Early adolescent boys’ descriptions of nonparental adults who are significant to them and the influence these adults may have on the boys’ identity development

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously submitted or written by any other person except where due reference is made. The referencing and citing system used in this thesis follows the procedures outlined in the APA Manual (5th Edition). I undertake to retain the original collated data on which this thesis is based for a minimum of five years, in accordance with University ethics guidelines.

Signed:                        Date:
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ABSTRACT

Parents and peers play an important role in the lives of early adolescent boys but others may also be influential. This study considers the descriptions given by boys in their early adolescence, of their chosen, very important, nonparental adults and the interactions they have with these significant people. Primarily utilising a phenomenological approach, individual interviews and small group discussions were conducted with 11 and 14 year old boys. Four essences of the nature of the interactions between the boys and their chosen adults were identified within the boys' descriptions: fun and humour; care and encouragement; learning and teaching; and doing, being, becoming. Implications for parents, grandparents, teachers and others who care about, and work with, early adolescent boys are discussed.
CHAPTER ONE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 “Wild Boys”

On March 26, 2002 The Bulletin Magazine (a weekly current affairs magazine in Australia, shown below) featured two adolescent boys on its cover. One of the boys wears baggy long shorts and a white designer shirt as he sits on his BMX bike watching the other boy, who is, not surprisingly, dressed in dark jeans and a sloppy t-shirt. The latter is zooming down a half pipe on his roller-blades. The associated story title blazoned on the cover is “WILD BOYS – Coping with Adolescents” with the following subtitle, “Today’s male adolescents are under intense pressure to succeed – and many are not making it. Antisocial behaviour, resistance and disaffection are commonplace” (Bagnell, 2002, p. 2).
The book, “Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society” (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002) also has on its cover an adolescent boy, in this instance flying high on his skateboard. The cover images and the titles, of this book and the preceding current affairs magazine, raise a number of contemporary and challenging issues for their readers. The introduction of the book describes how many researchers in the area of gender and identity (eg. Buckingham, 2000; Frosh, 1994; Kroger, 2000) have drawn attention to an apparent “crisis” in contemporary forms of masculinity. If there is such a crisis, it most likely has its roots in a range of social phenomena and is paralleled with a “developmental crisis” where boys are engaged in a process of identity construction “in a context in which there are few clear models and in which the surrounding images of masculinity are complex and confused” (Frosh et al., 2002, p. 1).

Both The Bulletin and Young Masculinities cover pages are, most likely, not a surprise, as they both portray adolescent boys as many see and experience them. The boys are not in school but out at the half-pipe, “hanging” with their friends, dressed in the gear that they would want to be seen in by their peers and not in an outfit suggested or imposed by their mothers. They are being what we expect of teenage boys in our relatively affluent, western societies. There are not necessarily any revelations in these images, but the surprises may be in the associated story title or subtitle in The Bulletin article or in the findings in the research by Frosh et al. (2002).

“Wild Boys” may fit comfortably, for some, with the images portrayed – not so much in the relationship between picture and words, but in the experiences and perceptions we bring to reading the cover of the magazine. For some in our society, there is a perception that adolescent boys are wild, and that we are in the situation of having to cope with them. Failing to succeed, antisocial behaviour, resistance and disaffection are a part of the experience of some young people, and in particular boys, in their adolescence. Risk-taking behaviours such as taking drugs and drink-driving are common (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001). But, just as common are the positive
attitudes and healthy development experienced by many young people (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). The concerning themes, the “crisis”, within this story line have been repeated in newspapers, on current affairs programs and in the popular press for some years now, and are topics of conversation between anxious, and sometimes frustrated parents, teachers, and others in our society. But the images, words and perceptions do not necessarily align with the reality experienced by parents and others concerned for young people. The stereotype is not necessarily the reality for all – it is not necessarily the experience of most young people.

Parents face significant challenges in steering their children through adolescence and into adulthood. Single parents may find their situation even more challenging as they face this process and journey alone, or with minimal support only (Burby, 1998). Anecdotal evidence and experience suggest that it is possible to turn around the failure to succeed and to help boys be positive members of society who are strong in character and resilient to the pressures around them. But sometimes failure is the outcome for a number of boys and young men (Frosh, 2000; Jukes, 1993). Parents, and to some extent teachers, have an influence on adolescent boys (Hendry, Roberts, Glendinning, & Coleman, 1992; Sartor & Younnis, 2002). Other adults may also have a positive influence, especially in the formative early adolescent years (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002; Claes, Lacourse, Bouchard, & Luckow, 2001).

In contemporary Australian society and other western cultures, most young people live with both, or at least with one, of their parents (AusStats, 2002). Parents are no doubt aware that their children are growing up and changing in many ways. Even if parents do try to ignore the realities that adolescents face in our society, the young people themselves are making clear that they have a greater awareness of the diverse reality of the world around them (Mackay, 1997).

1.2 Who they are and who they might become

As boys leave childhood behind and mature, as they wonder who they are and who they might become, these young men are developing their identity, building on the
past and shaping their future (Frosh et al., 2002; Kroger, 2000). This identity-forming journey, that began in early childhood and is the major task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1996), is one that every boy must negotiate. It is a journey that they need not travel alone. Parents and friends will most likely be with them, and other adults are potentially important influencers as the boys become young men.

The focus of this research project has deeply interested me since the beginning of my professional career almost twenty-five years ago. Working with adolescents and particularly those in the early years of this stage of development has drawn me to this doctoral research project – not from an outsider’s perspective but truly as an insider. The approach is from the inside in the sense that this professional doctoral research project has come about immediately out of my work as a Head of Middle School responsible for the overall growth and development of hundreds of young people in their early adolescence. This research project offers an opportunity to explore, by listening to some boys and truly hearing the essential essences that they share through their descriptions, one aspect of the life world of young people in this 21st century.

Teachers, educational administrators, parents, youth workers or adults concerned about young people in today’s society, may easily gloss over the reality for adolescents encountered in schools or the wider community. What is perceived as important to young people or who is thought of as important to them in their everyday lives of learning and recreation, may not be anywhere near the truth as the reality of adolescents may be misunderstood and misinterpreted (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001). This type of research is focused on bringing closer that which tends to be obscure to our attitude and understandings in everyday life (van Manen, 1984). An opportunity to remove our blindfolds, blinkers or darkened glasses is offered.

This research project was designed to understand part of the world of early adolescent boys, as described by them, in relation to the very important nonparental adults they chose to name and discuss.
1.3 **Significance and Goal of this Study**

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2002 Report, “Boys: Getting it Right”, was commissioned in response to growing community concerns about the education of boys in Australia. The committee given the task decided to consider this important matter in the wider context of what is occurring socially and economically as well as educationally. The report acknowledges that there have been obvious social developments over recent decades including the changing status of women, changing family structures and changes in the labour market. All these social factors, as well as others, have impacted on young people in our society “but appear to have more adversely affected boys” (*Boys: Getting it right*, 2002, p. xvii).

The Report also acknowledges how crucial the quality of relationships is to achieving optimal educational outcomes for all students, but particularly for boys. It discusses the roles of male teachers, fathers and other role models and states that “male role models do matter and boys benefit by men modelling appropriate behaviour and respectful relationships with other men and with women” (*Boys: Getting it right*, 2002, p. xxii).

The significance of this doctoral research project is that it focuses on the reality, as described by early adolescent boys themselves, of the roles of significant, nonparental adults in the lives of the boys. It is the boys’ descriptions of these important people, and the interactions the boys have with these adults, that are being explored and considered. This research project directly considers the issues that are at the forefront of most parents’ and teachers’ minds, as well as the minds of the leaders of our nation: some things appear to be working for boys in our society and some things appear not to be working. Who can positively influence early adolescent boys as they grow up in this complex and challenging society?

As I have taught, guided, questioned and listened to young people, particularly boys in their early adolescence, I have heard them saying, more in their actions than in their words, that it is quite challenging to try to work out who they are and who they will
become. This project intends to investigate the roles of significant, nonparental adults in the lives of early adolescent boys and to explore how these adults may influence the identity development of the boys. Parents and others involved with adolescents may immediately think that it is the parents and the peers that are most significant to young people as they grow up. We assume that, as young people progress through adolescence, the importance of parents wanes and the influence of peers increases. These perceptions may be true but the role of nonparental adults in the influence and identity development of early adolescents has only had limited consideration and even less empirical research has been conducted in this field. Hence the need for this research project with the following research goal and five research questions.

1.4 Research Goal

To understand the roles significant, nonparental adults play in the lives of early adolescent boys, especially in relation to the impact these adults may have on the identity development of the boys.

1.5 Research Questions

1. Who do the boys name as the nonparental adults significant to them?
2. What are the boys’ descriptions of the characteristics of these adults?
3. What are the boys’ descriptions of their interactions with these adults?
4. How do these adults influence the identity development of the boys?
5. What implications are there for those interacting with adolescent boys in educational or other settings?

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

1.6.1 Chapter One – Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic and context for this thesis. It discusses the significance of this research study and states the research goal and the five research questions. The structure of the thesis is outlined chapter by chapter.
1.6.2 Chapter Two – Literature Review

The Literature Review discusses the social context of young people in their adolescence, particularly in early adolescence. It explores the close relationship between adolescence and identity by exploring the history of these terms and a variety of definitions. This chapter emphasises the importance of identity development in the early adolescent phase of the life-span. Gender differences will be discussed with a focus on boys’ development. The role of “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in identity formation is also explored. Finally, a section entitled “Significant Influencers” discusses research into the roles that peers, parents and particularly nonparental adults play in the lives of adolescents. This section concludes with a detailed review of research into early adolescents and significant influencers.

1.6.3 Chapter Three – Methodological Issues

Methodological issues are presented in Chapter Three, beginning with consideration of the nature of research and relevant definitions. A “Tradition of Inquiry” in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998) is presented and the ontological issue explored in relation to this study. As this research project is qualitative in nature, foundationally utilises a phenomenological approach and has a mixed method design, these aspects are discussed.

As this study seeks to explore the influences that significant nonparental adults may have in the identity development of early adolescent boys, the larger, foundational issues of identity and ultimately the meaning of personal existence (Stewart & Mickanus, 1974) are discussed. A detailed and careful exploration of human experience is the goal of this research project (Hamrick, 1985).

Phenomenological research is presented from the key perspective that the researcher is focused on scholarly inquiry concerning the nature of ordinary, everyday experiences (Welch, 2001). Consideration is given to phenomenological description
and interviews. Generalisations and data analysis in phenomenological research are discussed along with consideration of presentation of outcomes of the research project.

1.6.4 Chapter Four – Research Method

Individual interviews and group discussions are the methods utilised in this qualitative, mixed method research project. This chapter outlines four procedural activities (van Manen, 1984) that are dynamically interwoven in this research project.

The two phases of this research project are:
1. individual interviews with 16 boys; and
2. 4 group discussions involving groups of four boys from the first phase.

These two phases are detailed as are the two schools that have been chosen.

Data collection procedures are listed in this chapter and three sections follow that describe the interviews/discussions, ethical implications and limitations of this study.

1.6.5 Chapter Five - Data

This chapter presents the data collected from the sixteen individual interviews and the four group discussions. These data form the first stage of the detailed consideration of the full transcripts of the interviews and discussions and initially detail the sixteen boys involved in the study and the sixty very important people that they named and described to the researcher. The second section presents significant portions of the transcripts of the interviews in the groupings of significant others named by the boys, as well as sections of the group discussions. It is emphasised in this chapter that the process of information analysis is essentially concerned with capturing what the experience of the phenomenon under study was like for the participants (Welch, 2001).

1.6.6 Chapter Six - Analysis

Van Manen (1984) suggests that a purpose of analysing a phenomenon is to determine the themes, the experiential structures, or essences that make up the
experience. In this research project, the individual conversations with the boys and the group discussions were listened to, and considered carefully a number of times to determine the essences that the boys themselves develop, as they describe the important adults they have chosen and their interactions with these very important people. Four essences are identified and discussed in detail.

1.6.7 Chapter Seven – Discussion and Implications

This chapter builds on the data analysis and draws from the Literature Review in Chapter Two to discuss in detail the findings of this research project in response to the five research questions.

There is significant discussion as to the roles these very important nonparental adults play in the identity development of the early adolescent boys who have participated in this research project. Also addressed are the implications of this research for those working with adolescent boys in educational and other relevant settings (Research Question 5).

The conclusions drawn from this project are particularly relevant to parents, teachers and others from school communities that are interested in the development of boys in their early adolescent years. Heads of Schools may find that the conclusions could influence employment and supervision practices for teaching, boarding, coaching and ancillary staff. Parents may find that the conclusions influence the way they view extended family interactions and how they encourage and support their sons’ developing relationships with significant adults beyond the immediate family.

Implications for families and schools are discussed. Additional implications are made that are relevant to the wider community, for example, to sporting or community organisations, church groups, and government departments or to professional organisations with an interest in the support and development of boys.
CHAPTER TWO

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the social context of young people in their adolescence, particularly in early adolescence. It explores the close relationship between adolescence and identity by exploring the history of these terms and a variety of definitions. Gender differences will be discussed with a focus on boys’ development. The role of “Possible Selves” in identity formation is also explored. Finally, a discussion of “Significant Influencers” guides the reader to the research questions to be addressed in the Methodology chapter to follow.

2.1 Young People and their Reality

Much of what we read about regarding the experiences of young people are the perceptions of adults and not necessarily the actual reality of the adolescents concerned. Newspaper and other current affairs articles about adolescents, in the most part, are written by adults. It is one generation interpreting and reporting on the world of another generation. To attempt to understand the world of the adolescent in the 21st century is to consider carefully the writings of adults about the adolescent world but to add to these perceptions the impressions and understanding of adolescence directly from young people themselves. Adults’ perceptions of the world of young people shape the community’s responses to the needs of adolescents including education, training, employment, recreation and rehabilitation (Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001).

2.1.1 Adults’ perceptions of adolescents

There is a perception about the nature of adolescents that runs deep in our modern western society. It is similar to the “Wild Boys” title in the Bagnell (2002) article referred to in Chapter One of this thesis. Some adults in our society perceive adolescents, and more particularly boys, as wild, displaying antisocial behaviour and, in
some ways, as a threat (O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). Young people can become the targets of adults’ anxieties, even of adults who know them well (Kraack & Kenway, 2002).

Sometimes, young people do not act in the ways that adults expect of them; many appear to have no longer automatic respect for authorities such as teachers, police or the clergy, nor appear to value education or employment and commitment to an employer, in the same way as previous generations. Adults, predominantly the elderly, are concerned about young people’s attitudes and behaviour. Mackay (1997) suggests that many older people, and in some cases even parents, are dismayed by young people’s “assertiveness, materialism and sheer rudeness” (p. 122) and intimidated by their apparent “swaggering overconfidence” (p. 124).

The dismay, intimidation and apprehension felt by some adults are more often targeted towards young men rather than young women. Tacey (1999) speaks of a “public anxiety about masculine maturity” (p. 35) and “the public crisis of masculinity” (p. 38). Young men are of particular concern because the news carries stories of them, for example, holding up banks and attacking old women to steal their purses. Pictures of young men are all too obvious on the front pages of our newspapers with captions that are written to scare and worry, and possibly even shock, the readers. Kraack and Kenway (2002) discuss the generalised anxiety throughout contemporary Australian communities as not only being about young men’s behaviour and its consequences for the young men themselves, but also that it is especially about the consequences for others. In reality, in cities and regional and country towns, this anxiety translates into distrust and fear of all young people and “into constructions of them as deficit, “bad” or threatening” (, p. 145).

2.1.2 Family relationships and expectations

Family structures and the parental expectations of their children in contemporary western society are very different in this generation from in any previous generation (Kraack & Kenway, 2002). In this generation, more children live in one-
parent families than with both parents and many more children live in family units that do not include their father (AusStats, 2002). Adolescent well-being is affected by the structural changes of family life (Spruijt & de Goede, 1997). A 2002 report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics stated that more Australians were divorcing than ever before, with 55,000 people being granted divorces in the previous year (AusStats, 2002). This figure is 34% more than 20 years earlier. The negative effects that divorce has on children, particularly boys and young men, are well documented (Allan & Crow, 2001; O'Connor, Thorpe, Dunn, & Golding, 1999; Pinsof, 2002; Sun, 2001).

In Australia, as in other first world countries, globalisation and the associated economic changes have led to a shifting of the population away from the country into the major cities. For rural and regional families, this has meant young people leaving their local communities, the communities of their birth and childhood, to pursue further education or to try to find employment (Kraack & Kenway, 2002). There has been a shift in the nature of work and in the expectations that young people have for their future in work and relationships. In a study of young people in a regional community in Australia, Kraack and Kenway found a movement away from a working-class culture that matched the movement away from the rural and regional areas of Australia. These movements create intergenerational tensions (Kraack & Kenway). Kraack and Kenway suggest that many fathers who came from working class backgrounds accepted, without question, working class circumstances for their lives and futures. Their understanding of what made them who they are was formed out of working class experiences and beliefs. In this generation, in the contemporary globalising conditions of this age, what was important to the construction of many fathers’ working class understandings of themselves is far less relevant to their sons. Young men are searching for what it means to be male and to be a citizen in this new world (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001). They have very different questions to answer and pathways from which to choose in their journeys through adolescence and into adulthood (Kraack & Kenway).
The young people of this generation are leaving behind their communities and many of the beliefs and values of their parents' and grandparents' generations (Mackay, 2000). Young people are being shaped by, and living with, the globalising effects of this new millennium. Kraack and Kenway (2002) suggest that young people are moving away from traditional industries and are experiencing the subsequent reshaping of the world of employment, as well as moving away from traditional family and community values into new forms of individual and community identities. The “good” and “bad” qualities of youth, as viewed by the older generations, are being reconstructed through the intersection of “old” and “new” values (Kraack & Kenway). It is not an easy place for young people to be, but it is the place in which they find themselves and where they must go about the task of forming their unique identities (Kroger, 1996, 2000).

Recent Australian research conducted for Kids Help Line (Kids on kids growing up in Australia: A research report, 1999) shows that early adolescents have three main worries that cause anxiety: school matters including failure to pass tests or exams and worry about bullying; safety and security of friends (along with a projection of personal security); and conflict with parents. Children in their early adolescent years were also, not surprisingly, worried about family and parent matters, with just over half saying they were troubled by family problems and nearly half stated that they were worried about their parents splitting up. This same research that looked into children’s worries also investigated the role models that children perceive as helpful to them. Parents (43%) and relatives (27%) were nominated most frequently. Sports’ heroes (20%) and pop culture personalities (19%) are also admired but they featured less than may have been expected when it comes to acting as role models for youth. Boys were more inclined to look up to sports’ stars than girls, and early adolescents (12-15 year olds) were less able than younger children to come up with any role model. A smaller number of participants mentioned other adults (9%) and teachers (7%) as role models (Kids on kids growing up in Australia: A research report).
2.1.3 Societal impact

In the past, the society in which boys grew up appeared to be more stable, with clearer expectations and outcomes (Kraack & Kenway, 2002). In most cases boys knew their fathers, knew that their fathers went to work and their mothers stayed home. Boys knew that they went to school and then they got a job. If they were sufficiently bright and from a higher socioeconomic status, they would most likely go to university following school, then get a job, and then get married and have children (Adams, 1996). The reality seems quite different for boys today. A significant number of boys grow up, not knowing their fathers or seeing them only intermittently (Marsden, 2002). There is a blurring between male and female roles and identities. The majority of mothers no longer stay home; they go to work and have careers and often live without a man in their lives (Allan & Crow, 2001; Weston, 1999). Boys have to go to school for longer now and there is no guarantee of a job following school – not even the guarantee of a job following double-degree studies at university (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001). Boys in most western societies see that more than 50 percent of marriages end in divorce and today’s young man is far more likely to live with his defacto partner and possibly get married some time later (AusStats, 2002).

Boys today appear, in some circumstances, to be left to their own devices. With absent father figures, boys will most likely turn to someone else for guidance - probably their peer group, as extended family and other support structures are not as available as in the past (Stapleton, 2000; Way, 1998). Boys need guidance, possibly even more so now, as family breakdown and societal changes impact upon them and contemporary Australian society is generally not giving the support that boys need (West, 2000). Family structures are different and supports that were once readily available to boys are not as available, or are not wanted by boys or their caregivers. Without guidance, males, but especially young men and boys, may drift aimlessly (Gurian, 1999). The impact of this listlessness and uncertainty will not only be on the boys or men, but also on those around them, including their parents or partners, and
the wider community. There is a lot at risk if our society allows a proportion of boys to
grow up feeling as though they have little or no stake in our community (West).

Without a sense of purpose or direction for themselves and the society around
them, boys and young men may tend to express their despondency in forms of
aggression and risk-taking behaviours or in withdrawal, extreme introspection and
ultimately self-harm or suicide (Adams, Gullotta, & Markstrom-Adams, 1994; Martino &
Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001). These responses, at opposite extremes of a life-response
continuum, result in tragic consequences for the individuals and the society in which
they live (Young menspeak out, 2002). “The consequences of having large numbers of
young men who are under-educated, unemployable and who hold little responsibility in
society are potentially explosive – and a tragedy for the individuals concerned as well
as the community in which they live” (Bradford, 1999, p. 1).

2.1.4 Depression/Suicide

Collins and Harvey (2001) and others (Buckingham, 2000; Steenkamp &
Harrison, 2000) report that the major factor in the rising suicide figures for adolescent
and young adult Australians is depression. Even in their early teenage years, young
people display depressive symptoms and figures for those clinically diagnosed, are
increasing (Buckingham, 2000). Young people who have suffered depression in
childhood may become more depressed as they journey through adolescence. The
incidence of depression in children in the prepubescent stage is equal for boys and
girls, but as they enter and progress through adolescence, it changes. Australian and
American studies consistently indicate that adolescent girls are more likely to be
depressed than boys of similar ages and that, by adulthood, females are twice as likely
to be depressed as males (Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, & Papillon, 2002).

Although the rates of depression are higher in adolescent girls than in
adolescent boys, the rates of suicide for young men are much higher than for young
women, peaking in the 15-19 age group with a 5:1 ratio male to female suicide rate
(Steenkamp & Harrison, 2000). There are equally significant numbers of young females
who attempt suicide but survive given that they do not employ violent means (Steenkamp & Harrison, 2000). Many statistics represent only the known diagnosed cases of depression or reported attempts and successful suicides. These known and reported cases probably symbolise the tip of the iceberg (Buckingham, 2000). A recent study notes that rates of male suicide in all age groups and in most countries have shown a striking increase since the 1970s but this is most marked in the 15-24 age group (Young menspeak out, 2002). A multiplicity of factors have been linked to youth suicide, including mental health problems, unemployment and social disadvantage, alcohol and other drugs, adverse childhood experiences and an interaction of cultural and individual issues (Youth suicide in Australia: What are the causes and risk factors among young people?, 2000).

2.1.5 Schooling

The more common media representations of the issue of boys’ education are based on a belief that boys are the “new disadvantaged” (Stapleton, 2000, p. O17). Phrases such as “girls are outperforming boys”; “girls are succeeding at the expense of boys”; “boys are struggling”; and “boys are in deep trouble” are seen so regularly that they now have been taken up as conventional wisdom (Cresswell, Rowe, & Withers, 2002; Stapleton). The belief is that, in the past, girls were disadvantaged in the educational system and the world of employment. The media presents the idea that the pendulum has now swung from girls being in an inferior position, to boys now experiencing similar, if not worse, educational disadvantage (Bagnell, 2002; Duffy, 2001). This is the new “moral panic” as described by Arnot, David and Weiner (1996) where, it is perceived, boys are underachieving and being outperformed by girls, particularly in literacy levels as well as in end of school and university entrance examinations (Foster, Kimmel, & Skelton, 2001).

The 2002 Australian Commonwealth Parliamentary Report into the education of boys, “Boys: Getting it Right”, aimed “to evaluate evidence of boys’ educational underachievement and disengagement from learning as well as strategies being used
by schools to address these issues" (*Boys: Getting it right*, p. xv). The Report refers to the growing community concerns about the education of boys and acknowledges that this concern, and the lower achievement of boys as compared to girls across a broad spectrum of measures of educational attainment, is a pattern that is reflected in almost all other OECD countries. There is a need for a whole new way of viewing the educational opportunities and performances of girls and boys, not that either group is deficient in some way, but that each is simply very different (*Boys: Getting it right*). A part of the popular culture is that boys and girls are the same, but boys’ uniqueness needs to be delineated, understood and appreciated (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001). It is too easy to allow phrases such as “boys will be boys”, used and reinforced by populist writers such as Biddulph (1997) to become a frustrated cry as part of a simplistic argument that demands something extra or different for boys. The notion of allowing boys to be boys is based on an over reliance on biology as the reason for the perceived under-achievement of boys and is primarily taking “an essentialist stance with overtones of biological determinism” (Ashley, 2003, p.258). Popular writers such as Biddulph, Gurian (1996; 1999) and Pollack (1999) have been strongly criticised for reinforcing the “boys will be boys” excuse for the perceived current situation of boys in our society (Ashley, ; Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli). In contrast to this popular writing and set of beliefs, current empirical research in this field supports a social constructivist view of gender and sex role development (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998).

When considering boys and education, it is important not to become entangled in the notions proposed by the dominant pop culture and press. Foster, Kimmel and Skelton (2001) describe three dominant discourses in debates about boys and achievement: “these are ‘poor boys’; ‘failing boys, failing schools’; and ‘boys will be boys’” (p. 4). There is a strong message in the popular press that boys will be boys; that the very nature of the male of the species creates the boys we live with in our families and read about in the press. It is proposed by some popular writers, for example Gurian (1996; 1999) and Pollack (1999), that the nature of boys is embedded
in the genes, and part of the psychology of boys, and that boys are aggressive, fight and have delayed maturity. These factors are presented by the popular writers as uncontrollable by the boys themselves but, at the same time, they would have us believe that the poor performance of boys in the education system, as compared to girls, is totally an extrinsic matter and not related to the boys’ development or the intrinsic nature of boys (Foster et al., 2001). Empirical evidence does not support the idea that boys will be boys. Nor is there empirical research to support the idea that boys are victims of the feminist movement of previous decades (Foster et al., ; Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001).

There are significant within-gender differences in both boys and girls that should impact on the debate raised in media statements about girls out-performing boys in educational settings. These differences cannot be ignored when considering the reality for boys and girls, especially in the post-schooling opportunities available to young women. A small minority of girls may be highlighted for their outstanding performances in tests or tertiary entrance scores or rankings, but they are not necessarily representative of the total population of girls. In fact, the post-school career prospects for girls have deteriorated since the early 1990s (DETYA, 2000).

Boys may disengage from schooling for a number reasons, including such social factors as marriage breakdown, absent fathers, irrelevant curriculum, limited male primary teachers, poor teaching, bullying and boys’ slower social/emotional development (Buckingham, 2000). For boys to stay engaged, Professor Faith Trent (Slade & Trent, 2000) suggests the need for schooling to equip young people for the future, to teach them for leisure and for work. She also states that the educational system should teach the “basics” but also the “complexities”. “It should encourage the individual and the group … and that is just the start” (N. Williams, 2001, p. O63).

It appears that our society has decided that the behaviour of some boys, particularly in school, is out of control and that the only solution is to medicate them – hence the considerable rise in ADD/ADHD medication prescriptions, primarily to boys
The motivation here may not be only to make the boys clinically "better" but also to make them better boys, which is very concerning as the diagnosis and treatment may be responses to parenting issues or other related matters. Some would argue that the medicating of boys for ADD/ADHD has added a new chance for parents, teachers and possibly even the boys themselves, to turn away from the inner life and emotions of being a boy in favour of drugs that offer a promise of a quick fix (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). In 2000, the President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Jonathan Phillips, was quoted on this subject as saying, "There has been an epidemic in recent years where paediatricians and psychiatrists have been treating mild social disorders with psycho-stimulants" (Duffy, 2001 p. O35).

Schooling and related matters are part of the reality that faces many early adolescent boys as they grow and mature. These issues are part of the context in which the boy forms his identity. To understand adolescence and identity more fully these two subjects are individually addressed in the following sections.

2.2 Adolescence

The period between childhood and adulthood is commonly termed adolescence. This stage of life begins with early adolescence that has been described as “the time when the ‘symmetry’ of children’s life experiences is slowly ‘fractured’ by a series of biological, psychological, and societal events that precipitate adolescents’ quest for a psychosocial identity” (Roeser & Lau, 2002 p. 3). In western cultures, the adolescent period is often experienced and described as “a time of emotional turmoil, intense moodiness and preoccupation with self” (Collins & Harvey, 2001, p. 69). Adolescents are seen as difficult or in some ways rebelling against whatever their parents and the society present as important or of value. Whether or not adolescents and those closely associated with them experience turmoil and stress, the core function of adolescence is most often described as the successful formation of a positive sense
of personal identity, while developing close peer relationships and retaining loving parental relationships (Kroger, 1996, 2000; Rey, 1995).

This section on adolescence discusses the historical, biological, social and contextual issues that form the basis of this stage of development. It explores various definitions for adolescence and considers the age range of adolescence that may be most appropriate in contemporary western society.

2.2.1 History of the term - Adolescence

Although the adolescent period and the complexities that are a part of this developmental stage are very relevant in our current times, it is not a stage that has been invented in the past century or even in the past millennium. Looking back to ancient philosophers gives us a very early view of what we now call adolescence. Plato (427-347 BCE. cited in Berzonsky, 2000) did not use the term adolescence but did suggest that boys younger than 18 years of age were so excitable that they should not be allowed to drink wine, and Aristotle (384-322 BCE. cited in Berzonsky, 2000) considered adolescents as being impulsive, moody and controlled by their passions.

The term adolescence first appears in the 15th century, but it was not until early in the 20th century that the onset of adolescent psychology appeared in the work of G. Stanley Hall. Hall’s work bridged the philosophical and somewhat speculative approach of the past and moved the study of adolescence toward the scientific and empirical approach of the present (Muuss, 1988, p. 20). Hall proffered an interesting recapitulative view of human development, an expansion of Darwin’s concept of biological evolution that suggested individual human beings reenacted evolutionary changes that the species had experienced. For example, crawling in infancy was seen as a replay of a very early animal-like era in human evolutionary history and “the unruly, obnoxious and undisciplined behaviour of junior high school students reflected a more barbaric and savage human epoch” (Berzonsky, 2000, p. 12).

Hall (cited in Berzonsky, 2000) described adolescence as being a “rebirth”. He saw childhood as a stage with selfish drives, needs and survival concerns as in the
animal kingdom and the move into adolescence as being “reborn” as a member of a
civilised species. A part of the rebirthing process during the adolescent years is a
significant level of tension between the self-interest of childhood and the move towards
a social responsibility and a sense of the rights and welfare of others (Berzonsky). Hall,
in the early 20th century, is the first to describe adolescence as a time of “storm and
stress” (Muuss, 1988, p. 22).

There is much anecdotal evidence in our society that suggests that the
adolescent period is a challenge for young people, their parents and the wider
community. This period could be seen as one of confusion, questioning, testing the
limits and rules, and a time that does cause storm and stress in a significant number of
those involved. Titles of articles such as “Wild Boys: Coping with Adolescents”
(Bagnell, 2002) reinforce such a view in the community.

The view of adolescence as a stressful and a tumultuous period, initially
proposed by Hall in the early 1900s, has been questioned and argued against from as
early as the 1960s. Kroger (1996) discusses the work of a number of researchers who
tested the “storm and stress” theory and found little evidence of psychopathology or
emotional and social turbulence among large samples of adolescents in the general
population. Changes during early adolescence and the concept of the period being
difficult for young people were explored by Wigfield and Eccles (1994). They suggest
that a number of researchers have questioned whether the many changes experienced
during early adolescence should necessarily be characterised as stormy or stressful.
Eccles et al. (1989) considered stability versus change in early adolescence and
believe, in contrast to the general stereotype that this period is one of storm and stress,
that, at both individual and group levels, there is a remarkable stability and consistency
in variables. Most contemporary psychologists reject the view that adolescent storm
and stress is either universal or inevitable (Arnett, 1999).

2.2.2 Definition of Adolescence

It is difficult to state who typifies an adolescent in a modern western society.
Consider these examples: a 10 year old experiencing early onset puberty; two 15 year old boys out on the half-pipe riding and skating; an 18 year old, second year apprentice chef who lives independently; and a 21 year old student in the fourth year of double degree university studies living at home with his parents.

There is significant difficulty in defining the period called adolescence with many theoretical frameworks and perspectives, along with fundamental issues, to be considered. Steinberg (1996) describes how adolescence may be defined from a biological, emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, social, educational, legal or cultural perspective: each view having its own particular slant on the nature of adolescence and each view formulating a unique but related definition of this period of development.

Adolescence may simply be described as the crossroads from childhood to adolescence (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Contemporary views may need to incorporate greater intersectionality of race, gender, and class into theories and definitions of adolescence (Garrod, Smulyan, Powers, & Kilkenny, 1995; Way, 1998). A psychosocial definition states that the adolescent is “required to forge an identity that involves the ego’s ability to synthesise childhood identifications, the demands of the libido, the abilities developed out of natural capacities, and the various opportunities offered by available social roles” (Collins & Harvey, 2001, p. 70).

In some ways, it is quite simple to say that adolescence starts with puberty but it is difficult to define an ending to this period (Adelson, 1980). Adolescence is defined by Newberger (2000, p. 207) as “an interrelated and overlapping set of processes” that don’t begin at exactly the same age and certainly don’t end at the same age. Some rely heavily on the onset of puberty for defining the adolescent period of development, with the conclusion far more difficult to define (Adams & Berzonsky, 2003; C. C. Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Muuss, 1996). A clearer picture of the difference in the two events is found in this explanation - “puberty is an act of nature and adolescence is an act of man” (Muuss, 1988, p. 87). The two are closely related but do not define each other nor set limits on the other.
Adolescence may be perceived as a period of development that is primarily a product of our industrialised, western society and the modern, and now post-modern nature and composition of families, schooling and communities (Adams, 2000; Berzonsky, 2000; Grovetant, 2001; Heaven, 1994). Another view finds technologically advanced cultures responsible for the, usually now prolonged, adolescent period (Fasick, 1994). It is also suggested that the adolescent period is spent in the pursuit of the full power and status accorded adults in society (Modell & Goodman, 1990). Adolescence may be seen as a cultural phenomenon, and not physiologically necessary to the development of the human being (Sieg, 1971, p. 52).

Nielsen (1987) and Rice (1995) discuss a synthesis of theories, the contemporary “Life-span” approach, that views human development from a “transactional, contextual or dialectical view” (Nielsen, , p. 23). The Life-span approach attempts to synthesise both the organismic and the environmental perspectives. Life-span theorists would see adolescent behaviour as a consequence of the exchange between internal factors, for example, cognitive development, and environmental factors such as reinforcement (Lerner & Foch, 1987; Nielsen, ; Rice). Adolescence, then, is “both acting upon and being acted upon by the environment” (Nielsen, p. 24).

The adolescent years may be viewed initially as the teen years (ages 13-19), but should be extended to gain a more full understanding of the influencing factors associated with this developmental phase. These include the onset of puberty (approximately ages 10-14) and the young person’s departure from living in the parental home (usually ages 18-25) (C. C. Johnson & Johnson, 2000, p. 620). When considering modern western cultures, there appears to be some difficulties defining the end of the adolescent period of development (Moshman, 1999). As the need for young people to go to work to support their families or themselves has significantly diminished and the period of tertiary education elongates for undergraduate studies and may include post-graduate studies, the ending of adolescence becomes more blurred and can extend well into the twenties. Muuss (1988) suggests that adolescence is the
period from puberty through to full adult status attainment, with adolescence ending comparatively late, in the mid twenties.

A present-day definition of adolescence may make a distinction between those under the age of 18 and those who face the many different challenges of life beyond the teen years. Young people between the ages of 11 and 17 usually have in common that they live with their parents, are experiencing the physical changes of puberty, are attending school and are part of a school-based peer culture. Therefore a definition of the later part of adolescence, especially for those in the post-schooling period of development, may more appropriately refer to a period of "emerging adulthood" rather than to late adolescence (Arnett, 2000).

The traditional view of identity formation being a principal task of adolescence needs to be reconsidered as the changing cultural and developmental contexts for young people have meant that many now delay full-time employment, marriage and parenthood well into their twenties, if not later. Erikson’s (1950) mid-20th century view that identity was achieved when an adolescent had found the right job and the right spouse seems comical in this new millennium with its very different social context and expectations of young people (Cote & Levine, 1997; Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002).

In contrast to this difficulty in clearly defining later adolescence or emerging adulthood, the task of defining early adolescence is somewhat simpler. In our commercially and media driven society, it is not as straightforward as saying that early adolescence begins as puberty starts in a child. The onset of puberty has traditionally been used as an indicator of the beginning of adolescence. However the emergence of physical changes does not necessarily mark the start of what we call adolescence. Many prepubescent children display adolescent traits such as a desire for more independence and greater release from their parents’ control (Kroger, 1996).

Starting and ending ages cannot define the adolescent period, as it relates very much to the process of forming a stable identity. Adolescence starts when young people, as early adolescents, start to explore their opportunities and different roles in
the world beyond childhood, and finishes, as older adolescents are able to synthesise a variety of roles and “form a self that provides them with a sense of well-being and with who and what they are in the adult world” (Finkenauer, Engels, Meeus, & Oosterwegel, 2002, p. 26).

### 2.2.3 An Existential View of Adolescence

An existential definition of adolescence looks at the adolescent as not being in a discreet stage of development but as a “whole being who not only exists in the here and now but is inextricably linked to a past childhood leading imperceptibly to a future adulthood” (Hacker, 1994, p. 302).

A developmental perspective may not give a full understanding of the nature and experience of adolescence. Theorists such as Erikson, Piaget, and Marcia see adolescence as a stage within a series of sequential stages (Kroger, 1996). Without a broader view, our understanding is limited to the perspective that puberty and the development of abstract thought are the fundamental features of adolescence. An existential view of adolescence takes a step further to the point of a thorough examination of what is the focus of adolescent thinking as they experience their fast growing bodies and use their newly developed abstract thinking skills (Hacker, 1994). An existential view adds to the objective contributions of the developmental approaches by examining the subjective experiences of life through the “unique phenomenological perspectives of the individual adolescent” (Hacker).

Existentialists see all humans experiencing the conditions of their existence that include isolation, death, meaninglessness and choice. It may be difficult to see how these more adult-like concepts are relevant to adolescence but Hacker (1994) describes a number of studies that illustrate how adolescents can be intensely aware of these matters and related feelings in their lives. This awareness inevitably involves and leads to some conflict in the adolescent.
2.3 Identity

Most theorists and researchers will ascribe a primary task of adolescence as the development of an identity (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1996; Leather, 1999). Adolescence may be described as a stage of possibility. It is a time when one creates the self. “A consuming task of the adolescent is to discover or construct possible selves that are at once believable, personally satisfying and coordinate with the responsibilities that confront adults in one’s community” (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b, p. 145). Adolescence has been characterised as the stage in the human development during which the individual must establish a sense of personal identity (Muuss, 1988). The task of developing a sense of personal identity during adolescence is a relatively recent phenomenon in western societies because, in the past, there was a simpler movement from childhood to adulthood (Kroger).

2.3.1 History of the term - Identity

Although the stage of adolescence was not formally named until the 15th century, consideration of the nature and development of an identity, during what is now recognised as adolescence, has occurred since early philosophical thought began (Violato & Travis, 1995). Early philosophers, theologians and educators considered human nature and development and therefore, directly and indirectly, considered the development of identity throughout the lifespan, including the period we now call adolescence (Muuss, 1988).

Kroger (1996) discusses identity and proposes that it may be viewed as a social construct, and in these terms, historical context plays a major role in our understanding of the use of the term identity. In medieval (11th-15th century) and early modern times (15th–17th century), unlike the term adolescence, adult and adolescent identity was perceived in a relatively straightforward manner. Social rank and family links determined, for life, the status of an individual as they moved from childhood and through their adulthood. The early modern period brings into being a middle class in
society where wealth, instead of kinship, was the primary measure of social status, and hence identity (Sisson, Hersen, & Van Hasselt, 1987). Later changes in the nature and structure of the Christian Church allowed people to either accept or reject the religious traditions of their forbears. In the 19th century, up to the Victorian era, society was generally perceived to be oppressive and there was a need in many individuals to reject perceived demands of this society, particularly in this era of rejection of Christian dogma (Violato & Travis, 1995). “Thus Victorian adolescents had to define their adult identities without clear guidelines in the midst of general cultural uncertainty on issues of appropriate values” (Kroger, , p. 3). Present day adolescents find themselves in a similar position.

In the 20th century the study of identity development “is traced from Freud’s early writings to Erikson’s extrapolations and theoretical expositions, Marcia’s empirical operationalization, and finally to 6 alternative theories that have been introduced since 1987 (Berzonsky, Grotevant, Waterman, Kurtines, Adams, and Cote’)” (Schwartz, 2001, p. 7). As one of a number of classic theorists, Erikson established, along with others such as Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and Blos (1962), a tradition of identity theory. Much of the early and current debate about identity centres on two dimensions of identity – internal and social contextual. Erikson’s definition (see below) skilfully includes both dimensions and is described by Schwartz as “multi-dimensional, broad and inclusive” (p. 8).

### 2.3.2 Definition of Identity

Moshman (1999) describes the task of defining identity as “complicated” (p. 77) and that “no-one has ever proposed a definition of identity that is universally accepted” (p. 78). Identity has been called a “sense”, an “attitude”, and a “resolution” (Adelson, 1980, p. 159). Another understanding is that identity is “a self-structure – an internal self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history” (Adelson). Identity can also be seen in an existential way, with it being described as
“referring to an existential position – to an inner organization of needs, abilities, and self-perceptions as well as to a socio-political stance” (Adelson).

Theorists and researchers have used many terms to refer to the “identity” of a person. These terms include “identity”, “self”, “ego”, “I” and “me”. Kroger (1996) discusses the use of identity-related terms by two leading theorists. She states that Blos uses the term “character” (p. 49) to describe that observing centre and Kohlberg prefers to name the “ego” as the “organizer of the I” (p. 10). Many writers use a variety of terms to discuss identity, often making very fine distinctions in the terms (Kroger, 1996). Lapsley and Power (1988) argue that the further differentiation of terms will hinder development rather than assist understanding and progress in the field of identity research and understanding. They make a plea for integration of the terms and Kroger (2000) supports this approach using the terms self, ego and identity interchangeably unless presenting the ideas of a particular theorist who attributes special meaning to a particular term. This paper takes heed of Lapsley and Power’s argument and will follow the same approach as Kroger (1996; 2000) and primarily use the term identity.

A frequently cited definition of ego identity written by Erikson (1959) describes many different dimensions of identity’s structure and functions: “Ego identity is an evolving configuration of constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favoured capacities, significant identifications, effective defences, successful sublimations and consistent roles” (in Kroger 1996, p. 33). A later definition of ego-identity by Erikson (1968) is “the awareness of … self-sameness and continuity … [and] the style of one’s individuality [which] coincides with the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others in the immediate community” (p. 50). Erikson uses the term ego identity in a variety of ways with differing senses: sometimes as “a conscious sense of individual identity;” at other times as “an unconscious striving for continuity of personal character;” at others “as a criterion for the silent doings of ego synthesis;” and, “as a maintenance of an inner solidarity with a group’s ideals and identity” (Rosenberg, 1979,
Marcia (1966) extrapolated from the work of Erikson, the “assumedly independent dimensions of exploration and commitment” (Schwartz, 2001, p. 11). Grotevant (1987) defined exploration as “problem-solving behavior aimed at eliciting information about oneself or one’s environment in order to make a decision about an important life choice” (p. 204). Marcia (1988) describes commitment as representing adherence to a specific set of goals, values and beliefs. Taking these two dimensions, juxtaposing them, and giving a level of high or low to each, Marcia (1966) derived four independent identity statuses – Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium and Achievement. Schwartz and Dunham (2000) further describe the interactions of the two dimensions and the high and low levels, which is depicted in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1. Identity Statuses and Dimensions related to high and low dimensions**

From (Schwartz & Dunham, 2000)

Foreclosure is the identity status from Marcia’s (1966) paradigm, where the individual has made commitments to a set of goals, values and beliefs with possibly only little, if any, experience of prior exploration. This status is generally associated with some degree of closed-mindedness, smug self-satisfaction and rigidity (J. Marcia, 1980).

In most cases, foreclosure adolescents have been strongly socialised by their parents and their peer group (Heaven, 1994). Muuss (1988) suggests that such teenagers will have difficulties making their own decisions, having not been sufficiently challenged and having adopted a set of “programmed values and beliefs” (p. 70).
Identity Diffusion is the state where there are limited or low levels of both exploration and commitment. Diffusion may be classed developmentally as the most unsophisticated status and is often associated with early adolescence (Rice, 1999). Marcia (1980) describes diffused individuals as generally apathetic and disinterested. Another perspective of Marcia's is that the young person in this status “is likely to report having neither experienced a sense of needing to search for personal answers nor made any strong commitment to a given perspective in life” (Marcia in Adams et al., 1994). For this identity status there is a risk of “a number of maladaptive outcomes, including academic (Berzonsky, 1985) and drug (Jones, 1992) problems” (Schwartz, 2001, p. 13).

Identity Moratorium occurs where an adolescent or adult may be experiencing a crisis “but have not yet made choices or a personal commitment” (Heaven, 1994, p. 32). This status is particularly relevant to adolescence, as many young people seem to declare a moratorium or a kind of “time-out”, where they are not committed to settling with any one identity but appear to be enjoying exploring a number of alternatives (Berger & Thompson, 1995).

Achievement is the fourth status described by Marcia (1966). This stage has been described by Heaven (1994) as “synonymous with maturity and, ultimately, identity formation” (p. 33). This status is attained when the adolescent abandons some of the “inherited” values and beliefs from parents and some of those almost automatically absorbed from peers, and establishes his or her own goals and values - a personal identity (Berger & Thompson, 1995).

The usefulness and versatility of the identity status model (Marcia, 1966, 1980), particularly in considering identity in adolescence, has been established by empirical research (see Meeus, 1996; Schwartz, 2001). However, “Marcia (1966; 1993) himself admitted that the identity statuses deviated from Erikson’s construct of identity and that the model focused primarily on personal identity” (Schwartz, 2001, p. 19). A key criticism of the identity status model is that it is not viable as a developmental theory.
Weaknesses in the identity status model have been identified by a number of researchers who discuss: under-representation of Erikson’s concept of personal identity (Cote & Levine); lack of Erikson’s levels of identity (van Hoof, 1999); and, the reduction of the richness and depth of a one-hour interview to the assigning of a single status (Archer, 1992).

Accordingly, there was a call for an extension and expansion of the neo-Eriksonian identity theories beyond identity status constraints (Schwartz, 2001). Berzonsky (1997), in an example of an extension model, highlighted an individual differences process perspective, and Kurtines (1999), in an example of an expansion model, introduced a set of culturally related identity skills and orientations.

Identity and its ongoing formation is an undeniable aspect of human experience. The development of our identity may be seen as the central task of human experience, especially in the adolescent period. It is with dire consequences that we ignore this important aspect of our humanity – a consequence being that we are set apart from our community and even our very self. “Unwillingness to work actively on one’s identity formation carries with it a danger of role diffusion, which may result in alienation and a sense of isolation and confusion” (Muuss, 1988, p. 60).

2.4 Identity and Gender differences

Identity development is a complex process that is multidimensional in its components (Kroger, 2000). The personal and societal contexts of individuals must be considered as fundamental in the process (Frosh et al., 2002). Also significant in the process is the consideration of the role of gender in the development of identity. Schwartz and Montgomery (2002) state that “identity processes and outcomes were relatively responsive to the effects of culture and gender-related experiences” (p. 369) and “that gender had a greater impact on identity outcomes than on the processes by which those outcomes are achieved” (p. 370). A difference found by Schwartz and Montgomery between males and females (mean age of 21.6 years) was that females
were functioning more adaptively than males with respect to identity development. The females scored higher on achievement scales with the males scoring higher on diffusion scales. (For explanation of these identity descriptors refer to the previous Identity section)

2.4.1 Identity and Gender Differences in Early Adolescence

Some early work in studying identity statuses in early adolescence was carried out by Meilman (1979), who included 12 –15 year olds in a study and Archer (1982), who studied responses from Grade 6 and 8 students. Both researchers found that a major proportion (96% and 80% respectively) of respondents exhibited the less sophisticated identity statuses of diffusion and foreclosure. A later study carried out by Flum (1994) with 14-15 year olds found discrete identity styles in younger participants, but did not differentiate between genders.

Allison and Schultz (2001) report research by Abraham (1984) and Jones and Streitmatter (1988) that concludes early adolescent males score lower than females of the same age group on measures of moratorium status and identity achievement. Jones and Streitmatter also described early adolescent boys as more identity diffused than girls in the same age group. “These findings are consistent with the view that female adolescents mature earlier than males and that this difference in psycho-social maturity is manifested in the more sophisticated identity status categorisations for females and the less sophisticated statuses for males” (Allison & Schultz, p. 520).

Outcomes in this area of research are not clear or consistent. Findings by Allison and Schultz (2001) do not match the outcomes described by other researchers in the preceding paragraph. Allison and Schultz found that early adolescent females exceeded males in the less sophisticated statuses of diffusion and foreclosure. In stark contrast no gender differences were found for the more sophisticated statuses of moratorium and achievement.

developmental theorists like Erikson conceptualise development as a process of increasing separation and individuation, Gilligan, Miler and Surrey suggest that “female development follows a different course, a relational pathway” (Lacombe & Gay, p. 796). The key relationship for adolescent girls is their same sex caregiver who is usually their mother. It is a mutual sharing process that fosters a sense of emotional connection. By feeling involved in relationships, girls’ self-esteem and sense of effectiveness is fostered. Female concept of self is organised and developed in the context of important relationships.

In contrast, boys’ self-concept is fostered by psychological separation from others with boys in their adolescence particularly focusing on developing increased autonomy and an independent identity (Lacombe & Gay, 1998; Marshall & Arvay, 1999; Moshman, 1999; Sprinthall & Collins, 1995). Adolescent boys experience these processes over a period of time and particularly require opportunities to develop a sense of individuation and to become more self-reliant and identity achieved (Sprinthall & Collins).

2.4.2 Significant others and gender differences

When considering the significant others named by early adolescents some differences are noted in the types of others stated and the differences in the responses given by boys and girls. A large study of almost 3000 seventh to tenth graders in the USA (Blyth, Hill, & Theil, 1982) concluded three main findings in relation to who were named as significant others and differences between the genders. These writers found that parents and siblings were almost always listed as significant others with negligible differences between the genders. Secondly, they found that the majority of boys and girls listed at least one extended family adult and at least one nonrelated adult as important in their lives. Differences between the responses of boys and girls were noted in this field, with females listing significantly more extended family members than males and, in regard to nonrelated adults, females listed slightly more opposite sex nonrelated adults than did males. Finally, Blyth et al. (1982) found that overall, girls
listed more significant others than boys. In a study of 360 adolescents, Tatar (1998) notes that males were twice as likely as females to list nonfamily significant others beyond same sex friend, boy/girl friend, or teacher.

In relation to teachers as significant adults for adolescents, a study by Hendry et al. (1992) found that girls were unlikely to choose teachers as their most significant nonrelated individual but that mid-adolescent boys did nominate teachers as significant figures in their lives. Hendy et al. state that this difference may be explained by the finding that some male adolescents relate to “authority figures” more than females (Willis, 1977).

2.5 Possible Selves

As adolescents start to consider who they are and who they think they are going to become, a consideration of “possible selves” will assist in better understanding their experiences of identity formation.

The term “possible selves” has been used to represent individuals’ ideas of a combination of future possibilities for the self. Markus and Nurius (1986) explain, “possible selves derive from representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future. They are different and separable from the current or now selves, yet are intimately connected to them” (p. 954). Possible selves can also be described as “a type of self conception and refer to conceptions of the self in future states” (Knox, 1997, p. 13). An additional view is that possible selves provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current view of self (Cross & Markus, 1991). Possible selves are individually defined; they are set in the present drawing on cultural and historical context, also considering past experiences in their formation. Possible selves include the hoped for selves that an individual would like to become, the expected selves that are believed will be realised and those future selves that are feared (Aloise-Young, Hennigan, & Leong, 2001).

Psychoanalytic approaches to the self emphasise the importance of the “ego-ideal” in psychological well-being and dysfunction (Kroger, 1996). These approaches
also take a future view of who we would like to become – a future possibility for the self. For example, Sprueill (1993, p. 98) defines the ego-ideal as “that part of the mind that concerns the versions of ourselves that we aspire to be – our own collective ideals, the very best possible versions of ourselves” (p. 98). Unlike real/ideal approaches to the self, possible selves are not only what a person aspires to but also include what an individual fears or a negative view of what one might become.

The psychoanalytic approach does not appear to consider the negative possible selves described by Markus and Nurius (1986), but views ego-ideal as playing a major part in maintaining mental health or educing psychological dysfunction (Knox, 1997). Higgins (1987) describes the distance or difference between perceived, real and ideal selves as a possible cause of negative psychological health.

Possible selves are more than what an individual hopes to become in the future. There are two types of possible selves described by Markus and Nurius (1986). Positive possible selves are the selves that are perceived that have a positive aspect to them and negative possible selves are the selves that the individual hopes they will not become. For example, a young adolescent may have positive possible selves that include a successful university student, a professional rugby player or a happily married father. The same young person may have a number of negative possible selves that could include, for example, becoming a “druggie” or ending up a prisoner in jail. These possible selves represent for the adolescent a vision of, and hence a guide to, their future adulthood. Some research has been conducted on the relation between possible selves and delinquent behaviour (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). These researchers found that the presence of positive expected selves or possible selves might steer the adolescent toward positive self-defining activities. The converse is that, if these positive possible selves are not present, then the young person might drift into negative or self-destructive behaviours (Aloise-Young et al., 2001).
Adolescence has been described by most developmental theorists as the time when young people are shaping who they are to become. Erikson (1968) explained the stage immediately prior to early adolescence as a time when the child is acquiring a sense of personal industriousness. The child is conscious of their self in the sense that “I am what I can learn to make work” (p. 127). Erikson suggests that this perception changes significantly with the onset of puberty and entry to the early adolescent period. Harter (1990a) suggests that the onset of formal operational thinking is linked with the ability to construct multiple selves, thus it seems likely that possible selves are emerging in the early adolescent. The young person is becoming more able to sense who they are, and they look forward in time for new self-definitions. “The crisis of adolescence is thus connecting the roles and skills learned in childhood with the ideal, adult role models of the day” (Fraser, 1995, p. 4). Therefore, during early adolescence, the possible selves are developing for the first time and may be “highly salient” (Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush, 2000, p. 289). The young person is experiencing the formation of their identity in an intensity not felt before this stage of development.

This possible selves theory of identity and its formation (Markus & Nurius, 1986) does not include a behavioural component. Many current researchers and theorists have future-looking components in their models and therefore have similarities to the Markus and Nurius notion of possible selves (Fraser, 1995). For example, such conceptualisations include “current concerns” (Klinger, 1975), “personal projects” (Little, 1993), “life-tasks” (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987), “desired identity images” (Schlenker, 1985) and “personal strivings” (Emmons, 1986). Some other researchers have operationalised the forward-looking components of the self and add a behavioural component. For example, Little describes people’s personal projects as “sets of interrelated acts extending over time” (p. 276) and Emmons explains personal strivings as what “individuals are characteristically aiming to accomplish through their behaviour” (p.1059). Possible selves are not necessarily visible to others and have been described as purely psychological and are a person’s vision of their own potential (Fraser).
Because the possible selves are not necessarily known or visible to others, they are more readily adapted or changed than other aspects of our identities that are embedded in our actions or are public descriptions of our selves (Cross & Markus, 1991). The possible selves are, therefore, parts of the self that can most easily take on new forms, especially during adolescence.

There may be a significant link between influencing adults and the possible selves of early adolescents. This study proposes that the adults who early adolescent boys perceive as influencing their identity development may have an impact on the possible selves of these boys. The adults described by the boys as significant to them, and as influencers on them, may shape the possible selves that the boys form for themselves.

2.6 Significant Influencers

In the contemporary western world, young people live in a complex social milieu that includes for most, a nuclear family, school, structured social groups (e.g., musical or sporting), and various formal and informal peer groupings. In this setting, they perceive as significant, the support of parents, friends and extended family members (Claes et al., 2001; Laursen, 1998; Sartor & Younis, 2002; Updegraff, Madden-Derdich, Estrada, Sales, & Loenard, 2002). Beyond peers and the immediate and extended family, young people indicate the importance of other adults, primarily for mentoring, guidance and support (S. F. Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004). Both boys and girls equally state the importance of adult, significant others in their lives (Claes et al., 2001; Scales & Gibbons, 1996). In the last decade, research in this field, has begun to identify the possible effects of these supportive relationships on the social and emotional development of adolescents (Beam et al., 2002; Cauce, Mason, Gonzales, Hiraga, & Liu, 1994; Lerner & Steinberg, 2004).
2.6.1 Parents

Parents who guide and direct, set limits and appropriately discipline their teenage children play a positive part in the development of their adolescents. Barber (1997) proposes a model of parenting with a strong theoretical foundation linking parenting and adolescent identity formation. Barber identified three aspects of socialisation that are necessary for healthy development: a sense of connectedness, also referred to as warmth, with significant others; parental regulation of behaviour; and facilitation of psychological autonomy through responsiveness to the need to separate from parents. The sense of security found in the connectedness and warmth in regard to significant others “is crucial for exploration in identity formation” (Sartor & Younnis, 2002, p. 221).

It may be hypothesised that parental support and monitoring would be associated with higher identity achievement in adolescents. Sartor and Younnis (2002) found that parental support and monitoring of social and school activities were significant predictors of identity achievement. They describe how parental encouragement and support are vital in the individuation process as “adolescents are not leaving behind their parents as they develop their identity…but rather, a qualitative change that permits distancing occurs” (Sartor & Younnis, 2002, p. 222).

The parental role in the individuation of their adolescent children and in their adolescents’ ongoing identity formation is usually positive and vitally important. Berger and Thompson (1995) describe adolescence not as a time of detachment from parents, but as a time for parents to consciously nourish the individuation process by ongoing, persistent support and encouragement of their children. Sartor and Younnis (2002) found that adolescent identity formation “is an endeavour that leads to a restructuring of parent-adolescent relationships rather than a process of breaking ties with the family of origin” (p. 232).

This process of identity formation and individuation has been proposed as quite different for boys from girls. Gilligan (1986) suggests that boys and girls take different
paths toward individuation and identity achievement. She states that, for girls, the process is one of building on skills already learnt that enhance interpersonal relationships and build a sense of connectedness. For boys, it is almost an opposite process and more complicated, with the identity crisis of adolescence being resolved through separating from others and establishing autonomy (Sartor & Younnis, 2002).

In a study by Sartor and Younnis (2002) girls reported higher levels of parental support and social and school monitoring. These researchers proposed that this indicated a higher degree of connectedness with parents. But the higher connectedness did not translate into higher identity scores even though all these factors are associated with higher identity achievement. Sartor and Younnis suggest that gender differences exist when considering parental involvement and identity achievement.

In the early adolescent period, parents still offer a significant influence, as young people at this stage have not yet developed a strong need to seek and work toward independence from the family unit. The influence that parents have on their adolescent children has been found to be domain specific, pertaining specifically to school, future plans and career goals (Meeus, 1989; Younnis & Smollar, 1985). There is a contrast between the influence and support provided by mothers and fathers. Younnis and Smollar suggest that mothers are more likely to self-disclose information and feelings to their early adolescent child and there is a likelihood that young people will respond to this modelling - therefore the development of a supportive relationship. It has been found that adolescents’ relationships with their mothers can be described as having a degree of symmetrical reciprocity (Younnis & Smollar). On the other hand fathers are seen as unilateral in their communication and less democratic in their decision making style (Hendry et al., 1992) or more judgemental and less willing to negotiate with their adolescent children (Noller & Callan, 1990).
2.6.2 Nonparental significant others

Early adolescence marks a time of important changes in how particular individuals and groups of people are influencing young people in their identity development (Allison & Schultz, 2001). During childhood, the most significant “influencers” are the parents and friends of the child (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Sartor & Youniss, 2002). During the later years of childhood, the level of influence of these two main groups starts to change (Cornwell, Eggebeen, & Meschke, 1996). The friends of the child, their peer group, take on a greater significance to the young person than they did during the middle childhood years (Azmitia, 2002). Contrary to popular belief, this increase of significance of the peer group is usually not to the detriment of the relationship with, or influence of, the parents of the emerging adolescent (Beam et al., 2002; Sartor & Youniss).

Parents are arguably the most important adults in the lives of most children (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Sartor & Youniss, 2002) but as adolescence begins and childhood starts to fade, the relationships between early adolescents and their parents change (Delaney, 1996). This change occurs along with young people developing increasingly important relationships with their peers (Beam et al., 2002).

Extended adult networks.

Adults, other than parents, have been a part of the life of the child, but now the young adolescent sees relatives, friends of the family, teachers, coaches, music teachers or other significant adults from a variety of activities or fields of endeavour, in a different way (Frey & Rothlisberger, 1996). Nonparental adults can play an influential role in adolescent development (Hirsch, Mickus, & Boerger, 2002). In their research, Beam et al. (2002) refer to these people as “VIPs” – “very important nonparental adults” (p. 305), with the relationships between adolescents and VIPs being found to be a “normative component of adolescent development” (italics added, p. 323). The unique relationship provided by VIPs appears to be qualitatively different from that
provided by peers or parents (Darling, Hamilton, & Hames, 2003; Darling, Hamilton, & Hames Shaver, 2003; Sartor & Younís, 2002).

There are relatively few studies that have evaluated relationships between adolescents and their extended adult networks. Some studies have explored adolescents’ relationships with parents, extended family and other adults (Tatar, 1998), or members of the extended family and nonrelated adults (Claes et al., 2001). A study by Levine and Nidiffer (1996) investigating the underlying factors that enabled 24 people who grew up in poverty to make it to university found that only one factor seemed to be shared by all individuals: “an individual who touched or changed the students lives” (p. 65). A similar, but larger study, also found that personal intervention of informal mentors was the deciding factor in the success of adolescents living in poverty (T. Williams & Kornblum, 1985). Another study investigated the role of grandparents in the lives of African-American at-risk adolescents (Burton, 1996) and work on resilience in young people has found that nonparental adults may have a positive effect on at-risk adolescents (Cowen & Work, 1988; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Quinton & Rutter, 1988).

**Grandparents.**

Of particular note are the relationships between adolescents and their grandparents. These relationships and associated influences may occur through various processes and roles including regular care-provider, surrogate parent, buddy, storyteller or confidant (Bales, 2002; Tomlin, 1998). Just as older community members may have negative attitudes towards adolescents (Mackay, 1997; Thomas, 1998), as discussed earlier in this chapter, the reverse may apply with adolescents having preconceived negative perceptions of aged people including grandparents (Thomas). This issue has been recognised in some learning communities and intergenerational curricular for teaching aging appreciation to early adolescents has been trialed and investigated (Chowdhary, 2002). Despite possible negative perceptions in both directions, grandparents do play an important role in the lives of most adolescents.
A piece of retrospective research highlights grandparents as the most important nonparental significant adults recalled by college-aged students from their adolescence (Galbo & Demetrulias, 1996).

Shared activities, particularly one-on-one interactions, have a strong influence in the quality of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents (Kennedy, 1992). These relationships have taken on a new significance due to social changes experienced in western societies in the 20th century including the feminist movement, advances in medical and communication technologies, changes to traditional family structure, modern divorce laws, increases in drug and alcohol abuse and in child abuse and neglect (ACOSS, 2000; Backhouse & Lucas, 2004; Reynolds, Wright, & Beale, 2003). Contemporary grandparents are a significant source of help to their families, being asked more often to take on the childcare role in place of working mothers (Edgar, 2000; Goodfellow, 2003). Most grandparents who find themselves taking on the parenting role find it a “mixed blessing” because the role is one that is still being clarified in society and is unique in each family situation (“Grandparents raising grandchildren,” 2003). The influence of grandparents may also be mitigated by factors including parental divorce and custody arrangements, geographical distance, intrafamilial relationships, socioeconomic status and rural/urban residence (Lin, Harwood, & Bonnesen, 2002; Tomlin, 1998).

Grandparent-grandchild relationships can be of the widest possible variety of types with some being significantly positive and others overtly negative (Fingerman, 1998). Quality grandchild-grandparent relationships have been described as having these five elements:

1. a reciprocal feeling of closeness;
2. grandchild feels known and understood by the grandparent;
3. grandchild knows and understands the grandparent;
4. grandparent exercises a positive influence on the grandchild;
5. grandchild views the relationship as authentic and independent (not dominated, but supported, by the middle generation) (Kennedy, 1992)

Gender differences are noted in the relationships between grandchildren and their grandparents (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Generally, females are more likely than males to name a grandparent as a significant adult (Galbo & Demetrulias, 1996). Kennedy (1992) found that grandchildren who named a grandmother as most close grandparent, “felt better understood by and felt they understood their grandparent better than did students whose most-close grandparent was a grandfather” (p. 86). The same study also found that two-thirds of the most-close grandparents were grandmothers, which may reflect both the longer lives of grandmothers and possibly the availability of grandmothers and their styles of relating to grandchildren. “While both male and female grandchildren more frequently identified grandmothers as most-close, grandsons more than granddaughters identified grandfathers as their most close grandparent” (Kennedy, p. 96).

“At-risk” adolescents.

A significant proportion of research focuses on at-risk samples and the role of nonparental adults with these at-risk adolescents (refer to Beam et al., 2002; Rhodes, 1994; Ungar, 2004). The discussions and findings of such research focuses on the “compensatory role” (Beam et al., p. 307) within the relationships. Beam et al. suggest that, in such studies, the role of the mentor or VIP is typically conceptualised as someone who gives support or resources that are not adequately provided by parents. This may not be the basis of the relationships between adolescents and significant nonparental adults (Ungar, 2004). These relationships may develop quite naturally in the many and varied social contexts of the adolescent as part of normative development (Beam et al.). Fewer than one in four young people in the study by Sartor and Younnis (2002) reported that a significant life event triggered the relationship with the nonparental adult. This further strengthens the belief that these relationships are normative rather than compensatory.
Several key studies on naturally occurring relationships between adolescents and nonparental adults (Garmezy, 1985; Quinton & Rutter, 1988; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982) have found a link between the presence of an important nonparental adult and better outcomes for the child. Positive effects for adolescents include: a short or medium term influence that leads to a choice of a positive future pathway (Quinton & Rutter); increased resiliency amongst those at high risk as a result of poverty conditions and parental mental illness (Cowen & Work, 1988); lower levels of depressive symptomatology along with more positive career attitudes and greater life optimism amongst pregnant and parenting African American teens (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992); and lower involvement in problem behaviours in single parent families (R. D. Taylor, Casten, & Flickenger, 1993). It has also been found by Greenberger et al. (1998) that adolescents with a VIP – a very important nonparental adult – were significantly less likely to be involved in misconduct, regardless of the behaviour and attitudes of family members and close friends. Research by Greenberger et al. on young people’s relationships with nonparental adults and the resultant positive outcomes for adolescents adds foundation to the choice, in the present research project, to study, in an Australian context, the nonparental significant adults identified by early adolescent boys.

2.6.3 Early adolescents and significant influencers

Younger adolescents’ relationships with parents, peers, teachers, and other significant adults change as they enter and journey through early adolescence (Claes et al., 2001; Scales & Gibbons, 1996; Stepp, 2000). These changing relationships and the related changing influences of these “significant others” may cause disequilibria and raise identity-related issues (Beam et al., 2002; Sartor & Younns, 2002). During the early adolescent period and continuing throughout adolescence, the teenager expands his or her perspective beyond the family and into the larger social system (Tatar, 1998). Recent research shows there may be a change in the order of importance of influencers but the significance of the influencers certainly does change
(Claes et al.). “Parents, first, and peers, second, appear to be the contexts for primary influence for early adolescent identity development although all contexts contribute influential socialisation experiences” (Kroger, 2000, p. 51).

Significant nonfamilial adults play an important role in the lives of most early adolescents (Allison & Schultz, 2001; Beam et al., 2002). The situation young people find themselves in, or the problem they are facing, may influence to whom they refer or from whom they seek assistance (Beam et al.). Peers are more likely to influence the adolescent through modelling, and parents are more likely to influence by the development of norms (Biddle, Bank, & Marlin, 1982). The influence that significant nonparental adults have on early adolescents is an area still to be clarified by further empirical research (Beam et al.).

In contemporary Western culture and specifically in Australian culture, the influence of sports’ heroes and pop stars could be significant on the identity development of adolescents (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002). An English study by Balswick and Ingoldsby (1982) asked adolescents to name heroes and heroines. They found approximately three times as many public (unknown) heroes were named over personal (known) heroes with opposite findings for personal heroines (3 to 4 times greater number) than for public heroines. A more recent study (Bromnick & Swallow, 1999), also conducted in England, found that sports’ stars featured highly amongst the heroes of 11-13 year old boys (53%) and 14-16 year old boys (24%). In the same study pop stars scored at 4% and 9% respectively. Hendry et al. (1992) asked Scottish young people to consider who they would pay most attention to or copy when considering a list of developmentally relevant issues or questions. Those to be considered by the young people included parents, friends, pop stars, sports’ stars and "experts" (e.g. doctors, teachers). They found that different people or groups from the list would be consulted for different issues or questions. The influence of pop stars and sports’ stars was only marginally important in the realms of fashion and fitness but took little importance in other areas. Hendry et al. concluded that adolescents make a rational
selection from significant others, depending on their concern or their own particular needs at the time.

American and English young people present in a similar way, in regard to their moving away from parental influence as they progress through adolescence (Marsland, 1987; Schonert-Reichl & Offer, 1992). One of the most readily noticeable changes in the world of the adolescent is the time spent with peers - in the classroom, and more so in this period of development - in social settings, both formal and informal. Schonert-Reichl and Offer state that adolescents spend twice as much time with their friends than with their family and that these peer experiences fulfil a developmental need that cannot be filled by parents. Similar findings are reported by Montemayor and Van Komen (1980) who state their work demonstrates extensive "age-segregation" in American society and that the frequency of adolescent-adult interactions decreases through adolescence. This notion of decreasing interactions between adolescents and adults is mirrored in English research by Marsland (1987) who states:

The crucial social meaning of youth is withdrawal from adult control and influence compared with childhood. Peer groups are the milieu into which young people withdraw. Time and space is handed over to young people to work out for themselves in auto-socialization the developmental problems of self and identity which cannot be handled by the simple direct socialization appropriate to childhood. (p. 12)

An argument against the age-segregation hypothesis is found in the work of Blyth et al. (1982) and in a Norwegian study by Bo (1989). These studies found that adolescents listed many significant adults in their lives, saw adolescent-adult relationships as important and indicated regard for and need of adults in their lives. Hendry, Shucksmith and Love (1989) argue that, for adolescents who attend organised youth clubs or similar organisations, the opportunity for regular interaction with nonfamilial adults and the opportunity for continued alignment with peers is extended.
Parents, peers and nonparental adults can offer social support to early adolescents. These people are then, either directly or indirectly, influencing the young person in their identity development. There is not strong support for the idea that there is specialisation in the type of support offered by different groups to the early adolescent. There may be some level of specialisation but there is a considerable degree of overlap in the functions filled by different people (Munsch & Blyth, 1993, p. 149). When specifically considering the social support provided by others and its positive effect for the young person “it appears that the decision to mobilize someone may be of greater consequence for the adolescent than the decision to mobilize a specific relationship” (Munsch & Blyth, p. 149). It has also been noted that if high–risk adolescents are able to draw on a number of informal sources of support they are more likely to develop in a psychologically healthy way (Quinton & Rutter, 1988; Schonert-Reichl & Offer, 1992, p. 28).

Nonparental adults, for example, relatives, family friends, teachers, coaches or youth leaders, do play an important role in the lives of early adolescents as important people in the young person’s social networks (Blyth et al., 1982). This finding was reinforced in research conducted by Munsch and Blyth (1993) that found 7th and 8th graders reported a high level of support from nonparental adults similar, in some dimensions, to the support offered by mothers and exceeding, on most dimensions, the support offered by fathers. Hendry et al. (1992) describe the characteristics of significant adults (relatives or nonrelatives) that young people stated as most important as, enabler, teacher, supporter, believer and, to a lesser extent, role model and challenger. They found that “the most important of these characteristics is believer” (p. 268). It is clear from this, and other research, that young people appreciate being appreciated and that they like having others who take them seriously and value them as well as have confidence in them (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001).

It could be reasonably expected that teachers would play a significant role in the lives of early adolescents as they have such extended periods of time with young
people and they are in positions traditionally seen as of importance in the development of their students. Contrary to this belief, Galbo (1989) reports that “teachers are seldom found to be significant for a large portion of adolescents (approximately 10% of all significant adults)” (p. 5). Hendry et al. (1992) state that teachers do not play a supportive role in the lives of their adolescent students. Other research also reports limited influence of school-based personnel on children and adolescents. “With respect to children's and adolescents’ perceptions of the important adults in the school setting, 12% of elementary children and 5% of senior high school students reported that they would turn to teachers or coaches for advice” (Schonert-Reichl & Offer, 1992, p. 33).

It may be assumed from these findings that the influence of teachers and others in schools is limited and decreases throughout the secondary schooling years. But a significant longitudinal study of adolescent girls who were raised in alternate care settings (Quinton & Rutter, 1988) showed that teachers, other school related personnel and care-providers other than parents, did provide, for some of the girls interviewed, important support and encouragement. These positive relationships with nonparental significant adults offered the girls an opportunity to make important life decisions and take a positive path or trajectory (Robins & Rutter, 1990; Rutter, 1987). The structure and nature of adolescents’ future social networks in adult life may also be influenced by the relationship they have with nonparental significant adults during the adolescent years (Beam et al., 2002).

2.6.4 Nature of the Influence

The nature of the influence that nonparental adults may have on young people will vary according to the nature of the relationship. Significant adults can convey knowledge or skills, they may challenge the young people in their lives, provide new perspectives, and serve as role models (S. Hamilton & Darling, 1989).

Adolescents’ interactions with adults who are important in their lives may be paced on a continuum from mentors, to role models, to heroes - with young people being involved in ongoing interactions with their mentors, to heroes usually being a
one-way attachment in which the adult has no knowledge of their importance to the young person (Darling, Hamilton & Hames Shaver, 2003). Merton (1968) is credited with the term “role model”. He suggests that this term implies identification with only a narrow aspect of a person’s character or skills – one role - rather than the whole person. However, a mentor is, by definition, someone with whom a young person has direct contact, “and the modelling function of the mentor is usually presumed to extend beyond a single role, encompassing, for example, values and ways of treating others in addition to specific skills” (Darling, Hamilton & Hames Shaver, p. 363). The relationship between an adolescent and a nonparental adult may become significant when the adult communicates, in words and actions, the idea that the adolescent matters as a person (Cotterell, 1996).

Conceptual frameworks may assist in understanding the function or functions of relationships between adolescents and nonparental adults. Foster-Clark (cited in Scales & Gibbons, 1996) describes a conceptual framework with five functional roles that adults play for young people: teacher-model; guide-supporter; challenger; controller-antagonist; and friend-companion. A related conceptual framework divides the possible roles of significant persons into 10 categories – enabler, believer, teacher, supporter, role model, mollycoddler, challenger, antagonist, rejector and bully (Hendry et al., 1992). When describing the importance of adults beyond the family, young people stated the primary roles of these adults as guidance, support and mentoring (S. F. Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004). Other researchers investigated the functions of the mentoring role. The most important mentoring functions identified for unrelated adults were believer, enabler and teacher (Cotterell, 1996) and in another study – believer, supporter and enabler (Tatar, 1998).

The relationship between an adolescent and a parent or a nonparental adult, will be influenced by the language used in the interactions of the relationship. The language used may allow the young person to see themselves as continually evolving and changing (Wachtel, 2001). The type of language deliberately used to show the
child or young person that their personality is not set in stone but developing over time has been called “the language of becoming” (Wachtel, p. 369). This concept and language use is similar to the theory of “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) discussed in a previous section of this chapter.

Some describe the focus of the relationship between an unrelated adult and an adolescent as more instrumental than emotional, and places relatively more emphasis, compared with family members, on shared activities (Blyth et al., 1982; Darling, Hamilton, & Hames Shaver, 2003; Darling, Hamilton, & Niego, 1994; Galbo, 1984; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). Relationships between adolescents and nonrelated adults “tend to be more temporary, instrumental and specific” (Beam et al., 2002, p. 308). Although these relationships may have these characteristics and appear somewhat limited in their influence it must be also noted, in contrast, that the influence of significant adults may modify a young person’s self-concept, their self-worth, and educational and occupational aspirations (Galbo, 1984). Hence, the influence may be broad and quite significant.

For a relationship between two people to become significant, there needs to be trust, respect, open acceptance of the other and “the kind of genuineness in normal social interaction which has validity” (Cotterell, 1996, p. 188). Gottlieb and Sylvestre (1994) describe relationships between adolescents and adults who are significant to them as “marked by informality, spontaneity, acceptance and sustained interaction” (p. 21), which developed when the adult responded to the young person as someone who was “capable of mature dialogue” (p. 21). Features of effective support from a nonfamilial adult include:

- the adult has the benefit of distance from the tensions of the peer network, to provide more balance and objectivity;
- the adult is able to consider the young person’s ideas, problems and worries on their merits, free from any family history
- the adult is able to interpret the reactions and views of adults to the young person
- the adult can present a reality-based perspective, arising out of similar experiences or difficulties
- the adult can provide a model of an effective person who can manage to integrate experiences and regulate conflicting demands on his/her life. (Gottlieb & Sylvestre, 1994)

Different people take up different functional roles in the lives of adolescents and these people may have diverse influences on young people. A sport coach may occupy a central role in a young person’s development and be expected primarily to offer skill development. One study describes how volunteer coaches of youth sports identified providing good leadership and promoting the young person’s well-being as priorities within their coaching role (Gould & Martens, 1979). Teachers, because of their teaching loads and timetables, usually do not have time or the opportunity to build influential relationships with students (Darling, Hamilton, & Hames Shaver, 2003). It must be acknowledged that as well as positive influences between nonparental significant adults and adolescents it may be the case that “negative aspects of significant others’ attitudes and behaviours can also exert influence on adolescents lives” (Tatar, 1998, p. 698).

2.7 Summary

This Literature Review has explored perceptions and realities about adolescents in our contemporary western society. Following Chapter One that reviewed the feature article “Wild Boys” (Bagnell, 2002) and the book Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society (Frosh et al., 2002), a number of key issues including young people and their reality, adults’ perceptions of adolescents, family relationships and expectations, societal impact, suicide/depression, and schooling, were reviewed and discussed.
The next two sections explored the history and use of the terms “adolescence” and “identity” and a variety of definitions for these terms. This was followed by an exploration of gender differences in identity formation during adolescence.

Two major sections followed: Possible Selves and Significant Influencers. Each of these sections presented literature that assisted in an understanding of the nature of boys’ experiences and the exploration of who they are and who they might become in the future.

The final section, Significant Influencers, explored who the adults are that have a significant influence in the lives of early adolescents, with a focus on boys in their early adolescent years. This final section identified empirical research that links significant adults in the lives of adolescents and the possibility of positive outcomes because of the influences these adults have on the young people.

In the next chapter, Methodology Issues, the nature of research is explored along with the ontological issue and a tradition of enquiry. The chapter continues with a description of the phenomenological approach and mixed method utilised in this research project and a consideration of Phenomenology as a form of philosophical enquiry. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of Phenomenological Research, the foundation of this research, with key sections that include: four procedural activities, phenomenological description, phenomenological interview, analysis of the gathered information and, generalisations and “fittingness”, within a phenomenological approach.
CHAPTER THREE

3 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 The Nature of Research

Research is a creative action where the work undertaken is part of a process that, traditionally, has had clear boundaries and definitions for varying types of investigations (Krathwohl, 1998). However, in the new millennium the researcher is challenged to move beyond a dichotomous paradigm that sets at either extreme of a continuum qualitative and quantitative methods of research (Christensen, 2001) and consider the wide variety of possible frameworks (Creswell, 2003). In the creative action of research, there needs to be detailed consideration of possible frameworks, elements or methods and perhaps a combination of these methods to achieve the goals of the study. Researchers’ “only limits are their own imaginations and the necessity of presenting their findings convincingly. The research question to be answered really determines the method” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 27).

This research project that investigates early adolescent boys’ descriptions of the nonparental adults that are very important to them, is qualitative in nature, foundationally utilises a phenomenological approach and has a mixed method design. This chapter initially explores the nature of research, offers a variety of definitions, and considers how research is experienced by those involved in the process. It discusses the ontological issue and considers a “Tradition of Inquiry” in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). An explanation of the phenomenological approach utilised in this project and the mixed method design are included. This chapter continues with a description of Phenomenology, Existential Phenomenology and Phenomenological Research as the foundations influencing this research project. The next chapter – Chapter Four Method – draws on these foundational theoretical matters and describes in detail the actual methods utilised in this research project.
3.1.1 Defining research

“There is no one thing, nor even a set of things, which research is” (Brew, 2001, p. 21). Considering such a statement as this, the task of defining research is a complex one with a satisfactory outcome being quite elusive. A wide variety of definitions of research is available and considering these will assist in gaining an understanding of research. As humankind has explored the environment and human interactions since the beginning of civilisation, the search for meaning and understanding has driven some of the species to question and investigate the world they live in, both physical and social (G. R. Taylor, 2000). A knowledge centred definition from Oliver (1997) states “research is about advancing knowledge and understanding” (p. 3). Parse (1997) extends this form of definition stating “research is the formal process of seeking knowledge and understanding through use of rigorous methodologies” (p. 74). Powers and Knapp (1995) offer a further extension, with a focus on the purpose of research as “a systematic process of investigation, the general purpose of which is to contribute to the body of knowledge that shapes and guides academic and/or practice disciplines” (p. 148).

Polit and Hungler (1995) define research as “systematic investigations that are rooted in objective reality and that aim to develop general knowledge about natural phenomena” (p. 9). This is a quite restrictive definition, with an emphasis on so-called “objective” research that may exclude so-called “subjective” modes of enquiry such as qualitative methodologies including phenomenology. It suggests that, in the purist “objective” sense, phenomenological research may be considered as not research (Fawcett, 1999). In most fields, understandings of research and research methods have moved far beyond this kind of narrow interpretation (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lippi, 2001; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Newman & Benz, 1998; Silverman, 2001; Valle, 1998; Welch, 2001).

Researchers, in the broadest sense possible, are attempting to focus on what is perceived, considering how the elements of what is perceived are related to each
other, and then trying to give meaning to what is perceived. Brew (2001) describes research in this way and goes on to outline four distinct variations in the way researchers think about the concept.

Firstly, Brew (2001) describes the most traditional form of understanding research as a sequence of tasks, events, problems, ideas, or questions with the aim being to answer specific questions or to solve distinct practical problems. She suggests that a second way of experiencing research is as a social phenomenon. The focus here is on the completed research, on the social outcome of the research, and its impact back on the researcher in context. Brew suggests a third variation on the way research is conceptualised – as a sense of layers, through which the researcher gazes to illuminate “the darkness by looking beneath the surface” (p. 25). The researcher sees the surface as reality and is investigating or uncovering the phenomena or meanings that are lying beneath the surface. In the fourth variation, research is experienced with an emphasis on the life issues that underpin the questions being asked, and the research is experienced holistically, acknowledging a transformative outcome for the researcher. In this final variation, in the foreground are the researcher’s “personal existential ideas and dilemmas, …linked through an awareness of the career of the researcher…interpreted as a personal journey of discovery, possibly leading to transformation” (Brew, p. 25).

This research project investigating the very important nonparental adults named and described by early adolescent boys will be conducted from the perspective of the third variation – looking beyond the surface and illuminating the layers below.

Brew (2001) suggests a simple view of research as it being the process of “finding out something and making it public” (p. 21). A modern-day explanation of research by Creswell (2003) describes the process as being somewhat like the creation of a mandala – a Hindu or Buddhist symbol of the universe made of sand and taking days to create– where there must be careful contemplation of the big picture as
well as tremendous consideration and work on the detail. The mandala depicts the interrelatedness of the parts within a whole, reflecting research and its design.

The current study of the perceptions of early adolescent boys of the significant, nonparental adults in their lives, works from an understanding of the big picture, the broad social context of the boys, as in the mandala described above. It carefully considers the reality of adolescent boys in our western society firstly, from the perspective of adults, and secondly, the research is designed to hear the detail of one aspect of the lives of these adolescent boys directly from the boys themselves. This is the detail of this study, as the detail is described as a significant part of the mandala.

Whatever the definition, experience or understanding of research, an exploration of reality and the researcher’s understanding of that reality are a significant consideration in empirical research methodology.

3.2 The Ontological Issue

The researcher’s perspective of the nature of reality, and the perspective of reality of others involved in the research, is the ontological issue to be considered (Creswell, 1998). Ontology is also described as the study of being (Crotty, 1998). This is a key issue that underpins all others in the researcher’s world. Multiple realities may exist: the researcher’s reality, the realities of those being researched, and the realities of the readers of the research. Creswell explains that these multiple realities need to be reported, particularly by the qualitative researcher, in the form of extensive quotes and evidence of different perspectives on the theme.

This study draws on the phenomenological approach. This approach is not about searching for a reality or the real in the world, for, in searching for a reality, we are considering it as something to be found external to the person (Welch, 2001). Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) synthesise the works of early phenomenologists and related philosophers including Sartre, Luckmann and Strauss, stating that these early theorists suggest a contrary view: “the phenomenological real is to be found nowhere but in the ongoing ever-changing context of the social and natural world; the
real [italics added] is that which is lived as it is lived” (p. 31). Therefore, in a research project that utilises a phenomenological approach, such as this one on the perceptions of early adolescent boys, the multiple statements representing the diverse experiences of, and perspectives on, this phenomenon, will be reported (Moustakas, 1994).

In this research project, the reality of the world of adolescent boys, is to be found in listening to the boys describe their experiences. Their perceptions of their experiences are their realities, for that time, in that context. The perspective of the researcher, as an investigator of the boys’ realities, may best be developed in the context of accepting that reality is found in listening to the boys and exploring their realities.

3.3 A Tradition of Inquiry

A theoretical lens will frame studies and researchers need to be aware of the extent of theory used within the chosen tradition of inquiry (Creswell, 1998). This study on the significant adults named and described by early adolescent boys utilises a qualitative methodology that, in the broadest sense, refers to research that considers people’s own written or spoken words and observable behaviour and produces descriptive data that are analysed in nonmathematical ways (Riehl, 2001; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Qualitative research has these characteristics: it takes place in the natural setting; uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic; is emergent rather than tightly prefigured; is fundamentally interpretive; views social phenomena holistically; and the qualitative researcher is reflective and sensitive to their role in the study, uses complex reasoning, and adopts and uses one or more strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Qualitative research may involve the utilisation of a multiple-methods design within a given study for the purpose of “enhancing the interpretability of assessments of a single phenomenon – via broader content coverage or alternate levels of analysis” (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989, p. 257). When considering the use of different methods to investigate different levels of a phenomenon, the analogy of peeling the
layers of an onion may be helpful (Mark & Shotland, 1987). One method may be followed by another closely related method, as in the research project reported in this thesis, to assist in more fully understanding the phenomenon and in more fully answering the research questions posed in the study.

Researchers within a qualitative framework may use a theoretical perspective to provide a prediction, an explanation or a generalisation about how the world operates (Creswell, 1998). The ways in which theory is used in five key traditions is symbolised in the following figure.

*Figure 2. Extent of Theory Use in the Five Traditions*

From (Creswell, 1998, p. 85)

Note. E = Ethnography; P = Phenomenology; B = Biography; C = Case Study; G.T. = Grounded Theory

Creswell (1998) conceptualises five traditions of inquiry onto the continuum (see Figure 2 above) with the “Before” and “After” describing whether the tradition is used before the study (i.e., before the research questions are framed or data gathered) or after the study (i.e., after the data gathering phase). Ethnography and Phenomenology are placed at the “Before” end of the continuum as both perspectives bring beliefs and ideas to the research. They respectively bring, a strong cultural lens to the study, or a strong orienting philosophical framework to the research tasks (Creswell, ; Fawcett, 1999). Biography and Case Study are positioned near the middle of the continuum because theory use varies considerably in biographical and case studies (Creswell). Grounded theory sees the researcher develop theory after data collection and analysis, driven to the theory by the findings of the research (Fawcett).

Either posed at a broad philosophical level or at a more concrete, substantive level, the five traditions are used by qualitative researchers to guide studies or frame questions for investigation (Flinders & Mills, 1993).
This thesis describes a qualitative research project utilising a phenomenological approach and therefore may be placed at the “before” end of the continuum described above. Therefore, it is acknowledged that a strong philosophical and theoretical lens frames this study.

3.4 A Phenomenological Approach

This research project utilised a phenomenological approach with a mixed method design. Mixed method design is described by Morse (2003) as the incorporation of various strategies within a single project and has four design principles:

1. recognise the theoretical drive of the project,
2. recognise the role of the imported component in the project,
3. adhere to the methodological assumptions of the base method, and
4. work with as few data sets as possible.

These four design principles were followed in this research project.

The theoretical drive of this project was inductive, utilising a phenomenological approach, with a purpose of exploring and describing a particular aspect of the life world of the boys involved and gaining thick descriptions as the primary outcome of this qualitative research. There are two components proposed in this research project: individual interviews (main component) and group discussions (imported component). The role of the imported component, the group discussions, was to supplement and inform the main component, the individual interviews. This project adhered to the methodological assumptions of the base method by using, in the group discussions, the same set of basic questions and prompts as in the individual interviews and following the same processes as in the individual interview phase. The same data set was used in both phases – the same sixteen boys participated, simply grouped by age in the school where they were interviewed (described in detail in Chapter Four – Method).
The following section outlines phenomenology and phenomenological research as the foundations influencing and underpinning this research project.

3.5 Phenomenology

The term *phenomenology* is derived from two Greek words: *phainomenon* (an “appearance”) and *logos* (“reason” or “word”) (Moran & Mooney, 2002). The two Greek words together lead us to a definition of *phenomenology*: a reasoned inquiry which “discovers the inherent essences of appearances” (Stewart & Mickanus, 1974, p. 3). The notion of appearances, anything of which one is conscious, is one of the major themes of phenomenology (Stewart & Mickanus, 1974).

Stewart and Mickanus (1974) describe how phenomenology rejects an approach that attempts to treat consciousness as an empirical phenomenon that can be investigated by the quantitative methods of natural science. They detail, in a section on the origins of phenomenology, how philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries were concerned with the essence of appearances but were captured by a dualistic belief (Cartesian) that there are two substances – mind or consciousness, and body.

A consequence of this dualistic belief was a shift away from conscious experience to objective realities. Stewart and Mickanus (1974) explain that by the 19th century the “subjective” factor in experience was ignored as irrelevant.

Stewart and Mickanus (1974) go on to explain that there are two key reasons that phenomenology rejects a belief that quantitative methods of scientific investigation can adequately treat the nature of consciousness. Firstly, “consciousness is not an object among other objects in nature…and (secondly) there are conscious phenomenon that can not be dealt with adequately by means of the quantitative methods of experimental science” (Stewart & Mickanus, p. 4). Phenomenology offers a way of investigating realities that are beyond a materialistic or naturalistic objectivity. Stewart and Mickanus state,

Consequently, phenomenology offers a considerable broadening of the range of philosophical inquiry inasmuch as phenomenologists make no assumptions
about what is or is not real; they rather begin with the content of consciousness – whatever that content may be – as valid data for investigation (p. 4).

There are four key advantages to utilising a phenomenological approach in a qualitative study such as the one described in this thesis. It provides a comprehensive picture of the environment being studied. It is more likely than other methodologies to lead to new insights and hypotheses (Borg & Gall, 1989). The hypotheses or theories are grounded in observational data gathered in a naturalistic setting, and as the researcher does not start with specific hypotheses there is less likelihood to overlook phenomena that do not fit prior expectations (Borg & Gall, 1989).

3.6 Phenomenological Research

The phenomenological researcher is not a neutral, objective observer collecting data to prove or disprove an hypothesis or particular point of view; but rather, "an involved collaborator, interested only in exploring the lived word of the participant in all its richness and depth" (Welch, 2001, p. 68). In phenomenological research, the researcher and participants together build an environment in which the lived world of the participants freely emerges without being constrained by forms of predetermined restriction (Pollio et al., 1997).

Engaging in phenomenological research is basically a process of scholarly inquiry concerning the nature of ordinary, everyday experiences of humans living in the world and that these day to day experiences include the realms of “uncertainty, ambiguity and mystery which are aspects of the first-person world” (Welch, 2001, p. 69).

A phenomenological study will ask questions such as: What is the nature of the phenomenon as meaningfully experienced? Is that which is to be considered a true phenomenon, i.e., as some experience that humans live through? These questions are asked so that the aim of any phenomenological research is clear – to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience (van Manen, 1984).
3.6.1 The nature of everyday experiences

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience or “the study of the life-world – the world as we immediately experience it, rather than as we conceptualise, categorise or theorise about it” (van Manen, 1984, p. 1). Phenomenology seeks to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. This form of philosophy, translated into a research experience, aims to explore the very nature of a phenomenon and to describe the essence or nature of an experience in a deeper manner than simply describing the phenomenon (van Manen).

Everyday, practical concerns become the interests of the phenomenological researcher. Phenomenologists believe that human reality is situated in a concrete world-context and that humans are only human as a result of actions worked out in the world (Stewart & Mickanus, 1974). A key attitude to phenomenological research is described by van Manen (1984) as, thoughtfulness, a “minding, heeding, a caring attunement – a heedful, mindful, wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life” (p. 1). Phenomenologists reject the world of abstract theorisation where there has not been scrupulous attention paid to the experiential beginnings of the work and “seek to recover full appreciation and understanding of the otherwise taken-for-granted subtleties and nuances of the experiencing that comprises everyday living” (Attig, 1985, p.162).

Phenomenology also is concerned with a search for what it means to be human – often in a poetical way. Phenomenological research has been described as difficult to summarise or to draw to a clear conclusion, as for a poem (van Manen, 1984). In most empirical research the results can be, in some way, severed from the means of collecting the results, but for phenomenological research, van Manen states that the link between the method and the results cannot be broken.

3.6.2 Four procedural activities

Phenomenological research is described as:
a dynamic interplay among four procedural activities:

a. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
b. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it;
c. reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon;
d. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1984, p. 2).

The commitment to the world, as described by van Manen (1984) in point (a) above, is in a sense, to be full of thought. Not to have a whole lot on our mind but to …recognise our lot in minding the Whole – that which renders fullness or wholeness of life. So phenomenological research is being-given-over to some quest, a true task, a deep questioning of something that restores an original sense of what it means to be a thinker, a researcher, a theorist (p. 3).

Original experience, and the nature of this lived experience, is the centre of phenomenological research. In point (b) above, van Manen (1984) describes the placement of the researcher as “in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations” (p. 3) and the researcher must actively explore “the category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects” (p.3).

Phenomenological research, unlike any other form of research, makes a clear distinction between appearance and essence. This may be further understood as the difference between “the things of our experience and that which grounds the things of our experience” (van Manen, 1984, p. 3). This type of research is focused on bringing closer, that which tends to be obscure to our attitude and understanding in everyday life (van Manen).

In the research reported in this thesis, the world of adolescent boys and the adults they see as significant to them will be brought into the foreground of the thinking of the boys as well as the researcher. Out of the experience of being a participant in this research, both the boys involved, and the researcher, should have a greater
understanding of the adults the boys name and the roles these adults play in the lives and identity development of the boys.

3.6.3 An antireductionist approach

Phenomenology is antireductionist in its approach; it is descriptive rather than explanatory, with a desire to understand the ongoing processes of experiencing, knowing and living in the world (Hamrick, 1985). Hamrick also describes phenomenology as “a return to careful and detailed scrutiny of experience itself, through disciplined reflection upon it. The conceptual net must be complex in order to capture the fullness of experience” (p. 165). A principal watch-phrase of Husserl, one of the earliest phenomenologists (as described in Hamrick), was “to the things themselves” (p. 165). These key words assist in understanding the importance of describing the experience in all its fullness without being drawn into any predisposition to believe that an experience has to be of a certain kind or in a certain way.

3.6.4 Bracketing

Within phenomenology there is a procedure called bracketing. Hamrick (1985) explains that, “in exploring and describing experiences, the philosopher should suspend judgement about the experience and about the validity of the experience” (p.166). It is a process of moving away from making judgements about the objects of experience as they are in themselves, and focusing on describing the objects of experience “as they are taken to be within the experiencing process under description” (Hamrick, p. 166). Hamrick describes how, within descriptions of experiences, there is the possibility that there will be statements where objects are taken as being real. The challenge to phenomenologists is to bracket the part of the description that may be considered unreal and work on only the exploration and description of the experience without any decision of the “reality” of the content of the experience.
3.6.5 Phenomenological description

The Dutch phenomenologist, Buytendijk, is quoted by van Manen (1984) as having termed phenomenology as “the science of examples” (p. 25). But it is not that a phenomenological study will describe the nature of a phenomenon in the same way as an ethnographic study. An ethnographic study will “contain a certain reality validity” (van Manen, 1984, p. 25) when describing the way a context is experienced by the group being studied, but van Manen contrasts this with a phenomenological study that will attempt to make clear the nature or essence of the phenomenon.

It is important to consider phenomenology as more than description. Stewart and Mickanus (1974) describe how not just any description of experience is phenomenological, “for basic to phenomenological method is the exclusion of naturalistic assumptions about the ontological status of the world, including one’s subjective reactions to it” (p. 142). It becomes clear then, that an ongoing task of phenomenology is to make clear the naturalistic assumptions in a description and to clarify the experiential factors in the description.

A phenomenological description may be described as an example composed of examples (van Manen, 1984). The description, if the researcher has been skilful at creating exemplary descriptions (examples), should lead us to a deeper experience of the phenomenon in question and an experience of, “the more foundational grounds of the experience. Every phenomenological description describes the original of which the description is only an example” (van Manen, p. 25).

3.6.6 Knowing too much

A problem faced by phenomenological researchers is not one of knowing too little about a phenomenon but being aware that one may know too much. The problem is “that our ‘common sense’ pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, … predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1984, p. 9). For example, initial consideration of the role of positively influential adults in the identity
formation process of early adolescent boys, may bring to the fore considerable everyday information and knowledge as well as empirical research that already exists about parenting and identity development processes. All this may come to mind or be easily accessed before the important and fundamental task of understanding the actual phenomenon of early adolescent boys’ relationships with positively influential adults. It is very important to consider, as a researcher utilising a phenomenological approach, how to suspend or bracket these assumptions, this information - these beliefs (van Manen, 1984).

If we simply try to ignore what we already ‘know’, we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories in order then to simply not try to forget them again, but rather to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character. (van Manen, 1984, p. 9)

3.6.7 Phenomenological interview

The qualitative interview is a research method that “gives a privileged access to our basic experience of the lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 54). The phenomenological interview builds on this conception, adding a contextual understanding that must be characterised by trust, openness and respect for the interviewee as a coparticipant (Eyring, 1998). The goal of the phenomenological interview is to borrow other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences to be able to come, within the context of the whole of human experience, to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience (van Manen, 1984).

With a focus on the life-world and an openness to the experiences of the subjects, the phenomenological researcher gives primacy to precise descriptions whilst bracketing foreknowledge and searches for invariant essential meanings in descriptions (Kvale, 1996). A first person account of a particular human experience is the focus of a phenomenological interview between the researcher and the participant.
with the participant primarily setting the path of the interview dialogue (Welch, 2001). The relevance of phenomenological interviews is in clarifying the manner of understanding within the exploration of the experienced meanings of the interviewee’s life-world (Kvale, 1996).

Before and whilst interviewing the participants in phenomenological research, the researcher needs to be aware of personal experiences that may be similar to those being described by the participants. Similar experiences can not be ignored but should be bracketed by the researcher because “my experiences could be our experiences … to be aware of the structure of my own experience of this phenomenon may provide me with clues for orienting myself to the phenomenon and thus to all other stages of phenomenological research” (van Manen, 1984, p. 14).

These suggestions are made by van Manen (1984) when considering phenomenological interviews:

1. tape the interviews as it is sometimes easier for participants to talk about personal experiences than to write about them and to write about experiences may force a more reflective attitude which moves away from staying close to an experience as it is actually lived (from experience I suggest this is particularly pertinent to adolescent boys)
2. stay as close as possible to the experience as lived – ask questions that are as concrete as possible so that the participant can think of specific instances, persons, situations or events
3. be patient and consider using silence as a tactful way to prompt recollections and assist the participant to recall experiences or events, or repeat the last statement in a questioning tone
4. ask for examples to redirect the participant if they begin to generalise or become opinionated about the experience
5. stay focused on the deeper goal of phenomenological research (more than the subjective experience of the participant) - to remain orientated to asking
the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon as an essentially human experience.

Phenomenological interviewing may be seen as taking a semistructured approach to conversation with the subjects with a sequence of themes to be covered and some suggested questions (Kvale, 1996). There is a need to be open to changing the sequence and form of questions or prompts, in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the participants, almost as if there is an unwritten script with a flexibility that is interviewee centred. The crucial issue is the interviewer’s ability to sense the immediate meaning of a statement or answer and the “horizon of possible meanings that it opens up” (Kvale, p. 132).

The phenomenological interviewer, if truly wanting to go beyond asking questions to record answers, is required to attempt to enter the life-world of the interviewee.

Spradley (1979) describes the attitude the phenomenological interviewer needs to have embedded in their mind in the following suggested introduction to an interview:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me to understand? (p. 34)

This example of an introduction to a phenomenological interview or discussion makes clear the need to listen beyond the words of the participant and to ensure, as the interviewer, that the focus is on the descriptions given by the participant.

3.7 Interviews

Careful consideration needs to be given to the purpose of the interview in any research, particularly when it is the primary method of data collection in research utilising a phenomenological approach such as this project. Roberts (2000) discusses the importance of doing more than simply listening to children in the interview process.
She believes that it is the responsibility of the researcher to listen, to hear, and to act upon that which is heard from the children. She states, “There have always been people who have listened, sometimes there have been people who have heard, and perhaps less often, those who have acted wisely on what children have had to say” (p. 238). The responsibility to be taken up by researchers who really want to listen to children is to move beyond a simplistic listening and reporting model of research. This research project will take the descriptions and discussions of the boys and hear their themes. The data gathered will be considered and reconsidered (Brew, 2001). The essential themes heard from the data will be reflected upon to build a clearer understanding of the phenomenon in question (van Manen, 1984).

Standard interview practice may require adaptation in the form of more flexibility as children and young adolescents tend to ask for more guidance (Scott, 2000).

A paraphrasing of the question may be required rather than simply asking the respondent to interpret the question in whatever way it means to them. In this research project, the photo-elicitation process was utilised in a semistructured form, and assisted in allowing the participating boys to direct the discussions about the adults they are identifying and describing. The participants primarily set the path of the interview dialogue (Welch, 2001). The researcher used short prompting questions or statements to assist the participants to describe their significant adults and the activities they undertake together. If initial information supplied by the participating boys did not provide sufficient data to answer the research questions, the use of prompts was considered appropriate to elicit further information (Scott, 2000). The use of visual aids and prompts is particularly important when interviewing early adolescents as they, more often than older adolescents, require assistance to link with the research questions (Scott). The goal of the researcher in facilitating the discussions in this way was to elicit from the boys “that which constitutes the nature or essence of the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1984, p. 25).
As children’s social worlds span many different contexts, especially school and home, it is important to consider the context for the interview as part of a research project. A child’s behaviour may be boisterous and outspoken at school but relatively quiet and reserved at home. They may view these different contexts, and the people in them, in quite different ways. “Thus where the interviews are carried out is quite likely to influence the way children respond” (Scott, 2000, p. 103). For this research, careful consideration was given to the venue for the interviews. For ethical and organisational reasons, the sections of the research process involving the participating boys, the interviews and group discussions, were conducted at the schools of the participants. It is not as ethically or organisationally viable to hold the individual interviews at the homes of the participants and it is most simple to conduct the group discussions at the schools the participants attend. The possible negative impacts of conducting the interviews at school are addressed in the following paragraph.

School based interviews are usually easier to organise and conduct with a lower cost factor to the researcher but consideration must be given to the proximity of the peer group and the influence that other individuals may have on individual interviews and the research process (Scott, 2000). Even if the confidentiality of the process has been explained and agreed to by the child or early adolescent, there is still a strong possibility that respondents in these age groups “will quiz one another on their responses and may be tempted to give answers that win favour with the peer group” (Scott, p. 105). This study utilised an open and informative process as well as a limited number of boys from an individual Year group within each school. These steps appeared to alleviate or at least significantly reduce the possibility of peer interactions and influences in the one-on-one interviews. Also a purpose of the second phase of the process, the group discussions, was to give the boys the opportunity to discuss their individual responses and reflections on similarities and differences in responses, with other boys who participated. Knowing that this opportunity to discuss their responses
with peers was provided in the process should have reduced the necessity to quiz others or discuss responses outside the process provided.

Krathwohl (1998) describes a continuum of interview structure from unstructured, through partially and semistructured, to structured and lastly totally structured.

This study conducted interviews with boys, in their early adolescence, in the partially structured manner, described as “the area is chosen and the questions are formulated but order is up to the interviewer. Interviewer may add questions or modify them as deemed appropriate. Questions are open-ended, and responses are recorded nearly verbatim, possibly taped” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 287).

It was deemed important to build some rapport with the boys participating in the interviews, as this should have allowed them to describe more comfortably the significant others in their chosen photos. Krathwohl (1998) states “no interview succeeds unless the interviewer builds a relationship with the respondent in which both are comfortable talking with one another” (p. 290). He adds a number of factors to consider in rapport building including: consider the respondents’ comfort in the interview setting; adapting to the uniqueness of the interviewee; building a rhythm of questioning to achieve a natural and sustained flow; avoid closed questions that have “yes” or “no” answers; use some kind of rejoinder to stimulate responses; positively reinforce full and thorough responses; and, be quiet and listen intently.

In this study the interviews and discussions were taped and fully transcribed as the purpose of taping and transcription was to have the discussions available to the researcher for consideration of key words, phrases, and ultimately, essences.

3.8 Research with Early Adolescents

There is growing evidence to suggest that the best source of information about issues pertinent to children is the children themselves. While parents and teachers can provide useful insights into child behaviour, the direct interviewing
of children provides a far more complete account of the child’s life. (Scott, 2000, p. 107)

This research project has as a primary goal, the exploration of the "lived world" of the early adolescent boys who volunteer to participate (van Manen, 1984). It is their world and their descriptions of the adults they choose to name that are the subject of the discussions in the research process. As the research questions are asking for the boys’ descriptions, and it is their responses and descriptions alone that will constitute the research data gathered to answer the questions posed, it is most appropriate to follow Scott’s (2000) statement quoted above and directly ask the boys.

Scott (2000) makes a clear distinction between research with young people in late childhood and those who are in their early adolescence. She describes the younger children as less reticent to become engaged in discussion than teenagers. Scott suggests that, by early adolescence, a sense of cynicism has entered young people and they are wary of revealing something of themselves to adults that may be perceived by the young person as personal.

The voluntary nature of participation in this research project, and the openness in the information giving about the research purpose, was designed to assist in reducing cynicism in the participating boys. As they chose whom they talked about, utilising the photos they may have taken or collected, there should have been little or no sense of the information being private nor a need for mistrust of the researcher. With the use of an appropriate lead into the discussions, it was possible to build an atmosphere of mutual interest and trust in which the lived world of the boys was described by them (Pollio et al., 1997). Such an introduction to the individual interviews and group discussions was used in this project.

The introduction in each phase involved a restatement of the goal of the research and a short discussion of the importance for the researcher to hear what the boys wanted to say rather than the researcher taking too much of a lead in the discussions.
Rapport was built by focusing on the preparation the boys may have undertaken in planning, taking, and arranging the development of the photos taken with the supplied disposable cameras, or the collection of photos or pictures. The researcher thanked the boys who did bring photographs for their commitment to this preparation for the interview or discussion.

3.9 Analysing the Gathered Information

Within a phenomenological research project, the process of information analysis is essentially concerned with capturing what the experience of the phenomenon under study was like for the participants (Welch, 2001). Pollio et al. (1997), suggest that “understanding the world as it is, requires both a certain perspective and a certain level of critical distance in which the researcher steps back to reflect on the phenomenon [under investigation]” (p. 70). Within the analysis process, a reflective distance on the part of the researcher is an important component that allows the researcher “to immerse him/herself in the data while simultaneously being able to distinguish between one’s own emergent material from that of the participants’ texts” (Welch, 2001, p. 70).

The purpose of analysing a phenomenon is to determine what the themes, the experiential structures, are, that make up the experience (van Manen, 1984). Further, van Manen describes how a single statement or thematic phrase could not possibly capture the full mystery of an experience. After stating that themes are “the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through” (van Manen, p. 20), he also states that a thematic phrase “only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon” (p. 21).

Two approaches to uncovering thematic aspects of a phenomenon from written texts or transcriptions are described by van Manen (1984). The first is the highlighting approach – after reading the text a number of times the researcher considers what statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described. These statements or phrases are then highlighted or underlined. The
second approach is the line-by-line approach where the researcher considers every single sentence and considers what each sentence reveals about the experience being described. Thus, the lived experience descriptions begin to reveal, through the careful discernment of the researcher, certain commonalities or possible commonalities across the various descriptions gathered in the study.

3.9.1 Generalisations and “Fittingness”

Many qualitative researchers actively reject generalisability as a goal, for example, Denzin (1983) who states, that “every instance of social interaction, if thickly described … represents a slice from the life world … and must be seen as carrying its own logic, sense of order, structure, and meaning” (pp. 133-134).

In traditional experimental research, the central issue of external validity is replicability (Krathwohl, 1985). There is a basic incompatibility of traditional conceptions of external validity and the fundamental aspects of qualitative research. The goal of qualitative research is “not to produce a standardised set of results that any careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation” (Ward Schofield, 1990, p. 203)

Guba and Lincoln (1981) write about generalisability as applied to qualitative research: “It is virtually impossible to imagine any human behaviour that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs. One can easily conclude that generalisations that are intended to be context free will have little that is useful to say about human behavior” (Guba & Lincoln, p. 62). They go on to add: “The aim of (naturalistic) inquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge… that is best encapsulated in a series of ‘working hypotheses’ that describe the individual case. Generalizations are impossible since the phenomena are neither time - nor context - free…” (p. 238).

Given these views, Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest replacing the concept of generalisability with that of fittingness. They argue that this new term, with an emphasis
on analyzing the degree to which the phenomenon studied matches other similar contexts, provides a more realistic and workable way of thinking about the generalisability of research than more traditional approaches. A logical consequence of this approach is “an emphasis on supplying a substantial amount of information about the entity studied and the setting in which the entity was found” (Ward Schofield, 1990, p. 207).

Dialectical tensions exist between phenomenology and existentialism, particularly in existential phenomenology, such as “between the abstract and the concrete, the necessary and the contingent, the universal and the particular, the collective and the individual, and theory and practice” (Welch, 2001, p.161). The most acutely sensitive phenomenologist may make generalisations from the described experiences of others, but the existentialist would not generally be able to accept such generalisations as anything more than generalisations that cannot possibly capture all that is important to those experiences (Welch, 2001).

Generalisability may best be thought of as the matter of fit between the phenomenon studied and its fit with the phenomenon in similar situations or contexts where the concepts and conclusions, of the original research, may be applied (Ward Schofield, 1990).

3.10 Summary

This chapter explored the nature of research and gave a cross-section of definitions that allowed for a deeper understanding of research. It raised the ontological issue, referring particularly to Welsh (2001) who discusses reality within a phenomenological paradigm and Pollio et al. (1997) who describe the real as “that which is lived as it is lived” (p. 31). The final consideration was that the researcher’s perspective of the boys’ realities, as described by them in this research project, may best be developed in the context of accepting that their reality is only found in listening to the boys and exploring their reality as it is lived by them.
A Tradition of Inquiry in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998) was presented along with Phenomenology, the philosophy that underpins the approach utilised in this research project. It was also explained that this research project utilised a phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1984) with a mixed method design (Morse, 2003).

Phenomenological Research was detailed including discussions on four procedural activities, as well as, bracketing, phenomenological description, and phenomenological interviews. The issue of generalisation and fittingness in qualitative research was explored and discussed in relation to research utilising a phenomenological approach.

The next chapter, Research Method, takes these theoretical matters and translates them into the actual methods that were utilised in this qualitative research project.
CHAPTER FOUR

4  RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Research Goal and Research Questions

The goal of this research project was to understand better the roles significant, nonparental adults play in the lives of early adolescent boys, especially in relation to the impact these adults may have on the identity development of the boys. This goal and the following research questions led the writer into a discovery of phenomenological research as the foundational methodological approach for this research project, and an exploration of an existential understanding of our life and its place in the world in which we live (both described in the previous chapter). The research goal and questions also guided the researcher to consider what kind of information was to be collected for this study and how to gather that information, the descriptions and discussions of the boys (to be described in this chapter). A pragmatist philosophy, supported by the researcher, led to the use of mixed research components that work well for the research goal and questions (B. Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

The research questions, drawn from the research goal, ask the boys to name and describe the significant adults chosen by them and their interactions with these very important adults. These questions focus the research task clearly into an exploration of the lived world of the boys in relation to the nonparental adults who are very important to them.

Research Questions

1. Who do the boys name as the nonparental adults significant to them?
2. What are the boys’ descriptions of the characteristics of these adults?
3. What are the boys’ descriptions of their interactions with these adults?
4. How do these adults influence the identity development of the boys?
5. What implications are there for those working with adolescent boys in educational and other settings?

This chapter describes in detail the method utilised in this research project. There were two components of the research - individual interviews followed by group discussions. The same boys who were individually interviewed were formed into groups for the discussions. This process is described below in detail.

4.2 Gaining Access to Participants

This research project identified the need to interview a number of boys, in their early adolescence, about nonparental adults who were very important to them. Literature on phenomenological research has depicted the appropriate number of participants as depending upon the nature of the phenomenon to be researched (Sanders, 1982; Tesch, 1984). The usual number of participants in a phenomenological study, as argued by Tesch, is between 10 and 15 with an upper limit being 25 and a lower limit being as few as 6 participants. For this project, 16 was chosen as an appropriate and manageable number of participants where sufficient quality and richness of descriptions could be ensured. Sanders (1982) contends that phenomenologists must be concerned with the quality not the quantity and that too many participants can be overwhelming and not conducive to effective investigation.

As children’s social worlds span many different contexts, especially school and home, it was important to consider the context for the interview as part of this research project. A child’s behaviour may be boisterous and outspoken at school but relatively quiet and reserved at home. They may view these different contexts, and the people in them, in quite different ways. “Thus where the interviews are carried out is quite likely to influence the way children respond” (Scott, 2000, p. 103). For this research, careful consideration was given to the venue for the interviews. For ethical and organisational reasons, the sections of the research process involving the participating boys, the interviews and group discussions, were conducted at the schools of the participants. It was not as ethically or organisationally viable to hold the individual interviews at the
homes of the participants and it was most simple to conduct the group discussions at
the schools the participants attend.

4.2.1 Two schools involved in the research

The research for this project was undertaken with 16 boys in total from two
schools in the southeast corner of the state of Queensland, Australia.

School A.

Eight boys were from School A - four 11 year olds and four 14 year olds.

School A is a large city, outer suburban, coeducational, Years P-12
independent day school of nearly 1450 students. The school was established over 40
years ago as a high school for boys and has undergone significant changes in the past
15 years. Initially, upper primary year levels were added and approximately 12 years
ago the school became coeducational. Six years ago the lower primary years (Years 1-
4) were added. The school has recently undergone a significant curriculum review and
was restructured to have three subschools – Junior (Years 1-6), Middle (Years 7-9),
and Senior (Years 10-12). The school added a Preparatory Year in 2004.

The researcher approached the Head of School A to seek permission to return
to the school to conduct part of this doctoral research project. The researcher had
worked at the school in the past. This school has a cohort of six staff all pursuing
professional doctorates through the same tertiary institution. The author of this thesis is
one of these six and as a past staff member and as a member of this cohort, chose to
return to School A because of the support offered by both the Head of School and the
other members of the cohort.

School B.

Eight boys were from School B - four 11 year olds and four 14 year olds.

School B is a regional city, suburban, coeducational, independent day school
with classes from Preparatory to Year 12. The School supports an enrolment of 1550
students with all 3 sections of the School, Junior (Years P-6), Middle (Years 7-9), and
Senior (Years 10-12), located together on a 40-hectare site. This school was established in 1987.

The second school chosen, School B, is similar in size and structure to School A. The researcher has had contact through professional organisations over the past five years with senior staff and teaching staff from this school. In 2002 and 2003 the author of this thesis was a coopted member of a working party within the school that was investigating the school’s responses to the learning and developmental needs of boys in the school community. This close relationship with the school and members of the senior staff made access to School B simpler than attempting to access other schools where the researcher had no prior contact.

4.2.2 Approaching the schools

The researcher’s professional relationship with each school allowed the initial approach to be made verbally to seek approval to submit a written research proposal. Each principal was very willing to consider a written submission. A formal letter of request to conduct research in the school was sent to each principal. Both principals replied in the affirmative. These letters were included in the ethical approval application made to the appropriate University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee granted approval for this research project, subject to any and all conditions placed on the researcher by the principals of the participating schools. Details of ethical considerations are discussed later in this chapter.

Both principals referred the researcher to the relevant Head of Middle School as the school contact person to make arrangements for the involvement of participants, interviews and discussions.

4.2.3 Procedures for random selection of participants

In each school, groups of at least 50 boys of the target age (11 or 14 years old) attended a meeting, called and hosted by the Head of Middle School. At this meeting,
the research goal and process were introduced by the Head of Middle School and then carefully explained in detail by the researcher. Confidentiality matters and arrangements were also discussed in detail.

The researcher explained that he was conducting research with boys who were 11 and 14 years of age, from two schools, to find out who were the adults, other than parents, who were very important in the lives of the boys. We explained that any adult, being a person over the age of 18 and not their own parent, could be chosen. The adult needed to be someone the boy saw as important in his life, who meant something special to him, or someone who may have a significant influence on him. The adult could be someone he liked or someone he liked spending time with. The adult could be well known to the boy or could be someone that he had never met in person.

The researcher explained to the boys that a disposable camera would be provided so, if they wanted to, the participant could take photos of chosen adults. It was carefully explained to the boys that photos of chosen adults could also be found in family photo albums or in the newspaper or magazines, for example sports or music magazines. If the boys wanted to, they could bring the photos taken or collected to the interview. It was not a requirement but an option, to use a supplied camera and take photos and bring them to the interview. It was not a requirement, but an option, to collect photos of people from family albums, newspapers or magazines and bring the collected photos to the interview.

During the briefing session, the boys were given an opportunity to ask questions of the Head of Middle School and the researcher. At the end of the meeting boys were invited to volunteer for the project, by writing their name on a provided list or by leaving their name in a box at the nominated school office.

At each school, for each age group, the researcher randomly allocated numbers to each name on the list of volunteers. The Head of Middle School was then invited by the researcher to randomly choose numbers to identify the order of invitation to participate in the project. For each age group, eight numbers were chosen and
therefore an ordered list of eight potential participants was created. The first four on the list were identified and their parents were sent a letter of information by mail to the family home. The letter included all relevant information, an invitation for their son to participate in the research project and consent forms to be signed by the boy and a parent and returned to the school (Appendix 1). The four short-listed boys, not given letters, were back-up participants should one or more of the initial four choose not to participate or they or their parents did not give consent for participation.

In School A, two back-up participants from the 14 year old group were required. Additional letters were posted out to parents as one boy from the initial group chose not to participate after receiving the letter of invitation and another boy repeatedly forgot to return his consent forms. In School B all of the original eight participants, randomly chosen, returned their consent forms signed by themselves and a parent.

Once written consent was received from four participants of each age group, the interviews and group discussions were arranged with school authorities. Interviews and group discussions took place in interview or counselling rooms provided for the purpose by the school authorities, with the door open, and under direct supervision of school personnel. Boys were only withdrawn from classes that they agreed to miss and the school authorities agreed that they might miss. Arrangements were made with the Head of Middle School and the boys themselves for the boys to receive lesson information, handouts and homework as required.

The process of information sessions, volunteers, short-listing, consent gathering, individual and group discussions was repeated until the 16 individual and 4 group discussions were completed.

Participants, parents/caregivers and Heads of Schools/Principals were offered, through the Head of Middle School, a summary of the findings and discussion of the research. Each Principal requested a copy of the summary and findings.
4.3 Interviews and Group Discussions

In the investigating stage, two components, individual interviews and group discussions, formed the mixed method design of the project, with the interviews being the major method and the discussions being the “imported” component as discussed in detail in the previous methodology chapter.

4.3.1 Two components in the research project

There were two distinct but closely linked components in this research project. The first phase was designed to address Research Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. The second phase was designed to attempt to gather data that would particularly address Question 4. As Question 4 attempted to identify a link between the significant adults named and described by the boys and the boys' identity development, it was necessary to develop a process that facilitated higher order discussion. The second phase needed to address Question 4 but without over-interference by the researcher. This second phase was designed to allow the boys to discuss what they had previously discussed in the individual interviews, but this time with peers. This interaction with their peers gave an opportunity for open discussion and comparisons between the boys and gave the researcher an opportunity to hear more from the boys concerning this particular phenomenon.

A scripted introduction was used at the introduction of each of the individual interviews and the group discussions. This involved a restatement of the goal of the research, a statement about confidentiality and the commitment of the researcher to reporting any abuse or related matter to a school authority, and a short discussion of the importance for the researcher to hear what the boys wanted to say rather than the researcher taking too much of a lead in the discussions.
Phase 1 – Individual interviews with researcher.

Sixteen boys were involved in this phase of the research. Eight 11 year old volunteers and eight 14 year old volunteers were randomly chosen to be involved in the interviews. The process of random selection has been described earlier in this chapter.

As described in the Literature Review (Chapter Two) the generally agreed age range for early adolescence is 10-14 years. For boys, with a later onset of puberty compared to girls, the range may be more appropriately set from 11-14 years. Therefore, for this study boys aged 11 and 14 years were chosen to represent the early and later stages of the early adolescent period.

If brought with them to the interview, the boys used photos they had taken with the supplied disposable cameras to assist them in the description and discussion of the adult, nonparental, significant others they identified. The process for the inclusion of photos taken and brought by the boys to the interviews is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

A set of questions or prompts was used to guide each interview (Appendix 2). The researcher used these questions to start conversation, to ensure the interviews went in a similar direction, to open up new ideas, and to bring the interview to a planned conclusion. The interview questions required adaptation in the form of flexibility as young adolescents tend to ask for more guidance (Scott, 2000). In some interviews, paraphrasing of the question was required rather than simply asking the respondent to interpret the question in whatever way it meant to them. A level of flexibility in timing during the interviews was also required to allow the boys to spend time recalling certain important people and their interactions with these people. If detail was not forthcoming from a participant, the researcher used open-ended questions to assist the boy in further exploring and explaining the person or interaction being considered, for example, “If you never knew this person, what might you be like?”.
**Phase 2 – Group discussions.**

The groups formed for this phase were created by bringing together the four boys of the same age, from the same school, who participated in the individual interviews. The boys were given the opportunity to discuss similar issues to those raised in the individual discussions. The researcher used very similar questions as used in Phase 1 to initiate discussion between the boys and, as necessary, redirected discussion back to topics referred to in the research questions, using prompts similar to those used in Phase 1. More flexibility was used during the group discussions, as the boys were encouraged to take more of the lead. Certain matters were discussed at length in some of the groups and other matters were briefly touched upon or not mentioned at all. The uniqueness of each of these four group discussions is detailed in later chapters of this thesis.

### 4.3.2 Cameras and photos

Each boy who returned a completed Consent Form was offered a packet that contained a disposable camera with a flash, instructions for use of the camera and a letter from the researcher inviting the boy to use the camera to take photos of any chosen important adults. The letter from the researcher explained the option of taking photos with the supplied camera, the process for having the photos developed and how to claim the costs of development and printing back from the researcher. The instructions reiterated that taking photos, collecting photos, or simply bringing names of very important adults other than their parents, were all options for their consideration. (Appendix 3 - Camera and Instructions leaflet included in the packet.)

This photo-elicitation strategy was used to facilitate the thinking of the boys about who were very important adults in their lives, to assist in the explanation of the wide parameters from which the chosen very important adult or adults could come, and possibly to make easier the opening interactions in each of the interviews. If a boy brought photos to an interview it could assist in “breaking the ice” as the researcher
could thank the boy for his efforts in taking the photos and having them developed and printed, or his efforts in collecting photos from newspapers or magazines. If the boy had brought photos, the researcher could ask about the people in the photos and the context of each photo. The boy could use the photo as a stimulus for discussion or prompt for things to say about the important person in the photo or the times they had spent together.

The voluntary nature of participation in this research project, and the openness in the information giving about the research purpose, was designed to assist in reducing cynicism in the participating boys. As they chose whom they talked about, utilising the photos they may have taken or collected, there should have been little or no sense of the information being private or a need for mistrust of the researcher. With the use of an appropriate lead into the discussions it was possible to build an atmosphere of mutual interest and trust in which the lived world of the boys was described by them (Pollio et al., 1997). Such an introduction to the individual interviews and group discussions was used in this project.

Rapport was built by focusing on the preparation the boys may have undertaken in planning, taking, and arranging the development of the photos shot with the supplied disposable cameras, or the collection of photos or pictures. The researcher thanked the five boys who did bring photographs for their commitment to this preparation for the interview or discussion.

4.3.3 The individual interviews

At School A the individual interviews were conducted in a room within the Counselling Department at the school. The room was a typical counselling office with a desk and a set of chairs. The researcher and participant sat in the chairs with a coffee table between them. The coffee table was used for a jug of water and glasses, notes for the researcher and for holding the small tape recorders used to tape the interviews. The door of the office was kept open during the interviews.
At School B the individual interviews took place in an office in the Middle School Administration building. The office used was beside the office of the Head of Middle School and adjacent to the Reception area. The room had a round meeting table with five chairs. For the interviews, the researcher and participant sat at the table with a jug of water and glasses, the researcher’s notes and the tape recorders placed on the table. The door of the office was kept open during the interviews.

At both schools a white board was available for use during the interviews. Following a welcome and thanks for attending the interview, the researcher invited the participant to list all the very important adults that he intended to name and describe during the interview. At no time was a limit placed on the number of important people that could be named and discussed during the interview. Only after the boy had completed the list of people did the researcher estimate the possible length of the interview and advise the participant of the same. Interviews ranged in length from approximately 25 to 45 minutes.

4.3.4 The group discussions

At School A the group discussion with the four 11 year olds was conducted in a different counselling room from the individual interviews. A larger room with more chairs and a variety of counselling resources was offered and used by the researcher. The four boys sat, with the researcher, around a covered sand-play table. The group discussion with the four 14 year olds took place in the office of the Head of Middle School as no rooms in the Counselling Department were available at the time allocated for the discussion.

At School B both the group discussions took place in the same office as the individual discussions. This venue was again very appropriate as all the boys and the researcher could sit around the table for the discussion.

For all the group discussions, two tape recorders were set up and used to record what was said. This allowed for the possibility of one recorder not working and for the audible recording of all four boys and the researcher’s comments.
The group discussions followed a similar format as the individual interviews. The same set of questions and prompts were used to stimulate the discussion. The boys responded to the comments of others involved in the discussion and in some instances topics and issues were pursued as the interest of one or more of the boys was maintained. Each group discussion took on its own form as certain issues were expanded upon or abandoned. The researcher allowed more flexibility in these group discussions as the boys had already individually addressed the questions and were now in a position to more deeply consider the matters raised through the questions and prompts, and by the comments and reactions of other participants. The group discussions were more participant driven than were the individual interviews.

4.4 Analysing the Data

At the conclusion of the 16 individual interviews and the four group discussions, all the tapes of the interviews and discussions were fully transcribed by the researcher. This allowed the researcher to immerse himself fully in the words of the participating boys and gave an excellent opportunity to listen to what the boys had to say, their descriptions of the very important adults they chose to name and discuss in the interviews and the matters they raised with each other in the group discussions.

The transcriptions were then put aside and the next stage of the process of analysis was to return to the tapes of the individual interviews, and then the group discussions, and listen to them again. As van Manen (1984) would describe, the researcher immersed himself in the data, again.

Following this reimmersion into the descriptions offered by the participating boys, the researcher took each transcription and with different coloured highlighter pens marked the responses to the three initial research questions. This resulted in clearly marked names and types of very important adults (Research Question 1), for example, a grandparent, friend of the family or teacher; descriptions of these very important adults (Research Question 2); and the interactions the boys described they had with the very important adults (Research Question 3). These identifiers and
describing words and phrases were then tabulated so as to provide a summary of the
highlighted information for further consideration (Appendix 4 – tabulated summaries).
These summaries were used to report the data presented in Chapter Five.

The next stage was to return again to the tapes and transcripts of the interviews
and the discussions and listen this time for the themes or essences within the
descriptions offered by the boys. Notes were not taken at this stage but some sections
of the transcripts were marked as possibly significant and individual words or phrases
were underlined as possibly representing a theme or essence. Actual words and
summarising terms were then noted at the bottom of marked pages within the
transcriptions. This process was used for the individual interviews and the group
discussions. Lists were then drawn up of all the actual and summarising words for each
individual interview (Appendix 5).

From these lists the researcher identified, from the transcripts, common
recurring actual words or phrases and repeating theme or essence terms. After careful
consideration of the lists (Appendix 5) and rereading of, and comparison with, the
group discussion transcripts, these words and terms were then summarised again,
revealing the four essences that are presented and discussed in Chapter Six.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

As a researcher I believe that it was my personal and professional responsibility
to develop and enact this research project in an ethical manner. Twenty-five years of
professional training and work with children and young people in schools, community
organisations, churches and child protection and juvenile justice settings enabled me to
consider, from experience and theoretical knowledge, the ethical implications of this
research project. I have studied two post-graduate units in philosophy and another in
Christian social ethics and these informed my planning and decision-making processes
in this research project.

Neuman (2000) suggests that the responsibility for ethical research rests with
the individual moral code of the researcher and that this is the strongest defence
against unethical behaviour. In this sense we are “our own moral agents” (Moss, 2001, p. 1). Others see that an overriding sense of honesty and openness should prevail (Wellington, 2000). There is certainly an individual responsibility upon the researcher to determine, after careful and informed consideration, the ethical implications of all aspects of the research proposal and to bear these implications continually in mind through all stages of the planning, conduct and review of the research.

4.5.1 Informed consent

Informed written consent was sought from the participants and their parent/caregiver (see Appendix 1 – Information/Consent Letter) as well as from the Head of School of each school involved.

4.5.2 Management of risks

Limited risks were identified in this research project. Risks to participants should be no greater than in usual classroom interactions or discussions. No research project is totally without risk and therefore the following matters were reviewed and appropriate procedures identified to do all that was possible to minimise risks.

It was possible that some participants could experience anxiety should they remember, or raise in discussion, a matter distressing to them for example – family issues, divorce of parents or significant others, or major sickness or death of a significant other. If such matters arose the researcher was prepared to use appropriate listening/counselling skills to reduce stress to the participant and appropriately respond to the participants needs. The researcher has a Masters of Education (School Guidance and Counselling) degree and over 25 years experience working with adolescents. The researcher would also consider referral to a School Counsellor/Psychologist and, as appropriate, advise the school contact person and parent/caregiver should such circumstances arise. No such difficult or distressing matters arose in the interviews or discussions. The boys were very engaged in the
process and appeared to enjoy the opportunity to discuss their chosen very important people.

The researcher is a Registered Teacher in Queensland and holds a "Suitability Card for Child Related Employment" issued by the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People.

4.5.3 Child Protection considerations

The possibility of a participant in this research disclosing some form of abuse during the interviews or group discussions was acknowledged. As the boys were describing significant adults and their interactions with these people there was a possibility that a participant may have chosen to disclose that they had been, or were being abused, by one of the significant adults being discussed, or by another person. No such disclosure of any kind occurred during the individual interviews or group discussions.

As a Family Services Officer, Senior Family Services Advisor and Area Manager (Families Department, Queensland Government) and founding Coordinator of a nongovernment Foster Care Agency, with over six years experience in Child Protection matters, and having undertaken Child Protection training in the education sector, in both state and private schools, the researcher brought a significant depth of theoretical knowledge and practical experience related to working closely with children who have disclosed abuse, the investigation of such matters with other departmental officers and/or the Police, and appropriate follow-up processes and procedures.

The researcher has been specifically trained in how to respond to children and young people who disclose abuse including consideration of such matters as: responding in a believing manner; the use of appropriate questioning techniques (not leading questions so as to maintain the integrity of evidence); limiting the disclosure until appropriate authorities are informed and can then undertake the investigation; caring for the child in the process and ensuring those they trust are quickly available for them; making notes immediately after the disclosure while words and actions are fresh
in mind; responding only within the responsibilities of the role the researcher held at the time of the disclosure (i.e. as a Family Services Officer, teacher or researcher).

The researcher undertaking this project and conducting the interviews and group discussions ensured that:

- child protection matters were addressed in the introductory letters to Principals/Heads of Schools and to parents and participants;
- an “open door” venue was used for the interviews and discussions;
- the mandatory requirement to inform the Principal or Head of School of any disclosure of abuse was followed;
- no promise of absolute confidentiality was given, considering the mandatory responsibility upon the researcher to notify disclosures of abuse;
- a script was used at the beginning of interviews and group discussions to inform the participants of the requirement to tell someone in authority if abuse is disclosed; and if so required
- participants were included in the discussion and decision making process about the form of the notification to authorities of the disclosed abuse (without negating the mandatory responsibility to notify of the disclosure of abuse).

It is acknowledged that these procedures could have led to the withdrawal of participants from the research project. This was accepted as a part of the research process, as the maintenance of the protection of young people had to remain paramount. No participants withdrew due to the child protection related conditions of the process.

4.6 Limitations of this Study

The goal of this research project and the research questions focus on the roles of nonparental significant adults in the lives of early adolescent boys. Considering this goal, three possible limitations of this project are discussed below.
4.6.1 Nonparental adults

One possible limitation of this study may be the specific focus on nonparental adults rather than opening up the study to include parents and other adults. The Literature Review (Chapter Two) clearly outlines research that shows the roles and impact of parents in the lives of adolescents and particularly those in the early adolescent years. Some of this research looked only at the role of parents or that of parents and peers (Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002; Sartor & Younis, 2002; Updegraff et al., 2002; van Beest & Baerveldt, 1999). Other research looked at the role of parents and nonparental adults in the lives of adolescents (Hendry et al., 1992; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992; Tatar, 1998). Only limited research has specifically and solely looked into the roles of nonparental adults in the lives of adolescents (Beam et al., 2002; Galbo, 1989; Galbo & Mayer Demetrulias, 1996). The minimal amount of empirical research in this area has led to the specific and deliberate focusing of this study on early adolescent boys, to consider nonparental adults and their influences on the participants.

4.6.2 Number of participants

The number of participants in this research project may be perceived as a limitation to the study. Sixteen boys in total will participate in the interviews and group discussions. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the usual number of participants in a phenomenological study, as argued by Tesch (1984), is between 10 and 15 with an upper limit being 25 and a lower limit being as few as 6 participants. Sanders (1982) contends that phenomenologists must be concerned with the quality, not the quantity, and that too many participants can be overwhelming and not conducive to effective investigation. This phenomenological study of the descriptions provided by 16 boys in their early adolescence fits well within the argued parameters and should provide sufficient information as well as information that has adequate depth so that the phenomenon may be well considered and reported by the researcher.
4.6.3 Two independent schools

A further limitation is that this project draws boys from two independent schools only. Because this is a phenomenological study, the epistemological and methodological considerations have allowed the researcher to limit the number of schools as sources for participants and not to have to attempt to draw participants from a cross-section of society. The paramount consideration in the selection of participants in a phenomenological study is the goal of hearing the nature of the phenomenon as it is meaningfully experienced (van Manen, 1984). It is acknowledged that the descriptions of the significant adults chosen by boys from one school will be different from the descriptions of the significant adults chosen by boys from another school. It is also acknowledged that the descriptions of the interactions the boys have with the nominated adults will be different in each of the schools. The essence of this research project is not to compare the cohorts from the two chosen schools but to hear from a sufficient number of participants so as to have a depth and richness within the gathered descriptions, to allow the researcher to consider carefully and deeply the essential nature of the particular lived experience (van Manen).

4.7 Summary

This method chapter has reiterated the Research Goal and Research Questions and detailed the processes utilised in this project.

As previously discussed in Chapter Three, Van Manen (1984) describes phenomenological research as:

… a dynamic interplay among four procedural activities: turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it; reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon: and, describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting (p. 2).
This research project, although not purely a phenomenological study, utilised a phenomenological approach and followed these four procedural activities in the research process. This chapter also demonstrated how this study realised the advantages of utilising a phenomenological approach as discussed by Borg and Gall (1989). This comprised providing a comprehensive view of the environment being studied, has the potential to lead to new insights and hypotheses, the findings are grounded in observational data gathered in a naturalistic setting and the researcher has not started with specific hypotheses, therefore there is less likelihood of overlooking phenomena that do not fit prior experiences.

The two schools involved and the two phases of the project were described and the processes for engaging participants, conducting the individual interviews and the group discussions, and gathering the related information were detailed.

Child Protection issues and procedures were detailed, due to the current community awareness of these matters, particularly in regard to schools and their students.

Limitations of this research project were considered and discussed.

The underlying goal of investigating “that which constitutes the nature or essence of the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1984, p. 25) was reinforced in this chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

5 DATA

The data presented in this chapter directly relate to the goal of this research project: to understand better the roles significant, nonparental adults play in the lives of early adolescent boys, especially in relation to the impact these adults may have on the identity development of the boys.

This chapter presents the data collected, within a phenomenological framework, from the 16 interviews and four group discussions. This chapter, the presentation of a reduction of the data gathered, is a part of the process of data description and analysis. This whole process is essentially concerned with capturing what the experience of the phenomenon under investigation is like for the participants (Welch, 2001). The phenomenon being considered is the role of very important, nonparental adults in the lives of boys in their early adolescence. Specifically this study investigates: who the boys name as their very important people (Research Question 1); the descriptions the boys give of these people (Research Question 2); and the boys’ descriptions of their interactions with these people (Research Question 3).

The fourth research question asks how do these adults influence the identity development of the boys? Data from the group discussions will add to the data from the 16 individual interviews and provide further information to assist in answering this fourth question.

The first section of this chapter presents the data that was collected on the participating 16 boys and the 60 very important people named and described by them. The second section presents the data from the 16 interviews and the group discussions.

The next chapter, Chapter Six, will present a further reduction and an analysis of the data presented in the two sections of this chapter.
5.1 The participants

The 16 boys who participated in this research project were either 11 or 14 years of age at the time they were invited to participate. One 11 year old from School A turned 12 during the process. The four 11 year old boys from School B turned 12 years of age very close to, or during, the research process. Therefore all of the participating 11 year olds were close to or had turned 12 years of age in the research process. That more boys turned 12 in School B may be attributed to the unique enrolment requirements of that school which requires children entering Year 1 to have turned 6 by the middle of the year and to the timing of the interviews and discussions on either side of the mid year (June/July) school vacation.

All participating boys had siblings. Fifteen of the 16 participants had siblings living in their home with them. Eight boys had one sibling, five had two siblings, and two had three siblings. Only two had brothers/siblings over the age of 18, and one 11 year old boy (A2) named an older brother as a very important adult to him. Table 1 indicates the number, gender and ages of the siblings of each participant.

Table 1 Numbers and Gender of Sibling

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<td>9 &amp; 7</td>
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<td>10 &amp; 6</td>
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Totals: 24 11 13
Note. * This symbol and the age in bold indicate the brother who was identified by the participant as a very important person for him.

All 16 boys lived with both parents in their household. Two 16 year old boys had persons other than immediate family living in their households or on their property. One boy (B4) had his grandparents living on his property but in a different dwelling; he saw them almost daily and he named them as very important people. The other boy had a cousin aged 28 living in his household. This cousin was not named as a very important person.

5.2 Sixty Very Important People

Individual interviews were conducted with each of the 16 boys. They identified and described 60 very important adults other than their parents. The number of very important adults for each participant ranged from 2 to 6. Three boys named 2 very important people and one boy named 6 very important people. The mean of very important people named by the boys was 3.75. The mean for 11 year olds was 4 and the mean for 14 year olds was 3.25.

The figure below (Figure 3) shows the number and age ranges of the 60 very important people named by the 16 participating boys in this study. Boys were asked to state which age range they thought their VIP would currently be in. The ages ranged from 18 through to 8 VIPs who were over 70 years of age.
Figure 3. Very Important people by Age and Gender.

The following table (Table2) identifies the breakdown of gender and age ranges for the 60 very important people named by the boys. The number, gender and age range distribution of VIPs for each participating boy and the totals of VIPs by age range and gender are represented.
Table 2 Gender and Age Ranges of Very Important People

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<td>B4</td>
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<td>B5</td>
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<td>8</td>
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Table 3 (Types of Very Important People named by the 16 participants) shows a breakdown of the types of very important people identified and described by the boys including:

- 18 Grandparents named by 11 of the boys – with twice as many grandmothers as grandfathers and includes 2 grandmothers (A4 and A8) and 1 grandfather (B6) who died within the past three years
- 14 teachers (including two Chaplains) named by 7 of the boys with 1 boy (A7) naming 5 teachers - 13 of the 14 currently teach the boy who named them (one of the Chaplains recently left the school) and 6 of these teachers also had extracurricula involvement with the boys
- 9 relatives named by 5 boys with 1 boy naming 3 uncles – the relatives included: 1 auntie; 5 uncles; 1 brother; 1 cousin and 1 mother’s cousin
- 6 friends of the family named by 4 boys including one couple
• 5 sports’ coaches named by 4 boys including Tennis and Tae Kwon Do (B2), Soccer (B5), Golf (A5) and Fencing (A4)
• 2 godparents (B8) who are a married couple
• 1 instrumental teacher who teaches the boy (A6) trumpet
• 1 sports’ personality (B8) – Tiger Woods an international golfer whom the boy has not met
• 4 others that included: cousin’s boyfriend (B4); nanny who is also mother’s best friend and the nanny’s son and daughter (A3).

Table 3 Types of the 60 Very Important People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Important People</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>(including 2 deceased)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including 1 deceased)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives (other than</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends of the Family</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports’ Coaches</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godparents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Teacher</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports’ Personality</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(not known to boy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

5.2.1 Photos and Pictures

The photo elicitation process allowed the participants to take photos with the supplied camera, find pictures in family albums or find pictures in newspapers or magazines. All except 1 of the boys took a camera when they returned their consent forms. The majority of boys, 11 out of the 16 involved, attended the interviews without photos or pictures for a variety of stated reasons including: did not take photos or find pictures; had not arranged developing of photos in time; forgot to bring photos or pictures. The 11 year old boys were more likely than the 14 year olds to have taken or found photos in family albums and bring them to their interview.

When considering the responses to questions and discussions that took place in the 16 individual interviews it appears that the use of photos did assist in “breaking
the ice” and building rapport in the opening few moments of the interviews and also assisted in starting conversations about particular very important people (e.g., A4, 11 year old, describing three grandparents and two teachers). The lack of photos to support the discussions does not appear to have inhibited the flow of the interviews or reduced the quality of descriptions and responses given by the boys.

5.3 Descriptions of the Very Important People and interactions with these people

Initially this research project asked the first question under investigation: Who do the boys name as the nonparental adults significant to them? The preceding data have outlined the variety of very important people nominated by the boys who participated in this research project.

This chapter now moves on to report the findings from the second and third research questions: What are the boys’ descriptions of the characteristics of these adults? and, What are the boys’ descriptions of their interactions with these adults?

Early in each interview, as each very important person was named, the researcher asked the boys to describe the people they had nominated by using a variety of opening questions or prompts such as:

- “Granddad …, can you tell me about him? Tell me about your Granddad.” (A1, 11 year old).
- “Can you tell me about her? What was she like, what kind of person was she?” (A4, 11 year old).
- “Can you describe him as a person? What do you think he’s like, his character?” (A8, 14 year old).

The boys gave, in most instances, quite detailed descriptions ranging from simple, short statements, “a nice person” (A2, 11 year old) or “funny … sporty” (B4, 14) to more detailed descriptions such as, “just always supportive, always encouraging people” (B2, 11) and
He’s like a really easy going person that is good to talk to. It is really easy to talk to him because, I don’t know, looking at him he’s always smiling and stuff like that and I guess he’s like a friend to me, yeah … (A7, 14 year old).

Also during the interviews the researcher asked the boys to describe things they did with the nominated very important person or describe times they had spent together, for example, “Ok, and what kind of things would you do with her, what kind of things have you done?” (A3, 11 year old) and “When you spent time with G what kind of things did you do with him? … What other kind of things did you do?” (A6, 14 year old).

Following are sections detailing the descriptions the boys gave of the individuals they nominated as very important people and their interactions with these people. The descriptions are grouped according to the types of very important people.

### 5.3.1 The boys’ descriptions of their grandparents

The largest group of Very Important People (VIPs) named by the participating boys was grandparents with 11 boys naming and describing 18 grandparents. Seven of the eight 11 year old boys named at least one grandparent, with 4 of these boys naming at least 2 grandparents as very important. Four of the eight 14 year old boys named at least 1 grandparent with 2 of the boys naming 2 grandparents.
Figure 4. Number and Gender of Grandparents named as Very Important People.

The boys described, usually in quite some detail, the grandparents they chose as very important people. Amongst the 11 year olds a grandparent was most often the first VIP to be named and described. One description of a grandfather included, “very nice, very strong for his age, quite cheeky sometimes, a role model sort of thing – well he never says any bad things” (A1, 11 years old). Other 11 year olds described their grandfathers as, “a nice person, very funny, likes playing tricks and jokes” (A2); “quite nice, understanding, always quite good at things – he’s tried everything, he’s still young – he’s old but he acts young, quite a good person to talk to really” (A4); “really funny, always cracking jokes, really nice, he goes along with you he just plays along, there is always excitement when he is there” (B2); “he is positive about everything, I’d believe in myself a lot when I was with him, he was strong, very strong” (B6 about his deceased grandfather).

Two grandfathers were described by 14 year olds as, “pretty adventurous, gets into anything, really active, always easygoing, always helping if you need anything done, a pretty good guy” (A5), and “a big bloke, deaf in his ear, funny” (B4).
Descriptions by 11 year olds of their grandmothers included, “she reads a lot, a very calm person” (A1); “a nice person, like grandpa but more of a sensible person, very kind” (A2); “very nice, very considerate, a really great person, very nice, she’s Dutch, helpful really” (A4); “she’s pretty good at cooking, pretty tall, grey curly hair and glasses, really nice and friendly” (B1); “she’s caring, she spoils us all, I feel safe and happy with her” (B6); “friendly, really fussy about neatness, loves cooking, always likes to correct us, she’s quite like I used to be but she’s sort of a silent achiever sort of person” (B8).

The 14 year old boys described their grandmothers as, “the most caring of all the people up there (on his list of VIPs), she has an urge to care for us just as Mum does, caring, always there for us” (B3); “she cares a lot for us” (B3 about his other Grandmother); “a bit like a second Mum, she gets like angry a bit, she’s always giving” (B4); “very loving, very, very funny person, always there, always good to be with, everyone liked her, always happy, a good listener, always comforting if I had a problem, a really nice person” (A8 about his deceased grandmother).

5.3.2 Descriptions of interactions with Grandparents

When asked about interactions with their nominated grandparents, the boys often described how they talked together. For example, “just talk …sit down and talk” (A2, 11 year old). In seven of the twelve descriptions of interactions by 11 year olds, the boys described how they talked with their grandfather or grandmother – “sitting with her and talking” (A1), “we talk and see where the conversation goes” (A2), “talk about school … about anything” and “well we did most of the talking …” (A4), “tells me stories about her brothers and everyone who went to the war” (B1), “he’s taught me a few jokes” (B2), “sit and talk with him” (B6), “she speaks Cantonese … she laughs at my vocabulary” (B8).

Six grandparents were identified by four 14 year olds. Each of the four participants described some form of “talking” with their grandparent, for example, “talk with him – ask him how he’s going” (A5), Researcher - “…so she talked to you about
how to do that?” “Yeah” (A8), “Yeah exactly that, she says that to all of us” (B3), “asks me the same stuff until I know it” (B4).

All the boys, who nominated grandparents, described active engagement and doing a wide variety of activities with them. Following are the descriptions of interactions with grandparents grouped according to the age of the participant.

**11 year olds describe their interactions with their grandparents.**

A1 – (Granddad) “he just sneaks up on you in the back yard”, “he punches people in the back and those things”, play with the dog, read, (Grandma) sitting with her and talking, “when we are up there we always go with her” (to Church), play cards with her.

A2 – (Grandpa) “talk, I sometimes help Pa with his puzzles”, “picked me up from school”, “stay home together”, “talk about books”, “read”, (Grandma) “talk about school work and stuff”, “go to the movies”, “exploring her backyard”, “spend time together but don’t have to talk much”.

A4 – (Grandma, deceased) “go up to Redcliffe (the beach) and spend the day with family”, “visit her in hospital”, (Pa) “spend time with Dad and me”, “go to his place for dinner”, “go fishing”, “encouraged me to do things at school”, “holidays together”, “tours and trips with him”, “taught me lawn bowls”, (Grandma) “she gives me money”, “taught me things to do with crosswords”, “helped me a bit with Chess”, “go to the park”, “visit places in her area”, “teaches me Dutch”, “teach me other things like sewing”.

B1 – “she baby sits us and helps me with homework”, “we go see movies and do all different things”, “we go and have a cup of coffee and something to eat on the weekends”.

B2 – “play water pistols”, “he’s taught me a few jokes”, “he’s taught me just to have fun basically”.

B6 – (Grandmother) “go to the movies”, “stay over at her house”, “play tennis”, “she might have a sleep and I might just stay there and watch a bit of TV”,
(Grandfather, deceased) “sit and talk with him”, “he’d watch us play tennis”, “just sit and talk about the news and everything”, “he’d come to nearly all my football games”.

B8 - "she always likes to correct us …and lead us, and most of all, she has our best interests at heart”.

**14 year olds describe their interactions with their grandparents.**

A5 – trekking, bushwalking, “taught me how to fish”, gardening, “he just teaches me a lot of stuff like how to use stuff”, “taught me how to fix stuff”, “I usually go down there and help him fix anything”, “taught me how to sharpen knives properly”, “talk with him – ask him how he’s going, that kind of stuff …and tell him a bit about my golf”, “talk about what Dad did when he was young”.

A8 – “visit her …when I was over there it was a good experience, I just liked being with her”, go camping, learnt to pitch a tent, cooking, planting plants.

B3 – (Grandma) take care of us, pick us up from school to help my Mum, cook dinner, help with homework, always there making food for us after surfs and stuff, play cards and Monopoly and things, takes me fishing, (Nonna) she stays on the beach and watches us, fishing, picnics, go to her place, stay over at her place.

B4 – (Pa) makes stuff like woodwork, make stuff like chairs, learnt to mow, taught me stuff about school, (Nanna) “I see her every day and she keeps us in line”.

**5.3.3 The boys’ descriptions of teachers**

Seven of the 16 boys interviewed in this study chose to name teachers as very important people to them. All bar one of the teachers currently taught the boy who named them. The exception was one of the teachers who was also a Chaplain who had recently left the employ of the school.
Fourteen teachers in total were named as very important people. Five teachers were named by 4 of the 11 year olds and 3 of the 14 year olds named a total of nine teachers with 1 boy (A7) naming five teachers as his chosen very important people. The 11 year olds named only female teachers and of the nine teachers named by the 14 year olds, six were male.

Figure 5. Number and Gender of Teachers named as Very Important People.

The teachers who were named and described by the boys were, in all bar one case, a current teacher of the participant. In School B, the teachers were the homeroom teacher or a specialist subject teacher of boys. In School A, where the Middle School structure is somewhat different, the teachers named taught the boys for one, two or three subjects respectively within the curriculum.

Of the total of 14 teachers named by the boys, 11 of them were from School A and only 3 were from School B. No 14 year olds from School B named a teacher as a very important person.

The 11 year olds described their teachers in the following ways: “quite nice – if you do what you are told, she can get angry if she needs to, she’s kind, she’ll help if you ask for it” and “nice, she teaches you if you want to learn, she’ll help you, she likes
teaching people, humorous if she wants to be” (A4); “really kind of fun, always kind of
testing new things out, she kind of only gets really strict when people are really
naughty, if you are good she is really nice, pretty cool, she is just out of university and
she has still got the same mind as us and she knows what’s fun for kids and stuff” (B2);
“she’s friendly very friendly, she’s easy to talk to” (B8). This boy also went on to
describe how he felt communicating with this teacher, “I’ve had for some reason a real
comfortable ease talking to her, maybe because she is young, yeah, she might
understand what I might feel like” (B8, 11 year old).

From School A 1 of the boys, (A6, 14 years old), named two teachers who were
also Chaplains at the School. One of these Chaplains had recently left the employ of
the school. This boy described the male Chaplain as, “very kind and generous, always
had time for people, a friendly person, he liked to help with life but he knew where to
draw the line, always had time to listen to what you had to say – he always thought that
it was important”. He described the female Chaplain in this way, "she’s a lot of fun, you
could have a laugh with her, she also knew where to draw the line, she speaks her
mind, a lot of fun to be around, a little bit strange, I felt happy when I spent time with
her”.

The participant identified as A7 (14 years old) named five teachers as his very
important adults other than his parents. He was asked at the end of the interview
whether he was aware that he could have chosen people other than teachers. He
replied that he was aware of that option but he only wanted to name the five teachers.
He described them in the following ways:

• Teacher 1 – “a really easy going person that is good to talk to, he’s always smiling
  and stuff like that, I guess he’s like a friend to me, yeah, he’s just easy going,
  interested in sports a lot, I guess … like he likes the same things as us, you know,
  he’s like a really good friend to me”.

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• Teacher 2 – “he’s very learned, very smart, he’s the best teacher that I’ve ever had, I treat him as a friend as well, really nice to talk to and we make jokes and stuff like that, I really get happy when I have Science, he’s very smart”.

• Teacher 3 – he’s pretty cool for a teacher, I just think of him as a really cool singer who can reach high notes which I can’t, a little bit quiet towards new students, he’s got things in common with me, I class myself as a good friend of him”.

• Teacher 4 – “he’s excellent, he’s really lively, he’s always happy (except those times you don’t practise your music), he’s funny, I think he’s really cool”.

• Teacher 5 – “she’s happy, happy all the time, she’s very good at drama and she can act dramatic, she’s a really good teacher”.

Another 14 year old (A8) named and described two teachers in this way, “a good person, full of knowledge, pretty smart, always helpful, pretty kind, a pretty good teacher, he’s really good, always happy, an easy person to speak to” and the other teacher, “pretty funny, happy, she’s always happy, very nice, she’s generous, definitely a good teacher, good at most things she does, easy to talk to”.

5.3.4 Descriptions of interactions with teachers

Descriptions of interactions with teachers sometimes centred on learning related or classroom based activities, for example, “helped me with assignments in her subjects” (A4, 11 year old) and “I love him as a Maths and Science teacher. He’s the best teacher that I’ve ever had” (A7, 14 year old). Some descriptions, particularly from the 14 year olds, described interactions that involved the relationship with the teacher, or life and experiences beyond the classroom or school, for example, “I like to discuss what’s happened in my day and I talk to her about my holidays and she really enjoyed what I was talking about” (B8, 11), “she’s always got a good joke to laugh about” (A8, 14) and “you can just go up to him and talk to him about something and say ‘How is your day going?’ and ‘What’s happening?’ and I’m going to tell you about this, and you do, and whatever” (A7, 14).
The 11 year olds further described their interactions with the nominated teachers in the following ways:

- A4 – (Teacher 1) she taught me a lot – Science, Maths, PE; talk to her about subjects or what’s happened; (Teacher 2) teach me Music, teach me keyboard, talk to her Music or what’s happened
- B1 - school work, get taught and stuff like that, she just teaches me everything, Homework Club
- B2 – just be in class with her, she puts up little competitions, she has taught me quite a lot of stuff this year – spelling skills, Maths
- B8 – teaches me a lot of stuff, helped me to try to talk more – do something active, “she’s told me to get out there and do something, like even if its not for yourself, just do something

The 14 year olds further described their interactions with the teachers they nominated in the following ways:

- A6 – (Chaplain/Teacher 1) served in the Chapel with him, Confirmation Classes, went to Chapel Services that he led – things he said in the services, the way he acted; (Chaplain/Teacher 2) she helped me with my public speaking, “she definitely made it different in Chapel”.
- A7 – (Teacher 1) just drop in and say ‘Hi’ and ask how he is going, just chatting to him, I think about what his reaction would be to what we are talking about or something like that; (Teacher 2) Maths and Science teacher, Head of House (pastoral system), you can ask him a question and he will answer it fully; (Teacher 3) Music teacher; (Teacher 4) he’ll make jokes and he makes people happy all the time; (Teacher 5) Drama teacher.
- A8 – (Teacher 1) if you’ve got questions he’s always got answers to them, if you are in trouble he’ll always help you out, I like being with him because he’s kind,
sometimes I feel relieved when I’ve asked him something that’s been on my mind;

(Teacher 2) Drama teacher, always got a joke to laugh about.

5.3.5 The boys’ descriptions of relatives (other than their grandparents)

The closest relative named by one of the boys (A2) was his older brother who was 19 years of age at the time of the interview. The most distant relative was the boy’s mother’s cousin named by the boy identified as (B7). A total of 9 relatives were named by 6 of the participating boys. The relatives named by 11 year olds were a brother (A2) and three uncles (B6). The 14 year olds named an auntie and uncle (B3), a cousin (B5), an uncle and Mum’s cousin (B7).

The brother named by A2 (11 year old) was described as, “a nice person to be around, likes to play around a bit, pretty smart, I’m like him, he has a sense of humour”. This boy explained that “the way we are just kind of binds us together”.

The other 11 year old who named relatives was B6. He named three uncles and described them as, “they are smart very smart and funny as well, they crack a joke or something, funny really funny, I’m never really down when I am with them, one is a surfer – he goes surfing all the time”.

One of the 14 year olds (B3) named the only female relative as a very important adult other than a parent. He described his auntie as, “really nice, always caring, outgoing, really caring, she laughs at our jokes, she’s always there for us when we need her, she is always offering to take care of us”. The same boy (B3) named an uncle and described him, “he makes me laugh, sort of a kid still, likes to play rugby, always surfing, a rough bloke, rough really active aggressive, tackles us hard, crazy you know always outgoing, always wants to do things – rugby, cricket surfing, really easy to be with him”. This boy named, as his very important people, both his grandmothers and the auntie and uncle described above.

Another of the 14 year olds (B5) named a cousin who was in the age bracket 18-20 years. He described his cousin as, “caring and conscious and careful”. When asked what he meant by conscious he explained, “Everything has to be done properly,
nothing can be done second best, everything has to be done proper”. He went on to describe his cousin as, “a caring bloke, always stuck on my side and stuck up for me a few times and that was good, big pretty big, a computer person, into things I’m into – cars and stuff like that, he is a good guy a really good guy”.

Near the conclusion of the part of the interview about this cousin the depth and closeness of this relationship became clearer.

Researcher: Just what’s important about him?
Interviewee: Oh like he’s really caring and just stuff like that and … I sort of feel sad in a way cause he’s never had a Dad for himself since he was two, so it’s a bit sad. So that’s why my Dad and my cousin and I are really close together, cause ……

Researcher: The three of you?
Interviewee: Yeah, so it’s sort of like a family sort of thing, so yeah, my Dad’s sort of like his Dad in a way.

Researcher: As well?
Interviewee: Yeah

Researcher: And is he like a big brother to you?
Interviewee: Yes, definitely, definitely.

A third 14 year old (B7) named two relatives other than a parent. He named and described an uncle and his mother’s cousin. The uncle was described as, “really easy to talk to, he’s got good knowledge about things I am interested in, he’s basically a champion, he’s great, I think he’s just great – that’s it”. His mother’s cousin was described as, “a really, really funny guy, he’s got all the toys to play with (motorbikes), very, very outgoing, he’s always fun and we are always doing things”.

5.3.6 Descriptions of interactions with relatives

As the participant, identified as A2 (11 year old), described his interactions with his brother aged 19 he initially described their interaction as “just living in the same house”. He added: playing around the house, hiring movies, he’s helped me with
schoolwork, talk about his uni. and work, introduced me to things – shown me things, for example, Japanese culture.

The other 11 year old (B6) to describe interactions with nominated relatives, his uncles, did so in the following ways: watch my footy games, play tennis, see a movie, S is with the bank and tells us about the Stock Market.

Of the 14 year olds to describe their interactions with a relative, B3 gave these descriptions of time with his auntie: she takes care of us, she likes to visit us, she likes to spend time with us, she does things for us out of her way, “she really benefits with the family”, she comes over some Sunday mornings and cooks breakfast for us, go to parks – have picnics, “I go to the surf and I came back and she is just standing there”. He described times with his uncle: he takes us on surfing holidays – down to his house, he likes to do what we do so “we come attached to him”, play cricket, fishing, goin’ out on his boat, he does what we do so we have a lot in common.

Another 14 year old (B5) described times with his cousin in the following ways: if I want to go somewhere he’ll take me, go to see people, go out to lunch. The researcher asked him, “You kind of choose to spend time with him deliberately?” and he replied, “Yeah, cause sometimes I go surfing with say, some friends, sometimes I prefer to spend time with him, working on cars and stuff like that …just spend time with him”.

A strong “doing” together is evident in the descriptions of interactions with an uncle as described by another 14 year old, B7: we build things, he helped me build boxes for my speakers, talk about school and sport, a bit of boating, build electrical things, taught me how to solve little problems around the house.

5.3.7 The boys’ descriptions of friends of the family and godparents

“Friends of the family” was a discernable group amongst those named by the boys as very important people. A total of 6 people, 2 females and 4 males were named by two 11 year olds (B1 and B8) and two 14 year olds (A6 and B7). Friends of the family were, in all instances, parent-like figures, of similar ages to the parents of the
Boys, and in the case of those identified by the 14 year olds, two couples who were friends of the parents of the boys and the family as a whole.

B1 (11 year old) named a man in the 40-50 years age group who is an architect and close friend of the family. This important person works on the same level of an office building as the participant’s father and he and his family spend time during the week and on weekends with the participant’s family. The boy described this important person as, “very careful – really smart, like he knows a lot of things, really good with boats and things, really nice, doesn’t really get grumpy or anything, a kind man who helps a lot”.

The other 11 year old (B8) named a friend of the family whom he called “Uncle” but was not related to him. Every weekend, this man joins the participant and his father for a round of golf. They also had times where the two families got together for barbecues or similar social events. The boy described this uncle as, “pretty friendly, he likes talking about like what’s happening, he’s really like optimistic, funny, he’s quiet if you don’t know him, he’s someone you can confide in – someone you can gain trust from, he always gives me encouragement”. He states that, “probably mainly he’s given me a lot of self confidence”.

The two 14 year olds, who named and described very important people who were friends of the family, both named a couple who have a close relationship with their family. The first couple were described by the boy (A6) as, “fun, they have a lot of time for people they like, they listen to you, he’s funny, he jokes a lot, she’s fun loving, she likes spending time with us”. The other couple were described by the second 14 year old (B7) as, “really nice, she’s directed, always helping my Mum, really, really smart, really helpful, she’s always got time for you, he’s just the funniest bloke you’ll ever meet, really easy going, carefree, he’s got boats and stuff – he’s like a maniac or something, pretty spontaneous, he’s just like a little kid really, like a teenager”.

One of the 11 year old boys (B8) named a couple who are his Godparents as very important people. This couple live in another country but the participant has
contact with them a few times a year. He has known them all his life. The boy
described them as “a bit contrasted, Godfather is a quiet sort of person, Godmother is
more a talky sort of person, they are really happy, they are talkative cause I want to
talk”. He says of his Godparents, “I reckon I’ve been pretty lucky with them, because
I’ve never had such good people to talk to besides my parents, Uncle or Grandma”
(some of his other VIPs).

5.3.8 Descriptions of interactions with friends of the family and
Godparents

Descriptions of interactions with friends of the family:

- B1 – he shows me things, for example, computer work in drafting at his architect
  office; he fixed our tinnie; work on the computer; play soccer with his son
- B8 – every weekend we play a round of golf with Dad; he keeps me informed of
  stuff; always encouraged me to do school work like really good; just sit there and
talk with him and he’s like laughing
- A6 – we just have dinner and talk, families spend time together
- B7 – (female friend of the family) talk about school and how it is going, she asks me
  about my Mum and my family, helps me with schoolwork; (male friend of the family)
go boating, “he tenses his pot belly and goes, ‘Go on, hit it as hard as you can’”.
- B8 (11 year old) described how he is pleased when his Godparents ring him, “they
  actually call me for no reason and say, ‘What’s up?’ ‘Are you doing good at
  school?’”.

5.3.9 The boys’ descriptions of sports’ coaches

Five sports’ coaches were named by 4 boys within this research project. Two
11 year olds and two 14 year olds nominated a variety of sports’ coaches as very
important people. Of the 11 year olds, A4 named his fencing coach, and B1 named two
sports’ coaches, his tennis coach and his Tae Kwon Do Instructor. The 14 year olds
named and described a golf coach (A5) and a soccer coach (B5).
The 11 year olds described their coaches as, “really nice, really good at teaching you moves, encourages us to try and keep doing it” (A4, fencing coach) and B2 describes two coaches as “kinda tall blond hair and he pulls it up, I mean back, really good at tennis he’s helped me heaps, he’s pretty funny too, very friendly and easy going, a lot of patience too with naughty people, he’s pretty cool too, very friendly, he is just really nice, he does really fun things, just always supportive, always encouraging people” (tennis coach) and “he gets really strict, kind of, during class, a really good instructor, he thinks he is really good, he’s friendly when it comes to just talking, just normally, he’s really strict and he doesn’t like bad behaviour” (Tae Kwon Do instructor).

The first of the two 14 year olds to name a sports’ coach was A5, who nominated his golf coach and described him as, “very easy going, very, very nice, funny, he likes to talk about anything, easy to talk to ‘cause he’s so, like, supportive, says all these good comments and stuff”. The second 14 year old to describe a coach was B5, who described his soccer coach as, “sort of like my Dad, very strict and wants lots of discipline out of you, yeah and respect and stuff like that, hard – if you do something wrong he makes you run laps, he’s a really good guy”.

5.3.10 Descriptions of interactions with sports’ coaches

The boys’ descriptions of interactions with sports’ coaches centre on skill development, for instance, “he’s really good at teaching you moves, strategies and the movements” (A4, 11 year old) and, “he’s a big part of my sport, … I’ve learnt a lot with skills and just things like that” (B5, 14).

The descriptions also include interactions that go beyond skill development into areas such as personal development. The participant identified as B5 (14 year old) talks further about how he has learnt more than just skills:

B5: I’ve learnt a lot, with skills and just things like that.

Researcher: How do you feel then?
B5: Um, tired. I feel pretty good that I have learnt, ‘cause I like to learn a lot about just things, (Yeah) and I’ve learnt a lot of things from him.

Researcher: So he’s taught you a lot of stuff?
B5: Yeah.

Researcher: What have you learnt about yourself through that spending time with him and him training you? What do you reckon you’ve learnt about yourself?
B5: A lot. ‘Cause um, I got cut from, like, the Queensland team and he just told me not to worry about it and he’d get some people to come and look at me so I could go overseas and stuff. So I’ve learnt a lot from him as well.

Researcher: And about yourself, you’ve learnt maybe to stick in there?
B5: Yeah and to keep my head up when things go bad.

Researcher: Oh ok. And if you’d never met him, if he hadn’t been your coach?
B5: Yeah it would be a lot sort of different if he wasn’t my coach, it would sort of be different cause …. 

Researcher: Would you be different?
B5: Ah yeah, I wouldn’t be as good as I am now with soccer and um, with, what’s the word, if it wasn’t for him my head would still be down because of the team, but now I am moving on.

One of the 11 year olds, A4, says he learns moves and strategies in fencing but he also describes how he learns about life and applying principles learnt in fencing to other aspects of his life:

A4: I like the fact that he, that um, he encourages us to try and keep doing it and now that I think I am going to keep doing it, I’m going to learn a lot more, not only with the sword moves but with everyday life …. 

Researcher: … when you are with him, what things do you think about?
A4: I think that I should try, really try, umm, in anything, not just fencing. If I have to do something, after that time, I’m still thinking that I’m going to give it my best shot.

Another 11 year old, B2, describes skill development with his tennis coach, “he’s helped me heaps with doing all the strokes and stuff”, and how he has learnt Tae Kwon Do moves and applied the tenets of this sport to life:

Oh, he’s taught me all the moves, yeah …

You have to write this essay about, there are these tenets of Tae Kwon Do, like indomitable spirit and perseverance and self-control and stuff. … it’s just Tae Kwon Do has made me more disciplined and um, expect things, kind of anything, instead of just wanting the good stuff …

Chief Instructor, he helped me, he gave me encouragement when I couldn’t grade and stuff, so that was the indomitable spirit side.

One of the 14 Year olds, A5, describes his interactions with his golf coach: he “just likes to talk about anything, like what’s going on and stuff, ‘How’s school?’; he asks these sorts of questions, so yeah, he’s just really nice to talk to, like really easy to talk to”, and this boy likes the way that this very important person speaks to him and coaches him, “Oh he just gets, golf can get very technical, but he kind of turns that down so he speaks to you at your level sort of thing …”.

5.3.11 The boys’ descriptions of other very important people

Four of the 60 very important people identified by the participating boys did not fit into the above categories and are individually detailed below.

An 11 year old, A3, named three very important people in his interview. He nominated and described his “Nanny” and the Nanny’s son and daughter. He had been cared for by this Nanny every school day afternoon and most evenings, as well as numerous times over weekends since he was an infant. Very early in the interview he openly stated that, “I really, well, I love her, yeah and she’s really, really nice”. He described his Nanny as, “kind of like an animal lady; really nice to me; a good care lady
(Nanny); unusually nice”. He also nominated the Nanny’s two children as very important people and described them as, “really nice; funny – he can be a comedian” (nanny’s son, 18-20 year age group) and “funny – not really a comedian; really, really nice; really smart” (nanny’s daughter, 20-30 age group). When asked at the conclusion of the interview if there was anything he disliked about any of these three very important people he replied, “No, everything is perfect about them”.

One 14 year old, B4, named his cousin’s boyfriend as a very important person. This VIP was described as, “he’s like a mate, he’s a bit like me when I was, when I’m now” (like each other at the same age). Other descriptions included, “funny; sporty; serious sometimes but when you are talking to him … he likes to joke around a lot; really nice; just easy going; just funny”.

5.3.12 Interactions with other important people

As the boy A3 (11 years old) describes his interactions with his Nanny and her adult children, he describes domestic interactions and goes further to describe a deep, parent-like relationship: “… go to the beach on Saturdays and Sundays and … walk the dog and stuff” and he described how he’d learnt “to care for babies”. He said, “I’m pretty lucky to be with her, ‘cause usually you don’t meet a lot of people like her”. In describing his relationship with the Nanny this boy states, “I say she would be like my second Mum”.

When describing the sort of things they do together, this boy told the researcher that he, “…talks to her about things, … if someone is really annoying at school, yeah, and stuff, … things I would be doing in the future, like this year”.

In describing his interactions with the Nanny’s young adult aged children this boy says the son, “taught me other things, like how to fish real good” and “He taught me how to ride a bike”. When describing his interactions with the Nanny’s daughter he stated, “she’s taught me how to play basketball … and she taught me how to rollerblade too”.

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In his interactions with his cousin’s boyfriend, B4 (14 year old) describes how he enjoys barbeques with his family and this very important person, “he like comes down to the tennis court and we like muck around … and play cricket and basketball … like just muck around on the tennis court … he’s a great bloke to hang around with”. He also describes how this young man has “got pretty good stories from when he was my age”.

**5.3.13 One “Unknown” Very Important Person**

Out of the 60 very important people named by the 16 boys in this project there was only 1 “unknown” very important person. Interviewee B8, an 11 year old born in Australia with Asian parents, named Tiger Woods as his fourth very important person. Tiger Woods is an international golfer of world renown who was recently awarded PGA Player of the Year for an unprecedented fifth time (Soltau, 2003).

When asked what made Tiger Woods important the boy simply replied, “It comes from the golf, because he’s really good at it”. The researcher asked the boy if he had ever met Woods or talked to him. The boy replied, “Never, just on TV”. This was the first indication of the boy showing some familiarity with this unknown very important person. The boy explains that even though Woods is only on TV and he hasn’t met this famous player in person, there is a significant connection between Woods and himself.

The researcher asked, “What do you think about when you see him, what do you think about yourself, when you see him on TV?”

Um, I want to be like him! Um, yeah, I want to increase my confidence, yeah, for some reason, I know he’s on TV, he doesn’t really communicate with me, but, he gives me that sort of feeling that, I should do better at golf, ‘Keep doing it and you’ll get it’, and I’ll do something like him if I do.

The boy was asked what he liked about Woods and how he would describe him, replying:

He’s pretty victorious, he’s good at golf. Um …… he’s given me like, sort of a moral booster in my golfing. I want to play like he does. Yeah, but it doesn’t
really work cause, well, he, um, he strengthens my mind in golf, but not physically. Not at all.

5.4 Group Interview / Discussions

The group interviews that were conducted as Phase 2 of this research project were designed to attempt to answer the fourth research question: How do these adults influence the identity development of the boys?

Phase 2 was designed to allow the participating boys to speak more openly and generally about very important adults. The questions and prompts in these interviews facilitated discussions and direct answers assist in addressing the hypothesised link between the very important people and the identity development of the boys involved in the study. The particular design of Phase 2, with its flexibility and open-ended nature, enabled the researcher to consider more deeply the nature or essence of the phenomenon under consideration (van Manen, 1984).

5.4.1 11 Year olds – School A

This group of three (one boy was not available for the interview) had some difficulty engaging in the discussion. The context, one of the counselling rooms in the school, should have been conducive to good interactions but the boys found a collection of sand-play toys very interesting and quite distracting. The group did discuss some of the questions with insight. These matters are discussed here.

The boys initially summarised how they would describe very important people:

Researcher: If you were summarising it or thinking about the best way to describe very important people, for you, how would you describe them?

P: They taught me a lot. … Sometimes just by being teachers they’ve taught me lots of things that I need to know. And grandparents or coaches, they’ve taught me something about sport or something about myself.

K: Yeah they’ve probably taught me things and been really nice to me.

M: They help me.
A: Yeah, lots of people said that too. In what way do they help you?
M: When you’re sad.
A: Do they help you when you are sad, or do they help you with your homework? What do you mean they help you?
P: That sort of thing.
A: With practical things?
P: Yeah. … They’ll try, even if they don’t succeed…
A: How else would you describe your very important people?
K: Humorous …
P: They are nice to you in any way…
M: Try hard to meet your needs…

The boys attempted to describe some feelings that are involved with the chosen very important people. One boy said, “happiness” and another followed with “self-control”. They went on when asked, “Tell me some of the things … that you do with these very important people”, to reply, “Just talking to them about things”, with another boy adding, “Just spending time with them”.

During the discussion the boys agreed that they learn things about themselves from their very important people. Two of the boys spent some time describing how they think they learn from them:

P: We just, as a kid, you just watch what they do, and try to copy them and that’s how everyone learns things.
A: That’s how everyone learns things. Yep, ok.
K: ‘cause you are with that kind of thing you just do it all the time without knowing it. ….
A: So how does it happen that they like things and we end up liking them and they don’t like things we end up not liking them? How does that happen?
P: By actually knowing them and you keep seeing them.
The boys went on to discuss how teachers did or did not make their lists of very important people.

A: So what’s the difference then, between one of your very important people, you don’t have to name who they are, and a teacher? What’s the difference?
M: Well, you don’t spend very much time with teachers.
A: Right. Ok, and that’s a huge difference, isn’t it?
M: Yeah.
A: Ok, K, what about you? You didn’t put teachers either did you?
K: No, I didn’t.
A: Right. Did that surprise you now that you think about it?
K: No, I did think about teachers but I didn’t find them very, … influential. … Even though you see them most of the year, I just don’t find that they influence me that much.

…

A: …What about for you P? You did mention some teachers, didn’t you?
P: Yeah, I did.
A: So you thought about it and … put a couple of teachers on the list?
P: Yeah. I was thinking whether I should or I shouldn’t, so I just put them on anyway. But, um, …I only put them on because they’ve taught me a lot more than they did at my old school, they didn’t have the facilities, especially in Science.
A: So generally the teachers got on the list as very important people to you because …?
P: They taught me things that I didn’t know.

The boys were asked, at the end of the interview, to try to summarise what makes these people very important people. They gave to following responses:
P: Ok. The fact that you spend time with them, they teach you things, they understand you.
M: They are there most of the time.

K: They are always willing to look after you and to spend time with you.

5.4.2 11 Year olds – School B

This group discussion was a far more successful interview with the boys engaging in the topics and responding openly to the questions and prompts. The four boys initially discussed what they thought of when asked about very important people.

C: Um, people who influenced our lives

O: … sports’ instructors

J: … close relations. Oh, I just picked my Nanna and Pop. …

I just thought of people that I spent time with mostly. … I just picked the uncles that I’ve seen and like… spent time with.

B: I immediately thought of my Grandma.

The discussion went on to consider how some people got on to the list of very important people and the reasons others didn’t make it on to the list.

O: Oh, I didn’t really work out who didn’t get on the list. I just thought of people that I’ve spent time with a lot and do things with more and they’ve taught me things and then I put them on the list. …

B: I thought of people who’ve helped me get to where I am and stuff. … also people who I see a lot. …

C: I had in fact, I had a very long list. But I just decided to choose people who actually, really change my life in some sort of special way.

The boys had some very insightful descriptions of what makes the people very important for them.

J: Just like the motivational factor for me. The people who actually gave me mental strength and everything

Researcher: Yep. What makes them very important? What are the characteristics of these people or what makes them very important to you?

C: ….. They really want to help you. …
O: Improving you and giving you support to do things that you want to do. …
They just teach you different skills and stuff, and um … encourage you to do better and give you tips and stuff. … Yeah and with everyone else they just teach me about everything, like, I go boating with my friend, and fishing.
C: Yeah, I just like, have fun talking to them and stuff like that …. 

Some discussion ensued around the question of doing activities with or talking with the very important people whom the boys named and described:

Researcher: Is it more about doing things or more about talking about things?
B: It’s a bit of both
Researcher: Both?
J: Yeah, a bit of both, yeah.
Researcher: Alright. Is it kind of like you do things and you talk about things?
O: Yeah
Researcher: And then you might talk about the things you’ve done?
O: Yeah
Researcher: But you also talk about other things that you haven’t done?
B: Yeah
O: Yeah
Researcher: Because one of you said you talk about school.
J: I probably say that I more do things than talk about things
Researcher: Yeah, ok. So more doing?
J: Yeah. So if they wanted to teach me something they’d show me, they wouldn’t just talk about it, they’d actually show me.

In answer to the question, “So all of you said very similar sorts of very important people, but what are these people like?” the boys replied:
J: Um, like really good to get, to get along with. They know what you are going through and they are like really good to talk to because they’ve been through it all and …
Researcher: Oh, ok.

B: Yeah they are ......

J: encouraging you

C: Use their experience to guide you, give you an idea.

J: Like they encourage you and everything. ‘Cause they’ve been like, through all ...

O: … they know a lot more than we do about a lot of things, like life.

The boys went on to explain how they thought they would be different because they have known these very important people. They said:

J: I’m like mentally strong after it.

O: Happy.

B: Life would be pretty dull without those kind of people that are really nice to you and stuff and .... Yeah, you wouldn’t be having quite as much fun, you know if you were with someone else who didn’t give you that support and encouragement. ......

C: I’d be lacking a lot of the character that I have today, like, it’s what they’ve taught me that’s built up during (inaudible). ...

J: Yeah, they put like, like um, life in a perspective, a bit in a different perspective to what we live.

Later in the discussion with this group of 11 year olds, the researcher asked more direct questions to attempt to gather information that could assist in answering the fourth research question about the link between these very important people and the identity development of the boys:

Researcher: …what roles do those people play in your life? What is their purpose? What are they for you? What is their role?

J: They are mentors, like, ... they’ve like moulded you, like moulded my life and everything
O: Yeah. …

B: That’s what I thought, kind of the same. … They encourage you and motivate you.

C: They want to lead you

B: Yeah, they want the best for you. …

Researcher: They want the best? … You were agreeing with that then, which parts particularly? … Any of those bits stick with you, do you remember? What is the role of these very important people?

C: Yeah, like they lead you in a sense of directions, in case you get strayed, they might …

J: Put you on the road again …

Researcher: How do you think these people actually influence you? What do they do or what happens that you are influenced by your very important people?

J: They give you encouragement and like, they tell you what’s right from wrong and tell you things that you could use later in your life, like being nice to people, like if you are going on the way up and if you go down they’ll be nice to you.

Researcher: Yeah. So how do these people influence you?

C: Give their opinions to you and you might use that or sometimes they might see what you are doing and maybe check out that maybe you could do this and let’s just say that maybe you are stressed they’d just be there and give you their own experience …

Researcher: So they’re influencing you, how do you think that happens?

O: I think it’s just like naturally, …… Yeah, say like what you are doing at the moment, say you are playing basketball at the moment and they might have played basketball, and they might give you all these tips and things.

C: Their persistence to make you do your best and to give you a good life. … so eventually that you’ll become a good person when you grow up….
J: Like they give you quotes, they give you quotes and everything
O: They always tell you what they think that you should do, they are always interested in what you do. That's what I was trying to think of. And they are always asking what's going on at school and stuff. ……
B: It feels good to know that there is someone who has kind of …
C: Done it
B: Yeah, who is interested in what you are doing and, yeah, it just feels good to know
C: Yeah, it’s good to have someone in the same boat with you.

5.4.3 14 Year olds – School A

This group discussion was the most successful of all the four group discussions conducted as Phase 2 of this research project. The boys engaged well with the topic and with each other. The interview was held in the Head of Middle School’s office with the boys appearing to be very comfortable with the setting and with the process to be undertaken. They responded openly and with detail as to their thoughts on a number of matters that related directly to the research questions and the general topics under consideration in the discussion. Following is a reduction of the fully transcribed interview with the 14 year olds in this group.

Researcher: Can you try and say, …… what was it that made people very important and important enough to stick on your list?
D: Um, if they like, changed me, made me a better person or anything?
Researcher: Right
D: Just how I feel around them and stuff. …
J: Oh, always there for me. Always there if I need to ask them for help. …
S: Have a strong impact on me. Like if they say something, like, you trust them, you have a feeling of safety when you are around them.
M: Well, I admired them … helped me, and you know, just helped me with everything …
S: It's how they treat me and if I know I can have a good time with them and I feel safe with them and they will be there to listen to me when I have something to say.

The researcher went on, later in the discussion, to raise matters that related to the fourth research question about the connection between the very important people and the identity development of the boys.

Researcher: Do these very important people that are in your lives, actually influence you or change you or affect you and your thinking and your acting? What do you think about that? … What kind of connection, what is it between these very important people and who you are and who you are going to become as you grow get older?

Do you think there is a connection there, J?

J: Oh

Researcher: Or what is the connection if there is one?

J: Yeah

Researcher: What's it like or what is happening?

J: … they, um, probably would influence what you are, what you are becoming. Umm,…

Researcher: It's really hard to, it's not so hard to think about sometimes it's hard to say. … I know, we'll grapple with this question, together, you can help each other try and answer this question

S: Because they have gone through the stuff we are going through they'll be able to tell us, ‘Don’t do this, but do this’ and tell us what to stay away from.

D: … if you have two different people, then it would be helping you to grow up in two different ways, sort of thing.

Researcher: Oh, ok. It might be good to have different people for different things?

D: Yeah.
Researcher: Good. Do you think it affects who you are and who you are becoming?

D: Yeah, I think it does because they are teaching you stuff, like all the time. That’s sort of what they are there to do I suppose, I suppose …

Researcher: Do you reckon, … these are very important people, is there a connection with them and who you are and who you are becoming? Is there a connection there?

M: Yeah there would be, because like S said they would be experienced in that path and something like that and they could teach you ways to develop the skills for what you want to become. …

J: Um, yeah, they’ve been down, gone down the same path as you are going down. So they would probably know a bit more than you would.

The boys in this group then went on to have a conversation about whether the boys choose the very important people or if the very important people choose to have the relationship with the boys.

Researcher: These very important people, do you choose them or do they choose you? How does that happen? …Do you choose them or do they choose you?

J: We probably choose them.

Researcher: Or does it just happen? …

D: I think we choose them and then maybe they know and then they sort of choose us. … Just kind of bonding together.

Researcher: Yes, good. Some bonding. You can’t kind of choose your grandparents though.

J: No

Researcher: You’ve got lots of people say grandparents in both age groups in both schools. It’s been a very significant finding. You can’t kind of choose your grandparents though can you?
M: But I guess you’ll grow to love them, because I guess they’ll help you with lots of things because they’ve been around a lot longer than us, even longer than our parents. …

S: We kind of choose them, ’cause we can say this person that really helps me and I can look up to them. But they also kind of choose us, like, they can say I want to help this person become all they can be …

M: I think that as well, if you choose this person and I want this person to help me become what I want to become, they’ll probably find out that and they’ll probably choose you and they’ll help you as much as they can. …

D: Well, if you like, sort of like, take a liking to them, they’ll obviously notice and then they might decide, oh yeah, I want to help this person become better, a better person. If they’ve done something wrong, tell them, that sort of thing.

Two of the boys summarised with the following statements what they thought about the importance of these nonparental adults in their lives. The first boy is referring back to an earlier part of the conversation where connections between the boys and the very important people were being discussed. He refers to the list of very important people whom each boy wrote up at the opening of each individual interview.

D: I think with that connect question, if you didn’t connect with them, if you weren’t going to grow up to be like them because they are always teaching you, if you are not connecting with them like that, in that kind of way, I don’t think they would have been on the list. … Yeah, because you’ve got to, they’ve got to be able to show you something I think. …

That was one of my, like criteria things, they had to be able to show me something, be able to show me what to do sort of thing.

Another boy in the group responds:

M: I think D speaks for us all. We all chose people that would teach us things in an interactive manner, so many times a week, and help us in the paths that we want to choose as we grow up, in matters of personality.
5.4.4 14 Year olds – School B

This group of 14 year old boys talked genuinely about the matters raised for discussion with a humorous but very realistic opening:

Researcher: I’m going to ask you, what was the first thing you thought when I got up there and started talking about very important people? What did you start thinking and what was the process that happened for you?

L: The first thing I thought about was getting off school, but … then I thought about who could be one of ‘em. Who were the people?

Another boy responded with his first thoughts about very important adults, other than Mum and Dad, in the following way:

W: I was just thinking of people that make a big difference in my life, that are good to see and that help me, basically.

Researcher: How did you start to formulate who was going to be on your list?

L: The closest people to you, people who are always around you.

Researcher: The people who are always there. Are there any other things that you thought of?

L: Who you have good times with …

W: Who you enjoy being with.

The boys were asked about their interactions with the people they had named and what makes these people important:

Researcher: So what are the most important things that you do with these very important people? …

L: Just spending time with them. Um, mucking around with them at home. Just spending fun time.

M: Being around with them, going on trips. That sort of thing.

Researcher: What are these people like? How do you summarise what very important people are like for you guys?
W: I think of people who have the biggest impact on my life. The ones I see more, and who … have more significant impact on me.

Researcher: So what makes them very important then?

W: Stuff that you remember forever.

Researcher: Are there other things that make these people very important?

L: Just like that. What they say and do – to give confidence and stuff.

Researcher: …What other things might you get from them, confidence?… Are there other things that come in to your mind when you think about, what you think about, what you get from these people?

W: Personality, advice, part of your personality

Researcher: Can you talk about that, what does that mean?

W: Oh, things that they do and say, make you what or who you are, like the way you are and the way you care and stuff like that. ……

Researcher: How does that happen?

L: Because they give role model kind of thing and you take on board what they’re doing

The researcher inquired about how very important adults were chosen by the boys. The discussion continued around doing activities together and talking with these very important people.

Researcher: …What was it about these people that made them end up on your list?

L: Just the good times, … and what they do with you, and how much fun you have with them.

M: …If they’ve given you any advice or anything

W: Helped you out with stuff

Researcher: Which is more important? (doing or conversations)

W: Probably sometimes talking about things ……and doing things with them, like going…., I don’t know, play football, whatever, surf trips, … stuff like that.
A: So it’s both for you?
W: Yeah
L: It’s more doing things, if you do more things you’ve got more to talk about, keeps the conversation going.
Researcher: So what’s it about for you?
M: Probably about stuff that I’ve done with them, probably more important than anything else.
The boys made comment on things they have learnt from these very important people and how they may be different because they have known these people:
Researcher: … what have you learnt and how are you different because you’ve got significant people?
L: Just to interact with other people, probably
W: Learn how to care. …
M: Having fun basically, just … The different sort of people that you mingle with the more you can relate to them, basically
Researcher: Yep, excellent. What would life be like without these people?
M: Wouldn’t be as interesting I don’t think …
W: It’d be different, yeah …
L: You’d probably lose something, part of your personality, or something of you.
The role of very important people moved from comments about basic needs, for example, “Keep, … a roof over your head, and look after you and keep you fed …” (L, Group Interview 14 B), to comments about how very important people have a role beyond these basic needs:
W: … they also teach us about exploring, caring even more for others, not fighting with people, you know, just things like that, showing us …
L: They give you stories about when they were young and stuff.
Researcher: … what do you do with those stories, what do you think happens with those stories?
L: Keep em in the back of your mind, like that, give the most of the people, my Granddad he moved, he got a job when he was 13 and …

A: And so you remember those stories and then what do you do with them, do you think? What happens with those stories?

M: Maybe you start to relate to them.

The researcher went on to ask more directly of the boys:

Researcher: Is there any way that you can talk about how you think these people influence you? How, do they kind of change you in some way, these important people?

M: Yeah, they do the way they act, kind of rubs off on to you

L: Yeah, um …, if you don’t, if there’s a problem that they have, you can learn from their mistakes, kind of thing, you can go down a different road. ……

W: Try and make things safer for us.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the data gathered about the 16 participating boys and the 60 very important people named and described by them. It has also presented the initial consideration of the 16 individual interviews and the four group discussions used to gather the data to answer the first four research questions.

The next chapter will present further detailed consideration and analysis of the data gathered in the individual interviews and the group discussions. Chapter Six – Analysis – names and discusses the four essences identified in this research project.
CHAPTER SIX

6 ANALYSIS

6.1.1 Further analysis

This chapter takes the information and sections of transcripts presented in the previous chapter, and continues the process providing further analysis and deeper consideration of the phenomenon that is being considered in this research project.

Four essences are presented and discussed in detail and a summary of the findings of this research project is presented as the conclusion.

This chapter is a further analysis of the data collected and moves from the initial consideration in Chapter Five to the next phase – “reflecting on the essential themes that characterise the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1984). The previous chapter presented the descriptions given by the boys in the interviews and discussions. The words almost speak for themselves and the initial stage in any research that takes a phenomenological approach, such as this project, must be to present the data in the purest form possible so as to have as little influence from the researcher as possible. The deeper consideration and analysis presented in this chapter continues in this vane and looks more closely into the descriptions given by the boys and seeks to discern, by reading and rereading the transcripts, the true essences of the phenomenon under investigation (Bullington & Karlsson, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle, 1998; van Manen).

6.1.2 Identifying the essences

This chapter identifies four essences, also known as themes or common emergent phenomenological structures (Bullington & Karlsson, 1984), that have been recognised following the further consideration of the research data. The four essences are the product of rereading the full transcripts of the sixteen individual interviews and the four group interviews. The thematic categories or essences are:
1. fun / humour
2. caring / encouragement
3. learning / teaching
4. doing / being / becoming.

These essences relate to the first four research questions -

- Who do the boys name as the nonparental adults significant to them?
- What are the boys’ descriptions of the characteristics of these adults?
- What are the boys’ descriptions of their interactions with these adults?
- How do these adults influence the identity development of the boys?

6.2 Four Essences

This section will present the four essences identified in the research. These essences are the final part of the consideration of the gathered data and inform the reader of the fundamental nature of the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1984).

The determination of the four essences was the result of a process of consideration and reconsideration of the transcripts of the individual interviews and group discussions. The transcripts had already been considered in depth in regard to the answers to the first three research questions by utilising the highlighting approach discussed by van Manen (1984) and described in detail in Chapter Three. To understand further, the phenomenon under consideration, and to answer more adequately the fourth research question, “How do these adults influence the identity development of the boys?”, an additional and new process of considering the transcripts was used by the researcher to bring forth the essences within the words and descriptions offered by the boys. This process is now described in detail.

Initially the researcher returned to the tapes of the interviews and the discussions and listened intently whilst considering the transcripts. The intention was to listen for the themes or essences within the descriptions offered by the boys. Notes
were not taken at this stage but some sections of the transcripts were marked as possibly significant. Individual words or phrases were underlined as possibly representing a theme or essence. After listening to all 16 individual interviews and the four group discussions, the researcher returned to the transcripts and actual words and summarising terms were noted at the bottom of pages previously marked.

Lists were then drawn up of all the actual and summarising words for each individual interview and each group discussion. From these lists, the researcher identified common recurring actual words or phrases from the transcripts and repeating theme or essence terms. These words and terms were then summarised again into the four essences to be described below in detail.

6.2.1 Essence 1: Fun / Humour

The first theme or essence identified is “fun / humour”. Every boy involved in this research project, all eight 11 year olds and all eight 14 year olds, spoke of their enjoyment of being with at least one of the very important adults whom they identified or used humour in describing a very important person or interactions with them.

Fun, or the use of humour, was identified by the boys in a variety of ways. The 11 year old boys described their fun or humorous experiences with identified very important adults as: fun watching movies together and a sense of humour in his family (A2); “he’s a comedian” (A3); “she’s humorous if she wants to be” (A4); used humour in describing his young teacher as “probably say 70+ (years old)” (B1); many descriptions of various very important people as fun or doing really fun things (B2); describing his uncles as “funny as well” and how they “crack a joke” and how another VIP was “really funny” (B6); and how VIPs are “really funny” and how they laugh together (B8).

The 14 year old boys mentioned fun or the use of humour the same number of times as the 11 year olds although in a somewhat more sophisticated manner. Examples of this essence in the descriptions by the 14 year olds include: “funny” (A5); numerous mentions of fun including “she’s a lot of fun”, “you could have a laugh with her”, “a lot of fun to be around”, “they have a lot of fun”, “he’s funny …he jokes a lot”,

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“we have a good laugh when I come to my lesson”, Researcher – “What have you learnt?”- reply – “to have a lot of fun” (A6); “we make jokes and stuff like that”, “he’ll make jokes and he makes people happy all the time” (A7); “she is pretty funny”, “She’s always got a good joke to laugh about” (A8); descriptions of a VIP using jokes with the boy and others (B3); VIPs described as funny and describing how a VIP “likes to joke around a lot” (B4); “…and he’s just the funniest bloke you’ll ever meet”, “he’s happy and funny” and other descriptions of how VIPs are fun to be with (B7).

When asked was there anything he wanted to say to sum up the descriptions he gave of his very important people, one of the 14 year old boys concluded the interview, “They’re very important and it’d be different without all of them, it just wouldn’t be as good or as fun as it is now” (transcript, B5, p. 8).

It may have been expected that descriptions of younger VIPs (in the 18-20 or 20-30 age groups) would include fun and humour more so than descriptions of older important adults, but many of the boys who named grandparents described these elderly VIPs as very funny or fun to be with. One boy (A1, 11 years old) described his Grandad as “quite cheeky sometimes” and another 11 year old (B2) described his grandfather as really funny. Fun or the use of humour crossed the age groupings (described in the previous chapter) of very important people. The boys spoke of fun and humour amongst grandparents, about his brother (A2), friends of the family, teachers, sports’ coaches, a teacher/Chaplain (A6), an instrumental teacher, and a cousin (B5). Fun and humour are part of the descriptions given by the boys in all the identified groupings of very important people as discussed in Chapter Five – Data.

Fun and humour were most often related to the character of the very important people, rather than the interactions the boys had with the adults. Fun and humour were used to describe individual VIPs. This characteristic was sometimes the very first descriptor used by the boy, for example, “He is really funny. He is always cracking jokes” (B2, 11 year old, about his grandfather), “She is really kind of fun” (B2 about a teacher), “She’s a lot of fun” (A6, 14 year old, about a Teacher/Chaplain), “She’s pretty
funny” (A8, 14 year old, about a teacher), and “He makes me laugh” (B3, 14 year old, about an uncle).

One of the 11 year old boys (A2) was asked by the researcher whether he ever thought he was like his VIP (19 year old brother) and the boy agreed, “… yeah the way we are just kind of binds us together” (transcript, p. 8). This boy explained that he has a sense of humour just like his brother, a sense of humour that “runs in the family”. The discussion continued with the researcher asking:

…do you think that’s (being like the VIP) helped you realise stuff about yourself?

A2: Yeah, maybe a bit.

Researcher: What kind of things maybe?

A2: Um, who I am, like my personality.

He goes on to talk about how he and his brother have the same sense of humour and that this trait is part of their family. This boy makes a clear link between the VIP and his own personality through their mutual sense of humour.

There was a sense of mutuality within the fun in some of the relationships between the boys and their nominated very important people. This mutuality was directly named by one of the 11 year olds early in his individual interview. The researcher asked, “What do you think about yourself when you spend time with him (Grandad)?”, and the boy replied, “I think that I am making him happy, like playing with the dog and stuff”. This boy speaks of how he thinks that by doing things with, and for, his grandfather, he is making his grandfather happy. Immediately preceding this mutuality statement the boy expresses that he has a feeling of happiness when he spends time with his grandfather.

The boys often described VIPs as fun or how it was fun to be with them. This recurring theme, evident in every individual interview and each of the group discussions, other than the 14 year olds from School A, identifies a core description and value in the relationships between the boys and their very important people. The
fun in these interactions may have been what drew the boys to build a relationship with the very important person, or, once the relationship has developed, fun may be an important aspect in the continuation of the relationship and the significant interactions and influences that are evident. It is not clear from the available data whether fun and humour are a precursor to the adult becoming a very important person or whether fun and humour are integral parts of the ongoing interactions and relationship between the boy and his very important adults, other than his parents. It is most likely, that for early adolescents, fun and the use of humour are attractive and that fun and the use of jokes and humour are an enjoyable and integral part of ongoing and developing influential relationships.

6.2.2 Essence 2: Caring / Encouragement

The second essence identified through the reconsideration of the descriptions offered by the boys within the transcripts was “caring / encouragement”.

One of the 14 year old boys (B3) described his Auntie’s care for his family and her enjoyment of spending time with his family, “…she really likes to visit us because she really likes to spend time with us, she really benefits with the family … she is always there for us when we need her” (transcript, pp. 1&2). This boy described at length the relationship with his Auntie and how he and his family benefits from all her care and assistance for the family. There is a strong sense of mutuality here – many benefit from the interactions, care and love in these relationships.

In a number of the interviews the boys described how the very important adult was like a member of their family – a brother or a parent. There was a strong sense of caring within the descriptions of these relationships. One of the 14 year old boys (B5) explained that his VIP, an 18 year old cousin, has never had a father and that he feels sad in a way because the cousin has missed out on having a Dad. After describing how he and his father do lots of things with this cousin he states, “So that’s why my Dad and my cousin and I are really close together” (transcript, p. 4). This boy also stated that his
A cousin was definitely like a big brother. This is an example of family-like, caring relationships with very important nonparental adults.

A second example is the 11 year old boy (A3) who describes his Nanny (after-school and vacation care provider) as like a second mother. The Nanny has cared for this boy for most of his life and he states, “I say she would be like my second Mum” (transcript, p. 2). He describes how he goes away on camp and such events and really misses her, how this VIP has taught him to cook and how to take care of babies, and how he can talk to her about anything, like “if someone is really annoying at school” (transcript, p. 3). This is a relationship just like a caring parent/child relationship and was the most parent-like relationship amongst all sixty VIPs named by the boys involved in this study. The longevity of this relationship and the significant periods of time spent together, every day after school and on weekends, appear to have led to such a close and significant relationship.

One of the 14 year old boys (A7) named five teachers only as his very important nonparental adults. He referred to most of these teachers as friends and described the caring relationships he has with these teachers. When asked if he had deliberately chosen only teachers as his five VIPs he explained that he had chosen only teachers as he knew them well and interacted with them regularly. He spoke of how important it was to him to know the personality of his VIPs and how he knew these five teachers very well. He stated, “Sometimes I think that I am a good friend to him”, and, “He’s just like a friend to me” (transcript, p. 2). This boy wanted to name five teachers only as very important adults. He described a very positive schooling experience which was enhanced by the significant relationships he had with these teachers and the mutual care experienced in these relationships. All four essences were clearly evident in the descriptions offered by this boy of his five teacher VIPs.

A sense of encouragement is evident in many of the descriptions the boys relayed about their very important people as well as in the group discussions. As the boys described their interactions with their VIPs and as they spoke of the feelings they
had when they spent time with their VIPs, the boys spoke of how they felt encouraged by them and sometimes specifically named the encouragement they felt from these important adults.

One of the 11 year olds (A4) stated that his fencing instructor encourages him “to try and keep doing it” (transcript, p. 12). He also described how his instrumental teacher doesn’t actually encourage him by telling him, but simply by playing her instrument and inspiring him, “she’s playing a piece and it sounds really good, yeah, I try and keep going” (transcript, p. 11). Amongst the 14 year olds, two boys describe how they are encouraged by their VIP to be happy with who they are. “They’ve just said that I don’t have to change” (transcript, p. 5), are the words of the boy identified as A6 as he describes how a VIP couple are very accepting and encouraging towards him. The second boy (A8), when asked if he had learnt something about himself, replied, “…always be happy with who you are…” (transcript, p. 2). Another 14 year old, A7, describes how he feels encouraged by his teacher, “I feel good about myself, that’s all. ‘Cause I know how to do this because she taught me how to do it and she’ll help me if I have any trouble” (transcript, p. 12).

In the group interviews, the 11 year olds from School B spoke four times about how they are encouraged by their very important people.

They just teach you different stuff and um, encourage you to do better and give you tips and stuff … (they are) encouraging you … they encourage and motivate you … they give you encouragement and like, they tell you what’s right from wrong and tell you things that you could use later in your life, like being nice to people, like if you are going on the way up and if you go down, they’ll be nice to you. (transcript, 11 year olds Group School B, pp. 4,5,9 & 10).

6.2.3 Essence 3: Learning / Teaching

The third theme or essence identified is “learning / teaching”. Direct and open-ended questions, for example, “Do you reckon you have learnt some things from your Nan?” (to B6, 11 year old) and “Are there any other things that you think you have
learnt about yourself?” (to B2, 14 year old), were used during the individual interviews to allow the boys to consider and describe their learning from interactions with the very important people.

Particularly amongst the 11 year olds, the initial response to these inquiries was a more concrete answer, for example, “...he’s taught me all the moves” (B2, about his Tae Kwon Do Instructor). But even in this age group, the boys were very capable of describing learning that went far beyond the basic and literal, for example, “(She’s) taught me the fact that I can be happy in bad times” (A4, about his Grandma) and “I’ve learnt that nothing can stop you except yourself” (B6, about his grandfather).

Amongst the 11 year olds, all eight boys interviewed spoke directly about being taught something by a very important person or learning something from a VIP. The boy, identified as A1, described how he had learnt from his grandfather that he’s “sometimes selfish” and he went on later in the interview to describe how he had learnt “heaps of stuff” from his Grandma, “like self-control” (A1 transcript, pp. 4&7). A2 stated that he had learnt “different things about … just knowledge” (transcript, p. 2). Another boy (A3) said of his Nanny’s son, “He taught me other things, like, how to catch fish really good” and of his Nanny’s daughter, “She’s taught me how to play basketball … and how to rollerblade too” (A3 transcripts, pp. 4&6). Other 11 year olds were able to be a little more conceptual in their responses, for example, A4 described his grandma as teaching him, “what I can do, my other abilities” (transcript, p. 3) and B1 described how his Grandma teaches him many things and how his teacher teaches him everything. In his descriptions of his teacher, B8 says, “...she teaches me a lot of stuff and ... sort of gives me a little bit of confidence” (transcript, p. 5). The 11 year olds were not able to make the kind of abstract response to this inquiry about learning from their VIPs as were the 14 year olds described below.

The 14 year olds were asked the same type of open-ended question about possible learning from their VIPs. Although some responses from the 14 year olds were literal, for example, about his Pop (grandfather), A5 stated, “he teaches me a lot of
stuff, like how to use stuff, … and how to sharpen them (tools)”. This same boy went on to describe how this same grandfather had shown him how to live life to the fullest (transcript, pp. 2&5). Amongst the 14 year olds, responses to the enquiry about learning from VIPs ranged from the very factual, for example, A8 described how he has learnt to “always be good in class”, to the far more abstract. Another boy (A6) described how he has learnt “to treat people equally, with respect and that everyone has the right to be treated fairly” and “I’ve learnt to be more open to people” (transcript p. 2).

A8 stated, “I’ve learnt to always be happy with who you are” (transcript p. 2) and B3 explained that he has learnt “to care a lot about people” (transcript p. 2). When describing his time with his VIPs, B5 stated that as he spent more time with them, “the more you learn, the more you get to know” (transcript p. 4). He was describing that the best part of spending time with his very important people was learning different things whilst watching interactions between the VIPs and their friends and others.

The boys spent a considerable part of the individual interviews and the group discussions attempting to articulate what they had learnt from their very important people. There is a strong indication amongst the descriptions, given by the boys, of their learning from the nominated VIPs, and in their descriptions of the teaching that is taking place in these important relationships, that this is also an important essence in the phenomenon under consideration. Every boy described learning, and in their descriptions articulated how the VIPs were teaching them about relationships and life. For example, B3 speaks of his love and care for his Auntie and how she has taught him more about himself and others, and how to express his feelings more to people in his family and beyond (transcript, p. 2).

This teaching and learning essence is manifested in the boys’ relationships with the very important adults they named and described. Teaching and learning are often embedded in interactions and the boys sometimes had trouble articulating the actual
learning, as the learning is such an integral part of the everyday nature of the relationships they described.

One of the 11 year old boys (A1) described his first VIP, his Grandad, as "strong, he's very strong" and went on to describe him as a "role model" (transcript, p. 2). He also described learning from his Grandad, “things like helping people” and when asked how he had learnt these kinds of things he replied, “…just by watching what he does" (transcript, p. 3). The learning is not necessarily directly taught. In these relationships with very important adults, most of the boys described learning that happened naturally and implicitly. This same boy (A1) goes on to describe further learning from his Grandad:

Researcher: And you reckon you've learnt something about yourself from him, by spending time with him?
A3: Yeah
Researcher: What kind of things?
A3: I'm sometimes selfish. ...
Researcher: What made you think of that?
A3: Ummm
Researcher: Has he talked about that?
A3: No
Researcher: Just being with him makes you think of that?
A3: Yeah
Researcher: Oh, ok. So that might make you less selfish, just because you know him, do you think that’s true?
A3: Yeah, I do.

When asked at the conclusion of the interview if there was anything else he wanted to say about his two very important people, A5 (14 Year old) replied:

A5: Both of them have taught me what I want to be in life, like, what I've got to do to be the best that I can, sort of thing, but in different ways.
Researcher: Yeah, and what makes them important?
A5: Yeah, … like setting guidelines sort of …
Researcher: Yeah, … and what’s the main way they do that?
A5: Well with Pop it’s teaching me about the outside world and what’s going on around the place and with J it’s teaching me to be calm and, … keep going with your golf and that kind of stuff.

The boys involved in this research project described how they were taught by these significant adults and how they had learnt from their nominated very important people. The transcripts of the individual interviews and the group discussions clearly show how there is a strong essence of teaching and learning amongst these early adolescent boys and their very important nonparental adults.

6.2.4 Essence 4: Doing / Being / Becoming

The fourth essence that has been identified is “doing / being / becoming”. This essence proved to be foundational in the interviews and discussions with the boys. It involves three sections:

1. “doing” activities together or being active together;
2. “being” together in activities, but also simply being together sometimes without action or activity or even conversation, and further developing a sense of our being; and
3. "becoming" – a sense of the present and the future within the times together and as an ongoing part of the relationship.

These sections are somewhat developmental in the sense that each builds upon the previous section. Spending time and doing things together may lead on to being together in the broader sense of the term and gaining a greater understanding of our own sense of being. Being together may then lead on to gaining a deeper understanding of whom we are becoming as a result of the doing and being. These three sections of this essence will be discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.
One of the 11 year old boys (A4) exemplifies the doing part of this essence. He describes times doing things with his grandfather, “Well, he enjoys doing lots of things. He spends time with my Dad and me, and we sometimes go to dinner at his place. We go fishing together on holidays” (transcript, p. 4). Another 11 year old (B1) describes his times with his grandmother and says they “go see movies and do all different things” (transcript, p. 1). The 14 year olds similarly described times together and how important these times were to them. One 14 year old (B3) says of his Auntie, “Basically she always gives up her time, even things she really wants to do, she gives up her time to come down and see us” (transcript, p. 3). Another 14 year old (B7) describes time spent doing things with a friend of the family, “He’s really easy to talk to. He’s got good knowledge about things that I’m interested in, most electrical things … well he builds, he knows a lot about home theatre and he like, he helped me build a box for some speakers that I got …” (transcript, p. 3).

**Doing things together.**

The initial part of this essence is the actual action of “doing” things together. It appears, from many of the descriptions, that being active in this time of doing was important. The boys often describe times together where they and their very important people are engaged in some form of pastime or activity. There were also descriptions from boys, in both age groups, that emphasised doing together in a less-active manner such as sitting with a grandparent, sometimes talking and sometimes not necessarily even speaking very much (e.g., A2, 11 year old; B6, 11 year old; A6 14 year old).

All the boys described times spent with their VIP except in the one instance where an 11 year old boy (B8) named the only unknown VIP – Tiger Woods, the golfer. This boy described being with Woods in a very different way. He talked about spending time together by viewing Woods play golf on the television. They had spent time together but not in a face-to-face way as did all the other boys with all the other nominated very important adults. This boy’s descriptions and interactions with Woods are more fully discussed in a later section of this chapter. In the descriptions of all the
other 59 known VIPs, the boys described how they enjoyed times spent with their very important adults.

**Being together.**

The “being” part of this essence is expressed by the boys in a less tangible way, as doing is easy to describe but being is more difficult to quantify. The beginnings of this essence are in simply describing being together but the being part of this essence involves more than simple activity together. The being descriptions move beyond the idea of doing things such as building speakers for a sound system, to a sense of being together that involves interactions at a more personal level. Being together is about sharing experiences and the sharing of ourselves within the interaction. A number of the boys described how they just liked being with their very important adult. They simply spent time together, with the importance not on what was done, or even on what was said between the boy and his VIP, but the importance was in the being together. Relationship and trust appear to be part the ‘being’ that takes this essence from the doing part of the essence to the deeper part that opens up into being together.

One of the 11 year olds (A3) says of time with a grandparent, “...we talk and see where the conversation goes”. Here are the beginnings of a sense of being between this boy and his VIP. Being together may not necessarily mean spending time directly in each other’s company, as another 11 year old (B6) describes, “…she might have a sleep and I’ll just stay there and watch a bit of TV” (transcript, p. 2). A 14 year old (A8), when asked if he could describe some feelings he had when he spent time with a teacher he had nominated as a very important adult replied, “Umm, always happy. I like being with him because he’s kind. … Sometimes I feel relieved when I’ve asked him something that’s been on my mind” (transcript, p. 1). Another 14 year old (B5) describes interacting with his VIP who is like a big brother, “I hear a lot of his opinions about things and, ... umm ... so we can agree or disagree sometimes but mainly its probably agree cause we sort of think the same in a way” (transcript, p. 5).
The transcripts of the interviews and group discussions with the boys show that being with their very important adults is more than simply doing things together. The boys, through their descriptions, are allowing others into the real experience of this phenomenon. They describe how they like the same type of things as their VIPs, how it is easy to be with them and talk with them, how the VIP helps them feel good about themselves, and for one 14 year old (A6) how the VIP allows him to feel that he doesn’t have to change anything about himself. These descriptions show some more of the essence of these relationships, making clearer the foundations of this phenomenon and giving us the opportunity to enter a little further into the world of this experience of early adolescent boys.

**Becoming.**

The third section of this essence, “becoming” builds on the previous two sections – doing and being. Becoming is a natural extension of being as it is the present along with a projection of the present into the future. Being and becoming may develop to be inextricably entwined, as what we are in the present is instantly moving to be part of what we are becoming in the future. These concepts are identified in this third essence – “doing / being / becoming”.

Becoming is found in the words and descriptions of some of the boys. One of the 11 year olds (A1), early in his interview, identifies that a VIP is like a role model to him. In this description the boy may be making a becoming type of statement because to identify the very important adult as a “role model sort of thing” (transcript, p. 2) is intimating that in some way the boy is saying he would like to emulate this adult. The adult is a role model and the boy wants to make some of his future self somewhat like the adult he has identified. Another 11 year old (A2) describes how looking up to his VIP brother helps him realise things about himself, about his personality (transcript, p. 8). A future perspective is identified in the words of A3 (11 year old), when he says what he can talk to his VIP about, “…what things I would be doing in the future” (transcript, p. 3). This is also an example of the becoming part of this essence.
Amongst the 14 year olds there is a number of examples of how the third section of this essence is evident. An example of becoming occurs when the boy identified as A5 describes his two VIPs, “Both of them have taught me what I want to be in life, like, what I’ve got to do to be the best that I can, sort of thing, but in different ways” (transcript, p. 9). Another example is in the self-awareness as described by B7, who says, a result of his relationship with a VIP, “I know that I am capable and that I can do most things, she’s definitely helped me with that”, and goes on soon after to add, “I believe in myself” (transcript, pp. 2&4).

These examples take the present and in some form project it into the future. They show that being may move into becoming in the way that the boys’ views of themselves are sometimes projected into their future selves. The boys describe how they see themselves as a result of their interactions with their very important people and sometimes project their views of themselves into their future. This is a tentative movement and is not linear or predictable. Not all the boys’ descriptions include evidence of this third section (becoming) of the third essence – doing / being / becoming.

A number of the boys named how they were like one of their very important people.

The identified similarity with a VIP may be part of the nature of this essence, where the boys are identifying parts of the character of the VIP that they like and see in themselves and in the significant other. They may be identifying mutual aspects of character that they want to retain as they grow older.

Some of the boys described how they have similar characteristics to one of their VIPs. For example, one of the 11 year olds (A2) said of his brother, “Well we kind of like the same things, we all (his family) have the same humour. So I probably got it from him” (transcript, p. 8). One of the 14 year olds (B4), when describing his cousin’s boyfriend, said that this VIP was similar to him at the same age. The cousin’s boyfriend had shared stories of his early adolescence. B4 stated, “He’s got pretty good stories
from when he was my age” (transcript, p. 2). Another of the 14 year olds (B5) described a cousin in the 18-20 age bracket. He said, “He’s into the things that I’m into, and stuff like that” and “… we sort of think the same in a way” (transcript, pp. 1&5).

In each of these examples, where the boys have identified similarities with their VIP, the very important person was in the lower age groupings and therefore much closer in age to the boys. This may indicate that the boys have identified closely with these VIPs because they have similar personalities to the boys. It may also indicate that the boys identify with younger VIPs on the grounds of similar likes and personality traits.

A significant part of the nature of this third section, becoming, is the influence that the very important adults have on the boys. Every 14 year old boy and the majority of the 11 year olds involved in this study spoke, in the individual interviews, of the influence of their very important adults. In all the group discussions, except one of the 11 year old groups, the boys spoke directly of the influence of very important adults.

Speaking of his Grandmother, one 11 year old boy (A4) spoke of her influence on him in his schooling (transcript, p. 3) and of how his Grandfather teaching him new skills, has been a very good influence (transcript, p.6). Another 11 year old (A3) described how his Nanny (care provider) had helped him to learn to be a bit nicer to other children (transcript, p. 3). “She’s like a really nice influence and she helps a lot”, said B1 of his Grandmother and the same boy said of his friend of the family VIP, “he kinda influences me and teaches me things” (transcript, p. 2&4). Another of the 11 year olds (B8) said that his VIP told him the old saying, “The early bird catches the worm”. This boy stated, “…he keeps saying that to me like every week, and it’s got in to my head and like I’ve started bringing it (school assignments) in early” (transcript, p. 2).

When asked how he may have learnt things from one of his VIPs, A6 (14 year old) spoke of the influence of the Teacher/Chaplain being in the way the teacher acted. He went on to describe how this teacher had taught him to treat people equally and with respect and how everyone has the right to be treated fairly (transcript, p.2). “I’m
looking for more adventures” (transcript, p. 5), stated another 14 year old, B3, after describing how his Uncle influences him.

Influence, from the very important adults upon the boys in this study, is evident in the words and general descriptions given by the boys. The influence is in more than skill teaching or the passing on of knowledge from one generation to another. The influence evident here is in the attitudes and thinking of the boys. The influence is upon the boys’ characters in the present and in their future. There is evidence, in the transcripts, of an acceptance in some boys of who they are, a strong indication of unconditional love, especially from the grandparents named as very important adults to the boys. The influence is also in the form of a satisfaction in some boys at being able to express their feelings more effectively with others or in having a strengthened belief in themselves.

This influence is in the naming by one boy (A1, 11 year old) of a VIP as “a role model” and of a number of boys saying how they look up to their very important adults. The very important adults are described by the boys as influencing their future and the boys spoke of how they want this influence to continue as they get older. One of the 14 year olds stated that his list of VIPs might change only a little when he was 18 years old, “I’d still have the same people I have on now, a couple more might add on to the list” (transcript, Discussion Group 14A, p. 6). The influence should go on as the boys grow older and mature into young men.

The fourth essence, doing / being / becoming, is the most complex of the essences and involves a wide variety of descriptions and attempted descriptions by the boys involved in this study. Many examples of this essence are to be found in the transcriptions of all 16 individual interviews and the group discussions with the boys.

6.3 Summary

This chapter provided further analysis and deeper consideration of the phenomenon being considered in this research project – the relationships between
early adolescent boys and the very important nonparental adults named and described
by them.

Four essences were identified and described in detail: fun/humour; caring/encouragement; learning/teaching; and doing/being/becoming.

The next chapter discusses the essences and findings of this research project in the light of the literature explored in Chapter Two, and concludes with a discussion of implications.
CHAPTER SEVEN

7 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Moving beyond the extensive data presented in Chapter Five and the analysis offered in Chapter Six, this final chapter returns to the research questions and discusses the findings of this project in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This chapter also includes consideration of implications, a discussion of possible future research, and an epilogue.

The five research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Who do the boys name as the nonparental adults significant to them?
2. What are the boys’ descriptions of the characteristics of these adults?
3. What are the boys’ descriptions of their interactions with these adults?
4. How do these adults influence the identity development of the boys?
5. What implications are there for those interacting with adolescent boys in educational or other settings?

The answers to the research questions will help inform those who work with adolescent boys and will add to knowledge about ways in which nonparental adults help to promote assets in young adolescents’ lives and reduce their risks of negative outcomes (Scales & Gibbons, 1996).

Further examination of the four identified essences in the descriptions given by the boys: fun/humour; caring/encouragement; learning/teaching; and doing/being/becoming; is incorporated into the discussion. Each of the four essences informs our understanding of the fundamental nature of the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1984) and assists in capturing what the experience of the phenomenon is like for the participants (Welch, 2001).
7.1 Very important nonparental adults

The 16 boys involved in this study named 60 very important people, with no limit being put on the number of people that each boy could choose to name. Research indicates that nonparental adults play an important role in the lives of adolescents (Darling, Hamilton, & Hames Shaver, 2003; Lemer & Steinberg, 2004; Sartor & Youniss, 2002) and the number of named very important, nonparental adults in this study reinforces this indication. The boys in this study wanted to tell the researcher about their important people and they were very open in describing their interactions and relationships with these very important adults.

Almost every reader of this thesis will have memories of their adolescence and the presence of significant adults, outside of the family, who offered various types of support and encouragement. This support most likely included guidance, challenges and some pointing to a way forward into adulthood. Hendry, Roberts, Glendinning, and Coleman (1992) state that these important people may have been teachers, sports’ coaches, friends of the family, neighbours, youth workers or even older siblings, but what was important about these people was that they were not parents and that they offered “something of themselves that was very special to us at the time” (Hendry et al., 1992, p. 267). The special nature of the relationships described by the boys in this study reinforces the above statement by Hendry et al.

The nature of these significant relationships is unclear. We know relatively little about this complex area of adolescent development and how adults outside the family touch the lives of adolescents in important ways. Darling, Hamilton and Hames Shaver (2003) refer to these nonrelated adults as “the neglected other” (p. 350), individuals who do play a role in the lives of adolescents but a phenomenon about which we know very little. The boys in this study have shed some light on who the “neglected others” are in their lives, how they perceive them, and the times they spend together.

The importance of parents to early adolescent boys was not explored as a part of this study and has been discussed as a limitation of this research in Chapter Four.
Numerous studies have been conducted that investigated the significance of support from parents, friends and extended family members (Claes et al., 2001; Laursen, 1998; Sartor & Younis, 2002; Updegraff et al., 2002). Boys and girls equally state the importance of nonparental adults in their lives (Claes et al., 2001; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004; Scales & Gibbons, 1996). In this study many boys volunteered to participate, all of them willing to talk about the adults, other than their parents, who were very important to them.

Sartor and Younis (2002) suggest that, for boys, the identity crisis of adolescence is resolved through separating from others and establishing autonomy. Pollack (1998) describes a notion of the adolescent boy as a stoic loner who thrives on solitude. Contrary to the suggestion of Sartor and Younis along with Pollack’s notion, and the findings of Montemayor and Van Komen (1980), who state their work demonstrates decreasing adolescent-adult interactions through adolescence, this research project appears to show that some early adolescent boys value the roles of a variety of nonparental adults in their lives and that these adults do play a part in the boys’ identity development. The findings of this research project, that some early adolescent boys do name a number of nonparental adults that are very important to them, is backed by the work of Blyth, Hill, & Theil (1982) and Bo (1989) who found that adolescents list many significant adults in their lives, see these adult-adolescent relationships as important, and indicate regard for and need of adults in their lives.

In the current research, the participating boys named grandparents more than any other very important, nonparental adults. A variety of social changes experienced in western societies in the 20th century including the feminist movement, advances in medical and communication technologies, changes in work arrangements and hours, changes to traditional family structures, modern divorce laws, increases in drug and alcohol abuse and in child abuse and neglect (ACOSS, 2000; Backhouse & Lucas, 2004; Reynolds, Wright, & Beale, 2003) may have led to grandparents being more involved in the lives of their grandchildren. The significant number of grandparents
named by the boys in this study, and the relationships the boys have with these
grandparents, affirms the findings by Edgar (2000) and Goodfellow (2003) that
contemporary grandparents are a significant source of help to their families and that
they often take on the child care role in place of working mothers. Mitigating
circumstances that may lead to disengagement of grandparents from their
grandchildren, as discussed by Lin, Harwood, and Bonnesen (2002) and Tomlin (1998)
appear not to have dampened the relationships described by the boys in this study.

The boys in this study named both grandmothers (12) and grandfathers (6) as
very important adults in their lives. That there were twice as many grandmothers than
grandfathers named by the boys in this study, may be primarily due to the longer lives
of grandmothers and their availability and styles of relating to children (Kennedy,
(1992). Gender differences have been noted in the relationships between grandparents
and their grandchildren (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Kennedy found grandsons are
more likely than granddaughters to identify a grandfather "as their most close
grandparent" (p.96).

Teachers were the second largest group of very important, nonparental adults
named by the boys in this study. Both Galbo (1989, p. 5) and Hendry et al. (1992)
respectively state that, “teachers are seldom found to be significant for a large portion
of adolescents” and that teachers do not play a supportive role in the lives of their
adolescent students. Other research reports limited influence of school-based
personnel on children and adolescents (Schonert-Reichl & Offer, 1992). These studies
found that teachers are not influential and do not play a supportive role in the lives of
adolescents. However the findings of the current research project suggest that
teachers are very important people in the lives of some early adolescent boys. The
older group of boys, the 14 year olds, did name more teachers (9) than the 11 year
olds (5). These figures do not match the finding of Schonert-Reichl & Offer that as
students aged they were less likely to turn to consider teachers or coaches when
seeking advice.
The 16 participants in this study all lived with both parents. However, a two parent family structure is not what would be expected in a random sample of contemporary Australian families. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2003) figures for family make-up show that 70% of families are two parent families. The presence of involved and supportive parents, particularly both parents, has been considered as a possible influence upon boys in whether they will seek nonparental significant others in their early adolescence (Frey & Rothlisberger, 1996; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). It does not appear that in this study, involving early adolescent boys, that their two-parent family circumstances have deterred the boys from being able to name very important nonparental adults in their lives.

One “Unknown” very important adult.

In this research project, one boy only named a very important adult who was unknown to him. With only 1 unknown VIP being named out of the total of 60 very important adults, the claim by Anderson and Cavallaro (2002) that the influence of sports’ heroes and pop stars could be significant on the identity development of adolescents, particularly in our western culture, appears to be contradicted. In this one instance, the boy in question did speak of the influence that Tiger Woods had on him and how he wanted to be like the golfing star. It is important to note that this one example of an unknown very important adult was in stark contrast to the other 59 named VIPs, all of whom were very well known to the participating boys.

This finding, on the naming of one unknown VIP only amongst all the boys in this study, is quite different to the findings of studies such as Balswick and Ingoldsby (1982) and Bromnick and Swallow (1999) where there were relatively high numbers of unknown heroes named by the male participants. This may have been due to the studies’ focus on heroes with the nature of this term leaning towards unknown people rather than those known to the participants. A study by Anderson and Cavallaro (2002) records, for white respondents, 60% known very important people and 40% very important people unknown to the respondents. One boy out of the 16 in this study
naming 1 unknown VIP out of 60 very important nonparental adults certainly shows that the vast majority of important adults were well known, and in most cases, readily available to the boys.

7.2 Characteristics of very important adults

7.2.1 Fun and humour

Many of the boys described their nominated very important adults as fun. It is clear that the characteristic, and the experience of fun and humour between the boys and their nominated very important people, was fundamental to the relationships. As stated in the previous chapter it is not clear from the data gathered in this project whether fun and humour are an aspect of the character of the important adult that attracts the boy to this person in the beginnings of the relationship, or whether fun and humour are primarily a part of the ongoing relationship.

It is possible that this essence is a part of what begins, as well as reinforces, these significant relationships. Only limited research in fields related to fun and humour in relationships between adolescents and significant adults is available for consideration. Cotterell (1996) describes a need of a kind of valid genuineness for a relationship to become significant, and Gottlieb and Sylvestre (1994) suggest that relationships between adolescents and adults must be marked by informality and spontaneity. No research was found to indicate that fun and humour were fundamental to relationships between adolescents and significant nonparental adults. Every boy in this study talked of fun and humour in describing their very important people or their interactions with these people. It is clear that these boys valued this characteristic in their VIPs and in their interactions with them.

In the descriptions offered by the participating boys, youthfulness in the very important adult was not a prerequisite for fun and humour to be evident. This may have been expected, as being closer in age may have been perceived as what could attract and maintain these significant relationships. In this study there was negligible
difference in the descriptions of fun and the use of humour across the age range (18 to 70+) of the very important nonparental adults named and described by the boys.

As the most named group of very important people in this research project, it is essential to consider the use of humour by grandparents with their early adolescent grandsons. Fun and the use of humour are a part of the relationship between the grandparent and the boy. The evidence of this is described in Chapters 5 and 6, with the significance of fun and humour being described in length in the explanation of this essence. Using humour without the basis of a relationship will, in most instances, not be appropriate and will not achieve the desired outcomes of bonding, building, and reinforcing the relationship.

Within their unique relationship, characterised by unconditional love and in some instances significant amounts of quality time together, grandparents and their grandsons are able to build strong and lasting relationships. These relationships have several facets and, in many cases, include a very natural and “uncluttered” sense of fun and use of humour. It is uncluttered in the sense that there is not the bantering or checking out of the connection that needs to occur in less defined and less developed relationships. Because, in most cases, the relationship with the grandparent has been a life-long one for the boy, there is a strength and depth that allows for a unique form of fun and humour to be evident and mutually experienced. In these instances the humour is subtle and different for each relationship. For example, in two of the 11 year olds’ descriptions of grandparents, there is an indication from the boys that their grandparents are seen as old but act as if young and described as really funny and always cracking jokes. Some of the boys go on to describe how their chosen grandparents take on almost child-like qualities and how this leads to fun and humorous interactions. There is a strong sense of security and safety in these relationships, as evidenced in a boy’s description of how he feels relaxed because there is someone joking with him and he believes that nothing bad is going to happen.
Between the boys and their very important adults, the use of humour was one of the mutual experiences. The boys described it in a natural and unaffected way, as a part of their descriptions of, and interactions with, their very important adults.

7.2.2 Caring and encouragement

The boys in this study valued the time that their very important adults made available to them. They described the giving of this time as “caring”. They described a direct connection between time spent and perceived level of care, particularly in relation to familial nonparental adults they considered as very important to them. The care offered to the boys was described as “like in a family” or that the VIP was like a family member. The care touched the boys and the encouragement, offered in direct and indirect ways, built and reinforced the significant relationships described by the boys.

There were not noticeable differences in the descriptions given by the boys of their grandparents, whether they were grandfathers or grandmothers. This finding is contrary to that of Kennedy (1992) who found that grandchildren who name a grandmother as most close grandparent “felt better understood by and felt they understood their grandparent better than did students whose most close grandparent was their grandfather” (p. 86). Kennedy suggests key elements in quality grandparent-grandchild relationships include: reciprocal feelings of closeness; mutual knowing and understanding; the grandparent exercised positive influence on the grandchild; and the grandchild views the relationship as authentic and independent. In this study there was evidence in the boys’ descriptions of their grandparents of these key elements, particularly reciprocal feelings of closeness where one 11 year old described how he felt close to his grandfather even when they didn’t speak much and that he was sure his grandfather enjoyed being with him and felt close to him. A number of boys also described how they felt their grandparent positively influenced them in aspects of their lives.
As mentioned in a preceding section, research suggests that teachers are not considered as significant by most adolescents (Galbo, 1989) and that teachers do not play a supportive role in the lives of their adolescent students (Hendry et al., 1992). The boys in this study did speak quite specifically of the support and encouragement they received from teachers which is contrary to the research, particularly that of Hendry et al. Some research (Quinton & Rutter, 1988) has found that nonparental adults do provide important support and encouragement but his study involved adolescent girls raised in alternate care, away from their parents, and would have few similarities with the research.

The findings of this study, in relation to sports’ coaches, support other research in the area that found the relationships between early adolescent boys and their sports’ coaches were usually “temporary, instrumental and specific” (Beam et al., 2002, p. 308). The sports’ coaches named by the boys in this study were most often known to the boys for relatively short periods of time, between six months and a few years, where most other VIPs named had been known to the boys for longer periods, especially grandparents and other relatives. The interactions, described by the boys, were functional in nature and usually specific to the sport and related to skill development. Encouragement was described by the boys as an attribute offered by the coaches but again it was usually sport specific. There were a few exceptions where the coach deliberately took an interest in the wider life of the boy and asked, for example, how school was going.

7.3 Interactions with very important people

This research project has shown that the negative perceptions of adolescents (Mackay, 1997), particularly of adolescent boys (Kraack & Kenway, 2002), regularly portrayed in the mass media and in popular culture (Bagnell, 2002), are contrary to the realities described by the boys involved in the interviews and discussions of this study. The boys described positive, enjoyable, affirming and important relationships and
interactions with a wide variety of nonparental adults who crossed a broad range of ages and roles.

Some of the boys in this study described their very important adults as “caring”, and described how, in their interactions with the boys, in a variety of ways, the adults were encouraging. Hirsch, Mickus and Boerger (2002) discuss the support and influence provided by relatives and nonrelated adults to adolescents. The boys’ descriptions of care took various forms, including very practical help and assistance or simply enquiring how things were going for the boy. The boys felt encouraged in their interactions with their very important people.

The boys in this study gave similar descriptions of their interactions with grandparents, whether they regularly spent time with their grandparents, or saw them only a couple of times a year. This finding matches that of Blyth, Hill and Thiel (1982) who “recognize that frequency of contact does not necessarily relate to the level of salience or the quality of the interaction” (p. 448).

7.3.1 Teaching and learning

In the interactions of early adolescent boys and their very important nonparental adults, a balance needs to be considered and maintained, between the relationship and the teaching and learning that occurs. These important relationships do not exist primarily as a teaching opportunity for the older generation to impart knowledge, skills or wisdom upon the younger generation. As a natural and sometimes incidental part of these significant relationships, teaching and learning occurs, but as described in previous chapters, this is not the core purpose of these relationships, nor is it necessarily a planned or intended outcome of the interactions. The need for a balance of intention and naturalness or spontaneity, is reinforced by the boys involved in this research project. For example, one of the 11 year olds sees a friend of the family he calls “Uncle”, as friendly, someone he can confide in and someone he can trust. He describes how he feels a sense of peace when he is with him. The boy explained how he believes that he talks a lot more with people because of his uncle’s influence.
A number of the boys described how their interactions with the very important adults involved the adults teaching them new skills and interesting things as well as learning things from the adults. The first of five functional roles that adults play for young people is “teacher-model” (p. 373), as detailed in a conceptual framework described by Foster Clark (in Scales & Gibbons [personal correspondence], 1996). This role goes far beyond a simplistic teacher/student interaction. Within the relationships described in this study, the teaching and learning falls within many of the other functional roles described by Foster-Clark including guide-supporter, challenger and controller-antagonist. The notion of teaching and learning went far beyond the basic and possibly expected notion of the identified adults teaching the early adolescent boys and the boys learning as a part of these relationships. Teaching and learning did take the form of the older, and possibly wiser, adult, teaching the adolescent boy a skill such as fishing or cooking, but it also went much further, and included teaching and learning in the broadest possible sense.

Boys in this research project spoke of how their VIP had shown them how to live life to the fullest or how to always be happy with who you are. These and other similar examples of descriptions from the boys indicate the significant depth of teaching and learning that is taking place in these relationships between early adolescent boys and their self-nominated very important adults. A similar understanding of the depth of teaching and learning in these types of relationships has been identified in previous studies including Hendry et al. (1992) who identified possible roles of significant persons into 10 categories including teacher, enabler, role model, challenger and antagonist, and Cotterell (1996) who also identified enabler and teacher as important mentoring functions.

The boys openly described the types of events in which teaching and learning in the broadest and deepest sense take place. They discussed them easily and naturally, indicating that these experiences are normal and comfortable parts of the
relationship. The existential matters of life are sometimes being taught and learnt in these relationships.

The teaching and learning is not necessarily overt in nature or necessarily planned by the adult or the boy. One of the 11 year olds spoke of how he learnt from his grandfather, explaining that he learnt things just by watching what his grandfather does. This naturalness in the teaching and learning interactions between the boys and their VIPs is a very important part of the relationships and the flow-on influences that are occurring through these interactions. In contrast, Cotterell (1996) reports that sports’ coaches formally planned their encouraging and teaching roles.

7.3.2 Doing, Being

It was easiest to identify the “doing” component of this essence as the boys were asked to describe times they spent with their chosen significant adults and activities they did with them. But, even in these simple recollections, there was evidence of the interactions being more important and noteworthy than basic times spent together. The boys, in their words and descriptions, intimated that these interactions meant more than just time together, doing things. A significant number of these interactions move beyond a simple interaction to a place where the times together intersect with the identities of those interacting. This is where the interactions, the relationships, intersect with identity development. Without realising it, the boys are exploring who they are through the interactions they are having with these significant others.

The boys involved in the interactions, and the significant adults they are describing, are both influenced by the experience of the interactions. The sense of who they are and who they will become is touched by words spoken and messages unspoken. This is the movement of the interaction from “doing” together to “being” together. This enhancement of the interaction does not always happen nor is it evident in every period of time spent together. The boy and the adult may simply work side by side on a project chosen by one of them or by both. If the interaction and the
communication is centred on the project, then an experience of being together may not occur. Being, in the sense described in the previous chapter, extends the experience to a more personal level. There is an enhancement of the interaction where individually, and sometimes in tandem, the participants develop their trust and relationship.

It is in the individual experience of “being”, and in the being together, that identity development may occur. When the individual boy is experiencing being as an intrinsic occurrence he is reflecting on, and comparing, who he was and who he is in this instance. It is as if there is a mirror before him and he can see himself in the past and see himself in the present, and compare these and see the differences. There is an interaction between who he was and who he is now. Although the boys did not directly describe this experience in the interviews and group discussions, they were able to describe how, when they were being together with their VIPs, they felt good about themselves, with one of the 14 year olds going further to describe how he felt as if he didn’t have to change anything about himself. This boy felt very secure about who he was in that relationship and at that time.

7.4 Influence on identity development

Doing, being and becoming permeated through most individual interviews and was evident in the group discussions, particularly amongst the 14 year olds. This is the most complex and probably the most significant essence of the four identified in this research project. The notion of becoming has been used by Wachtel (2001) who describes “the language of becoming” (p. 369) and how this way of speaking to children enables them to see themselves as continually evolving and changing. In this study the term is used with a future orientation and as an extension of the earlier aspects of this essence – doing and being.

It may be perceived as a rather mysterious process (Tacey, 1999), but most adults, and especially parents and those working with adolescent boys and young men, know that boys move from being in a state of boyhood, to a stage of development or a state, called manhood (Frosh et al., 2002). This transition appears to take quite some
time and it is not an easy thing for young people to experience as it primarily involves
the task of forming a unique identity (Kroger, 1996, 2000). Physical changes occur at
puberty, but far more than physical change occurs. Boys take whatever steps it takes
and they change, over time, from one state to another. The same person starts, moves
through, and finishes the process, but the physical, social, emotional, intellectual and
spiritual selves undergo a process that, in one sense, produces a new person, ever
changing and ever growing and developing.

7.4.1 Becoming

The process of forming and shaping a new identity, the process of becoming
undergoes an explosion of activity and challenges in early adolescence. The
development of a unique identity has been progressing since early childhood, but the
intensity of the process exponentially increases during adolescence with the
beginnings in early adolescence (Allison & Schultz, 2001; J. Marcia, 1980). This is the
time when “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986), negative and positive, are being
considered. These representations of the self are shaped from identity work in the past
and identity work that considers the possibilities for the future. The boys in this study
are wondering who they are and who they may become in their future. This wondering
occurred amongst the interactions with their VIPs and happened in very inexplicable
ways.

Early adolescent boys and young men are searching for what it means to be
male (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001) and, compared even to the previous
generation, they have very different questions to answer and different pathways from
which to choose in their journeys through adolescence into adulthood (Kraack &
Kenway, 2002; Kroger, 2000). It is clear that in this study, the boys were considering
their becoming.

The boys describe the significance of these people in their lives. One of the 14
year old boys described how each of his chosen very important people had an impact
on his personality. Another 14 year old explained that he had chosen his five very
important adults because he had extensive communication and contact with them and that the adults’ personalities were very important. These two boys were expressing, in their own words and in their own ways, the importance of their VIPs, as did the other boys involved in this research.

Just as parents are still significant influencers in the lives of early adolescent boys (Sartor & Younnis, 2002) and peers are very important to the boys (Updegraff et al., 2002), nonparental adults are also significant in the identity development of boys in their early adolescence (Beam et al., 2002; Darling, Hamilton, & Hames Shaver, 2003; Lerner & Steinberg, 2004; Sartor & Younnis).

In the security that is sometimes felt within these significant relationships it is possible, and not uncommon, for the boy involved to glimpse, or see more clearly, his future self. This is the movement within this essence from being into becoming.

Possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) are perceived and considered by early adolescent boys. Within interactions with their very important adults, the boys are experiencing, and sometimes searching for, who they may possibly be in their near and distant future. The descriptions given by the boys who participated in this study showed that when interactions moved beyond doing and being, there was a sense of becoming.

Becoming is a natural extension of being, with the two sometimes inextricably entwined. Who we are in the present, is immediately moving to be part of who we are becoming in the future. Of course, early adolescent boys are not naturally thinking in this existential manner as they go to school, play sport or musical instruments, or spend time with friends. This essence became more evident in the group discussions than in the individual descriptions given by the participating boys. When considering, in the groups, the relationships they had previously described in the individual interviews, the boys were, in a sense, one step removed from the interactions and relationships. From this stance, one that was similarly taken by the researcher conducting and reporting this study, there was an indication that in the most significant moments of the
most significant relationships, there was a real sense of the future – “Who am I becoming? Who will I be?”.

7.5 Interactions with adolescent boys in educational and other settings

The 16 boys involved in this research project have given, through their descriptions of their very important nonparental adults and their interactions with these significant people, an insight into a small part of their real world and real life experiences. This glimpse can then give us some hints into the real world of early adolescent boys in current Australian society, for these 16 boys are modern-day, early adolescent, Australian boys, in their place and their time.

The pervading popular views of adolescent boys are that the boys are moving away from adult influence, that they gather in groups, and in those groups they may get themselves into trouble (Bagnell, 2002; Kraack & Kenway, 2002). This view is reinforced by what is regularly seen by adults in their communities, at skate bowls, local shopping malls, at parks or on the local street. The media, and their own experiences, sometimes tell adults in our society that adolescent boys are troublesome or trouble waiting to happen.

However, this pervasive, negative image of adolescent boys, aimlessly hanging around with their peers, detached from adult influence and sliding down a negative spiral, is not the image experienced and perceived by the researcher involved in this project. Far from the negative image, the boys interviewed and involved in the discussions described very positive and affirming relationships and interactions with a wide variety of adults. The view through the personal windows of the boys, into their worlds of relationships and the influences these adults have upon them, was an encouraging and hopeful vision of the present and the future of the boys and our society.

Stories of the strong links some boys have with a grandparent or sports’ coach or the respect they have for a teacher or a close friend of their parents, hardly ever make the front page of the newspaper. Neither do we regularly notice the positive and
influential interactions between an early adolescent boy and his adult significant other as they work together on a project or as they share stories and laugh together. The boys’ stories recorded and analysed in this research project allow us to enter a world that is not widely noticed or acknowledged. This world is normally unseen, except to the few who think and notice that this world of relationship and influence does exist. These people sometimes get a glimpse of this positive and hopeful world as they watch a boy interact with one of his VIPs or hear a boy truly describing his relationship with a very important adult.

The detailed descriptions give us a look through the personal windows of these boys into a phenomenon that has not been viewed in this way by many others in the empirical world or even in the world of popular culture (Scales & Gibbons, 1996). At least some, if not many adults, years away from the familiarity of their early adolescence and usually detached from their own adolescent experiences, do not have a clear view or understanding of the seen world of the adolescent. They have only their adult perceptions of the adolescent world and experience. Neither do adults know the reality, or the essences, of the unseen world of the early adolescent boy in our current-day, western society.

By bracketing his own experiences and beliefs as best he could, the researcher in this project has attempted to hear, without prejudice and presumption, from the boys themselves. The goal was to hear a little of the real world of early adolescent boys, specifically about their relationships with very important nonparental adults. The boys showed a willingness to talk about the nonparental adults in their lives. This was evident in the interest shown by many boys who participated in the initial briefings to the large groups of boys in each of the participating schools. It was also evident in the long lists of boys who volunteered to participate in the research project. The boys were very willing to be part of this investigation, to tell someone about their very important people, and to share some of their real life stories and experiences. Through their descriptions they allowed the researcher into their usually unseen world of relationships
and interactions with very important nonparental adults. Through reporting, analysis and discussion of the boys’ descriptions, the researcher has been able to show others some of this early adolescent world.

7.6 Implications

The following implications of this research, discussed under the four essences, address all the research questions but particularly the fifth question: What implications are there for those interacting with adolescent boys in educational or other settings?

7.6.1 Fun and humour

The challenge for adults engaged in the lives of early adolescent boys, is to use humour appropriately and in a very natural way, to connect with the boys and to maintain these important relationships. This skill is one that is innate in some and may have to be learnt by others.

Whether the use of humour comes naturally or has to be learnt and practised, the most important consideration is that the humour be appropriate for the developmental stage of the early adolescent boy and for the particular relationship and context. The use of humour as a rugby coach, as an older brother, as a classroom teacher, or as a grandfather, will be different for each of these people, for the individual boy they are interacting with, and for each context they find themselves in as a part of each interaction and relationship. Different words will be used, different jokes will be told, and different situations may be responded to with humour. Sometimes it will be most appropriate to be serious, but at other times it will be “just right” to joke and laugh together.

Grandparents have the opportunity to establish and develop unique relationships with their grandsons. These relationships will change in the early adolescent years of the grandsons but grandparents, even if they live a long way from their grandsons, can work on their special relationships with grandsons and embed appropriate fun and humour into their communications and times spent together.
Teachers may need to consider deliberately the role of fun and humour in the classroom as well as in extracurricular activities. Some educational theorists, for example, William Glasser (2001) have recommended the inclusion of fun as a component of learning and teaching planning and activities. This consideration needs to be included as a part of in-service training as well as in professional supervision sessions between teachers and their immediate supervisors, for example, a Head of Department or Deputy Principal. Some find the use of humour and fun to be quite natural but for others it is not a part of their professional repertoire. But early adolescent boys have clearly shown in their descriptions that fun and humour are integral to their relationships with most of their nonparental significant adults. This challenges teachers and others working in educational settings to consider carefully the use of fun and humour in their roles with early adolescent boys.

**Implications in brief:**

- use humour to connect with early adolescent boys and to maintain the influential relationship between the boy and his very important adult/s
- grandparents may use, within what is most likely a life-long relationship, a natural and “uncluttered” sense of fun and use of humour to enhance their influence upon their grandsons
- teachers may use fun and humour in the classroom as well as in extracurricular activities. They need to consider the inclusion of fun as a component of teaching and learning activities.
- consideration given to teachers’ use of fun and humour as a part of in-service training as well as in professional supervision sessions between teachers and their immediate supervisors.

**7.6.2 Caring and encouraging**

When teachers see themselves as more than deliverers of curriculum they are acknowledging that they play a far greater role than teaching and facilitating learning.
When teachers show care for their students and encourage them in schoolwork and beyond, the students respond with higher motivation levels and possibly improved academic results (Martin, 2003). Preservice and inservice training should emphasise the potential that teachers have to improve a wide variety of outcomes for boys when they show extra care and give additional encouragement in their interactions with them in the classroom and beyond.

Although sports’ coaches may initially perceive their role as one of teaching skills and the application of these skills to the particular sport, their role can be one that has far more influence. The opportunity is begging for sports’ coaches, whether based in schools or in community sports clubs, to accept and understand a broadening of their role to include consciously caring for and encouraging the boys in their team or under their individual training. This care and encouragement may be a natural part of a coach’s style but needs to be deliberately included in all stages of coaching, as the benefits will work not only in skill development but also far beyond, into the life and future of the boys involved.

**Implications in brief:**

- caring may come naturally but it also may need to be a conscious act – don’t try too hard, it may limit a developing relationship and future influence within the relationship
- with boys, creative ways may need to be used to show you care – especially in the early stages of relationships
- encouragement is easily linked with doing activities together
- making time to “do” things together or “be” together may in itself be perceived by a boy as caring and encouraging
- remembering that the relationship is often a mutual one where caring and encouragement flow both ways – build on the mutuality.
7.6.3 Teaching and learning

In the area of teaching and learning there needs to be a considered and maintained balance between the relationship and the teaching and learning that may potentially occur as a part of the interactions in the relationship. Teaching and learning as a part of significant relationships between early adolescent boys and very important nonparental adults, needs to be considered in the light of the importance of the relationship rather than seeing these interactions as educational opportunities.

With grandparents taking on more direct and regular caring roles in regard to their grandchildren (Edgar, 2000), there needs to be a conscious acknowledgement of the significant teaching and influential roles these grandparents play in the lives and development of their grandchildren (Goodfellow, 2003). A key challenge is to enhance what Kivett (1991) refers to as “natural grandparenting” (p. 285) and encourage this naturalness so that even more effective teaching and learning may take place in these significant relationships.

Whilst teachers are expected to teach those within their charge, the actual influence teachers can have beyond basic curriculum delivery cannot be underestimated. The most effective teachers know that it is through an effective relationship with students that they are most likely to be able to influence and effect learning and growth. Classroom teachers need inservice training concerning the positive effects they can have on the development of early adolescent boys, especially in their roles beyond the classroom in extracurricular activities.

As a number of the participating boys named and described sports’ coaches as very important adults in their lives, consideration needs to be given to the teaching influence these people can have beyond teaching basic skills within the particular sport. Sports’ coaches, particularly if working within a school community, could undergo similar in-service training as presented to classroom teachers. This training would be designed to assist the coaches in developing an understanding of their influences upon
early adolescent students and to broaden their knowledge of related social, emotional and identity development matters.

**Implications in brief:**

- balance needs to be considered and maintained, between the relationship, and the teaching and learning that occurs as an integral part of the relationship
- enhance "natural grandparenting" by doing, being and becoming together and encourage this naturalness so that even more effective teaching and learning may take place in these significant relationships
- teachers need to be inserviced in the positive effects they can have on the development of early adolescent boys, especially in their roles beyond the classroom in extracurricular activities.
- sports’ coaches, particularly if working within a school community, could undergo similar in-service training as presented to classroom teachers. This training could be designed to assist the coaches in developing an understanding of their influences upon early adolescent students and to broaden their knowledge of related social, emotional and identity development matters.

### 7.6.4 Doing, Being, Becoming

As the fourth essence; doing, being, becoming, is more complex and somewhat existential in nature, the implications discussed are more generalised and apply across the variety of identified categories of very important nonparental adults.

The key aspect of this essence is the consideration of the identity development implications, especially the being and becoming components. In being together and consciously being aware of the intricacy of interactions occurring, the adults in these relationships have an opportunity to influence significantly and positively the identity development of the boys.

Those who are privileged to “accompany” (Green & Christian, 1998) boys and young men on their journey through adolescence toward adulthood need to consider
the nature and implications of this fourth essence. In “doing” things together we may play an important part in the life of a boy, but possibly only in an instrumental or functional way. If adults become aware of the possible positive outcomes of consciously adding "being" together to doing things together then the boys they are being with should benefit in a number of important ways. In some instances, the interactions between a boy and his nominated very important adult will develop to a point where the possibility of “becoming” will become a reality and part of the relationship. Being conscious of the possibilities, of the nature of the interactions that incidentally occur and sometimes are planned, and noticing in the interactions where there are “becoming” moments, is the challenge before all who come into contact with early adolescent boys.

**Implications in brief:**

- be conscious of the possibilities within interactions and relationships
- be aware of the nature of incidental and planned interactions – how each type has potential in a different way
- notice in interactions where there are ‘becoming’ moments and utilise them as opportunities to help boys explore their future selves

The implications across the four essences challenge all who come into contact with early adolescent boys and play a role in their lives and in their ongoing identity development.

The following section discusses future research possibilities as a consequence of this study.

**7.7 Future Research**

**7.7.1 Parental support and support from nonparental adults**

Although some research has been conducted where the types and importance of support from parents and adults other than parents has been investigated (Frey & Rothlisberger, 1996; Galbo, 1986; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992; Tatar, 1998)
further research could be conducted that specifically investigates the extent and nature of nonparental relationships, whilst considering the nature of the relationship the adolescent has with their parent or parents.

A particular focus of such research could be to consider the social factors influencing changes in grandparent involvement in the lives of adolescents and the interactions that adolescents have with their grandparents. These relationships could be investigated, considering participants’ perceptions and descriptions, and the influence that the grandparents have upon the identity development of the adolescents.

7.7.2 Socioeconomic status

This study took its participants from two independent schools. The limitations as a result of this choice have been discussed in Chapter Four. Scales and Gibbons (1996) state that there are relatively few studies, and therefore a research need, in the area of the relation of gender to young adolescents’ nonparental adult relationships (discussed below), that there is limited research on the possible differences amongst different races, “and still less information regarding the relation of young adolescents socioeconomic status to their nonparental relationships” (p. 377).

A challenge for future research is to include participants from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and compare the results. This would require a different methodological framework as such a comparison would not be possible within a phenomenological approach as utilised in this study.

7.7.3 Making the connections: Schools, teachers and role models

The recent report on the parliamentary inquiry into the education of boys, “Boys: Getting it right” (2002), was commissioned in response to growing community concerns about the education of boys. This report discusses at some length the connections between schools, teachers and role models. It states that “positive teacher/student relationships are essential to good teaching and learning, especially for boys” (p. xxi)
and that “male role models do matter and boys benefit by men modelling appropriate
description of relationships with other men and women” (p. xxii).

Further study could specifically investigate the teachers and other school staff
nominated by adolescent boys as very important to them and the descriptions the boys
gave of these people and their interactions with them, which would reflect the study
reported in this thesis and significantly add to the findings reported and discussed here.

7.7.4 What about the girls?

The most common question asked of the researcher when he described this
professional doctoral project was, “What about the girls?”. A duplication of the research
process utilised in this study, with early adolescent girls as the participants, is an
obvious suggestion for further research. Different developmental pathways, needs, and
styles of relationships with significant others, would necessitate appropriate variation of
methods utilised, and analysis and discussion of the research data. Recent doctoral
work has investigated related topics (Leather, 1999) and some recent texts begin to
address gender differences in this, and related, fields of study (Lerner & Steinberg,
2004).

7.8 Epilogue

Next time you look at a newspaper or current affairs magazine and see a
photograph of an adolescent boy in his street gear; next time you drive past the local
skate bowl and notice the “goings on”; next time you are bumped in the shopping aisle
by an angry looking young man; when next you are talking with your grandson or son;
or sworn at by a boy in your class or rugby team; become conscious of the blindfold or
blinkers you may are wearing.

Consider removing the blindfold or blinkers, or the coloured glasses we wear as
grandparents, parents, teachers, coaches or others who work with boys and young
men. Some of us tend to be blind, blinkered or have tainted vision; simply because that
is the history and view we bring to our experiences of adolescent boys.
Consider removing the blindfold, blinkers or coloured glasses. Do not allow them to block, limit or distort your view. Remove them and see the unseen world of the early adolescent boy and his very important nonparental adults.

As our vision becomes less blurry, as we begin to perceive more clearly, we have the opportunity to see and experience a world that is not ours but the world of the boy or young man before us. In his world, there may be supportive, encouraging, and influential adults other than his parents. These important people may not be obvious at first sight, but with blindfold, blinkers or coloured glasses removed, we will be able to see past the presenting attitudes and behaviours and notice the “Influencers”. These very important, positively influential adults bring to their relationship with the boy or young man, more than we may have originally realised.

Notice if you are one of these nonparental adults who is very important to a boy or young man. Use fun and humour; care and encouragement; teach and learn; do things together, “be” together and “become” in your communications and times together; as you, along with many others, play a very important part in the lives and future of boys who are becoming young men.
REFERENCES


Galbo, J. J. (1986). Adolescents' perceptions of significant adults: Implications for the family, the school, and youth serving agencies. *Children and Youth Services Review, 8,* 37-51.


APPENDICES
Appendix 1

Information on Research Project:

*Early adolescent boys’ descriptions of non-parental adults who are significant to them and the influence these adults may have on the boys’ identity development*

RESEARCHER: STEPHEN J LAKE

Doctor of Education candidate
School of Learning and Professional Studies, Faculty of Education

s.lake@qut.edu.au or phone 3864 3042

Thank you for putting your name on a list to say you are interested in being a part of this research project. Please read all this information carefully and discuss it with at least one of your parents or your caregiver. After you have read and discussed this information, if you still want to be part of this project, please read and sign the attached Consent Form. Your parent or caregiver is invited to sign the form as well. To participate in the project both you and a parent or caregiver need to have signed the Consent Form. If you want to withdraw from the project you can do this at any time during the process without any comment or questions from the researcher.

I know that parents are very important people in the lives of most boys but I also believe that other adults are probably important too. I want to do this research so that I can better understand what boys think about the important (non-parent) adults in their lives. I think it is important to ask the boys themselves.

You will be involved in thinking about who are the very important adults in your life. You will be asked to take photographs of these people or collect photos or pictures of them and bring the photos or pictures to a 20-30 minute discussion with the researcher. If you want you can just bring names of people you are willing to talk about instead of taking and bringing photos. Soon after that first discussion you will join a group of three other boys your age and have a discussion with them about your very important people. This second discussion will go for about 30 minutes. The photos you take or find and then bring to the discussions are there to help you talk about your very important people (other than your parents). You will keep the photos or pictures.

The goal of this research project is to better understand the roles significant, non-parental adults play in the lives of early adolescent boys, especially in relation to the impact these adults may have on the identity development of the boys.

I want to do this research so that I can try to answer these questions -

1. Who do the boys name as the non-parental adults significant to them?
2. What are the boys’ descriptions of the characteristics of these adults?
3. What are the boys’ descriptions of their interactions with these adults?
4. How do these adults influence the identity development of the boys?
The discussions that you have with the researcher and with the group will be audio taped. This is so that important words, phrases and ideas that you say can be written down in the research project. Your real name will not be used in the research document. A different name will be used in the written project to ensure your confidentiality. The tapes will be destroyed when the project is finished and the thesis approved. Some of the non-identifying information from the research project may be used in the future.

This research project has been approved by the Head of School and by the QUT University Human Research Ethics Committee (for information or concerns contact the Secretary at QUT on 3864 2902 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au). These approvals are part of the normal process of doctoral research projects. Although this research project is very similar to usual classroom activities, care has been taken to consider all the relevant safety and ethical issues.

Discussions with the researcher and in the small group will take place in a room provided at the school, with the door open and directly supervised by the Counsellor, Mr Simmons or another staff member. Although the content of the discussions are confidential, the boys will have explained to them, at the start of the discussions, that if they say something of a serious nature, the researcher must discuss the matter with the Head of School or nominated staff member.

Analysis of the project findings and implications from this research will be offered to the Head of School and Head of Middle School at the completion of the project.

It is hoped this study will help teachers, parents and others interested in the development of young people to better understand the roles of significant, non-parental adults so that we all can more effectively support and encourage boys as they grow toward manhood in our complex and challenging world.

Stephen J Lake
Dip.Teach(Primary) BEd MEd (School Guidance and Counselling)
School of Learning and Professional Studies
Centre for Innovation in Education
Faculty of Education

s.lake@qut.edu.au or phone (QUT) 3864 3042
Consent for Participation in Research Project

Early adolescent boys’ descriptions of non-parental adults who are significant to them and the influence these adults may have on the boys’ identity development

RESEARCHER: STEPHEN J LAKE
Doctor of Education candidate
School of Learning and Professional Studies, Faculty of Education
s.lake@qut.edu.au or phone 3864 3042

By signing this form you and your parent/caregiver are indicating that you:
▪ have read and understood the Information on Research Project sheet;
▪ have had any questions answered to your satisfaction;
▪ understand that if you have any more questions you can contact the researcher;
▪ understand that if you don’t want to continue in the research project and want to withdraw you can do that at any time and there will be no comment or questions from the researcher;
▪ know you can contact the Secretary of the QUT Human Research Ethics Committee on 3864 2902 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this project; and
▪ agree to participate in the two discussions that form this research project.

Student
Name __________________________________________ Age _____
Signature ________________________________
Date ________________________________

Parent / Caregiver
Name __________________________________________
Signature ________________________________
Date ________________________________
Appendix 2

Prompts / Questions for individual interviews and group discussions

1. Tell me about your very important people
2. What kind of things do you do together?
3. How would you describe this person? What are they like? What do you like about them?
4. If your mates were describing this person what might they say?
5. What do you think about this person?
6. Can you describe some feelings when you are with this person?
7. What do you think about yourself when you are with this person / have been with this person?
8. What have you learnt from this person / learnt about yourself?
9. Do you think you are different because you know / have known this person?
10. Have you learnt something about yourself because you know this person?
11. If you never knew this person what might you be like?
12. What sort of things can you talk to this person about?
13. How did you meet / get to know this person? When was that?
14. Can you think of any other very important people?
15. (Rating) Pick wither you Mother or Father or both. On a 10 point scale, one being not important at all and 10 being extremely important, how important is this person (VIP) to you and how important is your Mum/Dad? Please rate them on the scale from 1 to 10.
CAMERA and INSTRUCTIONS

Thanks again for being willing to be a part of this research project. If you want to take a photo or photos of adults who are very important to you, please take this pack and follow the instructions.

The Camera
In this pack, you have a camera for your use. It has a flash if you need it. Please take a photo or a number of photos of adults who are important to you. You might only have one important adult you want to discuss in the interviews, so you might only take one or a few photos. If you have a number of adults who are important to you, you may take quite a few photos.

Any shots left on your film are yours to use however you like. Remember, you keep all the photos you take – just bring the photos of important people to your interviews.

Film Processing
A voucher is included in the pack for discount processing. You can do any of these options for processing your film.

1. Use the discount voucher at a Rabbit Photo Shop and claim the cost of processing back by bringing the receipt to the Frost Centre (Junior School) Office.
2. Take your film anywhere and have it processed, and bring your receipt to the Frost Centre (Junior School) Office for a refund.

The University is covering the cost of the cameras and processing.

Interviews/Discussion
Individual and group discussions will occur in about two weeks. Please consider who you wish to photograph, have your film processed as soon as possible, and be ready for the interviews.

Photos/Pictures/Names
Remember, you don’t have to take photos. You may find photos in photo albums at home, or you may find pictures of people important to you in magazines or in the newspaper.

If you want to, you can also bring names of people as well as photos or pictures to the interviews. You don’t have to take photos if you don’t want to do that – names of people to talk about is fine.

Stephen J Lake
DipTeach (Primary), BEd, MEd (School Guidance and Counselling)

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Centre for Innovation in Education
Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology

s.lake@qut.edu.au or phone 07 3896 3042
### Tabulated Summaries – 11 year olds

<table>
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<th>Descriptions of VIP</th>
<th>Interactions with VIP</th>
<th>Notes/Quotes</th>
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<td>Grandad</td>
<td>very nice</td>
<td>he punches people in</td>
<td>a mutuality</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>the back and those</td>
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<td>taught me card games</td>
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<td>she’s taught me self-</td>
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<td>control “I don’t</td>
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<td>keep saying to Mum,</td>
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<td>“I’m bored I’m bored”</td>
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<td>Grandpa</td>
<td>nice person</td>
<td>talk help with</td>
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<td>very funny</td>
<td>jigsaw puzzles</td>
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<td>books read we talk</td>
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<td>and see where the</td>
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<td>conversation goes</td>
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<td>Grandma</td>
<td>nice person</td>
<td>just talk talk about</td>
<td>“happy to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>like above but more</td>
<td>school work and stuff</td>
<td>spend time</td>
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<td>of a sensible person</td>
<td>go to the movies</td>
<td>with them</td>
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<td>“I don’t get to</td>
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<td>see them a lot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandma</td>
<td>very kind</td>
<td>sit down and talk</td>
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<td>maybe she reads a</td>
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<td>book spend time together but don’t have to talk much</td>
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<td>exploring her</td>
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<td>backyard I feel happy</td>
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<tr>
<td>brother</td>
<td>a nice person to be</td>
<td>playing around the</td>
<td>“The way we</td>
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<td>around likes to play</td>
<td>house hiring movies</td>
<td>are just</td>
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<td>around a bit pretty</td>
<td>he’s helped me with</td>
<td>kind of ties</td>
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<td>smart</td>
<td>school work talk</td>
<td>us together</td>
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<td>about his uni and work</td>
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<td>shown me things eg</td>
<td>see transcript for</td>
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<td>Japanese culture</td>
<td>comments about</td>
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<td>Grandparents</td>
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</table>

**Grandma**
- She reads a lot
- A very calm person
- Sitting with her and talking
- Going to Church as extended family
- Playing cards together
- She’s taught me card games
- She’s taught me self-control
- She doesn’t keep saying to Mum, “I’m bored I’m bored”

**Grandpa**
- Nice person
- Very funny
- Likes playing tricks and jokes
- Talk help with jigsaw puzzles
- Picked me up from school
- Stay home together
- Talk about books read
- We talk and see where the conversation goes
- “It’s good, it’s easy” being with them

**Grandad**
- Very nice
- Very strong for his age
- Quite cheeky sometimes
- A role model sort of thing – well he never says any bad things
- Feels happiness with G’dad “I think I am making him happy”

**Brother**
- A nice person to be around
- Likes to play around a bit
- Pretty smart
- I’m like him
- Sense of humour
- Playing around the house
- Hiring movies
- He’s helped me with school work
- Talk about his uni and work
- Introduced me to things, shown me things eg Japanese culture
- “The way we are just kind of ties us together”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A3</strong></th>
<th><strong>Descriptions of VIP</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interactions with VIP</strong></th>
<th><strong>Notes/Quotes</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nanny</strong></td>
<td>kind of like an animal lady really nice to me really really nice to me a good care lady (Nanny) I say she would be like my second Mum</td>
<td>after school care and sometimes sleep over tell her any problems go to the beach on the weekend walk the dog go to the park cook together care for other children in care of the Nanny talk about my future</td>
<td>I really, well, love her, yeah she’s really, really nice to me anything you dislike about these three? “No, everything is perfect about them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nanny’s son</strong></td>
<td>really nice funny – he can be comedian</td>
<td>taught me things eg how to catch fish, crab pots, how to ride a bike taught me how to be gentle</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nanny’s daughter</strong></td>
<td>funny – not really a comedian really nice, really really nice really smart</td>
<td>taught me how to play basketball taught me how to rollerblade</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grandma (deceased)</strong></td>
<td>very nice, very considerate really great person</td>
<td>talk about school talk about anything go to the beach with family visit her in hospital</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pa</strong></td>
<td>he enjoys doing lots of things quite nice understanding always quite good at things – he tried everything he’s still young – he’s old but he acts young quite a good person to talk to really</td>
<td>spend time with Dad and me go to his place for dinner go fishing encouraged me to do things at school holidays together tours and trips with him taught me lawn bowls</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grandma</strong></td>
<td>very nice she’s Dutch helpful really</td>
<td>gives me money – change taught me things to do with crosswords helped me a bit with Chess go to the park visit places in her area teaches me Dutch teach me other things eg sewing</td>
<td>“I feel happy because she’s brightened up my day – she just makes me feel fine” taught me “the fact that I can be happy in bad times”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Miss R</strong></td>
<td>quite nice – if you do what you are told can get quite angry if she needs to she’s kind she’ll help if you ask for it</td>
<td>taught me a lot – Science, Maths, PE helped me with assignments in her subjects talk to her about subjects or what’s happened</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Miss D</strong></td>
<td>nice teaches you if you want to learn</td>
<td>teach me Music teach me Keyboard talk to her about subject or</td>
<td>influenced me to buy a keyboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIP Type</td>
<td>Description of VIP</td>
<td>Interactions with VIP</td>
<td>Notes/Quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandma</td>
<td>she's really good at cooking pretty tall, grey curly hair and glasses really nice and friendly</td>
<td>she baby sits us and helps me with homework tells me stories about her brothers and everyone who went to the war we go see movies and do all different things we go and have a cup of coffee and something to eat on the weekends</td>
<td>“I feel happiness and love and stuff … because we spend so much time together and talk and stuff” “She’s like a really nice influence and she helps me a lot.” “I’m happier and more, like, friendly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend of the family</td>
<td>very careful – really smart, like he knows a lot of things really good with boats and things really nice doesn’t ever really get grumpy or anything kind man who helps a lot</td>
<td>when I am older I want to be an architect (like him) he fixed our tinnie he shows me things eg computer work in drafting at architect office, computers play soccer with his son</td>
<td>“He kinda influences me and teaches me things” “He like shows me how you do things with architect” “I feel smarter… and probably a bit happier as well “I have one more friend” “see quote p 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>nice … and pretty stern pretty nice she’s so smart she can get pretty mean if she wants to she knows so much – she knows how to teach so well</td>
<td>school work get taught and stuff like that she just teaches me everything Homework Club</td>
<td>“I think I’m smarter … and happier” … (because) “She introduced me to everyone and … told me where everything is” (when new to the school at the start of the year)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Descriptions of VIP</td>
<td>Interactions with VIP</td>
<td>Notes/Quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tennis Coach</strong></td>
<td>kinda tall, blond hair and he pulls it up, I mean back really good at tennis, he’s helped me heaps he’s pretty funny too very friendly and easy going a lot of patience too with naughty people sees a mistake and points it out but doesn’t make it sound too bad he’s pretty cool too very friendly, he’s got a wife, I don’t know if he’s got children he is just really nice he uses a lot of expression and makes it sound really interesting he does really fun things just always supportive always encouraging people</td>
<td>helped me heaps with doing all the strokes and stuff</td>
<td>“It feels pretty good … he’s kind of encouraging you all the time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TKD Instructor</strong></td>
<td>he gets really, … strict, … kind of, …during class a really good instructor he thinks he is really good he’s friendly when it comes to just talking, just normally he’s really strict and he doesn’t like bad behaviour</td>
<td>taught me all the moves at TKD class write essays about the tenets of TKD like indomitable spirit and perseverance and self-control and stuff he helped me he gave me encouragement when I couldn’t grade and stuff (with broken arm)</td>
<td>“when I talk with him I always feel a little bit, I don’t know, nervous, cause he is so high up and stuff”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grandad</strong></td>
<td>really funny always cracking jokes really nice he goes along with you, he just plays along there is always excitement when he is there when he is tired and stuff he can get a little bit strict (bedtime example p 10/11) he was supportive when I hurt my ankle and that was good to know</td>
<td>play water pistols – G’dad shot a friend (p 11) he’s taught me a few jokes, he’s taught me just to have fun basically</td>
<td>I feel “kinda relaxed cause there is someone there joking and, yeah, … you can really tell that nothing bad is going to happen really” “Oh, I think that I have got a really good Grandad” “Every weekend he just changes the house … everyone is just more talkative and it just changes it every weekend”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B2 continued</strong></td>
<td><strong>Descriptions of VIP</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interactions with VIP</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
<td>really kind of fun</td>
<td>just be in class with her</td>
<td>“I think I do all right in all the work and I think she thinks I do pretty good work too”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>always kind of testing</td>
<td>she puts up little</td>
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<td>new things out</td>
<td>competitions</td>
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<td>she’s really fun, as a</td>
<td>she has taught me quite</td>
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<td></td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>a lot of stuff this year</td>
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<td>she is, you know, really</td>
<td>eg spelling skills, Maths</td>
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<td></td>
<td>nice</td>
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<td>she kind of only gets</td>
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<td>really strict when</td>
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<td>people are really</td>
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<td>naughty</td>
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<td>if you are good she is</td>
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<td>really nice</td>
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<td>pretty cool</td>
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<td>she is just out of</td>
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<td>university and has still</td>
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<td>got the same mind as us</td>
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<td>and she knows what’s</td>
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<td>fun for kids and stuff</td>
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<td><strong>B6</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grandmother</strong></td>
<td>she’s caring</td>
<td>go to the movies</td>
<td>I’ve learnt to “believe in myself and everything”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>she spoils us all</td>
<td>stay over at her house</td>
<td>If I didn’t know my Nan then “I don’t think I’d believe in myself as much as I do now”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I feel safe and happy</td>
<td>play tennis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with her – happy to be</td>
<td>she might have asleep and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with her</td>
<td>I might just stay there</td>
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<td>I’ve learnt that I can</td>
<td>and watch a bit of TV</td>
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<td>do things – like if I</td>
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<td>really want to do</td>
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<td>something, I could do it</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grandfather</strong></td>
<td>he was positive about</td>
<td>sit and talk with him</td>
<td>“Like he was the main one who told me to believe in myself”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(deceased)</strong></td>
<td>everything</td>
<td>he’d watch us play tennis</td>
<td>I learnt that “nothing can stop you except yourself”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I’d believe in myself a</td>
<td>just sit and talk about</td>
<td>“I wouldn’t be as mentally strong as I am today” if I didn’t know my Pop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>lot when I was with him</td>
<td>the news and everything</td>
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<td></td>
<td>he was strong, very</td>
<td>he’d come to nearly all</td>
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<td></td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>my football games</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uncles</strong></td>
<td>they are smart, very</td>
<td>watch my footy games</td>
<td>I’ve learnt “you can always do something”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>smart and funny as well</td>
<td>play tennis</td>
<td>“Like they’ve just always been there”</td>
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<td>they crack a joke or</td>
<td>see a movie</td>
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<td>something – R is really</td>
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<td>good at that</td>
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<td>R is a lawyer, he’s like</td>
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<td>funny, really funny</td>
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<td>I’m never really down</td>
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<td>when I am with them</td>
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<td>M is a surfie person –</td>
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<td>he goes surfing all the</td>
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<td>time</td>
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<td><strong>B8</strong></td>
<td><strong>Descriptions of VIP</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interactions with VIP</strong></td>
<td><strong>Notes/Quotes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>pretty friendly he likes talking about like what’s happening he’s really like optimistic funny he likes to teach me stuff he’s quiet if you like don’t know him he’s someone you can confide in, someone you can gain trust from he always gives me encouragement</td>
<td>every weekend we play a round of golf with Dad he keeps me informed of stuff always encouraged me to do school work like really good I feel safe and pretty happy with him it’s very peaceful with him cause you just sit there and talk with him and he’s like laughing I can talk to him quite easily about things I’ve talked a lot more cause of him</td>
<td>“Probably mainly he’s given me a lot of self confidence” quotes p. 2 “I think I need people who can guide me in a sense of direction so that I know what to do in life, cause I used to be really scared and stuff but, since he came in I’ve got a bit braver and just took more risks and that sort of stuff”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandma</td>
<td>she’s quite like what I used to be but she’s sort of a silent achiever sort of person friendly really fussy about neatness loves cooking always likes to correct us</td>
<td>she speaks Cantonese with me and she laughs at my vocabulary I feel quite peaceful with her, … sometimes a bit fearful because she might start rambling about you’ve got your shirt not tucked in or something I feel pretty confident with her</td>
<td>“…she like leads us and most of all she has our best interests at heart…she wants what’s good for us” “I’ve learnt to tidy my room, manners on the phone, I’ve taken much more interest in my school work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>she’s friendly, very friendly she’s easy to talk to I’ve had for some reason a real comfortable ease talking to her, maybe because she is young, yeah, she might understand what I might feel like</td>
<td>she teaches me a lot of stuff helped me to try to talk more… do something active I like to discuss what’s happened in my day and I talk to her about my holidays and she really enjoyed what I was talking about she’s told me to get out there and do something, like even if it’s not for yourself, just do something</td>
<td>“sort of give me a little bit of confidence” quote p. 11 about dislike of the teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Godparents</td>
<td>sort of like Grandma (above) basically Godfather is a quiet sort of person; Godmother is more a talky sort of person; they are really happy</td>
<td>they actually call me for no reason and say “What’s up?”</td>
<td>“It’s quite comfortable to talk to them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godparents continued</td>
<td>Descriptions of VIP</td>
<td>Interactions with VIP</td>
<td>Notes/Quotes</td>
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<td>they are talkative cause I want to talk</td>
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<td>“I reckon I've been pretty lucky with them, because I've never had such good people to talk to besides my parents, Uncle or Grandma”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tiger Woods</strong></td>
<td>he is important because it comes from the golf – he is really good at it he’s pretty victorious, he’s good at golf he’s given me a sort of moral booster in my golfing I want to play like he does</td>
<td>Have you ever met or talked to him? Never, just on the TV</td>
<td>quotes-pages 9&amp;10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Tabulated Summaries – 14 year olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview/VIP</th>
<th>Descriptions of VIP</th>
<th>Interactions with VIP</th>
<th>Notes/Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Pop) Grandfather</td>
<td>pretty adventurous gets into anything really active done a lot of trekking getting into fly fishing he’s pretty, like, always easygoing helpful – he helps put a lot he’s pretty good guy – always helping if you need anything done</td>
<td>trekking – bushwalking taught me how to fish gardening he just teaches me a lot of stuff like how to use stuff taught me how to fix stuff I usually go down there and help him fix anything taught me how to sharpen knives properly talk with him – ask him how he’s going, that kind of stuff, … and tell him a bit about my golf talk about what Dad did when he was young</td>
<td>It's &quot;just good to be with him&quot; “I’ve learnt that I can get out more” quotes p. 3 quote p. 4 about VIPs when he was 11 (14 now) What makes him important? “Mainly, because he’s shown me how to live life, like, to the fullest extent.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Golf Coach</td>
<td>very easy going very, very nice I haven’t seen his worse side yet funny he likes to talk about anything easy to talk to “cause he’s so, like, supporting” says all these good comments and stuff</td>
<td>coaches me in golf asks me how things are going – like school, AFL</td>
<td>I'm happy to have him as my golf coach he kind of speaks to you at your level “just happy that I know him quote p. 9 – excellent summary</td>
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<td><strong>A6</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher/ Chaplain (male)</td>
<td>very kind and generous always had time for people a friendly person always listened to what you had to say – he always thought that it was important</td>
<td>he liked to help with life but he knew when to draw the line served in Chapel with him Confirmation classes He spoke in Chapel – things he said The way he acted</td>
<td>I’ve learnt to treat people equally, with respect and that everyone has the right to be treated fairly I’ve learnt to be more open to people I wouldn’t have as much self control I probably wouldn’t be as good at speaking out loud to people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher / Chaplain (female)</td>
<td>she’s a lot of fun you could have a laugh with her she also knew where to draw the line she speaks her mind a lot of fun to be around she definitely made it different in Chapel a little bit strange I felt happy</td>
<td>she helped me with my public speaking I probably wouldn’t be doing as much for the Church – I wouldn’t do much speaking on assemblies or anything</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends of the family</td>
<td>they are fun they have a lot of time for people they like they listen to you he’s funny (Mr C) he jokes a lot he has a lot of time for people she’s fun loving (Mrs C) she has lots of time for people she likes spending time with us</td>
<td>we just have dinner and talk “that I am safe and … I don’t have to worry as much about stuff” “I have a good time” learnt “some stuff, yeah …” “that I can be myself and I don’t have to change” “They just said that I don’t have to change” quotes p. 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental teacher (Trumpet)</td>
<td>he’s, um, very folksy he likes a lot of the same stuff that I do he’s a fun loving guy he loves to laugh he loves teaching</td>
<td>trumpet lessons we have a good laugh when I come to my lesson “happy and not really that worried about what happens” p6 learnt “to have a lot of fun, if I don’t … if I fail at something the first time I can just keep trying for it” quote p. 7 “They’ve helped me to come around and help me with all sorts of stuff, like public speaking”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher / Head of Middle School</td>
<td>a really easy going person that is good to talk to he’s always smiling and stuff</td>
<td>just drop in and say Hi and ask how he’s going just chatting to him “It’s his personality that’s appealed to me, it’s made me like him”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like that I guess he’s like a friend to me, yeah he’s just easy going interested in sports a lot, I guess, … like, he likes the same things as us, you know he’s just like a friend to me he’s like a really good friend to me

I think about what his reaction would be to what we are talking about or something like that refer to p2 for intro to this… sometimes I think I am a good friend of him

“І’m like really kind to people and that’s what he’s like” “I feel … happy when I think of him because he is a very nice person to speak to” learnt from him? refer to p2 quote

Teacher he’s very learned very smart, everything he’s the best teacher that I’ve ever had I treat him as a friend as well really nice to talk to and we make jokes and stuff like that I get really happy when I have Science quote p4 he’s very smart

Maths and Science teacher Head of House you can ask him a question and he’ll answer it, fully he’s just shown me all these things through Science he collects War gaming and stuff like that … and I like that kind of stuff as well. We’ve got a lot of things in common, … even though he’s a teacher

Teacher he’s pretty cool for a teacher a little bit quiet towards new students he is pretty cool I just think of him, as some really good singer, who can reach high notes which I can’t I would be happy, … cause he’s got things in common with me I class myself as a good friend of him

Music teacher “…once you’re in his class and once you’re in his band he’ll talk to you a lot and he’ll take a strong like in you.” quote p7

Teacher he’s excellent he’s very lively he’s always happy (except those times you don’t practice your music) he’s funny I think he’s really cool

he’ll make jokes and he makes people happy all the time feelings? “basically happy all the time when I see him I want to play music”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teacher</strong></th>
<th><strong>Drama teacher</strong></th>
<th><strong>Grandma</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>she’s happy happy all the time she’s very good at drama and she can act dramatic she’s a really good teacher</td>
<td>“Well, I feel … fortunate that I have her for a Drama teacher”</td>
<td>very loving very, very funny person always there very good to be with everyone liked her always happy a good listener always comforting if I had a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she’s got a wide knowledge of all the concepts of drama and she’ll help you a lot with it</td>
<td>“I don’t feel down or anything because she is such a good teacher” p11 “I feel good about myself… cause I feel I know how to do this because she has taught me how to do it and she’ll help me if I have any troubles” feel “joy” with her I learnt to be a better, a person, to be nicer to other people Talk to her about everything, anything I wanted to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>refer to page 13 for quotes</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>quote p.6</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A8</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teacher</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teacher</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teacher</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a good person full of knowledge pretty smart always helpful if you’ve got a question he’s always got an answer pretty kind a pretty good teacher he’s really good always happy easy person to speak to</td>
<td>if you’ve got questions he’s always got answers to them if you are in trouble he’ll always help you out I like being with him because he’s kind sometimes I feel relieved when I’ve asked him something that’s been on my mind</td>
<td>pretty funny always got a good joke to laugh about happy, she’s always happy very nice she’s generous really nice definitely a good teacher good at most things she does easy to talk to</td>
<td>drama teacher quote p. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m always happy to ask him (questions) and I think he’s always happy to answer I’ve learnt to always be happy with who you are</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teacher</strong></th>
<th><strong>Grandma</strong></th>
<th><strong>Teacher</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>pretty funny always got a good joke to laugh about happy, she’s always happy very nice she’s generous really nice definitely a good teacher good at most things she does easy to talk to</td>
<td>very loving very, very funny person always there very good to be with everyone liked her always happy a good listener always comforting if I had a problem</td>
<td>visit her – when I was over there it was a good experience, I just liked being with her go camping learnt to pitch a tent cooking planting plants</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>feel “joy” with her I learnt to be a better, a person, to be nicer to other people Talk to her about everything, anything I wanted to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

quote p.6 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B3</th>
<th>Auntie</th>
<th>Uncle</th>
<th>Grandma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Auntie** | really nice  
always caring  
outgoing  
really caring  
does things for us out of her way  
she laughs at our jokes  
always there for us when we need her  
she is always offering to take care of us  
she always gives up her time—e even things she really wants to do she gives up her time to come down and see us | taking care of us  
she likes to visit us  
she likes to spend time with us  
“she really benefits with the family” comes over really early some Sunday mornings and cooks breakfast for us  
“I go for a surf and I come back and she is just standing there” go to parks—have picnics  
quote p.3 | she shows a lot of love to us and our family  
I’ve learnt to care, like to care a lot about people, to …not fight with my brothers, to respect I care for her a lot more because she is getting older, yeah I want to see her more  
I express my feelings more to people  
Well I actually care for my Mum, my Dad, my brothers and my friends a lot more |
| **Uncle** | makes me laugh  
sort of a kid still  
likes to play rugby  
aver surfing  
a rough bloke  
rough really active, aggressive  
tackles us hard  
crazy, you know, always outgoing  
always wants to do things—rugby, cricket, surfing  
really easy to be with him | takes us on surfing holidays—down to his house  
he likes to do what we do so we come attached to him  
play cricket  
fishing  
goin’ out on his boat  
he does what we do so we have a lot in common  
learnt around sports, surf  
quote p.5 | he’s like a kid, even my Mum says he hasn’t grown up  
feel? Really happy probably more relaxed, enjoyed myself  
I’m looking for more adventures |
| **Grandma** | most caring of all people up there (on his list)  
she has an urge to care for us just as Mum does  
caring  
always there for us | take care of us  
pick us up from school to help my Mum  
cook dinner  
help with homework  
always there making food for us, after surfs and stuff  
play cards and Monopoly and things  
takes me fishing  
quote p.7 | she is one of the people that I love the most out of my family, I treat her like my parents  
I care for her a lot really and just, …glad that she is there for us  
quote p.7/ 8 |
| **Nonna (Grandmother)** | cares for us a lot always down early in the morning | she stays on the beach and watches us fishing picnics go to her place stay over at her place quote p.10 | “Just happy to be with her, cause I spend every moment while she’s around until she’s, you know cause… she’s getting older, … I just want to spend good time with her quote p.11 / 12 |
| **Cousin’s boyfriend** | funny sporty serious sometimes but when you are talking to him … he likes to joke around a lot really nice just easy going just funny he’s like a mate | BBQs with the family play on the tennis court play cricket, basketball just muck around on the tennis court just muck around with him just tell him everything quote p.1/2 | he’s got pretty good stories from when he was my age learnt to just be polite wherever you are quote p.2 learnt to try hard in whatever you do whatever you like I probably wouldn’t interact with other people as well |
| **Pa (Grandparent)** | a big bloke deaf in his ear funny | makes stuff, like woodwork make stuff like chairs learnt to mow taught me stuff about school asks me the same stuff until I know it | can’t hear friends names so calls some random name – it’s pretty funny |
| **Nanna (Grandparent)** | a bit like a second Mum she’s always giving quote p.7 she gets like angry a bit quote p.7/8/9 | I see he every day and she keeps us in line | she is like this person that you don’t want to disappoint, cause then she gets angry and um, yeah it’s hard to explain quotes p.7 love ‘em |
| **Cousin** | caring and conscious and careful conscious? – everything has to be done properly, nothing can be done second best caring bloke | if I want to go somewhere, he’ll take me go to see people go out to lunch quote p.3 – spend time | he sticks up for me and helps get Dad on my side I feel pretty good about myself. Like,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soccer Coach</th>
<th>Learnt? “about everything, about life and stuff like that, as well as hobbies and stuff” quote p.3 – how learnt</th>
<th>Just to get along, cause we never used to get along from the ages of 4 up to about 10 or 11 quote p.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B7</td>
<td><strong>Friend of the Family</strong> really nice she’s directed she’s a single parent, two kids, … and she helps her kids along always helping my Mum really, really smart really helpful – never just mean and says “Go away!” she’s always got time for you</td>
<td>talk about school and how it is going she asks me about my Mum and my family helps me with work – I’m relieved then grateful she started off my schooling really well (Years 1,2,3 teacher) I know that I am capable and can do most things, she’s definitely helped me with that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Uncle</strong> really easy to talk to got good knowledge about things I am interested in he’s basically a champion he’s great I think he’s just great – that’s it a bit protective quote p.4/5</td>
<td>build things helped me build boxes for my speakers talk about school and sport a bit of boating build electrical things taught me how to solve little problems around the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Friend of the Family</strong> he’s just the funniest bloke that you’ll ever meet really easy going carefree</td>
<td>I feel I can talk to him about anything I feel happy and excited – I believe in myself I think he’s got me sort of a bit more easy going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>just stuck on my side and stuck up for me a few times and that was good big, pretty big a computer person into the things I’m in to – cars and stuff like that he is a good guy, a really good guy</td>
<td>learnt? “about everything, about life and stuff like that, as well as hobbies and stuff” quote p.3 – how learnt</td>
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<td><strong>B7</strong></td>
<td>“quote p.7 – to stick in there and to keep my head up when things go wrong” quote p.9 – things not as fun without them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Friend of the Family</strong> he’s just the funniest bloke that you’ll ever meet really easy going carefree</td>
<td>he is a good guy, a really good guy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B7</strong></td>
<td>he is a good guy, a really good guy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOF</td>
<td>Mum’s cousin</td>
<td>feelings? always happy and funny</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>really, really funny guy  he’s got all the toys to play with – motorbikes etc very, very outgoing  he’s always fun and we are always doing things</td>
<td>go to stay on his property  quotes p.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he’s got boats and stuff – he’s like a maniac or something pretty spontaneous he’s just like a little kid really, like a teenager</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5

Collation of Actual and Summarising Words

11 Year olds

A1
strong person helping/helping people
cheeky learnt from him
strong help people
role model learnt I’m selfish
looking up to VIP being with
mutuality taught self-control

A2
being with similarity with VIP brother
being with-not talking “Who I am like my personality” (p 8)
being with humour
interacting grandparents (q p 10)
fun/humour

A3
sharing problems taught me things
VIP-parent like figure humour
miss her treat others
influence taught me
future perspective

A4
kind/considerate being different because of VIP
talking influence
listening influence
influence limit of teacher influence
doing together humour
young attitude of the VIP encourage
future self encourage
influence extension – “I’m still thinking I’m going to give it my best shot” (p 12)
“but they’re kind of important to me and I hope that they’ll stay that way” (p 14)

B1
helps me teaches me
tells stories knows/teaches
movies/coffee feel smarter/happier
together friend
influence B1 used humour when describing VIP (p 8)
happiness/love smart/teaches me
teaches me smarter
being together happier
influences/teaches
**B2**

helped me heaps
fun
friendly/easy going
fun
supportive
encouraging
fun
encouraging
good instructor
teaching
friendly
encouragement
learnt
fun

**B6**

caring
movies/stay overs/tennis
believe in myself (p 2)
doing
happiness
I can do things (p2)
positive
(affirming/encouraging)
believe in myself
sit/talk
strong self (p 5 q)

**B8** *(5th VIP is Tiger Woods)*

funny
teaches me stuff
informed
optimistic/positive
trust
safe
personal growth
humour
self-confidence
influence
talking
friendly
encouragement
humour
peaceful
self-confidence
encouragement

teaches me
confidence
talking
teaching
guiding
young attitude
comfort with VIP
happy

about *Tiger Woods*

confidence
admiration

teachers (p 11)
q (p 12) "all six of them"
14 Year olds

A5
active/action talking
good to be with positive
teaches me interested
easy going getting adventurous nature from VIP
adventurous talking
taught me easy going
knowing nice
funny easy to talk to
talk about anything talks at my level
learnt about thinking
“shown me how to live life to the fullest extent” (p 5)
“what I want to be in life” (p 9)

A6
kind time for people
generous “don’t have to change” (p 5)
friendly positive time with VIPs
listening safe
learnt by way he acted good time
self-control good
fun laugh
fun fun
helped me fun loving/laughs
fun happy
listens to me fun
funny/jokes help me

cool teacher
happy
learnt lots
friend
lively/happy
funny/jokes
happy
happy all the time
happy all the time
knowledgeable
happy
feel good about myself
helped me
communicating
A8
knowledgeable/smart  happy
generous
helpful  gener
easy to talk to
care
kind  sad
joy
happy  fun
happy with who you are  good to be with
easy to speak to  happy
nice  Vlp is listener
funny  comforting
jokes

Q p. 6 (summary)

B3
caring  caring
humour  caring
shows love  influence of VIP on others
does respect  relationship
now I can express my feelings more  g’parent relationship (p 8)
gives up time  always there
holidays/time together  cares
happy  doing together
crazy  happy
easy to be with  learnt about self and others
have a lot in common

enjoyed myself-quote p 5- looking for adventures
*personality p 12

B4
funny  like
joke around a lot  knowing
doing/muck around  make stuff/doing
nice/easy going  funny
like a mate  taught me
tell him everything  don’t want to disappoint
like me when I was 14  like second Mother (q p 6)
be like him  love ‘em (her)
learnt tennis  influence
giving  always there respect for what Nan
thinks (q p 7)  VIP’s influence/importance (q p 9)

B5
caring  spend time together
caring bloke  catch up with each other
likes what I like  like a big brother
caring part I like of him  talking
sticks up for me  think the same way
being/doing (becoming)  respect/discipline (p 6)
good guy  good guy
learnt lots (q p 7)

the more time spent together – the more you learn the more you get to know (q p 4)
fun (q p 8 summary)
B7
helping
nice
“I know I’m capable” (p 2)
self-awareness
happier
talk to her
easy to talk to
similar interests
doing
talk
happy
funny
easy going
funny
doing
fun
taught me “to be not so tense” (p 9)

respect “champion” (p3)
talk about anything
believe in myself
easy going
mutuality
funny
easy going
similar interests
spontaneity
Appendix 6

Summary of this Research Project

Early adolescent boys’ descriptions of non parental adults who are significant to them and the influence these adults may have on the boys’ identity development

A total of 16 boys, eight 11 year olds and eight 14 year olds, volunteered to talk about adults that they chose and identified as very important to them. The adults that the boys named and described were of a variety of ages from 18 to 70+ years. The largest grouping by far was the 40-50 age group and included a variety of people from different aspects of the boys’ lives. The age of the person appeared to play little importance as individual boys would name and describe younger or older VIPs with similar passion and sincerity and appeared to ascribe similar value to VIPs regardless of age.

The very important adults came in a wide variety of familial and non-familial relationships - grandparents, teachers, relatives (other than grandparents), friends of the family, sports’ coaches, Godparents, a sports personality that the boy had never met (the only ‘unknown’ very important person), and others not grouped. One 14 year old named only five teachers as his very important adults. Other boys named a variety of VIPs ranging from 2 to 6 in number.

Grandparents (18 out of 60) were the largest group of very important non-parental adults named and described by the 11 and 14 year old boys in this research project. The second largest grouping was Teachers (14 out of 60). Four boys named 5 sports’ coaches from five different sports.

Four essences of the relationships described by the participating boys are described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The boys indicated in their descriptions that fun/humour was an important aspect of the relationships they had with their very important adults. This essence of the phenomenon of the very important adults named by 11 and 14 year old boys was important across age groups and types of VIPs. The boys enjoyed being with these people and it appears that the enjoyment was mutual.

In many of the descriptions offered by the participating boys there was evidence of caring and encouragement. Many boys described their very important adults as “very nice” or “kind”. They often described feeling encouraged by a nominated adult. This aspect of the relationships between the boys and their very important adults appears to be quite critical in the ongoing interactions of the relationships. The boys feel liked, loved, valued, safe, and cared for and this all contributed to the potential of these relationships to be very significant and influential.

When interacting with these very important adults the boys experienced learning and teaching. The boys described how they learnt skills and information, as well as learnt about themselves as they spent time with these very important adults. There is teaching taking place in formal and informal ways in these relationships and the teaching is sometimes reciprocated from the boys to the VIPs. Teaching and learning about life occurs in these relationships, sometimes with many words, sometimes in silence.
‘Doing, being, becoming’ is the final essence identified in this phenomenon. Generally, boys enjoy ‘doing’ and the boys in this study were no exception. They described doing activities and being active with a wide variety of VIPs. ‘Doing’ took the form of gardening, playing chess or other games, travelling, building speakers for a sound system, visiting or walking the dog. The boys also described ‘being’ with their very important adults, this ‘being’ included active times and passive times of interaction and refers to an extension of the ‘doing’ in the relationships. ‘Being’ is more about experiences and learning about self, others, and the society and world we live in. It is primarily about the past and the present experiences and relationships. When the ‘being’ is projected beyond the present, into the future, then the boys are describing, in their own way, the ‘becoming’ aspect of this essence.

The boys projected themselves and these significant relationships beyond the present, by talking of their future and by wondering about what the future may hold for them. The boys, with their very important adults, explore their ‘future selves’ and this is how the boys, in their early adolescence, are working out who they are and who they might become.

There is a dearth of information about the relationships between early adolescent boys and the non-parental adults they identify as significant to them. This study has assisted in the development of an understanding of these relationships and what it is that makes these relationships important to the boys.

This study informs parents, teachers, schools and other community groups that work with adolescent boys, of the influences that very important adults potentially have on the identity development of early adolescent boys. It also shows that these relationships need to be acknowledged as important, and nurtured, as they positively assist the boys in question, on their journey through adolescence towards manhood.