifically focuses on explaining the term **Conspiracy of Silence Phenomenon** and its specific relevance and function in understanding the experience of silence surrounding gay male athletes in mainstream team sport organisations. Although Sparkes (1994) often refers to the Conspiracy of Silence in his works, specific aspects of the term and its mechanism are scarcely addressed or explained. In short, I am not aware of any scholarly research that shows mainstream sport to be a welcome environment for gay men or details the experience of silence within mainstream rugby in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Despite this, some scholars have investigated gay males athletes to a certain degree in relation to their sexual behaviour and their difference from heterosexual men. For example, Brian Pronger (1990b) conducted in-depth interviews with thirty gay male athletes. He used a phenomenological perspective to shed light on the experiences that gay men have in sport and how they differ from non-gay men. Although he does address homophobia in sport and its impact on gay men, there is no mention of a Conspiracy of Silence *per se*. Pronger’s study focuses primarily on, what he argues to be, the irony of gay men in sport. It is his contention that gay men hide in silence behind the veneer of a perceived heterosexuality in sport for mainly sexual purposes. Little attention is given to the fear experienced by gay men in sport and even less with regard for their passion for sport itself. Sparkes (1994) studied the lives of two gay male physical educators and Garner and Smith (1977) surveyed more than 100 male college athletes in team sports about their sexual behaviours and found a surprising overrepresentation of heterosexual identifying athletes who engaged in same gender sexual encounters. Rotella and Murray (1991) interviewed gay and lesbian college athletes about their experiences as gay and lesbian athletes and found that homophobia had a negative impact on the world of athletes, coaches, and sport psychology consultants. Both heterosexuals and gay men were shown to be affected. Homophobia kept some from striving for excellence while interfering and hindering some who pursued success in sport. Anderson (2002) interviewed a range of openly gay male athletes from various sports and found that
while heterosexual athletes are not likely to accept the creation of substantial gay subcultures within their mainstream organisation, gay athletes are beginning to contest sport as a site of hegemonic masculine production. Bryant (2001) surveyed gay male athletes in contact sports in the United States and found that 75% of gay men who participate in contact sports such as ice hockey, football and rugby were considered either the best player on their mainstream team or better than average. Hekma (1998) studied gay sporting organisations in the Netherlands and found an increasing number of gay athletes preferred participating in gay organisations rather than mainstream sporting organisations because of the healthier, supportive, and safe environment they offered. Wolf-Wendel et al., (2001) looked at the attitudes of heterosexual athletes towards the possibility of openly gay athletes being on their teams and examined how and why student athletes, coaches and athletic administrators at five NCAA Division I universities accepted some forms of diversity so readily, but remained closed and even hostile to gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals.

In a master’s thesis, one of few studies of gay male athletes in team sports, Price and Parker (2003) investigated gay rugby players from an all-gay team in London. They investigated the sexual politics of the club and its identity positioning within a hegemonic heterosexist mainstream rugby union league. Findings from the study indicate that the club promoted a liberal image towards dominant masculine and heterosexual definitions of rugby player behaviour to the consternation of some club members. The study also revealed that hyper-masculine behaviour and strong disapproval of sexual interaction existed amongst the gay players in that context. Of the previously mentioned studies, none explains in depth the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon or supply data to examine the prevailing silence of gay men in mainstream team sport organisations. What these studies are missing with regard to understanding homophobia in sport and the production of silence, and what this study endeavours to do, is gather rich contextual data relevant to the ‘essence’ of the gay athlete’s lived experience of silence within sport. Although homophobia is addressed throughout, none
specifically question or supply evidence regarding the ways gay male athletes survive in a climate of fear of exclusion, isolation and stigmatisation within mainstream team sport organisations. Moreover, none distinctively locate or show clearly where, when and how the production of silence is manifested in the lives of gay men in sport. Nevertheless, given the limited research available, it is deemed important to highlight the major findings of these studies and how they might inform this current project.

Few primary sources, such as autobiographies, exist and those that do have yet to be critically analysed. Consequently, in the absence of sufficient “factual” experiences of gay male physical educators and athletes, Sparkes (1994) found it necessary to create an ethnographic fiction in order to highlight the oppression and stigmatisation that constrain the lives of gay male athletes and the manner in which they differ from non-gay males as well as lesbians. Although Sparkes is the latest scholar to reiterate the need to uncover the “Conspiracy of Silence surrounding gay men in sport”, insufficient explanation of the conspiracy of silence is offered in his study (p. 98). Sparkes’ work of “fiction” highlights the need to answer questions related to the silence of gay males in sport, such as that posed in this study. In his research, Pronger (1990b) argues that the experience of being gay “is a matter of context, that is of understanding oneself in the light of socially constructed sexual and gender categories” (p. 142). He asserts that most gay men have control over the fluidity of their experiences in time and place regardless of the hegemonic and ideological set of values exerted upon them within a dominant heterosexual patriarchal society. Although his discussion revolves around the identity management strategies of his sample, this is not clearly identified as such in his arguments. Instead, he centres his arguments on what he terms “the ironic experience” of gay men in mainstream sport organisations. He states that this ironic experience is based on the fluidity between both the masculine and feminine traits associated (especially) with gay men. According to Pronger (1990b) gay irony is a way of thinking, communicating, and being that emerges out of the experiences of being gay in a
society in which people tend to believe that everyone is straight (heterosexual), (p. 149). Arguably, Pronger’s invocation of gay irony in relation to gay male athletes, takes away the validity of their experience in sport as being natural and justified. Pronger reserves too much attention for the sexual attributes and eroticism given to the gay experience in general and focuses little on the social paradigms that influence the experiences of gay male athletes’ participation in sport specifically. Pronger speaks little of the fear of isolation and stigmatisation that may be experienced by gay male athletes, especially those elite players in mainstream team sport organisations. Except for Pronger’s (1990a, 1990b and 2000), substantial contributions in addressing identity management strategies, no other study of this nature has focused on the experiences of gay male athletes in mainstream sport organisations using a phenomenological approach.

Klein (1989) interviewed twelve male hustlers (six formal - six non-formal interviews) about their association with being gay and the link to body building. Key findings indicate the incongruous presence of homophobia, resulting in a juxtaposition of being gay and anti-gay behaviour. His study shows that this irony is necessary if the hustler is to maintain his alleged heterosexual identity. He examines hypermasculinity and strategies of economic survival in the highly competitive southern California bodybuilding scene, in relation to hustling in particular, and to American masculinity in general. The study presented major contradictions in a bodybuilder’s sexual identity compared to other hustlers and prison populations where sexual acts among men are practised within heterosexual identities. The most important point in Klein’s study in relation to this one is that it confirms the restricted capacity of gay men to live a more meaningful and complete emotional life caused in part, by homophobia and a disdain for the effeminate. He has also shown that promoters, organisers and owners of publishing houses for body building products seek to conceal (keep silent) the institution of hustling (and sexual behaviour between men). They see it as a threat to their vested interests. In most gyms, hustling is officially repudiated, though there is a tacit understanding (silence)
that it is imperative for survival (Klein, 1989). Basically, being gay according to Klein’s study is widespread in professional bodybuilding circles, yet no one with a vested interest will speak out against homophobia or set inclusive guidelines and policies for gay male athletes (bodybuilders).

Rotella and Murray (1991) provide some accounts of the experiences of gay and lesbian athletes, in particular those of a college basketball player who expresses a great degree of fear and sense of isolation. In doing so, they have drawn a “wish list” of actions they see as needed in combating homophobia in mainstream sport organisations. Although none of the strategies have been proven effective, they do serve as starting blocks for future research. Understandably, as sport psychologists, Rotella and Murray present little discussion on the sociological implications of homophobia. Most of their focus is on group (team) cohesion and player performances, and how both are affected by homophobia.

Two other studies, although not directly linked specifically to gay male athletes in team sports, are relevant to this research. Pitts (1989) and Schuyf and Stoepler (1996) studies both looked at sport management issues regarding mainstream team sport organisations dealing with gay and lesbian athletes. Schuyf and Stoepler (1996) investigated the boards of thirty gay and lesbian sports clubs and fourteen national associations. They were asked about the actual state of integration of gay and lesbian sports teams within mainstream sport organisations and their competitions in the Netherlands. They found that about half of the national associations interviewed are committed in some way to the “integration” of gay and lesbian athletes within their organisations. Other associations, however, do their utmost to keep being gay irrelevant to the world of sport. In some cases they mention that gays and lesbians do not play their particular sport. Interestingly enough, others were of the opinion that being gay is a “social problem” and that as sport associations it is not their duty to solve social problems. Some think that being gay would not be a problem, if only gay men would behave like heterosexual men. These findings showed that most organisations in fact want to assimilate gay athletes
within heterosexual values, beliefs and above all behaviours. Basically it showed a positive response to the integration (tolerance) of gay men as long as they were not found to be “provocative” (i.e., ostensibly showing that they are gay). In other words, the study gives evidence of the existing encouragement of oppressive mechanisms within mainstream sport organisations towards apparent gay athletes.

Pitts (1989; 1997) describes the importance of the sport management field in identifying the effects of the emerging leisure activities available for gay and lesbian consumption in the United States. Her findings indicated a 5% to 10% yearly growth in the emerging lesbian and gay sport industry, suggesting that 20% of the athletic population is gay and that they maintain healthier lifestyles compared to heterosexuals. She notes the obvious financial losses for mainstream sport organisations caused by lesbian and gay populations shifting their personal funds into the emerging specialised (gay and lesbian) sport and leisure industry. Although no in-depth interviews were administered, the survey results revealed that the existing fear of isolation and stigmatisation did not motivate gay and lesbian athletes to join other gay and lesbian sport organisations in lieu of mainstream ones. Zipter's (1988) study Diamonds are a Dyke’s Best Friend also confirms this for lesbians.

Finally, Dan Woog (1997, 2002), an openly gay male high school coach, recently became the first author to document the experiences of gay male athletes and coaches in his two books Jocks: Stories of America’s Gay Male Athletes and Jocks 2: Coming Out to Play. Woog interviewed fifty mostly “out” self-identifying gay male athletes he found via the Internet. These men, all non-professionals, were involved in a variety of sports including football, baseball, soccer, running and ice hockey. The pressure that men feel to be part of a team, to be physically and emotionally close to their teammates, lurks in the stories Woog recounts. Blatant homophobia was shown to be an integral part of the experiences of all the gay male athletes involved in competitive mainstream sport organisations. Most of the gay male athletes felt they had to make a choice between being athletic or gay, “being a man’s man or
some kind of shrieking nellie queen” (Krask, 1998, p. 24). Others in the book strive to separate their sexual lives from their athletic lives, creating two different identities. It seems many of the men interviewed were afraid of their gayness, that internalised homophobia forces them into isolation. Nevertheless few stories of rejection, abuse, or intense fear appear in Woog’s interviews. Most stories are positive and Woog suggests that “perhaps gay men, facing rejection because of their sexuality, are more likely, not less likely to stick with sports to counter the anticipated rejection of society” (Krask, 1998, p. 24). In his book, Woog falls short of a critical perspective of their experience and little analytical insight is given. There is no mention of the influence of important social systems or structures on the experiences of his participants.

In the following section, literature on masculinity in general and on masculinity expressed within the sport of rugby in particular is presented to better understand the social context in which this study investigates the silence of gay male athletes.

**Masculinity in New Zealand**

Pringle (2002) states that “rugby, in Aotearoa/New Zealand is impossible to escape, and it is heading in a direction that is increasingly harmful to New Zealand and men in particular” (p. 58). As much as rugby may be seen or perceived to be a positive form of physical expression and activity for most, it may however remain a negative experience for a number of New Zealanders; gay men in particular. One could argue that many men do not have the courage to refrain from playing rugby in New Zealand. They would rather face the gruelling tackles on the pitch, than the offensive comments off it. This is primarily due to the social stereotypes of what it is to be a man, to be masculine, in New Zealand. One of the foremost scholars on masculinity in Aotearoa/New Zealand and chief historian of the Internal Affairs Department’s historical branch, Jock Phillips (1996), states that: “The male stereotype in New Zealand was based initially upon pioneer traditions, and later versions … continued to view backblocks experience and outdoor strength as the most distinctive element of Kiwi
manhood” (p. 288). Additionally, the belief that rugby is ideal for developing manly character in boys is in part inherited through the colonisation process, but was also politically promoted, especially after the 1905 British Tour (Phillips, 1996). After this and numerous other All Black successes, a dominant discourse has developed over the last 120 years that promote rugby as a maker of tough New Zealand men from all social categories, thus making rugby a positive social force. However, groups such as gays have suffered from the narrow definition of the male stereotype as it developed in New Zealand. Phillips adds that: “the sheer ideological hegemony of the male mythology served to disguise conflicts and obscure [silence] diversity within society itself” (p. 284). Therefore gay men grew up realising more than their heterosexual brothers the repressive, rigid parameters of the role of “A Good Keen Bloke” because they didn’t fit into the square box marked “The Acceptable New Zealand Man.” Pringle (2002) notes:

In other words, rugby helps produce a dominating discourse of masculinity which informs that ‘real men’ are tough, aggressive, physically superior to others, risk takers, and competitive. The dominance of this discourse of masculinity exclusively produces New Zealand men who are consistently unreflective and critical about violence, pain and relations of power (p. 61).

Furthermore, rugby has the appearance of being that which unites men, yet it might also be a practice that divides many men; gay men in particular. Phillips (1996) adds that because of these masculine and rugby stereotypes, many men were afraid to leave the role that they had been trained for since birth and were lacking models that might have been more fulfilling. Still today, many men, gay men in particular, may remain afraid to admit weakness, fear or defeat. They may still suffer in silence or channel their feelings into bitterness and self-contempt either because of the continued Kiwi-male stereotype and/or the added pressure of the culture of rugby, which is conventionally comprised of rituals and traditions.

Given the highly aggressive nature of rugby and its close connections with nationalism and men in New Zealand, Pringle (2002) is especially concerned with how rugby may help shape male subjectivities and relations of power. As rugby seems to be a prime dividing practice
that distinguishes some men and boys from other men and boys, it is certain that current male
behaviour within rugby organisations does not suit all men. Kimmel (2002) offers a strong
statement of what we ought to think about men. Taking a historical-sociological approach to
the issue of the social construction of masculinity, Kimmel identifies "Marketplace Man" as
the "new vision of masculinity" (p. 128) that came to the American scene in the early
nineteenth century and never left. He focuses particularly on the social mechanism by which
Marketplace Man is constructed. He argues that homophobia, which he defines as the fear of
"other men" who "watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood" is what
makes the world of masculinity go round (p. 131). "Masculinity is a homosocial enactment.
Men test themselves, perform heroic feats, and take enormous risks, all because they want
other men to grant them manhood" (p. 129). Kimmel's model helps to resolve the paradox of
male power. From the perspective of men's experience, men as individuals are
"disempowered" by the "rules of manhood" formulated by men as a group (p. 138).

Hearn (1990) questions how men and masculinities are differentiated. They argue that
social divisions, such as age, ethnicity, or economic class, create "men" and "masculinities," but also that men and masculinities themselves create social divisions. For them, the
fundamental unity and commonality of "men" as a "gender class" is that they benefit from a
system based on the "family mode of production" and that "appropriates the means of
reproduction." In short, "men may be seen as simply the class that benefits from particular
material relations over women" (p. 106). Having been created, this class of men then creates
other masculinities in relation to itself, for example, gay and heterosexual masculinities. Other
social divisions may then generate other differences, such as: fatherhood, occupation, and
appearance.

This study seeks to uncover and explain an area within rugby where certain definitions of
masculinity are reinforced and serve to exclude gay male players by silencing their existence.
This may be the fundamental source of homophobia within the Conspiracy of Silence
phenomenon explored. Hence, this inquiry also questions how a particular group of men may inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they may legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance. Consequently, the possible hegemony of rugby officials, captains, players and their sponsors in New Zealand will be scrutinised during this inquiry.

**The Conspiracy of Silence Model**

I have organised this second section of the review of the literature into two parts. In the first part I outline specific research related to the term conspiracy of silence. In the second part I elaborate on the four tenets of the **Conspiracy of Silence Model**: a) Hegemonic Heterosexuality, b) Oppression Theory, c) Identity Management Strategies and d) Noelle Neumann’s Spiral of Silence Theory.

In relation to the phenomenon of silence, hegemonic heterosexuality and Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory assist in explaining the reasons why rugby players remain silent and oppression theory and identity management strategies assist in describing how gay men experience (feel and act) the phenomenon of silence when it is produced. All four tenets interact with each other to form the conspiracy of silence phenomenon.

**The Conspiracy of Silence of Gay Male Athletes in Sport**

Though they have not referred to the phenomenon specifically by name, many scholars have described, in one way or another, the link between limited visibility and a **Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon** (Bennett *et al.*, 1989; Bohls and Wangrin, 1993; Cotton and Jackson, 1992; Cramer, 1996; Krane and Michalenok, 1997b; Lipsyte, 1997; Portman and Carlson, 1991; Pronger, 1990b; Sparkes, 1994; Squires and Sparkes, 1990; Vealy, 1997). None have gone so far as to articulate all its mechanisms or even to attempt the identification of its purveyors beyond that of heterosexual white males via dominant masculinity. The ongoing silence of gay male athletes, which permeates the world of sports, is so complex in nature that
very few insights beyond its uttered existence have been written. To understand the silence of gay male athletes is not a simple task. Therefore, this brief section attempts to present the different areas in which silence is exercised. This serves to clarify the dimensions of the Conspiracy of Silence by delimiting the actors within its existence.

To begin to explain the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon it is necessary to identify the dominant actors (conspirators). The actors (conspirators) in the Conspiracy of Silence are stakeholders who are not necessarily homophobic, but who have a vested interest in homophobia. Generally, heterosexual white Anglo-Saxon males are viewed as the main stakeholders in homophobia, yet women and male youth as well as some gay men, especially covert gay male athletes, also (knowingly or not) play an important part in the phenomenon to conspire tacitly by keeping silent and remaining invisible in sport. It is important to remember that the terms conspiracy and conspiracy of silence have different meanings. The term conspiracy of silence in this case suggests the existence of individuals who by their tacit behaviour of silence fuel the phenomenon.

Academics and academia have been negligent of their responsibility as stakeholders in eradicating the silence of gay male athletes in sport. With the objective of adding critical research on gay athletes to the ongoing debate regarding gay men in sport in general, and team sports particularly, I argue that the problem of inclusion regarding gay men in sport has not been sufficiently argued openly or addressed politically, nor provided the critical scholarly attention it deserves. Therefore, many academics are also seen as actors within the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon.

In addition, Griffin (1992) states that the most consistent and enduring manifestation of the Conspiracy of Silence in sport in North America is expressed by the lack of visible gay athletes within sport organisations (p.253). Most professional and amateur sports organisations have also responded with silence to the discussion of the inclusion of gay men
in sport. Reporters who attempt to discuss the topic of gay men within sport organisations, athletic directors, coaches and athletes are typically rebuffed in the American context (Lipsyte, 1997). Silence is the strategy for coaches, administrators and especially by gay athletes themselves to avoid public scrutiny and scandals. Not surprisingly, event promoters and athletes’ agents are the most reluctant to disclose their male clients’ true sexual orientation because of the perceived financial losses that would seem to be incurred by their disclosure. “Career death” is how National Football League agent Leigh Steinberg assesses it, “the first thing it would cost him would be his career” (Bohls and Wangrin, 1993, p. 2). A comment such as this only encourages elite gay male athletes to choose to remain hidden rather than face possible financial losses and potential public condemnation. Moreover, gay male athletes in mainstream sport organisations remain silent and hide their sexual orientation in fear of being stigmatised, discriminated against, and above all, isolated from playing their favourite sport. The litany of accusations or offences against athletes who are, or are perceived to be, gay has resulted in psychological stress and terminated athletic careers (Bennett et al., 1989). The message articulated from the sporting world is that drugs, rape, assault and solicitation are more acceptable than being gay.

The silent participation of gay males in sport, and the added silence expressed by their sport organisations and agents form the ensemble of individuals who produce the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. All who remain silent about the existence of gay men in sport become actors within the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. In return for the silence, actors are allowed a piece of the action in sport that would not be offered otherwise if the existence of gay men was known in the present homophobic context. The interests of mainstream sport organisations defined by heterosexual men, serving heterosexual male patriarchal values are thus maintained.
Hegemonic Heterosexuality in Sport

Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) notions of hegemony, in which a dominant group influences a subordinate by consent rather than coercion, I chose to include a form of hegemony in which gay males are subordinated to heterosexual dominance. For Gramsci, an Italian Marxist writing from jail in the mid-1930s, hegemony is a contest of meanings in which a class gains consent to the social order it rules by making its power appear normal and natural. In Gramsci’s thesis consent is a belief in the ‘right’, the ‘naturalness’, the ‘goodness’ of positions and ideas. Hegemony usually means ideological control by consensus, as distinct from coercion, meaning that they are not overtly forced into thought or action. The concept of hegemonic heterosexuality is linked to Gramsci’s writings and plays an important role in the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon in explaining the possible sources of power that silence gay athletes. Some scholarly efforts have contributed to a better understanding of the concept of hegemonic heterosexuality in sport, but according to Genasci et al., (1994) there is little research available in this area specifically related to gay men, perhaps a reflection of the controversial nature of the topic. Initial writings focused primarily on the terms sexism, heterosexism, and hegemonic masculinity (Griffin, 1984; Bennett, Duffy et al., 1989). Heterosexism is an ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatises any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationships or community. It is the common belief that heterosexuality is the norm in human nature. The term hegemonic heterosexuality (or heterosexual hegemony) in sport was introduced by Lenskyj (1986; 1989; 1990a; 2003). Hence hegemonic heterosexuality refers to the ideological control on sexuality issues by social institutions, which act as socialising agents regulating individual behaviours. Such social agents that promote heterosexuality as the “norm” include parents, peers, medicine, education, religion, media and sport (Lenskyj, 1991). Lenskyj (1991) adds that, it is important to state that hegemonic heterosexuality differs from other hegemonic forms because in this
instance, control is “in fact maintained by the forces and violence of (overt) prejudice and discrimination” (p. 62). These forms of prejudice and discrimination are sustained towards gay men, especially in sport, just as they are expressed generally towards women and minority groups.

Anderson (2002) also applies the notion of hegemonic heterosexuality in his research on openly gay male athletes in a variety of sports within the United States. In turn, Flintoff (1994) and McDermott (1990) have written about the effects of sexism in sport. Olrich (1991) and Pongrac (1991) have researched masculine hegemony, where males are dominant over females, and hegemonic masculinity in sport, where some males are dominant over other males. Davis’ (1992) doctoral dissertation looked at the hegemonic masculinity of Sports Illustrated magazines. Authors such as McKay (1991), Messner (1992), Messner and Sabo (1994), and Sabo (1989; 1980) have incorporated key relevant ideas from research on masculinity, which inform this study with regard to the social powers of hegemonic heterosexuality. Kimmel (2002) sees masculinity as a constantly changing collection of meanings socially constructed and historically shifting. In fact the search for a timeless definition of manhood is itself a ‘sociological phenomenon’. This should not be seen as a loss, but a capacity to act. For the purpose of this research, it is important to realise that men, both individually and collectively, can change for the better. As Kimmel states:

Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture. Manhood means different things in different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of ‘others’ – racial minorities, sexual minorities, and above all, women. (p. 267)

Today’s masculinity as defined by Western values and morals is marketplace driven. It reconstitutes itself by excluding others such as women, non-white men, non-native men, and gay men. The hegemonic definition of masculinity in sociological research, according to
Kimmel (2002), is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power. So true masculinity is only possible for a distinct minority of heterosexual men.

The objective in discussing the issue of gay male athletes, from a feminist perspective, is to analyse the basis of socially constructed gender roles, sexual identities, and the role of male gay athletes’ silence in maintaining a heterosexual male dominance (patriarchy) in Western society. The continuation of silence exists because gay men are also stakeholders; they have something to gain by supporting the status quo. As expressed by Pronger (1990a), gay male athletes pose a significant threat to the well established male dominated “old boys’ network” in sport. They may also be considered, like lesbians, “outsiders in the club house” (Nelson, 1991).

In fact, Clarke (1995a) states that gays in sport (and physical education) must deal daily with prejudice and discrimination in order to survive in a more homophobic and heterosexist environment than in other social contexts (p. 14). Clarke goes on to say that the messages conveyed through sport, police sexualities and that cultural practice, rules and dress codes, and all behaviours and displays of heterosexuality operate as an institutionalisation of heterosexuality. These forms of imposed assimilation confirm the damaging myths and stereotypes encouraged by sports organisations. Those who attempt to uphold heterosexuality for their own benefit reproduce the hegemonic powers that silence gay male athletes. Therefore, being gay, in the context of sport, must be regarded differently than in most other social settings (family, school, work) where hegemonic heterosexuality is less dominant or pervasive.

Griffin (1992) suggests that sport in the 20th century is, perhaps, the last arena in which heterosexual men can hope to differentiate themselves from women. Through sport, many generations have learned to value the traditional heterosexual masculinity that embraces male domination and denigrates women’s values (Messner and Sabo, 1994). If sport is to maintain
its meaning as a masculine ritual in a patriarchal society, women in general and gay men in particular must be made to feel like trespassers. While women’s sport participation is trivialised and controlled, gay men’s sports participation is silenced. The ‘lesbian’ label of women athletes and the ‘feminine, non-athletic’ attributes given to gay men are equally effective tools in achieving heterosexual male dominance in sport.

Assumptions about sexuality constitute an important axis of the ideological powers that form the conspiracy of silence of gay men in sport. Because of this, understanding hegemonic heterosexuality is vital to the understanding of the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. These assumptions about sexuality also constitute one axis of ideological power in sport. Institutionalised hegemonic heterosexuality is supported by systematic discrimination, intentional or unintentional, against all gay male and lesbian athletes created by organisational policies or practices, and backed by the power and control implicit to institutions (Bennett et al., 1989). Bennett et al also state that control used by those in power, generally heterosexual white Anglo-Saxon males, not only benefits them financially and socially, but controls (a) the fundamental access to the sport experience, (b) physical competence, (c) opportunities to excel, (d) opportunities for financial success, (e) the coaching job market, (f) recruiting efforts, and finally (g) research on the topic (p. 17). Control through hegemonic heterosexuality is the key connection between homophobia and sport, not only for girls and women as stated by Bennett et al., but for openly gay male athletes as well. Examples of these types of control include:

a) Openly gay men are continually discouraged from taking part in sport, especially overt or visible gay men who are continually taunted by homophobic slurs such as “sissy”, “girlie”, “poofter”, “fag”, etc. Non-visible, or covert gay men are afraid of participating for fear of being exposed, hounded or denounced.
b) Being channelled away from sport, some gay males grow up with very minimal movement skills and are actually physically weak and vulnerable because of this marginalisation process.

c) Opportunities to excel are limited by the lack of role models and encouragement needed for elite athletes.

d) Few professional contracts and careers are available for openly gay male athletes.

e) With respect to elite athletes, opportunities for financial success are minimal because of lack of sponsorships and endorsements.

f) The pederast and paedophilia stereotypes and myths about gay males prevent them from getting coaching or other leadership positions involved with children.

g) Recruiting efforts are hampered when known gay athletes or staff members are present. Newcomers fear being guilty by association.

Even if some progress has been made, little is known about gay male athletes, not only because it was considered taboo in the past, but also because of the enduring denial of sport organisations that gay male athletes exist within their structure or programs (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983).

In simplistic terms, we can summarise hegemonic heterosexuality as the “old boys network” upholding their hegemonic power by establishing a consensus (rather than coercion) of beliefs and values on those they influence and govern. Hegemonic power is best observed through the gay male athletes’ experience as they are continually marginalised because of the perceived major threat they pose to the “establishment”. This is where homophobia becomes what some have referred to as a “weapon of control” (Kitzinger, 1987; Rich, 1980). Within the Conspiracy of Silence model, exploring the relationship between hegemonic
heterosexuality and the production and manifestation of the phenomenon of silence plays an important role in understanding why gay athletes remain silent within mainstream sport organisations. Using Messner and Sabo’s example of a wheel, hegemonic heterosexuality may be the tenet that carries the majority of the weight of the entire Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. In the following section, the relationship between oppression theory and the phenomenon of silence, as illustrated within the Conspiracy of Silence model, is addressed.

**Oppression Theory**

Jackson and Hardiman (1988) have defined oppression as:

> A systematic social phenomenon based on the differences between social groups that involve ideological domination, institutional control, and the promulgation of the oppressor group’s ideology, logic system and culture on the oppressed group. The result is the exploitation of one group by another for its own benefit, real or perceived. (p. 5)

In this study, oppression theory is used within the Conspiracy of Silence Model to understand the experiences of self-identifying gay male athletes as an oppressed minority in the context of sport. Generally, it is used to examine the unequal distribution of power and privilege among various social groups. Oppression may be identifiable in four ways: (1) individuals are silenced, (2) they fear being discovered, (3) they isolate themselves, and (4), they feel powerless, (Jackson and Hardiman, 1988). In this section, I will address the imbalance of power that exists between heterosexual men and men who are gay. This theory asserts that the process by which oppression operates and its resulting conditions (of oppression) are defined as the problem and not the oppressed group itself. In the past, for example, being gay was considered a deviant behaviour and therefore a problem in society, whereas today, some consider bigotry and intolerance of lesbian and gays as being the problem (Woods, 1990).

Schweitzer (1993), Smith (1991), Anderson (1991), Woods (1990), Jackson and Hardiman (1988), Baker-Miller (1976), Freire (1972) and Memmi (1965) have all contributed greatly to
the development of oppression theory. Woods (1990) defines oppression by looking at the context of oppression (individual, institutional, socio-cultural), the awareness of oppression, and the mode of its application (behaviour and attitude). “The primary focus of oppression research is not the isolated act of discrimination or harassment directed at the members of a subordinate group, but rather the system of domination within a particular societal context” (Woods, 1990 p. 37). This definition of oppression has been used as a theoretical framework for understanding the unequal relationships between many different social groups: whites and blacks, rich and poor, male and female, heterosexuals and gay men (Woods, 1990).

Common labels used in past research concerned with the social theory above include the colonisers and the colonised, the oppressors and the oppressed, and the dominants and subordinates. Harro (1983) used Baker-Miller's (1976) terms of dominants and subordinates to synthesise his work and that of others to list common characteristics for each social group. With regard to this study, the dominants in the context of sport organisations are the heterosexual male athletes and the subordinates are the gay male athletes. However, to demonstrate the applicability of oppression theory to various socially constructed groups in various contexts other than gay males in sport, additional examples of oppression (racism, sexism, ableism, etc.) are illustrated in the following discussion by presenting characteristics of the subordinates and the dominants.

Harro (1983) characterised subordinates as (1) powerless, (2) stereotyped, (3) knowledgeable about dominants, (4) dependent upon dominants for reward and punishment, and (5) outsiders by virtue of isolation, invisibility and silence. Each of these is discussed in turn.

1) **Subordinates are powerless:** As noted, dominants control the open power and authority in society. Consequently, subordinates are, in fact, powerless or made to feel powerless. The sense of powerlessness occurs on various levels; individually, socially, and
institutionally. Individually, subordinates are made to feel inferior to, and different from, dominants. As a group, their past and present cultural significance and contributions are denied or unacknowledged. Institutionally, their powerlessness translates into legal, social and economic discrimination. The experiences of racial/ethnic minorities in Western societies (e.g., African-American, Inuit, Māori, etc.) provide vivid illustrations. Whether by being forced to sit in the rear of the bus, left out of traditional history books, or denied the right to speak and learn their language, racial/ethnic minorities have a long history of being excluded from positions of power.

2) **Subordinates are stereotyped:** Each subordinate social group has their own list of negative stereotypes. For instance, women are stereotyped as weak and passive, people of colour as lazy and dumb, Jews as pushy and tight with money. Stereotypes serve two functions: to keep subordinates powerless and to keep dominants ill informed (given misinformation). As Woods (1990) notes: many subordinates internalise these stereotypes. This not only affects their self-image; it also helps perpetuate the stereotypes and puts subordinates in a position of supporting the system (hegemony) that oppresses them. For example, some gay men internalise the stereotype that they are mentally ill and consequently, seek professional help to fight their sexuality, or in the case of sport think they are unqualified or unable to be athletic because of the sissy stereotype. Dominants use stereotypes to deny subordinates access to power. Few women, persons of colour and overt gay males achieve leadership positions, partly because they are stereotyped as being incapable of handling such roles.

3) **Subordinates are knowledgeable about dominants:** Since the world of dominants represents what is normal and good, it is a world subordinates know. For instance, historical accounts are, for the most part, dominated by the accomplishments of heterosexual Anglo-Saxon males. Present day sports media (television, radio, and print) present primarily a heterosexual male perspective. For subordinates, however, knowledge about the dominants’
world goes beyond who or what is portrayed in the media. As Baker-Miller (1976) noted, subordinate groups are forced to concentrate on basic survival. “Subordinates know much more about the dominants than vice versa… they become highly attuned to the dominants, able to predict their reactions of pleasure and displeasure” (p. 10). Gay male athletes who want to keep their position on a team learn how to “pass as straight” to avoid questions about their sexual orientation.

4) **Subordinates look to dominants for reward and punishment:** The dominant world is a valued world. The qualities valued by dominants are portrayed as the most desirable. Subordinates, then, look to dominants as role models and respond to their distribution of reward and punishment. The phrase, “she thinks, plays or throws like a man”, (which in a dominant world is meant as a compliment) illustrates this point. A professional woman has “made it” if she can demonstrate that she can operate in a man’s world (Baker-Miller, 1976). The subordinates may end up colluding with the very system that oppresses them in the first place. As a result of this phenomenon, subordinates experience what Freire (1972) called the duality of their innermost being where “to be, is to be like the oppressor” (p. 13).

5) **Subordinates are outsiders by virtue of isolation, invisibility and silence:** The knowledge society has about subordinates is limited and clouded by negative stereotypes. Fear of rejection causes some subordinate groups to remain invisible and silent. Labelled by society as “deviants”, many gay men and women choose to stay in the closet. Instead of risking discrimination and degradation directed at many gay men and lesbians who have come out publicly, many prefer to remain isolated, hidden and silent. One consequence is that by remaining invisible, they have little power to change the stereotypes that keep them outsiders. The nature of isolation, invisibility and silence experienced by subordinate groups takes on different forms. For example, physically disabled persons have no choice about their isolation and invisibility. They are kept isolated by the architectural design of buildings, streets, and vehicles. Their limited access to the public world of able-bodied dominants keeps them
invisible and keeps dominants ignorant of their experiences, needs, and abilities (Baker-Miller, 1976, p. 67).

Harro (1983) also cited five characteristics of the dominant social groups: (a) dominants are perceived as being “normal”, (b) they are the “namers” of society and subordinates, (c) dominants know little about themselves, (d) they know little about subordinates, and (e) dominants are “privileged”. The following examples of heterosexuality versus being gay clearly demonstrate these characteristics.

1) **Dominants are perceived as normal:** To be a member of a dominant group is to be equated with normalcy. As Baker-Miller (1976) stated, “the dominant group is the model of normal human relationships” (p. 9). Heterosexuality is culturally and socially valued in society, whereas being gay is not. As “abnormal” members of society, gay males and lesbians are subjected to various legal, social, and religious sanctions.

2) **Dominants are the namers:** By representing the norm, dominants are the namers of society and subordinates. For example, heterosexuals are labelled “straight”, a term implying virtue, while lesbians and gay men are called the derogatory names of “queer”, “faggot”, “dyke”, “bent” and “sissy”. Labelling one’s experience as “normal” and another’s as “abnormal” is another illustration of this point.

3) **Dominants know little about themselves:** The processes by which lesbians and gay men “got that way” are of great interest to many social and psychological researchers. Considerable research has examined the life histories and psychological profiles of lesbians and gay men to search for answers to this question. The question that is rarely addressed, however, is how heterosexuals become heterosexual? From the perspective of dominants, this question is considered unnecessary since they are considered “normal”.

4) **Dominants know little about subordinates:** As Harro (1983) stated, “Most dominants have never perceived a need to know more about subordinates. The culture we live in is a
dominant-oriented one, and all one needs to know to survive are the ways of the dominant” (p. 12). The media provides a good example of the heterosexually oriented nature of Western society. Few images (especially positives ones) of lesbians or gay men in sport are portrayed in mass media, and as a result, gays and lesbians are invisible and silenced. The information dominants do have about subordinates is usually based upon stereotypes, myths, and misinformation.

5) Dominants are privileged: The dominant group usually holds all of the open power and authority and determines the ways in which power may be acceptably used (Baker-Miller, 1976). This power entitles them to certain privileges that subordinates are denied. For example, a heterosexual’s right to marry, teach, coach or be a parent is not questioned on the grounds of his/her heterosexuality. The extent of heterosexual privilege is best illustrated in the numerous ways lesbians and gay men are discriminated against in the public and private sectors of society.

In summary, oppression theory serves as a key component of the Conspiracy of Silence Model. In identifying the characteristics of “the old boys’ network” as a dominant group versus gay male athletes as a subordinate group, oppression theory assists in explaining the imbalance of power that exists within sport organisations. More importantly it has been used to explain a potential source of the complex phenomenological problem studied. As Krane (1996) notes, an understanding of gay male athletes comes from an understanding of their socialising process. The organisational environment of sport, which promotes and sustains oppression, must be accountable for the negative socialising and identity management strategies which gay male athletes are forced to use. In conclusion, it is important at this point to understand the juncture between oppression theory and the neo-Marxist theory of hegemony within the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. While oppression theory assists in explaining how gay male athletes experience the phenomenon of silence in sport, hegemonic heterosexuality explains why they remain silenced. Both these tenets of the Conspiracy of
Silence Model present a conceptual framework for the understanding of resistance. In the case of gay male athletes within sport organisations, resistance is silent.

The next section offers a detailed description of identity management strategies gay men employ to cope, survive and participate in mainstream sport. The transformation of silence into visibility is located within a continuum of six stages. All six stages are explained in the next portion of this chapter.

**Identity Management Strategies**

Identity management theory is an outgrowth of identity development theory stemming from various perspectives within social-psychology (Griffin, 1991). It constitutes an important part of the Conspiracy of Silence Model from which the study of the experiences of gay male athletes is articulated. The identity management perspective has also been used most recently in other areas such as Jacobs' (1994) study on undercover drug policing and Carter's (1993) study of identity management issues with the elderly.

Simply defined, identity management is the development of skills, techniques, and strategies used by individuals when managing potentially stigmatising information concerning their identity. As an example, many gay individuals, because of homophobia, manage their identities differently under different circumstances and at different stages during their “coming out of the closet” process (typically referred to as the process by which gay individuals go through different *stages* of public and personal acknowledgment of their sexual orientation).

Considerable research has examined identity management strategies of lesbian and gay men (Button, 1996; Cain, 1991; Fogarty, 1980; Griffin, 1991; Hare, 1993; Henkin, 1984; Leinen, 1992; Moses and Garfinkle, 1977; Riemer, 1995; Sagarin, 1975; Weinberg and Williams, 1974). However, the use of identity management strategies is relatively new. Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge (1986) presented their work as an initial attempt to formalise
identity theory by tracing the concept of “identity development” back to Erikson’s ego development work during the 1950’s. They defined identity as:

a totally social production, identity is a humanly constructed, defined and sustained meaningful object… It is both totally social and uniquely personal; it results from varying degrees of appropriation by the self and/or bestowed by others. The dramatic quality of life flows in part from the endless negotiations of identities as the self attempts to appropriate identities that others do not bestow, or others attempt to bestow identities that self does not appropriate (p. 30-31).

Woods (1990) also asserts that the negotiation between the self and others demonstrates the socially constructed nature of identity: a critical underlying assumption about identity development and its management is that “society is prior to and shapes the individual” (p. 45). Cain (1991) suggests that despite their interactional complexity, and significance for gay individuals’ social relationships, disclosure and secrecy have generally been treated in a rather simplistic and taken for granted manner in the social work literature. He states, “the strategic management of personal information (one’s identity) is an important means for gay individuals to help reconcile differences between how they view themselves and how they are seen by others” (p. 67). Selective disclosure and concealment help gay men and lesbians reduce the inner costs of possessing a discrediting identity and in protecting their social identity in situations where disclosure may have negative consequences such as within sport.

In sport, expressing oneself explicitly remains questionable and difficult for most gay male athletes. Most prefer to pass as heterosexual for fear of being ostracised, stigmatised or even losing professional endorsements and contracts because of prejudice and discrimination. Martina Navratilova recounts in her autobiography that she lost millions of endorsement dollars because of the public knowledge of her sexual orientation (Zwerman, 1994). Consequently, she was shunned by corporate America and was overlooked by most marketing agents.
In applying identity management strategies specifically to being gay and in sport, Pat Griffin (1991) proposes a continuum model of identity management strategies used by both lesbians and gay male athletes. Considered a “stage theorist”, she has devised from her research six kinds of strategies used by lesbian and gay athletes to manage their identity. In sport, most gay athletes choose to “pass” as heterosexual (leading people to believe that they are heterosexual) in order to be accepted. Others “cover” their sexual orientation (attempt to conceal gay identity, not to pass as heterosexual), some are “implicitly out” (assuming everyone knows they are gay) and none in professional team sports today, except for Ian Roberts are “explicitly out” (publicly disclosing gay identity).

At one end of this continuum, passing requires concealing all information about oneself to others and maintaining a strict separation between personal and athletic identities. At the other end of the continuum, explicitly coming out requires revealing specific information to other players and staff members in order to integrate both identities into one (see Figure 2).

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<tr>
<th>Completely Closed</th>
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<th>Covering</th>
<th>Implicitly Out</th>
<th>Explicitly Out</th>
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<td>You see me as heterosexual</td>
<td>You don’t see me as gay</td>
<td>You can see me as gay</td>
<td>You see me as gay</td>
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«------ Silence ------ ------------ Fear --------------- Visibility --------»

Separation »----------------» Social / Sexual / Sporting Identities »----------------» Integration

FIGURE 2:
Identity Management Continuum
Krane (1996) states that “passing” leads to a discrepancy between one’s personal and public lives and causes an individual to deny and silence one part of the individual’s true identity (p. 241). Maintaining this pretence can become very stressful, especially when one lives in fear of discovery. Many additional negative manifestations due to the silence (passing) of gay athletes have been described by Krane (1996): depression, feelings of inferiority, self-defeating behaviours, decreases in self-esteem, under- or over-achievements, physical or mental health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, distrust, loneliness, self-hatred, shame, anger, and development of defensive strategies. Therefore, sport-specific consequences of the sustained silence of gay male athletes may include decreased and increased athletic performance, distrust of teammates, and social isolation from other team members. Some may even, on their own accord, go as far as having sex with women and/or establishing heterosexual relationships to remove any suspicion that they are gay. Others, according to Kershaw (2001), are asked by club officials to “set about creating false identities” (p. 3). For example, the chairman of two top [football] clubs in the United Kingdom (UK) was worried about “top players”. He had arranged for them to be seen, photographed with and even engaged to beautiful women in order to hide (silence) their true sexuality. Such lying is not uncommon among gay athletes who feel the need to keep sponsors happy and spectators off their backs. Some gay players also keep up the pretence of being heterosexual to avoid blackmailers and tabloid backlash.

Unquestionably, gay rugby players reach many extremes in order to hide their sexual orientation. To a great extent, this transpires from their fear of what they believe others think of them. In the following section I use the Conspiracy of Silence theory to facilitate the understanding of why gay male rugby players feel pressured to remain silent in view of the negative perceptions they have of the public opinion related to gay men.
The Spiral of Silence Theory

The ideas and concepts derived from Noelle-Neumann (1993) Spiral of Silence theory are used in the Conspiracy of Silence Model to explore both (a) why the public opinion process becomes problematic for gay rugby players, and (b) the players’ opinions of the media’s portrayal of gay men.

The Spiral of Silence theory has been the focus of recent content analysis and other studies used to determine actual and perceived public opinions on various social issues from political polls, abortion and religious issues to market-place research (Cramer, 1996; Lashin, 1984; Mayer, 1992; Merkle, 1993; Neuwirth, 1995; Perry, 1995). Generally speaking the theory looks at the public opinion process. It holds that people have private opinions and that they will not make their opinions public if they do not perceive support for them. When people are not willing to express their opinion, the spiral of silence continues by leading others to believe that the different oppositional or minority opinion has less support than it really has. The Spiral of Silence theory has shown that when an individual sees plainly that something is wrong, he/she will keep quiet if public opinion (opinions and behaviour that can be exhibited in public without fear of isolation) and the consensus as to what constitutes good taste and the normally correct opinion speaks against them. In Noelle-Neumann's (1992) view, the climate of opinion depends on who talks and who keeps quiet. Figure 3 illustrates the downward spiraling (silencing) effect the perception of a discrepant public opinion inflicts on one’s willingness to speak out on a given topic. For example, few spectators, if any, would feel compelled to speak out against homophobic slurs directed toward rugby players during a game, even if they felt it was wrong and unjust. The same might not apply to racial slurs.

It is important to analyse this component within the Conspiracy of Silence Model to show that silent gay men may be just as much a part of the problem as the dominant voices heard through popular discourses. This statement may be akin to blaming the victim, but is not
intended as such. Its intention is to cover all aspects of the gay male athlete’s experience and to openly question the risks involved when ending the silence of gay men within a sporting organisation.

Bennett et al. (1989) add that the most critical manifestation of institutionalised oppression in organisations is the non-manifestation of those who oppose it. It is the “self-imposed” silence of conformists such as gay male athletes themselves and their straight allies that masks the fact that gay male athletes do exist and participate within mainstream organisations. Therefore, the topic of gay men in sport is rarely addressed or contested, and if so, seldom in a positive, supportive and constructive way within sport organisations by those who advocate its right. Krane (1996) also says that to begin to understand ‘homosexuality’ in sport, it is essential that the socialising process of lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes be examined. This is because they (lesbians, gays and bisexuals) are socialised within heterosexist societies. Thus the socialising process serves as a form of social control in which individuals learn to regulate their behaviour consistent with societal expectations due to fear of retribution (isolation) for
acting contrary to social norms and public opinion. As a consequence, “The silence helps maintain power and privilege for those who hold it” (Bennett et al., 1989, p. 18). Hence, the answers to questions of whether or not gay male athletes exist in professional sport, or whether or not they are “normal” and have the right to be included wholeheartedly in mainstream sport, are heavily governed by the vocal few. As an example, in recent times, vocal Christian extremist groups have (predominantly) led the way in voicing their disapproval of gay men in general through many forms of media. The Promise Keepers’ movement (founded by Bill McCarthy, former Colorado University head football coach) advocates the heterosexual male’s role by defining his dominant position in society through sport and fitness related activities. As such, the ideology of sport as a heterosexual masculine preserve is reinforced through the absence (silence) of gay male athletes. In this sense, the fear of isolation, because of homophobic and homonegative attitudes may be one of the underlying reasons for the silence of gay male athletes.

However, many might argue that in fact sport organisations are very tolerant of gay males, but have never been put to the test. Using the Spiral of Silence approach in this context can assist in describing the actual perpetrator(s).

Noelle-Neumann’s (1992) theory places extraordinary emphasis on the power of mainstream media. She maintains that people use media representations of social issues/public opinion to judge their own opinions. Noelle-Neumann argues that any selective perception or selective retention is quelled by heavy dependence on the media for information, the repetition of that information over time, and the congruence of journalistic values and message content. As various scholars have shown (Bryson, 1989; Duncan and Brummett, 1989; McKay and Middlemiss, 1995; Messner, 1992; Miller, 1995; Sabo and Curry Jansen, 1998) print and electronic sport media are a site for the social construction of hegemonic masculinity in ways that reflect and secure gender differences and men’s collective domination over subordinate groups such as gay men. Traditional definitions of
masculinity and femininity have established sport as an arena where gender differentiation and the mass media play a significant role in stereotyping gender roles. Basically, the ideas and concepts used in the Spiral of Silence theory explore the role that the mass media play in influencing people’s perceptions of prevailing opinions and the effect that these perceptions have on subsequent individual and public opinion expression. In particular, the fear of isolation and possible exclusion have been found to be related to the decision concerning whether a person will speak out or not, or enter a discussion or not, on various social issues. According to Noelle-Neumann (1993), people accommodate their opinions to their perceptions of the majority of people’s opinion because they fear feeling and/or being isolated.

Further findings by a range of scholars suggest that traditional gender-role stereotyping is deeply embedded in sport and the media portrayals of athletes contribute to gender differentiation and hierarchy in sport. The ideology of sport as a heterosexual masculine preserve is reinforced through the media’s over-representation of heterosexual male athletes. Noelle-Neumann’s theory also supports the argument that the mass media play a significant role in transmitting the dominant values and ideologies of gender-role stereotyping, and assist in forming perceived common public opinion on what is deemed socially acceptable (or not) in sport today (p. 4).

Little has changed since Lippmann (1965) argued that the gendered social reality that media have constructed associates muscle, power, and aggressiveness with masculinity, and suppleness, grace, and passiveness with femininity. Still today, those socially ascribed masculine characteristics for men are reinforced when they watch or read about sports like football, rugby, ice hockey and boxing. Similarly, feminine characteristics find reinforcement in such sports as synchronised swimming, gymnastics, and figure skating. Ironically, the majority of the descriptors used can be seen in a fluid sense across and within both constructed categories of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ sports. Accepting a different version or
contradicting these established stereotypes calls into question the absolutism of the dominant world view. Labels such as “pervasive, alien, dangerous or deviant” are often assigned as a result of these actions. Also the fact that many professional athletes and coaches have reiterated the misconception that gay males do not exist on their team or in their organisation adds to the argument that gay males do not “generally” participate in sport. Gay males themselves, by remaining silent for fear of stigmatisation, also participate in the negative public opinion process directed towards them because gay men are perhaps more susceptible to the lure of public recognition than others (Clasen, 2001). “Their friends (allies) are asked to protect this secret from outsiders, (media) and the unspoken pact (Conspiracy of Silence) is maintained and passed on to each new generation of gay males in sport” (Griffin, 1992).

To be clear, this study does not examine nor analyse the media directly, but does acknowledge the potential influence (negative or positive) it may have on the silence of gay male athletes. Yet, the lack of positive examples (gay or heterosexual) within the sport context in general needs to be addressed. Heterosexual (male) players growing up have a multiplicity of positive images at home, at school and especially through the media. The same does not apply for the gay players who are limited to identifying totally with heterosexual sporting heroes. Moreover, Flowers and Buston (2001) state that “representations of gay men have become more commonplace within the media in recent years, but often they do not constitute positive role models and are still less accessible than their heterosexual counterparts” (p. 63). In 1997, twenty-two gay characters were seen across the U.S. prime-time network schedule. No gay athletes from competitive team sports were represented (O’Connor, 1997). Acceptance of gay rugby players may be completely dependent on the public opinion invested in the sports entertainment marketplace at the moment. Therefore, the media plays an important role in influencing not only the experience of gay male athletes, but also the public’s experience of gay male athletes. As long as the status quo of the gay athlete’s minimal to negative representation in the sport media remains, few positive changes within
public opinion may be foreseen. The existing political climate within the media towards the representation of gay athletes is conducive to their silence. In this sense, Noelle-Neumann’s Spiral of Silence theory is an important component of the Conspiracy of Silence model used to explore why gay male athletes are silenced.

Like all perceptions, the gay stereotype articulated through media varies with the expectations, needs, values and purposes of the perceiver. Disagreement, argument and conflict between individuals and groups over the correctness of specific stereotypes is part of the social, political, and historical process through which society moves (or tries to move) towards a consensus of valid behaviours from the perspective of a whole community (Oakes, Haslam, and Turner, 1994). Therefore, the use of Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory within this study’s Conspiracy of Silence Model is significant in understanding the media’s influence on the formation of public opinion about gay male athletes, how the process of fear and sense of isolation evolves, and how the combination of all these factors affects the gay male athlete’s visibility. In many instances the absence or the stereotyping of images of gay men in the mainstream media reduces the likelihood of public awareness of gay men in sport (Cramer, 1996). Therefore, the media, the organisations, and the athletes themselves may well have equal stakes in conspiring to produce the phenomenon of silence. This aspect of the Conspiracy of Silence model assists in explaining the roles of each actor.

I complete the review of literature with information pertaining to other phenomenological studies that inform my research. Parallels drawn from each study assisted in the selection of my theoretical framework, my methodology and methods, as well as my group sample.

**Phenomenological Studies of Gay Athletes**

For the most part, phenomenological studies of gays in sport have dealt with lesbian athletes, coaches, officials, educators and athletic trainers. Few phenomenological studies address the experiences of gay men in sport. Interestingly, oppression theory and identity

The phenomenological investigations informed by oppression theory (cf. Anderson, 1991; Clarke, 1995a; Schweitzer, 1993; Woods, 1990; Deware, 1990) have revealed how homophobia and heterosexism envelop the world of lesbians in sport. Schweitzer’s study, for example, describes the experience of nine female officials who worked in women’s basketball in NCAA Division 1 conferences. Anderson interviewed 13 female athletic trainers and Woods interviewed 12 lesbian physical education teachers as did Deware and Clarke. The participants’ description in all of these studies revealed the prevalence of sexism, heterosexism and homophobia within physical education and sport environments. This oppression kept them all silent, isolated, fearful and powerless in creating social change. The lesbian label was specifically used to intimidate or harass the women in these studies.

Identity management strategies were observed by Krane (1997a) in her phenomenological study of 12 female collegiate athletes and Squires (1996) who drew upon life history data to explore moments from the lives of five lesbian physical education teachers at different stages of their careers. Reimer (1995) interviewed 29 women (23 lesbians and 6 non-lesbians) and found that the softball environment was a location that facilitated the formation of lesbian identity. Griffin’s phenomenological study of 13 self identifying gay and lesbian educators (6 men and 7 women) revealed the overwhelming presence of identity management strategies
that gay and lesbian athletes/educators are forced to adopt in a cultural climate characterised by homophobia and heterosexism.

The above phenomenological studies have shown directly and indirectly that there is an enforced silence that serves to perpetuate the negative stereotypes associated with gay men in sport and physical education, which further negates any sustained challenge to homophobia and heterosexism. These findings support the contention that because of the extreme negative stigma attached to being gay in most societies, many, perhaps most, gay and lesbian athletes live in silence because of fear of isolation and stigmatisation.

It is worth noting, that most of these studies have looked at lesbians versus gay males in sport. This highlights both the need for further inquiry into studies relative to gay males and the greater invisibility of gay males in sport compared to lesbians. Perhaps this is because all male athletes are assumed to be heterosexual versus many female athletes who are assumed to be lesbian. Female athletes are sometimes openly asked about their sexuality versus male athletes who are very resentful of such innuendo (e.g. Ex All Black Jeff Wilson). Arguably, the context of sport itself and physical education is largely characterised as hypermasculine and as a consequence research into gay issues faces many challenges.

**Chapter Summary**

The aim of this chapter was to present the literature relevant to the areas of past and present experiences of gay men in sport, masculinity in sport and the Conspiracy of Silence Model (i.e., hegemonic heterosexuality, oppression theory, identity management and the Spiral of Silence). Arguably, a greater understanding and explanation of the silence of gay male athletes is only possible when all relevant factors and their interrelationships are considered both theoretically and in practice. Using the Conspiracy of Silence model as a research framework, combined with personal accounts of gay male athletes’ experiences in sport in Chapter IV, is one step towards a better understanding of the problem and hopefully a
contribution to the body of knowledge needed for positive social change to occur. The interpretive and social phenomenological methodology chosen in the context of the theoretical framework used in this study was selected because it embodies the academic rigour necessary for understanding the lived experiences of gay male athletes in mainstream sport organisations.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

“Golden Rule: Treat others as you'd wish to be treated. Platinum Rule: Treat others as they wish to be treated.”

(Carnevale and Stone, 1994, p. 22)

Introduction

To treat others as they wish to be treated, it is necessary to question and understand their desires and needs. We generally assume that others experience the world basically in the way we do, that is, we think we share the same realities. However, this is clearly not true. As such, this study investigates the ‘life experiences’ of gay rugby players within mainstream rugby union. The objective is to better understand from their perspective, how silence manifests itself in their lives. To achieve such an understanding of others requires that we suspend our assumptions and that appropriate questions be asked, interpreted, and analysed. Doing so enables the readers to grasp the ‘true’ meanings gay men give to the phenomenon of silence. In turn, this may help elicit in the readers a feeling that they understand what it would be like to experience the phenomenon themselves. It is intended that by the end of this thesis the reader will have gained a better understanding of “how” gay men remain silent in sport and perhaps be able to infer “why” gay athletes as well as certain straight coaches/administrators remain silent. Hopefully, developing some empathy for their experience will provide an impetus to the development of practical policies and programs of inclusion for gay men in sport. Only then will social change be possible.

This chapter outlines the basis of social phenomenology, the methodological/theoretical approach taken within this study. Specifically, the chapter:

- Outlines the ontological and epistemological origins of phenomenology.
- Outlines the various types of phenomenology and why social phenomenology was chosen.
- Provides background information about the recruitment and selection of participants and the specific procedures associated with: the interviews, collation and analysis of the data.

Reflecting on the experience of gay men in rugby union in conjunction with literature related to homophobia in sport, the Conspiracy of Silence model was conceived as a guiding framework for the research process aimed at understanding the phenomenon of silence. The Conspiracy of Silence model also assisted in (1) further developing my review of literature, and (2) selecting and implementing my research strategy, including my theoretical and methodological perspectives.

I knew from the outset of this study that in order to understand the experiences of gay male rugby players required a method that enabled me to collect data most relevant to the research question. Phenomenological inquiry best governs the methodology necessary to do so because it provides access to individuals’ life-worlds and it describes their experiences of a phenomenon. Life-world is the translation of the German term Lebenswelt used by the founder of phenomenology, philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), it refers to the individuals’ inner world of consciousness and experience. It is a combination of feelings, thoughts, and self-awareness at any moment in time in ones’ mind (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). After deciding on phenomenology as my methodology, I determined that interviewing was the best strategy given the aims and objectives of collecting multiple instances of the gay male rugby players’ life-worlds. The type of interview schedule put together was guided by the need to fill the void of knowledge surrounding the silence of gay rugby players by recording their statements in relation to the phenomenon. To do so, I needed to reflect upon and acknowledge my assumptions about the notions of reality that I bring to this work. This shaped my theoretical perspective of the kind of knowledge I sought to attain from the results of this research.
This chapter explains the methodology used to examine gay rugby players within mainstream team sports and the meaning they make of their experience. Moreover, it will also assist in understanding when, where and how their silence is produced. As a starting point, I delineate in Figure 4, the elements of the research process undertaken in this study. As with most qualitative studies, I respected the following steps: (1) selected the research topic, determined the questions and methods of data collection, (2) chose a methodology to analyse the collected data, (3) generated findings based on a theoretical perspective, and (4) discussed the findings within an epistemological stance. Setting forth my research process in terms of these four elements enabled me to justify the methodologies and methods employed in this research. For Crotty (1998), this “constitutes a penetrating analysis of the process and points up the theoretical assumptions that underpin it and determine the status of its findings” (p. 6). In brief, methods are the techniques and procedures used to gather and analyse the data; methodology is the strategy lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linked to the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes; the theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance informing the methodology; and finally the epistemology is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology. I have chosen in-depth interviewing as my method using phenomenology as the methodology based on an interpretive theoretical perspective. My epistemological stance is based on the notion of constructionism.

![FIGURE 4: The Research Process](image-url)
My assumptions about human knowledge are expressed by the ontology and epistemology of constructionism; they inform the theoretical perspective which lies behind the methodology and methods used. Their applicability in relation to the research question is explained and justified within the following sections of this chapter.

The social phenomenology methodology is therefore used to explain the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon surrounding gay male athletes within mainstream team sport organisations and more importantly to gain an insight (knowledge) and understanding of how gay men think and feel about their ‘life-world’ (their world of experience) in sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Arguably, its usage can make a significant contribution to the knowledge and understanding within the broad field of sport-related research by learning more about the gay male’s perspective of his experience in sport. Phenomenology gives us an “insider’s view” into the phenomenon.

The Ontology and Epistemology of Constructionism

This study sought to understand the meanings gay male athletes make of their experience and how those meanings create barriers or opportunities for their survival in the mainstream sport context of rugby union in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It would be too simplistic to ask gay rugby players questions such as: “Why are you in the ‘closet’? Instead, questions should focus on determining the nature of the experience of silence of gay rugby players, how they manage it, and the potential consequences of it from their perspective. In turn, we need to gain an understanding of whether this creates barriers or opportunities for their participation in rugby union in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Answers to this question would reveal their reality, hence the ‘truth’ of their experience. In this way, “truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty 1998, p.8). In other words, it is possible that humans may give different meanings to the same phenomenon. The meanings gay rugby players give to silence may be different from the meanings of heterosexual males involved in
rugby as players and officials. This does not imply that either set of meanings is good or bad; it merely means that each group may experience similar or dissimilar ‘truths’ with regard to the phenomenon of silence. In this philosophic view, subject and object emerge as partners in the production of meaning. Hence, the philosophy of constructionism utilised in this research is based upon relativist ontology, where multiple realities are created by individuals around a consensus of social experiences, rather than a single reality waiting to be discovered (Guba and Lincoln, 1983). Crotty (1998) expands this definition of constructionism.

[Constructionism] is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

Therefore, it is the gay athlete’s personal construction of his own social reality that I seek to understand within this inquiry. In order to do so, constructionist ontology supports returning to the subject as the source of information. By honouring the rugby player’s experiences as being ‘truth’, “insight into potential assumptions, generalisations and stereotypes can be acquired” (Buck, 2003, p. 65). There are many possible meanings given to the phenomenon of silence of gay men and they are philosophically relative to the individual’s constructed values and beliefs. Such variables are complex and may not be fragmented independently. Therefore, hypotheses testing or controlling independent variables found in positivist research is not appropriate in this paradigm of thought (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Given this ontological assumption, understanding the value of a gay rugby player’s experience in the context of sport in general and mainstream rugby in particular is believed to have an impact on the way other athletes, coaches, administrators and the general public view them and, therefore, is relevant to cultural studies, gender studies and sociology of sport research.
The epistemological process of ‘what it means to know’ in a constructionist view suggests that empirical research takes the individually experienced, everyday world as its point of departure. As the researcher, my interpretations of the participants’ experiences are guided by my sensibilities and judgements throughout the research process. My ability to construct meaning of their experience relies heavily on my own constructed perspectives. This provides strength to the research process, as acknowledgement of different perspectives is an epistemological characteristic of qualitative research. Tolich and Davidson (1999) refer to it as “reflexivity – the idea that social researchers always remain a part of the social world they are studying. Consequently, their understanding of that social world must begin with their daily experience of life” (p. 37).

Schwandt (1994) characterizes constructionism as not being a process focused on “the meaning making activity of the individual mind but on the collective generation of meaning shaped by conventions of language and other social processes” (p. 127). This is in line with Crotty’s (1998) assessment of constructionism as a process that emphasises “the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things … and gives us a quite definite view of the world” (p. 58). Hence, the appeal of constructionism in relation to this research is its tendency to foster a critical spirit of social constructs. As a researcher, I must be aware and critical of the restrictiveness inherent in cultural understandings. My own realities or that of others must not mask the gay rugby players’ realities in this study. In this research, reality must be driven by the phenomenological and epistemological endeavour to go back to the sources themselves.

The Theoretical Perspective of Interpretivism

Interpretivism provides the theoretical context for this research process because it grounds its logic and criteria. Interpretivism “is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it” (Crotty 1998, p. 8). It is interpretive in that it seeks the interpretation or classification of
meaning (Denzin, 1984). In interpreting the silent behaviour of gay male athletes, meaning is given to such behaviour. This occurs through the process of recording, describing, and piecing together meanings of the participant’s experience and placing them within a meaningful totality. Such a method is phenomenological since “it attempts to secure the interpretations and understandings [of the silent behaviour] from within, as the latter is felt and experienced by the individuals engaging in it” (Rail, 1990, p. 3). There are different types of interpretivisms: notably, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics and phenomenology. Symbolic interactionism explores understandings broadly in culture as the meaningful matrix that guides our lives; hermeneutics is the discipline concerned with interpreting and understanding the products or ‘objectification’ of the human mind (e.g., institutions, languages, religions, literature); and phenomenology treats culture with a good measure of caution and suspicion in the sense that culture may be enabling but, paradoxically, it is also constraining. I selected phenomenology as the philosophical and theoretical stance in my research strategy because in the first instance it stems from constructionism, and secondly it allows me to widen my critical observations, to interpret and analyse the phenomenon of silence. “Phenomenology and constructionism are so intertwined that one could hardly be phenomenological while espousing to either an objectivist or subjectivist epistemology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 12). Therefore an objective or subjective understanding of the meanings gay men make of their rugby experience is not attainable with this strategy, because human knowledge is not like that. At best, the outcomes of an interpretive process, such as phenomenology, will be suggestive rather than conclusive. Nevertheless, phenomenology stands alone as a means of understanding phenomena as the immediate objects of experience (Crotty 1998).

According to Kerry and Armour (2000), “phenomenology is one of the major strands of existential philosophy with a long and varied history” (p. 2). The German philosopher Johann Lambert, who discussed the illusory nature of human experience, first used the term
phenomenology in 1764 (Rory, 1993); it followed on from much of the work by Immanuel Kant on *a priori* knowledge, which showed that it must precede understanding of the sense data of empirical experience. From this perspective, contemporary researchers such as Denzin (1989) in particular, along with others such as Schuman (1982), have carried on the phenomenological tradition of studying the individual’s lived experience from within. This perspective combines elements of phenomenology, hermeneutics, interpretive theory, symbolic interactionism, and existentialism, and includes several key concepts borrowed from the founding authors such as Husserl and Heidegger, as well as their supporters Merleau-Ponty, Dilthey, and Sartre.

The phenomenon of silence surrounding gay rugby players is the object studied with the intent to unravel its underpinnings by firstly understanding its manifestation. Theoretically, the goal of this research is to know how silence works before attempting to know why it works. Understanding human behaviour is different from explaining it, and serves as the purpose of qualitative research. In doing phenomenological research, I seek to answer “How?” questions in the first instance rather than “Why?” questions in order for the participants to present their experiences as visibly as possible. Doing so directs the interview towards a descriptive (what-and how-questions) and not towards a causal explanation (why-questions). Nevertheless, an exploration such as this, which also attempts to unravel the mechanisms that provoke (cause) the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon, supplements the needed insight for a better understanding of my participants’ experiences. By utilising the Conspiracy of Silence model we are able to gain an appreciation for the complexity and multifaceted relationships that contribute to the problem.

The notion of understanding (verstehen) was initiated by Dilthey (1976) and viewed as a methodology providing the means of studying the world of human experience by reliving or enacting the experiences of others. This method enables the investigator to understand human beings, their inner minds and their feelings, and the way these are expressed in their outward
actions and achievements (Rail, 1990). Dilthey (1976) argued that a main avenue for understanding was through the study of empirical life assertions or social phenomena. He advocated that the latter should be analysed in detail, and interpreted as texts, to reveal the essential meanings and significance. He stated that the social whole cannot be understood independently of its parts, and vice versa. In common with this line of thought, Crotty (1998) adds that “there are humanly fashioned ways of seeing things whose processes we need to explore and which we can only come to understand through a similar process of meaning making (p. 9). Therefore, as Rail (1990) suggests: “there are no absolute starting points, no certainties on which the interpretation can be built: the investigator makes assumptions that are always provisional, always revised” (p. 6). All human understanding is interpretation, and no interpretation is final, because the human mind never stands outside the world, judging it from an external vantage point (Tarnas, 1991 p. 397).

Natanson (1966) sees the central endeavour of phenomenology as transcending what Husserl calls “the natural attitude of daily life in order to render it an object for philosophical scrutiny and in order to describe and account for the essential structure” (p. 3). Husserl, in his pure phenomenology, sought to penetrate at the level of the phenomenon by putting reality aside, or in his terms, ‘in brackets’. Rail (1990) adds that his attention was turned not on the objective reality, but on the reality in consciousness; on the ‘ideal essences’ (p. 7). From this point of view, Husserl laid important foundations for the development of an existential phenomenology. Husserl felt that his phenomenological approach was the only genuine philosophy because it was the science of the essence of human experience. The central notion of Husserlian phenomenology, therefore, is the identification that experience is the basis of knowledge (Kerry and Armour, 2000).

Other leading phenomenologists such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger largely abandoned the transcendental aspects of Husserl’s philosophy; and attempted to develop a phenomenology based on everyday existence. Rail (1990) suggests that rather than pure
philosophical discourse, “their main concern was the more sociological endeavour of understanding the social world from the point of view of those living within it” (p. 7). By redefining the manner in which we conceptualise the lived body, Merleau-Ponty’s work, and that of Sartre and Heidegger, allows us real insight into the depth and richness of human experience. Using this theoretical view, we can better understand the phenomenon of silence of gay rugby players by investigating their lived experiences within the social/sporting world where they are manifested.

The Research Methodology of Phenomenology

An epistemological concern underpinning the methodology within this constructionist study is that of valuing the gay rugby players’ voices as the starting point for constructing understanding. As in any social critique, the intent is to bring about positive social change. In order to do so, I must show first hand knowledge that such social change is necessary by documenting, interpreting and analysing the gay rugby player’s experience. Such a task calls for a distinct methodology to be used that would reflect the philosophical and theoretical aims of this research to understand and explain the social world primarily from the point of view of the participants in the study.

Of the four major qualitative research approaches; phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory and case studies, I adopted phenomenology as its design shapes my methods and fits the purpose of this study. Its ultimate goal is to assist the reader in understanding the gay rugby players’ perspective as clearly and richly as possible. As the researcher, I must identify the ‘essence’ of gay male rugby players’ experiences concerning the phenomenon of silence. As Creswell (2003) notes; “understanding the ‘lived experiences’ marks phenomenology as a philosophy and a methodology” and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects (10-15) through extensive and prolonged engagements (in-depth interviews) to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (p. 15). Within phenomenology there are four successively dominant and sometimes overlapping philosophical tendencies and stages, which
can be recognized within the century-old and multidisciplinary movement. There are four types: a) realistic, b) constitutive, c) existential and d) hermeneutical (Embree, 1997). In brief, **Realistic phenomenology** emphasizes the search for the universal essences of various sorts of matters, including human actions, motives, and selves. **Constitutive phenomenology** is chiefly devoted to reflections on phenomenological method; its procedure involves suspending acceptance of the pregiven status of conscious life as something that exists in the world and is performed in order to secure an ultimate intersubjective grounding for the world and the positive sciences of it. **Existential phenomenology** is concerned with topics such as action, conflict, desire, finitude, oppression, and death used to analyse human beings as a means to fundamental ontology. **Hermeneutical phenomenology** sees human existence as interpretative. The issues addressed in hermeneutical phenomenology include all of the previous tendencies and stages, which are applied in this study. What is different is the emphasis on hermeneutics to interpret language within written texts (Embree, 1997). In the course of its development, many types of hermeneutics have been formed: classical hermeneutics, phenomenological hermeneutics, philosophical hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics, and reader-response theory to name a few. To study the silence of gay men in mainstream sport I selected the social phenomenology approach, which is a strand of philosophical hermeneutics. Because of its interpretive and descriptive nature it assists in examining how individuals experience commonalities of a phenomenon within a given social context. It focuses on the ‘life world’, that is the everyday experiences that we take for granted. Compared to philosophical (hermeneutic) phenomenology which is founded on the notion that human consciousness actively constitutes the objects of experience, social phenomenology rests on the tenets that social interaction constructs as much as conveys meaning. This approach best suits the objective of this study of describing how a social object, such as the phenomenon of silence, is made meaningful for the participants and the reader. Its emphasis is on setting apart the object of experience, in this case silence, as ‘things’
from the readers’ point of view. This process is called ‘bracketing’ the life world of the participant. For gay male rugby players, this would mean segmenting aspects of their silence in order to better understand the meanings they make of their experiences (Holstein and Gubrium, 1994). In this way all ontological judgments about the nature and essence of things and events are suspended. The reader can then focus on the ways in which members of the life world themselves interpretively produce the recognisable, intelligible forms they treat as real, as ‘truths’.

Hence, social phenomenological methodology best suits the objective of answering the research question in this study. It is comprised of three main steps that articulate the lived experiences of individuals. The specific approach I adopted for my study is similar in nature to that posited by other researchers such as Schuman (1982), who has used the terms “profiling, themes and reduction” in his traditional methodological approach to phenomenology, and this is very similar in nature to that of Heidegger and Husserl. Other researchers have used similar approaches using different terms, such as second-generation phenomenologists such as Pronger (1990b), Rail (1990), Smith (1992), Wessinger (1994) and Woods (1992) who were criticized by Kerry and Armour (2000) for insufficiently documenting the actual lived experiences of the participants in their approaches. Therefore, I have chosen to revert to the use of collecting heavily textualised data to be categorised and analysed within the three traditional phases as encouraged in traditional phenomenological methods (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5:**
Traditional Phenomenological Process
Phase 1: Review of literature and data collection

Within this initial phase of the social phenomenological approach, literature concerning the phenomenon (topic studied) is reviewed and as Denzin (1989) formulates, “deconstructed”. This phase is what Heidegger called “destruction”, or what is more commonly known as the **review of literature** as presented in Chapter II of this study. According to DePoy and Gitlin (1998) it is framed with the phenomenological principle of the limits of communication. “The literature may be used to illustrate the constraints of our understanding of human experience or to corroborate the communication of the other. It may also support the experiences that emerge from informants” (p. 133). Specifically, the deconstruction (destruction) phase in this study consists of a review of literature and critique concerning the phenomenon of the gay male athlete’s experiences within mainstream team sport organisations in general and in rugby in particular. It has provided the rationale for (a) using a phenomenological methodology, and for (b) drawing the theoretical perspective that informed the context of the experiences that have emerged. Previous concepts, findings, understandings, and theories surrounding the silence of gay male athletes are ‘deconstructed’ and examined in this initial phase. This permits a laying bare of prior understandings or misunderstandings of the phenomenon. In this case it is the behaviour (the silence) involving gay male athletes within their mainstream sport organisations that is studied. This silence is investigated within the literature surrounding the phenomenon of silence as well as frequently used terms such as: conspiracy of silence, circle of silence and culture of silence. After reading the literature and collecting multiple instances of the phenomenon (player experiences), an attempt at understanding **what, where, when, how** and **why** meanings within this phenomenon of silence are produced and manifested is then possible.

This phase also contributed to the development of the Conspiracy of Silence model. That is, as I read the literature and interacted with it based on my own experience, a framework emerged. Moreover, a set of guiding assumptions also emerged. In turn this helped to shape
the conceptual approach of this study and the development of my interview guide. To be clear, this study does not seek to ‘test’ the Conspiracy of Silence model but (a) to use it as a research framework and (b) to acknowledge that the experiences of gay male athletes are multi-dimensional and are influenced by a range of interpersonal, institutional, structural symbolic factors and processes.

Therefore, before collecting data from the participants I needed to identify my assumptions of their experiences in order to fulfil the phenomenological research objective of searching for meanings gay men make of their experiences and not my own. To deny the contributory role of my assumptions of the lives of gay men would have been to hide behind the illusion of objectivity. As Schuman (1982) stated, “In an empirical work that involves human beings, the whole notion of objectivity is important for this reason: It is something the researcher should never claim” (p. 4). In this study reality is viewed as contextually bound, changing and flowing with each actor’s life experience. No single set of ‘truths’ exists which explain all human behaviour; therefore, it was essential that I not deny the role of my assumptions about the experience of gay male athletes. The clearer I could be about my assumptions of the meanings my subjects’ made of their realities, the better the reader would be able to understand the data presented and how I went about categorising and organising the meanings they presented in view of my research question(s). Conversely, to understand the meanings gay male athletes make of their experiences I also had to grasp what could not be assumed in an instant and search for meaning in what Woods (1990) called “the pulse, spiral, or melody” of life as best described by philosophers such as Bergson (1946), James (1909) and Sartre (1963). The essence of this qualitative approach depended on my ability to represent a distinctive view of the world of gay rugby players. My own life experiences influence how I see the world (of gay male athletes) and how I conducted research accordingly. The assumptions I have of their experiences were based primarily on my seasoned experiences in mainstream team sports, my fifteen-year experience as a physical education teacher, a coach,
and as a gay man. Primary and secondary sources relevant to gay athletes also influenced my
perception of the participants’ experience in mainstream sport. As such the following
assumptions are acknowledged with respect to my analysis of the production of silence. These
are later discussed in relation to whether they are confirmed, contradicted or absent from the
experiences of the participants in this study. Presenting assumptions assists in understanding
and establishing the appropriate interview schedule and assists in formulating the questions
necessary to be able to answer the central question of this study.

1) Gay male athletes, especially those in mainstream team sport organisations, feel
   forced to remain silent about their sexual orientation. They are not open to
teammates, coaches or administrators.

2) Those who participate in mainstream team sport, do so in fear of stigmatisation
   and vilification, and are very isolated and feel powerless in bringing about
change.

3) Many try to pass as heterosexual or asexual. They live in two worlds; they
   separate their mainstream sporting world from their gay social world.

4) Many adopt a hyper-masculine image and are over-achievers in their sport in
   order to counter balance the effeminate-non-athletic social stereotype of gay
men in general.

5) Many abuse drugs, alcohol and often think of suicide as an answer to their
   problematic situation.

6) Many have quit their sport altogether because of the social and personal pressure
   related to their sexual orientation.

7) There is unspoken knowledge of other gay players, and little or no sharing takes
   place about their experiences as gay male athletes.
8) For many, their internalised homophobia restricts their participation within the gay community and generates a certain animosity (intolerance) towards ‘effeminate’ gay men.

9) The higher the level of competition the more isolated and pressured gay male athletes feel.

10) Gay male athletes fear the presence of other gay male athletes and coaches more than the presence of heterosexual ones within mainstream team sport organisations.

In view of these assumptions an interview guide was established in order that they could be addressed through an open-ended question format.

The phenomenological narration of the experiences of gay males and a perceptual meaning of what it is like to be gay in a rugby organisation emerged from a series of descriptions gathered from the review of literature as well as from the data gathered from the interviewing process. These descriptions will be used in the next phase of profiling and categorisation to provide an insight, “an essence” (Kerry and Armour, 2000), by searching for the invariant structures of what it is like to experience silence in sport.

**Phase 2: Profiling and categorisations**

It is in this phase of the methodological process of phenomenology where the reader is provided with the narratively rich style of life world reporting that gives an insight into the experiences of gay men in sport. The emphasis is placed on presenting subjective accounts rather than objective ones, by getting “inside” the phenomenon of silence. It stresses getting insights from the subjects themselves. It is in this phase of the profiling and categorisation process that multiple instances of the phenomenon (silence) are obtained directly from the participants’ interpretation of their lived experiences. At this point, all presuppositions (assumptions) of the phenomenon are removed in order to bring forth the true lived
experiences of the participants. A person’s history or background is an inexorable part of the lived experience and is a part of a person by culture and from birth. As Kerry and Armour (2000) note:

This presents a way of determining and understanding what counts as real for the person... it is the recognition that these personal histories lead to a unique perception of different experiences and that this personal history cannot be bracketed out; it is fundamental for interpretation. (p. 6)

Therefore, profiles of all participants are presented during this second phase in order to illustrate the similarities and differences that may exist within the lived experiences of these participants’ lives. Denzin (1984) proposes that the phenomenon secured must be “situated by time and place and recorded within language and meaning of the world being investigated” (p. 7). He states, however, that the selection of the sources of these lived experiences is not subject to methodological rules per se. Any instance of the phenomenon, whether derived from case studies, open-ended interviews, field conversations, imagination, history and/or art is suitable for phenomenological purposes. In the present study the rugby player participates in this world in cultural, historical, and social contexts. Not only is he being created by it, but at the same time he is also creating it from his own experience and background. The profiles presented reflect the composition of each participant in this study with regard to the contexts of his life experience in rugby. The data from each interview was tape recorded, transcribed verbatim and used to capture multiple instances of the phenomenon of silence.

Another part of this phase is the categorisation phase. Here, Denzin (1984) draws together a number of important terms from his predecessors. The concept of phenomenological reduction goes back to Husserl, for whom it was a method of leading phenomenological vision from the “natural attitude” of a human being to the transcendental life of consciousness. This is only possible with the suspension or “bracketing” of the natural standpoint:
Phenomenological reduction brackets the natural attitudes surrounding the phenomenon. This permits a move to the essential features of the phenomenon. This movement is progressive and regressive, forward- and backward-looking at the same time” (Denzin, 1984; p. 13).

For Denzin (1984), this alteration of what Husserl terms the “natural thesis” allows the investigator to grasp the essence of a phenomenon. Therefore, the second phase (categorisation) is primarily a search for the essence, which makes a phenomenon what it is. Here, I try to capture the necessary principal eidetic structure of the essence of the phenomenon. I consider the imaginative (theoretical) variation as a step of this phase towards the final description of the phenomenon. The phenomenological essence is thus an internal, conceptual, structure of the phenomenon.

In the process of discovering the essential features of a phenomenon, Denzin presents a movement approximating the “progressive-regressive method” suggested by Sartre (1963). Sartre’s analysis begins in the present, with observation of the data of experience, and the displays of its complex structures. It then involves a regressive analysis, back to the historical antecedents of this experience; and a progressive analysis, where all these “facts” are brought back to the daylight and incorporated in a meaningful totality. In direct relation to this study, rugby players were asked to give accounts of their present and past sporting experiences in the context of mainstream sport organisations with regard to their life as gay males in order to investigate multiple instances of the phenomenon of silence.

Denzin stresses that phenomenological inquiry is first descriptive and then interpretive. Basically, once the essential structures and properties of the phenomenon have been “captured” through interviews and placed in meaningful quotes, they must be interrogated and carefully described by the researcher (categorisation). Finally, phenomenological methodology suggests that classifying, comparing, ordering, and synthesising the factual information and phenomenological structure provisionally conclude the second phase.
With respect to the present study, reduction analysis was done manually (by hand) in the first instance; that is, reading and re-reading all interviews until certain recurring themes became apparent. In the second instance, the use of the computer program Nud*Ist, which stands for Non-Numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorising, significantly reduced the need for the traditional (manual) filing techniques (see http://www.scolari.com). As these themes were categorised, they were then re-read as a category by themselves to see if they might not be better suited in other categories or themes. Once all themes were saturated or becoming redundant, final categories were then identified and examined in relation to the framework as guided by the Conspiracy of Silence model. Additional themes that did not fit into the Conspiracy of Silence model were also inserted at the end of the data results section to be analysed in the next phase. Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to this as the “saturation point” (p. 188) where further data is adding no new information. This process involved four stages. First, the socially constructed attitudes surrounding the phenomenon of the silence of gay men in sport were suspended. That is, once multiple instances of the phenomenon were obtained, they were “disconnected” from the social world where they were experienced (Heidegger, 1982). This permitted me, as the researcher, to “bracket” the findings, propositions and theories of previous researchers and to separate the multiple quotes from their original script and combine them into categories relevant to their meanings.

Second, the phenomenological structures of lived experiences of behaviour involving the silence of gay male athletes were exposed (i.e., identity management strategies, etc.). That is, the multiple sequences and episodes that constitute a text from which situational, relational, interactional specifications regarding the “who, what, where, when and how” of the experiences were extracted. To ensure intracoder reliability (consistency within a single coder), I photocopied the transcripts and after reading through several times, line by line, I began identifying (coding) meanings, described here as themes, that emerged in relation to the
participants’ experiences in rugby, their experiences as gay men, and their experiences as gay men in sport. The data (quotes) were numbered and cut up for easier manipulation, classification and filing into meaningful analytical themes (units) until all data collected was segmented. Those which fit into the Conspiracy of Silence model were easier to identify than others, which really did not fit into the model’s tenets of oppression theory and identity management strategies. This process was very ongoing and iterative (nonlinear). I used a priori words (i.e. bullying, suicide, etc.) to identify the subsequent segmented categories. A priori codes are codes that are developed before examining the data; hence words relevant to the tenets of the Conspiracy of Silence model were used. I classified these ‘additional’ themes into separate categories as they were mostly relevant to the players’ visibility rather than their silence (invisibility). In working through this process, the data were inductively segmented into categories or themes. The size of each theme varied from a sentence or two to lengthy paragraphs where some participants spoke at length on a precise topic, such as bullying for example. Nevertheless, each item, or category of meaning, stood on its own and were ‘very’ self-explanatory. I found 25 categories of meanings related to the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. The process was repeated several times to ensure consistency of meanings. Meanings, which fit into several categories or themes, were photocopied and placed in multiple categories. Eventually, themes were reviewed within their categories and those that presented the clearest meaning were selected for the eventual data presentation in Chapter IV. Many of the players’ quotes were eliminated because of the redundancy their insertion created in the presentation process. This did not affect the phenomenological endeavour to present raw data as the quotes retained present a rich and detailed textual account of the participants’ life experience.

Then, following the progressive-regressive movement necessary in phenomenology, and with the aid of Nud*Ist 1997©, I searched for recurring “facticity” (the quality or state of being a fact or reality for the participants) or meanings as suggested by Merleau-Ponty (1962)
as the essential properties or realities (facts) of the phenomenon. Using Nud*Ist assisted in verifying that no fact or themes had been overlooked. The Nud*Ist program was utilised simply as a verification tool, a sort of “spell check” for the categorisation of themes. This qualitative data analysis program facilitated most of the manual (by hand) techniques that I used to file (classify- categorise) the emerging themes (e.g. storing and coding data, creating a classification system, enumeration of themes, attaching memos and finding relationships). I did not use Nud*Ist to produce the Conspiracy of Silence model, although qualitative data analysis programs such as Nud*Ist can in fact produce diagrams, sketches and drawings to clarify the relationships between parts of a whole (Johnson and Christensen, 2004).

Third, the disclosure of the phenomenon’s essence was interrogated and carefully described. That is, once the results of the Nud*Ist 1997© analysis were obtained they were carefully scrutinised once again. No additional categories or themes emerged from the use of the Nud*Ist program. The recurring, generic and necessary properties of gay men’s lived experiences in sport were then submitted to the descriptive analysis of the third and last phase.

Fourth, all phenomenal structures and facts related to gay male athletes’ experiences in sport organisations were put in order, highlighted in bold, synthesised, and classified. It is the very richness of quotes given (text) that is the basis of interpretive social-phenomenology and it is from this method of data collection that the process of interpretation and analysis begins. This completed the last step of the second phase of the phenomenological method used in this study. At this stage, I consulted with my supervisory committee members who reviewed the categories and their subtexts (quotes).

Phase 3: Interpretation and Analysis

In this phase of the phenomenological method the interpreter, in the process of understanding, ultimately brings certain background expectations and a theoretical framework
to bear. That theory can be generated from the standpoint of the observer who stands outside the situation (Kerry and Armour, 2000).

Denzin (1984) adopts in its “literal wording and substantive intent”, a key element of Heidegger’s phenomenology, by inserting the process of phenomenological construction in his social phenomenological method. In Denzin’s terms, phenomenological construction is the “construction of a phenomenon in its fullest, interpreted forms” (Denzin, 1984 p. 64). This interpreted totality discloses the phenomenon with all its structures and their interrelations, and engulfs both the emerging and prior knowledge about the phenomenon. Denzin also argues that the construction process requires the location of the phenomenon in the lives of interacting individuals, in the world of lived experiences. At this stage, interpretive investigation is considered complete. As Rail (1990) put forward, “the investigator adopts the subject’s point of view and rejects interpretations outside their lived experiences” (p. 12). This means that the interpretation and understanding are not sought in terms of causal agents, factors or variables external to the phenomenon. However, in relation to the aims of this study, the participants’ experiences also inform and validate aspects of the Conspiracy of Silence model. Instead, Denzin (1984) also suggests that the interpretations and understandings proceed through a specific method termed hermeneutics, the work of interpretation and understanding of the data (written texts) that emerged (p. 253). Additionally, Denzin makes interactional experiences the subject matter of hermeneutic interpretation. It follows that Heidegger saw hermeneutics as a philosophical method, not a scientific one. Understanding is not conceived of as a way of knowing but as a mode of being, as a fundamental characteristic of our being in the world. The latter lies in grasping the inner side of the act as seen and lived by the subject, for it is from that perspective that subjects give meaning to their unfolding action. Interacting individuals (such as gay male athletes in mainstream sport organisations) are thus the starting point of this type of inquiry, and this ensures the grounding of interpretation in the world of lived experiences. Denzin draws on the
work of Dilthey (1976) and identifies two basic steps with respect to the process of hermeneutic interpretation:

... a stepwise progression from part to whole ... the separate acts, utterances, and sequential speech acts that make up an interactional experience are pieced together, offering a text of the interaction ...

... (an uncovering of) the inner meanings of the act in question. These meanings, which unfold during the act, are displayed in the act’s outer forms, including the author’s gestures, utterances, actions, and interactions with others. Interpretation follows the interpretations of the author of the action. The act and its meaning are seen within, as interactive productions. (Denzin, 1984)

In this second step of hermeneutic interpretation, Denzin stresses the identification of the investigator with the author of the text of lived experience being interpreted. Beyond the subject’s language and grasping his meanings, this requires the appropriation of the subject’s standpoint, the lodging of the feeling self in the text (to recreate) an original relationship to the text (Denzin, 1984).

Identification to, and interpretation of, the text leads to its understanding. But interpretation and understanding are also linked in a complex interaction, where interpretation suggests an understanding of the text to be interpreted. Denzin (1984) notes that the researcher must grasp the meaning of the total text before working her/his way back through the text; that is before moving forward part by part to the assumptions I had in the beginning; understanding works back through interpretation, just as interpretation begins with prior understandings. As the parts that fit together into the whole are unravelled, the whole takes new meanings. Rail (1990) adds that Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle and Sartre’s progressive-regressive method speak to this critical interaction between interpretation and understanding. Hermeneutic interpretation “finally represents not only a new approach to understanding, but a new act of understanding” (p. 13). The role of the phenomenologist, therefore, is to return to those taken for granted experiences and re-examine them. The aim of this is to arrive at a structural description of an experience. In other words, “how did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?” (Kerry and Armour 2000, p. 8).
These phases comprise the investigation of the **Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon** of gay male athletes within a mainstream team sport organisation. According primary importance to the “lived experience” of the participants, the following attempt at the interpretation and understanding of this phenomenon is largely based on the content analysis of in-depth, open ended interviews with fifteen rugby players who self identify as gay. In the following section, I attempt to uncover the advantages and disadvantages of the methodologies applied in recent phenomenological inquiries. Although other researchers use many different terms to distinguish the methodological phases in phenomenological research, the process of understanding the lived experiences of the participants and the way in which we gain knowledge remains the same.

**The Data Collection Method of In-depth Interviews**

The key strength of any phenomenological study comes from heavily documented experiences where the researchers delve into the lives of their subjects in order to capture the richness of information. “The goals of phenomenological inquiry are to provide insight and tools for reflection” (Kerry and Armour, 2000; p. 1). Therefore, the rationale to use in-depth interviewing techniques comes from the use of phenomenological methodology where the objective is to collect multiple instances of the lived experiences of participants. Because phenomenology avoids presuppositions, explicit underlying philosophical assumptions and rich text examples were sought and are provided during the analysis process. These are the key features of interpretive social-phenomenological research because human experience is fundamentally structured by language; the raw data of human experience that is most valid (Tarnas, 1991; p. 353).

The aim of collecting data from gay rugby players is to unravel the structures, interrelationships and essential properties of the phenomenon of silence that surrounds them. I have selected phenomenological interviewing for several reasons. First, this methodological process permits the actors themselves to express the meaning they make of their own
experiences, and better assists in the understanding of the phenomenon of silence. Second, the pre-interview process associated with phenomenological interviewing lays the groundwork for treating each participant with dignity, respect, and care. Providing this kind of safe and respectful environment is imperative given the possibility that some or most participants live in fear of being discovered as gay within their sporting context. Third, since they have been silent or silenced I try to provide a vehicle, a voice through which to understand their experience. This perspective will be communicated by presenting the data in the participant’s own words (quotes). Fourth, participants are in control of what they choose to disclose. Given the fear and risks involved for them, I felt this element of power was crucial for the participants. Finally, the data collected through phenomenological interviewing is grounded in the individual context of each participant’s experience. Presenting contextually rich and thick data is a powerful tool in dispelling inaccurate stereotypes (assumptions) and generalisations that are made about gay males generally and gay male athletes in particular.

The fifteen athletes (rugby players) were recruited and questioned using in-depth open-ended interviews. Researchers from a number of disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology and even geography, have used this technique successfully to better understand the importance of the lived experiences of other people (Denzin, 1989). The following section explains the data collection procedure.

Initially, the recruitment of rugby players rested upon their interest as volunteers in this study. Finding individuals, some of whom are still living in silence, was not an easy task. Access to most of the fifteen participants was gained through an elaborate formation of a national gay and lesbian athletes’ network, Gay Sport New Zealand Inc. (GSNZ), I initiated in 1996. Initial participants for the study originated from the Krazy Nights Gay Rugby Team in Wellington. They were contacted using the GSNZ network of athletes. Additional interviewees were referred by word of mouth from other participants, one of whom is a former NPC player. This is known as the “snowballing” technique (Woods, 1992). This
proved to be most beneficial in contacting the elite and competitive rugby players who remain most silent within their mainstream rugby organisations. Two other participants contacted me directly after I discussed my research on Queer Nation (QN), a lesbian, gay, transgendered, takataapui (gay Māori) and fa'afafine (gay Polynesian) television program presented on TV2 in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Many e-mail messages (45) from other gay rugby players across the nation giving personal experiences were also collected after the research topic was presented on Queer Nation (QN) in July of 1998.

A qualitative interview schedule (guide) was developed and open-ended questions from the interview guide (see Appendix B) relating to how the men experienced being gay rugby players directed each interview. The interview style was non-directive (questions asked in any order), and the process of reflecting and probing was utilized (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). These interviews were designed to ascertain how individuals perceive, feel and think about a phenomenon by probing, exploring and summarizing their experience in the sport of rugby. Some examples of probes used for clarity or additional information involved questions such as: Anything else?, Any other reason?, and What do you mean?. Because there were no hypotheses, the goal of using this format was to have the participants present (deconstruct) their experience of being gay by reflecting on the meaning they made of their experience as gay male rugby players in mainstream sport organisations.

With the objective of extracting the maximum amount of information from the participants, trust and rapport were most important, especially when delving into the most intimate and personal elements of one’s life; sexuality. As much as they wanted to be informed, none of the players had access to any other players’ identity or transcripts. Before beginning the interviews, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity by me as a researcher, a friend and an ally in solidarity with the gay community. It was important for me to make clear my shared minority status as a starting point to my privileged participant-researcher partnership. Therefore, all interviews were conducted privately in the interviewees’
homes and recorded on audiocassette, then securely stored at the University. A consent form and interview information sheet were presented to and signed by the participants before the interviews began (see Appendix C and D). Because I was able to empathise with each player’s views, extensive interviewing exposed the players’ ideas, arguments and stories as they knew and recalled their experiences in rugby union, their experiences as gay men and their experiences of being gay in the context of sport. My knowledge of popular gay culture permitted me to note subtleties of meaning offered verbally and non-verbally. Beer (1994) commented on the effectiveness of such attentiveness, “that the interviewer be grounded enough in the life world of the respondent that she or he can properly understand the meaning of utterances about the subject at hand” (p. 112). Although our ‘voices’ (life-experiences as gay athletes) are similar, I needed to respect and take note that all gay men do not experience life similarly. Although it was clear to a certain degree that as gay men we do share a similar knowledge of what it is to feel and experience homophobia, I made sure that searching for differences was just as important as finding similarities during the interviews. Nevertheless, this communal knowledge assisted in establishing a positive climate for the interviews. On average, interviews lasted two hours, the shortest being 90 minutes (1.5h) and the longest, lasting 210 minutes (3.5h).

Once all the interviews were transcribed verbatim, participants were asked to read over the transcripts and reflect on the meaning they made of their experience as gay athletes in team sport organisations. Participants edited their interviews by further detailing their accounts and gave additional insight to some of my interpretations. This proved to be quite helpful as several additional detailed comments were provided. Their ability to reply to my transcriptions insured the fairness and trustworthiness of my interpretations and enriched the value of the data collected. Gathering detailed information on the lived experiences of these players was an important epistemological foundation of this thesis for constructing knowledge.
Brief descriptions of the participants and their sporting histories as well as their social categories are presented (i.e. age, ethnicities, career, and social status) in the following chapter. A player profile spreadsheet is presented in Appendix H. Answers to the general interview question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” accompanies each brief description of their profile. I consider the data collected to be highly representative because of the uniqueness in the way they describe the pertinent and sometimes poignant experiences as gay male athletes. It is intended that these quotes be as powerful for the reader as they are significant for the participants’ description of their individual lived experiences. Further quotes from each participant are given in latter parts of the study as they accompany the emerging themes within the Conspiracy of Silence model and the analysis section. The quality of all quotes (data) presented ensures that the phenomenological process of giving thick description of experiences is respected.

The Analysis of In-depth Interview Data

This research analysis was led by the questions: “What meanings from their perspective do gay rugby players give to their experience of participating in mainstream rugby?” and “How do these meanings create barriers or opportunities for their survival in rugby?”

As the interview schedule was set out to answer these questions, the rugby players’ views, stories, anecdotes and feelings were transmitted, tape-recorded and transcribed as data. Analysis of the data required systematic and rigorous organisation. Selecting an inductive analytical process “accepts a diversity and breadth of data from the field and welcomes the emergence of meaning rather than the testing of given pre-determined meanings” (Buck, 2003 p. 91). What became important to analyse was what emerged from the data itself, “out of a process of inductive reasoning” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 127). Although I came to this research with my own experiences, values and assumptions, I placed much emphasis on the players’ feelings and words in order to ‘stay close’ to the ‘true’ meanings of their lived experiences. I only used my own perspective to shape the analysis in order to maximise
opportunities for the data’s meanings to reveal themselves, not to create them for what I thought or wanted them to be. The descriptions, interpretations, feelings, meanings, and understanding offered by the gay male participants in this study with respect to their lived experiences of the phenomenon form the basis of the themes that have emerged. Using the participants’ words in presenting common themes conveys the participants’ meanings and establishes the credibility of the themes identified and satisfies the criterion of trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Lincoln, 1985).

In this research, hermeneutic interpretation was also used in the phenomenological construction stage as prescribed by Denzin’s approach. The interpretation of gay male athletes’ lived experiences within mainstream team sport organisations involved the following steps:

1) I proceeded to identify the whole text and analyse it from within, episode by episode, phrase by phrase, memory by memory, etc.

2) Following this “internal analysis” (Denzin, 1984, p. 260), the inner meanings of the experiences of being a gay male athlete within a mainstream team sport organisation were displayed.

3) Respecting the subjects’ meanings and their feelings about the constituting text, I developed a series of “working interpretations” for each subtext.

4) In view of the interplay between interpretation and understanding, I verified my working interpretations against the text that unfolded from the text that followed.

5) In a stepwise progression from part to whole, I had to grasp the text as a totality by fitting the subtextual interpretations into an overall interpretive scheme to give it total meaning (Denzin, 1984).

Rail (1990) also used these five steps in her study. For her, they “bring the phenomenological construction (categorisations) phase to an end”, yet “the work of interpretation and understanding will only begin” (p. 14). This is for two reasons: (a) the hermeneutic circle of interpretation moves forwards and backwards, but always starts from
the present, and according to Rail, “the interpretation presented in the study is provisional, incomplete, unfinished, and to be started again upon [my] return to the phenomenon”, and (b) returning and studying the phenomenon in the individual’s lived experience “is a condition crucial to interpretation and understanding” (p.14). To realise this condition, the study necessitated a final methodological phase termed “contextualisation” or discussion. Denzin’s (1984) social phenomenological method which is derived from Heidegger’s ‘reduction-construction-destruction’ trivium, emphasises the importance of spatially and temporally grounding the interpretation by adding the contextualisation phase. In this phase, the previously bracketed phenomenon is returned to the social world, sent back in the personal biographies of interacting individuals (Rail, 1990).

While the analysis “contextualisation” process is presented within Phase 3 of this methodological process, Denzin (1984) stresses that the concern to stay near to experience must be present throughout the interpretation. Phenomenological contextualisation is thus interwoven with phenomenological construction. For Denzin (1984), the phenomenon “is situated and studied in the world of lived experiences: meanings, subtleties, innuendos, distortions, and significations are brought to life and thickly described within the lived experiences” (p. 11). The construction and contextualisation then move in circular fashion toward interpretation and increased understanding of the phenomenon. Following Rail’s (1990) research model, four rules were adhered to in this research in order to reach an interpretation in touch with the gay male athlete’s lived experiences.

First, when studying the text, I needed to uncover what goes on in the minds of gay male athletes outside of the sporting context, and then within the sporting context. Their feelings and relational bonds must be revealed.
Second, when sharing the experiences of gay male athletes in sport organisations, I proceeded through “thick” description and “experience-near” concepts, which presented experiences as temporal and practical accomplishments.

Third, when displaying the inner meanings of the experiences of being a gay male athlete, “fore-interpretations” and “after-interpretations” were considered. I sought to reveal the “fore-interpretations” that justify, compel, and perhaps neutralise the self of gay male athletes in relation to their experiences within mainstream sport organisations. Then, the process required that I reveal the after-interpretations of their experiences within mainstream sport organisations. Meanings of the experience to the participants needed to be fitted into a structural totality. In other words, it was necessary to investigate as much as possible the lived experiences of gay male athletes, and the meanings they made of it by questioning them on the memories they have of the phenomenon before, during, and after the silence had occurred.

Fourth, before completing the construction-contextualisation phase, I wanted to ensure that the interpretation met the following criteria set forth by Denzin (1984): (a) it illuminates and reveals the experiences; (b) it rests on thickly contextualised, thickly described materials and on concepts near to experience; (c) it is socially, spatially and temporally grounded; (d) it engulfs what is already known about the phenomenon; (e) it produces understanding: the elements are interpreted into a meaningful whole; and (f) it is provisional, to be completed upon my investigation of its relevance to the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon using the Conspiracy of Silence Model presented in this study.

At the end of the study, I provide an interpretation and understanding of some of the gay male athletes’ experiences in mainstream sport organisations. These interpretations and understandings are presented in the following chapters, along with the full structure of the social phenomenological aspects of their experiences as gay male athletes in mainstream team sport organisations.
Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methods of inquiry and the methodological approach used in this study. Emphasis was placed on explaining the purpose and parameters of the theoretical perspective of phenomenology with regard to the research question’s objective of gaining knowledge of the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon surrounding gay rugby players in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I also made clear that the eventual understanding of this knowledge of meanings may be constructed in different ways, by different people, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Such is the epistemology and ontology of constructionism.

Kerry and Armour (2000) state that “phenomenological insight goes beyond providing rich description and it may have a direct impact upon administrative practices” within sport in general and in the NZRU in particular (p. 14). The practical use of the phenomenological knowledge gained from this study may suggest ways administrators could or should adapt the provision of sport to ensure it is meeting the expectations of all involved. By achieving insight into the lived meaning of certain sporting experiences of gay male athletes, administrators and other officials in rugby may need to reassess the provisions of the rugby experience to recognise the experiential meaning of being a gay male and playing rugby.

In the following chapter, interview data from this study are presented and analysed with two purposes relevant to phenomenological study; one, to present profiles of selected participants, and two, to present common themes that have emerged from the participants’ recollection of their lived experiences. For Woods (1992) profiles emphasize the contextually bound uniqueness of participant’s stories while common themes reveal the junctions of their shared experience. Both yield valuable information describing the contextual realities of gay male rugby players. In the first instance it shows that gay rugby players, although invisible to many, do exist, and in the second instance it shows how the silence surrounding these players is articulated within their sporting and social experiences.
The underlying purpose of the data analysis is not to make generalizations about the experience of gay male athletes. Rather, the goal is to present a thick description (in the actual words of the participants) in order to make connections between the experiences of the participants within the context of sport and our own experiences. Phenomenological researchers search for the commonalities across individuals rather than only focusing on what is unique to a single individual (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Using the actual words of the participants instead of paraphrasing communicates more directly the meaning they made of their experience. Therefore many direct quotes are used in the following chapter. Presenting this data in this form is especially critical in understanding the phenomenon of silence (invisibility) that surrounds gay men’s presence in mainstream team sport organisations. Direct quotes came from voices that have not previously been heard or that maybe would never have been heard without this avenue of communication.

However, for the purpose of this study and as stated by Woods (1992), we must remember that profiles change continuously as do day to day lived experiences and that qualitative research is very much an interpretive process. As phenomenology is used as a way of knowing and sport is seen as a dynamic, subjective and contextual experience, then both objectives of this study are met; understanding (How?) the phenomenon of silence is created and exploring (Why?) the Conspiracy of Silence exists. Guba and Lincoln (1983) state that phenomenology is numerical in language (justifiable), and that to understand a phenomenon one needs to describe it in words (profiles and experiences) rather than in numbers and in quantities. This study continues in this qualitative tradition and presents themes inductively developed from the analysis of gay rugby players’ accounts. Thus, I explore the experiential aspects of being gay in the context of sport. The following profiles and categorisation chapter provides rich descriptions and a vicarious experience for the readers. Using this sample of participants makes it distinct from the bulk of other academic research related to gay men’s experiences in general and their experience in sport in particular because no other studies
explore the lived experiences of gay rugby players within the Conspiracy of Silence Model as presented in this study.
CHAPTER IV

PROFILES AND THEMES

In this chapter, I examine the phenomenon of silence within gay males’ sport experience in relation to three parts. First, I present a diagram in order to illustrate a general overview of the participants in relation to a traditional rugby formation. As part of this overview I have included a fictional player, named Player X, in order to highlight the significance of the phenomenon of silence. In effect, Player X is a representation of the many other silent and invisible gay rugby players in Aotearoa/New Zealand for whom this research serves as their ‘voice’. In turn, I provide a profile of individual players in order to help the reader get to know the participants. Finally, I categorise the data collected into emerging themes from the transcribed interviews; where the essential properties (data) of the phenomenon are disclosed. This phenomenological process serves to show how and where the silence is produced in the lives of the participants in this study.

Part A: General Profile Description

To describe the experience of gay male athletes in team sport organisations and to understand the meaning they make of their experience, a general profile of the participant group was undertaken. The general profile gives the reader a snapshot of the group’s composition (i.e. age, ethnicity, employment, etc.). I have chosen to use the scrum formation diagram in rugby to present the 1st XV, a popular phrase referring to the premier starting line-up “first fifteen players” (participants) within a team. The general profile also serves to highlight the criteria by which participants were purposefully chosen for this study. Specifically, they needed to fill two basic requirements: a) play or have played rugby in New Zealand and b) acknowledged to me, the interviewer, that they were gay or bisexual.

Figure 6 presents the participants in a standard rugby scrum formation. To protect their identities and to assure confidentiality players have been given pseudonyms. They were also
randomly assigned field positions, although some players do actually play these given positions and numbers. Hopefully this strategy will enable the reader to better visualise and differentiate the participants and assist in identifying them as real people.

An introduction to each individual participant accompanies the First Fifteen scrum figure.

FIGURE 6:
The “First Fifteen” Rugby Team

Undoubtedly, there are more than fifteen gay rugby players in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I could have continued interviewing many more gay rugby players; in fact, enough to field several complete teams. Rather than attempting such an ambitious feat, I decided to complete this ‘First Fifteen’ team of gay rugby players with a fictional fullback, for whom I reserved
the name: Player X. I have purposefully inserted Player X, #15, as a fictional player whose profile is intended to complete and reflect the broad range of gay rugby players currently participating within mainstream rugby in New Zealand. Doing so provided a fictional overall composite of these participants in terms of time, resources, emotions and meanings emerging from the interviews. Although Player X is fictional, the reader should be alert to the likelihood that most gay rugby players in New Zealand are possibly very similar to Player X, his situation is certainly believable, and the situation he confronts is plausible. The silence and invisibility of all other players speaks volumes. The reality that Player X could not otherwise be heard in this study provided the impetus for his inclusion. Such a narrative is considered ethnographic fiction in qualitative research studies. The value of this genre of representation as a tool for critical research is well documented (Sparkes, 1997). I chose to include Player X in order to give a voice to the many silenced gay rugby players and to illustrate the possibility of his/their existence. Although, little narrative is given to Player X in this study, the ‘quotes’ that do exist should be judged on their emotive force, by their capacity to engage the readers emotionally in his story and by its verisimilitude. The intent is to provoke multiple interpretations and responses from the readers. It allows me to represent all other silenced gay players in a way that acts as a political point of resistance to their enforced absence and silence (Sparkes, 2002). “Ethnographic fiction and other kinds of story by their ability to condense, exemplify, and evoke a world, are as valid a device for transmitting cultural understanding and achieving these goals as any other researcher-produced device” (Sparkes, 1997; p. 38).

The participants in this study had all played a competitive level of rugby in the past, either in their formative school years or at the club level within mainstream structures (heterosexual organisations). They revealed and expressed their love of rugby and have well over 200 years of combined experience in this sport alone. They all identified themselves as being gay. At the time of the study, most worked in professional fields (one lawyer, one physiotherapist, four
educators, three public servants), three came from the private sector (one chef, one photographer, one banker), one rugby field groundsman, one garbage collector and finally Player X who is under contract, as a professional rugby player, with an NPC team to make up the total of fifteen rugby players (see Appendix H: Player Profile Spread Sheet). I chose to portray Player X as a professional player because, in fact, one of the other previously mentioned workers also plays rugby professionally with an NPC team. To identify the NPC player’s other place of work would have jeopardised his anonymity.

The average age of the participants is thirty-six ranging from twenty-five to sixty-three years. Ten were of white European descent (nine English, one Irish, one French), two were Māori, one was Samoan and one was Asian. Player X is of white European descent because the majority of silent gay rugby players he represents reflect the reality of the Aotearoa/New Zealand cultural and racial landscape. The majority of the participants (n = 10) identified themselves as coming from middle class backgrounds (based on parents’ employment) and the others (n = 5) came from lower middle class families. All but three identified themselves as Catholic with two who identified themselves as atheist and one as Ratana. All are New Zealand citizens, six were raised in Auckland, four in Wellington, one in Taranaki, one in Canterbury, one in Otago, one in Southland and two from abroad (Malaysia and Canada).

Besides all identifying themselves as current recreational players, ten had played competitive first fifteen high school rugby of which five had gone on to play colts level and senior premier representative rugby. Five of the participants still played on mainstream senior competitive teams and the same five also coached or assisted with minor (youth) teams. The average experience of years played was twenty.

Most “came out” at the age of twenty-seven, the youngest at nineteen and the oldest at sixty-three. One has yet to come out. Only one was married and two of the participants have children. Eight are in relationships that have lasted an average of seven years.
Part B: Individual Profile Descriptions

#1 Art - Loose head prop:

Art has played rugby all his life for various ‘A’ grade teams, from high school first fifteens to senior rep teams. He is the number one player in this First Fifteen team of gay rugby players for many reasons including: he is a highly articulate and intelligent lawyer and he is strongly motivated in creating positive social change for gay rugby players in New Zealand and abroad. With his promotion and creation of gay rugby in New Zealand, he has become a community leader by reaching out to the many rugby players still struggling with their sexuality within mainstream sport organisations. It is no surprise then, that rugby is his favourite sport and that his favourite athlete, Ian Roberts, is also his most positive example of what gay rugby players can achieve. Art admires Roberts mainly because of his visibility as a professional rugby player who came out completely (stage six) during the peak of his athletic career.

Well known rugby league player Ian Jones has also been the sort of person Art looks up to, “Because he’s just so bloody good and he always excels at the sport he does well and is so relaxed and calm doing it. Jones is not an ego man or anything like that,” says Art. His favourite team is the All Blacks. It was always the team he followed and supported. He accepts that it was hard not to as a New Zealand boy. He is attracted to rugby by just the sheer complexity of the game. He acknowledges that there’s so much in it and there are so many different facets and all those different facets are so testing of different parts of any player. He explains that there’s the physical side, there’s an extremely mental side, there’s speed, and there’s lots of strength needed as well. There’s so much in it for him because it’s a team sport and that’s what he loves about it the most. Art is of European descent and came out to himself in his late teens, during the peak of his rugby career. At thirty-five, Art is currently captain of his senior mainstream rugby team as well as the gay team he plays with. He currently lives with his partner of six years in Auckland.
Art’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” is very positive with regard to his participation in a gay rugby team.

I have a [better] sense and understanding of diversity, of different people, of things like oppression and discrimination and all those sorts of things, the isms. I can only now understand what being on the wrong side of the fence really feels like. I think that’s one of the key things. It’s brought knowledge in my life and who I am because now I am so much more than I was before. I’m beginning to understand society and people and all those sorts of things because I can. I now belong to a group, which has been a minority group.

#2 Val - Hooker:

Val is a fifty year-old European Catholic New Zealander and is probably the most competitive and well disciplined. He loves his rugby, having played all his life (forty years) at top grade levels and even professionally. He still coaches First XV high school rugby where he works as a custodian and groundsman. Val also plays and coaches cricket in New Zealand. Many articles have been written about his playing and coaching abilities in both codes over the years. Coming out wasn’t an easy process for him. After many failed relationships with women, Val came back from a brief stay in Sydney to confront his silence and live his life in complete integrity at the age of thirty. Except for a few notable negative experiences in combining sport with his true identity, sport remains his first love, his first “crush”. Val came out at the age of thirty.

Val’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” reminded him of his worst experience as a gay athlete as being also one of his best.

We were in this final and we were getting done and there was a group of about 15 or 20 young guys who ran this barbecue and bar and they started singing this song about me that was really nasty and derogatory and homophobic. They started up this chant and it went on for about 20 minutes and I got very upset cause it was aimed at me and it was echoing through the night, going through the ground and you know there were probably 200, 300 people watching. I sort of went into my shell and I tried to ignore it, tried to concentrate on the game. There were even homophobic guys in our team. Two guys especially, the redneck … brothers, their attitude was just incredible, they just went and tried really hard. The team, the whole team just went right and full on, and we won the game, from nowhere, and it was great because we had never beaten this team before. Winning the game was great [they] had played a lot of first class sport for Wellington, who was, you know, really straight sort of, he just went
sprinting straight to these guys he was going to smack them. The game had finished he was on his way. We had to restrain him. That reaction was amazing to me because that meant that they respected me not only as an athlete but also as a gay guy.

#3 Ron - Tight head prop:

Ron is one of three public servants in the team and is very eloquent in wording his sentiments about being gay and playing rugby in New Zealand. Ron is thirty-eight and comes from a European Catholic sporting household and played prop and captained his high school second fifteen. He could have played for the first fifteen but was doing scholarship examinations and was head boy at an all boys’ school. After high school he decided to pursue interests in student union affairs as president at his university. Even if he didn’t score his first try until the age of fourteen as a prop, rugby was always part of his life as a youth. He used to stand on the terrace at Carisbrook and get wildly enthusiastic about the incredibly gutsy and passionate Otago rugby teams. Naturally his favourite teams are any from his native Otago region especially because “they played a sort of inordinate manic style rugby where they’d throw the ball around from anywhere”, which is how he said he liked to see rugby being played. He always preferred team sports to individual ones because he’d tend to try harder when other people were around who were relying on him to do some of the work. He was known as a good tactician in sports, especially cricket and rugby. The First XV coach and social studies teacher would often come to him and talk about tactics for the First XV rugby teams at his school. Ron decided to come back as a player with the formation of a gay rugby team in Wellington. Politically, former New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange and Labour MP Chris Carter, New Zealand’s first openly gay politician, are his biggest role models. Ron came out to friends and family in 6th form, and has had to deal with certain issues when trying to combine his sporting life with his social life. Ron is in a six-year relationship.

Ron’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” describes his tumultuous coming out experience and an attempted suicide.
There was a, you know, as you do when you’re a teenager, you’ve got groups of friends and I was part of this quite large group of friends, rugby players, and this group would usually end up at somebody’s house on a Friday or Saturday night drinking. And one Saturday night no one rang to tell me what was going on, so I rang up a couple of people and they were all out, and I progressively rang around people and finally found where everybody was and sort of said, oh is there a party and is everyone around there, and the guy on the other end of the phone was really evasive and I sort of had an inkling that something was going on and I knew where he lived. So I marched to the bottle store, bought myself a bottle of gin, I knew how long it would take me to walk to this person’s house, it would take me 3 quarters of an hour and I drank the bottle of gin while I walked and I finished it. And I arrived on the doorstep to find a bit of paper with handwriting with the person who, to this day I would recognise anywhere in the world and it said no fags allowed. And I probably collapsed on the doorstep cause I had just drank a bottle of gin and I remember them finding me and taking me inside and putting me on the bed or something and from then on it’s just little bits of memory. But I do remember getting up at one stage and screaming about this particular guy who needed me and I needed him and I don’t remember anything else, except that the person I was screaming at was myself. I was telling myself that I needed to be true that I needed myself. I believe that was my first suicide attempt.

#4 Bernie - Lock:

Bernie is one of the two locks on the team; the position generally known for having the tallest players. Bernie is thirty-eight years old and has more than twenty-five years experience in rugby. He is Māori with a Ratana religious background and is in a three-year relationship. He plays the nurturing figure to all the other players, being the best in terms of ability and strength, and has cultivated a strong sense of altruism from a solid sporting background. Bernie played representative rugby all his life, from early childhood representative teams to senior representative teams. Besides being vice captain of his under 21 team, Bernie played premier rugby for twelve years, has been coached by Graham Hill and a few ex-All Black captains, and has played with All Blacks such as Christian Cullen, Carlos Spencer and Adrian McKenzie to name a few. Caring for others comes from strong Māori family bonds formed by his six sisters and three brothers, he being the youngest. He was always surrounded by sport, his mother was a netball coach and showed him the importance of interacting with different people, working with them as a team, to form and achieve common goals in various ways.
Bernie left school at fifteen to play club rugby and become a professional chef. His first sexual encounters were with his brothers’ rugby friends when he was 10 years old.

Bernie’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” is very positive and describes in detail his wonderful coming out experience to Mongrel Mob gang members.

My first coming out was one of the best feelings I’ve ever had of being gay I guess, of being proud of being gay. I was in Wellington at the time, invited to a friends wedding back in Auckland in South Auckland and I was really looking forward to it... catching up with all my friends and family. Anyway, I was at the reception part of the wedding and a really good friend of mine who used to be in the Mongrel Mob, came up to me and said ‘Oh Bernie, let’s go and have a talk, come outside.’ And at the point, I just don’t know why but I just knew that he was going to ask me if I was gay and I was quite nervous cause he was a lot bigger than me and he was pretty much of a hard ... We grabbed a couple of beers and sort of like went outside and he gave me a can. I had a big sip out of it and he just said: ‘look bro, I just want to know if you’re gay?’ He said: ‘Are you gay?’ and before I could answer he turned around and said: ‘Look I’ve been inside [prison] off and on for a number of years. I’ve seen what goes on and I know what goes on’ he said ‘as far I’m concerned bro it doesn’t worry me, you being gay. You and I have grown up together, done things together had a great moment in childhood’, and he said: ‘You’ve helped me out heaps, when I was thrown out of home you took me in and looked after me, when you got sick of me you told me to piss off and get my shit together, and I did. So as far as I’m concerned you know you’ll still be my best friend.’

Right there and then it was such a relief to know that I could turn around and say to somebody who had meant a lot to me that yes I am gay, yes I’m happy to tell you that I’m gay and that I’m still your best friend. I was really happy in such a peculiar way. It was a lot off my shoulders and I could just feel it, it was just an awesome experience. I started to cry and he came up and he hugged me and he just said: ‘Hey bro it’s OK’ and he was really, really good... Yeah I remember it was just such a great feeling, I just felt so relieved, a huge, huge, huge turning point in my life. I just thought yeah I’ve got to tell my family, got to tell the rest of my friends cause there truly is nothing wrong with being who I am. It’s more the person that you’re interested in rather than what you actually do. And from that day onwards I sort of felt more empowered, just more relieved with telling people who I am and what I am, and being positive about it.

Well the next day he rung me up early in the morning, I was still feeling a bit hung over, a bit you know, as you do after a wedding reception and he said: ‘... I’m just gonna come around pick you up...I want you to tell [other gang members] what you told me last night, and I’ll be there with you, to see you through this, so you don’t have to worry about it anymore’, he said and that just topped it all off for me.

So we drove around to a friend’s place and we picked him up and we went around to another old friend’s place and some of the boys were already there. They were all there and we were all having a few drinks. But on the way around...
to my old friend’s place the other friend was talking to me about me being gay and he said: ‘Are you comfortable with it, have you told your family, have you got a boy friend?’ and all these questions that I’d been dying for someone to ask and then able to tell someone, you know like my closest friends or my brothers and sisters. And I said to him: ‘Look let’s just sort of like slow down’, I said: ‘This is the first time I’ve actually come out to anyone’ I said, ‘I’ve always wanted to do that ’cause I’ve never had a hang up of being gay, just on how people might react towards me,’ and I said: ‘What you did last night at the wedding was just the best way of you asking because you told me how you felt before I gave you the answer. That just made it easier for me to turn around and tell you the truth’ so I said: ‘But I’m still taking it in so anything you want me to answer or anything you want to ask I’ll definitely answer it because I want to talk about it but just slow down bit that’s all’. ... He was very supportive, completely supportive and also helped me get through the whole thing with my [other] friends that I used to hang out over at the school with. The questions that they all wanted to know were a bit dirty, a bit personal but it was more on a humorous way that they asked not so much sarcastically or disrespectfully. They were just trying to let me know that they felt comfortable with the whole thing. And that week, and the wedding, the whole thing was just absolutely wonderful.

#5 Pete - Lock:

Pete has had a chequered life in sport and in family, and has a history of substance and sexual abuse. What makes him stand out from the rest though, is the fact that he is now a physical education teacher. He used to hate sports as a child, ever since his first incredibly traumatic day in rugby when he wet his shorts on the playing field because everybody was yelling at him to run with the ball. Nevertheless, he kept on playing rugby, even if he hated it, only for the social acceptance and the façade it provided him to hide his sexuality. He concedes that he manipulated his way through life in order to survive as a gay man in a heterosexist society. It is only with the advent of the gay rugby team in Wellington that Pete has been able to reconcile an interest in sport with his sexuality. Pete is a thirty-nine year old Catholic of European descent raised in Christchurch. He has fifteen years experience in rugby and came out when he was twenty-one.

Pete’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” describes his initial disdain for sport and physical education classes.

_I mean in New Zealand especially, sport is this incredibly important thing. You know, everybody has to be involved in sport, to be anybody, sport is so fuckin’_
important in this country, especially rugby, you know, rugby is really, really, important. It’s like you don’t play rugby you’re a wuss. You’re a nobody. You know I used to fuckin’ love it when it pissed down on a Wednesday afternoons at school, ohhh no rugby today!!!

#6 Jeep - Blind side flanker:

Jeep is the thirty six year old funny man on the team. Coming from a large Irish Catholic family (13 aunts and uncles and 26 cousins) from South Auckland this participant recalls most of his experiences as a gay rugby player with lots of open-minded humour. Jeep’s favourite sport and team are rugby and the All Blacks. He started playing rugby at age twelve when he was following in his older brother’s footsteps. A fellow flanker, ex-All Black Michael Jones, is his favourite rugby player as he represents the pinnacle of achievement, determination and desire. Jeep grew up “just adoring the guy” because he was an exceptional gentleman, a true professional and a giant in terms of character, never hearing a bad word about him or from him. When not working as a banker, Jeep is an avid soccer player, having played on representative teams for Counties-Manukau until he was nineteen years old. In any sport, Jeep sees himself as a very competitive athlete. He first came out to his “adoring” sister when he was twenty-four years old after having a six-year relationship with another rugby player from his high school first fifteen team. Like Ron, Jeep was also his university’s student union president.

Jeep’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” was very positive and good humoured as he recalls his awareness of being gay all of his sporting life.

I always knew I was a gay rugby player...Oh yes, very young! When I was watching Peter Pan I got a boner, with Peter flying around. You know for God’s sake it was kind of like pretty fucking obvious. It was those tights, ok? And don’t even get me started on what I thought of Pinocchio.
Andy is an Asian immigrant who set up his medical practice in New Zealand. Andy didn’t play sport much because he says he wasn’t really good at it when he was young. He had a huge fear of being hurt. He never liked hard objects being thrown or kicked at him, but when the Wellington gay rugby team came to light in 1998, Andy decided to tackle his fear of contact sport in a supportive environment. He’s been playing rugby ever since and has also begun dragon boating and other sports as well.

At nineteen, Andy had his first sexual experience in a car with an older thirty-year-old married man from the courier company where they both worked part time. Andy is currently in a loving relationship of seven years.

Andy’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” was also very positive. He recalls his coming out experience to his family as a surprising event in his life.

[When I came out to my family] ... I was a bit unsure about my father, cause he is a policeman and he’d said some pretty derogatory things about gays and it was just like, oh I wonder how he’s going to take this. So we turned the TV off and I told him and I started crying. It was all very emotional. And then he came over and he just gave me a hug and he said: ‘Well Andy to be totally honest I actually thought you might be.’ He said: ‘I’m not really that surprised’ and he goes: ‘I’ll tell you something,’ he said that, when he was about 16 he had actually had sexual feelings towards guys as well. And that freaked both my mum and me out cause he hadn’t told mum any of this and it was just like, she goes: ‘You what?’ And I go: ‘Oh wow, OK.’ So that was sort of pretty groovy. And then both my brothers are actually overseas so I couldn’t tell any of them. But then my eldest brother came home and yeah, he was home for about a week and I told him and he said: ‘Well, yeah I thought you were ... don’t worry if anybody gives you any hassles I’ll go sort them out.’ My big brother, that was really funny. And then my other brother came home about another six months later and he was a bit of an [excentric] and so I wasn’t sure if he’d take it as well. But he was OK; he doesn’t like gays, so I don’t think he really likes that aspect about me. We don’t really talk about it. He didn’t know how to handle the fact that I am gay. He talked to my mum and they just had a bit of a talk about it once. Apparently it sort of helped him understand that we’re brothers and that’s the most important thing. But I don’t think he’s comfortable with the fact that I am [gay]. But it hasn’t caused any trouble between us. Yeah we’re still as close as we ever were so it hasn’t been a problem.
Sam is a thirty year-old atheist Māori from Taranaki. Traditionally. The No 8 position in rugby in New Zealand is sometimes called the last man down. This title is most fitting for Sam because he would definitely be the last man down in any of life’s most difficult situations. He has overcome hardships that many could not even imagine. Indeed, his unique life experiences add much significance to this study because of the fact that he comes from a background of extreme poverty, neglect, and physical abuse. He is the only one of seven children who does not suffer from substance abuse or have a criminal record. This sportsman only began playing rugby at the age of fourteen when he could finally afford to purchase a pair of “footie boots”. Sam eventually managed to play rugby at the New Zealand representative Colts levels. His most positive example of any athlete is ex-All Black Jeff Wilson.

The term family to him is anyone who shows kindness and respect and surprisingly, his idol is his mum for enduring years of abuse from his father. Sam has an enormous extended family of friends, which he refers to as his whānau (family). He is currently an educator; still plays intense rugby regularly and has been in a relationship for the past year.

Sam’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” tells of a man who has used rugby all of his life to hide his sexual orientation and to please others.

I don't know what I would do if sport wasn't a part of my life. I used sport to hide who I really was. If I were good at sport, then no one would ever think that I was gay, which is what made me push even harder and try to be better than they made everyone else. I was a good soccer player when I was young but Dad wanted me to play a man's sport, which is why I took up rugby and I have been playing it ever since...it’s a shame that I left a sport that I really loved (soccer) and took up a different sport just because of what people might say. The better I got at rugby the further my sexuality was hidden, I was afraid and scared of what people might say if they ever knew.
#9 Léo - Halfback:

Leo, a thirty year-old Catholic Aucklander of European descent, is the smallest player on this team and was never considered by others during his youth to be very good at sports. His life experiences are mirrored with irony. For instance playing lock, a position usually reserved for the tallest amongst rugby players, is where he excels the most as the smallest player. He always wanted to play rugby but was one of those boys in physical education classes who were never picked to play with the others. He did not hesitate in joining a gay rugby team in order to finally fulfil his dream to play rugby. Playing rugby in a supportive environment makes him feel much better about his “harrowing experiences” as a child. Leo is the photographer who never hesitates in sending his rugby pictures to his family and friends who, otherwise, would not believe his sporting fulfilment. Consequently, Leo is a more confident person who does not hesitate to speak out against homophobia in sport or other spaces. Leo lives with his long-time companion, the first person he ever came out to at the age of twenty-one. They have been together for more than fifteen years.

Leo’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” explains one of his reactions when experiencing homophobia.

> The only thing I can sort of think of is [that] I was in a parade once, a gay parade, and there were Christians there throwing eggs at people and I thought that was just so rude because like in one way they were like preaching, but like you see these people preaching in the mall in the weekend and then when there’s this parade they’re throwing eggs at people because [those people] are different. They don’t celebrate the good things about how they’re different or whatever. I found that quite rude because, [ironically] one of my friends [my ally] had an egg thrown at her and she’s not gay and I think these people threw eggs at her because they thought she was. I was really annoyed about [the fact] she was made the target of bigotry and that the people who were throwing eggs didn’t understand what they were doing, that it was wrong.

#10 Marc - 1st 5/8:

Marc is the oldest of the participants in this study. His involvement with rugby spans five decades from being a player, coach, and educator. His favourite player is Michael Jones. Marc is still not out to friends and colleagues, which is why his contribution to this
phenomenological study of silence is most significant. His thoughts and emotions related to his fears are most authentic and carry a great deal of meaning relevant to our understanding of the phenomenon. Marc lives alone and has never established a gay relationship, yet he has had anonymous sexual encounters with other men.

Marc’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?”

A bit lonely really! You know I’m sixty years old and I have never had someone sleep in my bed at night. All I wish is that I was thirty or forty years younger and that I could live my life all over again more freely. I find that because of my involvement with rugby that I’ve missed out on so much of what is really important in life. All I wish is that some day I could find someone to love and love me in return, someone to just hug and embrace in my bed all night, someone who would really want to be with me, to love me, and hold me. Just one night, just one entire night!

#11 Henri - Left wing:

Henri, a twenty five-year-old Catholic raised in Southland is one of the few players on this team with little rugby experience. He really does come from a left field position, meaning that he has always stood out in a crowd or has always been seen as different. He was the one, during his youth, who was always harassed and vilified for being perceived as being gay. The terms poofter and fag were all too common attributes given to him in school especially by rugby players. Despite this, Henri started to play rugby in his twenties as a conciliatory effort in giving the sport of rugby a second chance in his life as a New Zealander. As a Crusaders’ rugby fan, it was important for Henri to reconcile his past differences with masculine rugby culture in order for him to sustain a fulfilled life by including a once despised team sport in it. In doing so, Henri has created numerous lasting friendships that he did not have before. Henri is a public servant and is in a relationship that developed through his rugby contacts. His favourite athlete is American Olympian gay diver Greg Louganis. He says he always backs underdog teams. His most humiliating experience in sport was in primer two or primer three rugby when he ran the wrong way down the field with the ball to score a try over his own goal.
line. Henri came out quite late in comparison to most other players in this study. This is quite surprising given the fact that out of three children in his family, two are gay, he being the youngest.

Henri’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” made him recall his first sexual experience through rugby, with a heterosexual teammate, as not being very positive.

*Oh yeah, my worst experience in rugby happened very late [in my sporting life] actually. I knew what my [attractions] were long before I did anything about it. I think I might have been twenty-three years old and that was with another player on the team who was married with two kids. At an after game function, he was drunk and so was I, basically. I don’t think there was anything particularly great about it. It bothered me for a long time, took a lot away from my game.*

**#12 Hubert - 2nd 5/8:**

Hubert, a thirty year-old Catholic raised in Wellington, came out when he was twenty-seven. He considers himself an average rugby player with the team he plays for. He did not play much competitive rugby in his youth, but does have many vivid memories of negative incidents related to rugby in general and rugby players specifically. Hubert is also a public servant and is single. Other interests besides rugby and going to the gym include socializing with friends and travelling overseas. His favourite athlete is Ian Roberts.

Hubert’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” recalls his experiences with sport as being very negative.

*I was actually picked for an interschool [running] competition but never got to it. What had happened was, I’d never read the list [of selected runners] on the notice board, I never read the notices about going to interschool things, cause I just never got [selected]. But [that day] someone said my name was there. There were no girls in our school but someone took my name and wrote it in the girls’ blank side, it was just a plain form. So when I [eventually] looked at it, I just walked off and just [thought] it was a joke you know. The next day I got hauled over the coals by the principal for not attending the interschool races when they were on. He said I didn’t take it very seriously. That was sort of the only event that I could have managed to win but I didn’t ‘cause I didn’t attend, thinking my name wasn’t on the list, but it was, it was actually on the boys side,*
and I was too upset to look. So ironically, what could have been my best sporting experience turned out to be my worst. In fact my best achievement was a non event.

#13 Jake - Centre:

Jake is an all-round seasoned athlete. He has played contact sports all of his life in New Zealand and overseas on various representative teams from high school, university, and national premier levels. Jake, as a physical education teacher, has also coached many teams from first fifteens to senior premiers, winning a considerable number of titles. His idol is Ian Roberts and his favourite team would be the Krazy Knights because of the courage and integrity these men have shown in sport.

Jake, a forty-year-old of French Catholic origin, came out to himself in his early thirties and has been advocating gay rights ever since. Nevertheless, he feels incapable of coming out to other team members from his mainstream teams, as well as his work colleagues. He is a single dad to a daughter from a previous heterosexual relationship. He has been in a relationship for more than a year with another rugby player.

Jake’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” explains his coming out as a very powerful and positive eye-opening experience.

Nothing but positive except for my mum’s comments really. When I told my best friend which I now consider my best fag hag, she said: ‘You know Jake! I can’t love you more; I can only love you better now.’ My mum just said: ‘Oh! Why don’t you just kill me?’ That’s my mum for ya! She didn’t know how to react, so I told her: ‘Wrong answer mum, this is where you get up, hug me and tell me you love me.’ Sometimes parents act the way they think they’re supposed to act, TV drama like! Yeah, coming out to the people I love was nothin’ but good for me, very positive, very empowering … wish I could do the same in my sport that I love just as much.

#14 Sione - Right wing:

Sione is a Samoan in his twenties and is a premier rugby player who has played in the NPC (national provincial championships) in New Zealand and has little contact with the gay community. To supplement his rugby income, Sione works as a garbage collector. His idol is
All Black Jonah Lomu. Sione has played competitive rugby all his life, from first fifteens to the national provincial championship. At over two metres tall and weighing well over 100kg, Sione is without any doubt the toughest and biggest participant interviewed in this study. He is only out to a select group of friends yet he entrusted me with his anonymity. He is not out to any family members nor to anyone in his sporting environment and therefore was quite hesitant about being interviewed for this study. Nevertheless, his contributions to this study are most important because of his involvement at a top level within the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU). Sione lives with rugby player flat mates who are unaware of his sexuality.

Sione’s response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” describes the difference between the gay shower scenes to heterosexual shower scenes.

Well I don’t know much about the gay scene bro cause I’m still not much into all that, but I always found it peculiar that in straight teams all the guys know who’s got the biggest cock, coaches included. And then they tell us not to look, that we’re the perverts, yeah right mate! Build a bridge and get over it, I say!

#15 Player X - Fullback:

Player X is the generic player on this first fifteen’s gay rugby team. He could be either White, Asian, Māori or Pacific Islander. He could be playing at junior level just as much as he could be playing at a premier level of rugby in New Zealand. He might, as fictionalised here, even be an All Black. He could have had sexual encounters or not. But one thing is certain; this player is attracted to the same sex, lives in silence and is invisible to his family, friends and sporting organisation. He is one among many thousands in Aotearoa/New Zealand and abroad who might fear revealing his attractions to other males because of the existing climate of homophobia that exists in sport today.

If Player X were able to share his thoughts, his response to the question: “How would you best describe your experience as a gay athlete?” might be best described in just a few words.

I’m a New Zealand All Black and I’m not out!
I’ve written this ‘fictional’ quote intentionally, because it is possible that there is a current All Black who is gay, and if there is not then there was, and if there was not then there probably will be in the future. Accordingly, Ron’s quote below, although anecdotal, does suggest that Player X could be or is an All Black. In this sense, such a comment provokes discussion and generates thought. Reflection on such matters respects the traditional objectives of both ethnographic fiction and phenomenological study; that of instigating debate on current sociological truths.

#3 Ron : I know of somebody very well who slept with an All Black, a guy [Player X]. My friend who told me about it wouldn’t lie. I know it’s true because he told me the story in a very hilarious circumstance. He came over to my flat one day and I was watching rugby, watching a test match and they were playing the national anthem and going across the whole team showing each player one by one. My friend looked at this one guy and said: “Is that [player X] and gave the player’s first name, and I said: “yeah, yeah, that’s him”, and he said that he had met this guy and that the guy said he played rugby. But my friend didn’t know he played for the All Blacks. And believe me, seriously, cause this friend of mine knows nothing about rugby at all and would never have known [Player X’s] name otherwise than having had slept with him. So he slept with [Player X’s] name otherwise than having had slept with him. So he slept with [Player X] and [Player X] told him he was a rugby player but never told him that he was an All Black.

In the following section, I delve into the lived experiences of these fifteen players by categorising themes that have emerged from the entire interviewing process. Many of the participants’ quotes are grouped into themes relevant to the theoretical framework, the Conspiracy of Silence model, used in this study in order to ensure greater clarity and understanding for the reader.

**Part C: Emerging Themes**

In this section, analysis focused upon identifying recurrent themes emerging across transcripts with regard to the research question of how, based on their experiences, self-identifying gay male athletes survive in silence within their sport organisation. The second part of this chapter is divided into three sections of emerging themes that relate to aspects of
the Conspiracy of Silence Model: (a) themes relevant to oppression theory, (b) themes relevant to identity management and (c) themes relevant to visibility.

Recurrent themes are similar and consistent ways people think about, and give accounts concerning particular issues. The phenomenological methodology used is primarily interested in the subjective meanings people make of events rather than attempting to record or represent objective ones. Additionally, I would argue that when a person gives an account of a personal experience of an event and shares the meaning she/he attributes to it, then this meaning serves as a personal truth for that person (player). In other words, the meaning is valid for that person, even if or when questioned by the reader. In turn, the readers’ perspective of that meaning may be shaped and influenced by the actual meaning given by the actual experience of the participant (player). Indeed, the primary source remains the experience and interpretation of the participant, regardless of the reader’s subjective interpretation. A deconstruction of gay sport experiences aims to expose what is left out by the culture and what that marginalisation indicates about the true nature of the culture (Holstein and Gubrium, 1994). In other words, what gay rugby players know and understand about their own experiences in rugby tells us not only something about gay men in sport, but it also tells us something about the people and the context in which it is experienced. Society’s true colours are thus reflected through the eyes of marginalised individuals.

Each interview transcript was read repeatedly as part of the analysis. The recurring themes, which reflect the day-to-day worlds of gay male rugby players as they emerged from an in-depth analysis of the transcribed interviews, are presented in Table 3. Appropriate steps were taken to ensure that the derived categories were internally consistent. That is, they were repeatedly verified to ensure that all quotes best illustrated that category since it is acceptable for a quote to fit into more than one category: the categories are socially constructed by me as the researcher. I stopped searching for additional emerging themes to generate and
substantiate my arguments when I could no longer find additional information within the data to support or reinforce the concepts and their inter-relationships.

**TABLE 3:**
**Frequency of recurring themes within the data collected**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes relevant to Oppression Theory</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ostracism and bullying</td>
<td>12/14</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of exclusion</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of isolation</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims, agents and heterosexual men</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness and invisibility</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of loneliness and alienation</td>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-achievement and hypermasculinity</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes relevant to Identity Management</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defined by difference</td>
<td>13/14</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living a lie</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self reflection and conflict</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts of suicide</td>
<td>7/14</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling oneself</td>
<td>7/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom and pride</td>
<td>10/14</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholeness and integrity</td>
<td>12/14</td>
<td>75%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes relevant to Visibility</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipation</td>
<td>13/14</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility with heteros</td>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility with gays</td>
<td>8/14</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>6/14</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings tabulated in Table 3 provide a simple enumerated collation of the vast amount of qualitative information found. In qualitative research, enumeration is a way to summarize results. It is often used as a simple way of illustrating quantitative aspects of data in contemporary qualitative research. Here I simply note the number of participants who report particular experiences relevant to the emerging themes. For example 12 out of 14 players experienced ostracism and bullying within mainstream rugby organisations. Although this is not a quantitative analysis, it was deemed worthwhile to provide the reader with some basic information regarding how often particular themes appeared and were referred to. In short, they are another way of summarising the participants’ experiences. As such, they have been categorised quantitatively to help summarise with more clarity their utility and relevance in the analysis of the participants’ common experiences as they emerged from reading the data.

The clustering and synthesizing of categories were used to discover themes among the participants. The themes shared help to confirm aspects of the Conspiracy of Silence Model and provide valuable insights into how they concealed their sexual orientation within the mainstream sport experience.

The themes that have emerged are presented chronologically in this section, that is, they follow the theoretical framework (Conspiracy of Silence Model) used in this study. They are introduced in accordance with the two tenets presented in the Conspiracy of Silence Model: oppression and identity management theories as they relate directly to the phenomenological understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. They both served in directing the interview questions that asked the participants how they experienced (felt about) being gay rugby players in a mainstream sport organisation. Such questions are guided by the phenomenological methodology chosen for this enquiry that searches for a better understanding of the phenomenon of silence. The two other tenets of the Conspiracy of Silence Model: hegemonic heterosexuality and spiral of silence theory serve to explain why gay male athletes are silenced. Although they are part of the model and do assist in the
holistic understanding of the Conspiracy of Silence, they did not direct the interview guide; for such causal questions do not reflect the phenomenological process of analysing lived experiences. In other words, as phenomenology is grounded in the lived experiences of participants, I focus my attention during data collection on the ways silence is produced. In turn, the data supplied will assist in establishing the possible sources of its existence. The sources are then addressed in the following chapter within the discussion of the phenomenon findings. They are important factors in the lived experiences of participants and must be included in the discussion as essential to the entire understanding of the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon using the Conspiracy of Silence model theoretical framework. Presenting themes using this format enables the reader to follow the model more clearly as it unfolds with the participants’ accounts of their lived experiences as gay male rugby players.

The sequence of themes introduced in Table 3 is purposefully presented in accordance with the players’ degree of silence and visibility. Placing themes within this continuum assists in understanding where silence may most be produced and experienced during the players’ coming out process. This does not mean however, that all players’ experiences follow this sequence. For example, some players may have had feelings of alienation before having experienced ostracism and bullying. Also, themes relevant to identity management strategies may have coincided in time with experiences relevant to oppression theory. Therefore, the challenge in this section was to introduce the data as clearly as possible given the intertextuality of the lived experiences of each participant. Table 3 serves mainly as a guideline for the reader. Hence, the focus in this section rests upon the presentation of data in a clear and concise manner in order for the reader to understand the factors that contribute to the production of silence.

I continue this chapter by initially presenting emerging themes relevant to oppression theory, then I continue with emerging themes relevant to identity management strategies and I finish the chapter with data relevant to the visibility of gay rugby players.
Emerging Themes Relevant to Oppression Theory

In this section, the key factors relevant to oppression theory are clearly presented in relation to the participants’ experiences within sport in general and in rugby in particular. Examples of ostracism, bullying, fear of exclusion, isolation, victimisation, powerlessness, invisibility, feelings of alienation, loneliness, over-achievement, and acts of hyper-masculinity are given. Similar and sometimes contradictory behaviours experienced by the participants in this study are grouped into themes relevant to oppression theory. The complexity of their relationship to the silencing of gay rugby players is discussed in the following chapter.

Ostracism and bullying:

Physical and verbal abuse and intimidation were common experiences among all gay rugby players either directly or indirectly. The terms ‘faggot’, ‘queer’, ‘poofer’, ‘gay’ and ‘homo’ made their appearance in the lives of these participants well before their adolescence. The negative effects of these derogatory comments play a major role in forming the association of being gay with the feelings of shame; often well before their sexual awareness had even developed. In this sense, most gay men in this study learned that being gay was shameful before they had learned they were gay. The data show that all players would have liked to experience playing rugby without the feelings of being afraid of being found out or of being harassed when and if they became open about their sexuality. Such homophobia was audible and visible and is a key component of discrimination against these gay athletes. Even if heterosexism seemed to be less visible than homophobia, it is nonetheless a powerful phenomenon in the lives of this group of men. It is seen as a form of punishment for being gay and experiencing homoerotic desire. This formulation is tacitly accepted to the point that it is simply an underlying given, unspoken in institutions such as sport where the heterosexuality of all is taken for granted. Any deviation from this unspoken identity (heterosexuality) is seen as abnormal, especially for the rugby players (Flowers and Buston, 2001).
Most participants in this study experienced incidences of derogatory and homophobic slurs. Val, Henri and Ron give examples of how they felt about rugby when hearing derogatory terms. Parts of the quoted sections are bold-faced for added emphasis and clarity.

#2 Val: [I remember]... the stigma [of being gay] and that sort of thing was pushed around secondary schools ... I mean if anybody was suspected of [being gay] there was a lot of ridicule and pressure. They’d make comments, those ignorant schoolboys’ comments you know, ‘back against the wall boys’ and all this sort of carry on.

#11 Henri: When we were left alone without teachers there were some [other rugby players] who would play up, it wasn’t great. I seem to remember it was something I did not look forward to.

#3 Ron: The main reason I gave up [playing rugby] was that I actually didn’t like the people I was playing with because they were classic, macho, male, New Zealand rugby heads and at teenage years I think that’s actually even worse when I wasn’t confident. Kids can use pretty unfortunate sort of language and their general behaviour. It just didn’t do anything for me. The way they view women even at that age, I didn’t like. The first 15 and the second 15’ seemed to get a mixture of some reasonably good players who perhaps weren’t interested in playing for the first 15. Some other people weren’t that good but were just there cause they just played rugby, they were thugs, they would have no problem in trampling all over guys from our team let alone people from the other team. But it was generally the [negative] attitude for me because I knew I was gay and I knew I didn’t feel like I was fitting in with them. In general, I didn’t like the culture and the ethos that went with the rugby set. It was homophobic. Rumours started to fly when I was in seventh form and some of the guys in the rugby team had obviously picked on them. And there were things that were said in the changing rooms and sort of comments and body language whatever you like that were horrific, and that really contributed to me not enjoying that period in my life. It was actually quite racist in [my home town] as well. It was the general culture I didn’t relate to. I got to university, there was another world there that was different, and it was a formidable world and the arts world. And so I walked away from rugby very happily. Still kept watching it and supporting it, but walked away from [playing it]. I was never going to be an All Black and I was never going to be in a rep team and anything like that, why else would you play, you play because you get on, for social reasons, I didn’t like the people, there was no point in playing anymore.

Pete explains clearly how he dealt with being a victim of bullying in school; Ron and Jake give accounts of gay bashings in public.

#5 Pete: By the time I got to school, you see, I was already a victim. On my first day at school I was harassed by this rugby player who I always hated, he chased me around the school with a dead crab and rather than stand there and slug him on the face, of course I ran because I’m a victim ... he obviously had the power, he had the upper hand.
#3 Ron: I got beaten up when I moved to Wellington. I was wandering down the road with [my boyfriend], it was late and we were drunk and we were holding hands, and I didn’t think anyone was around and I got a decent punch in the mouth.

#13 Jake: I use to get into punch-ups after school all the time. It was always me against the rugby players. I remember one time coming home from practice, I came across one of those fat guys at school who was just abusing me verbally you know in front of other guys, so I just got sick of it eh! One day, I fuckin’ punched him in the gut as hard as I could with my eyes closed... and then ran!

Ron also shared quite candidly an incidence of ostracism at home from his parents.

#3 Ron: I remember playing a game and not being a particularly successful game for the rugby team that I was [part of]. I remember coming home and I was having a shower and I overheard my father say to my mother that I was useless, that I was absolutely useless. I got out of the shower and I said to him, that’s really awful, you know, saying something like that. And they said that people like myself can’t be good rugby players, that I was best to try something else. I hadn’t thought of that until today.

However not all participants experienced ostracism in the same way. Bernie recalls an incident where, in his presence, heterosexual rugby players dealt with homophobic slurs positively.

#4 Bernie: One of these guys from the under 21 team, they were at the club rooms, they had finished their drinks, it was sort of like about 7:30pm at the end of the night, the clubroom usually closes at 8 o’clock and they usually all shoot off to either one of the local pubs. At that time my friend and his younger brother, owned one of the best pubs in town at that moment definitely. So everybody said: ‘Oh let’s go back to the bar’ and this young guy said oh something sarcastic like: ‘Let’s go back to the, the gay bar’ or something like that and one of the senior players took offence to [the homophobic comment] and actually knocked him out. Just, hit him and knocked him out. And then, I’d heard about it because they all came back to the pub and this young guy came there about two weeks later and apologised to me about what he had said and that he didn’t mean it in a demeaning way he just meant it sarcastically, funny but it was taken the wrong way. In a way I felt good that the senior player stood up for me but he went a bit overboard, he didn’t need to do that, didn’t need to hit the under 21 player, he just needed to talk to him. All people need to do is talk!”
Some men in this study never encountered homophobia directly. Sam and Marc remember hearing gay slurs especially within their rugby team. Many of these slurs inhibited players from identifying themselves as gay to their rugby team.

#8 Sam: *I really haven’t experienced a lot of homophobia. I guess the only experiences I have had was when I was playing rugby, when the guys would joke around and call each other poofs and faggots* but that’s about it. *There were never any effeminate guys at our school.*

#10 Marc: *I can’t say that I really experienced any physical or verbal abuse, because no one knew I was gay.* However, one of the main reasons I never told anyone was because I was afraid of what my rugby mates would have thought of me. *I wasn’t prepared to take the risk that I would lose my friends because of it, and I’m quite sure there would have been quite a bit of verbal abuse [directed towards me] at least if people had found out.*

Homophobic acts of ostracism and bullying are the fundamental building blocks of the shame experienced by most gay men. According to Ryan (1988), shame typically appears in a variety of forms that are universal and distinctive. The following themes are forms of shame experienced by most participants in this study. Shame is present in each one, along with additional features that together make the overall experience feel distinctly different from one to another. As shame fuels hatred towards oneself it also fuels hatred towards others. Shame is the affect from which all stigmas and taboos spring. These attitudes and values are deeply rooted in the theological, moral and legal traditions of our culture, and are still pervasive.

As I continue to present themes relevant to oppression theory in this section, I do so by keeping in mind the sources of shame present in all experiences of oppression and bullying related to homophobia.

**Exclusion and fear of exclusion:**

It is important to remember that identity disclosure brings with it high risks. Within the sport context, the threat of harassment can be magnified for gay rugby players because as I have shown, disclosure can also lead to exclusion from the team, exclusion being their biggest fear of all. Examples of exclusion are given when a gay rugby player is not welcomed within
the organisation because of his sexuality. He is not given the chance to prove himself as an equal member of any mainstream team. Many of the participants in this study were excluded from team sports because of the perception of being gay, especially during their schooling years. As young men, some participants in this study could not escape the disciplinary powers associated with the dominating discursive practice of rugby and manliness. Although some were not directly coerced to act in a particular manner, they were soon influenced by the exclusive subjective masculinity that was heavily shaped by the rugby context. Indeed, as stated by Moore (1998) the disciplinary power of rugby places meticulous control on one’s bodily actions. In simpler terms, the participants in this study felt the need to conform to heterosexual behaviours expected in the context of rugby organisations or face exclusion from their team and organisation. For those who did not experience blatant exclusion, they did fear exclusion nonetheless. For example, Val and Leo were literally excluded because they were perceived as being gay.

#2 Val: I lost my job for coming out because the guy ... who was the club president who employed the pro... rang my agent and said: ‘We don’t want a guy like that in our club.’ I’d never done anything, you know, I mean he just out of nowhere thought I was gay. I wasn’t you know, wasn’t practicing anything, I mean I was there to coach and play and I was basically celibate. You know not very easy in a small town. [Overall] I lost four coaching jobs [during my career] because I was gay because a couple of parents found out and didn’t want their kid coached by a you know what? Maybe more, which I don’t know, no one’s ever going to admit it. I mean it’s illegal now anyway but you know I’m 99.9% percent sure [being gay was the reason] but that’s life’s experiences it’s going to happen. People have prejudices.

#9 Leo: When we played rugby at school I was angry at the people who were good at playing sports. They would play badly with you so that you wouldn’t be able to participate. They would … make it intentionally unpleasant for you to participate. They’d intentionally exclude me.

Others, such as Marc, lived in constant fear of being excluded from rugby if someone within the rugby organisations ever found out they were gay. Being accepted by their teammates was more important than being true to themselves.

#10 Marc: You always want to be the same as your friends - or at least I did when I was growing up, I didn't really want to be different, and I certainly
didn’t want to be excluded from rugby because I am gay. I loved playing the game and I was bloody good too. I didn’t want to be ‘not gay’, but I also didn’t want to give up rugby and other ‘normal’ things. I didn’t ‘feel gay’ except I liked having sex with guys.

For other participants, exclusion was self-imposed because of their individual interests coming into conflict with the general interest of other team members. Their inability to feel ‘engaged’ in a heterosexual team is best expressed by Art who explains the difference he felt when playing with gay players as opposed to playing on a mainstream team.

#1 Art: It’s the stuff that goes on in the shed beforehand [during] the training, on the tube to the game, it’s gay stuff, boys talking about boys that they know, as opposed to the mainstream teams where the boys are talking about chicks and what they did [with them]. Part of that meant you didn’t have to disengage. 
I think [self-exclusion] was my response … with the mainstream teams when they get on to the heterosexual, macho banter. As a gay person … I thought, ‘hey this isn’t quite me’, and disengage, bow the head, just not get involved. That’s sad because [I] wasn’t really getting the whole benefit of that team, that community.

Pete also excluded himself from mainstream rugby because he did not want to conform to the heterosexual norms he felt were imposed on him within the context of rugby.

#5 Pete: I excluded myself from rugby really. I guess it was the image … To be somebody, in order to be recognised [accepted] as a person you had to play sport and mainly one of those sports was rugby. In my later adolescence, it was because I needed to play that sport that was precisely the reason I refused to play it. … I would not be put in this place where people are going to be run like that… sport was just incredibly threatening… the messages that were portrayed on the field and in training as a contact sport [were very exclusive to me].

Certain participants, such as Ron, excluded themselves from playing with mainstream players by choosing players they felt were non threatening.

#3 Ron: When I was in sixth and seventh form … the problems [associated with being gay] should have been worse because people were starting to talk about it, but it was better because at my school we were given freedom to do what was called a recreation period. We were free to do what ever we wanted. So I’d go out and play touch rugby or whatever and it would be with a group of people that I’d … choose players who I thought might be my friends.

Others, such as Leo, excluded themselves because of their feelings of inadequacy and unacceptance based on their lack of playing ability.
#9 Leo: If I had been stronger, when I was at University I probably would have taken more notice to [mainstream rugby]. … I mean when I was young I played badly and that didn’t make me want to [play rugby]. When I look back on it now I should have participated more I would have been OK.

Fear of exclusion from rugby is the predominant feeling of most participants in this study. Jake and Sione express this feeling most vividly in the following quotes.

#13 Jake: **Being humiliated and not being able to play team sports are my biggest fears.** Whenever I walk in to a change room, I’m always expecting someone to say: ‘Get out of here you poofster.’ I’m really scared of that, cause I really like the guys in my teams and I think the shame of it all would just be really devastating.

#14 Sione: **Oh bro, that’s why I can’t say anything to anyone, [about being gay] eh?**

The selected sample of quotes demonstrates both the existence of exclusion and the fear of exclusion among the participants in this study. Although experienced in a range of ways, exclusion and the fear of exclusion are complex behaviours and sentiments that result from the existence of an oppressive environment. In this case, homophobia witnessed in society in general and in the context of rugby is a contributing element in the conspiracy of silence of gay male rugby players.

**Isolation and invisibility:**

The fear of exclusion from rugby created a climate of silence that in turn became very isolating for the participants. Publicly criticising the oppressive nature of homophobia in rugby was not an option for the participants. Few, if any, attempted to openly criticise and or change the status quo of the generally homophobic rugby context they had experienced. As young teenagers and young men they worried in silence about being found out. Therefore, not only did the silence isolate them from other players, friends and family, it also unfortunately isolated them from each other. Pete, Andy, Henri and Jake express clearly the relationship between silence and isolation. As for many other gay male athletes in sport, these men
knowingly isolated themselves in fear of being stigmatised. Pete’s quote in particular clearly confirms literature on individual versus team sport gay male athletes.

#5 Pete: It was always a very threatening thing for me to play sport unless it was a singularly competitive sports where I was an island. Because by that stage I had learnt to isolate [myself] anyway and I’m a very good isolator, I learnt to be able to be independent and not dependent of other people, so team sports was something that isolated me.

#7 Andy: I’ve never experienced any form of homophobia you see, that’s why I kept to myself so I wouldn’t have to deal with it. So I was protecting myself by isolating myself from [other] people. So I didn’t have to deal with it.

#11 Henri: At that time, I thought it was a sickness that was the way it was taught to me at that time, that’s the way my mother had talked about it so I mean, OK, well, this is the way I am, it’s sad but I guess you just keep it to yourself.

#13 Jake: I’ve never ever come across any other gay guys on my teams, any team. But I do wonder about some of them, one in particular who always use to call everybody ‘fag boy’. It seemed like if it was always on his mind for some reason. He was the biggest and the only one of our minor team players to make it to the premier level.

Nevertheless, some participants such as Bernie have attempted to communicate with other gay males. However, as Bernie encountered, even knowing, or suspecting someone else of being gay is still not a solution for eradicating the silence and isolation. In this instance, even if one knows of the existence of another gay male, he may still choose to remain silent about his sexual orientation.

#4 Bernie: [My older brother’s son is gay, my nephew]. I remember going to his 21st a Tangi up North. I picked him and his sister up and we went up to the Tangi. On our way up, I was talking to him about my stay in Sydney, living with my boyfriend and me being gay and he says: ‘Yes, dad told me about it and …that’s really cool … live your life be who you are and so on, and so on.’ I said: ‘Yes and what about you? Are you living your life and being who you are?’ And he says: ‘Yes I am uncle. I said that’s great and if you ever want to talk to me about anything you know I’ll always be there for you.’ He hasn’t said anything and I’ve even asked his father, I said: ‘What’s up with your son?’ He goes: ‘Oh I don’t know, I don’t know.’ and he just left it at that.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of gay men in sport, some participants in this study, such as Sione, Sam, Marc, and Ron, still felt very much alone on their teams and hence, contribute to their own isolation.
#14 Sione: I really think I'm the only one bro!

#8 Sam: There were definitely no other gay guys on our team, that I know of anyway. I was too worried about myself being gay rather than anybody else.

#10 Marc: I definitely worried about anyone else finding out that I was gay, I wouldn't have been able to look my friends in the face. When I was about seventeen I was really surprised to find out that one of my teammates was gay too, but we made sure that no one else knew about it. No one 'came out' in those days - it simply wasn't an option! Isolation didn't really come into it - you just made sure no one got to know.

#3 Ron: I didn't know of any other gay guys at school except for my friend and that was a problem I think. There were a couple of guys that were in different sports teams. I sort of probably thought were gay but I didn't know about them

Messner (1992) wrote that the extent of homophobia in the sports world is staggering. Boys [in sport] learn early that to be gay, to be suspected as gay, or even to be unable to prove one’s heterosexual status is not acceptable. Therefore, they do little to end their silence. Undoubtedly, the context of sport in general and in this case the context of rugby particularly remains very isolating for gay male athletes and that they should not be seen as the single agents of their isolation. The following section provides data relevant to gay and heterosexual men as actors in the conspiracy of silence. The significance of this information is that it reveals the existence of many men who engage in sexual activities with gay men but choose to identify as heterosexual. Ostensibly, they are major contributors to the invisibility of gay men in sport.

Victims, agents and heterosexual men:

Multiple instances of the victimisation of gay rugby players have been recorded in this chapter thus far. Examples of ostracism, exclusion, or isolation are common. Whilst the victimisation of gay rugby players from non-gay rugby players is apparent, further analysis of this theme shows that some gay players may be agents of their own victimisation. Furthermore, some gay rugby players may play the double role as victims as well as agents of homophobia. Men who identify as heterosexual but who have sexual intercourse with other
men are discussed in this section. Several accounts of this theme are presented in light of the fact that hegemonic masculinity is an important factor in the silencing behaviour of gay men and men who identify as heterosexual.

Perhaps the most common example of gay rugby players being victims comes from their need to pretend to be heterosexual. They must sometimes demonstrate their heterosexuality and in doing so become even more invisible and silenced in mainstream rugby organisations. This is not to say that they should be blamed for their actions. The dominant cultures’ power to have them conform to instances of hegemonic heterosexuality must not be ignored. Marc gives a pertinent example of how he felt the need to act like other rugby players in the following quote.

#10 Marc: *We all occasionally made fun of 'homos', and I probably joined in just like everyone else. I guess I tried to play the game, and I tried to go through the whole 'girlfriend' thing as well. I had plenty of girlfriends, but things weren't quite so promiscuous in those days so it wasn't too difficult. In fact, I was probably having twice as much sex as my straight mates, except mine was with guys. Even in my 30's I can remember going to a whorehouse when we were on a rugby tour just because the other guys did. It wasn't exactly a great experience and it certainly wasn't fulfilling! However, it kept my image intact with the team. Hard to believe now that I did this, but I wouldn't have considered any other option then. Rugby was too important to me to jeopardize it by letting the others know I was gay."

Furthermore, the most common example of gay rugby players being agents is that of Sione who more often than not felt the need to be homophobic himself towards other gay men. On many occasions, he was physically and verbally abusive towards other gay men. Such acts are provoked by latent homophobia and serve to camouflage his sexual orientation. In a sense, many gay men, such as Sione transform themselves in very assertive ways when dealing with the pressures of homophobia. I would suggest the use of a term such as ‘chameleon’ to best express how gay men render inconspicuous their true sexual orientation.

#14 Sione: *For some reason I was part of those pack of blokes taking the piss out of the un-sporty guys in school. Being one of the bigger guys in school, nobody ever really gave me any grief, yeah, yeah bro!"
#14 Sione: I remember a few years back, there was this gay picnic organized in my hometown, in the botanic gardens. I tried rounding up a bunch of my rugby mates to go and punch ‘em up… nobody else wanted to come, so I didn’t go in the end, but the intention was there, eh!”

Others, like Jeep, would not act against or oppose abusive behaviour when being witnesses to it.

#6 Jeep: I’ve witnessed situations where some classmates or buddies were shunned or called sissy. I suppose half the time I would have been in agreement and the other half the time I felt sorry so it’s kind a like half and half as though, it was kind of my feminine half. I would think: Jesus what a sissy you know!

Val’s example of his attempts at homophobic humour is another prime example of gay men being agents of a homophobic discourse.

#2 Val: I found acceptance through humour. I mean I make jokes about myself and I make an after match function speech at our [mainstream] club and everybody laughs cause I mean it’s a joke at my own expense. [But] I must admit I came out with all the fag jokes and all that sort of stuff when I was at school. Even though I knew, [I was really laughing at myself].

As in Ron’s and Pete’s examples, many players in this study admitted to playing rugby in order to hide their sexuality. This in itself is a prime example of gay men being agents of their own silence. Hekma (1998) found that the gay athletes in her study also often viewed their silencing as normal and accepted a negotiated, segmented identity that contributed to their own culture of silence.

#3 Ron: I think sport had a lot to do with my [denial]. Playing rugby was an excellent way of hiding my homosexuality. Homosexuals don’t play rugby; end of story. I know it’s not why I played but it was a good way of being invisible, and I know for various reasons I can cite teams to you, I could in fact tell you almost anything you want to know about a sport at anytime, any where in the world and that was always useful as well. And you know, cause you wouldn’t know that much about sport if you were gay, gay people aren’t interested in sport, I mean, particularly teenagers. So that was a good way of hiding it. The fact that I don’t consider myself to be particularly camp in any way at all really, you know, so that helps hide it. Just denying it, just denying it to yourself and others is a good way of hiding. But I think we all employ various strategies to do that.
#5 Pete: I wasn’t doing it [playing rugby] because of the love of sport, I was doing it because I knew it would be another feather in my cap, very [calculating] person, I am. I didn’t necessarily enjoy it but I did get a lot of kudos out of playing and a lot more acceptance. And I was sort of playing these cards really, because before that I was such a loner, I mean, I never had friends really right through school it was like, always being alone. I also got very popular at that stage because we were going out drinking every weekend. Yeah drinking every weekend and playing rugby on Saturday, you know, school rugby. And of course we became even more popular at that stage. We got drunk, we went to school, but we still managed to make it to rugby practice. It was sweet, we joined in the pack, and everything was fine. It was all just a big fuckin’ game really. It’s all about getting approval. So it was just this big part of a big rebellion and a big escape I suppose from being gay.

Other participants considered themselves victims even in the absence of homophobic actions or discourse. Leo recalls incidences when he felt scared by what he perceived as danger.

#9 Leo: Sometimes I do feel scared. Like skinheads for example or people whom you perceived to be bigoted and not very safe and it’s kind of like eternalized. So people like that can sort of make you feel scared without physically doing anything. And I’m not sure if there is a lot you can do, just because you perceived that somebody could be a danger to you doesn’t mean that they are so there’s no way that you can do anything. It’s like they’re not physically doing anything wrong.

Examples of sexual abuse among gay men were also noted in this study. In the following excerpt Art recalls an incident with one of his coaches who abused his position of authority. Even if these men were consenting, the existence of dominance and power of authority does define these actions as abusive. In a heterosexual context, this would be considered a blatant act of sexual harassment. Art is regretful of the incident.

#1 Art: I’d probably be naive to say no [at being a victim after scoring my coach] … I mean at that stage, I was feeling reasonably strong … and … it wasn’t forced on me, it wasn’t pressured on to me, it was something that I guess I was looking for a wee bit. But … in hindsight it concerns me and it’s something that actually put me off, for I preferred not to have done it because I don’t like to get involved with those sorts of issues, yeah!
Viewing it from a different perspective, Bernie and Art best express in their own words how some gay men are agents of their victimisation. It may be possible that some gay men are not actually victims of homophobia even if they think they are.

#4 Bernie: Well I think you’ve got to accept in yourself firstly and realise that people may not accept you, not only because you’re gay but because of who you are or what you are. If you’re a sort of sad lonely sort of person well not many people are going to like you anyway cause you just don’t have anything that they can feel warm towards. Being gay is not a bad thing as long as you realize that if people don’t like you it’s not because you’re gay, it’s because you’re you. Being gay is not an excuse to hold back, I mean if anyone is interested in sports then they should follow that regardless of being gay.

#1 Art: People dislike it, perhaps [are] even mortified and I think the sole reason they do it is because they don’t have the person’s perspective. For me I’ve found that people can hate gay people in the abstract and all that type of thing but until, the moment they find a person they know that is gay, they know they can’t take them and they, and I think, yeah, I just see so many homophobic people change once they have experiences with gay people, you know, and that’s why I thinks it important the gay people get out now, I think provide an opportunity for homophobic or straight people to, and they’ve got to come out and accept gay people generally and we’ve got to provide them the bridge for them to do that. And it’s got to be, it’s a personal bridge.

Andy also recalls multiple instances when he senses opposition to his sexuality, when admittedly, it may not even be there.

#7 Andy: “I’m the cause of my own problems cause I get so wound up about what other people think of me … It’s so stupid, I’ve got to get over that.

Nevertheless, Pete explains the need for gay men to stand up and be counted as equals to non-gay men. In his statement, he indicates his reasoning for the silencing of gay men. They are as much victims as they are agents of the silence. In his argument, Pete parallels the oppression of gay men in the context of sport to that of gay men in certain religions and cultures. It highlights the idea of a recognition of identity politics and an ‘affinity of oppression’, that is, one oppressed group identifying/empathising with others. Many gay men see their experiences of homophobia as beneficial to the understanding of other forms of oppression directed towards other social groups.
#5 Pete: I get really tired of the Christian attitude. Which is basically homophilic. You know Bible-based homophobia really isn’t on. I’ve been a victim of that for a long time and now I’m quite angry towards it and I do speak out against it and always will. It makes me angry because it drives us back into a place where as homosexuals we can’t afford to be. It drives us back into the shadows and into the place where darker deeds happen. And it’s like any other minority culture. You take away enough of people’s self-esteem and that particular group of people ends up to be particularly dysfunctional, you know. You deprive Māori of land and of their rights and of their Mana and they end up as alcoholics, abusers and in jails, disproportionately misrepresented. You do the same to the American Indians, the Aborigines and every minority culture; it turns out to be this huge fuckin’ problem. And I think it’s the same within gay culture, if you push them back into the shadows, you push them back into the existence of shame, the existence of worthlessness that make them feel less than they are then they start taking it out against themselves. There are enough of us out there who do that, in that world anyway, and we need to come out of that space and into the healthy light.

Admittedly, gay men are victims of homophobia in sport and in rugby more specifically. This section was intended to expose some instances of gay men being agents of their victimization. More importantly, this theme exposes multiple instances where gay men remain silent and their silence is the greatest cause of their invisibility. Sione best summarises this statement in his quote.

#14 Sione: Never a victim of others, just a victim of myself!

Although sport actually provides a legitimate space in which males can express feelings to each other, homophobic attitudes act to rigidly limit the extent of such expression. By adopting these unwritten rules, some gay athletes feel they have no choices or alternatives and become agents of such homophobia and contribute to the silence of gay male athletes in general. The competing discourses that surrounded rugby for these men and the more general discourses of being gay impacted on their own subjectivity. Unknown to most participants was a life experienced through contradictions. On one hand they wanted to play rugby, but on the other they couldn’t be like the other rugby players. This added to their inner tensions of being gay. Still today many find it difficult to fully escape their self-imposed and regimented
behavior and live a life free of contradiction, tension and fragmentation. Bernie and Jake’s quotes best sum up the theme of victims and agents, by acknowledging that some gay players are their own worst enemies.

**#4 Bernie:** I guess the biggest thing in being gay is facing that issue straight away. How they go about it is, I guess is up to them. Being comfortable with who you are I guess, expressing those sorts of feelings that you want to is possible. There is support out there as much from the straight community as the gay community. I have never had to use them but they are there for support if someone needs guidance coming out. Like people need to … not only challenge themselves but have the courage to challenge others.

**#13 Jake:** In a lighter sense, it’s who makes the first move that counts. The NZRU, for example, think we don’t exist cause we haven’t shown them. We need to put them to the test. It’s the chicken and egg thing again. They are the chickens and we are the egg waiting to hatch. All we need is to be mothered a little by the chickens and we’ll hatch.

It was not uncommon for the participants in this study to have had sexual experiences with men who identified as heterosexual and/or who were in heterosexual relationships. Acts such as these practiced under the veil of rituals and traditions within rugby are presented in this section. That is, some men may use the context of sport as a means of acquiring intimacy with other men and/or for the object of same sex pretences that would otherwise be unacceptable elsewhere. Men who identify as heterosexual but engage in sexual acts with other men may be seen as agents of silence and have a negative effect on the lives of men who identify as gay. Understandably, it is difficult to give general statistics of the numbers of heterosexual or bisexual identifying men who engage in sexual acts with other men. Nevertheless, it is important to show that they exist and that many heterosexual men within the context of rugby have sexual experiences with other men. We may assume that their behaviour is not common knowledge within their rugby organisation and therefore these silent actions do affect the lives of young gay male rugby players who remain isolated and invisible.
The following quotes from Ron, Bernie, and Jeep serve as testimonials to the fact that within the heterosexual confines of rugby, some heterosexual identifying men do engage in sexual acts with other men.

#3 Ron: My first sexual experience was in that sort of 13 to 14 year old period with another guy at school. He was a sporting guy too; in fact that’s how I knew him. We both played rugby and cricket together he was like, he was like that movie Stand By Me with Stephen King when they say, the best friends you have are the one’s you have when you’re 12, and he was that kind of guy, he was the first, we were totally inseparable. He’s straight and he’s now married actually.

#4 Bernie: My first sexual encounter [with someone else] was with one of my brothers’ straight rugby friends. I didn’t know what he was doing at the time. I was 9 or 10 something like that. He would have been 16 or 17, cause my brothers were 7 years older than me. Their mates use to sleep over at our house and obviously bunk up you know where there’s a bed we’d bunk up together sort of thing so one of their mates jumped in bed with me. I was fast asleep at the time so didn’t realise that he’d jumped but he’d obviously had intentions I wasn’t aware of. In the morning, I woke up and yeah he was fondling me it was great so I just let it happen and enjoyed it. It was the first time anyone had actually done it to me.

#6 Jeep: I had a 6 year relationship through high school, we both played first 15 rugby. It started in 3rd form school camp. I was really close to this guy and I was always quite a good manipulator, even though I didn’t know it at the time. Anyway we got it on ‘till the end of high school. We carried this on all over the place, my place, his place, behind the bike sheds to phrase a corny tune, but, oh God, public reserves, beaches, etc. We both ended up going to Massey University, where there’s a very conservative gay life style. So I just went: ‘Right! We’ve got to finish this, this is no good’, because it was fundamentally a relationship with a straight guy. I just thought he was getting his rocks off and it was heading up being a huge one-way thing, I think.

Although sexual encounters with heterosexual men were common for many of the participants in this study, it is important to note that these encounters or experiences were not always positive for certain players. Ron and Andy give accounts of instances when their experiences with men who identified as heterosexual were negative and sometimes dangerous. Undoubtedly, men who engage in sexual acts with other men could be considered gay men. However, the data from this study shows that many men who engage in sexual acts with other men do not identify as gay. This is possibly a considerable part of the production
and manifestation of the phenomenon of silence within sport in general and rugby in particular.

#3 Ron: … In the 6th form, when I met an older guy I got introduced to a whole lot of gay guys … I had various sexual encounters with straight men at a seedy nightclub. That nightclub is closed now; we had sex out the back, in the cleaning cupboard. It was …on Rattray Street. It’s been demolished; it’s where the big Southern Cross Hotel is. It was a horrible nightclub, just the most seedy thing. It was a straight nightclub and you used to have women dancing in cages and things, it was the most disgusting place. But if you went there on a week night it used to stay open fairly late ... I’d go to bed on say a Wednesday night about 10:30 pm or something and about an hour later I’d get up and go out. I’d go into town and I’d usually meet up with this guy, this older guy and met some of his friends, or later on just met guys myself and just went to the Tai Pai and the guy who owned it would show you out the back if that’s where you wanted to go. But it was ugly stuff and I actually don’t really like thinking about it.

#7 Andy: I actually hadn’t told anybody that I was gay until I had my first sexual experience with an older straight man in his 30’s. I worked with [him] when I was 19. I hadn’t had any form of sexual experience prior to that. Basically we were working as couriers and we had Friday night drinks and I had a little bit too much to drink one Friday and he said he’d take me home. I got in his car and I said: ‘Oh look I’m going to throw up, please pull the car over.’ So he pulled the car over, I opened the door and I was trying to reach out the car door when he started to grope me basically. And he just said: ‘Well do you like it?’ I didn’t say anything and so that was sort of taken as a yes. But yeah to be totally honest I was thinking, my God finally, it’s finally happening, wow so this is what it’s like. We spent about half an hour in the car actually and then he dropped me off home. He said: ‘Look don’t worry, people do this all the time.’ He was obviously a bit worried that I’d freak out a little bit and I did. Cause I’d never actually physically or verbally affirmed [being gay] and this was proof of the pudding. ‘Yes!’, I told myself, ‘You really are gay’. That was the first time. When I saw him the next day, I actually felt sick, I didn’t know how to handle it. We worked together for the next 8 months. He was in a relationship with a woman so we’d sort of have a fling every once and a while but that didn’t really last. By the end, we sort of like didn’t do it anymore. I moved on to greener pastures.

Henri and Jake show instances where sexual encounters with married men and relatives also exist. Jake’s quote expresses clearly that some men who identify as heterosexual do enjoy sex with other men.

#11 Henri: My first sexual experience happened very late actually. I knew what my preferences were long before I did anything about it. I think I might have been 23 and that was with a guy who had been married with 2 kids and it was basically, he was drunk and so was I basically. I don’t think there was anything particularly great about it.
#13 Jake: My first sexual experience was with my brother in law, my older sister’s husband of 28 years. It was just before my Dad died, I was 11 and he was 24 or something. I realize, as an adult, that it could be considered statutory rape, but as an eleven-year-old boy, I was just too curious for my own good. It lasted a few years until I found someone else my own age. He’s still married to my sister and I feel bad every time I see her cause I love her a lot and feel that I’ve betrayed her, I feel like a hypocrite because of that fucker that should have, as an adult, known better. I asked him to tell her, but he refuses and it’s not my shit to tell her.

Powerlessness:

Human beings are unable to thrive without experiencing a sufficient degree of inner control over their own lives – power in a positive sense. Shame is a principle source of powerlessness for all people (Ryan, 1988). The affective responses to powerlessness are often experienced by great intensity: terror, rage, anguish, and humiliation. For some men in this study, feelings of powerlessness were experienced in the context of rugby as clearly described by Pete. His inabilities to perform in rugby combined with his intense degree of shame as a gay man fuelled his lack of self-worth to a point of unparalleled anxiety. He was tortured by fears of inadequacy. Some gay men, such as Pete, are so overcome by the pressures to conform to societal norms that they feel powerless in contributing to positive changes both in their world and that of others. In this sense, Pete expresses a feeling of emotional exhaustion, rather than a physical one.

#5 Pete: Once, I had to leave the field five minutes before [the end of practice]. We’d start with touch then we do training, then we finish with touch. It was a Wednesday, I taught PE all day, went to the gym, worked out for an hour and half and part of that work out involved my legs, hadn’t eaten much and then went to training and didn’t quite have the energy I wanted. When it came to the touch I kept dropping the ball. You know it would be passed and I’d drop it, passed and I’d do something to drop it and it got so bad that I got a panic attack, an anxiety attack and I was trying to hold it together and I just lost reality and then suddenly I just had to leave. I tried to stay on the field and I just couldn’t, I thought, oh man I’ve got to get out of here, you’ve just got to get out of here, and so I just fuckin’ ran, ran off the field. Locked myself in the toilets and just burst into tears, I was a mess. I was an absolute fuckin’ mess! Somehow, my whole self-esteem is tied up in sport and I can’t change it.
Many of the players in this study stated that they would like to have had the same opportunity in sport as mainstream players but did not feel they had the power to change the climate of rugby organisations on their own, especially when they were younger. Val gives a good example of his sense of powerlessness to change the context of his rugby experience.

#2 Val: Sport and being homosexual have not combined because the sport has been totally different than being part of the gay scene or meeting gay guys or partners or what have you, sport ... is probably a release as well but they haven’t been combined at all apart from those little experiences where little things have happened. Sport’s very straight, very straight. ... I think it’s changing but it has always been like that. I was brought up with it and with all the rugby I’ve played I mean there was no way I was coming out when I played senior rugby. That was really straight cause sport would have hindered me a lot. That’s why I was 30 before [I came out], before I had the confidence to do it.

Cultural models for living a life outside the mainstream pattern were practically non-existent for the men in this study. They learned to behave according to the norms of the dominant culture within which they grew up. They also learned from what they did not see; images from gay men living normal everyday lives. Loving gay relationships between male rugby players were absent during their upbringing. Jeep and Jake explain clearly how they felt powerless to speak out as a younger gay male player. Creating a positive and supportive sporting context would have assisted Jeep in particular with his personal turmoil as a gay rugby player.

#6 Jeep: I never admitted to being gay in my sporting scenes because I didn’t sense the support of the people around, the people that surrounded me that could’ve helped me cope with it. I only actually made the decision to come out once I had gathered lots of really special supportive people around me. I wish I had the confidence and support network and realised without going into denial that I was gay and I would have come out a lot sooner.

# 13 Jake: It’s like as if when a Māori kid doesn’t get the ball over and over again from the white kids, he complains that he doesn’t get the ball because of racism. He learnt to do so from home and in school, because it’s wrong. But the perceived to be gay or effeminate kid who doesn’t get the ball doesn’t know why, cause not only did he probably not figure it out yet and if he did he wouldn’t know how to challenge it anyway, cause he didn’t learn how, neither from his home nor his school or anywhere.
Some men in this study shared accounts of how they felt when support, or a sense of support, existed. For Ron, playing sport in a supportive environment gave him a sense of power and freedom that he had never experienced before.

"#3 Ron: Interestingly though, when I left school and went to varsity, I played squash, I met a couple of gay guys and they played squash and I thought that’s a really good way of meeting them and so I went and played squash with them. We sort of had this totally informal gay squash league in a way cause there were all these gay guys there who played. I finally felt a sense of belonging, free, and empowered." 

For some players, such as Andy, bringing about change was very difficult because they sensed they did not have the athletic ability to demand change. Consequently, Andy and others did not receive the same opportunities and privileges of playing sport as did other more able or mainstream athletes.

"#7 Andy: I played soccer when I was about 9 cause New Zealand got into the World Cup so soccer was just like really cool. So everybody started playing soccer and I did too. My skill level wasn’t really there and so I was put as goalie. I was scared of the ball. So I got all these soccer balls flying at me. I didn’t want to be there, so that’s probably why I didn’t really play soccer or didn’t play any sport cause I wasn’t really good at it when I was young. I had this fear of being hurt. I didn’t like hard objects being thrown or kicked at me. I was one of those kids that were last picked for any teams cause my hand and eye coordination was not very good. This wasn’t fair cause I just didn’t get to play any sports."

Powerlessness for most men in this study came from shame, fear and embarrassment. Sam explains plainly how the opinion of others was more important than his own. Many gay men feel powerless to change their fate when faced with the daunting perception of exclusionary opinions of others.

"#8 Sam: The last thing that I would ever do is stand up for who I really was at that time. I felt embarrassed, scared, and worried about my teammate’s reactions if they ever knew."

Anderson (2000) suggests that the clubs gay athletes play for, through informal restrictions placed upon them often actively silence openly gay athletes bringing forth powerlessness through invisibility. In this sense, gay rugby players do not share in the array of key social
allegiances, specific educational resources, and cultural support routinely established for other subcultures in sport. As much as they would like to change the homophobic climate of rugby organisations, gay male players themselves feel weakened by the lack of overt support given to them. In this context of fear and shame, Sione, as do others, expresses a strong sense of powerlessness.

#14 Sione: I dream of the day really, when something or someone would change all of this. I can’t see myself fronting up to the media or my officials, eh!

Most men in this study spent years always believing they were the only gay players on their rugby teams. Perpetually frightened of exclusion kept them from speaking out against the injustices committed towards them and others like them. Social isolation from each other cultivated feelings of loneliness and a sense of alienation to the sport of rugby.

**Feelings of loneliness and alienation:**

In the context of rugby organisations and for the clarity of this section, differences are made between loneliness and alienation. Although most players felt isolated from other gay players because of the lack of visibility of gay players, many players also felt a strong sense of loneliness because of this isolation. Their fear of ostracism and their sense of being different to others aggravated a sense of loneliness. Examples of loneliness are given in this section.

In the narratives that follow, feelings of alienation are highlighted because of the importance the gay men in this study attribute to sport. Even if feelings of loneliness and alienation are not part of the consequences or effects of silence, it is important to explore its existence. Because the social construction of masculine identity for sport and the feminine identity for gay men is so strong, gay athletes often feel estranged from their sporting organisation. I also focus on examples of alienation, where gay male players feel disengaged from the sport of rugby because of the homophobic climate which includes overt insults
directed towards them from other players or family members because they are perceived to be gay. Pete explains how he feels alienated from his own family because of their unacceptance of him being gay. He also recalls how alienating physical education classes were to him, which is an important point regarding how oppression impacts on physical education participation and ultimately one’s health. His loneliness is well documented in the following quote.

#5 Pete: My parents still have a great deal of shame over [my sexuality] but that’s their problem. That’s also the reason I won’t go back down to Christchurch any more, you know, because I get caught back up into that sense of loneliness and I get back onto the drugs and alcohol and yeah, it’s just horrendous. Christchurch is a place I just can’t go any more.

#5 Pete: [PE and sport] was such that if I mucked up it meant that I was no good and I couldn’t do it and so therefore I would not do it. Sport actually became something that I avoided, I really avoided because I hated it, it actually became this threatening thing to me, you know I found sport really fuckin’ threatening so every time it was PE it was threatening to my self-esteem, just threatened my whole security …so it was something that I just didn’t involve myself in.

Jake describes his frustrations when he feels alienated in the gym from mainstream players.

#13 Jake: When I’m at the gym sometimes, I get really upset, cause I train by myself and I look around checking out the other guys. We don’t really talk to each other, and every so often I get someone who gives me [what I think is] a homophobic look and I’d just like to beat his brains out. But worse than that is when I make eye contact with someone I think is gay and they just turn a blind eye as if we didn’t exist. That really pisses me off more. I feel like going up to him and saying: ‘Hey what’s your problem mate? Get real!’

From these examples, clear links between this theme and the theoretical framework are made. Silence comes from a strong sense of exclusion, isolation, and alienation. The most relentless feature in the lives of these gay men is a sense of isolation. The men described a strong sense of loneliness and isolation during their participation in mainstream sport organisations. Many of the men talked of feeling that they were the only person in their team(s) who felt as they did. Because of their feeling of isolation, the participants did not feel able to share their concerns with the people around them and were, at the time, unaware of other players in similar situations with whom they could have shared these concerns.
Kielwasser and Wolf (1992) suggest that lacking social networks, cultural legitimacy and political leverage, the gay (athlete) remains invisible and thus succumbs to profound isolation. Ron best describes his sense of isolation from others in the following quote. He also describes an instance where gay male rugby players may not only be alienated from their rugby organisation but by themselves as well.

#3 Ron: I just use to get really frustrated and upset with myself and and just in mundane domestic situations but the lying was something else that was going on inside of me. I remember sitting drunkenly beside a tree in a park somewhere sort of bashing my leg with a bit of wood or something sort of saying: ‘why me?’ Sometimes I use to just sit there and say to myself it would be so much easier if I was straight, just whenever I was in a difficult situation and didn’t feel comfortable about it, that’s when I got mostly alienated at myself.

In several instances, the men mentioned that there were times when they felt lonely, depressed, and afraid, especially because they could not speak to anyone about their concerns. They felt especially lonely when social activities with their teams revolved around heterosexual partnerships (i.e.: dances, movie nights, restaurants etc.) In fact, all they wanted to do is feel validated in the context of sport. Val best describes his isolation when he admits to wishing to be like everyone else.

#2 Val: You’re born that way. I mean I wouldn’t want to be gay. If I had a choice I’d want to be straight. Not probably now. I’m proud of who I am, I mean, self esteem but you know it’s a bastard, especially playing sport and all that sort of stuff. It’s a hell of a lot easier to be part of everybody else. [Being heterosexual would have] made life a lot easier.

Henri describes his loneliness in terms of his isolation from other gay rugby players or likeminded individuals and his unwillingness to be part of the stereotypical gay minority. He did not identify with the more visible effeminate gay students during his formative years when he played on his schools first fifteen rugby team.

#11 Henri: In my teen years, 16 to about 22, [being gay] was really related to being [part] of a minority and you know I didn’t really know anyone else like me that was gay. It was really related to being lonely. I never wanted to be lonely, so I never wanted to be gay.
In this final quote, Sione best describes his feelings of extreme loneliness by describing how vulnerable he feels at sharing his sexuality within the context of rugby he loves so much.

**#14 Sione:** Despite my love of the game and my fondness for my teammates … most of the time I just think about [being gay] in my own head, I wish I could share some of it with other players, but that’ll never happen. They can talk about their girl friends and kids, but I can’t see myself talking about my last date and everyone being cool about it. Not at all!

This last quote serves as a good introduction or link to the next section detailing accounts of over achievements and hyper-masculinity. Here we observe the shaping of a paradox for gay men in sport. On one hand they participate effectively, even excel, in a sport they love, and on the other hand they feel alienated and isolated by the same environment. As we will see, the production of a hyper-masculine image and an over achieving reputation not only serves as a form of acceptance for gay men within mainstream sport, but also serves as a catalyst for their invisibility and isolation from other gay players in particular and players, coaches, administrators and supporters in general.

**Over achievement and hyper-masculinity:**

“Out of fear of their own same-sex attractions, men strive toward hyper-masculine identity to prove their maleness, and most important their lack of attraction to other men, they adopt machismo behaviours and take on extreme masculine identities” (Rhoads 1994, p. 138).

The silencing of their desires, by the perceived lack of support, in the sporting context may mean that many traditional coping mechanisms which can alleviate stress are difficult to access (Meyer, 1995). Instead, maladaptive coping mechanisms may be adopted, including hyper masculine behaviour related to physical abuse and harassment of other players in order to hide (camouflage) their true identity. Marc gives an example of this in the following quote.

**#10 Marc:** I was probably an over-achiever in sport in general, not just in rugby, although I probably never really realised my full potential in any of the sports I played. I don’t know whether my over-achieving had anything to do with trying to compensate for being gay, but I think I always felt that if I did achieve in sport or in anything else that I was much less vulnerable if anyone found out that I was gay. I felt safer if I did well in school or in sport because it gave me some pluses to fall back on.
Former running back for the San Francisco 49ers, Washington Redskins, and other teams, David Kopay comments on the issue: “I was overcompensating, overworking, overachieving, because I didn’t want to be found out” (Kettman, 1998; p. 17). Bryant (2001) writes, that for the gay athletes who are better than average and have the confidence in their abilities and contributions to their team, this may lend support to their belief that because they are better, nobody will learn of their gay identity (p. 1). Former Australian NRL player Ian Roberts asserts that “it’s far easier [being gay] if you excelled at a sport” (Kershaw, 2001; p. 17). Hyper-masculine behaviour as expressed by some of the men in this study may be the result of shame-based behaviour where fear, distress, and rage are the most frequent reactions to it (Ryan, 1988). Sione and Sam give very good accounts of their hyper-masculine behaviour.

#14 Sione: Sometimes I don’t even know why I play sports. Most of the time it’s not cause I really love it, it’s just a way to keep in shape and keep up that masculine image you know. I like the acceptance it gives me, the harder I hit the more friends I get.

#8 Sam: I believe that being gay made me push even harder than I would if I wasn’t. I had to be stronger, faster, or jump higher than anybody else, by being better than everybody else I would be looked up to, as an athlete and not a pansy. I guess I was scared of people finding out, and even if they did, they would have to think twice about not letting me play because I was a good athlete.

To be accepted as a gay player on any mainstream teams, most participants in this study felt that the most important criteria of acceptance was to surpass mainstream players’ performances. Bernie and Val’s quotes illustrate this finding quite clearly.

#4 Bernie: As far as the rugby guys are concerned they had no problems with [my being gay] as long as I kept performing on the rugby field more so than in the showers. And the coach knew and he told me that he knew and said basically exactly the same: “I want you because of your performance on the rugby field” and I said: “fine.”

#2 Val: I’ve got myself into a bit of strife being competitive at times. …That’s sport I suppose to a point, I mean you have to be a top sports man, not that I was a tops sports man but that’s part of it, very competitive and I still am. Put me on any sports field, I play to win. … I’ve always been a stickler for knowing all the rugby rules that never have been broken. …I use to get away with quite a
bit if you knew the rules and knew how to get away with them it gives you [an] advantage. In the old days it was a very physical game when I played, much more physical than I do now. The speed of the game has picked up but it was a lot slower, a lot harder physically. Mind you it allowed more thugs to play the game. I’ve seen some nasty things on a rugby field, I’d do the after match speeches and all that sort of stuff, I’ve had lots of articles written about me… most of it’s pretty positive. I am really a good student of sport. I watch and learn off players. A lot of people don’t see things, but I’ve really watched rugby. Passion [makes me a good player]. I think that’s very important. It does get me into a bit of strife on the side line occasionally in rugby because I’ve got a very loud voice and people all over the field can hear me when I sort of get upset with things… My brother in Auckland and his wife, they’ve got a lot of gay friends they socialise with and I’ve met quite a few of them you know, and my brother always says you’re the straightest gay guy I’ve ever met

Additionally, many other participants in this study simply played rugby because they were good at it. Nevertheless, proving their masculinity seems to be a strong motivator in their behaviour on or off the field. Pete explains how being a lock served a double purpose; that of showing skill and proving his masculinity.

#5 Pete: I joined [a] social rugby team … as a player there and I was a lock. Although I didn’t have a successful sort of history there it was at times a positive experience in the early stages and especially one particular game, which I had, I think it was my first game that I played and it was a sort of tough team … I really was in there boots and all. I mean it was a good day though because the ground was beautiful, just raining the night before so the ground was soft and there was something quite aggressive about the game and I was just in there and I was able to keep right up close … I was grabbing people and sort of tackling and getting into the mauls. I use to like getting into the mauls because my biggest challenge was to get the ball out and of course I’d be in there rummaging around looking for it trying to get the ball out, which I actually really enjoyed doing, and I was actually really rather good at it. I mean I was good at prising the ball out of people’s hands. I think I was out there trying to prove my masculinity.

Anderson (2002) states that: “sports attempt to tolerate gay male athletes when they contribute to the overachieving ethos of sport – winning – but try to taint the creation of a gay identity within sport that would see being gay and athleticism as compatible” (p. 1). Jake’s following example shows how some gay male athletes adopt behaviours borrowed from what they perceive to be more acceptable within mainstream sport. They seek social validation through physical ability rather than personal character and authenticity.
#13 Jake: *I was at practice once and remember seeing this bloke sitting in the stands surrounded by other guys. It was the way that he was sitting you know, very butch like, with legs open and one hand on his thigh and his other forearm on his knee, leaning forward and his jacket collar pulled up you know. At that point, I decided I would start acting like him to be more popular. He was kind of a masculine role model, cause the next day I walked to school with my jacket collar pushed up you know, the James Dean look!*

It is important to acknowledge that hyper-masculine behaviours were common among the participants in this study. However, this does not limit the factors of hyper-masculinity or overachievement to being gay. I simply suggest that they may be factors that contribute to the modified behaviours that enforce the silence of gay men in mainstream rugby organisations.

**Section Summary**

Key findings with regard to the data collected in this section expose how this sample of gay men has experienced the sport of rugby in New Zealand. Results show the following:

- There is clear evidence of homophobia and homophobic acts in New Zealand rugby.
- Gay rugby players remain silent about their gay identity and participate with **great fear** of exclusion from the sport. Moreover, they are isolated from each other within mainstream rugby.
- Many were victimised during their childhood rugby experience and as a result gave up playing mainstream rugby. They have been alienated by the culture that surrounds it.
- Gay rugby players feel powerless in bringing about changes in attitude and policies.
- Hyper-masculine behaviour and impulses to overachieve are the result of a lack of validation and the desire to distance themselves from effeminacy.
- Heterosexual-identifying players engage in sexual acts with other men.

Surprisingly, many players have had sexual experiences with other players, coaches and other men who identify as heterosexual. In contradiction to the assumptions that gay athletes
do not exist or that gay men are ‘too sissy’ to participate in sport, gay rugby players do exist and many have played at ‘A’ grade levels in New Zealand. Furthermore, many have contributed significantly to rugby union in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The overall results in this section are directly related to oppression theory issues as presented within the Conspiracy of Silence model. Commonalities of experiences of oppression within rugby emerged. Consequently for gay men, rugby is a site where power relations are contested. As subordinates, rugby players abide by the exclusionary heterosexist policies in place. They feel forced to remain silent and invisible by adopting assimilatory behaviours. The overall meanings gay men attribute to their participation in the mainstream sport context of rugby union create barriers for their survival in it.

In the following section, the complexity of gay men’s silence is studied further as I present data on identity management. These additional findings strengthen the understanding and explanation of how gay men remain silent in sport in general and in rugby in particular.

**Emerging Themes Relevant to Identity Management**

In this section, I present data from the emerging themes relevant to identity management strategies as described by the coming out process of gay men in Chapter Three. Hence, I have organized the participants’ experiences of their coming out processes in relation to Griffin's (1991) coming out model. These six themes coincide with Griffin’s six stages of the coming out process of gay male athletes which are:

1) Defined by difference (totally closeted)
2) Living a lie (passing)
3) Self-reflection and inner conflict (covering)
4) Telling oneself and not others (implicitly out)
5) Freedom and pride (explicitly out)
6) Wholeness and integrity (publicly out)
I have included an additional theme on suicide after the fourth stage given that it emerged during repeated readings of the interviews.

Although participants did not necessarily talk or present their lived experiences in this order, their quotes are presented in six stages for greater clarity in reading. All six stages are presented individually as themes and illustrated through relevant quotes. Understood as a process and not as a singular moment in life, coming out was experienced in different ways and times for the men in this inquiry. For many the process remains incomplete. However, the decisions to no longer live in silence for most of the participants lie in the power they had to release the heritage of the social and self-oppression they had experienced in their lives. No longer content to allow myths, lies, and half-truths dictate their lives, coming out was (often) a long process of reappropriating the feelings, attractions and stories of their own lives and embracing them as the only authentic way to discover, and eventually be themselves. The ultimate destination for most men during their coming out process was when they were finally able to reconcile their social and sexual identities with their sporting one. For many, this was the sense of closure they needed from a sporting history encapsulated by shame-driven denial and fear.

**Stage 1: Defined by difference (totally closeted):**

In this initial stage of the coming out process, most gay men in this study did not realise as children that they were gay. Therefore, they were considered totally closeted. However, they were able to describe feelings of difference as being central to their understanding of being gay in general and gay athletes in particular. Within their retrospective accounts, the participants describe these feelings of difference negatively. This negative evaluation appears to emerge from recognition of the pervasive power of gender conformity, traditional conceptions of masculinity and perceptions of hegemonic heterosexuality. Many of the participants in this study had negative experiences at an early age. Some such as Jeep did not
understand the reasons behind his being “shunned” while others such as Leo had inner
negative thoughts even though he did not understand their source.

#6 Jeep: I went to a South Auckland school and there was always kind of a gay
bashing kind of talk at school and I was always shunned during adolescence
for reasons I didn't understand. It was just during the homosexual law reform
bill and people badmouthed off about that and it just wasn’t accepted at all.

#9 Leo: There was this particular event that I do recall. It would have been
when I was at primary school so probably when I was 10 [or younger]. We had
a swimming pool at school and we’d go swimming in summer and at that point
I didn’t like it when other people looked at me when we were getting changed.
When I look back, that was the point I felt different to everybody else [because
I was gay and didn’t realise it].

At a later stage in their lives, others such as Val also felt being different. It is important to
note that many of the participants in this study, became aware of attractions at different ages,
some at a very young age and others during their adolescence. However, most men in
retrospect admit to having had same sex attractions even if they did not realise it at the time.

#2 Val: I don't know if I realised but in retrospect it was true, it was probably
in puberty [when I started having] an attraction to mates and stuff like that.
...We sort of... experimented little things during puberty. I don't know if I
realised that I was gay then but maybe there was an attraction there in
retrospect.

Jake expresses clearly, how, at the age of five, he knew that he was attracted to men but
did not come to identify himself as gay until his thirties although he did feel extrinsically
different to other boys and men his age.

#13 Jake: I could never put words to feelings until my early thirties. I was doing
it but not able to say it. Quite weird really! I was always attracted to men, but
couldn’t identify those feelings as being gay. I remember when I was four or
five and being attracted to hairy chests. I was in love with the actor Steve
Austin: The Six Million Dollar Man! By the age of 8 or 9, I remember giving
backrubs to my Dad and brothers, thinking how nice it felt but knowing how
unacceptable it was. I knew at that stage that I was different from my Dad,
brothers and every other boy my own age.

Flowers and Buston (2001) explain that for other minority athletes, such as African-
Americans or Jewish individuals, the buffering of shared minority status within the family
context would reduce this stress. But for many of the athletes in this study, family support was
not present during their upbringing mainly because of the fact that at this stage of the coming out process described by Griffin (1991) gay men do not identify as gay. Therefore, they cannot solicit support for feelings they do not understand themselves. At this stage of the coming out process, there is not yet a cognitive conflict for gay men. Most gay men do not associate their attractions with their identity. They are ignorant of the social implications of their sexual orientation. For instance, Pete recalls very clearly how different he felt, but was unable to express it, to either friends or family members.

#5 Pete: As a child I wasn’t aware of the fact that I was gay. I wasn’t aware of that at all, so that wasn’t really an issue. It was all the other issues but it wasn’t that one, I don’t think. I was sort of in denial of the fact that I was gay I suppose. Obviously, there was something [different] about me from the start because I mean growing up I probably used to play with the girls quite a lot but I was a fuckin’ good softball player actually as a kid. Just by nature, I use to love softball, I use to get up there and you know always hit the ball, always managed to hit or a lot of the time managed to hit home runs and seldom out always, managed to get to home base and I was a good catcher, quite a good thrower as well. So of course I felt confident in that sport because it was something that I could play as well as if not better than most other kids, boys or girls in my class, so that was cool but yeah I always remember a friend of mine, she was a little bitch. [I remember] walking out the school gate one day carrying my bag and she said: ‘Well maybe you’re not a boy, maybe you’re just a girl inside but just has a body as a boy’ which was quite sort of interesting thinking for a girl of that age we’re talking six, seven or eight-years-old. I just said: ‘hmmm, yeah maybe’ and just kept on walking and sort of pondered it and sort of kept on walking and it didn’t really particularly bother me. But having said that …who knows… there were other things going on at home that disturbed me even more.

In contrast, some gay men in this study did not feel different at all. In Ron and Bernie’s cases they felt it was all very “natural”. Nevertheless at that point, they did not identify as gay. They are to be considered as having been in the closet at that stage of their process. Clearly, if one player was not out to himself, he could not be out to anyone else.

#3 Ron: I think I probably was getting an idea [that I was gay] when I was 13, 14. That I liked guys and I thought, this is what usually happens, I thought everybody was like this but that I would also like women as well, eventually or at the same time or something. I just thought that this was like all guys were like, and so I wasn’t out to myself. I didn’t know what it meant; I didn’t have an understanding of it at all.
Bernie: [I probably knew I was gay] when I was a young child. I knew I liked males at a very early age and at that time I didn’t know what that was. I just thought it was natural.

However, as Bernie admits, and such was the case for most men in this study, he did start to feel different as he became older. There is a junction in the coming out process of gay men where personal denial of one’s sexuality comes from a sense of being different. Bernie’s sense of being different began early in his puberty, as was the case with other participants. It is noteworthy to comment on the differences Bernie felt as a gay boy compared to heterosexual boys. He thought that dating girls was a phase.

Bernie: [I didn’t see myself as different] until I was older, not until I was probably about 10 or 11 cause all my mates they were looking at females and I was looking at guys. I had my first relationship with a female at about 14. Everything was OK but I knew that there was something that wasn’t quite right. I liked her and being with her was fine, but it wasn’t completing my desires. In respect I was doing this for others, but I also think I did it to find out that I was interested in guys only because I’d been with girls and hadn’t been with men enough. I thought being with women was just a phase or something. So I had this, you know relationship with a girl from school and the sex was great too. I think it was time for me to experiment.

Other participants did not think of being different because they blocked out their attractions completely. Sam expresses this clearly.

Sam: When I was playing club rugby I never thought about being gay as that was the last thing I wanted on my mind. I was always hiding who I was. I just went out there and played week after week; blocking out anything about being gay.

From this theme, it is clear that in addition to other aspects of pervasive heterosexist culture, sport organisations represent a distinct forum in which such feelings of difference begin to crystallize and become embodied. Gay athletes create a sporting identity different from their social one. In this stage of the coming out process, most athletes in this study segregated (knowingly to themselves or not) their social worlds into heterosexual and gay spheres and hoped the two would never collide. The internalisation of the stigma attached to gay identity has profound effects upon the individual’s self-understanding. Besides seeing himself as both derided and worthless, the gay rugby player sees himself as very different to
others at this stage. The peer group subculture of early adolescents is the arena in which the ravages of shame reach their peak. Their importance makes the peer group a new source of shame and a powerful socialising force for what the peer group enforces is compulsory (hegemonic) heterosexuality.

**Stage 2: Living a lie (passing):**

Given the feeling of isolation and personal torment, it is not surprising that most gay athletes attempted to continue with their assumed straight identity well into their twenties and for some even into their thirties or more. Sometimes the straight identity many players grew up with was not initially rejected but maintained, or even managed, as a means to pass as straight and accepted. Hubert remembers how he kept passing as heterosexual with his best friend for a very long time. Hubert was, as were many other men in this study, unaware of his gay identity at this stage of his life. Yet, same-sex attraction was present for most men in this study at this stage, and some may have already experienced sex with other men.

**#12 Hubert:** Long before [I acknowledged I was gay] I had a heterosexual experience. I actually went away with a girl. We’ve known each other for years and we’d always been sort of very, very, very sort of similar and we use to do the same courses and we ended up doing the same general career. We’d drift in and out of each other's lives and funny enough [one day] I said: I’m thinking of going overseas. She said: ‘Oh, so am I, oh let’s go together’. So well anyway, that never developed into anything and we ended up splitting up ... at the end of the two and a half years when I got back I found out ... she [is a] lesbian.

The resulting conflict and dissonance, in terms of identity, are experienced as both difficult and painful. Rather than run the gauntlet of homophobia it appears that acting straight can potentially offer an easier option in terms of managing same-sex attractions. Jake describes his conflicting feelings as being not only painful but also hurtful and regretful.

**#13 Jake:** I fought this all I could, you know, until one day when I was doing the dishes and thinking, fuck man, I’ve got everything I want, a nicely furnished house, a nice car, nice clothes, the golden retriever, and a perfect blonde with lots of money. What else could I’ve asked for? But then I realized there was something fundamentally wrong that I needed in my life and that I couldn’t
change. I decided then and there that she’d be the last woman that I’d ever hurt or lead on.

Other participants managed their emotions by wishing and dreaming of being heterosexuals. Jeep and Pete remember quite vividly trying to repress their attractions to men. For many men, sexual attraction to other men is suppressed by their desire to be heterosexual in a heterosexual dominated world.

#6 Jeep: I tried going with a woman once, we got real drunk and I thought, ‘Right, OK I’m going to cure my disease, all right I can do this.’ So I’d read all about it in a Cosmopolitan the day before, I learnt all about foreplay with women and I thought ‘Right, OK I’ve read about this so I know what’s going to happen.’ So we got nude and things like that so I started masturbating her and masturbating her and shoving my fingers up her and then all of a sudden she shuddered and she shuddered and I turned to her and I said: ‘Are you cold’ and she goes: ‘No, no, no!’ and I go: ‘Oh! Ok shit!’ That was the next bit of the Cosmopolitan that I hadn’t read, something about orgasms. So I knew from there on that I wasn’t going to be terribly hot. Yeah, so I abstained from everything for about 3 years, women, and men completely.

#5 Pete: In a sexual nature at times, it still didn’t occur to me that I was gay, it was always this passing thing and sooner or later I thought my heterosexuality would blossom and I would meet this bright woman.

Griffin (1991) also describes “passing” as the most common of several stigma-evasion strategies that may be adopted. It is also the stage when most gay male athletes do not identify to themselves that they are gay. They are incapable of connecting words and thoughts to emotions and desires. The agreement not to disclose their sexual identity can be seen as a tacit matter of compliance, as Val reports.

#2 Val: The sex was very much part of the 20 year old male in the rugby world, I mean they all talked about it, you know it was all you did, you go away on rugby trips and it was pick up these birds and you know I’ve done that you know. I was flatting with a chap who used to be in my rugby club in Wellington, and met this girl, she was quite attractive, brain the size of a pea. And we had a relationship up there, I mean, you know, it was all go and yeah six months later I get this call saying she was pregnant, a bit frightening. So I disappeared to Australia, normally the girl went to Australia, but I went instead and met a guy over there and bought a house. It was a pretty horrible thing to do but you know it was [something] I had to do. It was just I had to do it you know. I feel sorry for the women I did pick up. In the long run it was all stupid. But I mean you couldn’t really bring a bloke back to the rugby team motel, now would you?
At this stage, in lieu of being gay some participants explored the possibilities of being bisexual as an acceptable compromise. For these two participants, identifying as bisexual was their way of ‘passing’.

#1 Art: Yeah, eighteen I think [I had my first sexual experience with a woman]. But at that stage I was still very much exploring the idea, the concept of bisexuality and things like that and having a girlfriend later on in that year, which didn’t really work, which is no surprise. ... After I’d broken up with her and things like that I think it was around that time that I scored my rugby coach. It was at the end of season function lots of our team were [drinking], was a big booze up and things like that and I think I ended up staying the night, he was 38.

#3 Ron: [When I started to come out] it was the usually trauma and drama. It was to a friend of mine who I’d grown up with in Dunedin and he’d moved away, to Christchurch, and he came back down for a holiday and he was telling me a story about a guy at his school who was out, he was gay. And he told me this huge story about it and how he was good friends with this guy so I said, well, funny you should mention that, something along those lines and he said cool! And that went quite well. I didn’t tell him I was gay I actually told him I was bisexual, which was my favourite phrase without telling the truth, it’s much easier to tell someone you’re bisexual because it’s still sort of ok. So by the time I was 16 I was confident I knew that I was gay. I wasn’t in a big hurry to tell people though, in that whole single sex boy’s school thing, the whole being head prefect thing. That is something, which is to my eternal regret, I’d start telling so many people through our 6th form year and I was 16 or 17 and when I became head boy I made a decision to get a girlfriend and I did. Simply for publicity purposes essentially, which I dread the thought of. This woman … is still a good friend of mine and I apologise to her about once a month.

According to Griffin (1991), men in this stage of the coming out process do not yet identify as gay. For some, being gay or bisexual was not even an option they considered. Their behaviour and efforts were purely heterosexual. Henri recalls trying very hard to be straight.

#11 Henri: As far as I can remember, I always noted boys more than girls… I’m thinking of primers here, you know if you had the choice of who you sat beside, it was a boy… I sort of started knowing what that meant [the term homosexual] when I was about twelve or thirteen, I started to think hmmm is that me? At fourteen I starting to think well I certainly do seem to be interested in the boys don’t I and I use to try and imagine being with a woman and seeing which one turned me on more. I did find at the time I could be turned on if I imagined a woman but it took a lot of effort. Like I remember a girl sitting besides me at a school social. Sort of the heat of the moment everybody had their hand over one and another… I sort of had my hand around behind her. I thought she was hot but in fact I had [my hand] on the heater not on her.
Yet being gay does not appear as clearly for some gay men as it does for others. Sione, as did others, remembers not having any sexual attractions to either sex at any time until it was initiated from another person.

#14 Sione: Of all things, eh! ... I was over at a friend’s house, picking up his gear before rugby practice from his room and his younger brother showed me the way. And did he ever. We were in the bedroom looking for his [brother’s] footie shoes and stuff when he grabbed my crotch just like that. I couldn’t hide the fact that I was excited by it, got hard on the spot. **He gave me my first blowjob right then and there**, can you imagine the nerve. It lasted all but two minutes and I knew my life would be different from that point on, bro.

However, some gay men rationalise their sexuality at a very young age. Sam knew at the age of nine that he was gay and he acted upon it without hesitation.

#8 Sam: My first contact with a guy was my auntie’s boyfriend... when I first laid eyes on him I was about nine years old, and my heart skipped a beat. He was a big man, with hairy chest about thirty-two years old. **I knew right then and there that I was gay.** Well, a couple of nights later I was sleeping in between my aunty and her boyfriend as there weren’t enough beds (my brothers were sleeping on the couches). Anyway, I woke up and just looked at him while he was sleeping and then I put my hand on his chest (my heart was racing 100 miles an hour). I then moved my hand down to his crotch (he was wearing underwear) and I just kept my hand on his crotch. I wasn’t expecting it but he then moved his hand and started caressing my ass, then moved it towards my penis. He then masturbated me right there (with my aunty next to us) and the last thing I remember was an amazing sensation and then my penis got sensitive. I guess that was the first time I had cum. It was an amazing experience, the next couple of days I couldn’t look him in the eyes and he did the same. We never did anything else and I always wonder what he is up to now. **He broke up with my auntie a couple of years after.**

In sum, the behaviours of the men in this study in relation to Griffin’s (1991) stage of passing varied. Some continuously had heterosexual relationships, others bisexual and for some none at all. Although most men experienced strong attractions to the same gender, none identified as gay at this stage.

**Stage 3: Self-reflection and inner conflict (covering):**

In this stage of the coming out continuum, many gay male players felt it was the most troublesome period of their coming out process. Although none had admitted being gay to
themselves at this stage, many knew the differences they lived were somehow insurmountable and without possibility of change occurring. It is a period of self-questioning. It is during this stage that feelings of fear begin to appear. Andy, Jeep and Art illustrate how they felt when they came to the realisation that they were different from most other boys their age and that their situation would never change. Their quotes were answers to the question of how they felt before coming out to themselves.

#7 Andy: *Growing up, there was always the fear of, you know, of being gay. Not really knowing exactly if I was or not or if I was going through a phase or anything like that.*

#6 Jeep: *I think what kept me from coming out was sheer peer pressure; societal pressure, I suppose, and fear. What would people think, what would people think of me as, as a person, as a sportsperson, just what would they think?*

Fear of conflict with others was the usual reason for the lack of disclosure as commented by Art.

#1 Art: *Oh [when] my flatmate who basically walked out of the room when I walked in. I guess in that coming out phase it was the fear and all that sort of thing the whole metamorphous … not knowing what was happening, feeling like there was a potential for you to get ostracised and lose things and lose people. And yeah that sort of fear. It’s hard to sort of characterise it but the sense of not belonging all that sort of thing. So rather just a specific experience it’s sort of the overall, those sort of dark nights wondering what, whether this was right, how was this going to affect the rest of my life and what was I going to lose, you know. [I know now that the fear] was not [about] whether I was losing [something or someone], it had to do with what I was, you know.*

This does not say however that they had accepted the fact that they were truly gay. Most participants in this study had difficulty attaining this stage by their mid-twenties. Others such as Sione often felt frustrations at being different. His self-reflection often turned into self-hatred and others such as Hubert tried rejecting his same sex attractions.

#14 Sione: *I hate being what I am. I wish I could get rid of these feelings. I wish I didn’t have to live with this shit. It really fucks me off!*

#12 Hubert: *Growing up, at school I was always cast as gay. I rejected it. I had no reason to support it.*
Experiencing the kind of discrimination and stigmatisation described by these rugby players placed them under chronic stress, which may lead to adverse mental health issues (Meyer, 1995). Self-hate and identity confusion may result, along with low self-esteem, depression, denial, suppression, and compartmentalization. From their experience, we can also add substance abuse and hyper-sexuality to this list of consequences resulting from inner-conflict. Jake, Pete, Val, and Andy remember how this stage of inner conflict occupied a lot of their thoughts and feelings.

#13 Jake: My [earliest] experience as a gay man is that of constant questioning of self, based on feelings of paranoia that is, continuously harbouring sentiments of doubt and rejection by others based on their prejudicial opinions.

#5 Pete: Just before coming out there was this real switch in my attitude. Where rather than being a victim, which I was all the way through, … I got to the stage where it was like, fuck you, I basically said, fuck you God you can fuck off I don’t need you I’ll do things my way from now on. That’s exactly what I said, it was a conscious thing I said, you can fuck off I’m going to do things my way from now on. You’re no fuckin’ use, you never have been. That was when I started drinking. I started getting drunk every week. A friend of mine and I went home at lunchtime and got drunk, on screwdriver and beer, and came back to school.

#2 Val: You know once I had my first experience it wasn’t a phase, you know, I mean it was really satisfying and natural. It was pretty exciting really. But it probably was a bigger issue for me than most people initially I was out there bloody getting quite emotional about [being gay and playing rugby].

#7 Andy: My insecurities, to a certain extent have something to do with my sexuality cause I was always aware of it. I wasn’t quite sure how people would handle it and I still don’t. Growing up, I sort of kept to myself. I just didn’t like what I was. And then going through Outward Bound and just pushing yourself mentally and physically, I realised that I really wasn’t such a bad person after all. That’s probably the biggest thing I actually got from it. I was 20 at the time and starting coming out after that.

In contrast, some men such as Henri did not experience fear, paranoia, or any form of frustrations when they realised they were different. For men such as Henri, identifying as gay came coincidentally with their awareness of same sex attractions.

#11 Henri: It became quite clear which way I was leaning when we went to Britain. I was about 16 and I remember going through Soho, which was a real eye opener. I went through there and saw one of these magazines shops and
[it became] quite clear just by looking at the magazines there ... of blokes [that I was gay]. I was definitely aroused, definitely! So after that I mean I stopped, stopped even trying to imagine women and happily lived my life as a gay man ever since.

For some gay rugby players, one notable consequence is the apparent decrease in athletic productivity. Tony Banks (BBC, 1999) implied that “if [gay athletes] have to submerge [their] sexuality in a macho display because that is what is expected of them then frankly, they don’t feel that they can give of their best in terms of their athletic prowess or support.” (p. 1). Griffin (1998), Krane (1996), Lenskyj (1990a) and Krane, Barber, and McLung (2002) also found that negative feelings for gay athletes negatively affects athletic performance and sport enjoyment. This is an interesting finding when comparing the data relevant to hypermasculinity. On one hand being gay can lead to overachievement and hypermasculinity and on the other it can impede performance. Comparing athletes who have competed in the Gay Games and felt empowered from the supportive environment to excel in their athletic performances, it is not surprising that some of these gay rugby players such as Val, Ron, and Jake did not feel that they had achieved their personal best in the context of mainstream sport organisations.

#2 Val: Obviously I was [attracted] but ...not that there was any chance to do anything about it really ... because I was involved in sport in a big way and especially rugby and the macho 16 to 17 year-old adolescent block with school and stuff like that. I mean anything that was slightly bloody camp was ridiculed and anything [that was] slightly different was ridiculed [as well]. That fear really affected my game.

#3 Ron: I just didn’t enjoy rugby and partly again it came down to that particularly sort of age boarding 15 onwards when I was handling things on who I might be. I think that played a part in it that I didn’t like the atmosphere. I felt like an outsider. Like any good New Zealand young gay male I was scared shitless I was going to do something that would give it all away. And so PE was associated with changing rooms and physical contact and all the things that could potentially give me away. So my memories aren’t great about that stage of my life. I guess I was probably at the age of 15 when I started to think OK I know what it means now. I think this is what I am but I went through a good denial period saying, no I can’t be gay

#13 Jake: Upon reflection, I can’t say I feel at ease with my performances, cause I can’t say I was truly happy and secure. I [think] I could have done
better if I knew I was accepted by the whole team for what I am. I guess something in me was holding me back a bit…

Finally, most men in this study would have wanted to change their sexuality if they could have at this point of their coming out process. For example, Sam gives a few reasons why he wanted to be straight.

#8 Sam: I use to think about this question all the time. **If I was straight life would be so much easier.** I wouldn’t have to hide who I was, and people finding out. Another thing would be the constant thinking about what I was - a faggot and if ever my friends found out, would they still accept me. Playing rugby would have been easier too.

**Stage 4: Telling oneself but not others (implicitly out):**

For the gay rugby player being implicitly out means putting words to emotions and affirming to themselves that they are in fact gay. For many in this study it was the climax of their personal journey of their coming out process and the start of their true sexual identity. For many of the participants, this moment of personal truth was very intense. For some it was a moment of revelation. For others, it was the moment of acceptance of their attractions to the same sex that they could no longer deny nor change. Art describes how telling oneself and finally identifying as gay was a very vague period of self-reflection. Personal opinions of oneself fluctuated during this stage. For most participants in this study, there never existed a specific point in time that they could identify the coming out moment. This stage of the process seemed very significant for some participants, especially for Art and Leo.

#1 Art: [At the] end of my first year at university and second year at university, there was a lot of time when I focused on coming out to myself and admitting it to myself. **In terms of when did I identify to myself through secondary school, I don’t know.** It’s so hard to tell when you get the cross over from mere sort of puberty interests in other people and things like that and actually [the] realisation that you’re interested in guys...I don’t know, but at the end of my first year at university was probably when I could verbalise [it] to myself. Which is after, you know, that’s even after having sex with a couple of guys and things like that, yeah.

#9 Leo: **I’m not sure [when I actually realized I was gay].** I thought about this a lot. When I was about 13 there was a friend of mine, who I quite liked, but I didn’t think I was gay [during that stage] because of that. It wasn’t until I was a lot older, until like I was 18 that I thought, hmmm I guess I am gay then
because I couldn’t get rid of the feelings I had for some other men. I hadn’t had any sexual relations at that point.

However for a few participants such as Jeep and Jake, a very specific moment in time did mark their coming out and acceptance of being gay.

#6 Jeep: I came out to myself when I was 25 in front of the Oscar Wilde School private college in Ireland when I was there visiting my 87 year old grandmother. It was where he did his cognitive development so to speak and I was just standing there, in front of his dorm and it is a beautiful, beautiful school with all these buildings and there was a green field and there was fog all over the field it was this absolutely fantastic scenery before me and something just hit me. I can’t explain what it is but it just hit me from out of the blue and I just went: ‘Shit! You know I’ve just got to go back and do this; I just can’t go on living a lie.’ But I was absolutely petrified when I came out, absolutely, just me thinking about what people might be thinking and where would it end?

#13 Jake: I remember getting on the bus leaving for my big OE [Overseas Experience], looking at my mum crying and stuff. I looked out the window and thought: ‘Ok mate this is it, you’re not coming back to this place the same person you were when you left. I’m gay, that’s it I’m gay, you are now a gay person.’ I remember telling myself those exact words as if they were being broadcasted over huge loud speakers. ‘You’re a gay person, you’re a gay person…’ and my life changed completely from that moment on.

The average age of the participants in this stage of their coming process was approximately twenty-seven years old. Marc was the oldest at sixty-three and Andy, the youngest, was sixteen. A specific moment also marked Andy’s self-realisation and acceptance of being gay.

#7 Andy: I was 16 when I accepted the fact that I was gay and yeah, I was actually working part time in a pet shop and I was just in the back and I was just sort of thinking about stuff and then I just sort of said: ‘Andy, just accept that you are gay, so just, don’t worry. You are gay and here we go, stop trying to deny it. Don’t try to make any more excuses that it’s just a phase that you will grow out of it. Just accept it, so then you can start sort of dealing with it and get on with your life.’

Others, such as Val came out to themselves when they were older.

#2 Val: Well I came out [to myself], when I was 30.

Most participants shared the fact that this period in their life was marked by an unhealthy perception of themselves. Pete describes how this stage was very destructive for him.

#5 Pete: I firstly acknowledged to myself that I was gay when I was, maybe 22 years old. I had just been kicked out of teachers college and at that stage life
was just one joint after another. Cause I had fallen in love with my best friend.

It was quite an unhealthy perception because it’s not that I was in love with him so much as I was not in love with myself. I just didn’t want to have him I wanted to be him.

Bernie also describes this anxiety and fear when he first realised he was gay, but also describes how his positive attitude helped him get through this stage of his coming out process.

#4 Bernie: Oh I had a bit of fear, in the beginning, like, when I finally realised that I was gay. The fear of having to be, or of being caught or being different, that was always there for a long while. So I had to come to grips with that and once I decided right I am what I am and what I do and what I do behind my door, bedroom door is my business. Once I got over that I was quite comfortable with the way things go. And then the whole issue of HIV, the Aids thing, that was another fear that came into my life. But when that did I didn’t say to myself: ‘Oh I wish I wasn’t gay’. Not at all.

It is important to note that at this stage, most players consciously decided to pursue their participation in mainstream sport organisations knowing they were gay. Their motivation to continue playing had nothing to do with hiding their sexuality, nor to get physically close to other men, but because they felt a greater need to be part of a team and feel less isolated. One might add that their love for the game was greater than the need to be accepted as gay members of a mainstream rugby team. Counsellor Jacobson (2002) states:

Athletes who identify themselves as bisexual or gay are so deeply closeted that they will only talk about it with a very intimate group of people. They spend most of their time attempting to hide it from their team and others. Even talking about it anonymously with a person in his or her own closed room would provoke anxiety (p. 1).

At this point of the coming out process, most players were victims of the system (sport organisation). The men did not have real choices (i.e. options) but mostly reacted to external pressures, hostility, and danger. Sione chose to play mainstream rugby and did not want to come out to his teammates in fear of losing his right to play rugby.

#14 Sione: Finally admitting [to myself] that I was gay didn’t change my mind about playing rugby. Even if I’m scared of being found out, playing the game with my mates is more important than being gay. I keep on playing because I
love rugby, the purity involved with it. It’s just something that is there, unquestioned.

We can observe through Sione’s statement that for some the passage into the sport environment is associated with his identity related distress. For many, not only does this distress escalate into causes of depression and anxiety, but it may also have severe consequences such as the development of suicidal thoughts. This emerging theme spoke volumes of the sense of powerlessness and isolation experienced by gay athletes as noted in the following section.

Emerging Theme of Suicidal Thoughts:

A relevant theme that emerged from the data during this period of the coming out process of the participants was that of suicidal thoughts. The stage of telling oneself and not others was heavily marked by feelings of great fear. Figure 7 illustrates the different degrees of fear experienced by the participants during their coming out stages.

![Figure 7: Levels of Fear During the Coming Out Process](image-url)
Stage 4 appeared to inspire higher levels of fear for most participants. The levels of fear seemed accentuated when the participants felt higher degrees of isolation, powerlessness to change things, and when they felt most alienated from their rugby organisations. Sione recalls his suicidal thoughts as being greatly related to his fear of ostracism and exclusion from his rugby organisation:

**#14 Sione:** Rugby was not the only problem, but it was a big part of it.

Some participants were imprisoned by this fear. Both gay men and lesbians appear to be affected by depression and anxiety at higher rates than the general community. Being in the closet and experiencing homophobia seems to contribute to the higher rate. The link Ron and others have to thoughts of suicide is well documented in this study. Like Andy, participants sensed higher levels of depression related to their fear of coming out when they had acknowledged to themselves that they were gay. Their feelings of loneliness and exclusion seemed most prevalent between stages three and four of their coming out process. Andy describes his suicidal thoughts related to his sense of isolation and fear (Scott, 2003, December 4).

**#7 Andy:** I was pretty depressed when I was a child [adolescent]. I thought about suicide a few times. I thought about what it would be like to just end my life so I wouldn’t have to deal with all the pain and the hurt that I was going through. I’d count how many times I’d have to cross the road to see what my chances were of being hit by a car and stuff like that. I never, ever took a knife or a gun or anything like that so I never actually physically held an object that could actually hurt me. It was just really hard, I was going through it myself, I didn’t tell anybody. Mum and dad didn’t know. So I was just doing it all by myself which is basically what I’d always done.

Jake’s response signals the severity of the crisis that feelings of fear may pose to some gay men. This participant’s problems had come to a head because he felt he had no one to turn to when his efforts to balance his professional and personal life had failed.

**#13 Jake:** When I moved back home to teach phys ed … was the hardest thing. It was like going back into the closet after being out at Uni. It was the most difficult year in my life, from being out to everyone to being out to no one. I
kept on looking at tree branches that were strong enough to hold me, even thought of maybe the car exhausts in the garage or a rope from the garage door hinges below the ceiling... I was too scared it wouldn’t work, so I never tried it, but thought about it a lot.

Most men in this study had thoughts of death rather than face the potential for alienation and rejection. The high instances of suicidal thoughts among the participants in this study is not disproportionate to the levels of suicidal attempts among gay men in general compared to heterosexual men. Given that gay male youth have been reported to be at greater risk of the more serious forms of self-harm - and that such results are replicated - they are therefore likely to be even more at risk for completed suicides (Bagley and Tremblay, 1997). Given the Bagley and Tremblay (1997) results and erring on the conservative side: Gay males may well account for more than half of the male youth deaths resulting from suicide.

Val and Ron commented on how they “bottled everything up” and did not feel as though they could talk to anyone about their sexual identity, especially not to fellow rugby players in mainstream rugby organisations. They felt they had nowhere to go and no one to turn to. "I felt I was in a big black hole and that there was no way out", said Val. “Asking for help was a sign of weakness”, said Ron and both conceded that they contemplated suicide because they were tired of “leading a double life” and that the burden of keeping their being gay secret was too great to manage.

Additionally, most men did not feel they could fit their sexual identity into their sporting world and that they would never meet others players’ and coaches’ expectations of them. Because of this, they felt lonely, frustrated, and confused about their sexuality during this stage even though they had accepted that they could not choose their sexual orientation. Some turned to rugby, hoping finally to find a place where they could thrive and have acceptable labels for themselves as “footie players”. For these players, the thought that their rugby organisations might discover the truth was more than they wanted to live with.
#2 Val: I think in my late 20’s. When it became a wee bit, you know, obvious [that I was gay], you know and very difficult to do anything. [Suicide] probably sort of crossed my mind but I mean [I am] too much of wimp …basically. I was having a good time still. My sport was going well. **Maybe that was an outlet to cover it a wee bit.**

#3 Ron: Certainly thought about [Suicide] lots, lots of times. That period when I knew I’d told a few people, I was thinking am I just going to go on like this forever. There were feelings of why don’t I? And then even a little bit further on in life when there were hurdles. I think a lot of gay guys that I talk to kind of go, as you get over one hurdle then you come to another and if you **had those suicidal thoughts which so many gay guys have had,** they come back easier, much more easier than they would to somebody who’s never had them I think. So yeah, it’s like right up to my early 20’s when I was playing competitive rugby, but not for years now.

For other participants, poor self-evaluations led to lowered self-esteems and sometimes to depression. As is always the case with depression, one of the possible outcomes is suicide. The relationship between depression and suicide is best explained in psychodynamic terms and seems to be linked to the so-called flight or fight reaction (Remafedi, Farrow, and Deisher, 1991). Any feelings of inadequacy that arise from a self-evaluation are readily associated with previous feelings of inadequacy, including life-threatening situations over which the person involved felt he/she had no control, and the current situation is reacted to as if it were also life-threatening which brings up the option of fight or flight. The fight option is possible if an external source of the bad feelings can be located but if not, flight will be the response. Real flight cannot occur as low self-esteem is an internal phenomenon but flight from reality into illness (mental or psychosomatic) or flight from life (suicide) is possible. Pete best describes this sense of low self-esteem when he was very young and had no control on some of his lived experiences.

#5 Pete: Well I think by that stage [of coming out] I’d already been sexually abused by my brother and I know that there must have been something going on [about suicide]. Cause apparently by the age of 4, I was wandering around home, obviously quite depressed, sort of saying: *‘I just want to die, I don’t want to live any more, I just want to die.’* So you know the question is why would a four year old boy be wondering around home, walking around home sort of saying to his mother: ‘I just want to die?’
In comparison, some participants, such as Jeep and Sam did not express any suicidal thought during their coming out processes.

**#6 Jeep:** *I've never thought about suicide*, never, no. I was just completely insane.

**#10 Sam:** *It never got to a point where I thought of suicide, life was too precious*. I used to say to myself as long as nobody knows then I should be ok. I really feel sorry for those people who get to a point where suicide is the only way out, but I never got to that point.

**Stage 5: Freedom and pride (explicitly out):**

Telling others (coming out explicitly) despite the risks it may sometimes entail, has served as a freeing experience for the gay rugby players in this study. The choice for the individuals in this study to come out is one based between acceptance by society or personal authenticity.

Ian Roberts in (Freeman, 1997) lends support to this claim by stating:

It took me too long a time to realize that if I had the courage to really like who I was, everything else would fall into place... it took me too long to realize that I was weighed down by a burden I shouldn’t have to carry, a problem that wasn’t really my problem (p. ix - x).

Jeep best describes his feelings of freedom and pride when he went through a period of telling others about being gay.

**#6 Jeep:** I was 24 [when I came out] to my sister who’s very, very dear to me and then the flood gates opened. I went through a period of having to tell everyone, because it was just so damn important. There was this kind of secret that I’d been keeping from people for 24 years that I just had to get off my chest. **The best thing about being gay is that I feel I’m a good person.** The best thing about being gay is that it’s a roller coaster ride from the time that you come out to whenever you die basically. It’s a huge learning curve. **The best thing about being gay is being gay, which means I take pride in myself as a human being. I show my pride by combining what I am with who I am. I don’t have a problem with it, it’s the best thing about being gay and those people around me who I grew up with and who I associated with don’t have a problem with me either, it’s [total] freedom.

Other participants in this study, such as Andy, describe coming out as never ending. It is not a singular stage in time. It is continual with every new person one meets. Although the sense of fear may not be as strong for most participants, it is still there for many.
Andy: I’m out to my family, to my friends, I still find it really difficult sometimes to tell some of my [new] friends. It’s just because I’ve never made friends easily, the friends that I have made I really, really like. They’re really important to me. So if I’ve made a friend and they don’t know that I’m gay I wonder what’s going to happen when they find out that I’m gay. So I still go through that sense of fear. I’m getting better at it though, I’m getting stronger and stronger.

Leo, in contrast to other participants, decided to share his sexual identity to a limited group of people because he feels he would be treated differently if everyone knew.

Leo: I’m out to all my friends that I spend time with. I’m out to people like my family, like my brothers and my mum but like not my grandparents because they’re pretty old and they’re slightly religious. And [I’m out to] some of my other extended relations but not a great deal and I don’t have a specific interest in telling them. I’m not specifically out to people at work, some people know that I am gay but I don’t make a point of being out because I don’t want people to treat me differently.

As freeing as this stage of the process may seem, many of the participants found it to be as difficult coming out to others as it was coming out to themselves and accepting it. Art describes his coming out to family and friends as the most difficult ‘year’ of his life.

Art: Gosh! This is, I guess the moment, the point at which I think I started coming out to other people, or the moment I hung on to, because I don’t know if it’s possible to identify a point, but [it was] the most significant earliest point. Actually, [it was at] my Methodist youth group, it was a youth group camp we were on one year at the end of my secondary school years. I found that I had some real strong feelings for one of the guys there and things like that and started working through those. Being open about those [feelings] was the point that sort of triggered as my first [coming out to others] because it was with [other] people. It was a very communal experience. [It was] not just coming out to one person but to a lot of people … you know. [There was] a lot of support and things like that, you know. Possibly, the next year was when I started coming out to the university crowd and … flat mates. That was difficult, that was probably the most difficult year of my life that one. Because it involved giving up a lot of [power and control], acknowledging that I would have to lose things in coming out and lose people in coming out. [It] was not something I wanted to do. [It] took me a long time to realise that shit happens and that’s it, you know.

Pete also states his coming out to others as a huge task.

Pete: I first acknowledged it to my closest [three] friends and I was, maybe, 24, I think, and I had met a man called Mark, in a sauna, and by the time that I’d slept with him 3 times I had fallen in love. By that time I was ready to tell
them. It was this huge thing, it was this huge awful thing: ‘I have this terrible thing to tell you; I’m gay.’ But it went down fine.

Nevertheless, most participants did describe the outcome of telling others as being a very positive and rewarding stage. Bernie and Leo expressed their experiences as being very positive.

#4 Bernie: My first coming out was one of the best feelings I’ve ever had of being gay. I can remember that weekend and from then on I just sort of took one step further as far as my sexuality with my family and friends. I was about 25 years old.

#9 Leo: I told my best friend one night during university. It was reasonably late and we were just sitting, talking and stuff on the sofa in the lounge and then we ended up sitting much, much too close together and then it was like, I get it now, I sort of realised that he was gay and I told him that I was too. It wasn’t a sexual relationship at all at first, but it turned into that later. The people in my flat were the next to find out, and then we went to a party one night and someone told everyone. It was interesting because after that some people who were at the party came out to us, so that was sort of positive in a way.

In many instances, the participants in this study stated that surprisingly, people they came out to already knew they were gay. Bernie, Sam, and Jake tell how people in their lives already knew and were supportive of them.

#4 Bernie: I don’t remember how I brought it out exactly, but I said to [my sister]: ‘Do you know that I’m gay?’ or something like that. I can’t remember exactly what it was we were talking about before the subject came up, and she said: ‘yes I do.’ And she sort of like said: ‘Yahoo, about time’ and I said: ‘What do you mean you know, how do you know?’ She goes: ‘Oh we’ve always known’, I said: ‘Who’s we?’ She said: ‘Your mother, your brothers and your sisters’ For me at that time, it was a bit of an anticlimax sort of. I was expecting this huge ‘what do you mean you’re gay?’ sort of reaction you know but it wasn’t like that at all. And when I said to her: ‘How do you know, what do you mean you all know that I’m gay?’ She said: ‘Oh we can tell, we knew, you know you’ve only had one girlfriend, you’re always hanging out with these other men. We can tell, we know, we know!’ [When I came out to my brother], he said: ‘No bro, it’s cool, it’s OK. You don’t need to worry about it.’ He said: ‘We still love you and you know if you need our support or anything give us a yell.’

#8 Sam: We were coming home from dinner and my closest friend had said to me: ‘You know you can tell me anything, anytime anywhere?’ I knew right there and then that she knew. She said that she had spoken to a girlfriend of hers that I had met in Christchurch. She said she knew that I had something to tell her.
I was confused and scared and as I took a long deep breath I said to her: ‘Yes, I am gay’, we both cried. She wanted to know everything from then on. Our friendship has grown even more now that I have come out to her. I have grown to realise that your true friends will stick with you no matter what sexuality you are, the hardest part of it all is just telling them.

#13 Jake: When I told my daughter, she said: ‘Oh dad! You really don’t hide it very well you know. All my friends know and we all think it’s cool. I have a cool dad’.

Henri also explains how his coming out to his family in a letter was very positive.

#11 Henri: [When I came out to my parents], I wrote a letter. But [I] phoned up before they got it and said: ‘look you’re going to get a letter and this is kind a what it’s going to say’. Actually that was really funny actually cause I got my mother on the phone and I said: ‘Look that would be to say I’m gay’. [She answered]: ‘That’s all right, that’s OK, I’ll just tell dad’ and [she yelled] out behind the phone: ‘Dear, Henri’s saying he’s gay’ and I thought: ‘Oh cripes, I cannot handle this’, so I hung up. But dad said: ‘Oh look it’s fine you still keep your position in the family.’

Other participants expressed how they were ‘outed’ to their family and friends by others.

#3 Ron: I told my mum in the midst of very traumatic times for my family. My father was sent to prison for a certain crime, so I was set to tell her, tell both of them actually but I delayed it because in my mind, it was probably an excuse really, but in my mind she didn’t need to have another upset. So later, I told her. So she was fine. Then unfortunately I was outed to somebody else to my dad and he came to me and said, what’s all this? And that was a classic thing of living in Dunedin because like, I mean, at age 21, my friends knew, a large number of people in the community knew and it was while I was student president and dad was in a meeting with somebody who was rattling on how it was good that there was a gay male as a university student president. And he had no idea. Now, if I ascribed to continuum theories of sexuality, I’d be right at one end of the scale. I’m out to family, but I haven’t outed myself to say my grandparents, I now know that they know through various sort of sources. Out to all friends!

Val’s comments describe how the participants’ relationships with their friends and family members were not affected negatively by their coming out, in fact all participants described their relationships as being better than before coming out.

#2 Val: She [my first girlfriend] was the first woman …I came out to. We were very close friends, we still are.
In fact, Bernie best describes how his relationship with his brother became closer after he came out to him. For many of the participants, the freedom he felt was very much associated with creating closer and more meaningful relationships.

#4 Bernie: So after we had a chat [about me being gay] we sort of like … never lost that closeness. I just felt there was a part of us that we needed to touch on.

The disciplining effect of rugby and its dividing and normalising practices were still influential at this stage for some of the participants in this study. According to Foucault (1990): “institutions [such as sport] seek to create docile bodies” (p. 134) that would tend to conform to the organisation’s ethos. Hence, the regulations and disciplining guidelines in rugby sport organisations, written or not, create an environment of opposition for rugby players in general and gay male rugby players in particular. None of the gay rugby players in this study ever came out to anyone during their participation within mainstream rugby organisations. Sione who currently plays competitive rugby still feels scared of coming out to anyone in his mainstream organisation. He best describes his situation in the following quote.

#14 Sione: The only person who knows about me is our friend [from the gay rugby team]. I felt comfortable enough telling him, because he’s a good bloke you know, I can trust him eh bro! He’s played premier rugby as well and understands my reluctance and my fear. If he hadn’t come out [to me] I don’t know who I could’ve talked to, no one on my [mainstream] rugby team, that’s for sure. No one in my family knows either, nobody else knows really; just him and you.

**Stage 6: Wholeness and integrity (publicly out):**

For most gay rugby players, their experience of identifying as gay was a difficult journey of self-discovery and realization. In Stage 5 of the coming out process, individuals felt a strong sense of emotional freedom. In this final Stage 6 of their coming out process, individuals feel a strong sense of freedom, but also feel an additional sense of wholeness and integrity about their personal identities as gay men. Art, Val, and Hubert feel as though their sexual identity at this stage has come in line with their social one. They feel complete and
better about themselves. They view their being gay with greater clarity, acceptance and much positiveness.

#1 Art: **Real good, it feels really good being gay.** Knowing that it’s right for me. And just feeling a complete sense of ease and that what I’m doing is right inside. Yeah a sense of relief that I’ve found what I need. Even if I had a magic wand I wouldn’t want to be straight. I wouldn’t change. Not at all, not at all, I mean, I don’t know. I actually think being gay’s kind of special too. You get so many invites to dinner parties it’s not funny, I mean it’s a chance to be different ... It’s distinct, it’s good. I mean there’s good and bad and that but I think overall there’s [more] positive things about being gay. I think the critical thing, the most important thing [is that I am] identified [to] what I feel like inside. Every aspect of my life is finally in line with each other.

#2 Val: **I’m totally relaxed at what I am.** It’s taken a while. It’s taken a lot of bullshit. [Because of whom I am] I think I’ve been a good educator of people at the [rugby] club. Gays aren’t limp wristed people that want to dress up in women’s clothes. There are some that do but that’s their choice. That’s probably one thing I have learnt; to be a lot more tolerant and that you can’t divide being gay from being an athlete, I mean you’re whole, you are what you are, and you’re a complete person. [The straight guys on my mainstream team are] very tolerant and I think I’ve helped in that. The way I am.

#12 Hubert: I don’t know whether there’s any advantage of being gay or being hetero. But being in an open gay relationship, [I do know] that I’m totally comfortable [with myself] and don’t care if anyone disapproves. **I think being gay, openly gay is the satisfaction of being myself.** I don’t have to hide it. I’ve got nothing to hide from.

These participants have shown that identity disclosure is continuous and spatially located, meaning that one comes out continuously to new people during his lifetime, but does so in an environment (space and time) which is physically and emotionally safe and supportive. Ian Roberts’ statement in (Kershaw, 2001) typifies the coming out process as an incredibly positive experience: “I’m so glad I’m gay. It’s a gift, a yardstick by which you judge humanity” he says, “what heterosexuals take for granted, we have to fight for” (p. 17). A similar positive example comes from Pete who also marks this stage as the realization of his being gay as a gift.

#5 Pete: If this angel came down and waved a wand and says, I can make you straight, I can give you a family, I can give you a wife with your children and a good job and a lovely house and I would just say: “Fuck off, who do you think I am, do you think I’m crazy?” Like anything else, with any gifts, I think you can
either abuse them or you can treat them well. You can either use them in a healthy way or use them in an unhealthy manner. So that's where I am. I see it as part of the giftness of who I am. And I wouldn’t change that for the world because I like the way I think about things. I like the way I process a lot of information. I like the way I act and where I am at the moment because it gives me a real empathy and a really good understanding of the children I work with.

At this point of their coming out process, none of the participants in this study would change their sexual orientation if they could. Bernie comments, as did all others, that he would not change from being gay to being straight. The participants felt an increased level of self-esteem, empowerment, and a greater sense of belonging during this stage.

#4 Bernie: No, I wouldn’t change anything in my life at this point. I’ve tried being a heterosexual it wasn’t for me. If I had the same feelings for a female that I do for a guy then there wouldn’t be any difference except I’d be with females instead of a guy. At the very beginning being gay was just something that I had to get over mentally, which I think most gay people do, they go through that, they realise or they’ve been told that they’re different. Some people handle it differently; some people don’t look at it as if it’s a problem but those of us that do get a bit concerned about it, some more than others unfortunately. I managed to get over it quite quickly. There were a lot of things that I needed to adjust to and do. Being gay is what I am and it’s all right. There are a lot of people around that seem to be turned off or give me sour looks about it, or if they do I don’t see it. I never had anybody or anything, bad, said to me, or done to me because of my sexuality. The only thing I feel deprived of because I’m gay is not being able to have my own children. I wish my partner could have his own children, with me. We’d love to have a house full of [our own] kids.

Many participants such as Ron felt that at this stage they had the strength and capacity to help others in the community. Their levels of fear and isolation have decreased to the point of feeling empowered enough to bring about change in their lives and the lives of others.

#3 Ron: One of my best experiences [being gay] is helping to comfort people to help other people come out cause I’m much more liable to take on homophobia now. I usually take it on in a half joking kind of way to try and show [homophobes], they’re stupid, or I just ignore them. I wouldn’t change if I could, no definitely, not. Cause I like being gay. I like guys and guys are great. If you’d asked me [to be straight] when I was 17 or 18 I would have probably said yes because the whole thing was just too fuckin’ complicated, you know. I just didn’t want to [be gay]. But now, I can’t imagine what girls are like. I don’t know what that’s like. I’ve no experience of what that means. God, being straight now would get me in trouble with a lot of people I know.

Andy best describes his empowerment in the following quote.
Andy: **As a person, I’m a lot stronger now.** Just, yeah, I mean, just growing up it does teach you how to deal with situations and being stronger. That’s the difference between me now and when I was 16. At 22, I remember, I was having coffee with a friend of mine just in a cafe and we were talking about both of us being gay and how we were getting on and stuff like that and how we were feeling. That was the first time I’d actually really thought about it, really, really deeply and thought, well actually I really don’t mind that person I am now, I think I’m actually quite a nice person, quite giving and I like the person that I’ve become and I wouldn’t want to be straight or change any of my experiences because then they would actually change the person that I would have become. So yeah, I was 22 when I really thought, wow, nope, I’m not bad, I like who I am and I’m happy. Being gay has been a good thing. Absolutely! I still have a few things to work on, but even if I was given the opportunity, nope I wouldn’t change, I want to be me.

Leo finds his strength in his feelings of being part of a minority community.

Leo: **I think that the good thing about [being gay] is that it gives me a way to appreciate how it feels to be in a minority.** Sort of like where other people are discriminated against for being different. So it sort of gives me an inside to that. You can identify with other people who are also the targets of bigotry.

**Section Summary**

This section described various emerging themes relevant to identity management. Clearly, the men in this study employed different identity management skills during their coming out processes. Findings were outlined in relation to Griffin’s (1991) six coming out stages. An additional theme on suicidal thoughts also emerged and was also presented. Key findings in this section include the following:

- Gay rugby players feel different to other players in a negative and inferior way.
- Many deny their sexual identity by lying to themselves and others.
- They did not come out because of their participation in mainstream rugby.
- They feel that their athletic productivity and performance are decreased.
- They realised and/or accepted their sexual orientation at varying ages.
- However, all confirm that they were born gay; that they could not change their same-sex attractions even if they wanted to.
- Their personal authenticity is more important to them than social approval.
- Many had thoughts of suicide.
Surprisingly, findings show that coming out (visibility) is a very positive experience and that once out few encounter any form of direct homophobia. More surprising though is the finding that most people in the lives of these players knew they were gay before the players came out themselves. Contrary to assumptions by many people that being gay is a choice and that most gay men engage in substance abuse; findings in this study show that (a) these gay rugby players never chose to be gay and in fact some still wish they were not, and (b) few of these rugby players have ever developed substance abuse behaviour.

The overall results in this section are directly related to identity management issues as presented within the Conspiracy of Silence model. It was common among the men in this research that rugby is a site where individual identities are contested. The meanings gay men attributed to their participation in the sport of rugby varied as they negotiated the fusion of sexual, social and sporting identities. Higher levels of silence and invisibility create barriers for their survival in the mainstream sport context of rugby union. Conversely, visibility with regard to the research question creates opportunities for gay men to participate and survive in rugby union. Visibility, within the Conspiracy of Silence model, is located in stages four to six of Griffin’s identity management continuum. The positive effects of gay visibility are also relevant to Noelle-Neumann’s Spiral of Silence theory where the media’s influence on public opinion processes can facilitate the inclusion, participation and survival of gay men in rugby union.

In the following section, additional emerging themes relevant to the visibility of gay rugby players are offered. Here, I will expand on the opportunities that the context of mainstream rugby could create for the participation and survival of gay players. The positive meanings gay men make of their participation in rugby are also examined.
Emerging Themes Relevant to Visibility

The previous section identified some of the results that are consistent with the existing literature and that of my personal assumptions. However, whilst these findings were expected, they are not the sole bases of this research. The objective of doing phenomenological research is to explore and find new and different themes than those assumed and which are pertinent to the lived experiences of these players. This section presents additional themes that have emerged that are not present in the current literature surrounding the silence of gay athletes, nor were they part of my assumptions. However, these additional themes are consistent within the lived experiences of gay men who are out; meaning that they are visible. Visibility, in the context of this research refers to stages 4 to 6 of Griffins (1991) identity management continuum where most men know or assume everyone knows they are gay. Hence, the findings associated with visibility are related to the identity management tenet of the Conspiracy of Silence model. At this point in the lives of these men, silence, as it has been understood in this study, is absent. It has been replaced with visibility as illustrated earlier in Table 3.

The additional emerging themes are presented in this section as follows:

- The enjoyment of participating in sport
- The sense of inclusiveness
- Finding compatibility with heterosexual players
- Developing compatibility with other gays
- The emancipation of self
- A sense of productivity
- The reconciliation of all identities
- The creation of a sense of altruism
The enjoyment of participating in sport:

One of the more obvious emerging themes in this study, other than the themes related to oppression theory and identity management, was that of the enjoyment of sport in general and rugby in particular for the men in this study. The participants shared quite clearly their pleasure of being part of a team sport and the satisfaction they experienced by training and competing with other men. Andy, Bernie and Henri express these sentiments in the following quotes.

#7 Andy: You know the team thing … I love team sports but the rugby thing is the most rewarding. I got in quite young and all these older guys, and sort of the life style and the social part of it I really enjoyed. I always based on the ability of the player is more important than basically some of the things you might say off the field or what have you. It’s what you do on the field that matters most. I like being around guys. You know sport enabled me to do that.

#4 Bernie: I think this rugby forms great camaraderie and obviously the sport itself is great, the physical side of it is also different. Sometimes I can be a bit drained but I find I’ve made a lot of great, great friends. I appreciate how hard it is, especially to be motivated and then to have set yourself goals and having to achieve them. The glory of achieving is great. I get a lot of satisfaction in that. I don’t think it’s so much contact sport I think it’s more just the 15 men playing, compared to 15 women. I think that was the first thing that attracted me to it was you know rugby guys are so straight up, straight acting. However not all of them are attractive but I think contact sports, team sports are more interesting. In a team sport you can rely on other people, which makes it sometimes better and sometimes a bit harder, I rely on them and they will depend and rely on you and you. You get an indication that you can do something and do it well that’s how anyone achieves their initial goal, their overall goal, when you achieve it as a team.

#11 Henri: I do suppose it’s the sociability of [rugby] too. That I like. I mean you can get together afterwards and have a drink and have a chat and that’s one of the things that I’ve really enjoyed about the rugby training is actually just doing these complicated ball moves and always dropping the damn thing … and talking to one another about what you’re doing.

Some of the rugby players in this study also shared their delight of having experienced playing on a gay rugby team and were able to make comparisons to the experiences they had within mainstream teams. Jake, Pete and Jeep felt they had finally felt a certain degree of gratification and validation in gay rugby that they had never experienced in mainstream
rugby. For many, gay rugby was the very first instance in their sporting lives where they truly enjoyed playing and participating in an environment free of homophobia.

#13 Jake: I really enjoy gay rugby and being with likeminded guys who are into sport. It’s good to see blokes that are just blokes, you know, no pretentiousness or anything. I really have things in common with some of these guys that I can’t find anywhere else.

#5 Pete: I’m getting a lot of joy with people where for the first time of my life I don’t have to pretend to be anything other than who I am. I suddenly know for the first time in my life what the fuckin’ offside rule is. I’ve always struggled with that all my life, it’s been like this huge block but all of a sudden the coach told me about it and I was just laughing when he told me. He couldn’t believe why I was laughing. I said that I never understood the fuckin’ offside rule and I’ve always wondered why people would say: ‘Offside, offside’, and I’d say: ‘How the fuck do you know [when you’re off side]? There are 30 people on this field, you know, and you can spot one person who’s offside and now you’re telling me.’ I said: ‘That is so easy.’ … Why didn’t I know it before? It was just this sense of joy, just to be able to even understand something easy like that. So that’s what I’m experiencing with this gay team. It’s given me that confidence I would like to take into straight sports and compete with that level of confidence against straight guys. If my head was where I am now, 15 years ago, there would be no pulling back, I would be involved in athletics, a swim squad, and I would be doing gymnastics. I would have wanted to be in so many sports because I suddenly have discovered this love that I have for sports.

#6 Jeep: I had to laugh at our first gay training session because there’s so much innuendo going on, and I’ve never heard that before in rugby. I spent half the time laughing my arse off it was just absolutely hilarious. In a scrum for example, it’s like: ‘Oh, so I grab you there do I?’ or kind of like: ‘Yes, yes, let’s get hard’. Get hard is a kind of term they use in rugby, but never in the same sense as in a gay team. What really fucks me off now, about the straight locker room scene or even the straight sports scene, is that they’ve used gay people as or they’ll use the gay terminology as being negative. [Straight players would say:] ‘Oh ya faggot, oh ya fuckin’ pansy, get fuckin’ hard like this’ … and that’s something that really fuckin’ rips my undies, because I actually find [being on a gay team] more positive than being on a straight team, to be perfectly honest.

Leo is among the very few participants in this study who had never attempted to play rugby before joining a gay rugby team. His remarks reflect those of a minority of athletes who never had the privilege of experiencing the physical and social benefits of sport in New Zealand during their childhood.

#9 Leo: Rugby is like New Zealand’s national sport and so that was a game that I never thought I would do. I remember I was talking to my mum on the phone about it and she was going: ‘What you’re playing rugby, that’s crazy!’ It
was just like hey my attitudes have changed a bit and mum’s expectations as well, so that’s great. **Yeah so I’m feeling different I guess, growing and enjoying it for the first time.** I get quite a lot out of playing rugby really. Fitness wise it’s good, I meet new people who have similar interests to mine, things like that. So getting to know different people in a situation that we will all enjoy I guess.

In comparison, Art comments on the fact that he never had a bad experience in mainstream rugby because of his sexual orientation. His level of enjoyment in rugby justifies his commitment to it year after year. His reasons for not playing rugby would be due to other more important commitments.

#1 Art: I can’t really think of [any bad experiences]. I just honestly can’t, you know. Probably the things that stick in my mind come around February, the last few years, when it’s that time to think: ‘Do I commit to another season? Can I justify the time that rugby takes? … What am I going to miss if I don’t do it?’ You know, that sort of … process of deciding whether it’s time to move away from it. I haven’t [quit] yet. I always come to the same result but it’s a very difficult time … particularly the last couple of years. I have [other] stuff, working, and there’s so many other demands on my life, yeah!

Marc, however, expresses his enjoyment in rugby as being limited to playing as a straight player on straight teams and within heterosexual organisations. Although he enjoyed playing rugby, it did come at a very high personal cost.

#10 Marc: I never felt when I was younger that I could tell people I was gay and still expect to have a future in sport, particularly in rugby! I had some great experiences in rugby, some of my best moments, but I suppose I also had a few bad ones as well. Still the good ones outweighed the bad by a mile. It would never have occurred to me, though, to try to change things, and I'm not sure I wanted to change things. It’s not as if I wanted to be like any other gay person, because you didn't even know who was gay. I was reasonably happy to be a rugby player, and to be someone else in my ‘private life’. At times, though that ‘private life’ was uncomfortable and even dangerous. I had a terrible time once because a policeman took my name because I was in a park toilet one evening. He didn't catch me doing anything, but I was really worried about it for ages.

The sense of inclusiveness:

Part of the enjoyment in rugby these men experienced came from the sense of inclusiveness they felt playing in a context where gay players were validated. Many found solace and a greater degree of comfortableness with themselves and others in gay rugby.
Andy, Leo, Hubert, Ron and Art justify this emerging theme in the following quotes. I have decided to include numerous quotes relative to a sense of inclusion, as the formation of inclusive policies within mainstream organisation is central to the survival of gay rugby players within them. These quotes express the power of inclusion from different perspectives. Indeed a sense of inclusion makes it easier for Andy to play rugby, for Leo to feel better about himself, for Hubert to make friends and feel proud of the gay community, for Ron to feel reassured and safe, and for Art to participate in a family atmosphere.

#7 Andy: I’d have to say I’d never ever returned to rugby if there hadn’t been this gay rugby team, just because I wouldn’t have had the courage to go to a straight rugby club. It’s made it a lot easier to actually play [gay rugby rather than] straight rugby, just because everybody’s sort of in the same boat. I like it because we have been given the opportunity to learn how to play; it’s made it a lot easier. Because we’re all gay, it has a little sort of community spirit going on, which is cool. It’s something we have in common other than being gay; it’s got a good feeling about it! Even if I’m still scared of getting hurt, at least I know it’s stupid and that others will be there to help me get over it.

#9 Leo: I just never thought I could play sports as well as other people could. People in primary school didn’t think I was good in sports. They don’t choose you to participate in their team, you know, because they don’t perceive you as being good at the sport if they perceive you to be gay; primary school or any school.

#12 Hubert: I’m out there in a gay team that’s open, a gay team that I quite admire for doing what they’re doing and I’m really happy to be part of that group. It’s almost like ten fold the number of friends that I have now.

#3 Ron: I’d happily say I was really worried before I went to the first [gay] practice that I wouldn’t be [accepted], I [thought] they wouldn’t be like they were at school but I was still worried getting on with the group. But getting there, they’re just a great group of people.

#1 Art: One thing for me [playing with other gay men] is a totally different perspective to the rest of my life as well. Particularly where I am at the moment [with] the nature of the [gay] people that are playing in my team. The mainstream teams are totally different to the people I socialise with at work or play with. They’re predominantly a low socio-economic group, predominantly Pacific Island generally labourers and all that. It’s nice to shag out of the academic law culture into another culture where the priorities are different and you see a whole different language a whole different sense of operating…. It gives you a … family, collegial type atmosphere and that’s what sport is. That’s one of the reason why I don’t give up sport is because it takes me, it brings me to people that I just otherwise wouldn’t have any reason to stop and
talk to or anything like that. ... I think I would be missing out if I didn’t have those people in my life.

Pete comments on his sense of inclusiveness as a responsibility towards other gay players.

#5 Pete: I guess I didn’t have a problem in the showers, cause the purpose for us being there was the camaraderie. I see them as other people, as my friends that I am choosing not to have a [sexual] relationship with, because this needs to be a healthy experience for all of us.

Conversely, Val and Bernie, describe how being out to heterosexual players on their mainstream teams has helped them feel more included within those teams as well as in the case of their gay rugby team.

#2 Val: ...And now [that I’m out] in my mainstream team ... they’re much more comfortable with me and I’m [more] comfortable with them and things like that and [we have] good humour, we play up. The odd time we play up things but that’s because we’ve got to that stage where that’s OK, yeah.

#4 Bernie: I thought [being gay] would be a problem in rugby. That’s why I never told anyone until I actually came out and when I finally decided to come out I thought, oh I wondered how my rugby would be, how’s it’s going to affect my rugby career with the sports people that I play and coached and administrated. But at that time I thought well it’s just something that we’re all going to have to deal with when it arises. So when I came out to one of my best friend [who] accepted it greatly, he asked if he could tell the rest of the guys and I said: ‘Like who?’ He said: ‘Well you know some of the rugby guys.’ And I said: ‘Yeah that’s great’, and he did. That year I went back and played [mainstream] rugby. I had a couple of guys come up to me and say: ‘Oh, we know that you’re gay and blah, blah, blah and that’s cool and we’ll still play rugby with you and still pack down the scrum with you but in the showers we might still have our towel around us,’ you know just in a laughing, joking way. It was great and I said: ‘Yeah that’s cool, you know whatever.’ As the season progressed, I was judged more on my playing ability than on my sexual orientation. Because I was quite good at rugby [and from that point on] everything else was fine.

Some gay men developed empathy for other gay men through sport. Jake expresses his sense of inclusiveness of other gay players based on their acts of courage to play rugby as visible gay men.

#13 Jake: Now, I look at effeminate guys and think of them differently than before, cause I know what they’ve been through and that it takes a lot more courage to be who they are than to be who I am, really. [As a masculine man],
I can get away with it, but they can't. So I guess I kind of look up to these guys just as much as I do the better players, even mainstream players.

Despite this, some participants in this study, such as Sione who is not completely out yet, do not feel inclusive of gay players.

#14 Sione: I don’t feel included at all eh! I look at the gay scene and I tell myself that that’s not really for me eh! I’d rather hang out with my straight rugby friends.

Finding compatibility with heterosexuals:

In the most straining of millennium mergers, Moore (1998) states that gay men are becoming more like heterosexual men and heterosexual men are becoming more like gay men. Often individuals are perceived as different in a particular way (such as sexual orientation) and therefore deemed different in all ways. Important similarities are not therefore taken into account. This section presents the data that emerged relevant to the similarities and compatibilities among gay and heterosexual men rather than their differences.

Moore (1998) writes that a transition from gay identity based on gender-inversion to identity based on same-sex attraction began in the antipodes by the 1940s, although gender-inversion remains institutionalised in the form of ubiquitous drag shows. Regardless of this residual anomaly, I would argue, from the findings in this study, there has been a marked shift away from the old feminine stereotype towards a ‘masculine’ one, weakening the link between being gay and effeminacy. The emergence of the gay movement (like that of the women’s movement) has meant major alterations in gay and heterosexual realities and self-perceptions.

The contemporary gay community includes older forms of gay identity now reshaped by a fuller understanding of the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Art, Jeep and Andy’s words indicate clearly the sameness these men have with heterosexual men when their lived experiences are related to the context of rugby. In describing his reasons for playing rugby, Art emphasises the similarities between gay players and mainstream players as well as gay rugby teams and mainstream rugby teams. Jeep and Andy’s reasons for participating in sport
are for the camaraderie and social interaction it provides for them which is similar to the reasons heterosexual men play sport.

#1 Art: I sometimes wonder. It’s just the sheer complexity of the game that I probably like about it the most. There’s so much in it and there’s so many different facets and all those different facets are so testing of different parts of you. There’s the physical side, there’s an extremely mental side, there’s speed, and there’s all that needed strength side. There is so much in it and it’s a team sport and that’s my reason for playing rugby. I love team sports. It means there’s other people helping me do my stuff. Which is a one-thing team sport give. The sense of support and I guess the pressure to do your job. If there wasn’t that I probably wouldn’t [play] it. I’m not the person who gets out of bed on my own willingly and goes for runs and things like that. In team sports, you know, it’s not just for you, it’s for the other people and I guess there’s the collegial type nature of the sport. You’re out there, you know, at my rugby club we talk of the family and the gay community is like a family. Everybody looks out after each other and we’ve got a chance to share what we do with so many other people. You know, it’s good; it’s no different from straight guys in straight teams.

#6 Jeep: Sport has given me close friendships, it’s given me satisfaction, it’s given me plenty of long memories, it’s given me the ability to teach and to excel in being the best I can be to the people around me. The camaraderie is the main reason I play rugby because I’ve always been a team person, I’ve never got into individual sports that way. You share a lot as a team and I always enjoyed that team element. It’s given me a lot of fun and probably kept me out of trouble on Friday nights.

#7 Andy: As you get older you sort of like to have the companionship and friendship around you. So that’s what group sports give you, well for me anyway.

As Art described his reasons for playing rugby, Val describes how the behaviour of gay rugby players may be similar to that expected from mainstream players. Being a seasoned rugby player and having played on both mainstream and gay teams Val is in a good position to compare gay players to mainstream players. The perception that gay men are more promiscuous than heterosexual men may be questioned. For Val, sexual orientation is the only difference between the two groups, as rugby players, their behaviour in the context of rugby is very similar. With the exception of the odd affectionate peck on the cheek or the occasional holding of hands and lingering hugs, the gay men in this study act the same as in mainstream sport. Yet, similar behaviours are all too common and visible on mainstream rugby fields.
where embraces and kisses are acceptable, especially after a try has been scored or a championship game has been won.

#2 Val: I didn’t notice any difference [in the showers]. I mean if you’re dirty, sweaty, hot you go and have a shower. I mean it’s the same as in mainstream sport, guys look at you, you look at them... I’m there because I enjoy the social scene of sports teams and things like that. It’s a lot of fun and I really enjoy being part of that. That’s why I coach as well cause I like the team situation and you know it’s made me a better person. It’s just good fun, good clean camaraderie. I’ve made most of my friends through sport so I suppose it just keeps going. I’ll never stop being part of sport till I die. I mean that’s just it... I’m just a bloke that likes blokes. That’s the only part of me that I feel is different to straight blokes.

Then again, Ron adds that the differences that may exist between gay and heterosexual men also exists among heterosexual men. In this sense, both groups have similar disparities, which serve to dispel conventional stereotypes between both groups.

#3 Ron: I’ll say there’s a gay truck driver and there’s a gay ballet dancer, and there’s straight ballet dancer and there’s straight truck driver and there are varieties of people within each group but that’s like a caricature really because I get the hint that there are commonalities of gay experience and straight experiences. We see it whenever we get a group of gay guys together, and we can see it when we get a group of straight guys together. We also see it when we get a bunch of rugby players together. There are bonds even though they’re different people, some gay some straight. In most cases we can’t tell the differences.

Bernie and Pete also describe the similarities between gay and heterosexual players by comparing their level of abilities. One of Bernie’s gay friends played with a gay team from London England; the Kings Cross Steelers and Pete played with the Krazy Knights from Wellington. Both describe the respect mainstream team players had for the level of athletic ability both gay teams presented on the field.

#4 Bernie: I asked my friend how hard were the straight teams in London [when he played for the gay team there] and he said: ‘That they were really hard’ and I said: ‘Why was that’, and he said: ‘Cause no one over there wanted to be the first team to lose to the gay team.’ If there was a gay premier rugby team in New Zealand they would be there because of their ability to play the game and would have had to be there because they had earned the right to be there, so they would be taken on like any other team. They wouldn’t be treated any differently.
#5 Pete: When they [straight men] get out there and they wonder what to expect, they actually see a group of normal looking men who are out there wanting to play rugby, you know, who are focused on wanting to play rugby and we may not play it very well, although some play it bloody well. As a team we may not necessarily have all what we need to get through but we’re out there to play rugby and enjoy the game, which is hopefully what they’re out there to do as well. So it normalises everything and I think at the end of a rugby game you can’t help but come off a field no matter who you are and where you’re from and have respect for the opposition members that you’ve just played because they’ve made you have respect for them. What they’ve said is that sexuality isn’t an issue it’s what is being done; it’s the game that we’re playing here that’s the issue. If we come off the field having enjoyed the game, then where’s the problem? Nobody goes for their balls in a ruck. I think it challenges people to think about it a little bit more. That’s had a great impact on where I am with my sexuality. It’s taken it out of that shame base and it’s put it onto healthy ground and that’s a big turn around in the way mainstream players think of us and the way we think of ourselves.

Stereotypical notions of gay men would see them disinterested in sport in general and even less in rugby. Henri dispels this notion when he describes his newly found fondness for the game. Henri explains how he never used to like watching rugby because sport was not something he perceived gay men could or should be part of. Once he realised that many gay men do play rugby, he also realised he could share this passion with his older heterosexual brother. His statements show evidence of the compatibility gay and heterosexual players may share.

#11 Henri: I think I rather like the team aspect of it [rugby]. The whole is greater than some of the parts; I like that aspect of it. I like the intricateness, the strategies, the covering you know? Like I went and watched the Crusaders game with my brother, the straight brother and his wife and it was really cool I enjoyed it for the first time where as previously it’s like oh rugby’s not for gay guys. Well that notion’s out the door! There are so many gay guys around playing it and all very good at it too. You should have seen my brother’s eyes light up when I told him I was playing rugby.

Hubert and Jake express how their values could be deemed similar to those of heterosexual men. They share similar notions of marriage and relationships as well as public values and morals.

#12 Hubert: For me being gay is the relationship with another person [as it would be with a woman] and you know I still have some of the principles that I was brought up with in a heterosexual context, you know the Catholic side of me. I was to enter that heterosexual marriage scenario you know you make that
commitment and you offer that commitment but I come from those kind of principles [in a] gay relationship.

#13 Jake: I remember playing rugby abroad where we had a co-ed scrummage and after the practice we all showered in the same room, straight men and women with no fuss. Now isn’t that the way it should be? What was so revealing to me, was my understanding that some straight as well as gay people have issues, and others don’t… regardless of your sexual orientation.

In comparison to statements from other participants, Sione describes the one main difference that may exist between gay and heterosexual players. In the context of rugby, gay players are preoccupied by their sexual orientation during a game, while heterosexual players are not.

#14 Sione: If you’re not concentrating on rugby during a rugby game, you don’t win the game. [Being gay] is just something you shouldn’t have to think about, and you’d be a better player for it.

Developing compatibility with other gays:

Changes in society such as huge migrations to the cities following World War II, began to build gay communities in urban centers, and gay people began to have a sense of themselves as a minority group rather than just a few isolated individuals (Moore, 1998). Yet still today, most of the participants in this study were isolated from other gay men also involved in mainstream sport organisations. The data collected in this study indicates that gay men did not feel comfortable in disclosing their sexual orientation within their sporting context because of the perceived non-existence of other gay men. Additionally, the perception that gay men do not participate or have any interest in sport keeps them apart from each other. However, once gay athletes do come in contact with other gay athletes, compatibilities with each other can be formed and maintained. Val recalls that the only gay men he knew, prior to joining the Krazy Knights gay rugby team in Wellington, were not involved in sport or had little interest in sport.

#2 Val: None of [the gay guys at a bar] knew anything about anything [regarding sport], and I sort of had to sort of try and discuss things that weren’t quite as interesting I suppose. I mean I like talking sport, I mean it is
my life. It probably stopped me from meeting a few people but now we’ve got the Krazy Knights [gay rugby team] and it’s growing, I think it’s brilliant. I’m meeting a lot of people. I mean I went [to the gay bar] on Saturday night and there was a few guys there and it was great because I was meeting people I knew that had, for the first time in my life, similar interests to mine.

Bernie also describes how he felt when he finally encountered other gay athletes. Beforehand he had little to do with the gay community. Even though he still remains distant to the gay community, he has developed friendships with other gay men because of their compatibility and shared interests in sport in general and rugby in particular.

#4 Bernie: Yeah, well most of my friends, if not all of them are all straight and they all know I’m gay. I’ve only just started over the past five years to get a circle of gay athletic friends. Because I think, I need that contact. Before, I guess I wasn’t interested in being in the gay circle if you like. I guess I wasn’t comfortable. Everything that was around I felt I didn’t need. What I find now is that it’s nice to have that contact, even though I don’t go out to gay bars that much or to the saunas. It’s nice to have that sort of support from what I consider my gay family, friendships, even if I don’t have many things in common with them outside of sport.

In comparison, some gay men are more interested in sport than their heterosexual counterparts are. In this instance, some gay men find it equally difficult developing compatibilities with heterosexuals as they do with other gay men. Ron describes how, in his family, he was the only sport minded individual compared to his other siblings.

#3 Ron: [In my family], I was always the one open to watching any sort of sport and I think it just carried from there. Interestingly though, my eldest [heterosexual] brothers are not sporting at all. One played sport at school and you sort of have to in New Zealand and my middle brother did as well but they’re not, they don’t share the same sort of interest or passion for sport [as I do].

The emancipation of self:

As demonstrated in earlier sections, the cultural and social movement directly and indirectly promoting gay integration into New Zealand society has done little to assist full integration and acceptance of gay men in mainstream sport organisations. In this section, data regarding the emancipation of gay athletes even within the existing homophobic sporting context are presented. Participants describe their liberating experiences as self-identifying gay
men within mainstream sport organisations in comparison to their experiences within gay
teams playing against mainstream teams. They describe how they felt as gay men playing on a
visible gay team compared to playing on mainstream teams. They also describe how they felt
playing as a visible gay team in a mainstream competition. First, Bernie explains why, in his
opinion, gay men were motivated to play rugby within mainstream organisation even if these
organisations are considered homophobic. Feelings of emancipation for gay men in sport
constitute the last stage of their coming out process. The level of fear has decreased and
given way to a sense of empowerment for most men in this study.

#4 Bernie: I don’t know why we want to [play rugby in mainstream
organisations] but I think it’s because we just feel like [the need to play] has
always been there, we’ve always wanted to but we were gay and it’s not a gay
sport, it’s not you know, [traditionally] for gay people. We were always told
gay men don’t play rugby. So finally being able to say enough is enough was a
very liberating experience for all of us.

Art describes his best sporting moment as being the first time he joined and played rugby
on a gay team. For him, playing rugby on a gay team or as a gay man in a mainstream
sporting context was not solely for reasons of social participation and physical activity, it was
also for political reasons. Refusing to adhere to the homophobic climate of exclusion and to
assist in breaking down stereotypes of gay men in rugby were very liberating and empowering
motivations to participate in a game of rugby.

#1 Art: [Playing my first gay rugby game was] one of [my] sporting moments
I would most remember because it was [experienced at] that next level up. We
were playing at a totally different level and although the result goal wasn’t
there the personal goal was achieved and that was good. Because, I mean,
there’s the collateral reason why you’re [playing for a gay team] you know.
And in that sense it is different, you know, it’s an extra step. It’s an extra
coming out step; it’s an extra growing step being not just an athlete but also a
gay athlete. And yeah, something which isn’t mirrored with just being a
mainstream athlete.

Emancipation, in general, means becoming free and equal to all others. For most gay men
in this study, emancipation of self means freeing oneself from one’s personal fears and
preoccupation of the public opinion of their sexual orientation in general and more
specifically of their participation in sport. Only when gay men enter the mainstream of society in general as well as that of a homophobic sporting context specifically do they find complete emancipation. In this sense, emancipation of self offers gay athletes empowerment as individuals to participate fully in sport within the mainstream sporting context. Ron describes his emancipation as a feeling of finally contributing to the national sporting landscape, taking his place in sport that is rightfully his and doing so without the pressure and fear he had experienced within rugby in the past.

#3 Ron: Basically, [gay rugby players] are just people wanting to have a go at playing rugby. However, they have an additional objective of [eliminating] stereotypes and having the chance to go back and play without that heterosexual male macho [pressure] that I didn’t like before. So I mean I’m enjoying contributing to the New Zealand sporting landscape be it hitting a squash ball around this morning with a friend or playing in a revolutionary rugby team.

Fed up with the existing homophobia within the mainstream sporting context, and eager to play and be fully accepted, some gay men eventually gravitate towards gay teams or decide to come out to their mainstream organisations, to claim what rightfully is theirs: freedom for themselves and others. Jake found emancipation when he got to the stage where he realised that being a good person is more important than being a good athletes and that being an honest, open and genuine gay person was more important for him than being perceived as a heterosexual one. For Jake and others, the need for authenticity as an individual was one of the most powerful forces guiding him to emancipation of self.

#13 Jake: Sticking a feather up your ass doesn’t make you a chicken, just like playing rugby doesn’t make you a man!

At this point of their coming out process, emancipated gay rugby players feel valued for their individual contributions to their team. Previously they may have only enjoyed rights as a group, now they enjoy rights as individuals. Pete and Andy recall how they felt a sense of emancipation when they practiced and played with their gay team. Not only did they feel empowered to play as a team, but they also felt empowered as individuals within a team.
#5 Pete: We had that training the other day, on Wednesday and at one stage, after we had done the tackle bag stuff, I was leaning against the end of the shed and I was just concentrating. **I had this sense of incredible well-being and joy**... I really enjoyed some of the dialogue that had gone down, I mean I thought it was just great the way no other rugby team could use that sort of dialogue. Someone would say: ‘Bend down lower it makes it a lot easier.’ ...It was the first time I could lean against that wall and say: ‘I am so glad that I am gay.’ I see it as being a gift; I see it as being a gift from God.

#7 Andy: **Playing gay sports has pushed me out of my comfort zone.** To a certain extent, I still find it difficult telling new people I’m gay. But I’m getting better. It’s not too bad. I’ve told people at work that I’m playing rugby and they go: ‘Oh who for?’ And I go: ‘Well have you heard about that gay rugby team?’ And they go: ‘Yeah!’ And I go: ‘Well that’s the one.’ So I’ve found it pretty good, picking up from people’s [positive] opinions at work, with me being in the gay rugby team.

Finally, Henri describes how he felt when he first practiced with his gay team. Emancipation for him, compared to others, was when he felt accepted and valued not only within a mainstream competition but also as a gay athlete within a gay team. A sense of cooperation, validation, and support from other gay players proved to be a very empowering experience for Henri.

#11 Henri: Well I wished my ball handling skills had been better I mean that would have been notable, being rucked mercilessly and going down the middle of the scrum and holding on to the ball while [other players] are saying: ‘He doesn’t know the rules, you’re supposed to release it.’ That was very funny. I mean that was a real good icebreaker. I was just thinking if I’d met those guys in a bar, we’d never, ever talk, I’m sure we wouldn’t have. Yet, [at rugby practice] you sort of got something in common and you’re all playing together and [it is ok if] you’re always fuckin’ up. You talk about it. **I mean it was great; it was very liberating.**

**A sense of productivity:**

Another emerging theme that arose following that of emancipation was a greater sense of productivity for the men in this study. Many felt that once they came out and felt more empowered, they also felt that they were capable of being more productive in their lives in general and in sport in particular. For many, the barriers of homophobia negatively affected their sporting experience. Nevertheless, for most men, coming out in their social worlds was easier than coming out in their sporting worlds. Art describes how he was more preoccupied
in coming out to his mainstream team organisation compared to his friends, family and work colleagues.

\#1 Art: I mean it [coming out] came at a good time for me and it didn’t worry me. It impacted on my rugby life [though]. All the pretence, you know. I wasn’t sure whether… it would be the most sensible thing that I should do.

Gay athletes, especially in professional sports are stuck. Their safest option is to continue hiding what they are, living in a pressure cooker of lies and unspoken truths. This pressure may only boil over during competition, sometimes in ways the public and the officials will never know or understand. As much as they may be productive, one can only imagine how more productive gay athletes would be if they did not waste so much energy and focus whilst trying to remain silent and invisible. One should not deny the psychological costs of managing their identity. David Kopay adds: “I think repression in anything leads to psychosis… it doesn’t lead to anything healthy, that’s for sure. I felt I was suffocating.” (Kettman, 1998). Sports writers who covered Los Angeles Dodgers’ baseball player Glen Burk remembered that he seemed distracted and distant when he played. Burk was traded when manager Tom Lasorda found out he was gay and he soon retired after he heard his next team’s manager, Oakland’s Billy Martin say: “I don’t want no faggots playing for me” (Kettman, 1998). From this example, the loss of human capital to homophobia in sport is undeniable. Ron and Sione clearly indicate their lack of productivity in sport because of the effect fear had or has on their concentration levels.

\#3 Ron: [In this environment], I’m more able to control my emotions; the fear has gone. When I think about my rugby career as a teenager, I suspect I was a bit scared quite a lot of the time. Just a fear of falling to foul thug guys. They would have done what they wanted to me; bashing me over or whatever. I don’t think they probably would have I just had this vision that they would. And so that [sense of fear] is gone with this [gay] team I can concentrate more on the game and have fun, be more productive.

\#14 Sione: If I could play rugby and know that everyone accepted me being gay, that would be sweet. I would enjoy that a lot, eh! I think I would play a lot better than I play now, I could concentrate on the game more.
Little productivity is better than no productivity at all. For a few men in this study, sport in general and team sports in particular were non-existent during childhood. Fear of ostracism and bullying kept them from participating fully in sport. Bernie expresses some of the men’s accomplishments “just by coming to the field.” With the advent of an accepting environment, some gay men experience the positive attributes of sport for the very first time.

#4 Bernie: They’re getting closer and closer together as friends therefore playing together as a team and going to get so much easier and more fun. When they start realising what it takes to have the ability to play, to pass the ball, or kick the ball, or run, to tackle and they all learn it together, I think they’ll come right and really come on strong as a team. They’ve overcome their biggest hurdle just by coming to the field!

Fortunately, some men have discovered the enjoyment and benefits of sport later in their life when their sense of fear and sometimes hatred of sport dissipated. Pete expresses with regret how he came to acknowledge sport as beneficial and rewarding only later in his life. Clearly, homophobia did have an effect on Pete’s participation and productivity in sport.

#5 Pete: I guess, the reality is I could have enjoyed [sport as a youngster], cause I mean I fuckin’ hated running and cross country and sports, you see by the time I got to form 3 I was fat anyway. You had to do this bloody running sports and I always came last, plodding along. I fuckin’ hated it and I think it was because I had such bad experiences [in sport]. The interesting thing is, as I got older I suddenly discovered that in an actual fact I really love running, part of my fitness thing in Christchurch, I’d run around the whole of Hagley Park, three times a week in the summer, you know all of a sudden I found myself going to the gym 4 times a week, you know maybe 5 times a week, going swimming 3 times a week. I really loved running, I really fuckin’ loved it and I thought, why didn’t I do this before, this is right for me. I think it was possibly because I was so incredibly depressed, as a child growing up and there were so many things going on and I had such bad experiences anyway, so distrustful of people, generally men, that this combination of it all aided to sport being threatening really. There was a great sense of sadness that all of a sudden, you know, in my 30’s when I suddenly discovered what my body was capable of doing this love of sport that it was, you know, almost too late.

As McCarthy (1997) points out, an awareness of one’s place within the family is essential to good health and well-being. Krane (1996) also found that a negative environment for lesbians could negatively affect athletic performance. The same may apply for the participants in this study as noted by Val and Henri.
Val: The gay rugby players are all very much more confident now as people; I think it’s made a big difference to them as well. ... Just seeing them at practice and [seeing] how their personalities have come out and how they seem to act differently, and train harder with more confidence, is a big difference.

Henri: I like to see what my body could do. You’re prepared to give it a go and it affects the way you do little jobs in ... life as well. I mean I think I’m different now than I ever was and one of the reasons I think is [because] I’m playing gay sports. Previously, I just thought it’s not for me I mean it’s kind of like these were the messages I got from school and society. Now, the messages I’m getting are different, I’m different, I’m better!

“By understanding each individual and accepting them for who they are, gay rugby players and heterosexual players might be able to use each other for sources of strength instead of sources of fear” (Krane, 1996 p. 359). Val’s experience supports the contention that fear does inhibit performance and achievement.

Val: As a sportsman and as a person I think, [being accepted in a team] is really important. I think you get the best out of yourself if you’re honest and in a team situation if you can get honesty then you get a lot better performance than if you get people telling you bullshit.

Finally, Andy describes how everyone may be affected by homophobia in sport. Not only do gay athletes experience a limited level of productivity, but also entire organisations if better players such as Andy are excluded from participation.

Andy: I just want to be confident in who I am and if people have a problem with it well then it’s their problem. If they don’t like me well then I can’t change the fact that they don’t like me. I mean if they haven’t even gotten to know me and they don’t like me because I’m gay well I’m not going to change for them. So my gain is their loss. It’s sad really cause it could be a win-win situation if they wanted it to be; I have a lot to offer.

The reconciliation of all identities:

The findings in this study indicate several defining identities within the gay athletes’ lived experience. Notably, they are (a) his sporting identity; which reflects his sporting experiences and interactions as an athlete in the context of sport, (b) his sexual identity as a gay man and (c) his visible or known social identity traits as an individual which encompasses his gender, race, religion, marital status etc. The three identities were at some point separated from each other or masked by others at particular points in time depending on which stages gay athletes
are situated in their coming out process. That is, one part of their identity was experienced and lived in different contexts from the others.

Figure 8 illustrates the separation of the participants’ identities during the coming out stages of the men in this study. For example when gay men are totally silenced in the initial stage of their coming out process, their sexual identity is separated from their sporting and social ones. During the middle of their coming out process when they are visible to others, they separate and exclude their sporting identity from their social and sexual ones. Only when they are in the last stage of their coming out experience do they combine and identify all three identities into one. This is when all identities have merged and that reconciliation of all their worlds is produced. When gay men in sport attain a certain satisfaction in combining their sporting identity with their social and sexual ones, they have fulfilled the ultimate objective of what I consider the point of reconciliation of their total self.

One notable quote relevant to reconciliation was given by, one of three people who attempted to overcome the highjackers of flight 93 on September 11, 2001. Mark Bingham was one of them and sent his gay rugby team an email a few weeks before his passing. He wrote it when he learned that their gay rugby team, the San Francisco Fog had been accepted as a permanent member of the Northern California Rugby Football Union (see complete e-mail in Appendix E). Its relevance is noteworthy in the understanding of the trials and tribulations gay men experience because of silence as well as for the appreciation visibility imparts on the freedom to be themselves.

“As we worked and sweated and ran and talked together this year, I finally felt accepted as a gay man and a rugby player. My two irreconcilable worlds came together” (Bingham, 2001 p. 1).
FIGURE 8: Reconciliation of Identities
However, for some men in this study and for most gay men in rugby today, the reconciliation of sport and sexuality remain impossible to attain because of the fear gay men harbour.

#10 Marc: I experimented with both girls and guys when I was in primary school, but by late primary school I knew I was really interested in guys. In secondary school, apart from the obligatory girlfriend, I was really mostly interested in guys. I didn't tell anyone I was gay until I was in my forties, and that came out at a party to a friend when I'd had one drink too many. It was never mentioned again, but I was comforted by the fact that it didn't affect our relationship. However, it still didn't encourage me to come out to anyone else. I've always led a double life in a sense - my family, working, sporting, and social life on the one hand and my sexual life on the other. It's really been a case of 'never the twain shall meet'.

Art comments, somewhat more ruefully.

#1 Art: [Sport in] New Zealand needs [reconciliation], we are a sporting nation, we are a rugby nation, we're also a gay nation and we need to reconcile them and there are so many, I think there are so many gay men out there that are just crying for this. They just need this opportunity to reconcile. [Playing gay rugby against a mainstream team] was fantastic. It had all the aspects of mainstream sport I look for but with a gay skew. In the gay team of course it's all there for you. You're fully involved and it feels cool, yeah. And I think the most important thing for the gay sport was the reconciliation of different aspects of [one's] life; a mainstream sport [identity] being reconciled with being gay. And not just by yourself but with other people sharing that same experience. People with a similar interest, gay [and heterosexual] people with similar interest, you know. Yeah it means when you're with gay people doing sport all the barriers are down. You don't have to put defence mechanisms for anything and you can just be yourself. And that's really important I think. Because I mean being gay and playing rugby are two of the most important priorities in my life and it hurts when they don't match up. It's like trying to put a triangle through the circle slot in one of those kiddie toys, you know, and now I can say that they can [be joined]. It can work!

Val and Ron also talk about the significance of reconciliation and the empowerment it produces to bring about change in the lives of gay men in particular and possibly in sport in general. At this stage of their coming out process, Val, Ron and others in this study realised the social significance of gay men participating in mainstream sport in New Zealand. Their pleasure and excitement of exercising their right to participate in mainstream sport are undeniable.
Val: I mean I love playing rugby but I love getting hard and teaching these people as well so I’m sort of the coach as well but I want to play. You know it’s a risk cause my knee has been a bit sore and I’ve pulled a couple of hamstrings. But when I had heard about the gay rugby team being formed, I said: ‘Put my name down.’ I got the letter and thought: ‘Hmmm yes, you’ve got to make positive bloody moves.’ So, since then it’s been full on. Since then, I’ve talked about it … to a lot of people who are friends of mine. I think it was just brilliant. Now I really realise a bit more the significance out of it [being publicly gay in sport]. There’s a few people that made some interesting [negative] comments but I sort of told them to fuck off. I don’t know what [others] talk about behind my back but I don’t give a stuff about that. I have some good friends down there [at the rugby club] and it doesn’t really matter [anymore].

Ron: For whatever reason New Zealand’s a sporting nation and if you’re not interested in it you can’t avoid it. I think there’s an element of that in this [gay] rugby team. People finally learning what [playing rugby] is all about and they never did it when they were kids cause they were gay or whatever and they didn’t feel they could contribute or play. So now finally they’ve been given an opportunity with this [gay rugby team]. Everybody spends so much time watching and talking about rugby and that’s great, that’s just great.

For others, such as Pete and Jeep, fear gives way to a sense of peace and comfort when they were finally able to openly identify as gay men in mainstream sport. They explain how important it was for them to reconcile all of their identities at this point in their lives.

Pete: I have a lot of sense of finally being in peace; there’s a vibrancy there. I’m so glad it’s happening now because I would hate to think that I would only be starting to discover [the enjoyment of rugby] 10 years on from now. This is why sport has become quite important. This has become quite an important facet to [my life] because I’m discovering a new part of myself, a new joy, a new area of being healthy of being gay and you know, getting into healthy areas, like gay sports. That’s just been a big positive thing for me; taking more risks. Because before, it was always incredibly threatening. Before, sport threatened my total identity. I’m glad I’ve got the confidence to be back. Because I’m with people who understand, it takes away the threat. It takes away a lot of that fear. Sport for me acted as a double-edged sword. It’s because I’m gay that I got out of sports and it’s because I’m gay that I got back into it.

Jeep: I just think the gay rugby team members are great. I just really rate them. It’s just so positive there’s no crap when you’re playing. I really take my hat off to the guys cause they’re playing rugby for the first time, a lot of them, and they’re giving it a go because they haven’t had the opportunity to have played before, because most of them have felt uncomfortable amongst rugby circles and they had never ever thought about it as a possibility.
Henri explains his aversion to sport as a child as a result of his prejudices to the sport and the culture of rugby. His experience with rugby was that of a macho world of bigoted men. It is clear from his perspective that rugby has more to offer to gay men than first thought. For Henri and others, the context of rugby can be very positive and rewarding to all.

#11 Henri: I went along [to rugby practice] and I quite liked the team and I liked the training sessions, so I started going regularly. I think it overcame some prejudices I had. The school I went to, rugby was very much a macho thing and that was how you scored the girls and all the rest of it, more of which was pretty alien and obnoxious to me so in a way I’m overcoming my prejudices about rugby, rugby as it was in Southland. I’m really surprised to hear myself say that I like rugby. Wow! After all these years of hating it.

Finally, Jake best sums up the results of his reconciliation in sport as having the best of both gay and mainstream worlds.

#13 Jake: I’ve never stopped playing any sport because I’m gay, but I have thought about it. I’ve stood the test of time really and I guess now that I’m out, I’ll play until someone tells me I can’t instead of always thinking that someone will. Playing straight sport and gay sport is really having the best of both worlds.

At this point of the coming out process of gay men, fear of exclusion from sport is minimal. Whilst the emerging theme of reconciliation shows that it is possible for silence to be replaced by visibility, it is important to understand and question the amount of personal torment and empowerment needed to overcome the fear that fuels the silence of gay men in mainstream sport organisations.

**The creations of a sense of altruism:**

As presented in the last section, the reconciliation of the identities of gay men within mainstream sport transforms their sense of fear into a sense of contribution, accomplishment and/or fulfilment. At this stage of their coming out process, they have overcome their need to be militant and politicised. They do not simply see their participation in sport as a mere physical activity or political act. For many, openly participating in mainstream sport at this stage serves as a significant personal contribution to the gay community and society in
general. It becomes an act of altruism. That is, caring and feeling responsible for the welfare of others because they know and understand the pain and suffering that may arise from being gay athletes. They recognized something beyond just the physical act itself, or the importance of it. They purposefully play the role of big brother to other gay men in their community who have not yet reached their stage of the coming out process. Jeep’s quote best explains the significance and importance of developing a sense of altruism within the gay community.

#6 Jeep: Over the last 3 or 4 years I haven’t taken sport seriously, so this has been an opportunity to pass on my experience, my tackle kind of experience through rugby on to the guys like teaching them how to maul, how to fall, how to run lines and things like that. I think having gay sport and visible gays in [mainstream] sport will help younger people who are about to come out still want to get involved in sport. There are going to be people there who have been through what they’ve been through or maybe others who haven’t been through what they’ve been through but can still add value to that person’s life by being supportive. They will be able develop a network of friends and feel comfortable about themselves within their teams in the sporting environment.

In the following quote, Bernie describes his intentions when he plays rugby as a self-identifying gay man. His sense of altruism is well developed.

#4 Bernie: But, I’m learning about different things that the gay community is trying to do and I want to be a part of it or do something for it, which is why I joined the rugby team, the Krazy Knights. When I heard that someone was going to start up the gay rugby team in Wellington, I was interested firstly because it was a rugby team, secondly because it was gay and perhaps I could help or do something for the gay community cause I’ve never done anything. I’ve never been on a gay float, never been in a gay dragon boating team or just you know just haven’t done anything to give back to the community.

Pete also presents a sense of altruism. Yet not as overt as Bernie and Jeep’s contribution, Pete’s participation is nonetheless important and significant.

#5 Pete: I think my only contribution to sport is that of having been a gay male who stood up to be counted for in rugby in New Zealand and I think in so far as I did that I made a personal contribution to the struggle of the gay community. To be counted as a normal, healthy sector of the nation, to stand up and be seen and be accepted, to be no more and no less than anybody else was really a revelation for me.

Finally, Jake’s participation within the gay community reflects his sense of altruism. It also reflects the positive results of eradicating the silence of gay men within rugby organisations.
However, this should not be construed as the sole responsibility of the gay community. The moral consciousness towards the mental and physical health of gay men remains the responsibility of all stakeholders in sport: all players, all administrators, and all organisations, gay or straight.

#13 Jake: I like organizing gay stuff, like gay workshops and gay sport festivals, cause it gives me a sense of satisfaction knowing that my life contributes to making someone else’s better. You know, if you question life enough it’ll answer just at the right time.

Altruistic people give of themselves simply because they want to, not out of a sense of debt or because they want something in return. They have no ulterior motives, no guilt feelings, just a desire to give for the sake of giving. Feeling good about themselves is the one ulterior motive that the gay men in this study see as being acceptable.

**Section Summary**

In summary, the key findings in this section relate to emerging themes that are new to the literature and/or beyond what was anticipated in relation to the research questions and guiding framework. Notably, many of the findings in this section are unique in the sense that most of the men could compare their experiences of playing gay rugby to that of playing mainstream rugby.

- Gay men can enjoy (love) playing contact team sports such as rugby.
- Gay men find greater validation within gay rugby compared to mainstream rugby.
- Playing rugby can be a healthy experience for gay men.
- Gay and heterosexual rugby players are very physically and socially compatible.
- Gay men want to play rugby and contribute visibly to New Zealand sport.
- Gay players find emancipation by playing rugby.
- Visible gay men feel more productive.
- Visible gay men reconcile their sporting, sexual and social identities into one.
The overall data presented in this section are related both to oppression theory and identity management issues as presented within the Conspiracy of Silence model. It was found that, among the men in this research, rugby is a site where individual rights and freedoms can be expressed when oppressive policies and homophobia are eradicated. This was possible as a result of the formation of inclusive and safe spaces for gay men. Such examples include Wellington’s Krazy Knights gay team and Val and Bernie’s mainstream teams. The meanings gay men attributed to their participation in the sport of rugby became very positive as they participated in inclusive environments as visible gay players. Feelings of inclusiveness, compatibility, emancipation, and productivity as well as acts of reconciliation and altruism create opportunities for their survival in the context of a gay rugby union team. With the exception of Val and Bernie’s examples, the same feelings did not apply for other participants in the context of most mainstream rugby union organisations.

Chapter Summary

The multiple accounts, responses, and anecdotes presented within Chapter IV have partially helped in the understanding of the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon. In a social-phenomenological sense, I have dealt with how the social experiences of gay men were meaningful to them. First, I focused on sharing the participants’ lived experiences in mainstream rugby. Second, as the researcher I endeavoured to expose the ways in which gay men produced silence and invisibility. The ultimate task in this chapter was to categorise and interpret the recognizable feelings and emotions of these men and to treat them as real; as ‘truths’. Thus, the experiences of silence as well as visibility for gay men in the context of rugby have been recorded and may serve as a source of inspiration for social change. The power of sport in the socialization process of the gay male participants in this study is irrefutable.

In the following chapter, I discuss the findings of chapter IV in relation to all four tenets of the Conspiracy of Silence Model. As such it both contributes to our understanding of how and
why gay male team sport athletes survive in their organisation and identifies the need for social change within mainstream sport organisations.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study gave a voice to gay rugby players. All the players talked of their experiences in rugby, their experiences as gay men and their experiences as gay athletes in a mainstream sport organisation. The analysis revealed commonalities that centred on how, where, and when the players experienced silence and the meanings they make of it. The research process allowed for profound dialogue, and in this way the true value of their experiences emerged. In this chapter, I discuss the major findings from the emerging themes in the previous chapter by relating their significance to the four tenets of the Conspiracy of Silence Model. I have chosen to discuss the findings of this study using the model in order to demonstrate the relationship between the participants’ meanings and the existing theories. For clarity of discussion, the relationship between the participants’ lived experiences (findings) and the theoretical framework, as guided by the model, is addressed in the following order: hegemonic heterosexuality, oppression theory, identity management theory and finally, Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory.

With regard to phenomenological study, this chapter attempts to bring to light the phenomenon of silence of gay male rugby players by reducing and interpreting their lived experiences within the theoretical framework for which I argue their experiences operate. As such, this chapter will assist in explaining how silence manifests itself theoretically. Hence, the discussion delves into the phenomenon by deconstructing the essential elements of silence as it interrelates with all four tenets of the conspiracy model. The findings are also discussed in relation to the research question and the review of literature that informed the study. The task is to highlight the findings and explore the information as it either was assumed, insightful or contradictory. Consequently, the phenomenological research objectives of this
study, to better understand the *Conspiracy of Silence* phenomenon by presenting it within the lived experiences of gay men in mainstream sporting organisations, will be met.

Figure 9 illustrates an overview of the results (emerging themes) that relate to the silence and visibility of the participants in this study. It is important, in a first instance of discussion, to locate where the silence of gay men in sport is produced and exists. I have inserted the resulting themes within Griffin’s (1991) identity management continuum to give a holistic perspective of when silence and visibility are produced during the coming out stages of these gay athletes’ lives. Gaining insight from the participants’ perspective served in locating the areas of concern where silence was manifested the most.

**FIGURE 9:**
*Results of Emerging Themes*

Indeed, silence is more apparent when the participants are totally closeted compared to when they are publicly out and visible to the community (public). Figure 9 is also used to help show when the participants’ social, sexual, and sporting identities are either separated or
integrated depending on the level of fear experienced by the individual during his coming out process. The findings are placed on a scale in order to demonstrate, at the onset of this discussion, the negative imbalance of social justice experienced by gay rugby players.

In sum, the discussion will not only focus on the production of silence but also on the production of visibility as it emerged in the analysis. In the next section, I begin the discussion by relating the production of silence to the hegemonic heterosexual tenet of the Conspiracy of Silence Model shown in Figure 10. Arguments in this initial section are drawn from the information gathered in the review of literature as well as from the analysis of the data collected. Locating hegemonic heterosexuality within the Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon will assist in explaining why gay male rugby players remain silent and/or invisible within mainstream rugby organisations.

**Hegemonic Heterosexuality Related to Emerging Themes**

![Diagram of Hegemonic Heterosexuality Related to Emerging Themes](image)

**FIGURE 10:**
*Hegemonic Heterosexuality Tenet*

As I begin the analysis of the participants’ narratives of being silent gay male athletes, I not only trace nuances within their interpersonal relationships, but also consider the wider social context in which those relationships operate. The focus of this initial section is to
explore hegemonic heterosexuality and its influence on the meanings gay men make of mainstream rugby.

The participants employed a wide range of strategies to subvert and appropriate spaces which have been claimed as heterosexual and which are vigorously defended as such. Heterosexism produced shame for the gay men in this study. The hegemonic heterosexuality that prevails in sports such as rugby is isomorphic with power and must be challenged. For some players, rugby has not only helped shape their careers but it has also helped shape how they view others as well as themselves. They learned early on that boys who did not play rugby were somehow not normal. The boys who played other sports such as soccer or badminton were called ‘poofs’ but those boys were still better than others who didn’t play any sports. Those individuals were led to believe that they deserved to be socially excluded from friendships and class activities. Rugby therefore helped create subject positions, which gave some participants in this study fewer opportunities to speak out or to be listened to. Heterosexual white males became, as Moore (1998) states, “discursively located in influential positions to exercise power” (p. 160). Hence, Jeep attributes the difficulties of being gay and vocal in rugby as the result of the dominant men in privileged positions whose prejudicial opinions serve to control the visibility of gay men in rugby. This is an example of gay men who remain silent in rugby organisations out of fear of retributions in a hegemonic heterosexual context.

#6 Jeep: There are difficulties, there are always difficulties associated with being a gay male in sport [in New Zealand]. There’s also quite a large old boys network out there, which is a little difficult from time to time, and what I found is the older the boy the greater the prejudice.

Jake’s comment also explains the reasons why gay men remain silent within a hegemonic heterosexual context. It is an example of gay men who do participate in sport openly, but do so only within the confines of gay sporting organisations, such as gay rugby teams, where fear
of retribution is minimal. Silence is still manifested because of the hegemonic forces of expected heterosexuality in it.

#13 Jake: Coming out is like going through a red light hoping no semi-trailer is coming your way. We live in a risk minimising society where every rule, regulation, policy, law, order and politics act like traffic lights and zebra crossings. They manage to keep us safe, free of harms way. This is why some gay guys don't come out cause they abide to all these straight stop signs that dictate their sexual course.

Hence, the sport of rugby serves as a contested terrain between the gay and heterosexual athletes, where straight athletes achieve their dominant position in society by a process of power relations in this sporting space. I would argue that heterosexuality is powerfully expressed in this space. Gay athletes have shown that they cannot be themselves in the context of rugby (i.e., mainstream rugby environment). For Shilling (1991) such a space is no longer seen just as an environment in which interaction takes place, but is taken to be deeply implicated in the production of individual identities and social inequalities.

Key findings demonstrate that these men adopted identities and performed roles deemed appropriate by a society that overwhelmingly privileges heterosexuality over other forms of sexual expression. Although Rojek (1989) clearly sees leisure (sport) as a dynamic site for social and sexual emancipation, providing opportunities for resistance and subversion through its ability to destabilize gender and power relations, this is not the case for gay athletes within the confines of mainstream rugby spaces. In this context, heterosexuality is privileged, and heterosexism and homophobia actively limit, control and regulate expressions of gay sexualities. Therefore, it is not surprising that some gay men develop an aversion to sport in general and rugby in particular. Henri’s comment confirms the existence of the hegemonic forces that exist within rugby which control the opinions gay men may have of themselves. In turn, some gay men remain absent and therefore invisible in mainstream rugby because they have acquired the belief that they do not have the right or the ability to participate openly in
rugby. This is an example of gay men who remain silent in sport by not participating at all. They develop an aversion to any form of heterosexual sporting space.

#11 Henri: You know if you’re straight you’re like this, if you’re gay, you’re like that. It’s not that [gay men] can’t [play rugby], it’s that they’ve been told they can’t [play rugby].

The boundaries created by the existing homophobia within mainstream sport organisations ensure the exclusion of gay men and promote the development of their aversion to it. Consequently, the spatial organisation of such sporting practices reflects to a large degree the control and regulation imposed by the hegemonic forces of heterosexuality. Gay men are preponderantly influenced and dominated by the ideals and values of mainstream sport organisations that serve as a vehicle to exclude and/or silence them. Consequently, the findings from this study indicate that the sport of rugby is implicated in the construction of a gender regime that acts to advantage heterosexual sporting men and boys. I argue that mainstream rugby is a specific space where the dominant heterosexual cultures’ ideals and values are maintained and enforced. I present the space and place argument in order to locate where homophobia is produced as a controlling weapon in the lives of the participants.

Although some research has been conducted on space and place in gay men’s leisure (Markwell, 1998), little phenomenological research attention has been given to the spatial location of the social process of stigmatization, heterosexism and homophobia in the context of mainstream sport as a space for gay rugby players in particular.

Within the next sub-section of the hegemonic heterosexual tenet, I discuss these social processes and possible consequences to the stories of gay male rugby players and their identity construction using mainstream sport as a space and place where silence and invisibility is produced.
Hegemonic heterosexuality within a space and place:

As the findings illustrate, the rite of passage (coming out) for these gay rugby players was not an easy process. Critically, this journey occurred both psychologically and in a very real sense across differing locales. This passage, of an individual from one social context to another, is pivotal in understanding the links between the fear and stress they experienced as a minority group and the process of their identity construction. The lived experiences of these gay male rugby players provide a coherent account of how heterosexism, homophobia and discrimination operate in a distinctive locale (space) and directly affect identity construction. For the participants in this study, it was within the sport context of mainstream rugby that heterosexual dominance and gay subordination were most keenly felt. Art offers a comment on space and place with regard to his moving from a small community into a larger one and his coming out process. His description serves as a testimonial fact that his sporting identity was separated from his social one in a space and place.

#1 Art: [My coming out in different places] was when I moved down to Wellington. …On advice from one of my close, close school teachers… the wife of a Presbyterian minister, it was … decided that over the next … going into a new city with a new environment …that [I come out slowly] just ….to see how things pan out. [It was] strange … because in the new city [I was] with a university crowd but still operating in the Methodist youth crowd and operating in a rugby crowd. … In that stage in my life [coming out process], [I had] very distinct areas [identities] in my life.

Pete offers a different perspective on space and place as a gay man by stating that gay individuals should not adhere to being accepted in mainstream society. For him, adopting the system and values of mainstream culture could never serve in generating space and places where gay men could or should be integrated. Duplicating the mainstream system would also duplicate its dominant characteristic. This is another reason why some gay men do not participate in mainstream sport. They would rather participate in a safe space such as gay rugby.

#5 Pete: Why are we striving to recreate a system that doesn’t necessarily serve our purpose anyway? I think it’s always going to be a struggle for those of us
who are gay to find a place at which we can say we're happy, which we’ve got peace if we look for it in the straight world. … I feel that it’s a little bit oppressive for everyone. I don’t think that you would ever have a mainstream society that will accept and normalise homosexuality because mainstream society itself is unacceptable as it is. Why buy into something that doesn’t work?

Additionally, the oppressive nature of hegemonic heterosexuality serves as a driving force for gay men to gather in spaces and places where courage and pride are generated. The uniting nature of spaces and places is best described in Jake’s following comment and further explains the development of gay teams, gay leagues and the Gay Games movement.

#13 Jake: Oppression brings people together in a same space, maybe not for the right reasons, but it does bring all these different people together for the same reason; the common intolerance. The amount of collective energy diffused by any gay gathering is more uniting than any other forces derived or opposed to it by any other group I’ve ever gathered with, sporting or non.

Obviously, the experience of rugby for the participants in this study is located within a social framework in which heterosexuality is privileged, and in which heterosexism and homophobia are actively limited, controlled, and regulated expressions of gay sexualities. Consequently the spatial organisation of gay rugby reflects to a large degree the control and regulation imposed by the hegemonic force of heterosexuality. Although the sport of rugby offers gay men opportunities for the creation of a diversity of cultural identities, it also creates sites for resistance and subversion. For some men their participation in sport was not negative because they were gay, it was negative for them because they were made to feel they were not good enough to contribute to the team or to society. Therefore, their feelings of inferiority alienated them from mainstream society in general and the sport of rugby in particular. Many, as stated by Pete, eventually felt the need to express their sexuality and their difference to heterosexuals through sport by joining gay rugby teams to play straight teams. In this way, gay men were able to show resistance to their invisibility and silence within mainstream sport by joining forces with other gay men and became more vocal and visible in a shared space and place where physical compatibilities to heterosexual men could be observed.
#5 Pete: For me being a gay rugby player now has to be something that I can start speaking. I want to make it an issue because society makes it an issue and if you're gonna push me then I will come out and I will fuckin’ push you back, because this is part of me this is who I am and it will never be anything else. All you will ever do by condemning and telling me that I can’t play and trying to force me back into my shell, and make me live a lie, make me pretend to be this person that I will never, ever be, will only make me stronger. You want me to be like you and I can never be like you. In a million years, it will never happen. This is who I am. So don't you fuckin’ force me back into that shell because I will be in your face about it.

The negative result of hegemonic heterosexuality on the mental and physical health of gay men in general and on gay rugby players has become apparent throughout this study. Marc describes his life long loneliness because of the lack of acceptance and safe spaces where he could have expressed himself honestly and openly.

#10 Marc: There were plenty of times when I was younger when I wished I was 'normal' because I would have loved to have a decent relationship with someone. It was always secretive or even furtive, pretty grubby most of the time. Once you left school it was harder to find someone you could be with. It's must easier nowadays because there are places you can go to meet and talk and I guess a lot of younger gays find it much easier to start a proper relationship. It was hard to do this when I was young because there was nowhere you could go. You don't start a life-long relationship when most of the guys you meet are in a public toilet! I'm less lonely now than I was years ago because I guess I've accepted being by myself, but I wish I had grown up in a more accepting society where an open relationship could have been considered.

Findings show that the silence and invisibility of the men in this study were both governed by ostracism and bullying, feelings of isolation, loneliness, and powerlessness, or the enactment of over-achievements and hyper-masculinities. The following section presents an analysis of the way heterosexist definitions of masculinity creates boundaries for gay rugby players in New Zealand.

Analysis of masculinity in New Zealand:

In the latest edition of his book A Man's Country, Phillips (1996) indicates how heterosexuality has become such a dominant aspect of the New Zealand male stereotype. He notes that other cultures, particularly older European cultures, have had much more space for gay subcultures. New Zealand has a monolithic culture, and to that extent, he thinks that it
was in some ways much more difficult to be a gay man in New Zealand society. Furthermore, gay men do not completely escape the social construction of masculinity, even though these constructions are problematized by non-normative sexual identities. Heterosexual ideals of masculinity often influenced the nature of behaviour for most men in this sample. Normative masculinity within the New Zealand landscape defines men as typically strong and silent, and allows them to disengage from their emotional world (Worth, Reid, and McMillan, 2002). Andy and Pete best describe the impact of normative constructions of masculinity on the lives of the ability of the gay men in this study to discuss their emotional needs. They give examples of what it is like to be a man in New Zealand in general and what it is like to be a gay man in New Zealand in particular.

#7 Andy: I think it’s still very hard to come out in some sports like rugby. It’s still probably one of the hardest sports to come out if you were gay. It is such an icon in New Zealand. It’s what a New Zealand man is all about.

#5 Pete: Of course growing up with my family, especially with my father, there has never been any conversations that I have ever had with my father that have involved feelings, that have involved emotions, that have involved making myself vulnerable. It has just never ever happened. So it’s not necessarily the fact that I’m gay and I can’t bear to talk to him about it, it’s just the fact that I’ve never ever discussed those three things with my father anyway. Of course it’s impossible that I should be able to do it on this issue. My mother can be a real fuckin’ bitch, she can be a real bitch from hell and she gets all closed up and all sort of quiet, you know, she’s a fuckin’ cow, you know, she’s a bitch.

Undoubtedly, masculinity in New Zealand is represented by strength, silence and heterosexuality. Findings in this study show that gay rugby players adopt similar stereotypical behaviours in order to remain invisible within mainstream teams in particular and in society in general. Many of the participants were conscious of the production of a hyper-masculine image and over-achieving behaviours. These acts are closely linked to their sense of shame where, as New Zealanders, and as men, the participants in this study developed an aversion to effeminacy. In the following section, aversion to effeminacy is discussed in relation to the forces of hegemonic heterosexuality that guide it within the New Zealand context.
**Aversion to effeminacy:**

Why in order to gain acceptance into the masculine world of sports, do gay men emphasize their hypermasculinity? I argue that traditional Western dualisms have created a paradox for gay men in rugby in particular and mainstream sport in general. This is related to but different from Clasen's (2001) argument that traditional Western dualisms have created a paradox for women in athletics. So too can it be argued that because sport is a masculine social environment, the presence of gay men threatens definitions of masculinity. As such, hypermasculine vigour among gay men capitalizing upon the violations of traditional gender norms effeminately undergirds the paradoxical nature of being a gay man. The received norm for males is toughness, silent conformity and hard work. Gay men perform the open deception of appearing to be heterosexual while violating some of the heterosexual norms (Cashorali, 1995). Because sport is a heterosexual masculine social environment, the presence of gay men threatens definitions of masculinity. As a result, gay men have needed to emphasize their hypermasculinity to the point of commodification in gay culture in particular. The general lack of acceptance of effeminate gays in society in general and in sport in particular, aggravates the coming out process of the more archetype (masculine) athletes because they feel guilty by association. This aversion to effeminacy that has been termed homophobia for heterosexuals and latent-homophobia for gay men is in fact best described by Ryan (1988) as a “toxic, virulent reaction that is fuelled principally by shame, disgust and contempt” (p. 7) for behaviours that are deemed unacceptable in a heterosexual context. Hyper-masculine behaviour has been recorded since ancient Greek and Roman eras. Masculinity was equated with domination or the appearance thereof (Williams, 1999). What is at stake for the men in this study is less their actual behaviour and more the appearance they give and the image they have. How men are seen and talked about by their peers is more important to them then what they actually do in private. Therefore, some gay men today as in ancient times adopt not only masculine behaviours but also hyper-masculine behaviours in order to deter any notion or
images of effeminacy they may be associated with. For these reasons, many gay rugby players develop an aversion to any feminine traits in other men as well as themselves.

People in general and some of these gay men specifically still have or had a narrow definition of what it is to be a gay male. The ‘limp-wristed’ image remains a strong catalyst for the unacceptability of being gay for heterosexual and for some other gay men. It is a safe way for heterosexual men to distance themselves from any implication that gays are similar to them in any way, shape or form. Although New Zealand society seems to be moving away from restrictive images of men in general, old stereotypes remain strong within rugby organisations (Phillips, 1996). However, the major male imagery since the mid-nineties in gay magazines and venues is rampant masculinity: gym trained taut muscles and an unrestrained maleness. Art comments more prosaically however, that this hyper-masculine imagery is the result of the gay community’s desire to be accepted within mainstream society by refuting any effeminate traits leading to the insufficiency of gay men to be viewed as masculine.

#1 Art: [Being masculine] is not something I set out to do, although some people often say that I might. … I’m beginning to understand how [hyper-masculinity] is a cult or a community creation because the gay community has set up its own identity standards in order to feel acceptable to those of mainstream society. For people coming in to it, what you do well you carry it on and I think that’s where [hyper-masculinity] has come from. I don’t know if that’s necessarily the right thing that we should be doing, especially when we’re promoting a community, which is based on diversity. It doesn’t worry me, not phased by it. Support anybody that wants to do it if they think it empowers them.

Val and Ron see effeminacy as an extreme behaviour. For them, it is simply a behaviour that renders the gay community more visible. Obviously, masculine gay men do not stand out in mainstream society, they in turn are camouflaged by their behaviour. In this sense, the invisibility of gay men in sport is simply a result of their masculine demeanour.

#2 Val: I’m just saying the whole concept of homosexuals portrayed as limp wristed is obviously absolute crap. But then, I mean I had Christmas dinner one day with a few [gay friends] and I got quite embarrassed the way they actually carried on, I think they were playing up to me being quite a straight sort of gay guy, and it annoyed me. It was a bit over the top, things weren’t necessary. I
wasn’t very comfortable. I didn’t identify with a lot of the more extremes of the gay scene.

#3 Ron: People in New Zealand still struggle with someone being gay and not being effeminate, your average New Zealander or whatever that means, still struggles with [the notion that rugby players can be gay]. Effeminacy is still linked to homosexuality but in reality it’s not, I think the sooner we get rid of that link, more rugby players might come out, or vice versa. It’s really the chicken and egg thing.

Many gay men such as Bernie also think that effeminacy is usually linked to being gay. However, for most of the men in this study, feminine behaviour was never practised or even considered.

#4 Bernie: I have a nephew who’s gay, the only obvious one. He’s very effeminate. I mean he used to wear his sister’s bras when he was at school. I mean that was a bit much. That isn’t typical of gay guys, although I use to think that it was. But just watching different documentaries on cross dressers and transvestites and other heterosexual things like that, I thought oh maybe he’s not [gay] then. But you know you just don’t know do ya? I mean it was something that I thought was always odd. I never wanted to wear women’s clothes, ever, nor did I ever want to be a woman. No, not at all. I don’t really look at myself as gay, I mean I am gay because I have same sex relationships but apart from that as far as I’m concerned my life is just being normal but it just happens to be gay, so my social behaviour wouldn’t be any different if I was straight.

Aversion to effeminacy for gay men stems from the hegemonic heterosexual belief that all men, gay or heterosexual, must behave in a masculine way. Any diversion from such behaviour is considered weak and passive as much for gay men as it is for heterosexual ones. Gay men or heterosexual men, who are effeminate, relinquish the dominant’s power and control. Gay men who appropriate conventional signifiers of male power destabilise the heterosexual monopoly (Bergling, 2001). Yet, hyper-masculine or hardened emotions and bodies may also be seen as a tribute to the very models that have traditionally excluded and brutalised them. In this sense, gay men see other gay men as the problem, rather than seeing mainstream society’s intolerance of differences and bigotry as the real quandary. Marc confirms this aversion to effeminacy in the following extract.

#10 Marc: I must admit I’d sooner have a relationship with a guy who seems completely straight. Most of my sexual encounters when I was young were with
friends who have since married and had kids. I still don't know if they were gay or straight, but they were guys who acted like guys. I'm very uncomfortable around guys who act feminine, and I've never been attracted to them or felt like them.

Consequently, because the gay community is a diverse one, it is not surprising that some gay culture commentators view hypermasculine images unfavourably. For instance, in commenting on men’s insecurity about their masculinity, Arthur writes that the great majority of gay men are acutely anxiety-ridden about their masculinity, just like their heterosexual counterparts (see Evans, 1988). An example of this anxiety is the extreme lengths to which many gay men now feel they have to go in order to avoid being labelled "sissies". Examples of compulsive bodybuilding, wearing denim and leather uniforms with Army-like short-cropped hair, deliberately adopting stiff body postures and lumbering styles of walking are validated images in gay culture. Arning (2000) presents the paradox of men’s bodybuilding. The gym and its architecture produce a blurring of binary social categories: male/female, observer/observed, homo/hetero, subject/object, public/private. The phrase ‘gay bodybuilder’ is revealing, an oxymoron for many heterosexuals that points to the surreal perversity of gay gym culture itself, whose implicit goal of heterosexual as well as gay acceptance and validation can never be achieved by such compliant actions. Additionally, Evans (1988) cautions that perhaps this hypermasculine appeal ought to be viewed as a temporary cultural trend. Nevertheless, these are the images, these constructed, deconstructed, moving violations that motivate gay men in contemporary gay culture, even if they signify a paradox of oppressive heterosexual masculinity.

Despite this, many heterosexual men and athletes in particular participate in effeminate and/or same-sex rituals during games or team functions. This would seem contradictory to hegemonic heterosexual norms of behaviour, yet in particular spaces and places, heterosexual men and gay men alike use the context of sport in general and rugby in particular in order to
participate in same-sex behaviours. The following section gives insight into the findings of this kind of behaviour.

**Ironic heterosexual behaviour:**

It is worth mentioning that it seems the playing field also serves as a terrain of ironic behaviour on the part of some heterosexual men. Some heterosexual-identifying men engage in intimate behaviour (i.e., hugging, kissing, patting of the buttocks), either for mocking gay men or imitating women. These acts are usually performed in a public social context. For example, the “Elephant Walk”, where rugby players line up naked during initiation rituals to march with their hands between their legs holding the other player’s hand or penis is a good example of what could be considered same-sex behaviour. Other traditional after game function rituals in rugby include the singing of homophobic songs such as “The Twelve Days of Training”, which has the lyrics “five fairies” or the occasionally sung: “For we’re all queers together, excuse us while we go upstairs. Yes we’re all queers together, that’s why we go around in pairs”. In the ‘Ten Commandments of Rugby’ (see Appendix F), number four states:

No 4. Thou shalt not kiss thy teammate on the mouth, even when he hath scored; for such is an abomination unto the IRB, especially he that kisseth in tongues, unless it cometh to pass that thou shouldst play with the circular balls, for then it is truly expected of thee’’ (Thomson, 1977, p. 163).

These findings are examples of instances where gay players who engage in such acts become agents of oppression on one hand and victims on the other by having to hide or deny their true sexual orientation. For example on the day after the Newcastle Knights rugby league team had won the ARL Grand Final in September of 1997, one of the players made a comment on local radio that he had kissed so many men in the past few hours he felt like going to Oxford Street (the gay district in Sydney). This was to indicate that acts considered gay by some would lead to being gay (Markwell, 1998). If that were the case, then most if not all male athletes would be deemed gay due to the ongoing occurrences of such acts.
Participants in this study give numerous accounts of heterosexual players engaging in sexual acts with other men in the context of rugby. Therefore, hegemonic heterosexual forces seem challenged, questionable and oppressive because of the silence of heterosexual-identifying players who engage in sexual acts with other men.

**Section Summary**

The relationship between hegemonic heterosexuality and its influences on the production of silence of gay men has been discussed in this first part of the discussion chapter. I have clarified possible reasons why gay men remain silent within mainstream rugby organisations. As New Zealand is a legally tolerant country towards gays where anti-discrimination laws exist, questions needed to be raised about why there are no visible gay rugby players within mainstream rugby organisation. I argued that mainstream rugby in New Zealand is a contested terrain (space and place) where heterosexual privilege is maintained over the social injustices towards gay men. One thing is certain: modern day gay male visibility extends far beyond the current subculture. It is intimately tied to the wider concepts of New Zealand masculinity. Findings show that the gay male athletes’ experience and survival in sport are heavily dependant on institutional politics and its linkages with hegemonic heterosexuality. This is observable in the articulation of their subordination to a patriarchal system of values and beliefs. Understandably, there is the paradox of gay men loving to participate in sport, but at the same time because it is a hegemonic heterosexual environment they are more likely to be oppressed through homophobic and homonegative attitudes and behaviour. As such, being gay is paradoxical to participating in mainstream sport. As they become more visible within sports, they respond to the paradox by perpetuating it through displays of hypermasculinity. Because effeminate gay men epitomize these paradoxes, Western culture assumes a heterosexual-gay binary that results in rigid expectations for each. From this standpoint, we can begin to understand how dualism leads to paradoxical thinking about gay athletes. Though dualistic thinking is not inherently paradoxical, the inability to exist at ‘opposite’
poles ultimately leads to paradoxical disjunctures. Being gay and playing rugby are not logically consistent in traditional Western dualisms.

In the next part of this discussion chapter, I address the relationship between the production of silence and oppression theory within the Conspiracy of Silence Model illustrated in Figure 11. Understanding how gay male athletes remain silent will be underlined.

**Oppression Theory Related to Emerging Themes**

![Oppression Theory Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 11:**
**Oppression Theory Tenet**

As expressed in the last section, the issue of homophobia in sport has little to do with sexuality and everything to do with the power of the dominant heterosexual culture. Using oppression theory in this phenomenological research facilitates the goal by framing the lived experiences of gay male rugby players in a broader social context and analysis. The participants’ experiences, when viewed through the lens of oppression, demonstrate the pervasiveness of their stigmatisation in mainstream sport organisations. Although the participants in this study did not use the term ‘oppression’ to describe their personal accounts specifically, their stories do reveal the homophobia and heterosexism that envelop their sport experience.
As gay male rugby players, the participants challenged the underpinnings of their oppression. As gay males, they defied stereotypical definitions of masculinity, and as athletes, they assumed roles that gay males do not frequently see as accessible. Art reacts by commenting on the external pressures, hostility, and danger that exist for gay male rugby players to be excluded from mainstream organisations.

#1 Art: Part of the problem is that we are rugby players first. You know it's difficult to draw strength from the gay community... because the moment you give an inkling of ... being involved with gay people as a rugby player and anything like that, rumours go around and you're effectively being outed anyway. So it's actually a huge, huge step to go from being in the closet or whatever and coming out. You have to be so strong, personally so strong and confident as a player. We [gay rugby players] harbour the perception that our selection in [a] team would be in doubt.

Consequently, their presence alone challenges the foundations upon which homophobia and heterosexism are built. Yet as individuals, they felt powerless to change the institutional and social forces that maintain their status as subordinates in a dominant’s world. The conditions of oppression the participants encountered as gay male rugby players – the negative labelling imposed upon them by others, their internalised homophobia, the harassment and discrimination to which they were subjected and their perceived socialized roles as subordinates – all served to maintain and perpetuate an oppressive system. As stated in the review of literature earlier and in accordance with Jackson and Hardiman (1988), the participants in this study were oppressed in four ways during their coming out process: one, [the participants] are silenced. Two, they fear being discovered as gay players. Three, they isolate themselves, and four, they felt powerless [to create change]. This sense of powerlessness was equally evident in this study as in Woods' (1992) study of lesbian physical educators where it can be further described in three ways: “(i) the participants blame themselves; (ii) they accepted their oppression as unchangeable; and (iii) they formed no collective identity as an oppressed minority” during their initial coming out process (p. 113).
These outcomes are typical consequences for the subordinates who attempt to survive and live within a successful system of oppression.

Also, Flowers and Buston (2001) state that other visible minorities within sport have greater protection from stress due to their greater visibility and acceptance. Yet the situation for the silent (invisible) gay rugby player is clearly dissimilar because of the isolating mechanisms of hegemonic heterosexuality (power) in place in the mainstream rugby environment. The lack of awareness of other gay rugby players in straight teams creates barriers in identifying other people who feel as they do. In these ways, the heterosexism that is embedded in the dominant culture often leads to the absence of protective buffers, which could make gay rugby players less vulnerable to stress. However, the rugby players in this study articulate a distinct and similar coming-out story, suggesting that sport is an important unifying feature for the oppression of these gay men.

The function of negatively labelling gay males is to instil fear in the participants. The fear of exposure, of harassment and intimidation and of being kicked off the team rendered participants powerless to challenge their oppression. Consequently, they remain silent about their sexual orientation. According to Omizo, Omizo, and Okamoto (1998) individuals who do not work out their concerns may direct fears and hostility inward, resulting in self-defeating behaviours, which in turn might have a direct effect on the productivity of their sporting organisation. Diminished self-esteem was also a common characteristic. It is clear that unless awareness is provided for all members of a sport organisation, gay rugby players will continue to suffer these negative effects alone.

Stereotyping gay male athletes as weak and effeminate is crucial in keeping gay male athletes silenced and invisible within sport. For those athletes who do not express or exemplify stereotypical traits, identifying positively to being gay seems impossible. As stated by Oakes et al. (1994): “People are motivated to evaluate themselves positively, and that
insofar as a group membership becomes significant to their self-definition they will be
motivated to evaluate that group positively.” (p. 82). In other words, people seek a positive
social identity. Since the value of any group membership depends upon the comparisons with
other relevant groups, positive social identity is achieved through the establishment of a
positive distinctiveness (stereotype) of one group relevant to another. These gay male rugby
players do not identify positively with gay stereotypes, as stereotyping involves their
unwarranted homogenisation with other gay males who are not considered to share their
definitive characteristic. This is the reason why many gay rugby players could not or did not
want to identify or be identified with stereotypical effeminate and physically weak gay males.
This categorisation reduces a gay man’s identity to traits and characteristics that are visible.
There is a considerable amount of richness of the gay man’s value that is lost or distorted by a
negative public perception. Thus, stereotyping of gay male athletes by dominant forces not
only serves to keep gay male rugby players silent and invisible, but it also serves to misinform
both heterosexuals and gay athletes in that they are uninformed about the true characteristics
of some gay athletes. Oakes et al. (1994) add: “the human search for truth, therefore, is not
simply psychological, but also social, historical and political.”

In the following section, the relevance of oppression theory to the social injustices
committed towards gay rugby players is presented in the context in which gay players are
victims. An analysis of the consequences of the agents’ oppressive actions is also addressed.

**Consequences for victims and agents of oppression:**

The oppression theory tenet of the Conspiracy of Silence Model serves to identify and
present the possible consequences of the conspiracy of silence phenomenon in mainstream
sport organisations and more specifically the possible harmful effects it might directly have
on all participants within this context. In accordance with Vealy (1997 p. 166), the silence
that exists is detrimental, even devastating, to all athletes, to sport scientists and scholars, and society at large. Nelson (1991) explains how this silence has extreme negative social psychological consequences for gay men in sport as the silence, designed to protect reputations, deprives those who are hiding (behind it) of a sense of community and history, restricts their cultural and political affiliations, and engenders fear and even paranoia. This silence is not only negative for gay athletes, but also all athletes in general. It perpetuates the myths, stereotypes, and fears about gay athletes. The silence also has negative consequences for sporting organisations as a whole (p. 134).

The best example of consequences related to all athletes would be the Graham Le Saux incident in the United Kingdom. Graham, who is heterosexual, spoke out in 1999 about the anti-gay taunts he has endured from players and spectators during his athletic career, especially the much publicized on the field row with Liverpool striker Robbin Fowler. Fowler was banned for six games and fined for taunting Le Saux as ‘homosexual’ during a game. He was shown on television waving his buttocks at Le Saux (BBC, 1999). It was not until this incident that the Football Association took steps to address the homophobia endemic in British football. After the misconduct hearings, the Football Association extended their anti-discrimination policy to opposing sexual discrimination of any description. Senior officials are known to feel that the issue of homophobia is no more acceptable to the modern professional game than violence or racism. Interestingly, for some of the players, ostracism and bullying are dealt with more easily when they reach Stage Six of their coming out process. For example, Art is more comfortable dealing with the oppressive nature of homophobia now than before.

#1 Art: [I deal with homophobia] in different ways, … I don’t get a lot of direct homophobia, gay bashing or anything like that. I think because of the strength that I [have] personally, people don’t come at me with that. The homophobia I see or focus on a lot more is the implicit homophobia and the language and the way the little things and barriers … which are … heterosexist. … My response is always to create, in that sort atmosphere, a discourse on it and to talk about it and get them talking about [it as well]. … That’s through at
work, through my mainstream rugby team and [places] like that. Because I think that’s for me, it’s the understanding of what’s going on that will help people through it and prevent that. … Having said that, there have been times directly, when my boyfriend and I walk down the street … holding hands, undoubtedly every night … we’ll have someone yell out: ‘Oh faggots’ and ‘Queers’ or something like that. I’m very dismissive of that. I sort of say: ‘Oh, I don’t give a shit.’ I just don’t, their opinion doesn’t affect me where I’m at now. … I’m not going to drop down to their level and I know that I’m comfortable with it. I don’t need them so I just walk on by. Yeah although my partner sometimes responds a wee bit more and gives it back. It’s not my way, it’s never been my way.

However for others such as Marc, being gay in today’s social context remains very oppressive and even more so in the context of rugby organisations.

#10 Marc: Some of the real doubts I had about myself when I was young might have been unnecessary if I’d let people know who I really was. But it was so much easier not to let people know. Even now, when it really doesn’t matter what other people think and when people are so much more accepting of gays, I’m still not comfortable with letting people know about my sexuality. A lot of my rugby friends might guess, they might even know, but I’m not happy to discuss it with them. I’ve only talked about it, only come out to a handful of close friends, and most of these friends are also gay.

In extension, the lack of visible gay male athletes, either at professional or amateur levels, needs to be discussed, studied, and debated within these organisations directly. Yet most sport administrators, coaches and athletes fail to acknowledge that it exists and that it might influence the productivity and sustainability of their own organisation. Like all perceptions, the gay stereotype articulated through the media has an impact on the expectations, needs, values, and purposes of the perceiver. Disagreement, argument and conflict between individuals and groups over the correctness of specific stereotypes are part of the social, political, historical process through which society moves (or tries to move) towards stereotypes, which are valid from the perspective of a whole community (Oakes et al., 1994). Findings show that many participants in this study have experienced common responses to their experiences as victims of oppression. Art explains more clearly how he feels as a gay rugby player who has reached the stage six of the coming out process.
For the men in this study, oppression came at a cost to their mental and physical health. Nevertheless, none of them would revert to living their lives as heterosexual men. However, findings show that many believe that their ability to recognise oppression and its consequences has profited them greatly as human beings. Common feelings of enjoyment, inclusiveness, sameness, and emancipation for the men in this study have inspired acts of altruism. Their sense of compassion and understanding for other minorities is a consequence of oppression they see as beneficial at this stage of their lives.

**Section Summary**

In this second part of the discussion chapter, I have described the link between the oppression theory tenet and the Conspiracy of Silence Model. Clearly, gay men in rugby are silenced by the oppression that manifests itself within their lived experiences in rugby organisations. I explained how they feel as gay men and how they modify their behaviour as rugby players.

In the following part of the discussion chapter, the identity management tenet is discussed in relation to the Conspiracy of Silence model as shown in Figure 12. Skills utilised by the participants in this study explain how they survived years of oppression within mainstream rugby organisations.
Identity Management Related to Emerging Themes

FIGURE 12: Identity Management Tenet

Findings in this study highlight the use of gay identity management skills by gay rugby players within mainstream rugby organisations. The idea of identity management of gay rugby players has been shown as fluid and transient. As stated by Flowers and Buston (2001 p. 60) “it is the changing matrix of their (gay men) identity categorization that arguably sustains the viability of normative (hegemonic) heterosexuality.” Moore (1998) also writes that sexuality either theoretically, historically or even politically, is about flux and change, that what we so readily deem as ‘sexual’ is as much a product of language and culture as of ‘nature’. It is, thus, interesting to acknowledge the valorisation of gay identity expressed by participants within this study. For these rugby players, gay identity brought with it both severe costs (fear of exclusion and isolation) and significant benefits (a sense of wholeness and integrity).

Furthermore, the combination of images portrayed by the participants in this study belies the vast differences between men who desire men: they have gay identities far more diverse than those perceived by mainstream society. In fact the invisibility of gay men in sport is arguably due to the level of compatibilities these gay men have with heterosexual men;
physically, mentally and even emotionally. Their sexual orientation could be viewed as the singular difference that divides them. Although having said this, inquiry into the sexual practices of men who identify as heterosexual might suggest that differences in sexual behaviour may only be limited to the gender of their partner(s). Acts of sodomy and other sexual behaviours generally associated with gay men are not always restricted solely to gay men, nor are all gay men engaging in such acts. According to Moore (1998) stereotypes such as these are inaccurate and inadequate, but they do exist and have some basis in observable behaviour. The negative labelling of gay males as child molesters or locker room perverts (deviants) also disempowered participants in their identity management. To avoid accusations, the participants remained silent about their sexual orientation, or they engaged in behaviours that led others to assume they were heterosexual. Accordingly, as the process of self-acceptance increases, gay rugby players may report feelings of wholeness and integrity, and self-esteem may increase outside of the sporting context. Yet the (their) sporting world remains tightly shut to any notions of acceptance and even tolerance of their sexuality. Given these difficulties, it may seem impossible for any gay players to ever come out within their mainstream sport career. Only gay players who run the gauntlet and succeed in managing their gay identity after their mainstream sport career are available for research such as this. There are most likely many gay rugby players within mainstream sport who are still having to “live a lie,” who are still experiencing identity management difficulties and conflict. They remain at the frontier of profound isolation from other gay men. However, the men in this study who have come out have realised that doing so gave them the power they needed to accept themselves as authentic human beings. The findings from this study stand as a testament to this. Pete’s succinct quotes express the ways in which he had to manage his sexual, social, and sporting identities in his life. They also describe the personal toll it took on his happiness. These words illustrate the tremendous emotional investments gay rugby players
have to make as they develop various identity management strategies to hide their sexual orientation.

#5 Pete: I learned to be a very butch sort of man. To behave a certain way, you know, not to cross my legs. I had taught myself not to do certain things as part of my mask, of part of the portrayal of who I was so that I felt people would accept me. I had to work so hard to keep that up. **I had to be conscious of how I acted at all times** in order to persuade people so they could not penetrate into who I was, and that became how I lived.

#5 Pete: I always remember that time when I was 23 and I came home and I looked myself in the window, cause you’ve always got that perfect glare and it was like I just thought, who the fuck are you? It was like I was completely lost, everything that I had acted and been was just not who I was. It was almost like the feeling that there was something beautiful there and something really strong and something really rich but not being able to reach it, not being able to fathom it. [I was] completely lost. That was where I was before I came out; **that one fundamental part of me that I denied, that I deprived.**

“This is accomplished by considering the partial, distorting and perverse nature of an enforced private/public divide in their lives” (Squires and Sparkes, 1990 p. 77). From this statement I would argue that the human instinct of satisfaction and acceptance is sought and required by the ultimate transgression of boundaries. In other words Pete, as did most other participants in this study, negotiated their identity in different situations. At different stages of their lives, gay men behave differently in different spaces and places. For example they may play a heterosexual role in a sporting context while occupying a gay role in a private context. Indeed, the context of sport presents boundaries for gay men to be completely authentic. Moreover, gay men who come out in order to satisfy their need of acceptance as gay men in sport may do so without much guidance or reassurance that they are safe within the boundaries they chose to come out. In this sense, understanding the hesitancy of gay rugby players to claim their space in sport becomes clearer when one acknowledges the intensity of the risks they must take.

The final section of this discussion chapter presents arguments concerning the gay male athletes’ perception of public opinion and the effects it has on their lives. The production of
silence in relation to the Spiral of Silence tenet of the Conspiracy of Silence Model shown in Figure 13 is discussed.

Section Summary

In this third part of the discussion chapter, I have shown the relation between the identity management tenet and the conspiracy of silence phenomenon within the Conspiracy of Silence Model. This tenet shows how gay male rugby players remain silent within mainstream rugby. The findings related to this tenet assists in the understanding of gay male behaviour during their coming out process.

In the final part of this discussion chapter, the relation between the spiral of silence tenet within and the conspiracy of silence phenomenon is reviewed as illustrated in Figure 13.

The Spiral of Silence Related to Emerging Themes

![FIGURE 13: Spiral of Silence Tenet](image)

As observed by the findings in this study, the experience of the gay athletes in mainstream rugby is that of constant questioning and of self based feelings of paranoia. They continually harbour sentiments of public rejection that are nurtured by the perceived prejudicial opinions of other people in their heterosexual social and sporting worlds. These findings are best explained using Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory where personal opinions are
silenced by the perceived public opinion manifested through the media. As discussed by (Holstein and Gubrium, 1994) socially organised circumstances provide models of social order through which experience is assimilated and organised. Therefore, an opinion is only seen to be the right one if it sustains the institutional thinking that is already in the minds of individuals as they try to decide if it is publicly acceptable or not. In Gramsci’s (1978) words, ordinary people give “spontaneous consent” to the “general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (p. 12). In other words, the public opinion within popular culture legitimises the socio-political order. Until the public opinion manifests itself positively and publicly in favour of the inclusion of visible gay rugby players within mainstream teams, few or no gay male rugby players will ever speak out against homophobia in sport. The onus is on the rugby organisations themselves to recognise the existing injustice and to rectify it.

Findings show that many of the participants agreed with Oscar Wilde’s statement that there is only one thing worse than people talking about you, and that is not talking about you, or, as Groucho Marx put it in a slightly different way “any publicity is good publicity” (Smith and Markson, 2000). Ron agrees with Marx’s statement.

#3 Ron: Mainstream news, television and radio media likes controversy; it likes things where people have emotional reactions too. So to me sexuality is an emotive issue the media will continuously pick up on it. So I don’t think it’s terribly bad. I don’t think it’s great. It’s difficult to get an understanding out there when that’s the only way that issues [concerning homosexuality] are presented; as sexual. But at least it gets people talking.

Other findings show that most of the participants in this study acted upon and behaved in accordance with the perception of how other people wanted them to behave. Andy’s altered behaviours may have been produced by what Noelle Neumann’s Spiral of Silence theory describes as the downward spiral of oppression. These participants harboured negative perceptions of public opinion, which led to their silence. Andy describes his preoccupation with peoples’ opinions of him.
#7 Andy: [Gay rugby players] always think about what other people are going to think. I know that’s what I have a problem with. I’m worried about what other people think because of my own insecurities about what other people think of me. I think, oh! I don’t want to have them not liking me and stuff like that.

Jake graphically describes what he believes to be the existing climate of public opinion within rugby in New Zealand today. It is a simple example of the perception gay men have of public opinion and the oppressive nature it has by silencing them. Remaining silent when one does not agree with the action around him is an altered and subordinate behaviour.

#13 Jake: I don’t think I or anyone would speak out against someone during a rugby game who yelled out faggot or poofster. Even if they didn’t know I was gay, they still wouldn’t react positively to my comments. They wouldn’t stand up cheer and support me, not yet anyway!

As stated earlier, the spiral of silence theory outlines the reciprocal communication-based conditions through which the oppression of gay athletes may be achieved. Given the obvious lack of research concerning gay athletes as media users, and a corresponding lack of gay athletes in the media itself, I proceed to discuss the theme of gay visibility drawn from Kielwasser and Wolf's (1992) work. Their arguments are useful in understanding the silence expressed by the gay rugby players in relation to Noelle-Neumann’s Spiral of Silence theory as outlined in this study. Keilwasser and Wolf (1992) suggests that the symbolic annihilation of gay [athletes] exhibited by most media in general, contributes to a dysfunctional isolation that is supported by the mutually reinforcing invisibility of gay athletes in the media and in the real world.

Society’s growing acceptance of gay men is seen through the allocation of social space, not only geographically but in the media as well. What began as a subculture has now become part of popular culture, courted by commercial culture using advertising aimed at the gay market. Today, gay characters in major sitcoms are common and highly visible and exclusive gay content productions as well as exclusive gay channels have multiplied during the last decade. There has definitely been a change of policy in the content of public broadcasting.
The mid 1990’s brought Ikea’s famous commercial showing two men furnishing their apartment together and Toyota’s male car-buying couple (Cronin, 2000; Dewaal Malefyt and Moeran, 2003; Fejes and Petrich, 1993; Gross, 1994; Kates, 1998, 1999; Kielwasser and Wolf, 1992; Turow, 1997). The “Pink Dollar” market among gay and lesbian consumers has influenced the desire on the part of the Cable TV industry to broaden coverage of gays in the media. In New Zealand, the coverage of the Krazy Knights’ (Wellington’s gay rugby team) first game against an all-heterosexual squad on prime time Channel Three News in 1998 indicates the extent of this degree of acceptance within the media. Pete describes some positive effects of the visibility of gay rugby players in the New Zealand media.

#5 Pete: I mean being on TV actually has had a positive effect. I had told my students that I was actually in a rugby team and it was called the Krazy Knights. I didn’t tell them anything more about that, they were really interested. Cause of course they had just joined these rugby teams as well, I mean this group of about five boys in my class really wanted to talk rugby, it’s quite funny. Anyway they heard about me, they heard that my big game was coming up, of course, and that was all they knew. So of course they came back on the Monday and said: ‘Mr your team it’s the Krazy Knights isn’t it?’ And I said: ‘Yeah that’s right.’ And they said: ‘It was on TV wasn’t it on the weekend, you know, you lost 62-0 or something like that.’ And I said: ‘Yeah that’s right, you know, it was a hard game.’ Then one of them said: ‘Oh Sir your team, that’s a gay team?’ And I said: ‘Yep that’s right’, and just kept on walking full on and thought if I leave you with that thought I’m not even going to discuss it and let you see where it goes from here. And there’s a part of me obviously that is cautionary about that, because I think I need to be in my job. But there is also a part of me that also says these kids need to have healthy attitudes towards all people and have to have that healthy exposure and be able to feel safe to process it as well. So anyway I left it at that and I’ve never promoted or said anything else. So anyway then one of them came back later on and said: ‘Oh Sir sorry for laughing about your team, you know.’ So they process as they like but it has had positive repercussions. Being out and being on that sports team and being in the media just showed kids that gay men do play rugby. Homosexual men can be good at these things and we’re not just a bunch of limp wristed faggots who don’t need to avoid sport simply because we’re gay. So I think that [the media] challenged the children as well and their perceptions and I think that’s quite healthy for everyone.

However, the media exercises a considerable amount of influence on the degree of isolation some gay athletes might experience. Despite the “Pink Dollar” market and other media determinations, there are still enormous barriers preventing gay athletes from coming
out and being visible in competitive team sports. Obstacles lie with the franchise owners who believe openly gay players will lose them money through diminished sponsorship and TV audiences (Miller, 1998). Many gay men are isolated from other gay men because of the lack of exposure or visibility of likeminded gay men in the media. For instance many gay athletes are unaware of the existence of other gay athletes specifically and few positive portrayals of gay athletes have been shown in the media. The best current example of negative stereotyping within the media is the 2004 NFL Super Bowl telecast on CBS being counter programmed by Bravo and NBC’s “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy”, as if to imply that gay men do not watch American football (McDaniel, 2004, January 15).

Walters (2001) also grapples with the contradictions that many gays and lesbians face at a time when their cultural visibility is higher than it has ever been while their political fight for equality seems to advance slowly if at all. As such, the hard work of making themselves seen and known, integrated but not assimilated, same and different has just begun for gay men in sport. Walters cautions that, visibility does not erase stereotypes nor guarantee liberation. “The paradoxes we are witnessing now (the simultaneous embrace and rejection) are reflections of a culture terrified of the potential disruption that full inclusion and integration would provoke” (p. 51). The story of gay visibility is really a story about the long arm of capital and its ability to shape our idea of progress. Lesbians and gays no longer set the gay agenda: The corporate managers of the mass media do (Walters, 2001). We all carry with us,’ she writes, ‘a belief in a sort of causal connection between cultural visibility and political change, but I am convinced that, more often than not, there is actually a radical disconnection between the two (Walters, 2001, p. 56). Dworkin and Wachs (2000) address paradoxes that juxtapose public perception of athletes as ‘positive examples’ against media coverage of immorality in athletes.

In fact a newfound media visibility might work against gay men in sport. Hypermasculine gay men in sport can be used in ways that deflect attention away from more substantive
concerns about gay civil rights. On one hand, cultural visibility can really push the envelope, bringing complicated and substantive gay identities into public view. And sometimes these cultural images slowly, almost imperceptibly, chip away around the edges of bigotry, never really getting to the core but perhaps revealing it all too clearly. On the other hand, gay men may be seen now, but are they known? As previously noted for Walters (2001) visibility does not erase stereotypes nor guarantee liberation, should gay men in sport become a regular part of the visual landscape, then they too could be mocked.

Art adds his comments on the lack of gay visibility in the media and the influence he believes media have on shaping the perception gay men have of the general public opinion as well as the perception they have of themselves.

#1 Art: Oh huge, huge. [The media have an] absolutely huge [influence]. I mean how many adverts do you see gay rugby players in? I don’t care whether they should be representing the society or representing what society is. I mean the fact that there are no regular car ads that show gay athletes or surf ads is a good example. We get pounded and pounded [by heterosexual content] especially. I feel sorry for the young gay men who are watching TV and just don’t see any of the normalised gay images. The role modelling is so, so critical for young gay men and there’s just none of it in our mainstream society and media. You know I’m lucky because I’m in a big city. Where can someone in Hawera or Twizel find people they can identify with? They can’t. You get this one camp person on Bird Cage, I didn’t even see the end of the movie, I just fuckin’ couldn’t. You know where are the people they can identify with. For me a lot of what I needed to do is I needed to identify to people, with people, gay people in my chosen areas. And that’s helped me cause I can see that other people are doing it and then it makes it OK, and I can see how they can [merge] the different parts of their life, their gay life and the other parts of their life.

Drawing upon Gross's (1991) interpretation of social power, Keilwasser and Wolf (1992) explain that the representation in the mediated “reality” of our mass culture is itself power. This power dictates the public perception of gay athletes for two reasons: firstly gay rugby players are stereotyped by visible images associated with other gay men, and secondly they are perceived as non-existent because of their invisibility in the media in general and in the sports media in particular. As Gross (1991) notes:
Certainly it is the case that non-representation maintains the powerless status of groups that do not possess significant material or political basis. That is, while the holders of real power - the ruling class – do not require (seek) mediated visibility, those who are at the bottom of the various power hierarchies will be kept in their places in part through their relative invisibility. When groups or perspectives do attain visibility, the manner of that representation will itself reflect the biases and interest of those elites who define the public agenda (p. 355).

The best example of how most heterosexuals perceive gays comes from Jeep who humorously describes the reality of the gay shower scene compared to the perception given through media such as in the pornographic industry.

#6 Jeep: The shower scene, everyone asks about the shower scene so let’s put it on record then. Showers are good, you turn the hot water on and amazingly hot water comes out, and then you get yourself clean surprisingly enough, and then you dry yourself off and then you put clothes on and go home. I think the perception of straight people is that we drop soap, sorry let me rephrase that we drop powdered soap because it takes longer to pick up, OK so we’re down there right and there’s no cubicles or anything like that in the perceived gay shower, so we’re picking up this powder soap and then away we gay guys go. One sort of slips over another one, and we all fall down and have a massive orgy in the showers so all the straight boys can watch from the side window.

A number of textual examples are offered to demonstrate why gay male rugby players fear speaking out against anti-gay bias because of perceived public opinion backlash. The perception of public backlash felt by the participants grew from their fear of exclusion, humiliation, and harassment, not for being gay, but just for speaking out against anti-gay bias in public. Relating this to pluralistic ignorance, Kielwasser and Wolf (1992) argue that “individuals monitor their social environment as one cue to opinion and action, opinions with visible adherents appear to be more widely held than they are in fact. The appearance of strength becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 357). In other words, as Art attempts to explain, the silence of gay men is the result of their invisibility in the media and elsewhere. Negative stereotypes and portrayals engender negative public opinion.

#1 Art: I get very bitter at the media now with the lack of normalised gay life in things like advertisements, and sitcoms. What I’m now beginning to hate are these little shows where they get these little kiddies like on Bill Cosby, where the boys always talk boys’ stuff like about girlfriends and stuff. This creates
this barrier from day one where the only relationships that are contemplated or normalised are heterosexual relationships and I think that sucks. [That will only change when] we change that and start changing our language and start creating situations, which are open, completely open, where someone is interested in a [same sex] partner, you know. That’s got to be our big, big goal. [The media] should stop putting up barriers and prescribing one model of what’s the norm.

Therefore, speaking out in public against anti-gay bias is not only impossible for these gay men but seemingly impossible for the general population as well. Coincidentally, because the gay rugby player experiences a general lack of support in reality, he becomes hypersensitive to the climate of opinion that results in making him particularly vulnerable to the spiral of silence dynamic. Although rare, support is found within the family nucleus for some gay men as stated by Ron:

#3 Ron: My mother [has been a good role model] for being who she is and coming to know sort of the background where she wasn’t up to much and wasn’t encouraged to give a lot to. Returning to university as an adult and becoming a lecturer and then coming out in the last few years. The strength and personality that she had, to have been closeted like she was for the best part of her life, bringing up three kids, doing all of those things. I mean before and now to have come out in her 50’s I think it’s awesome. So she’s a bit of a model, a role model of mine.

Nevertheless, what gay men do know, and what they believe others do not know, does hurt them. What they do not know, and what they believe others cannot know, may hurt them even more. As Baldwin (1963) states: “it is the innocence which constitutes the crime” (p. 15). In the following quote, Andy describes the production of public opinion regarding being gay as being founded on ignorance.

#7 Andy: I haven’t actually had a really negative response from anybody. One guy at the gym was unsure. We we’re talking about rugby one day. I was talking about the fact that I was going to play rugby. And he goes, oh! Have you heard about that poofs’ team? And I go, yeah, yeah I have actually, yeah. And he goes: ‘Oh bloody poofs!’ Then he goes: ‘Oh! Who are you going to play for?’ And I said: ‘Well, um actually I’m playing for that team.’ And he goes: ‘Oh what, you’re not gay are you?’ And I go: ‘Yeah, yeah I am actually.’ And he didn’t know, he wasn’t quite sure on how to react. And so I just sort of chatted away to him for about half a minute and I said: ‘Well I’ll just let you get on with your workout.’ And yeah, I just let him do his thing. That was my first time telling a stranger and I didn’t feel too bad actually. I felt that if he has a problem with it then it’s his problem, not mine. I think it took him by surprise.
I don’t know whether he expected anybody to say that they were gay right in front of him or what. But the next week he came in [to the gym] and it wasn’t a problem, we’d be talking away just as normal and bring the rugby team up every once in a while. He’s still derogatory towards it but in more of a sarcastic sort of a fun way now rather than a sarcastic negative way. I think it was just the initial shock of getting over the fact that I was gay cause he didn’t have a clue that I was. And I don’t know if he’d ever met gay people before, so yeah for me negative public perception comes purely from ignorance of not knowing a real gay person. Straight people who know gay people personally have a very positive opinion of them.

Hence, public opinion dictates ones public credibility. This is largely manifested when one speaks out against public opinion when one is part of that public. In other words, a heterosexual man would generate greater support from other heterosexual men towards the acceptance of gays in sport compared to a gay man or gay athlete revindicating the same rights. Marc explains this in his own words.

#10 Marc: If you really asked me, I suppose I’d have to say that my whole life has been a lie in respect of my sexuality. I haven’t been particularly unhappy about this since my twenties when they changed the laws against homosexuality - that was such a relief it’s hard to imagine! Now, though, I recognise that I could have been a good role model for younger gays, but although I’ve always been supportive of gays and gay rights for years I’ve never actually had the courage to say ‘I’m one’. It’s almost as if you feel you can give gays more support by being a 'straight' supporter - it gives you more credibility.

Section Summary

In this section I have discussed the relationship between the Spiral of Silence tenet and the conspiracy of silence phenomenon. The ideas and concepts from Noelle-Neumann (1993) Spiral of Silence theory were used in the Conspiracy of Silence Model to explore both (a) the role public opinion plays in the lives of silent gay men and (b) the opinion gay men have of the media’s coverage about being gay. Findings show that although male domination in the sport media is weakening and that efforts are made to include some gay content, gay male athletes are still silenced by their fear of a perceived negative public opinion on being gay. This may be the result of little or no exposure of positive examples showing gay athletes participating in competitive team sport organisations. The existing silence therefore, bears
quite different connotations in the meanings gay men make of it in comparison to what heterosexual players may make of it within a team, and what spectators or the general public make of it, in and out of the sporting context. Silence may have different meanings in our socially constructed world. For a deaf person silence may be a loss, to a musician silence may be a gain, and to a monk it may be a way of life. However, for a gay athlete silence may mean participation, safety and acceptance. Conversely, for heterosexual players it may be akin to power, domination and also safety and self-protection.

**Chapter Summary**

In this discussion section, I have reinserted the phenomenon of silence in the world of gay male athletes. I presented experiential episodes of silence behaviour, which embody and illuminate the meanings, subtleties, interpretations and essential features of the phenomenon, while locating the latter in the personal biographies of the gay male athletes involved in this study. The overall objective of this research was to explain and better understand why and how the silence of gay men in rugby is produced. I’ve used the *Conspiracy of Silence model* as a theoretical framework to explain and understand clearly how silence manifests itself in the lives of gay male athletes. As a phenomenological study, the aim was not to provide causal exploration of patterned behaviour, but to describe how gay rugby players recognised, described, explained and accounted for the order of their everyday lives (Holstein and Gubrium, 1994). Therefore, this is not a cause and effect study, yet many parallels can be drawn between the two tenets of hegemonic heterosexuality and the Spiral of Silence, which explore why silence exists, and the two tenets of oppression theory and identity management which assist in understanding how silence is felt and produced. As such, linking interpretive practice (how?) and interpretive structures (why?) within the model provides a way of understanding the deprivatisation of their experience. As contemporary life, especially that of gay rugby players, is increasingly conducted in a public organisational sphere, such as
mainstream sport organisations, outlining the interrelationships among all four tenets to their overall experiences is essential. As reality is socially constructed, objectivity of the world can be locally accomplished and managed with reference to broad organisational, social and cultural resources (Holstein and Gubrium, 1994). Together, all four tenets of the model illustrate the power relations that exist in the lives of gay rugby players to produce the silence and social injustices that construct the social realities of the men in this study.

Ryan (1988) suggests that silence breeds shame every bit as much as shame breeds silence. The two are locked in a self-reinforcing cycle as displayed within the Conspiracy of Silence Model presented in this study.

Silence first of all communicates shame because whenever there is a subject that cannot be spoken about openly, we invariably feel shame. Children learn this very early. A child who asks about a forbidden subject like sexuality and is greeted with silence learns not to trespass on that subject again (Ryan, 1988).

What cannot be spoken of openly must be too shameful to approach, too taboo. Therefore the silence experienced by most men in this study, especially during the first three stages of their coming out processes, was mostly instigated and driven by the enforced sense of shame experienced within their social and family lives in general and in the context of rugby organisations in particular. Shame silences and the silence incurred within rugby utilise shame on a broad scale to keep gay male rugby players invisible within their organisations.

Finally, it is important to note that all participants in this study did traverse many hurdles in order to find personal emancipation. Many still have hurdles to cross before aspiring to feelings of wholeness and integrity, but for those who have, they overcame their oppressive sporting experiences by integrating their sexual identity with their sporting identity. In other words, it is only when they felt completely comfortable in the context of sport (mainstream or gay) that they felt they had reached personal contentment and the sense of reconciliation of all their identities (e.g., social, sexual and sporting) into one. Their silence had finally ended.
As we move forward in the twenty-first century there seems to be a greater acceptance and understanding of human diversity within sexuality. There is a new generation of gay males who are less socialized by earlier gender-inversion and the separate socialisation of men and women, which led to misogyny, or even of the political struggles of recent decades. The next generation of gay men is in a better position to break down the barriers to their integration into mainstream society and to have their sexual orientation accepted as natural and non-problematic. However, as this study indicates, the domain of sport remains a very much-contested terrain for the rights and freedoms of gay men. It is worth restating a key fact noted in Chapter I. That is, in the history of sport only three gay male professional athletes in team sports have come out during their athletic careers. To date, no professional rugby union player has come out in New Zealand during his career. Evidence from this study indicates clearly that organisational policies and attitudes within the sport of rugby need to change if gay male rugby players are to be seen, treated and celebrated as equals to their heterosexual counterparts in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
“Our way is not soft grass, it’s a mountain path with lots of rocks. But it goes upwards, forward, toward the sun”

Dr Ruth Westheimer

As this study shows the road between silence and visibility is long and arduous for most gay men. Some chose different paths than others and/or used different strategies in order to reach and attain a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment in their everyday lives. Others are still on the road and continue to search for that destination called happiness. The one key element that these men share is their common experiences of playing mainstream rugby union in Aotearoa/New Zealand. For these men, the sport of rugby union has been revealed as a social site where individual identities and organisational politics are negotiated and contested. Confirming one of the main assumptions put forth at the beginning of this study, the findings show that gay men do exist in rugby, but that this existence comes at a very heavy cost; silence and invisibility.

In review, this research project explored and examined the experiences of gay rugby union players in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to: (a) gain a better understanding of the meanings they make of their experience within mainstream team sports organisations, and (b) to explore the tenets which form the Conspiracy of Silence Phenomenon. Hence, this study examined the problem of how based on their experiences, self-identifying gay male athletes survive in silence within their team sport organisation with a view of gaining a better understanding of how the phenomenon of silence may create barriers and opportunities for their participation. This concluding chapter provides a summary of the findings related to these research questions, and furthermore highlights the potential implications this study has for physical educators, health professionals, gay men and their
families, sport organisations such as the NZRU, and the field of sport studies. The chapter ends with future research recommendations.

Collectively, these interviews constitute what I referred to as a ‘voice for the boys’. Their stories and experiences are precious and represent a past, a present and a future that must be claimed with collective pride and not rejection with individual silence. More stories need to be heard, but given the risk at this time, most gay male athletes within mainstream sport organisations choose not to publicly come out and talk about their experiences. For that reason, this research serves a critical role: a voice. Even though the number of participants in this study may seem small, it still remains remarkable that such a number was found and that they had the courage to tell their stories as painful as some were. Yet, it is important to remember that those willing to identify themselves as gay are probably not representative of those who remain unable or unwilling to articulate such a definition or their experience.

The findings from this phenomenological study reveal helpful information for mainstream rugby organisations. Although the results may not be generally applied to all gay athletes or even all gay rugby players or their teams, they do give us a better and deeper understanding of possible common experiences. The results of this study give an idea of the concerns, the feelings, and the ways of thinking of most gay rugby players. The findings also presented an understanding of what situations contribute to their problems and how they can best be helped. Ultimately, it is now known that some gay rugby players – overcome by silence – do not survive, and others do not enjoy participating in mainstream sport organisations such as the NZRU. The multiple instances recorded in this study of attempted suicides and departures from the sport in general and rugby in particular serve as testimonials to this fact.

Specifically, it has been suggested that an estimated 13 000 gay male rugby players in Aotearoa/New Zealand are mostly living in silence, remain invisible, are isolated, have thoughts of suicide and are alienated by the hegemonic heterosexuality and the oppressive
nature of the NZRU policies towards gay men. The research found that some participants often hated sport and physical education, yet others were attracted to it, loved it, and found refuge in it. Surprisingly, the sport of rugby serves as either a shelter or ‘cover’ but at the same time it is not really ‘safe’ for gay men. This is quite a paradox of sport as a place/space for gay athletes.

Clasen (2001) writes that scholars must be aware of the current ways in which paradoxes function in society in order to promote positive social change. Many other leading scholars, have revealed numerous paradoxes that exist within the experience of men’s masculinity and sexuality in general and in sport in particular (Arning, 2000; Burstyn, 1999; Cashorali, 1995; Cirksena and Cuklanz, 1992; Clasen, 2001; Dworkin and Wachs, 2000; Evans, 1988; Fletcher, 1999; Garber, 1995; Hearn, 1990; Kimmel, 2002; Peterson, 1998; Plummer, 1999; Walters, 2001; Whitehead, 2002).

In considering the complicating paradoxical factors associated with the issues of masculinity and sexuality, Cirksena and Cuklanz (1992) present five major dualisms in Western culture: reason and emotion, public and private, nature and culture, subject and object, and mind and body. Indeed Whitehead (2002) suggests that man “comes to live his life and exercise his being in what is ultimately an artificial, cultural-social configuration – the compartmentalization of the public and private” (p. 128).

Each of these dualisms can be placed under larger categorical oppositions such as (a) the paradox of men trying not to be overly masculine because they are viewed as the oppressors yet not wanting to be viewed as weak wimps. This is especially true in the marketplace where individual aggressive macho behaviour must coincide with a civilised, cooperative approach (Fletcher, 1999; Kimmel, 2002; Whitehead, 2002), (b) the paradox of gay men needing to emphasise hypermasculinity, yet undermining their oppression as gay men (Arning, 2000; Cashorali, 1995; Clasen, 2001), (c) the paradox of gay men loving sport overtly, yet fearing it
in silence (Burstyn, 1999; Pronger, 2000), (d) the paradox of visibility not guaranteeing liberation (Walters, 2001), (e) the paradox of the nature-culture debate concerning bisexuality (Dworkin and Wachs, 2000; Peterson, 1998), and, (f) the paradox of culture versus politics, where the cultural moment is not wholly embracing, nor the political moment wholly rejecting of gay men: both realms coexist and interact in an uneasy mix of opportunity and opposition, inclusion and exclusion (Dworkin and Wachs, 2000; Peterson, 1998). As suggested by Walters (2001), the paradox results from two competing values, a liberal ethos focused on equal rights, and a heterosexual orthodoxy, and that many people are pulled between the two.

Ideally, we need to remove the masculine/feminine dualism in order to end the paradoxes for gay men in sport. Ultimately, using dualisms dichotomously harms every sex and gender and limits the experiences of individuals. We must acknowledge that binary poles do not need to lead to rigid role expectations for gay or heterosexual men. This reflects the need for further attention, exploration and research so that we may better respond to these complex paradoxes and dualisms which limit a gay man’s potential in sport. As Whitehead (2002) concludes.

…there is no singular crisis of masculinity, being a man is perhaps more complicated now; certainly there appear to be more ways of being (a man). Moreover, emergent discourses of gender increasingly pressure the masculine subject to negotiate, reflect and consider his position as man, and to be more aware of how one’s masculinist practices and assumptions might impact on others and self. In saying this, the concept of the masculine subject does not in any way excuse, or attempt to ‘justify’, men’s oppressive, violent behaviours (p. 220).

Additional results also show that most men who come out within rugby organisations express feelings of enjoyment, altruism and of reconciliation of their social, sexual and sporting identities. Yet, being gay can lead to overachievement and hypermasculinity and can also impede one’s performance. By sharing their experiences, gay male rugby players were at the same time describing the context of sport organisations where their feelings were
generated. In an interpretive socio-phenomenological view, the actions of mainstream organisations seem irrational, incoherent, unprecedented and unordered to the realities of gay male athletes’ lived experiences. Too often it is wrongly assumed that gay male athletes have continuous, logical or even interlocking selves, as if their sexuality was central to their identity. Hence, the results of this phenomenological study indicate that gay male rugby players in Aotearoa/New Zealand are specifically concerned about the need for social change. These concerns are fostered within a social context where people who are different lack the respect, understanding and affirmation they deserve under the human rights act. If social justice is to exist for gay men in sport, social changes are essential for the following purposes.

- Social change is needed for visible players to be accepted within mainstream society teams and organisations.
- Social change is needed for visible players to feel positive about themselves in rugby.
- Social change is needed for all New Zealanders to altruistically make a contribution to the sport of rugby and to the next generation of athletes; gay and heterosexual.

Although the possibilities for gay men in mainstream sport seem to be limited at this point in time, it appears the way to change people’s opinions is to educate them about gay athletes and that alliances should be formed between gay men and all other stakeholders of sport in general and rugby in particular. Billy Bean, the only living openly gay former major league outfielder, states that coming out within sport organisations “needs to be a positive experience, or no one will ever come out” during their professional career (Menez, 2001). For many, sport is not the demon, administrators and the media are. They often represent the voices of the vocal few who instigate negative public opinion perceptions towards gay men. The following example presence a moment in time and place where a positive public opinion is recognised. Val explains a different kind of silence; a silence that for some may seem
positive. A silence that cannot be clearly expressed in the media; a silence that cannot be loud enough for organisers and administrators to understand its significance.

#2 Val: You know how wonderful it was to see a gay team play a straight team and some of the little things that happened. Like I’ve never seen two guys come off a rugby field holding hands before. Nobody went: ‘Ohhhh!’ They all reacted really positively by saying nothing; just being silent like if there was nothing wrong. You know I mean I wish I was 20. Coming out now at that age I mean [life] would just be so much easier.

Reading through the lived experiences of these individuals has proven to be an emotional roller coaster ride to say the least. Emotions of joy and humour were quickly eclipsed by passages of grief and sorrow, yet to be re-ignited by moments of peace and contemplation. Their experiences were as much different from one another as they were united by a guiding conviction of making their space a better one for all who are lucky enough to share it.

I often thought how incompetent I was in being the messenger (the voice) of gay rugby players, for their powerful comments could never be told in the third person. They are too moving and strong for their own voices not to speak for themselves. Therefore, the original purpose of explaining and understanding the **Conspiracy of Silence phenomenon** in sport was met by combining my perspective with the meanings gay rugby players made of their silence.

Finally, homophobia in sport (rugby) is a problem for everyone, players, administrators and spectators alike. Although I dealt exclusively with gay rugby players, I view this subject as part of a larger problem of a society that tends to favour homogeneity over difference and consequently rejects all forms of sexuality that communicate any deviation from the heterosexual orientation. As stated, what is unique about being gay is that it is the one subculture that transcends all other social categories such as: age, gender, race, social class, nationality, religion, ethnicity, and the able/disabled. It has no barriers to all other social groups nor does it have any over/under-representation in any of these groups and that includes sport. It is a subculture that operates within others and where different individuals from
different backgrounds and cultures do show commonalities of understanding of what it is to be gay. Consequently, rugby in particular, and society in general has much to gain by eradicating homophobia. By publicly addressing the inclusion rather than exclusion of gay men, organisations in positions of privilege such as the NZRU could enable all young New Zealanders to play rugby to the full extent of their capabilities in a safe and supportive environment. Athletes should be able to use each other for a source of strength instead of a source of fear. By doing so they will also ensure that rugby and other sports are inclusive for all. The measure in which gay men in sport suffer (or not) depends on the involvement of heterosexual allies, ready to act on their behalf for the good of all. In the words of the Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG (see full speech in Appendix G) during his speech at the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Gay Games in Sydney: “… the days of exclusion are numbered … it is the truth that makes us free… you who come together on this magical night to affirm the fundamental unity of all human beings … let us be an example of respect for human rights. Not just for gays, for everyone” (Kirby, 2002).

As a final reflection on the existing silence of gay men in mainstream rugby union teams in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Ron describes in a few words what he thinks keeps Player X, our fictional All Black, from coming out publicly.

#3 Ron: The only things stopping an All Black from coming out are the other 14 All Blacks because it is that exalted position in New Zealand society where rugby is still the domain of heterosexuality and macho New Zealand male behaviour and homosexuality is still misunderstood and unaccepted within mainstream rugby’s public opinion.

The sporting experiences presented in this study show how we can account for the multiple ways in which the silence of gay men in rugby is constituted, thus enhancing our understanding of the complex and paradoxical world in which they live and play. Obtaining these perspectives may be the initial step needed in assisting rugby union officials in
transforming its policies and political practices in order for it to be truly an inclusive sport for all New Zealanders.

In light of current inaction and the continued silence from both gay and heterosexual allies we can only speculate about what lies ahead for impressionable athletes who are young, gifted, and gay. Will they shy away from sport, fearful of not fitting in? Will they repress what comes naturally to them off the field to excel at what comes naturally to them on the field? What will it take for the sports world and indeed, the whole world, to overtly accept and include gay athletes?

The following section presents what I suggest are starting and guiding points for both gay men and their allies to take action and create social change. Such actions would not only affect the gay rugby players in Aotearoa/New Zealand, but all athletes for they are the very people who can disprove the demeaning stereotypes, such as the belief that gay men are only ‘hairdressers, fashion designers, and interior decorators’? It is individuals, such as gay rugby players and others, whose amateur and professional careers are seen as wholly undistinguished who are the ones heterosexuals encounter in the media everyday who will help end the absurd pretence of universal heterosexuality.

Implications

As described by Art, it is important to encourage diversity in sport and it is the responsibility of all communities to do so. Publicly funded organisations must do more.

#I Art: I wanted to help make a difference. I’ve gone through a lot of my coming out process. I now want to give some back, and I wanted, I needed an opportunity to, or a vehicle to do that and for me playing rugby was the obvious choice. Not just for the gay community … I think both communities gain something for having a gay rugby team. I mean what I wanted to say was, it’s OK to be a rugby player and be gay and I also wanted to say it’s OK to be gay and be a rugby player because I think there’s both those barriers there. There are barriers from the straight community who don’t accept gay people and there’s also barriers in the gay community who don’t accept straight people. And I think that’s nonsense. We’ve got to show that diversity is all about all of us playing together, not separate from one another. It’s important that we let everybody know and have a go at what we think is important and valuable.
Clearly, much can be done to alleviate the insecurities, anxieties and distress experienced by gay athletes in mainstream team sport organisations. Through highlighting the importance of differing locales that affect identity management, I have illustrated the significance of mainstream rugby in New Zealand as a distinct context in which homophobia and heterosexism operate, and where silence is produced and reinforced. Because the minority status and the associated stress of gay rugby players are often not shared with the player’s family, the home does not provide the important safe space that it should and does for most other athletes as well as other minorities. Other spaces, such as schools, work and in some instances, the church also do little to support gay males. Therefore, the sporting context in which the player strongly invests his time, passion, and energy is an obvious and significant site in which heterosexism and homophobic behaviour can and should be tackled in the same way racial and ethnic slurs are. If homophobic and heterosexist attitudes are formed there then they should also be challenged there. The behaviours of future generations of heterosexual and gay athletes can be positively shaped if rights are respected and privileges shared. Unlike racism or sexism, homophobia in sport is rarely an issue where one finds high profile athletes, coaches, administrators or even politicians willing to take a public stand and call for change. Nevertheless the few organisations that have established anti-bias policies for gay athletes and where athletes have come out conclude that because of exposure, participants in team sports become less homophobic and more productive (Hekma, 1998). These findings are congruent with those of Anderson (2002) and Price (2000) who also observed that the attitudes of heterosexual teammates become less negative when their gay counterparts share their sexual orientation identity within their teams.

As leaders and allies, coaches, managers, and administrators need to be the instigators of change. Their silence is the voice of complicity and compliancy to standards of behaviour based on ignorance, prejudice, bigotry, and hatred. Although legislative contexts may force
them to do so in the near future, much time and energy would be salvaged if they understood the impact they have on organisational climate related to sexuality issues within their organisations and that being gay should no longer be feared or ignored. I concur with Freire's (1972a) stance that the oppressed are submerged in this situation and as long as they remain so submerged, they cannot be active participants intervening in reality; they cannot become engaged in the struggle for their own liberation (pp. 22-28). They need help to emerge and engage in that struggle (Crotty, 1998). Gay athletes need heterosexual allies to promote and defend their cause just as much as Jackie Roosevelt Robinson, over fifty years ago, needed his Caucasian manager Branch Ricky and baseball-scouting agent Edward ‘Ed’ Higgins to defend and give credibility to the cause of black athletes in professional sport. The NZRU needs to do the same by taking a positive stand on civil rights and equality for all players, including gay players. Their silence signals their consent that gay harassment, discrimination and prejudice are acceptable. Ron best explains the reasons why gay players would benefit from positive interventions by heterosexual organisations.

#3 Ron: Oh it’s nice to be called an athlete. Yeah I think the fact that we’re playing in a gay rugby team together says something really interesting, you know. You look at somebody [like our captain] and the way he behaves around straight or gay guys and the man’s got it made, you know. Part of me says wouldn’t it be nice if we could all just filter through various rugby teams and just be there, and that would be great and that would probably be the ideal world, but of course we’re not in that world and we’re not going to get there in a hurry. So because of that, a gay rugby team’s a good idea, the strength that the people can draw by playing together and being part of the gay team or being an individual gay athlete is a social thing that helps bring people together. Sport, particularly in New Zealand is an area that hasn’t mainly traditionally been that open to homosexuals or homosexuality so we need the communities and the groups and the teams to help us forward that on. We need those synergies.

Furthermore, it is important that all sport organisations be aware of the special challenges and issues of their gay populations as well as their non gay population so that they can better understand and fulfil social justice obligations and apply equity policies within their organisational structures. Sporting organisations must have goals that include trying to break
the isolation and to help gay athletes accept their sexual orientation in a good and safe
environment. Such goals could be achieved by increasing the sporting community’s
knowledge, understanding and support about the issues, that gay athletes face in New Zealand
and abroad. Coaches and administrators should be aware and be able to provide appropriate
professional referrals in order for their gay players to be able to access support groups and
that non-gay players be supplied with resources concerning the impact of homophobia. As
quoted from Ron, rugby is a sport for all, gay athletes included.

#3 Ron: Rugby is just a brilliant game for perpetual motion and movement and
for a variety of skills needed. Cause I see rugby as an egalitarian sport,
because there’s a place for everybody in rugby. A wee, weedy, fast guy or a
big solid, lumbering guy down the middle of the field, there’s a role for each of
them, gay or straight, and that’s why I like it.

As Baldwin (1963) argues, one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing
one’s own. It is also the rugby organisations’ responsibility to provide a supportive and safe
climate for all athletes. Administrators, coaches and even owners are in unique positions to
provide much needed support for gay athletes. Support, in two major forms, such as
developing anti-homophobic policies, codes of conduct and organizing diversity
workshops for all club members, are the building blocks in meeting the needs of gay male
athletes. As such, the NZRU should make sure that formal and informal policies do not serve
as barriers for their gay members. It is vital to objectively assess the actual consequences of
the loss of human capital because of the homophobia that exists in rugby rather than letting
emotions or fear dictate philosophy and policy.

Rugby associations as well as Players’ Unions should issue civil-rights statements
supporting gay athletes and providing assistance to secondary school and university players
where suicide rates are highest (Lipsyte, 1997).

Rugby officials should be capable of sharing their credibility and power or using it to
better the sporting experiences of all participants by speaking out against anti-gay bias within
their organisations. Other professional non-sport organisations are recognizing the advantages associated with the proper management of diversity. The NZRU, as professional organisation, should be no different. According to Ofori-Dankwa and Bonner (1998), organisations that value both diversity and similarities that players have enjoy some advantages over their monocultural or assimilationist counterparts. The productive aspect of cohesion among players on any given team should not be denied. After all, “without such feelings of self-worth, it is difficult to conceive how gay rugby players are to become productive and contributing members of a team” (Squires and Sparkes, 1990, p. 98). Other advantages accruing to players and organisations, in addition to the importance of eradicating discrimination and social inequity, may be their overall productivity levels. The potential benefits of effective diversity training for players and organisations include:

- Lower long term costs associated with integrating and motivating the players
  - Attracting and retaining the most qualified players
  - Having a national and community marketing edge because of the insights and cultural sensitivity of all the players and officials
  - Increasing the organisation’s creativity and problem solving abilities
  - Creating an organisation that is on the whole more flexible and adaptable to changes in the next generation of players and spectators.

Diversity within diversity must also be recognized, valued and appreciated. There are just as many differences and similarities between heterosexual and gay players as there are among either gay players themselves or heterosexual players themselves. There are just as many variations of psychological and physiological behaviours within designated groups as there are between different groups, but in the context of sport there is the added characteristic that optimal human performance be sought and that the desire to participate and win be significant. Therefore, organisations should place a high premium on valuing both team diversity and similarities in order to appreciate and focus on the common core values, goals
and objectives that bond all players. As stated by Wolf-Wendel et al. (2001): “Working together against adversity and toward common goals brings people on a team together in ways that cause them to care about each other” (p. 474).

A unique and very successful example of advantages in supporting diversity within sport organisations was tested by a high school football player in Connecticut who came out to his coaches and teammates during his senior year. Corey Johnson, a star student-athlete, made national news in the United States not just because he came out, but also because his teammates responded positively to his announcement. In fact, the Boston Gay, Lesbian and Straight education network awarded both Johnson and his team (organisation) a Visionary Award for tolerance (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001). Comments from the participants in this study demonstrates the possibility of such an event occurring within New Zealand but the rarity of such perceptions remains in sport in general and rugby in particular. Val and Andy comment:

#2 Val: I went to England the first time when I’d just come out, and my coach come up to Scotland with me and we lived in this residential caravan on the ground and he was just brilliant, I was totally out. I mean, he was really supportive and not a problem and he’s still a very close friend of mine. So that really helped especially after just coming out.

#7 Andy: What I would have really liked when I was young was for a really good person to stand up when they were playing sport and say, yes I am gay or to say that it was ok to be gay. Because of that, I can’t think of any role models really, gay or straight, when I was young. I dream of the day an All Black could say It’s ok to be gay. It would give younger [gay] kids the courage to do their best, to feel supported. That would have made a big difference in my life, to have had someone to look up to.

Jake also comments wisely on the importance and significance of all stakeholders in rugby.

#13 Jake: We are looking for a way to change our lives but can’t do it alone. We need help from others who have more credibility in sport than we do. We’ve never had any credibility in the past, not much more now, and I most likely won’t be here when and if we ever do. We don’t need better coaches or managers; we just need better people. It’s more important to be a good person than it is to be a good athlete or coach.
Ex-England rugby union international Brian Moore believes there is a great deal more tolerance among certain sports clubs when their spectators and officials have been better educated and sensitised than others. When referring to his own club members about the issue of gay players, he said: “They’ve been to school and university and take a wider [more accepting] view [than other clubs or sporting codes].” (Kershaw, 2001 p. 4) At a National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) meeting in 2001, members recognized the importance of talking about homophobia within sport organisations:

“… not talking about homophobia is the same as saying it is okay to allow name-calling, threats and incidents of physical harm, and outright discrimination in hiring, promotions or playing time. (It) is an issue of student-athletes welfare, and … it is time for the association to create a safer environment in which student-athletes and (sport) administrators are not harassed, are not threatened and are not subjected to anti-gay slurs on the playing field and in the locker room.” (Hawes, 2001 p. 10).

The formal constitution and mission statements are other sites within sport organisations where changes need to be made. The ethos of sport should be predicated on such inclusiveness, with all aspects of the sporting experience supportive of all individuals (gay and heterosexual). While the NZRU has moved to discourage racist abuse in recent years, no such action has been taken against homophobic abuse, either on or off the field of play. The NZRU’s vilification code bans players and club officials from “conduct that threatens or insults another person, on the basis of that person’s race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin.” Abuse of a player who is gay (either actual or assumed) is tacitly supported through the lack of any specific policy to the contrary.

Homophobic behaviour must be very clearly defined as unacceptable. At present, gay rugby players are being made to feel that their being gay is the problem. The real problem – the homophobia and the hegemonic heterosexuality endemic in society, which contributes greatly to the phenomenon of silence – needs to be addressed within sport organisations. All stakeholders in sport need to speak out against homophobia. In addition, creating an
environment where gay players feel free and safe to come out will have the added effect of creating positive role models for younger gays.

The most notable person to speak out against homophobia in sport is former British Sport Minister, Tony Banks, who called on all gay (football) players to come out: “Unless we can raise the issue, unless we can actually discuss it then quite frankly people will pretend it doesn’t exist” (BBC, 1999, p. 1). He went on to say that it would take a very brave footballer to come out and continue playing. Unfortunately, he did not call on heterosexual coaches, administrators, and owners to show their support for gay athletes. The real irony of being a gay male athlete is that the coaches and administrators that he looks up to and might aspire to be, are the ones working tacitly within the organisation keeping him from being accepted and integrated into his own mainstream sport organisation. Creating positive change for all must come from all; coaches, administrators and players, non-gay as well as gay. As Art responded to the question: “Any specific person that you look up to, that helped you along the way, encouraged you, served mainly as a positive example?”

#1 Art: I think there’s been a few. The years, I mean, obviously in my earlier years … my father would encourage me on the sideline and things like that and get very enthusiastic on the sideline. And coming through university years, actually my 19’s coach …was a person that I …could identify with and that was important for me at that time. There’s also a senior player in our club now, who was a very similar player to me, not big, not as dynamic as everybody else but did everything 100 percent and led well and all those sorts of things. He was a lock and he was an important role model for my game and it’s quite funny because he’s now a friend and he’s the [straight] person that is from the [straight] Krazy Lounge, which has sponsored our gay team so, yeah, that’s really cool.

**Future Research Recommendations**

Focus groups were not an option within this study because of obvious reasons of anonymity. However, it would be advantageous at some point if focus groups were initiated in order to foster greater discussion on ways of creating social and organisational change within sport and society. Focus groups combining both gay athletes and heterosexual ones would be most interesting.
Based on what this study has found, I would propose the following lines of research:

- Further attention should be given to phenomenological research such as this study regarding the attitudes and behaviours of individual heterosexual rugby players, coaches and administrators. An insight into their current opinions regarding gay players amongst them would be most valuable in understanding the exclusionary factors associated with mainstream rugby. Another methodological approach I would suggest, with the intention of creating positive change, would be a case study approach using participant observation during the implementation of a diversity workshop program within a mainstream rugby club. It would be interesting and valuable to explore the advantages or disadvantages of implementing inclusive policies.

- An investigation into the opinion supporters hold with regard to gay players and its influences on their allegiances would be most profitable to sport marketers and team owners.

- Further analysis looking at how gay athletes have created safe environments for themselves is needed in rugby and other sports. Notably, the development of the International Gay Rugby Association Board (IGRAB), championships and leagues should be documented further.

- Examination into the results of sport organisations that have instituted policies, codes of conduct, workshops in diversity training should be studied and compared to those that have not.

- Additional insight is needed into other sexual identities such as transgendered and trans-sex athletes, as well as takataapui (Māori gay men) and fa‘fafine (Polynesian gay men).

- Links between suicide rates and professional athletes should be further investigated to include possible links with being gay.
Additional insight into productivity and performance levels for all athletes in safer sporting environment should be addressed, as should the lived experiences of athletes who participate in individual sports.

Action research that looks at how administrators, gay and heterosexual players respond (and perhaps benefit) from diversity workshops may help develop useful programs and raise public awareness and support.

Lastly, insistence that a critical consciousness of both the pitfalls and possibilities presented by today's increased visibility is essential to advancing the gay agenda in the new millennium. Indeed, as suggested by (Walters, 2001) it would be interesting to study how exactly the cultural visibility of gay men might "chip away" at social bigotry and institutionalized heterosexism, as opposed to getting "caught" in the conundrum that it is not the cultural panacea we'd like it to be. For instance, of exactly how media representations of gays are affecting or even altering the lives of gays and straights, both young and old. As only one example, a cross-generational analysis of how gays and lesbians think about their identity in relation to these images would be truly fascinating.

Thoughtful consideration of the many paradoxical situations might be not only intellectually fascinating but socially and even politically revealing-particularly as we can catch a glimpse into how the mass media does not just represent but might actually shape our self-understanding. This kind of study would assist in the better understanding of the numerous paradoxes that exist in the lives of gay men in particular and heterosexual men in general.

In conclusion, the main purpose of this research is to serve as an impetus for dialogue and change within the context of sport by showing evidence that gay male rugby players are silenced by homophobia within Aotearoa/New Zealand society in general, and the sport of rugby in particular. The tacit acceptance of anti-gay bias should be challenged, for the silence
of all stakeholders gives consent for homophobia and social injustice to exist. It is wished that through this work, I may have saved the sporting life of a rugby player such as Player X and if not, then I have shown the need for change and the possibility that his world and that of others can be a better place for all.
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New Zealand, the Human Rights Act(1993).


APPENDICES

Appendix A:

NZRU: Policy on Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is unlawful in New Zealand and will not be tolerated by Rugby Clubs. Appropriate action will be taken against members who offend.

Sexual harassment is verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature by one person or a group of persons towards another person or group. It includes the misuse of visual or written material. The behaviour must be unwelcome, or offensive to the person or employee and persistent enough, or sufficiently serious to have a detrimental effect on the person or employees work performance or work satisfaction.

Complaint to person or employee’s representative

As sexual harassment may be grounds for a personal grievance, the complainant may wish to discuss the complaint with his or her representative. The alleged offender may also have representation.

Anyone may discuss any issue relating to sexual harassment, big or small, in confidence with a contact person, senior staff member, or employee’s representative and will not be victimised for doing so. Victimisation of a complainant (should it occur) will be treated very seriously.

Examples of Sexual Harassment

A sexual harassment complaint can be made if a particular person or employee finds something sexually offensive, even if other people or employees are not offended.

Personally sexually offensive verbal comments
   Sexual or smutty jokes
   Repeated comments or teasing about someone’s alleged sexual activities or private life
   Persistent, unwelcome social invitations or telephone calls from acquaintances at work or at home
   Following someone home from their workplace or sport grounds
   Offensive hand or body gestures
   Physical contact i.e. patting, pinching, touching or putting an arm around another person’s body
   Provocative posters with sexual connotation
   Sexual assault or rape

   Sexual harassment is legally and socially unacceptable. Taking steps to prevent it - and to deal with it if it does occur - will mean a better work environment for all employees.
Procedures for Handling Initial Complaints

The procedure for handling a complaint is set out in the N Z Employers Federation Guide for Employers on Dealing with Sexual Harassment (pages 18-32).

The procedures cover
When a complaint is received
Investigating a complaint
Interviewing the complainant
Notifying the alleged offender
Interim measures

Sexual harassment is prohibited by sections 62 and 69 of the Human Rights Act 1993 and is grounds for a personal grievance of the Employment Relations Act 2000.

If a person or employee feels he or she is being harassed, relevant information on available options may be obtained from the Club Captain, President or Chairperson who will listen carefully and respond in the strictest confidence. No-one who does not wish to will be required to make a complaint.

Options

1. Self Help

   The person or employee may:
   • Tell the person, or persons, in private, that their behaviour is offensive and request that it stop;
   • Write to the person, or persons, about their behaviour, sealing and marking the letter “personal and confidential”;
   • Speak to the person, or persons, in private in the presence of another person.

   Since allegations of sexual harassment are extremely serious, it is important to keep any information confidential to those directly involved.

2. Informal Intervention

   The person or employee may approach another person or a senior staff member to intervene. The selected person must act quickly, discreetly and fairly, and ensure that all discussions and any investigations are conducted in strictest confidence and according to fair procedure. It is the role of the person or senior staff member to explain relevant procedures to the person or employee, and allow the person or employee to choose whether or not to proceed with this option.

3. Formal Complaint

   If self help or informal intervention have not worked or if the allegation is, in the person’s or employee’s view, serious enough to warrant formal disciplinary action, the person or employee should submit a detailed written complaint to the Club Captain, Chairperson or President.

   Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken if investigation shows the complaint to be justified.
Appendix B:

Interview Guide

**Orienting Process:**
- Purpose of the study
- Rights as participant
- Taping of interview

**Introductory Questions:**
- What is your favourite sport?
- Why is it your favourite sport?
- What other sport(s) do you play? How often?
- Who is your all time favourite athlete? Why?
- Who is your current favourite athlete? Why?
- Do you have a favourite team? If so, which one?
- How old are you? What is your work? Religion? Ethnicity?
- Where did you grow up?

**Specific Key Questions:**

Part One: Personal Involvement in Sport and Rugby
- a) How can you best describe your involvement in sport? Years played? Highest achievement? Position played?
- b) How would you best describe the media’s portrayal of sport?
- c) How would you describe the sources of enjoyment / constraints in your sporting experiences?
- d) How would you describe yourself as an athlete?

Part Two: Experiences as a Gay Male
- a) How can you best describe your involvement in the gay or straight communities?
- b) How would you best describe the media’s portrayal of the gay community?
- c) How would you best describe your experiences within gay organisation?
- d) How would you best describe yourself as a gay male?

Part Three: Experiences as a Gay Male Athlete in Team Sport Organisations
- a) How would you best describe your involvement in gay sport?
- b) How would you describe the media’s portrayal of gay male athletes?
- c) How would you describe your experiences as gay male athletes in a mainstream sport organisation?
- d) How would you describe yourself as a gay male athlete?

**Conclusion:** Acknowledgments, review of purpose, possible additions to interview.
Appendix C:

Interview Information Sheet:

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not you wish to participate. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request. Participants in this study are from the Gay Sport New Zealand Inc. network. The information to be collected is about gay male athletes’ involvement in mainstream sport organisations. I am interested in understanding, from their perspective, the meaning they make of their experiences while participating in various sports.

Should you agree to participate you will be asked to complete an interview. The interview will be held in a face to face setting at a time and place convenient to you.

You may withdraw from the participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind. All information about yourself and the results of the study will be treated in strict confidence and you will remain anonymous. Results of this project may be published, but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant.

The data (interview transcripts) collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University’s research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish. If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Roger G. Le Blanc or
Dr Steven J. Jackson

School of Physical Education
University Telephone Number: (03) 479 8991

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago.
Appendix D:

Consent Form: Interview

I ______________ consent/do not consent to participate in the study being conducted by Roger G. Le Blanc, under the supervision of Dr. Steven J. Jackson, lecturer in the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago, Dunedin. It is further understood that I have received the following information concerning the study:

1. The study has been explained to me, I understand the explanation that has been given and what my participation will involve.

2. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary.

3. I understand that I am free to discontinue my participation in the study at any time without penalty.

4. The data [interview transcripts] 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 it will be destroyed.

5. I understand that the results of the study will be treated in strict confidence and that I will remain anonymous. Within these restrictions, group results of the study will be made available at my request.

6. I understand that transcripts of the interview will be returned to me so that I can add, delete or change any comments, if I deem it necessary.

7. I understand that, at my request, I can receive additional explanation of the study at any time.

8. The results of the project may be published, but my anonymity will be preserved.

_________________________                                          _________________
(Signature of participant)      (Date)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago.
Appendix E:

Mark Bingham’s last e-mail to his gay rugby team

The team received this e-mail from Mark a few weeks before his passing. He wrote it when he learned that the Fog had been accepted as a permanent member of the Northern California Rugby Football Union:

Wow! What an inspiring email. This is a huge step forward for gay rugby. When I started playing rugby at the age of 16, I always thought that my interest in other guys would be an anathema—completely repulsive to the guys on my team—and to the people I was knocking the shit out of on the other team. I loved the game, but KNEW I would need to keep my sexuality a secret forever. I feared total rejection.

As we worked and sweated and ran and talked together this year, I finally felt accepted as a gay man and a rugby player. My two irreconcilable worlds came together.

Now we’ve been accepted into the union and the road is going to get harder. We need to work harder. We need to get better. We have the chance to be role models for other gay folks who wanted to play sports, but never felt good enough or strong enough. More importantly, we have the chance to show the other teams in the league that we are as good as they are. Good rugby players. Good partiers. Good sports. Good men.

Gay men weren’t always wallflowers waiting on the sideline. We have the opportunity to let these other athletes know that gay men were around all along—on their little league teams, in their classes, being their friends. This is a great opportunity to change a lot of people’s minds, and to reach a group that might never have had to know or hear about gay people. Let’s go make some new friends...and win a few games.

Congratulations, my brothers in rugby.

mb
Appendix F:

The Ten Commandments of Rugby

1. Thou shalt not hesitate at the breakdown, but be mighty in the seizing of your rightful ball; for though it is written that the meek shall inherit the earth, this is in truth but a poor translation. The meek shall be trampled into the dirt is more to the point.

2. Thou shalt not speak profanely of the Whistler, nor question the purity of his birth, even though he be blind to the transgressions of the evildoers among thine enemies at the ruck and the maul, and whistlet hem not.

3. Thou shalt not smite thine enemies with an clenched fist, yeah, even in retaliation; for it is written that the Whistler and the Flag Waver shall assuredly be blinded to the coward which delivereth the first punch, only to see that which avengeth it second. Believeth thou then that what goeth round it shall surely come to pass again, and verily, in the fullness of time, the evil among men shall surely be found at the bottom of the ruck.

4. Thou shalt not kiss thy teammate on the mouth, even when he hath scored; for such is an abomination unto the iRB, especially he that kisseth in tongues, unless it cometh to pass that thou shouldst play with the circular balls, for then it is truly expected of thee.

5. Thou shalt not take the Word of the Lord thy Coach in vain, for blessed is the Word of that Lord. Verily, thou shalt wonder at His mighty wisdom and sticketh thou then to His Game Plan lest He acquainteth thee with these of his disciples who labour in the lower grades.

6. Thou shalt not chip nor kick for touch if thou be numbered amongst the pops or if thou wear any jersey below that of the number 9; for this is an abomination unto the Word of the Lord thy Coach, and surely shalt thy soul and thy body be His at training, perhaps in everlasting pain.

7. Thou shalt not run across the field with the ball in hand but see that thou runneth straight ahead upfield; for it is written in the Word of the Lord thy that the touchline is the best defender.

8. Thou shalt not kick the ball to the hands of thine enemies unless first thou maketh it to bounce; for then the Spirit of the Bounce of the Ball shall bring confusion among them, and if thy heart be pure, shall command that it bounceth back unto you.

9. Thou shalt not pass the ball to a brother thy team-mate about to be smashed by thine enemies, unless it be known to all men that he oweth you money, or hath rodgered someone dear to your heart, in which case all shall be forgiven and then, verily, thou mayest pass to him right slowly and on high.

10. Thou shalt not vomit upon the brethren of thy team after the game, nay even though thou hast partaken right fully of the waters of Guinness or of the entrails of pigs in a pie or of the beans which baketh right slowly in an earthen crock, for this shall be deemed unmanly in the eyes of thy brethren, and they mayest do it unto you.
Appendix G:

Speech by the Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG

COURAGE (Sydney Gay Games 2002)

Under different stars, at the beginning of a new millennium, in an old land and a new nation, we join together in the hope and conviction that the future will be kinder and more just than the past.

At a time when there is so much fear and danger, anger and destruction, this event represents an alternative vision for humanity. Acceptance. Diversity. Inclusiveness. Participation. Tolerance and joy. Ours is the world of love, questing to find the common links that bind all people. We are here because, whatever our sexuality, we believe that the days of exclusion are numbered. In our world, everyone can find their place, where their human rights and human dignity will be upheld.

This is a great night for Australia because we are a nation in the process of reinventing ourselves. We began our modern history by denying the existence of our indigenous peoples and their rights. We embraced White Australia. Women could play little part in public life: their place was in the kitchen. And as for gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities, they were an abomination. Lock them up. Throw away the key.

We have not corrected all these wrongs. But we are surely on the road to enlightenment. Tonight, we are part of it. There will be no U-turns.

Little did my partner Johan and I think, thirty years ago, as we danced the night away at the Purple Onion, less than a mile from this place, that we would be at the opening of the Gay Games with the Queen’s Representative and all of you to bear witness to such a social revolution. True, we rubbed shoulders on the dance floor with Knights of the Realm, such as Sir Robert Helpmann and with future Premiers, such as Don Dunstan. But if an angel had tapped us on our youthful shoulders and told us of tonight we would have said “Impossible”.

Well, nothing is impossible to the human spirit. Scientific truth ultimately prevails. So here we are tonight, men and women, indigenous and newcomers, black and white, Australians and visitors, religious and atheist, young and not so young, gay and straight - together.

It is put best by Corey Czok, an Australian basketballer in these Gay Games:

“It’s good to be able to throw out the stereotypes - we’re not all sissies, we don’t all look the same and we’re not all pretty!”

Looking around, you may only disagree with his last comment. Real beauty lies in the fact that we are united not in the negatives of hate and exclusion, so common today, but in the positives of love and inclusion.

We would not be here if it had not been for people of courage who rejected the ignorant denials about sexuality. Who taught that variations are a normal and universal aspect of the human species. That they are not going away. That they are no big deal. And that, between consenting adults, we all just have to get used to it and get on with life.
My people of courage certainly include Oscar Wilde. His suffering, his interpretation of it and the ordeal of many others have brought this occasion for us. I would include Alfred Kinsey. In the midst of the McCarthyist era in the United States he, and those who followed, dared to investigate the real facts about human sexual diversity. In Australia, I would also include as heroes politicians of every major party, most of them heterosexual. Over thirty years, they have dismantled many of the unequal laws. But the first of them was Don Dunstan. He proved, once again, the astonishing fact that good things sometimes occur when the dancing stops.

I would also add Rodney Croome and Nick Toonen. They took Australia to the United Nations to get rid of the last criminal laws against gay men in Tasmania. Now the decision in their case stands for the whole world. I would include Neal Blewett who led Australia’s first battles against AIDS. Robyn Archer, Kerryn Phelps and Ian Roberts are on my list - and many, many others.

Yet this is not just an Australian story. In every land a previously frightened and oppressed minority is awakening from a long sleep to assert its human dignity. We should honour those who looked into themselves and spoke the truth. Now they are legion. It is the truth that makes us free.

I think of Tom Waddell, the inspired founder of the Gay Games. His last words in this life were: “This should be interesting”. Look around. What an understatement.

I think of Greg Louganis, twice Olympic gold medallist, who came out as gay and HIV positive and said that it was the Gay Games that emboldened him to tell it as it was.

I think of Mark Bingham, a rowdy Rugby player. He would have been with us tonight. But he lost his life in one of the planes downed on 11 September 2001, struggling to save the lives of others. He was a real hero.

I think of Bertrand Delanoé, the openly gay Mayor of Paris, stabbed by a homophobe whilst attending a celebration at city hall. He showed courage. His last instruction before he was taken to hospital was that the party should go on till sunlight, just as these celebrations will do and thereby honour him.

And I think of all of you who come together on this magical night to affirm the fundamental unity of all human beings. To reject ignorance, hatred and error. And to embrace love, which is the foundation of all human rights.

Let the word go out from Sydney and the Gay Games of 2002 that the movement for equality is unstoppable. Its message will eventually reach the four corners of the world. These Games will be another catalyst to help make that happen. Be sure that, in the end, inclusion will replace exclusion. For the sake of the planet and of humanity it must be so.

Enjoy yourselves. And by our lives let us be an example of respect for human rights. Not just for gays. For everyone!
Appendix H: Player Profile Spread Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Raised In (city)</th>
<th>Years played</th>
<th>Player Position</th>
<th>Highest level played</th>
<th>Favorite athlete - team Role model</th>
<th>Coming out age</th>
<th>Kids (Married)</th>
<th>Single or in relationship (how long?)</th>
<th>Current</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Arthur</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Flanker</td>
<td>Senior A</td>
<td>Ian Roberts Ian Jones</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Rel 6 years</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Valmond</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>European</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Lock</td>
<td>Professional Premier</td>
<td>His mother</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Single Grounds man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ronald</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>European</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Prop</td>
<td>High school 1st 15</td>
<td>David Lang Chris Carter</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Rel 6 years</td>
<td>Public Servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bernie</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Hooker, Prop</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Rel 3 years Chef</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pierre</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>European</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lock</td>
<td>High school 1st 15</td>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Single P. E. Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jean–Paul</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>South Auckland</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Flanker</td>
<td>High school 1st 15</td>
<td>Michael Jones All Blacks</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Single Banker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. André</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wing</td>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Rel 12 years Physiotherapists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sam</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Taranaki</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Number 8</td>
<td>Colts Level</td>
<td>Jeff Wilson All Blacks</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Rel 1 year Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Léo</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lock</td>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Rel 15 years Photographer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Marc</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1st 5/8</td>
<td>Senior A</td>
<td>Michael Jones</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Single Academic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Henri</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Southland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wing</td>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>Greg Louganis Crusaders</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Rel 6 years Public Servant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hubert</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Single Public Servant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Jacques</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Otago</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>Ian Roberts Krazy Nights</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1 girl (never)</td>
<td>Rel 1 yr Teacher Academic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Sione</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Professional Premier</td>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>No Never</td>
<td>Single Garbage Collector</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Player X</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Fullback</td>
<td>All Blacks</td>
<td>Ian Roberts</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Married 2 Kids</td>
<td>Rel 3 Years Pro Athlete</td>
<td></td>
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