Characterisation, Adoption, and Expression of Subcultural Identities in Gay, Bisexual, and Queer-Identifying Men in Australia

Submitted by

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Abstract

The cultural communities of gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying (GBQ) men are often perceived as homogeneous but are comprised of numerous heterogeneous subcultural identities with varying characteristics and labels, such as 'Bear', 'Cub', and 'Twink'. These identities are often overlooked in health-related research and practice, though differences in health risks and outcomes have been identified in the limited available research. Few studies have sought to understand GBQ subcultural identities, including how these are characterised and ways in which men come to adopt and express different identities. There is also a shortage of qualitative research, including in an Australian context. The current study aimed to further knowledge of GBQ subcultural identities by exploring how these identities are understood from the perspectives of GBQ men in Australia who utilise them. Fifteen semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with GBQ men in Australia. Participant responses were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis.

Findings were reported in two papers and subject to peer review. Paper 1 examined how GBQ men understand and characterise GBQ subcultural identities and their importance in community life. Characteristics attributed to subcultural identities fell within five categories: physical traits; gender expression; sexual roles/preferences; interests and hobbies; and social interaction. Subcultural identities were highlighted as a form of social filtering and reflected queer history and culture. Paper 2 examined how subcultural identities are adopted, expressed, and change over time and contexts. Self-exploration, social comparison, and embracing/resisting labels were highlighted as some of the pathways toward adopting one or more subcultural identities. This study provides new insight into GBQ subcultural identities, their characteristics, and their meaning and importance to GBQ men. The findings inform cultural understandings of this population, with implications for culturally-sensitive research,

health promotion, health assessment in clinical settings, and the provision of support

services.

Statement of Authorship

This thesis includes work by the author that has been published or accepted for publication as described in the text. Except where reference is made in the text, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

The author of this thesis is the first author of all publications presented in the text and was responsible for the initial conception and design of the study and the manuscripts, data collection and analysis, and writing of the manuscripts. The co-authors and supervisors, Associate Professors Adam Bourne and Anthony Lyons, assisted in the initial conception and study of the design and publications, as well as provided advice on data analysis and critical feedback on all manuscripts and the thesis in full.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee (HEC19350). This work was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signed:

Jake D. Franklin

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the research presented within this thesis. It begins with cultural communities of gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying (GBQ) men and the subcultural identities that comprise these communities. Links between identity and health will be briefly introduced before illustrating differences in health risks and outcomes between subcultural identities of GBQ men, as highlighted in previous research. The general aim of the research is then presented, and finally, the key terms and framings used throughout the thesis are defined, and the structure of the thesis is outlined.

1.1 – Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Men's Identity

1.1.1 – GBQ Communities and Subcultural Identities

In both research and practice involving health promotion and mental health, the cultural communities of gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying (hereafter referred to as *GBQ*) men tend to be treated as a set of homogeneous groups, often framed primarily around sexual orientation and preference. However, these communities are considerably more diverse and comprise numerous, varied, and heterogeneous subcultural groups and communities of men that associate with and share certain characteristics, preferences, and/or values (Clausell & Fiske, 2005). The groups that comprise GBQ communities have been described using a variety of terms throughout the literature such as '*gay peer crowds*' (Willoughby et al., 2008) or '*gay community subcultures*' (Prestage et al., 2015), though the current study uses the term '*GBQ subcultural identities*', based upon the term '*subcultural identities*' reported in other literature (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014). The majority of the terms presented in previous literature, including those above, use the term 'gay' specifically; the current study captured men of varied sexual identities beyond gay (such as bisexual and queer; see *Table 1*), and thus the term 'GBQ' is used to capture and represent this broader range of sexual identities (explored further in *Chapter 1.4*).

Each subcultural identity differs in terms of the characteristics shared by members and the labels used to describe the group. For example, the 'Bear' subculture is one of the most prominent groups, and relates to characteristics such as older men, with a larger body mass, hirsute bodies, and are perceived as more masculine (Moskowitz et al., 2013). Other examples of GBQ subcultural identities include 'Twink' (archetypically young and slimmer, with less body hair; Lyons & Hosking, 2014), 'Gaymer' (actively engage in playing or discussing tabletop or video games; Shaw, 2012), 'Leather' (typically wear leather socially and/or for fetish and sexual activities; Mosher et al., 2006), and 'Pup' (typically wear dog-based fetish wear for social and/or sexual activity, and engage in dog-related role playing; Wignall & McCormack, 2017). The range of GBQ subcultural identities and the terms used to describe them is expansive, with only a portion of known terms reported in both previous research (see *Chapter 2*) and the current study (see *Chapter 3.3* for a description of the terms captured in the current study).

1.1.2 – GBQ Identity and Health

There is a breadth of research literature that demonstrates the link between the ways in which an individual self-identifies (e.g., ethnic background, sexual identity, etc.) and health, particularly for minority groups including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, or queer (LGBTIQ+), of whom GBQ men form a part (Jetten et al., 2017). Furthermore, the wellbeing of an individual may be influenced by, or rely upon, the status, stability, and overall perception of the group(s) with which they associate and self-identify, where changes in the group(s) may be reflected as changes in the individual's wellbeing (the *group circumstance hypothesis*; Jetten et al., 2017). The most prominent risk factors that may impact the health of LGBTIQ+ identifying people include the experience of minority stress, harassment, and stigma (Jackson et al., 2016; Russell & Fish, 2016; Valdiserri et al., 2019), in addition to an increased risk of harm to physical and/or mental health (Meyer, 2003). The literature exploring LGBTIQ+ identity

and health outcomes are reviewed in further depth with additional examples in *Chapter 2.2*. It should be noted that a large proportion of the research related to sexual identity and health either refers to and includes a more expansive range of sexual and gender identities under the LGBTIQ+ framing, or focuses on gay and bisexual men (GBM) specifically without reference to queer men (as the current study does). The appropriate framings for each study will henceforth be reported when discussing the findings of previous research throughout.

Health research examining GBQ subcultural identities has demonstrated differences in health risks and outcomes for those identifying with certain GBQ subcultures. These risks include behaviours such as illicit substance use and problematic levels of alcohol consumption (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Willoughby et al., 2008) and unprotected anal sex (e.g., Moskowitz et al., 2011; Prestage et al., 2015). Health outcomes include variations in self-rated overall health, experiences of discrimination and stigma, and self-esteem (Quidley-Rodriguez & De Santis, 2016). The health research examining differences between GBQ subcultures is detailed in-depth in *Chapter 2.2,* including the distinct variations between specific subcultures.

Whilst there are numerous studies that explore GBQ subcultural identities, particularly in relation to health, these studies are primarily quantitative in nature. To the researcher's knowledge, there are no psychology or health-related studies that have sought to approach GBQ subcultural identities qualitatively, or further develop an understanding of subcultural identities from the perspectives of GBQ men who use them. In addition, very few studies have addressed GBQ subcultural identities in the Australian context. The majority of research around GBQ subcultural identities has been conducted overseas (primarily the United States) and thus should be interpreted with those contexts in mind. Australian research on the topic (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Prestage et al., 2015) not only tends to utilise these overseas studies as points of reference, but do not

account for potential variations in the understanding or expression of identity between geographical locations, which have been found in other research (Brown-Saracino, 2015). Furthermore, the majority of studies rely upon descriptions and understandings of subcultural identities presented in previous research without capturing how the participants interpret these identities; thereby making it difficult to determine any differences in how subcultural identities are described across different time periods and contexts. The current study was developed to help address these gaps in the literature.

1.2 – General Aim

The aim of the current study was to contribute to and further develop the understanding of GBQ communities and subcultural identities by exploring the perspectives of GBQ men who utilise and self-identify with subcultural identities. The study was exploratory in nature, seeking to develop a greater foundation for interpreting and understanding GBQ subcultural identities in an Australian context. There were five specific objectives of the research, which were each addressed through conducting a total of 15 semi-structured interviews with GBQ men living in Australia and using thematic analysis to examine patterns of meaning throughout each of the participant responses. These objectives are outlined in *Chapter 2.3*.

1.3 – Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 – Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a sociological theory related to the creation of knowledge and how it is communicated. Social constructionism posits that the knowledge and meanings we give to the world around us are jointly constructed through coordination with others, perceived shared meanings and assumed knowledge that may be held by people in similar social conditions and settings (Burr, 2015). Social constructs relate to a vast range of concepts that are generally viewed or understood in particular ways in society (e.g., gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.). These constructs are created based upon

social and political factors, as well as being culturally and historically relative (Burr, 2015). Identity can be considered as socially constructed, as the ways in which one describes themselves using certain language and around certain elements of themselves (e.g., interests, sexuality) are often based upon concepts present in the media and general society (e.g., identifying based upon one's astrological sign, or around group association). In terms of subcultural identity, the terminology and understanding of GBQ subcultures that one may have could be based on the terms and subcultures that are presented and discussed in GBQ social spaces, in the media, or in online spaces for GBQ men (e.g., Grindr™; Jaspal, 2016).

1.3.2 – Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a prominent social psychology theory that suggests that the group(s) an individual is a member of or associates with forms part of their self-concept, known as their *social identity* (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). A key element of social identity theory is the concept of in-groups (the group(s) an individual associates with) and out-groups (any groups an individual is not a member of or associated with); the in-group(s) an individual belongs to is often determined through self-categorisation and actively associating with specific groups (Turner, 1987). In terms of GBQ communities and subcultural identities, there is an element of self-categorisation and choice for an individual to identify with GBQ subculture(s) based upon the people and groups they associate with as peers (Willoughby et al., 2008). As such, an individual's subcultural identity (or identities) can be seen as an example of the in-group(s) they consider themselves a part of, whilst those not identified with may be considered as out-groups. With regard to the current study, social identity theory works in tandem with social constructionism as a potential framing of subcultural identities. For example, groups of people who identify as the same subcultural identity may be considered an in-group

consisting of people who hold similar characteristics or an understanding of that identity

that is held and developed based on social constructs or an assumed shared understanding.

1.4 – Key Terms and Framings

The current study focuses on a sample of gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying men

and as such, uses the term GBQ to refer to the sample and the broader communities that

are represented by the sample. It is important to note that the literature uses samples of

varying sexual identities and/or use different terms to refer to them (e.g., studying only

gay men, 'gay and bisexual men (GBM)', or 'men who have sex with men (MSM)').

When referring to a particular publication, the sexual identities of the sample and the

terms used by those authors are retained in order to appropriately represent that work.

Furthermore, the terms LGBTIQ+, LGBT, LGBTQ, or similar terms, will be used as

appropriate when referring to literature that uses these terms to discuss their sample,

findings, or when discussing the broader LGBTIQ+ community beyond GBQ men.

'GBQ subcultural identity' is a term used throughout the current study to describe

how GBQ men may choose to self-identify with one or more of the numerous varied

subgroups of GBQ cultural communities (or *'subcultures')*, including potentially

incorporating the terminology, behaviours, and values of their identified subculture(s)

into their lives. While the current study uses the terms *'GBQ subcultural identity'* or

'subcultural identities' to describe the phenomenon studied, it is worth noting that the

broader literature sometimes uses alternative terminology to describe the same

phenomenon. To represent each publication appropriately and accurately, the original

terminology used by the authors will be presented, as appropriate, when referring to and

reviewing previous research (see *Chapter 2*).

1.5 – Thesis Outline

This is a thesis with publications and follows the La Trobe University

requirements for a thesis in this format. It includes two journal papers, one of which has

already been published in an academic journal (see *Chapter 4*) while the second is under

review (see *Chapter 5*). These publications have been presented in the relevant author-

accepted or submitted manuscript versions to ensure these papers are complete, with

reference lists presented separately at the end of each paper. A complete reference list for

the thesis, excluding the two publications, is presented at the end of this thesis.

The thesis begins with a literature review (*Chapter 2*). This provides a review of

the research literature relating to the topic of this thesis, including a brief exploration of

culture and subcultures, GBQ subcultural identities, and how technology and GBQ

subcultural identity are interconnected. Furthermore, the breadth of literature relating to

GBQ subcultural identity is examined, particularly health-related research in both

overseas and Australian-specific contexts. Finally, key knowledge gaps in the current

research literature are identified and explored. Following the literature review, *Chapter 3*

details the research design and methodology of the current study in further depth. In

particular, the qualitative approach, theoretical background, and approach to thematic

analysis are first explained. This is followed by a description of the recruitment and

sample screening processes, as well as the final interview sample. The method of data

collection, during both the recruitment and interview phases, are detailed alongside the

methods of organising and analysing the data. The ethical considerations of the research

are discussed, namely around recruitment and the reduction of potential distress for

participants. The chapter concludes with the author's self-reflection on their position in

the community being studied, in the current study, and their experience in conducting the

research overall.

Chapters 4 and 5 then present the results of the current study in the form of two

journal papers. The first paper (Paper 1; Franklin et al., 2020) is presented in *Chapter 4*

and illustrates characteristics attributed to numerous GBQ subcultural identities by GBQ

men in Australia, including the functions these identities have in their lives. The second

paper (Paper 2; Franklin et al., under review) is presented in *Chapter 5* and provides an exploration of how GBQ men come to discover and adopt subcultural identities, as well as how these identities are expressed (to varying extents) in different ways and across different contexts. As mentioned above, both papers are presented in their manuscript form, as either the author accepted manuscript or the submitted manuscript. The relevant publishers for each paper (Taylor & Francis for Paper 1; Springer for Paper 2) permit the inclusion of the author accepted manuscripts in a thesis. This thesis has been written in line with APA 7th guidance. Due to different formatting requirements that exist for journals, some of the formatting within Chapters 4 and 5 are shown in a slightly different format. This only relates to the use of inverted commas around quotes and for subcultural identity terms.

Chapter 6 provides a general discussion. It begins with an overall summary of the findings of the research, directly addresses each of the individual research objectives for the current study and situates the current study in relation to other existing research literature. The strengths and limitations of the research are also addressed. The chapter concludes by providing recommendations for health professionals and health promotion, particularly related to the use of culturally appropriate knowledge and approaches when targeting specific subcultures among GBQ men. Recommendations are also given for future research to further extend and build upon the current study. The chapter then ends with a final concluding statement.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The following is a review of the literature relating to gay, bisexual, and queer (GBQ) subcultural identity, including how psychological and health research has addressed and explored GBQ subcultural identity, as well as links identified between subcultural identities and health. The review begins by discussing how identity relates to culture, the formation of cultural and subcultural groups with reference to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), and how GBQ subcultures can reflect and facilitate unique identities that have been explored in a variety of ways within the literature. Next, the ways in which these identities have been addressed and explored in psychology and health-related research are examined, followed by coverage of some of the links identified in the literature between identity (particularly GBQ subcultural identity) and health. Throughout, the relevant gaps in the literature will be identified.

2.1 – Subcultural Identities

2.1.1 – Cultures and Subcultures

Culture can be broadly defined as "a system of enduring meanings, beliefs, values, assumptions, institutions and practices shared by a large group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next" (Kassin et al., 2015, pp. 543). There are a range of cultures that may be bound by particular characteristics such as geographical location, ethnic background, ideology (e.g., religion), or gender and sexuality (e.g., LGBTIQ+ cultures). Cultural groups are formed around specific beliefs, values, and practices (e.g., religious congregations) wherein members may choose or come to identify with the specific culture or group. Sexual identity (how one identifies themselves based on sexual attraction or sexual behaviour) is a characteristic that has given birth to a culture based around non-heteronormative sexual orientations and practices, including gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying men.

A subculture, according to the American Psychological Association (2020) is "a group that maintains a characteristic set of customs, behaviours, interests, or beliefs that serves to distinguish it from the larger culture in which the members live". Subcultures may maintain characteristics that relate to their parent culture but may have additional characteristics that are not present in or observed by all members of the parent culture. In addition, a subcultural group may be formed by people who identify with a specific subculture and their distinguishing aspects. With regard to the current study, sexual identity-based cultures such as GBQ men can be considered a parent culture with subcultures formed around varying distinguishing aspects such as demographics or preferences for specific acts (sexual or non-sexual). GBQ men with these preferences or demographics may choose to identify with a subcultural group(s) related to these characteristics, which are hence referred to as *GBQ subcultural identities*. GBQ subcultural identities and their distinguishing characteristics are discussed in *Chapter 2.2* and explored further in *Chapter 4*.

2.1.2 – GBQ Subcultural Identity

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) posits that people form an aspect of their identity (called a *Social Identity*) which relates to the social groups or social categories to which they belong and self-categorise, such as family groups, social circles, interest groups, and communities. The group(s) that a person identifies and associates with are known as in-group(s), and any group(s) not identified with are known as out-group(s). The association and identification with specific group(s) can be considered a form of categorisation that, whilst it is a common cognitive process, lends itself to stereotyping and social comparisons between in-groups and out-groups to evaluate the social identity of oneself and others (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Social identity theory is used within this thesis by considering GBQ subcultures as groups and subcultural

identities as a group formation that an individual may adopt (as their in-group) or may not adopt (as out-group(s)), thus reflecting aspects of their social identity.

There is a tendency in research and practice for the larger community of gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying men to be perceived as relatively homogeneous, largely defined by preferences for types of sexual partners. This perception arguably aligns with a phenomenon known as 'perceived outgroup homogeneity', in which people tend to view the members of an out-group as similar to one another (Simon, 1992). Whilst often perceived as homogeneous, gay, bisexual, and queer cultural communities are comprised of numerous heterogeneous subcultural identity groups relating to one or more specific shared characteristics with which members of the group self-identify (Clausell & Fiske, 2005). These subcultural identity groups may centre around specific characteristics and preferences and have one or more labels used to refer to the subculture as a whole and/or those who identify as part of that subculture. Examples of GBQ subcultural identities include 'Bear' – a subculture based around higher body mass and hirsuteness (Moskowitz et al., 2013) and 'Leather' – a subculture centred around hypermasculinity and predominantly wearing leather clothing, often in sexual settings (Moskowitz et al., 2011).

Numerous subcultural identities have been discussed within the literature, with the most prominent being the 'Bear' subculture (Moskowitz et al., 2013). Other examples include 'Twink' – perceived as younger, lean, and with less body hair (Filiault & Drummond, 2007) and 'Pup' – a more recent and emerging subculture framed around role-play, mimicking dog-like behaviour, and often incorporating specialised fetish gear (Wignall & McCormack, 2017). These subcultures, as well as numerous others, are often used to form and communicate an individual's identity, both in-person and in online spaces.

It should be noted that GBQ identity and subcultures have been addressed in various ways, including in research and discussion, within the literature across a range of

disciplines including the humanities and social sciences. For example, the Bear and Leather subcultures have been discussed in relation to their unique framings of masculinity beyond traditional masculine norms and images (Manley et al., 2007; Mosher et al., 2006). Other examples include work conducted by Barrett and Barrett (2017), who explored language use and linguistic patterns in numerous subcultures, including gendered language and forms of speech that challenge gender and sexuality norms. Also, Shaw (2012) conducted an ethnographic study to investigate how the Gaymer subculture and community was formed and how Gaymers perceive the representation of LGBTQ people in digital games. However, the vast majority of research on GBQ subcultural identity has focused on health-related behaviours and outcomes.

2.1.3 – Interconnection of GBQ Subcultural Identity and Technology

As digital technologies have become more advanced, the ways in which people communicate and represent themselves in online environments have diversified. The emergence of social media and virtual communities have facilitated the creation of GBQ-specific online spaces such as the geo-social networking applications Grindr™ (Grindr LLC, 2020) and Scruff™ (Perry Street Software, 2020), as well as websites such as the fetish-based men's social network Recon™ (T101 Limited, 2020). Within these applications, subcultural identities appear among a set of options ('Tribes' on Grindr™ and 'Communities' on Scruff™) that users can display on their profile, allowing one or more subcultural identities to be selected from a given list. As a result, the visibility of GBQ subcultures has increased and technology-based subcultures have emerged, such as 'Gaymer' – a subculture based around GBQ people who enjoy playing video or tabletop games (Shaw, 2012).

However, it should be noted that not all GBQ men consider their sexual identity or subcultural identity as important to their overall self-concept. Adams et al. (2014) conducted a focus group study around gay identity with 45 men who identified as gay,

queer, or homosexual, based in New Zealand. Whilst almost all participants identified as gay, the importance given to their gay identity varied and some participants stated that they dislike being labelled in general or openly expressing their gay identity in public. The use of labels and categorical terms for sexual identity was disputed within the group, with some participants openly disliking using labels or compressing their identity into a category, whilst other participants acknowledged the utility of labels to express themselves easily to others. Discussions also reflected participants downplaying their gay identity, emphasising other aspects of their identity, having negative experiences engaging with the gay community, and wanting to be accepted as a person rather than specifically as a gay man.

2.2 – Identity and Health

2.2.1 – LGBTIQ+ Identity and Health Outcomes

Whilst the main focus of the current study was on how GBQ men characterise, adopt, and express subcultural identities, there are potential implications for health promotion and research. A large part of the research literature related to GBQ subcultural identities has focused on health, such as health outcomes and behaviours, and establishing a clear link between how one self-identifies and their health-related practices (Jetten et al., 2017). This is particularly the case for minority groups (considered the 'outgroup), which are seen as different from what is perceived as the majority of society (or the 'ingroup'; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The *group circumstance hypothesis* (Jetten et al., 2017) posits that people who define themselves in relation to a specific social identity (or set of identities) may have their overall state of wellbeing affected by the status, perception, and structure (e.g., stability and legitimacy) of their associated group(s), and their wellbeing may change as the group(s) themselves change (Jetten et al., 2017).

People who identify as LGBTIQ+ are a prime example where their identity is linked strongly to differing health risks and outcomes. A person who identifies as

LGBTIQ+ is more likely to experience harassment, discrimination, stigma, and minority stress (Jackson et al., 2016), and can be considered at high risk of negative physical and mental health outcomes as a result of their identity (Meyer, 2003). Minority Stress Theory, as outlined by Meyer (2003), illustrates a key influence on the health and wellbeing of people who fall into or identify with demographics or groups considered a minority in society, such as sexual minorities. Minority stress builds upon the general everyday stress experienced by people, it remains stable across different social and cultural structures, and is not grounded in individual events or stressors but higher-level social institutions and processes (Meyer, 2003). The major processes that factor into minority stress for LGB people are experiences of discrimination and prejudice, expectations of being rejected or discriminated against, the concealment of sexual orientation, and the internalisation of negative attitudes such as internalised homophobia (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress has been strongly associated with negative health outcomes for LGBT people including psychological distress, substance use, poor mental health, and suicidality, as presented in a systematic review by Mongelli et al. (2019). These mental health outcomes are shaped by a wide variety of factors and are observed at differential rates across various geographical locations (e.g., different psychosocial risk factors in rural versus urban locations in the United States; Rickard & Yancey, 2018).

However, there are variations between how GBQ men consider their identity in relation to their health. Some GBQ men see their sexual identity as a secondary influence on their health, compared to factors like gender, whilst others consider their sexual identity to influence both their risk-taking behaviours and their active approach to seeking health advice and treatment (Adams et al., 2012). Furthermore, some GBQ men consider their sexual identity and engagement with the broader gay culture and community to be an influence on their overall lifestyle and health-related behaviours, including fitness and actively seeking health advice; however, participants also discussed how difficulties with

targeted health promotion for gay men and the need for further social acceptance of gay men are challenges that these men face for improving their health (Adams et al., 2013).

2.2.2 – LGBTIQ+ Health in Australia

The current study was based in Australia and focused on an Australian sample of GBQ men, as that is where the author and research team reside. As such, it is important to understand the context and some of the key issues related to the health outcomes of the broader LGBTIQ+ population in Australia, of which GBQ men are a subset. According to estimates made by Wilson et al. (2020), approximately 3.46% of Australia's adult population identified as a sexual minority. Of the 3.56% of males who identified as a sexual minority, approximately 1.97% identified as gay, 0.84% as bisexual, and 0.74% as another sexual minority (Wilson et al., 2020). Whilst LGBTIQ+ people comprise a minority of the Australian population, there are considerable issues and differences in health outcomes that have been identified in Australia-based research.

One of the most comprehensive studies on LGBTQ+ Australians is *Private Lives 3* (Hill et al., 2020), a survey conducted in mid-2019 that examined the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ adults (aged 18 and over) in Australia, building upon and reinforcing previous iterations of the study that were conducted in 2007 and 2012. Several comparisons between LGBTIQ+ adults and the general Australian population are presented within the study, including comparisons related to general health, mental health, and suicidality. In terms of self-rated health, over twice as many LGBTIQ people reported poor or very poor self-rated health than has been documented in surveys conducted among the general population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018b; Hill et al., 2020). Regarding mental health, 39.1% of LGBTIQ people reported being diagnosed or treated for depression in the past 12 months (Hill et al., 2020, pp. 49), a figure that is considerably higher than the 4.1% observed in surveys of the general population (Slade et al., 2009). Four times as many LGBTIQ people aged over 18 years indicated high or very

high psychological distress than is observed in the general population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018a; Hill et al., 2020, pp. 46). Furthermore, the number of LGBTIQ people who reported suicidal ideation within the previous 12 months were almost twenty times higher than that reported in the general population (Hill et al., 2020, pp. 50; Johnston et al., 2009). the proportion of LGBTIQ people who reported a suicide attempt within the previous 12 months were approximately ten times higher than reported for the general Australian population (Hill et al., 2020, pp. 51; Johnston et al., 2009).

Among the key issues that impact the health of GBQ men in particular are drug use, HIV, stigma, and discrimination. Drug use is an issue impacting the health of GBQ men in Australia, the prevalence of such is the focus of the *Following Lives Undergoing Change* study (FLUX; Bui et al., 2018). One-tenth of gay and bisexual men who participated reported ever having injected drugs, 91.4% of which had injected crystal methamphetamine (Bui et al., 2018); and over two-fifths had reported using alkyl nitrites (Vaccher et al., 2019). The use of these substances to facilitate or otherwise enhance sexual encounters has been reported in gay and bisexual men in Australia, and has been associated with sexual risk behaviours and an increased risk of HIV transmission from sexual intercourse or exposure to contaminated needles (Bui et al., 2018; Vaccher et al., 2019).

According to the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (2021), approximately 29,045 people were estimated to be living with HIV in Australia in 2019, 59% of HIV transmission in Australia in 2019 related to men who have sex with men (MSM) and 7% related to MSM and injecting drug use. Whilst the treatment and health outcomes for HIV have improved over time, there is a significant level of stigma associated with HIV and the perceived risk of HIV transmission. Broady et al. (2020) examined HIV stigma by association in a sample of non-HIV-positive gay and bisexual men in Australia, finding that almost three-quarters of participants reported feeling

stigmatised by others due to the assumed risk of HIV. Furthermore, HIV stigma by association was significantly related to psychological distress, community attachment, and previous experiences of stigma related to sexual identity (Broady et al., 2020).

Research has also documented how significant social and political developments can influence mental health among the LGBTIQ+ community, as seen during the 2017 Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey. This was a highly controversial period during which discrimination against LGB people became more publicly visible and the mental health of many LGB Australians was negatively impacted (Verrelli et al., 2019). Given these associated risks and health outcomes, a GBQ individual may try to protect themselves by avoiding expressing their identity in certain contexts, such as around family, in a school environment, or in public (Higa et al., 2014).

2.2.3 – Health Research and GBQ Subcultural Identity

Whilst there is a wide range of literature related to broader LGBTIQ+ identities and health, the literature specific to GBQ men, subcultures, and health is somewhat more limited but nevertheless makes up the main focus of work on GBQ subcultural identities. Some of the literature seeks to enhance understanding of these identities within health research and practice, such as for mental health counselling (e.g., Maki, 2017). However, there have been numerous studies examining the link between subcultural identity (often presented using different terms) and specific health outcomes for GBQ men. The majority of these studies have been conducted in North America, though Australian-specific research on the topic exists (see *2.2.4* below).

Willoughby et al. (2008) examined whether 'gay peer crowds' exist based on the opinions of self-identified American/Canadian gay men and how affiliating with a gay peer crowd is related to health differences and risk factors for gay men. A sample of 340 gay-identifying men from the United States and Canada participated in an online survey, which utilised the Gay Peer Crowd Questionnaire that was specifically developed for the

study; participants were presented focus group-created descriptions of key peer crowds and were asked whether they believe that group of men existed. The list of peer crowds presented included 'Activists', 'Bears', 'Goths', 'Granolas', 'Professionals', and 'Twinks', among others. Furthermore, participants were asked about their engagement in health risk behaviours such as substance use, binge drinking, unprotected casual anal sex, and steroid use. Regarding the existence of peer crowds, all 12 peer crowds presented were believed to exist, but the crowds reported most certainly to exist were 'Drag Queens', 'Bears', 'Circuit Partiers', 'Activists', 'Twinks', and 'Professionals'; conversely, 'Granolas' and 'Goths' were the least certainly reported. In terms of health differences, significant variations in health risk behaviours were found between certain peer crowds including higher rates of substance use, binge drinking, unprotected anal sex, and steroid use (Willoughby et al., 2008). Specifically, higher cannabis use was associated with 'Artsys' and 'Granolas' whilst the use of other drugs was positively associated with 'Circuit Partiers', and negatively related to 'Professionals' and 'Suburbans'. Binge drinking was more associated with 'Circuit Partiers' and less associated with 'Suburbans'; and smoking was associated more with 'Goths' and less with 'Twinks'. Unprotected anal sex with a stranger was more associated with 'Bears', 'Circuit Partiers', and 'Muscle Boys' and less associated with 'Artsys'. Finally, steroid use was more associated with 'Muscle Boys' and less associated with 'Suburbans' and 'Activists' (Willoughby et al., 2008). Whilst Willoughby et al. (2008) approached a broader range of peer crowds and identities, other studies have focused more in-depth on specific subcultures and identities.

Moskowitz et al. (2011) investigated potential differences in sexual health and sexual behaviours specifically for men identified as 'Leathermen' compared to those not identifying with the leather community. A total of 1,554 self-identified 'Leathermen' completed a quantitative survey distributed at two events in the United States (one that

was specific to 'Leathermen', one that was not). The survey asked participants whether they considered themselves part of the Leather community, whether they identify as 'Dominant' or 'Submissive' orienting (or non-orienting), how many leather-based activities or events they had attended over the last month, and how strongly they identify with and consider the leather community important to them. Sexual health-related questions were presented around HIV status, sexual health testing, number of partners, sexual role, and condom use. Results illustrate that 'Leathermen' were 61% more likely to be HIV-positive compared to non-'Leathermen'. Whilst there were no significant differences regarding sexual health testing, 'Leathermen' were less likely to use condoms for both receptive and insertive anal intercourse when compared to non-'Leathermen' (Moskowitz et al., 2011). The findings demonstrate that there are significant differences in health risks and practices between those identifying as 'Leathermen' specifically and those not identifying, which suggests that specific subcultures may differ in terms of health risk and practices compared to other subcultures and to men who may not identify with a subculture. It should be noted that whilst the majority of participants identified as homosexual (89.3%), bisexual (5.6%) and heterosexual (5.1%) men were included in the study which suggests that the leather community is not inherent to gay men.

Featuring commonly in the research literature is the 'Bear' subculture, which has been the focus of numerous studies around the health and characteristics of these men. A systematic review of studies related to the health of men identifying as 'Bears' was conducted by Quidley-Rodriguez and De Santis (2016). The review incorporated a total of 11 articles, including qualitative ($n = 6$), quantitative ($n = 4$), and mixed methods ($n = 1$) studies which were grouped into the categories of physical, psychosocial, or social health. Notably, many of the studies described within this chapter were included in this systematic review. The range of studies examined suggested that the 'Bear' subculture is one that exists globally. In terms of physical health, the results indicated that 'Bears' are

significantly at-risk of weight-related issues associated with a higher body mass index. Regarding psychosocial health, experiences of discrimination and harassment, and a lack of available role models were reported. In particular, experiences of discrimination were reported based on weight and not fitting the stereotypical image of a young and slim gay man. These experiences can result in lower self-esteem, and negative self-image was reported for men identifying as 'Bears', particularly before they had discovered the 'Bear' community. Overall, 'Bears' reported lower self-esteem when compared to other gay men. For health risk behaviours, 'Bears' reported less drinking, smoking, and substance use compared to other gay men. Furthermore, 'Bears' reported engaging in more diverse sexual acts and were more likely to have unprotected anal sex compared to other gay men, but engaged more often in testing for sexually transmitted infections.

2.2.4 – Australian Health Research on GBQ Subcultural Identity

Beyond the internationally-based studies of GBQ subcultural identity, as highlighted above, there is a rather small but valuable set of studies exploring subcultural identity in relation to health within an Australian context. For example, Lyons and Hosking (2014) conducted an Australia-wide quantitative survey of young Australian gay men to investigate potential differences between common subcultural identities related to health. A total of 1,034 Australian gay men, aged between 18 to 39 years, were asked about their sexual orientation and subcultural identities using a list of commonly known identities, compiled through consultation with relevant health organisations, sexual health researchers, and gay men. The identities listed were 'Bear', 'Cub', 'Wolf', 'Otter', 'Twink', 'Daddy', and 'Sex Pig'. Furthermore, the survey examined measures related to physical health (i.e., body mass index (BMI), substance use, and drinking), mental health (e.g., psychological distress, self-esteem, and experiences of stigma and discrimination), and sexual health and behaviour (e.g., number of sexual partners, condom use, and sexual health testing). Whilst a total of 458 men reported a subcultural identity, only the two

most-common subcultures; 'Twink' ($n = 206$) and 'Cub' ($n = 92$) were included in the final analysis alongside non-identifying men ($n = 572$). The results indicated significant differences between 'Twinks' and 'Cubs'. For example, Twinks reported a lower BMI, higher tobacco and alcohol use, higher psychological distress, more recent receptive anal sex, and higher rates of sexual health testing, whilst 'Cubs' reported lower overall self-rated health compared to 'Twinks' (Lyons & Hosking, 2014).

In a similar vein, Prestage et al. (2015) explored how Australian gay and bisexual men's participation in gay community subcultures are associated with risk behaviours, particularly around sexual behaviour and HIV risk. A cross-sectional quantitative survey of 849 gay and bisexual men in Australia was conducted, asking about participation in gay community subcultures, social engagement with other gay and bisexual men, HIV serostatus, and sexual practices and behaviours. The gay community subcultures listed in the survey were grouped into five subcultural groupings based on similarities: 'Sexually Adventurous' (related to more diverse sexual practices, such as 'Master/slave', 'Leatherman', and 'Sexpig'); 'Bear Tribes' (related to the Bear subculture, such as 'Bear/cub' and 'Daddy/boy); 'Alternative Queer' (associated with non-conformity to norms of gender or sexuality); 'Party Scene' (related to nightlife and party behaviours, including 'Twink' and 'Drag Queen'); and 'Sexually Conservative' (centred around more traditional sexual practices). The findings illustrated that individuals who were more engaged with subcultures in the 'Sexually Adventurous' or 'Bear Tribes' groupings were associated with higher age, more likely to be HIV-positive, to have more gay friends, to test more for HIV (if HIV-negative), and less likely to be in a relationship, to use a condom with casual sexual partners, or to have a higher level of education (Prestage et al., 2015). Men engaging with the 'Alternative Queer' grouping were associated with lower age, higher numbers of gay friends and sexual partners, were less likely to have a higher level of education, and less likely to identify as gay. Those who engaged with the 'Party

Scene' grouping were associated with lower age and were less likely to have a higher level of education but had a higher number of gay friends. Finally, men who were engaged with the 'Sexually Conservative' grouping were more likely to be older, to have higher levels of education, and (if HIV-negative) were more likely to test for HIV (Prestage et al., 2015).

2.2.5 – Gaps in the Literature

The studies described above provide a broad range of information related to GBQ subcultural identities. However, there are numerous limitations and knowledge gaps. Firstly, the majority of this research has been conducted in the United States, has focused greatly on the association of GBQ subcultural identities and health, and has been quantitative in nature with few qualitative studies. Furthermore, there has been little research or knowledge provided of how these identities are perceived by GBQ men, or the roles that these identities serve in their lives.

Some of these gaps have also been identified by Quidley-Rodriguez and De Santis (2016) in their systematic review of research focused on 'Bears'. The systematic review incorporated many of the studies described in this chapter, which highlighted a range of limitations. For example, it was noted that research on the 'Bear' subculture is particularly limited outside the United States and further research was recommended in other countries. Conducting research on GBQ subcultural identities outside of the United States would allow for greater knowledge of the potential diversity perceived within GBQ communities (including subcultural identities) to be explored further and within different contexts such as Australia.

Quidley-Rodriguez and De Santis (2016) also specifically called for further qualitative research on men who identify as 'Bears', particularly with regard to how an individual's behaviours (such as sexual behaviours) may be related to or grounded within their identity as a 'Bear' and their association with the 'Bear' community. As such, it is

important to examine how an individual's subcultural identity may be expressed (e.g., through language and behaviour), as well as the meaning and importance their subcultural identity holds within their life.

Furthermore, the review addressed how the health outcomes and practices of men identifying as 'Bears' were different but did not examine why these differences may arise in 'Bears' specifically or how the 'Bear' community and identity are perceived or described within the contexts the studies presented. This suggests a need to explore how subcultural identities like 'Bear' are understood and defined by people, particularly by those who perceive themselves as belonging to these groups. Given that the perceptions and status of a group, and any changes in these, may influence the wellbeing of those who identify with the group (Jetten et al., 2017), examining how 'Bears' and other GBQ subcultural identities are perceived may also help to clarify how an individual's identity (and expression) may change contextually (e.g., as perceptions of a specific subculture change).

The range of Australian health-related research around GBQ subcultural identities is relatively narrow and quantitative in nature, which has limited the amount of knowledge and understanding gained about GBQ subcultural identities in an Australian context. Whilst Lyons and Hosking (2014) conducted one of the few Australian studies of gay subcultural identity, it is important to note that only gay-identifying men were targeted and thus the findings are potentially less applicable to bisexual or queer-identifying men. The authors acknowledge that a number of bisexual men did report subcultural identities, suggesting that including bisexual men in future subcultural identity research may prove valuable and help test whether the findings generalise beyond gay-identifying men. Whilst findings from Prestage et al. (2015) provided valuable new information related to links between subcultural groups and some health-related outcomes, the study was limited to a specific set of subcultural groupings. In addition,

neither the Prestage et al. (2015) of Lyons and Hosking (2014) studies accounted for the possibility that people may identify with more than one subcultural identity. Both of the studies presented subcultural identities with pre-determined definitions, without accounting for how the participants themselves may understand or interpret the meaning or characteristics of each subculture listed (or whether they were aware of them in the first place). This means that any incongruency between how the subcultures are described to participants within the community being studied and how the participants themselves understand and describe those subcultures may not be addressed, especially if the way the broader community understands a specific subculture has evolved over time or differs between locations.

As illustrated above, there is a need for research in other contexts, such as Australia, that is qualitatively focused and seeks to improve cultural understanding of GBQ men, particularly in relation to subcultural identities. Addressing these gaps would help inform future research on GBQ subcultural identities, as well as help to further enable health promotion and support strategies to be culturally-informed.

2.3 – Research Objectives

In order to help address the key gaps in the literature outlined above, the aim of this research was to further develop current understanding of GBQ communities and subcultural identities through exploring the perspectives of GBQ men who utilise and self-identify with subcultural identities. There were five specific objectives of the research that were devised to accomplish this aim, listed below with their relevant publication and chapter indicated in parentheses:

- The first objective (Objective 1, Paper 1; *Chapter 4*) was to explore the potential diversity of subcultural identities that GBQ men perceive within their communities.

- The second (Objective 2, Paper 1; *Chapter 4*) was to examine how GBQ men understand, define, and attribute meaning to subcultural identities, including the importance and function of subcultural identities in community life.

- The third (Objective 3, Paper 2; *Chapter 5*) was to explore how GBQ men develop their sense of identity and adopt a subcultural identity (or identities).

- The fourth (Objective 4, Paper 2; *Chapter 5*) was to investigate whether an individual's subcultural identity changes over time and within different contexts.

- Finally, the fifth objective (Objective 5, Paper 2; *Chapter 5*) was to examine the ways in which GBQ men express their identity, including through language and behaviour.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter details the methodology used to address the aim and objectives outlined in the preceding chapter. This chapter outlines the specific qualitative research design, including the recruitment and sampling procedures, along with a description of the research sample. This chapter also explains the data collection and interview materials and processes, as well as the approach and framework for data analysis. A discussion of potential ethical issues and the positionality of the researcher are then discussed in the final sections.

3.1 – Research Design

3.1.1 – Qualitative Approach

The current study sought to further develop the understanding of GBQ subcultural identity in Australia through exploring how these identities are understood, described, adopted, and expressed by those who use them. As the topic of subcultural identity, and indeed identity in general, is quite complex and multifaceted, the development of identity and the meaning(s) identity has are not easily captured or expressed through quantitative means, a qualitative approach was adopted in order to appropriately capture and explore the diversity of experiences in relation to subcultural identities. Qualitative approaches offer greater depth and flexibility in researching less quantifiable and more theoretical topics, such as identity (Liamputtong, 2012), and offered a useful strategy to explore the current study's topic in a more holistic manner.

3.1.2 – Social Constructionism

As was explored in detail in chapter 1.3.1, the current study utilised a social constructionist perspective, which theorises a shared understanding and knowledge of the world developed and influenced through social constructs, assumptions, and conditions (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism is a theoretical approach that critically questions the assumptions and categories people use to perceive and improve their understanding of the

world and posits that knowledge and understanding are considered specific to both cultural and historical contexts (Burr, 2003). Furthermore, social constructionism emphasises the relationship between knowledge and social action, as well as the role of social processes and interaction in maintaining the knowledge and understanding of the world held by individuals within the same social and cultural contexts (Burr, 2003).

Phenomenology was considered as an alternative, which explores the lived experiences of an individual as shaped subjectively by their consciousness and individual perspective (Smith, 2018). Another potential approach considered was critical realism, which posits that there are objectively real structures and objects that exist in reality and have causal relationships, but these structures may not be easily observed directly and may instead only be observed and understood through the effects they cause (Burr, 2015). However, social constructionism was considered a more appropriate perspective to explore how subcultural identities are commonly understood and described by GBQ men, as prior research has emphasised how identities within these communities can be socially-constructed (Jaspal, 2016). In addition, social constructionism is often used to explore and explain social phenomena (such as GBQ subcultural identity) as a result of social processes and the interactions between different groups and individuals through examining the language and discourse used by individuals (Burr, 2003). The more relativist and subjective nature of social constructionism aligned more with the current study's emphasis on interpreting how different GBQ men understand subcultural identities as their own subjective truths and perspectives of reality, as opposed to the more objective approach of realism.

3.1.3 – Thematic Analysis

Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore participants' thoughts and feelings in relation to their lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews allow for a reactive and flexible approach whilst still having a structured

interview schedule to ensure data collection is achieved across key topic areas (Liamputtong, 2012). Thematic analysis was utilised for the data analysis as it is a flexible method of qualitative analysis through which participants' responses are searched through and examined for patterns of similar content and meaning as well as dissimilar or diverging themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

The thematic analysis utilised an inductive approach with semantic coding and a realist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012). An inductive approach derives the structure of the data, the themes, and the coding from the data directly as opposed to fitting the data to a pre-existing structure or concepts based on theory. A semantic approach to coding involves organising and coding the explicit content of the data, which in this case are the direct phrasing and language used in participant responses instead of any underlying assumptions or concepts. The realist framework to the thematic analysis considers the data (e.g., participant descriptions of how they directly understand and interpret their own identity) to be the assumed reality for the participants, taking their responses at face value. As the study was designed to explore participants' understanding and expression of subcultural identity as they explicitly interpret and describe them, this form of thematic analysis felt the most appropriate for analysing the participant responses.

Another method that may have been appropriate for the current study is Discourse Analysis, which examines the meaning and discourses of speech or written text through analysing the structural elements and use of language (Burr, 2015). Discourse analysis would be appropriate for the current study due to the data being analysed as text, allowing for the structure and discourses present within participant responses to be analysed. However, it was felt that the current study would focus less on the specific structure and language of participant responses and more on the patterns of meaning, similarity, and shared constructs between the responses of the participants, and thus thematic analysis was selected in preference to discourse analysis.

Alternative methods such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Grounded Theory were also considered for the current study. Whilst IPA is also based upon using the transcripts of semi-structured interviews in analysis, research questions that utilise IPA tend to emphasise rather specific or short-term situations or direct lived experiences (Smith, 2007) and incorporate a more active role for the researcher that takes into account their own perception of the world and interpretations of responses and interactions between the researcher and participant (Willig, 2008). The current study considered the potential formative influence of multiple events or longer-term situations on identity, rendering the more specific and precise focus of IPA less appropriate. Furthermore, the focus of the study was on taking the ways in which the participants described how they themselves perceive and understand the world around them as their interpretation of reality, with less emphasis on applying the researcher's own interpretations, thus making Thematic Analysis more appropriate than an IPA approach.

Whilst Grounded Theory might also be considered an appropriate approach to the study topic, it is a more rigid and less accessible methodology (Chun Tie et al., 2019) than Thematic Analysis, with the latter offering a more accessible and flexible approach that suited the study aims. Furthermore, Grounded Theory seeks to generate theory and hypotheses that are grounded within the data to be used in further research, instead of relying on existing concepts or pre-existing theories to expand upon the data (Willig, 2008). The aim of the current study was not to generate hypotheses or theory, but rather to examine and document the diverse range of experiences of GBQ men who utilise subcultural identities through a more exploratory lens, with a focus on identifying emergent and divergent patterns of meaning and shared understanding, given the small amount of previous qualitative work on the topic. This aim is more suitable for a thematic analysis approach, further highlighting its usefulness as an approach for this study.

3.1.4 – Sampling

The sample size of 15 semi-structured interviews was determined to be appropriate through referring to guidelines and literature from numerous qualitative researchers such as Guest et al. (2016), Willig (2008), and thematic analysis-specific texts by Braun and Clarke (2013). Each of these texts recommend around 10 qualitative interviews as appropriate to reach theme saturation, with the decision to conduct up to 15 interviews being made to potentially account for as many unique perspectives as possible given the range of subcultural identities.

3.2 – Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a two-stage method, involving an expression of interest survey that was hosted on the Qualtrics™ online survey platform (see *Appendix A* for the consent form and *Appendix B* for the survey structure) and a self-booking system for interviews (see *Chapter 3.2.1* below for further details), advertised in a formal advertisement (see *Appendix C*) that was distributed via social media (Facebook™, Twitter™, and LinkedIn™). The advertisement called for volunteer research participants to take part in a study on the 'diversity of identities among same-sex attracted men in Australia', asking for people identifying as male and openly same-sex attracted who were aged 18 years or older and living in Australia. The advertisement specifically invited participants to take part in a face-to-face or online interview in which they would be asked questions about how they think about and describe themselves, including the terms they use and what those terms mean to them. Advertisements were initially shared through the personal Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts of the author, who is well connected online to a wide range of diverse LGBTIQ+ groups and subcultural groups in Melbourne.

During the interview sign-up survey, demographic information (age, gender, sexual orientation, education, ethnic background, and location within Australia) was collected from participants. In addition, they were presented with a list of 19 subcultural

identities and asked which terms they identified with personally. Given the potential for many other identities that may not have been included on the list, an option was also provided for participants to report additional identities through an open text field.

This list of subcultural identity terms presented was derived primarily from profile options within social mobile applications specific to same-sex attracted men (including GBQ men), and therefore covered many of the more common identity terms. In particular, the terms were derived from the 'Tribes' option of Grindr™ (Grindr LLC, 2020), the 'Communities' option of Scruff™ (Perry Street Software, 2020), and the 'Interests' option of fetish-based social site Recon™ (T101 Limited, 2020). Most of the terms included were common to both Grindr™ and Scruff™, with several identity terms such as 'Leather' and 'Pup' also appearing on Recon™. There were no refinements made to these terms to reflect the Australian context, in order to accurately reflect the terminology used within these digital spaces that are commonly accessed by GBQ men in Australia.

The use of the terms selected reflected the contemporary terminology presented in previous research on the topic of subcultural identity (e.g., Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Willoughby et al., 2008), which featured similar terms and language to the current study. The terms presented included terms that are similar to one another such as 'Geek' (a subculture unrelated to sexual identity framed around enthusiasm for popular culture and obscure media such as science fiction; McCain et al., 2015) and 'Gaymer' (a subculture associated with sexual identity framed around enthusiasm for the specific media of video and tabletop gaming; Shaw, 2014), to potentially capture the similarities or differences between these subcultural identities. However, it should be noted that these identities and the language behind them are ever-changing, and the terms presented reflect some of the language used in the specific time and geographical contexts that those studies were conducted within.

Through the survey, participants were screened for whether they met the inclusion or exclusion criteria for the study (see *Chapter 3.2.1*). Participants who met the inclusion criteria were then given the choice to take part in an interview, either online or face to face, and were prompted for an email address and/or phone number if they agreed to take part. They were then redirected to a screen stating that they had been placed in a recruitment pool and would be contacted if they were chosen for an interview. Participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were notified that they were unable to take part in the study. Every participant who completed the expression of interest survey was asked whether they consent for their responses to be included in the study.

The geographical focus on Australia was chosen in order to reduce differences in situated cultural context, which shapes expression and performance of one's culture and can influence their behaviours; an example of this is health beliefs and behaviours as demonstrated in Congress and Lyons (1992). This also allowed for the generation of a detailed and rich picture of a small number of same-sex attracted men, living in Australia during the time of interviews. Additionally, emphasis was placed on gender identity rather than biological sex. As the study was grounded in identity and self-perception, the study was open to any participant who identified as male in some form (whether cisgender or as a transmasculine person). This allowed for greater potential diversity in the data obtained, as well as the opportunity to collect information on terminology from transmasculine men within the same community.

3.2.1 – Sample Screening

Participants who were eligible to participate in the interviews had to meet the following criteria: 1) aged 18 years or older; 2) live in Australia; 3) openly identify as same-sex attracted (namely gay, bisexual, pansexual, or queer), and 3) identify as male (whether cisgender male or trans-masculine). Participants also had to state that they identify with one or more subcultural identity terms, either by selecting one or more from

the provided list of 19 terms and/or by completing the open text box to write in a different term or terms they used. Participants who identified as heterosexual, asexual, or as a 'man who has sex with men' were considered ineligible to participate. The current study focussed on communities of self-identifying GBQ men, and heterosexual-identifying 'men who have sex with men' (MSM) are likely to have a range of different life circumstances or be involved in other communities that would require separate examination. It is less likely that MSM not identifying with a GBQ community label (such as gay or bisexual) would identify under subcultures related to GBQ communities. As it was essential for the current study that participants openly identify both under a GBQ community and as one or more GBQ subcultural identities, the inclusion criterion was based on identity rather than behaviour.

Each participant who met the inclusion criteria was contacted via email with a link to Acuity Scheduling™ software, to book themselves in for either a face to face or an online interview. The interview participant information and consent form (see *Appendix D*) was attached to the email, and participants were asked to read the form before booking their interview. Each interview booking was followed up on the week prior to the interview date via email.

3.2.2 – Sample Description

Fifteen in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted between September and November 2019. All the men in the sample were same-sex attracted and identified as gay, bisexual, queer, or related identities, such as pansexual. For brevity, the sample is hence referred to as GBQ men within the analyses and reporting of the results. The final sample comprised fifteen same-sex attracted men living in Australia who utilise one or more subcultural identity terms and had attended an interview.

The full set of demographic frequencies for the sample can be found in *Table 1*, whilst the frequencies with which subcultural identity terms were used among the sample

can be found in *Table 2*. The sample ranged in age from 22 years to 54 years old. Most participants identified as male or cis male ($n = 14$) with one participant who identified as transmasculine. The majority also identified as gay ($n = 12$). Whilst participants from all states and territories in Australia were eligible and encouraged to participate, those who self-booked and attended an interview lived in either the state of Victoria ($n = 13$) or Queensland ($n = 2$). The most common subcultural identity reported was 'Geek', with 60% of the sample identifying with this term ($n = 9$), followed by 'Queer' ($n = 7$) and 'Bear' ($n = 5$). Each participant identified with more than one subcultural identity, with several identifying as three or more.

3.3 – Data Collection and Organisation

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect the qualitative data that forms the main data analysis of this study. Semi-structured interviews allow for interviewers to be more flexible and responsive when conducting interviews, adapting questions and prompting for further elaboration when relevant, whilst also providing a foundational structure for the interview schedule (Liamputtong, 2012). As previously stated, Thematic Analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was chosen as the approach for analysing the interview content, and the interview schedule (see *Appendix E*) was designed to help facilitate the potential grouping of responses by breaking the interview into three sections of related questions.

Section 1 (Demographics) of the interview schedule involved a repeat of the questions within the Expression of Interest survey to check for accuracy and to allow participants to give revised responses as a result of further thought on the subject post-survey (the interview-based responses comprise the demographic data reported in this thesis). After collecting this information, the interview schedule comprised two further distinct sections, each covering the two main research objectives of the study.

Section 2 (Understanding of Identity) was designed to explore the perspectives through which the participants view identity, and to gauge their understanding of subcultural identities, whether their own or not. This included participants' perceptions of the functions, definitions, and characteristics of 11 of the 20 subcultural identity terms presented in the Expression of Interest survey. Participants were presented with the 11 terms, one after the other, and asked if they had heard of the term before and to describe the subcultural identity that they perceive it represents (i.e., how someone who identifies with that term may look, or any stereotypes/archetypes related to the term), with prompting and further elaboration of responses requested, as necessary.

Section 3 (Experience of Identity) focused on participants' reflections of their own experiences of forming and expressing their identity and self-concept. This section explored how various aspects of their backgrounds, such as religion, sexual preferences (both for particular types of people or for certain sexual acts), and physical appearance, potentially factored into participants' identities. Furthermore, participants were asked to reflect upon how they had developed and expressed their identity, particularly their subcultural identities, in different contexts, including whether and how their identity might have changed over time. For example, whether they emphasised or suppressed certain elements of their identity or specific subcultural identity terms in their workplace compared to social situations, or with friends as compared to their family. This section also explored the performative aspects of subcultural identity. Specifically, how preferences for, or engagement with, certain activities (i.e., hobbies such as video gaming, preferences for engaging with specific types of people socially, and sexual preferences such as leather and fetish play) are related to engaging with or performing certain identities (such as Gaymers, Leathermen, and Pups). The behaviours explored related to social interaction (e.g., preferences for face to face or online interaction), health (e.g.,

diet, exercise, visiting a doctor, etc.), or sexual activity (e.g., sexual activity preferences, casual sex, engaging in condom-less sex).

Each participant was given the choice of attending either a face-to-face interview on-campus at La Trobe University or an audio-only online interview conducted via Zoom. The majority of participants opted for a face-to-face interview ($n = 9$) over a Zoom interview ($n = 6$). Both interview formats used the same interview schedule, were the same length, and all interviews were conducted solely by the author. It is important to note that the data collection, including both the EOI survey and the interviews, were completed in late 2019, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Australia. As such, there was no impact by changes in subcultural interaction and performance that may have resulted from COVID-19 restrictions.

Every interview was recorded and transcribed by either the author or a pre-approved confidential transcription service. Transcriptions were conducted confidentially with all names and identifying information removed from each transcript. The transcripts were further checked by the author multiple times for accuracy and to ensure de-identification. Each participant was assigned a code number based on the order in which they interviewed, which was used for the purposes of transcription, data analysis and storage (i.e., P1 for the first participant, P2 for the second, etc.), as well as a pseudonym for use in reporting the findings. The subcultural identity (or identities) used by each participant and their age was recorded with their pseudonym for quote attribution and context.

There were both benefits and drawbacks with utilising online interviews in addition to face-to-face interviews. Firstly, access to video calling technology and a consistent network connection were required for both parties which led to occasional audio drop-outs or drops in quality and having to repeat or clarify what was said when these instances arose.

To reduce the possibility of these glitches or disconnecting, the choice was made prior to the first interview to conduct audio-only interviews without either party using their camera within the call. This meant that certain non-verbal data (such as body language and facial expressions) could not be observed in the online interviews, whereas these could be observed in the face-to-face interviews. Regardless, however, several participants often expressed after the interview that they felt more comfortable and able to articulate their thoughts more clearly to the interviewer when there was no camera feed. There was no observable difference in the richness of the data captured face-to-face or via audio only.

Providing the option for an interview on-campus or online allowed for flexibility for participants, wherein they could participate in which of the two contexts/locations they felt most comfortable. For example, an interview on-campus may have been preferred if a participant did not feel comfortable talking about their identity at home or were concerned that family or housemates may hear their responses. Furthermore, the use of online interviews allowed for data collection with participants in other locations outside Melbourne, at more convenient times (e.g., outside regular work hours), or if they felt more comfortable expressing themselves in their own home or familiar space.

3.4 – Data Analysis

Prior to the qualitative data analysis, IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences 25 was used to generate frequency statistics for the demographics and subcultural identities of the final interview sample, using the quantitative data from the Expression of Interest survey and from the first section of each interview. These included age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and the frequencies of each of the subcultural identity terms presented in the survey. Only the responses given by those who participated in the interviews ($n = 15$) were utilised in the quantitative analysis. There were minor discrepancies that emerged between the identities listed by some participants during the

interviews as compared to the survey. In these cases, the interview responses for this question were regarded as the complete data presented in this thesis, given that filling out the survey may have prompted further self-reflection from some participants in how they identify before or during their interview.

As explained above (see *Chapter 3.1.3)*, the qualitative data analysis comprised an inductive thematic analysis with a semantic approach to coding within a realist framework as detailed by Braun and Clarke (2012). The transcripts from the interviews were stored and coded utilising NVivo 12 software, with specific nodes generated for each emerging theme. The following procedure, based on the six-stage framework presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to conduct thematic analysis:

First, a transcript was generated from the recording of each interview and read multiple times by the research team to familiarise and immerse oneself within the data (*Stage 1: Familiarising Yourself with the Data*). Next, each line within the transcripts was analysed and the message of each line were used to generate initial codes based on content and meaning (*Stage 2: Generating Initial Codes*); each code was refined repeatedly as more transcripts were analysed. Any refined codes that were relevant for the research objectives were incorporated into larger themes, according to patterns and similarities found between codes (*Stage 3: Searching for Themes*). These themes were reviewed and refined multiple times based on fit first with the coded data, then with the full data set (*Stage 4: Reviewing Potential Themes*). The final revision of the themes captured the key message and critical information to report, as well as organising and structuring the themes into higher-level and sub-themes that convey these messages (*Stage 5: Defining and Naming Themes*). Finally, illustrative examples of each theme were selected from the transcripts and utilised to report the findings (*Stage 6: Producing the Report*).

3.5 – Ethical Considerations

3.5.1 – Recruitment Through Personal Networks

The study was approved by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee (ethics approval can be found in *Appendix F*). One of the ethical considerations of the research methodology relates to the recruitment method, utilising a personal social media account to recruit. The use of personal social networks in recruitment can present some challenges with regard to the privacy of participants (Gelinas et al., 2017) and the potential loss of control over where and how study advertisements are shared through the networks of others (Fileborn, 2015).

Due to the potential personal connections and the nature of social media itself, the privacy of those who participated could only be guaranteed from the researchers but not from other participants. Namely, some participants reported either when sharing the advertisement or via commenting on the original advertisement that they had completed the expression of interest questionnaire, and therefore may have been interviewed for the study. This means that any quoted sections of interviews with these participants could potentially have been able to be identified by people who are familiar or connected to the participant personally. To account for this potential privacy concern, each interview participant was asked to keep their interview participation confidential and not share details of the interview itself. Furthermore, care was taken during the data analysis and transcription phases to reduce potential identification through the use of pseudonyms and limited accompanying demographic information and by selecting quotes from the interviews that were less likely to be identifiable in general.

The current study utilised guidelines from the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham & Buchanan, 2012) to recruit in as ethical a manner as possible through the use of passive online recruitment (sharing an advertisement broadly without directly contacting potential participants), no participants were directly asked to advertise the

study themselves and any sharing beyond the author's personal social networks was offered by participants and personal connections themselves without prompting.

There were also potential issues around interviewing people personally familiar to the author that were considered and addressed when conducting the research. These include concerns around potential hesitation or discomfort for participants sharing potentially-sensitive information and experiences with a researcher who may be a friend or acquaintance, and the potential of assumed knowledge prior to the interviews, which have been discussed by others in relation to qualitative research (Brewis, 2014). Participants who were personally acquainted with the author prior to participation were assured that the interviews were confidential and that the option to withdraw data or to skip questions was available. Furthermore, both parties agreed that both the author and participant were to respond as if there were no prior familiarity with each other, and that only the information brought up by participants within the interview would be included (with encouragement to share anything they thought was relevant, regardless of whether it had been shared previously outside of the study).

Personal familiarity with the author did not influence whether a participant was invited for an interview as all eligible participants who provided contact details were invited to participate and not every participant was familiar with the author. However, there was considerable value and benefit from including participants who were personally familiar with the author, especially in regard to developing rapport and encouraging openness in the interviews. Within interviews with personally familiar participants, a rapport and flow were noticeably more naturally established, and it is possible that these participants felt they could be more open and reflective in the interview because they had prior familiarity with the person conducting the interview. These sentiments have been reflected in other studies that utilised friends and acquaintances as interview participants (Blichfeldt & Heldbjerg, 2011). Given the highly personal nature of identity, it is likely

that these participants were more easily able to talk about their identity within the interviews because there was a sense of familiarity and potentially even feelings of lower-risk or higher trust when discussing this sensitive topic, which may not have arisen for participants who were meeting the interviewer for the first time.

3.5.2 – Reducing Psychological Distress

An additional ethical consideration was that the personal nature of one's identity may have been distressing or uncomfortable to talk about in an interview setting. To mitigate potential risks, and to provide help when needed, each participant was given the details for an anonymous LGBTIQ-specific phone and online counselling service and encouraged to contact them if they felt any distress or discomfort post-interview. The author took care to ensure that all participants were fully informed about the nature of the study and the content of the interviews prior to giving informed consent. Throughout the interviews themselves, the author also encouraged participants to pause, skip questions, or end the interview as necessary if they felt uncomfortable. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw their data after the interview if they changed their mind about their responses being included in the study.

Finally, care was taken in the wording of both the advertisement and the interview schedule with regard to including trans participants. Trans people who identified as male were allowed and encouraged to participate, represented by the term 'Transmasculine' on the advertisement and the expression of interest questionnaire. Within the interviews, only the terms and pronouns given by the participants were used to identify them, thereby preventing misrepresentation of pronouns or identity, and helping to build rapport and a respectful interaction.

3.6 – Positionality of Researcher

3.6.1 – Being Part of the Local LGBTIQ+ Community

Throughout this study, I have reflected on how my position in the Melbourne community and the ways I interact with others have shaped both the areas I am interested in and the ways in which I conduct research. I have been involved in numerous LGBTIQ+ community-based roles including community radio, sexual health outreach, and event work, and each of these roles have exposed me to the larger LGBTIQ+ community and people within them. This allowed me to develop both professional and social networks within Melbourne particularly, which has a unique culture involving people of a diverse and broad range of identities and communities. Each of these factored into my pursuit to understand as much as possible about specific communities, such as GBQ men, and piquing my curiosity and a desire to learn more about identities other than my own. When it came to the current study, my experiences both online and in-person unearthed subcultural identities for me through their use as keywords or seeing how others declare their own identities using these terms or through their appearance and behaviour. I was relatively familiar with a large number of subcultural identities when proposing the project and I myself identify as a 'Geek' and 'Gaymer' primarily (though also identified by others as a 'Twink') and had engaged mostly with others like me. However, I wanted to learn more about the range of identities in the community and how others understood these identities in similar (or dissimilar) ways to me.

The questions asked and the facets of identity explored in the interviews came as a result of reflecting on my own identity and the sort of experiences or considerations that helped form my identity (e.g., my hobbies, physical appearance, preferences, etc.). In terms of the broader topic, I had an insider perspective as such as that I utilise subcultural identities myself though I could be considered an outsider when it came to interviewing people different to myself who identify with subcultures that I do not. This proved slightly challenging when it came to forming questions and things to consider when talking to others who identify differently to myself (such as not making assumptions and

using appropriate terminology). However, this provided a valuable opportunity for creating rapport through exploring similarities between the subcultures both myself and the participants identify with and using my pre-existing understanding and knowledge of the subcultures I identify with to prompt, compare, and learn more about similar and different subcultures.

3.6.2 – From Quantitative to Qualitative

Prior to this work, I had only ever been trained in and conducted quantitative research, having gone through an undergraduate Psychology degree and an Honours-equivalent. When first thinking about the appropriate approach for this study, it became apparent that a qualitative approach would fit best. As I had never conducted qualitative research before, I made a concerted effort to understand and develop my skills for qualitative research and data collection, including a considerable amount of reading on the topic and refining my interviewing skills. This meant that the first hurdle in completing this study was not only learning qualitative research but overcoming the inherent positivist perspective that had been ingrained in me throughout my previous degrees.

Whereas my previous (unpublished) research also examined sexual identity, it did so quantitatively in relation to marriage equality, internalised homophobia, and self-evaluations of mental health. Examining a new facet of identity in much greater depth proved an interesting challenge as I had to shift away from seeking strict definitions or categories for interpreting how people self-identify. Instead, I had to learn to see the more nuanced and fluid ways in which people interpret and express themselves beyond numbers or limited responses. I started off trying to find more concrete definitions for a lot of these subcultural identities but as I learned to adopt a less positivist-oriented and more interpretivist-oriented approach, the focus shifted to seeking to understand how

someone understands and interprets their own identity and expresses it to themselves and others.

In my community radio role, I was trained in and conducted numerous interviews for entertainment, which gave me a considerable foundation in how I approached both creating the interview schedule and conducting the interviews. However, the types of questions varied significantly from what I was used to in the past and the level of caution and care put into the phrasing and delivery of the interview questions was more in-depth than anything I had done before. Conducting these interviews and being in that space was a challenging experience, with the main challenge being learning to respond to and prompt for further depth from questions that feel quite personal or feel difficult to articulate clearly. I had to learn more concise and clear ways to frame these questions, which in turn taught me to be a more direct and open interviewer when presenting questions.

Chapter 4 – Paper 1

As mentioned previously, the findings of this study are presented in two separate papers, one of which has been published in a peer-reviewed journal (Paper 1) and the other is currently under review (Paper 2; see *Chapter 5*). Paper 1 addresses the following objectives of the research:

Objective 1 - To explore the potential diversity of subcultural identities that GBQ men perceive within their communities.

Objective 2 - To examine how GBQ men understand, define, and attribute meaning to subcultural identities, including the importance and function of subcultural identities in community life.

The paper addresses these objectives by examining how GBQ subcultural identities are understood by GBQ men in Australia, including the perceived diversity and characteristics of a range of subcultural identities and some of the functions that subcultural identities serve in their lives. Supplementing this work, the paper also presents a glossary of descriptions for numerous subcultural identities derived from participant responses. This paper was published online in the academic journal *Psychology and Sexuality* on the 7th of December 2020 and is presented in its author-accepted manuscript version below (Franklin et al., 2020).

Characteristics and Functions of Subcultural Identities in the Lives of Gay, Bisexual,

and Queer-Identifying Men in Australia

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Abstract

Gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying (GBQ) male communities tend to comprise various distinct subcultural identity groups based on shared characteristics and associations, often overlooked in research and practice. This study aimed to develop a greater understanding of GBQ subcultural identities by exploring how they are understood and described by individuals who utilise them. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying men living in Australia and who identified with one or more subcultural identities. Interview transcripts and data underwent thematic analysis. All participants identified with two or more subcultural identities. Results indicated that subcultural identities were understood and characterised through physical traits, gender expression and perceived norms, sexual preferences and sex roles, interests and hobbies, and social interaction dynamics. Important functions of subcultural identities were noted, such as their utility in filtering and regulating social associations and interactions as well as reflecting elements of queer history and culture. Findings highlight some key characteristics that define subcultural identities and the functions they serve for GBQ men. This knowledge furthers understanding of GBQ subcultural identities and may assist in developing culturally relevant approaches to future research and practice in areas such as health promotion and service delivery.

Keywords: Identity, Gay Subculture, Subcultural Identity, Bears, Twinks, Thematic Analysis

Characteristics and Functions of Subcultural Identities in the Lives of Gay, Bisexual,

and Queer-Identifying Men in Australia

The tendency in both research and practice relating to gay, bisexual, and queer-identified (GBQ) men has been to treat this group as relatively homogeneous, often to simplify these populations as a singular group for numerous purposes (e.g., comparisons in social research, targeted health promotion). This simplification potentially illustrates an *outgroup homogeneity bias*, the tendency for majority ingroups to perceive minority outgroups as effectively identical, downplaying intragroup differences between minority groups (Simon, 1992). However, communities of GBQ men encompass many smaller subcultures based upon people who identify as having shared characteristics (Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Willoughby et al., 2008), which are hereby referred to as 'subcultural identities'.

Subcultural identities

There is a range of literature across several disciplines that has explored gay subcultures in relation to gender (Filiault & Drummond, 2007; Hennen, 2008), history (Wright, 2013), and media representation (Seif, 2017; Shaw, 2012). Literature within these fields has often examined and interpreted cultural artefacts (e.g., artistic pieces and writing manuscripts) as data sources. Other texts have collected empirical qualitative data through direct accounts of participants' personal, grounded perspectives and experiences; generally focused on specific subcultures such as 'Bear' (Manley et al., 2007), 'Pup' (Wignall & McCormack, 2017), and 'Drag' (Levitt et al., 2017). However, studies have been lacking that explore the perspectives of GBQ men on how a range of different subcultural identities are characterised and the functions they serve in community life.

Two of the most commonly known GBQ subcultural identities are the 'Twink' and the 'Bear' subcultures, which often appear as characters in gay media (e.g., the film BearCity; Langway, 2010) or mainstream media such as Kurt Hummel in 'Glee' (Murphy

et al., 2009-2015), considered to be a Twink; or as the subject of academic literature (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Moskowitz et al., 2013). The dominant archetype of 'Twinks' is that they are young and slim, with less body hair, and a tendency to have higher regard for their own physical appearance (Filiault & Drummond, 2007). For 'Bears', the dominant archetype is one of masculine presentation, hirsuteness, larger body builds, and being older in age (Quidley-Rodriguez & De Santis, 2016). These terms, amongst others, are utilised socially within GBQ communities and frequently appear as profile options on gay mobile-based geo-social networking applications such as 'Tribes' on Grindr (Grindr LLC, 2020), 'Communities' on Scruff (Perry Street Software, 2020), and 'Interests' on fetish-based gay social networking site Recon (T101 Limited, 2020). The development of digital technologies and applications have facilitated different forms of social interaction (sexual or non-sexual) between GBQ men, including the development of virtual communities (Gudelunas, 2012) and increased visibility of certain subcultures and practices such as 'Pup play' (Wignall & McCormack, 2017). Beyond geo-social networking applications, advances in digital technology have given rise to emerging subcultures such as 'Gaymers', a subculture based around interests in video and tabletop gaming (Shaw, 2012).

Subcultural identity and health

Several studies have suggested associations between specific GBQ subcultures, health outcomes, and risk behaviours. Willoughby et al. (2008) explored health differences between gay peer crowd affiliations in a sample of American/Canadian men. Significant variations were found between peer crowds with certain groups reporting higher rates of cannabis and other drug use, binge drinking, smoking, unprotected anal sex, and steroid use (Willoughby et al., 2008). For example, higher rates of other drug use were positively associated with 'Circuit Partiers' alone and negatively related to 'Professionals' and 'Suburbans.' Moskowitz et al. (2011) examined sexual behaviours

and HIV rates for 'Leathermen' (men identifying with the Leather subculture). Results indicated that Leathermen were approximately 61% more likely to be HIV-positive and significantly less likely to use a condom during anal intercourse compared to non-Leathermen.

Lyons and Hosking (2014) investigated potential health differences between subcultural identities (specifically Twinks and Cubs) of young gay men in Australia. Results indicated that, compared with Cubs, Twinks reported a significantly lower body mass index, higher rates of tobacco smoking and alcohol consumption, greater psychological distress, were more likely to have engaged in recent receptive anal sex and were more likely to have ever had an HIV test compared to Cubs. Furthermore, Cubs reported a significantly lower self-rated health compared to Twinks (Lyons & Hosking, 2014). Prestage et al. (2015) explored Australian gay men's participation in gay community subcultures and association with risk behaviours. Numerous gay subculture labels were organised into five subcultural groupings based on preferences, levels of sexual activity, and social engagement: *Sexually Adventurous, Bear Tribes, Alternative Queer, Party Scene,* and *Sexually Conservative*. Participants engaging more with people from the 'Sexually Adventurous' or 'Bear Tribes' groupings reported higher rates of condom-less anal sex with casual partners, were more likely to be older, have less education, to be HIV-positive, and to not be in a relationship.

The subcultural groupings utilised by Prestage et al. (2015), whilst convenient for research, limited the ability to examine specific risk factors for individual subcultures that were grouped together (such as Bear and Daddy). Both Lyons and Hosking (2014) and Prestage et al. (2015) focused on a smaller subset of identities and specific associations with health behaviours and outcomes. This limited the knowledge gained regarding how participants understood (and identified with) the identity terms used in each study, or what functions these identities have in their lives; both may influence or account for

subcultural differences in health and health-related behaviours. Furthermore, these and other studies noted above were entirely quantitative in nature. Qualitative research is needed to explore the diversity of perspectives of GBQ men on the distinctions and functions of different subcultural identities in relation to their lives.

Considering the numerous associations between GBQ subcultural identities and health outcomes, there is a considerable case for further exploring subcultural identities from the perspectives of those who use them. Demonstrating the diversity of GBQ communities through the personal, grounded experiences of men within these communities may provide valuable insight regarding perceptions and characteristics of subcultural identities and the functions that these serve in community life. These characteristics can highlight potential subculture-specific health factors, behaviours, and terminology which can inform the development of culturally-relevant and appropriate programmes for supporting health and well-being, including health promotion strategies.

It is worth noting that not all GBQ men openly identify with gay culture (or subcultures) or feel intrinsically connected to a notion of gay community. Many men, for example, resist or downplay being labelled as gay or rigidly categorised for their sexuality, preferring to express their sexuality more fluidly or emphasise other aspects of their individual identity that they consider as more important to themselves (Adams et al., 2014). Furthermore, sexuality is considered by some GBQ men as a "secondary influence" to health (Adams et al., 2012) and broader gay culture as an influence on lifestyle and healthy behaviours, such as fitness or seeking medical help (Adams et al., 2013). However, many GBQ men do identify with GBQ cultures (Lyons & Hosking, 2014) and the focus of the current study is on these men.

Study aims

This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of GBQ subcultural identity in Australia by exploring the ways in which those who utilise these identities understand and

describe them. Specifically, two main objectives involved examining: (1) the potential

diversity of subcultural identities that GBQ men perceive within their communities and

(2) how GBQ men understand, define, and attribute meaning to subcultural identities,

including the importance and function of subcultural identities in community life. To

address the study aims, the study adopted a social constructionist approach (Burr, 2015)

which posits that people hold a shared understanding of the world developed through

social constructs, based on shared assumptions and influenced by social, political, and

historical conditions. This also extends to the ways in which GBQ men understand,

reflect, and co-create subcultural identities.

Method

Participant recruitment

Semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted between

September and November 2019 with 15 GBQ men living in Australia. To be eligible for

interview, participants had to be aged 18 years or older, live in Australia, identify as male

(inclusive of trans male or other transmasculine identities) and identify as gay, bisexual,

pansexual, or queer. Participants also had to identify with one or more subcultural

identities from a given list of 20 terms derived from profile options available from three

mobile-based geo-social networking applications – Grindr (Grindr LLC, 2020), Scruff

(Perry Street Software, 2020), and Recon (T101 Limited, 2020) which are used by large

numbers of GBQ men. Participants were also able to specify their own terms if they

wished.

Participants were recruited via an online expression of interest survey advertised

via the primary author's online social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

Participants were directed to the survey, which provided further details about the study

and asked for demographic information and their subcultural identity to assess eligibility

for an interview. Eligible participants were given a link to self-book an interview with the

primary author. Eighty-three people responded to the survey, of which 56 were eligible. All eligible participants were invited to a one-on-one in-depth interview, of which 15 attended to form the final sample. The remaining 41 participants either did not book in for an interview or failed to attend an interview and were not able to reschedule. Table 1 displays demographic information of the interview sample and Table 2 provides a summary of the subcultural identity terms self-reported by participants.

Data collection

The interviews (approximately one hour each) were conducted by the primary author either on campus or online via private voice call. The participants were sent an information form for the interview prior to attending and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of each interview. The interviews focused on participants' self-reported subcultural identity, characteristics they attribute to specific subcultural identities, their understandings and perspectives of identity, and the importance of subcultural identity to them and their social circle(s). Participants were able to opt-out of the study any time prior to their interview and could withdraw their data from analyses up to four weeks from their interview date. Details of LGBTIQ+ specific mental health and peer counselling services were also provided to participants if they felt the need to follow up on any issues raised during the interviews. Each interview was recorded digitally, transcribed, and de-identified. The study was approved by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data Analysis

Linked to our underlying social constructionist approach, interviews were subjected to an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using semantic coding and a realist framework, although in doing so we sought to acknowledge the ways in which subcultural identities in this community can be socially constructed (Jaspal, 2016). This method was chosen for both flexibility and accessibility (Nowell et al., 2017), which

suits the study's exploratory nature and allows patterns of meaning to be identified within

the data. The process involved six stages, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), starting

with the transcripts being read repeatedly for familiarity with the data (Stage 1:

Familiarising Yourself with the Data). Secondly, initial codes were generated from the

data (Stage 2: Generating Initial Codes), which were then formed into themes of similar

content that were identified (Stage 3: Searching for Themes). Each theme was refined and

reviewed multiple times throughout the analysis (Stage 4: Reviewing Potential Themes)

prior to being defined and organised into higher-level themes and sub-themes (Stage 5:

Defining and Naming Themes). Finally, relevant extracts for each theme were recorded

and the analysis was written up (Stage 6: Producing the Report). All coding and analyses

were conducted by the primary author and regularly discussed and reviewed with the

other authors throughout the process. Illustrative quotes for each theme were selected and

reported using pseudonyms generated for each participant, along with their age and their

self-reported subcultural identities.

Results

Several higher-level themes were identified from participant responses in relation

to unique perspectives on identity more broadly, perceived characteristics of specific

GBQ subcultural identities, and the overall function and importance of subcultural

identities in GBQ communities. Each theme is discussed and illustrated with quotes

below, which include a participant pseudonym, age and their self-reported sub-cultural

identities. Note that at times the data refer to a 'queer' identity and a 'queer community.'

While these terms are not universally embraced, they are commonly used and accepted

within the specific geosocial context for Melbourne, Australia, where the majority of data

for this article was sourced, and several participants identified as queer.

A glossary of the subcultural identity terms mentioned in the results can be found

in Table 3. This is provided as an accessible means of understanding the ways in which

participants understood these terms. They are drawn from participant responses to form a composite overview of the characteristics of these identities. We acknowledge that other literatures and framings of some of these subcultural identities (such as Bears and Twinks outlined above) exist, however this glossary only reflects the perspectives of our participants and should be understood within their situated cultural context of Melbourne, Australia. We make no claim that this glossary of terms represents subcultural identities operating within other contexts.

Reflecting on identity

Participants were asked what the word "identity", in its broader sense, meant to them and their immediate thoughts upon hearing the term. Identity was established as an inherently personal concept, categorical in nature and process, and was related to perceptions from oneself and others. For some, identity encapsulated and helped one to interpret their own personal qualities through language:

"I think (identity) allows somebody to ascribe their own personal experience to a set of ideas or to a word, and not only allowing them to sort of see themselves in that word, or that sort of thing that go along with (it), or the associations I guess with (it)."
(Mark, 35 – Otter, Queer)

Several influences were highlighted by participants as shaping identity, including personal factors (e.g., physical appearance, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) and social forces (e.g., social association, media, and politics). Participants referred to the importance of identity in various ways, such as its place in identity politics (e.g., legislation around homosexuality), defining aspects of a person's sexual practices (orientation, preferences, etc.), belonging with similar people, and informing social norms (e.g., etiquette, expected behaviour and appearance). For Harry, identity was something to be proved and demonstrated in society through means such as ID cards and documentation:

"When you say you want some identity ID, that's identification as opposed to identity. But still identification basically shows your identity, that's the whole point of it I think." (Harry, 32 – Otter, Poz)

Characterising GBQ subcultural identities

During the interview, participants examined a list of 11 common GBQ subcultural identity terms and were asked to characterise an individual who would identify with each term. The responses formed five categories of characteristics based on participants' past experiences, assumptions, and exposure to the particular subculture. However, there were several characteristics that can be considered as spanning more than one category and many subcultures incorporated elements of multiple categories (e.g., Pup incorporated the power dynamics of *sexual preferences and sex roles* alongside community dynamics of *social interaction and dynamics*).

The primacy of the physical

Participants referred to characteristics related to visual observations about physical traits such as body type, perceived age, and style. For example, Twinks were characterised by all participants as being younger (up to 25 years), slimmer, toned, and with minimal body hair. In contrast, Bears were characterised as older, heavier (both fat and muscle), and hairier. Physical traits were stated as a boundary between similar identities, such as Bear and Cub differing by age more than appearance:

"I think for me anyway it's a little younger than what I would consider a Bear to be, sort of 20's to 30's age. [...] For me, it's more of the physical attributes rather than behaviour that conjures less of a community around (Cubs), it's more [...] of a physical attribute that defines that." (Mark, 35 – Otter, Queer)

Physical traits were also considered important for determining how a person may identify themselves or others within a subculture(s):

"Daddy (is) an older gay man, I see a Daddy as being somewhat Bear-ish but not necessarily as big, they're not like a slim man, they're well built. I wouldn't call a slim older man a Daddy; I'd call an older man who's broad, who might have some facial hair, that's what I would consider a Daddy – so not just age." (Stephen, 24 - Bear, Cub, Queer)

Gender expression and perceived gender norms

Approximately half of the participants characterised certain subcultures based on how 'masculine' or 'feminine' they were perceived as (gender expression) and how an individual's behaviours resembled dominant constructs of masculinity and femininity (gender norms). These characteristics often overlapped with other categories, particularly physical traits and social interaction. For example, Bears and Daddies were designated as 'masculine' in both appearance (body hair and shape) and behaviour (dominance and confidence). Twinks were designated 'feminine' due to smaller body types, less hair, and effeminate mannerisms:

"There's a masculinity (that Daddies) exude a little bit, like confidence, (like they) have their life together a little bit." (Stephen, 24 - Bear, Cub, Queer)

"(Twinks are) young, generally slender, I hate generalising it but more femme, on the femme side of things generally." (Robert, 38 - Bear, Daddy)

Sexual roles and preferences

Sexual activity/partner preferences (e.g., kink or specific ethnic preference), sex role ("top", "bottom" or "versatile"), and sexual power dynamics (dominant versus submissive) were each associated with certain subcultures, especially Twinks, Pups, and Daddies. Twinks were associated with a stereotypically receptive sexual role, potentially related to their feminine expression:

"The Twink (is) usually younger, thinner, more feminine to an extent. I guess it's often considered that they'd be a bottom too, but not always, but definitely the stereotype would be that way." (Heath, 26 – Geek, Gaymer, Queer)

Pups were strongly associated with explicit power-related dynamics and terminology representing the role one plays (i.e., dominant Handlers) and who has more or less power (i.e., Alphas and Betas):

"A lot of the Pups I know are quite submissive, but I know within that subculture there are Alphas and Betas, […] and then you would have a Handler who is the dominant one, within that sub-community." (Harry, 32 – Otter, Poz)

For Daddies, the power dynamic was expressed as similar power-related roles to Pups and BDSM relationships, but with different family-themed terminology of an older 'Daddy' being paired with a younger 'Son' (also described as a Twink) and taking a more assertive or controlling role in the relationship:

"(Daddy and Son relationships are) very much like a master and slave construct but switching their roles to father and son." (Martin, 27 – Geek, Otter)

What I do is who I am: Hobbies and interests

For several subcultural identities, sexual interests were not a key characteristic of the identity, but rather other hobbies or interests were perceived as closely tied to their meaning.   These interests relate to activities that are shared by communities associated with identities (i.e., playing games for Gaymers) or reflect other perceived characteristics associated with them (e.g., athleticism for Jocks):

"I think what brings (Gaymers) together is the online gaming and community through engaging in (gaming); (but they) tend not to do as many things in real life and community." (Mark, 35 – Otter, Queer)

"A jock is your muscle man, goes to the gym all the time, has or is a PT trainer, so that sort of look." (Martin, 27 – Geek, Otter)

Several of the interests and hobbies identified by participants also had related social activities (e.g., Gaymers engaging in online gaming, Jocks interacting and/or exercising with other people at the gym). As such, interests and hobbies overlapped with social interaction and dynamics. However, the key distinction between the two categories was the intention behind the activities engaged in (recreation and leisure versus social interaction), as many of the aforementioned activities could be engaged in by individuals, without a social element (i.e., single player gaming and solo exercising).

Shaped by the social: Identity by interaction

Several participants highlighted differences in how people of particular subcultural identities interact with other people, environments, and social practices that are associated with those subcultures. For example, many participants referred to a specific bar in Melbourne, Australia that has a strong association with Bear and Cub (and to a lesser extent, Leather and Pup) communities, having hosted several Bear and fetish-centric events (incorporating both sexual preferences and social interaction). For some identities such as Twink, there was an emphasis on more broad clubbing or partying behaviours as a common social practice:

"I think the idea of being a party animal or associated with the clubbing scene, I think the Twink has for a long time probably been categorised as the media's image of what gay is, or what the Queer community is. You might think about fake tan and bleached blonde hair that kind of thing, Paris Hilton-esque." (Andrew, 28 - Twink, Geek, Queer)

In addition to social practices, participants associated varied levels of confidence within social environments with particular subcultures. Social confidence was associated with (but not a defining feature of) specific subcultural identities, alongside personality traits (such as introversion). Gaymers and Geeks (in addition to their gaming interest) were associated with lower social confidence. Furthermore, Gaymers' preferences for

online or virtual interaction was considered a result of lower social confidence in face-to-face social contexts:

"I know quite a lot of Gaymers that characteristics-wise are socially awkward, or lack social confidence, so it's a way [...] that they can hide behind a screen. They can again be a persona behind a screen, and they've got that level of comfort that there's a barrier between them and reality protecting their identity and who they are." (Robert, 38 - Bear, Daddy)

Purpose and importance of subcultural identity

To explore how and why subcultural identities are adopted, participants were asked to describe the value they invested in subcultural identity terms and how seriously they believed these terms were taken by others (both within and outside the GBQ community). Two distinct themes emerged, which speak to both the facilitation of social connection and the role of sub-cultures in the long history of the gay and queer movements.

Finding a place in the world: Social connectivity

Subcultural identities were reported by most participants to offer a fast, simple way of connecting with others and creating a shared understanding through social labels. The availability of identities provided a form of social filtering, allowing people to quickly share characteristics of themselves and to identify characteristics of others before deciding to further engage in social, romantic, or sexual interaction. This was especially useful in online dating and social applications such as Grindr and Recon where first impressions are made through the contents of a user's profile:

"(Subcultural identities) serve a purpose in that if you're identifying as or you're outwardly identifying as one of these terms, then it already sets up certain expectations about you and sort of allows you to say something with one word to allow someone to know how you see yourself (...) and how you fit into the rest of the community. (...) It's

useful in that type of environment because people think that they know what they're

attracted to, and so they can filter based on those types of terms." (Mark, 35 – Otter,

Queer)

Not only do subcultural identities allow people to filter who they are attracted to,

but they also expedite the process of finding individuals and communities to interact with.

To some participants, like Arthur, categorising and filtering are natural behaviours used to

avoid uncertainty:

"Within the gay community I think they're taken quite seriously, because I think

it's a way of categorising people/explaining them. [...] This is a human nature, I think

humans are always trying to categorise people, because I don't think humans like

uncertainty. (Subcultural identities are used) to look out for things you're attracted to but

also to look out for things that might threaten you." (Arthur, 54 - Bear, Daddy, Queer)

To Arthur, there was an element of safety and security involved in using

subcultural identity terms as a categorical filter. Having assigned terms for different types

of people, and an awareness of which terms represent those who could be personally

beneficial (or harmful) reduced uncertainty and potential risk in interacting with

unfamiliar people. Arthur implied throughout his interview that he developed this view at

a young age because he knew he was 'different' from others (due to being gay) and

potentially at risk of physical harm, amongst other issues (e.g., laws against

homosexuality at the time). However, a few participants discussed not fitting the 'criteria'

of a subcultural identity fully or partially fitting into more than one identity's 'criteria':

"I feel like if you sit very clearly in one that it's a lot easier to identify with that,

and for people to see you as that. But I just think a lot of my friends personally, they

don't sit clearly in one or the other, and so for them they sort of disregard those labels

entirely." (Stephen, 24 - Bear, Cub, Queer)

Reflecting Queer history and culture

Some participants shared how they believe subcultural identities reflected the history of sexual minorities overall (especially same-sex attracted men) as well as how homosexuality was currently viewed by Australian society (e.g., homophobia, the marriage equality debate, current and pending legislation, etc.). Subcultural identity labels were theorised to originate and function as a discrete communication tool or 'code' from when homosexuality was still illegal and taboo in Australia:

"It is obvious that labels are very much a part of the Queer community, not everybody within the community likes the labels, but a lot of people take great pride in having labels attached to them. (…) I think it really possibly stems even from that the 70's where our community was taboo, and so (they're used) to find someone within our community that you could identify with and were attracted to. […] I think that's where these kind of sub-identities within the community came out. You've got definitely sub-communities and interest groups within our community and that's so that, because it was so taboo and hush-hush, people could find likeminded people within a sub-community and good relationships." (Harry, 32 – Otter, Poz)

According to most participants, subcultural identities were a system of labels reflecting specific subsets of people within the larger GBQ community, with mixed effects. Robert how subcultural identities have emerged as a distinctive part of GBQ culture and communities in both positive and negative connotations:

"Within the gay world […], it's ways to identify communities and pockets of people, and unfortunately, we marginalise a marginalised community. In the straight world, it's neither here nor there. […]I have seen it being used as a derogatory term, especially the Daddy, the Chub, and the Bear. […] Most straight people wouldn't even have a clue what half of them mean." (Robert, 38 - Bear, Daddy)

Alex reinforced that subcultural identities are more distinctive to the Queer community, but also posited that they are less integral to some members of the community:

"It depends if they're in the Queer community or not. If I had talked to some cis-het random and been like "Yeah, I'm a Bear"; then they're just going to be like, "You're human, do you need to see a psychiatrist?" and not get it at all. I don't think it's taken particularly seriously within the gay community either. [...] Most reasonable people do not gatekeep the exact boundaries of what counts as a Bear, versus a Cub, versus an Otter; and if you say you're a Bear but "No, actually you should be telling people you're an Otter", that - generally speaking - doesn't happen. Because there's always someone that's going to be a jerk." (Alex, 38 – Bear, Chub, Daddy, Queer)

For Alex, there was an element of shared understanding around subcultural identity unique to the Queer community. However, he implied a risk of others still responding negatively or trying to gatekeep (restrict usage of) certain identity terms for those who may not meet the identity's perceived 'criteria'. This may reflect different perspectives on a subculture, depending on whether or not a person identifies within that subculture. Someone identifying with a subculture may have preconceived notions of who can and should identify with them, especially anyone similar to themselves. As such, they may act to discourage anyone who is different or does not meet these notions from identifying as part of their subculture as an outsider.

Insider versus outsider perspectives

Participants discussed each subcultural identity from an 'insider' (self-identified with the subculture in question) or an 'outsider' (not self-identified) perspective, based on how they personally identified. Differences emerged when comparing these perspectives on how subcultures were viewed and characterised, as well as awareness around specific subcultures. The descriptions of each subculture varied slightly between perspectives,

though some characteristics were universally attributed. For example, compare the following descriptions of the Otter subculture from Samuel's (insider) and Andrew's (outsider) perspectives:

"That's me. So young, slim, little bit of extra musculature that a Twink might not necessarily have, but body hair." (Samuel, 28 - Otter, Pup, Chaser)

"I don't know, Otter… Maybe Otter is like a Cub but skinny. […] Honestly, I don't know, in my head an Otter is wet so maybe it has to do with water sports, if we're thinking about sexual preferences." (Andrew, 28 - Twink, Geek, Queer)

This example was perhaps the most pronounced from the interviews, but it demonstrated potential perspective-based differences in understanding. Compared to insider descriptions, outsiders were apparently prone to grounding their understanding of an identity in (potentially inaccurate) assumptions or associations. These assumptions may suggest a lack of knowledge or experience with the subculture in question or reflect the ambiguous nature of subcultural identity altogether.

Certain identity terms were labelled as divisive in the larger GBQ community due to connotations and historical use. The term 'Queer' was explicitly called divisive due to its historical context as a slur and subsequent reclaiming by the LGBTIQ+ community. Andrew elaborated by comparing it to another homosexuality-related slur:

"I want to think of it almost like the word faggot, and I think the word faggot is still not the same as Queer where it's been more reappropriated, but it has been reappropriated by some groups. I think it's a similar parallel there where it's really not ever going to be fully embraced by the entire LGBT+ community, but it is being within certain circles, and it's more of a circular word, where it fits in with a group of friends or perhaps an entire venue that celebrates that word as their marker. But […] I don't foresee it being an all-encompassing all-accepted word. Not whilst people are alive who experienced it as their attack word." (Andrew, 28 - Twink, Geek, Queer)

Several participants emphasised that the positive connotations of the word Queer may still be overshadowed by its harmful use in the past, particularly with older members of the community. Daddy was similarly divisive due to its implied reflection of one's ageing (a common insecurity) and the potential connotations around sexual preferences for younger men. Robert recounted his initial negative response to being called a Daddy by someone else:

"I remember the first person that called me a Daddy, I slapped and walked out. Because I was just like 'No, this ain't going nowhere'. I was horrified, […] I think it had a very negative context to it, because […] it made me feel old." (Robert, 38 - Bear, Daddy)

Robert then explained how his perception of the Daddy identity changed to be more positive, and the point at which he adopted the identity term himself:

"I was chatting to these two (Dominant) people, and we were talking, and they asked me if I was a Daddy. and I was like 'aargh'. They explained to me that it's actually a term of endearment, and that it's actually quite special when someone calls you (Daddy). Because (they're) normally characteristics (that) are very nurturing, caring, guiding. People look up, like the person looks up to you in some way shape or form, as a mentor, role model, looking for guidance or whatnot. They were saying that in the BDSM world that Daddy has that (as) more of a connotation." (Robert, 38 - Bear, Daddy)

Robert's story showed a key difference between insider and outsider perspectives and demonstrated how people may change and shift their own perspectives and identity over time. Robert went from being an outsider and not identifying as a Daddy, to embracing the subculture within his own identity and adopting an insider perspective. Several similar examples emerged of how participants' identities and perspectives evolved through exploring GBQ subcultures.

Stigmatised identity

For some, certain identities such as Chub and Poz (a colloquial term for being HIV-positive) carried implications of poorer mental or physical health and were therefore stigmatised more than others. Robert discussed being labelled as a Chub (which he does not identify as) by others and the connotations of the term:

"I was given the label Chub, [...] there is more of a mental stigma associated with it, social isolation, social judgement. [...] I would never call someone a Chub, or I would not personally identify them as a Chub. I find it's quite a derogatory term." (Robert, 38 – Bear, Daddy)

Regarding the Poz identity, this stigma was attributed to the long-term stigmatisation of HIV itself, and of being HIV-positive. Harry, an openly HIV-positive man, discussed the term 'Poz' and the inherent stigma:

"It's a relic term. Some people use it as a badge, I don't think that's the way. Because even having that label creates stigma around that community. [...] I don't like the word Poz, that's a personal thing. [...] If you tell someone outside the community that you're Poz, then you're basically dead to them, you're on a life sentence. That's because of the stigma around that." (Harry, 32 – Otter, Poz)

Discussion

This article illustrates the diversity of GBQ communities and subcultural identities. The terminology and phrases used by GBQ men to describe their identities (and those held by others) were made apparent through their characterisations and discussions of specific subcultural practices (e.g., identity-specific terms such as Handler for Pup). Furthermore, the ways in which participants understand, define, and attribute meaning to subcultural identities was evident through the apparent social function (e.g., determining who to associate with and 'filtering' any potentially undesirable interactions) as well as

the perceived historical context they reflected (i.e., stemming from previous criminalisation and ongoing stigmatisation of homosexuality).

The findings of this study offer unique perspectives of understanding identity, the nuanced considerations of identifying with a subculture, and the social function and historical significance of subcultural identities in general. The characteristics attributed to subcultural identities went beyond physical appearance and interests; unexpected characteristics emerged such as stigmatisation, social confidence, power dynamics, and hierarchies within specific subcultures. Each of these characteristics provides a rare and valuable insight into GBQ subcultures, especially those less explored in previous research, such as Otters (as distinct from Cubs and Bears), Geeks (in the context of GBQ men), and Chubs. Furthermore, the multiplicity of identities used by each participant demonstrates the diverse and intersectional nature of GBQ communities, especially when considering the vast number of potential combinations of subcultural identities that can be utilised.

In regard to prior research, the social nature and function of GBQ subcultural identities aligns with previous research on similarly described subgroups of the gay community (Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Willoughby et al., 2008). The characteristics attributed to specific subcultural identities were consistent with descriptions in previous literature. For example, descriptions of the physical and social characteristics of Bears were similar in the present study to that conducted by Quidley-Rodriguez and De Santis (2016), and similar emphases on age and body size were used to described both Bears and Twinks as depicted in the work by Lyons and Hosking (2014). Furthermore, several of the subcultural identity terms that participants actively identified with and referred to, such as Bear, Twink, or Daddy, were consistent with terms used in previous research on Australian populations (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Prestage et al., 2015).

The characteristics attributed to each subculture provide a basis for more in-depth explorations of less-explored subcultural identities such as Otters, plus examples of subculture-specific terminology (e.g., Handler for Pups) for use in future research and practice. Furthermore, by highlighting the importance of subcultural identities in the lives of some GBQ men, this study suggests that more attention may need to be paid to subcultural identities as psychographic variables in addition to basic demographics when seeking to understand the implications for designing targeted health promotion programmes. Having a greater understanding of the role of subcultural identities in defining the lives of GBQ men may therefore be important. For example, programmes aimed at reducing obesity may need to consider that GBQ men identifying as a Bear or a Cub may have social and cultural reasons for preferring a larger body mass. Paying attention to how health messages may be conveyed and interpreted by specific communities may be necessary, requiring a knowledge base on subcultural identities, to which this study has sought to contribute. The multiplicity and numerous potential combinations of identities may present greatly different combinations of related health behaviours and vulnerabilities to consider regarding health promotion and further research. For example, a Chub may be at-risk of weight-related disease and stigma-related distress, whilst a Gaymer may demonstrate lower confidence or connection to their community.

Study strengths and limitations

This study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first study to qualitatively explore subcultural identities using a ground-up evidence-based approach based on the perspectives of the communities and individuals who utilise subcultural identity terms in Australia. Addressing a larger range of subcultural identities enabled the exploration of multiple identities for each participant, embracing the diversity of GBQ communities and strengthening the novelty of the research.

The study was limited to participants who were willing to be interviewed, who openly identified with one or more subcultures, and who were more connected with gay culture. No data was collected from GBQ men that do not openly identify with a subculture (or who may be unsure of where they identify) or any men that do not identify as GBQ but may engage in similar behaviours (such as straight-identifying men who have sex with men). As a result, the findings of this study are largely from an insider's perspective of GBQ men within gay cultures and should be interpreted with that context in mind. Furthermore, it is possible that some of these subcultural groups may be more private than others and that members may be less willing to share their experiences in an interview. As such, we cannot be confident that these groups have been accessed fully and other methods may be needed to ensure broader coverage, such as identifying 'gatekeepers' who may be able to provide access to a wider variety of participants. It is recommended that future research explores different ways of accessing particular subcultural groups as well as examine the perspectives on subcultures from those who do identify with any subcultural group.

A further limitation of the study was the representation of only two Australian states (Victoria and Queensland), with the majority of participants coming from Victoria. This limits what is known about GBQ communities in other states. For example, it could be possible that the social environments of each state may shape the identity of the local GBQ communities as well as any variations in identity between rural and urban locations, similar to those found by Brown-Saracino (2015). Additionally, only one participant was aged over 40, thus preventing the exploration of historical or generational differences in perspectives of subcultural identities.

Further research should aim to recruit equally from younger and older populations for a more rounded exploration of perspectives across generations. Studies in the area should also seek to explore perspectives from a greater range of Australian states and

territories and examine any potential differences or variations between GBQ communities according to jurisdiction. Additionally, further information can be gathered from participants around the characteristics of specific subcultural identities explored in this study; including physical characteristics (e.g. weight, approximate level of body hair), preferences for specific identified activities (e.g., video gaming), and preferred sexual dynamics/roles (e.g., dominant/submissive, top/bottom/versatile). This study was relatively broad given the few other qualitative studies of this topic with the aim of exploring a range of topics. In future, it is recommended that studies be conducted that gather further in-depth data of specific topics, such as those mentioned above.

Conclusion

This study involved a qualitative analysis of ways in which GBQ men in Australia perceive and attribute meaning to subcultural identities. The findings offer insight into the potential diversity, characteristics, and significance of GBQ subcultural identities from the perspectives of individuals who utilise them. The characteristics attributed to specific identities and the different ways in which importance and perceived functions are attributed to subcultural identity in the lives of GBQ men can be informative for researchers as well as those working in health promotion who require a comprehensive understanding of GBQ subcultures.

Declaration of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Table 1

Demographics of the Interview Participants (N = 15)

Demographic	n	%
Age		
18-30	8	53.3
30-40	6	40.0
40+	1	6.7
Gender		
Male	13	86.7
Transmasculine	1	6.7
Other	1	6.7
Sexual Orientation		
Gay	12	80.0
Bisexual	1	6.7
Pansexual	1	6.7
Other	1	6.7
State/Territory		
Queensland	2	13.3
Victoria	13	86.7
Ethnicity		
Anglo-Celtic	9	60.0
Eastern European	1	6.7
Other European	1	6.7
South East Asian	1	6.7
Other	2	13.3
Not given	1	6.7
Education		

Did not finish high school	1	6.7
High school graduate	2	13.3
Technical and Further Education (TAFE)[1]	3	20.0
Graduate Diploma	2	13.3
Bachelor's degree	3	20.0
Master's degree	3	20.0
Other postgraduate degree	1	6.7

[1] TAFE refers to vocational training centres and institutes in Australia, which are distinct from universities

Table 2

Numbers and Percentages of Interview Participants Who Identified With Particular

Subcultural Identities (N = 15)

Subcultural Identity	*n*	%
Geek	9	60.0
Queer	7	46.7
Bear	5	33.3
Otter	4	26.7
Daddy	4	26.7
Gaymer	4	26.7
Cub	3	20.0
Pup	3	20.0
Chub	2	13.3
Jock	2	13.3
Twink	2	13.3
Chaser	1	6.7
Guy Next Door	1	6.7
Leather	1	6.7
Poz	1	6.7
Other	1	6.7

Table 3

Glossary of Subcultural Identities Referred to by Interview Participants

Term	Definition (a composite based on participant responses)
Bear	Older men with a natural body build (hirsute with both muscle and fat); perceived as masculine and confident, with a focus on community interaction and involvement with other Bears
Chaser	Someone with a preference for a particular type of person (often a particular subculture such as Bear, Chub, or Daddy); no typical physical archetype
Chub	Larger body build with less emphasis on muscle or body hair; often associated with body positivity or solidarity
Cub	Considered a younger version of Bear, with similar body builds; considered more playful, social, and inclusive of other subcultures and communities than Bears.
Daddy	Middle-aged or older men, with a broader or well-built body, facial hair; associated with dominant/assertive and caring roles and a preference for younger men socially/sexually
Gaymer	A non-heterosexually-identified man interested in tabletop and/or video gaming, may interact with other Gaymers or Geeks (often online); perceived to have lower confidence socially, or introverted; no physical archetype
Geek	Similar to (and often combined with) Gaymer, with a broader interest in popular culture and media beyond gaming and no emphasis on sexuality; no physical archetype

Guy Next Door	A less-used subculture, considered as someone who is pleasant, approachable socialises with a broad range of people regardless of identity or attraction; no physical archetype
Jock	Athletic with a preference for sports activities and exercise, more athletic body builds, and less emphasis on sexuality
Leather	A man (often associated with broader or more toned body builds) interested in wearing leather gear such as harnesses, as part of a kink/fetish-related activity; strongly associated with Bear and Daddy
Otter	Similar body hair to Bear and Cub, but with lower weight (and often more muscle); associated with similar Bear/Cub social and community spaces
Poz	Colloquial term for HIV-positive, used to refer to someone living with HIV
Pup	Interested in 'pup play' fetish-related behaviours, including wear dog-themed fetish gear and acting like a dog (or controlling someone doing so as a Handler), associated with power dynamics; no physical archetype
Queer	A broader term used to incorporate diverse identities including non-normative gender and sexual identities; no physical archetype
Twink	Young men with a slimmer and more toned build, less body hair, and a more feminine presentation

Chapter 5 – Paper 2

Paper 1 (see *Chapter 4*) examined how GBQ subcultural identities were understood and characterised by GBQ men that utilise them, as well as the importance these identities hold in community life. Paper 2, presented below, sought to expand upon this knowledge by examining how and why subcultural identities are adopted by GBQ men, how these identities are expressed, and how they change over time and within different contexts. Paper 2 addressed the following objectives of the research:

Objective 3 - To explore how GBQ men develop their sense of identity and adopt a subcultural identity (or identities).

Objective 4 - To investigate whether an individual's subcultural identity changes over time or within different contexts.

Objective 5 - To examine the ways in which GBQ men express their identity, including through language and behaviour.

This paper addressed these objectives by exploring how GBQ men in Australia discover subcultural identities and adopt a subcultural identity (or identities), ways in which they express these identities, and how the expression of their subcultural identity (or identities) varies over time and within different contexts. This paper is currently under review with the academic journal *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* and is presented in manuscript form below.

Exploring the Adoption and Expression of Subcultural Identities Among Gay, Bisexual, and Queer-Identifying Men in Australia

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Abstract

Introduction: Gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying (GBQ) communities tend to comprise various subcultural identity groups based around shared practices and intersectional identities, but little research has sought to qualitatively understand how these identities are situated within communities and enacted in everyday life. Further understanding subcultural identities is important as they reflect the diversity of GBQ men and potential health risks/differences between groups of men that may otherwise not be considered. This study aimed to advance understanding of GBQ subcultural identities in Australia by investigating how GBQ men come to adopt and express subcultural identities, such as 'Bear', 'Twink', or 'Daddy'. **Methods:** Fifteen gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying men living in Australia who identified with one or more GBQ subcultures participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews between September and November 2019. An inductive thematic analysis with semantic coding and a realist framework was used to assess patterns of meaning within the data. **Results**: Two higher level themes emerged relating to discovering identity and evolving practices of identification, with sub-themes related to self-guided exploration, identification by others, and contextual changes in expressing identity. **Conclusions:** These findings highlighted that adopting subcultural identities involved elements of exploring language and discourse and embracing or resisting identification. The ways in which subcultural identities were integrated and expressed appeared to evolve over time and shift within different contexts, including emphasising or suppressing aspects of identity. **Policy implications:** This knowledge expands understanding of GBQ subcultural identities and help inform culturally-sensitive considerations for health promotion, policy, and research that engages GBQ men.

Keywords: Identity, Gay Subculture, Subcultural Identity, Queer, Culture, Thematic Analysis

Exploring the Adoption and Expression of Subcultural Identities Among Gay,

Bisexual, and Queer-Identifying Men in Australia

Identity is a concept that underpins much of a person's self-concept as well as how they relate and interact with others. Gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying (GBQ) men, in addition to identifying with a sexual identity (say as gay, bisexual, queer, and other related identities), may also identify with one or more subcultural identities, such as 'Bear', 'Twink', 'Daddy', and many more (Franklin et al., 2020). Little research has been conducted on the lived experiences of subcultural identities from the GBQ men who use them, especially regarding how these identities are adopted and expressed in their everyday lives. It is important to better understand how subcultural identities are adopted by GBQ men as these identities have been potentially linked to health and wellbeing-related practices and outcomes (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Prestage et al., 2015).

Identity and Health

It is well known from broader research on identity that the ways in which a person chooses to identify and associate with others and expresses their identity may relate to their health and wellbeing (Jetten et al., 2017). This is particularly relevant for those who belong to minority groups (or 'out-group') from the perceived majority of society (or 'in-group'; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Furthermore, the *group circumstance hypothesis* (Jetten et al., 2017) states that those defining themselves around a specific social identity or identities wherein their state of wellbeing may be affected by the status, perceptions, and structural conditions (such as stability and legitimacy) with which the group(s) they associate (Jetten et al., 2017). For example, a person identifying as GBQ (and expresses such) is more likely to experience lower social status and associated stigma, discrimination, and minority stress (Jackson et al., 2016), and thus is at-risk of associated negative outcomes for their mental and physical health (Meyer, 2003). These health and

social outcomes are also impacted by both geographical location (Rickard & Yancey, 2018) and significant social developments, such as the 2017 Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, which impacted the mental health of many LGB people in Australia (Verrelli et al., 2019). As such, a GBQ individual may avoid expressing their identity in certain contexts such as with family, in school, or in the larger community (Higa et al., 2014). However, it should be noted that not all members of GBQ communities consider their sexual identity as an influence on their health, wellbeing, or health behaviours (Adams et al., 2013), or consider it as a 'secondary influence' compared to other elements of their identity (Adams et al., 2012).

Subcultural Identities

Gay, bisexual, and queer communities tend to comprise numerous smaller communities and subcultural identity groups centred around associations with others that share one or more specific characteristics (Clausell & Fiske, 2005). These groups may relate to physical traits, shared activities, sexual preferences, or other characteristics as detailed in another article from the authors (Franklin et al., 2020). Among these groups are more well-known and common subcultures within academic literature such as the physical trait-focused 'Bear' (Quidley-Rodriguez & De Santis, 2016; Wright, 2013) and 'Twink' (Lyons & Hosking, 2014), and fetish-related 'Leather' subcultural identities (Barrett & Barrett, 2017; Moskowitz et al., 2011). Other subcultures include 'Gaymer', which is established around communities of GBQ-identified people who enjoy playing tabletop role-playing games and/or video games (Shaw, 2012), and the emerging subculture of 'Pup', which is based within kink practices around power dynamics and the adoption of a persona to engage in dog-like behaviours in a sexual or non-sexual manner (Wignall & McCormack, 2017). The terms for these and many other subcultures are often used to connect socially within GBQ communities and within self-description options on personal profiles hosted on mobile geo-social networking applications such as Grindr

(Grindr LLC, 2020), Scruff (Perry Street Software, 2020), and Recon (T101 Limited, 2020).

Numerous studies of GBQ subcultures have linked specific subcultures and various health differences, outcomes, and behaviours such as risk-related behaviours. These outcomes include mental health (e.g., self-esteem), physical health differences, and rates of specific behaviours (e.g., alcohol consumption). Willoughby et al. (2008) investigated potential differences in health behaviours between gay men's peer crowd affiliations in an American/Canadian sample; results indicated that certain peer crowds differed in rates of substance use, alcohol, consumption, and condomless anal sex. Moskowitz et al. (2011) examined the 'Leathermen' (men who wear leather and engage in "rougher, passive-aggressive sexual activities"; Moskowitz et al., 2011) subculture's sexual behaviours and rates of HIV in an American sample; results showed that those identifying as 'Leathermen' were less likely to use a condom and more likely to be HIV-positive, compared to non-'Leathermen'-identifying participants.

Within an Australian context, Lyons and Hosking (2014) investigated potential physical and health differences between the 'Twink' and 'Cub' subcultures for young gay men. There were significant differences found for self-rated health, body mass index, tobacco and alcohol consumption, and receptive anal sex between the two subcultures. Furthermore, additional differences were found for mental health outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, community connectedness) and sexual health (e.g., number of sexual partners, rates of testing for sexually transmitted infections) between 'Twinks' and 'Cubs' compared to participants who did not have a subcultural identity (Lyons & Hosking, 2014). Prestage et al. (2015) explored how risk behaviours are associated with gay men's participation in gay community subcultures in Australia; grouping numerous gay subculture labels into groupings around preferences and engagement in social or sexual activities. Participants who were more engaged with others within the 'Sexually

Adventurous' or 'Bear Tribes' groupings were more likely to be older, to be HIV-positive, and to not be in a relationship. They were less likely to use a condom with casual partners or to have a higher level of education (Prestage et al., 2015).

Notably, the majority of research has examined GBQ subcultures with regard to sexual health or HIV-related behaviours or outcomes such as condom use or testing rates for sexually transmitted infections. Whilst there is a broad literature examining subcultural identities for GBQ men, many of these studies have examined representations of identity, such as in media (e.g., Seif, 2017; Shaw, 2012), or utilised a quantitative approach to draw associations between subcultural identity and health behaviours (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Moskowitz et al., 2011; Prestage et al., 2015). Investigating how GBQ men adopt, and express subcultural identities is important to providing overall understanding of how identity shapes lives, particularly given the potential links to health and wellbeing. Such knowledge can potentially inform ways in which GBQ men are engaged around health promotion and support programs, such as ensuring that practices are grounded in cultural understanding, utilise appropriate terminology, and reflect social norms and lived experiences of those who identify with particular subcultures. Previous research from the authors has explored the ways in which subcultural identities are understood and characterised by GBQ men and the social functions they hold within the community lives of GBQ men (Franklin et al., 2020).

Study Aims

This study aimed to further contribute to the understanding of GBQ subcultural identity in Australia through exploring the experiences of individuals that utilise these identities with regard to adopting and expressing their identity. Specifically, there were three main objectives, which involved investigating: (1) how GBQ men develop their sense of identity and adopt a subcultural identity; (2) whether an individual's subcultural identity changes over time or within different contexts; and (3) ways in which GBQ men

express their identity, including through language and behaviour. The study utilised a social constructionist perspective (Burr, 2015), which holds that there is a shared understanding of the world held by people that are developed through numerous social constructs and assumptions, which are influenced by changes in social, political, and historical contexts. This approach extends to identity, in that GBQ men jointly construct an understanding of subcultural identities relevant to themselves.

Method

Participant Recruitment

The study sample consisted of 15 GBQ men living in Australia who attended a semi-structured qualitative interview between September and November 2019. Participants were eligible to attend an interview if they were 18 years of age or older, living in Australia, male-identifying (including transmasculine identities), and openly identifying as gay, bisexual, pansexual, or queer. Furthermore, eligible participants had to identify with at least one subcultural identity either selected from a provided list of 19 subcultural identity terms or specified by the participant themselves. The list of 19 terms was developed from a review of profile options on three geo-social networking applications for same-sex attracted men: Grindr (Grindr LLC, 2020), Scruff (Perry Street Software, 2020), and Recon (T101 Limited, 2020).

Potential interview participants were recruited through an online expression of interest survey, advertised through the primary author's social media (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn), which assessed eligibility for an interview through questions around demographics and self-identified subcultural identities. Participants who met the eligibility criteria were invited to book themselves in for an interview with the primary author using a weblink. A total of 83 respondents accessed the survey, 56 were deemed eligible and invited to take part in an interview with the primary author; of which 15 attended and formed the final interview sample. The 41 participants remaining either did

not book an interview, were unable to attend an interview, or failed to attend and did not reschedule their interview.

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted either face-to-face at a university campus ($n = 9$) or via an online private voice call (without video; $n = 6$). Each attendee was provided an electronic information and consent form upon scheduling an interview and these were provided again at the beginning of their interview in order to obtain consent to be interviewed. Each interview began with a repeat of the expression of interest demographic questions to clarify and the responses given. The interviews then focused on participants' experiences of their identity including how they came to adopt the subcultural identity term(s) they used, how they express their identity to others (including language and behaviour), and in what ways (if any) their identity has changed over time or within different contexts. The interviews also explored characteristics attributed to specific subcultural identities by the participants, their understanding of identity, and their perspectives towards subcultural identity and its importance, which are the subject of discussion in a separate paper (Franklin et al., 2020). At the conclusion of each interview, the participant was given details of peer-counselling and mental health services specific to LGBTIQ+ people if needed; participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time before their interview and could withdraw consent to include their data in analysis for up to four weeks after their interview. Each interview was conducted by the primary author between September and November 2019 and ran for approximately 60 minutes in duration. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and de-identified for analysis. The study was approved by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data Analysis

Reflecting the underlying social constructionist approach for the study, participant responses were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A realist framework using semantic coding was adopted for the analysis to explore the patterns of meaning within the explicit content of each response, whilst acknowledging that subcultural identities of GBQ men can be developed from social constructs (Jaspal, 2016). Thematic analysis is a method of analysis that is both flexible in application and accessible to researchers (Nowell et al., 2017) and therefore fit the exploratory nature of the research well. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a six stage process. In Stage 1 (*Familiarising Yourself With the Data*), each transcript was read numerous times for familiarity; Stage 2 (*Generating Initial Codes*) then involved coding extracts based on content and meaning; Stage 3 (*Searching for Themes*) saw these codes being formed into themes based on patterns of content and meaning; Stage 4 (*Reviewing Potential Themes*) required refining and reviewing each theme multiple times before being defined and organised into structured themes and sub-themes in Stage 5 (*Defining and Naming Themes*); finally, Stage 6 (*Producing the Report*) involved selecting relevant illustrative extracts for each theme and reporting the analysis. Each step of the analysis was conducted by the primary author with regular discussion and review of the analyses with the other authors throughout. Pseudonyms were generated for each participant and are presented alongside their age and self-reported subcultural identity term(s) to report illustrative quotes.

Results

The majority of participants were aged between 18 and 40 years ($n = 14$) and only one participant was aged over 40. Of the sample, 14 participants reported their gender as male or 'cis male' and one was transmasculine. The majority of the sample identified as gay ($n = 12$), one participant identified as bisexual, another as pansexual, and one

identified as queer for their sexual orientation. Participants were based in Victoria ($n =$ 13) or Queensland ($n = 2$). In terms of subcultural identities, the majority of participants identified as 'Geek' ($n = 9$), followed by 'Queer' ($n = 7$) and 'Bear' ($n = 5$). Four participants each identified as 'Otter', 'Daddy', and/or 'Gaymer'; three identified as 'Cub' and/or 'Pup'; and two as 'Chub', 'Jock', and/or 'Twink'. Only one participant identified as each of 'Chaser', 'Guy Next Door', 'Leather', 'Poz', or as another subcultural identity term. Participants could select more than one subcultural identity.

Two higher-level themes and three sub-themes arose from the responses of each participant regarding how they explored and developed their understanding of identity as well as how they express their identity. A glossary detailing how the interview sample defined each subcultural identity discussed can be found in Franklin et al. (2020).

Discovering Identity and Subcultural Identities

Participants were invited to share their experiences of how they came to discover GBQ identities in general and the different subcultural identities that they felt an affinity with. Participants outlined several concepts such as exploration, language and discourse, embracing identity, the evolution of identity, and how subcultural identities are integrated and expressed. Their responses also reinforced the notion that it is possible to identify with more than one subcultural identity (as every interview participant had).

Self-Guided Exploration: The Role of Language and Discourse

Most participants articulated a period of self-guided exploration and a process of gaining knowledge around GBQ communities, subcultures, and language. Brandon briefly summarised how he came to discover his identity(or identities):

> Just sort of learning about these labels within the community and then seeing who
>
> already falls under those, who are already identified as those types. Then, I'd
>
> basically be like comparing [myself] to those individuals whether consciously or

subconsciously, and seeing who's somewhat applicable to yourself as well, your

circumstances. (Brandon, 37 - Daddy, Jock, Geek, Gaymer, Queer)

Brandon (among other participants) highlighted the importance of social

comparisons, particularly in identifying where he fit within different identity categories,

but Brandon also implied that comparing and identifying with others could be both a

conscious and deliberate process as well as a natural or automatic process, at least for

him. Often, participants mentioned that their sense of identity developed as they explored

GBQ communities further, observed and interacted with people of different subcultures,

and developed an affinity with subcultures that align with their own personal

characteristics such as physical traits, hobbies and interests, and sexual preferences. A

common theme emerging was that the language used to identify themselves within a

subculture had to be learned and developed, and that it took time to realise how best to

describe themselves. For some participants, they began learning about the terms they use

from other people, whether from encountering terms being used by other people or being

labelled directly by others (see *'Embracing or Resisting Identification'* below). For

example, Mark recounted his first experience with subcultural identity terms:

I remember sitting around with some friends and we did like an online quiz, that

you know puts you into different categories depending on [your answers]. So, I

think probably that was one of the first times I'd really thought about myself in

fitting into a category like that. (Mark, 35 – Otter, Queer)

For several participants, learning about these terms and/or the communities that

use them was an important process in developing and adopting their subcultural

identity(or identities). Additionally, some participants mentioned how discovering and

selecting terms from those they have encountered in online spaces or have heard from

other people that relate to their own personal characteristics, experiences, and social

affiliations prompted them to adopt these into their overall identity, as discussed by Samuel:

> When I moved to Melbourne I started to branch out and interact with new people, and I've had both positive and negative experiences […] From there, I've sort of developed bits and pieces going 'Okay, yeah, I enjoy this, this title fits me and explains this part of me simply'. (Samuel, 28 – Chaser, Otter, Pup).

Furthermore, discourses behind subcultural identities were explored by participants including symbols, unspoken expectations, and dominant framings that influence how these identities are discussed and understood. These include framings related to gender norms, and expectations around perceived interests or behaviours, and may be influenced by media and social conditions. For example, each participant drew upon similar descriptions and characteristics for better-known identities like 'Twinks' and 'Bears', in both appearance and behaviour, to how they are portrayed in media. However, lesser-known identities like 'Otter' and 'Guy Next Door' had less consistent framings and fewer implicit archetypes, potentially as there are fewer reference points and symbols that shape understanding of these identities.

Embracing or Resisting Identification

A common experience described by participants was the manner in which they were identified or labelled by other people, some of which they may or may not already be familiar with or feel an affinity to. Some terms were welcomed and adopted into their sense of identity, others were rejected or resisted by the participant for numerous reasons, including internal reflection of one's identity and personal characteristics, recognising elements of oneself within specific communities, or purely through visceral responses to being labelled. For example, Alex explained why (although the term may be accurate) he does not identify as a 'Geek': "Yeah, it's an accurate description but I don't feel that - I

don't have any kind of visceral response to being labelled a Geek to bother identifying in that way" (Alex, 38 – Bear, Chub, Daddy, Queer).

Alex's response suggests that there is a difference between appearing or behaving in ways that others may feel reflects a particular subcultural identity, and actively feeling and identifying with that identity.

For others, the rejection of identity terms was based on negative perceptions, such as stigma or discrimination by others. Robert described his perspective on being called a 'Bear', a term that he now uses:

I hated identifying [as 'Bear']. It wasn't until […] I started seeing an ex that I actually started identifying as 'Bear', because he just nicknamed me Bear. […] Growing up in [home city] the 'Bear' community was ostracised and segregated. […] Because (I am) hairy, people tried to put me into that category, and I saw it as a negative term. It was one that I fought off for a very, very long time, until I moved to Melbourne and started to understand more about the 'Bear' community and that it wasn't actually a bad thing, and it was just, it was more what I identified as. (Robert, 38 - Bear, Daddy)

Although given the term 'Bear' by other people, Robert had encountered negative connotations of the term and experiences of the 'Bear' community in his home city. He eventually came to learn more about the term through interacting with other 'Bears' positively in Melbourne, which helped Robert to understand that it was how he identified, and he adopted the 'Bear' label into his own sense of identity. In a similar manner, Brandon briefly expressed how he incorporated the 'Gaymer' term referred to by others:

At first, I really rejected that term, the 'Gaymer' with a Y, but it's cool. […] Just due to my own experience, especially not really having a community of 'Gaymers', wasn't really until I started playing World of Warcraft™ and [realised] there's dozens of us. (Brandon, 37 - Daddy, Jock, Geek, Gaymer, Queer)

For both Robert and Brandon, they have adopted subcultural identities based on how others have identified them. However, they only adopted these identities after engaging with others who identified in this way and after experiencing a sense of community these terms can facilitate in relevant physical (e.g., Melbourne) or virtual spaces (e.g., World of Warcraft™). Although resisting them at first, both of these men demonstrated acceptance of subcultural identities, a process commonly mentioned by the participants.

Several participants referred to self-acceptance, deciding upon term(s) to identify with and becoming comfortable with them over time was an important part of adopting and articulating a subcultural identity or identities. By accepting themselves first, it became easier to utilise and share how they identify to other people, as summed up by Evan:

> When you identify as these subcategories of queerness or fetish whatever, it's the same as when you identify as gay. You have to accept it, and say it to yourself, and be it yourself internally to be able to share it externally. If you're saying externally 'I'm [these identities]', but internally you're saying 'I'm [other identities]', there's something going on that you need to address. Because unless you're comfortable and willing to say to yourself 'This is who I am', then saying it to other people isn't going to mean anything, and it's going to make you more uncomfortable, because that means you're just faking it. (Evan, 28 - Bear, Cub, Geek, Chub, Pup, Leather)

Evolving Practices of Identification

Several participants also highlighted the evolving and fluid nature of GBQ communities and how the terms for GBQ subcultural identities themselves change over time, as exemplified by Harry.

> With time, you go to grow with those [GBQ subcultural] communities [which] are
>
> always popping up all the time, so you can't always self-identify with these
>
> communities. It's not until they come along that you can identify with [them], so
>
> my identity now might be different from my identity in five years' time. (Harry,
>
> 32 - Otter, Poz)

As both he and the communities change, Harry felt that his identity could change

entirely over time, including identifying with communities he had not felt aligned to in

the past.

To some participants, the way that they expressed themselves with subcultural

identity terms had also changed over time, whether through changing which terms they

use or the ways in which they describe themselves. Mark, for example, stated that he has

become more comfortable in declaring and understanding his subcultural identities over

time.

> I'm less subtle over time, and I think feeling more comfortable using some of,
>
> using those words and definitely more comfortable yeah having a little bit more of
>
> a theoretical discussion about it because, just I think that's an increase in
>
> knowledge, it's an increase in experience, and it's just feeling more comfortable in
>
> myself. (Mark, 35 – Otter, Queer)

For other participants, the subcultural identities they used have changed as their

interests (or other factors such as age, weight, or sexual preferences) have changed over

time. Maxwell illustrated that his identity has changed to reflect changes in both his

personal interests (becoming more focused on popular culture and 'Geek' tendencies) and

self-concept:

> It depends on my most prominent identity trait at the moment. […] For a while, I
>
> was like a gym junkie, […] that one guy who talks about the gym. Nowadays, it's

a lot more like femme stuff, and about the ['Gaymer'] stuff. (Maxwell, 23 – Cub, Gaymer, Geek, Twink)

Maxwell's change in identity came about as a result of shifting identity traits and the management of his multiple subcultural identities, having identified as 'Geek', 'Gaymer', and 'Jock' (among others) at the same time. When 'Jock' was no longer relevant to himself personally and the 'Gaymer' identity was more prominent, he chose to manage his multiple identities by discarding 'Jock'.

Expressing Identity Differently Across Social Contexts

Several responses from participants suggested that social norms have a role in shaping subcultural identities as well as the behaviours associated with them. These social norms may be influenced by stereotypical perceptions of how someone in GBQ communities act, or the notion of meeting these perceptions by 'acting gay' as mentioned by Mark:

I think with the things that you identify with it's easier to fall into the behavioural norms of that, because you know that you're not going to be questioned about it, and you sort of blend in I guess with those types of things […] Like when you go to a gay club, the more gay that you are there the less people are going to say, or less the perception I guess that people are going to look at you as being an outsider you know, if you're acting the role of it you're able to blend in a little bit more I guess. (Mark, 35 – Otter, Queer)

Participants indicated that they emphasised certain identities or aspects of their identity, depending on the context and any potential benefit to doing so (such as communicating with others more easily or successfully, feeling safer in a given situation, or an increased feeling of belonging with an individual or group). Brandon and Zachary gave examples of how they emphasise and express certain identities:

I would perform a little bit sometimes I'd play up an identity when it's, say, beneficial to me or within certain groups for sure. Within the 'Gaymer' group for example, I would be talking about how much I love video games, and all these different games. Whereas in the workplace, I'm just 'Oh yeah, I spent the weekend hanging out, just you know watching TV, and all that sort of stuff', [and I] don't really mention the video games to someone that's not going to be interested in video games. (Brandon, 37 - Daddy, Jock, Geek, Gaymer, Queer)

However, several participants stated that there were also situations in which they would suppress or downplay subcultural identity or other aspects of themselves, often to reduce the risk of potential social rejection, harm, or discrimination, or to increase their perceived safety in an environment. This suppression can manifest in a number of ways, including avoiding the use of subcultural identity terms in general, altering the levels of self-disclosure to others depending on the environment, or even avoiding interaction or disclosure altogether. Alex discussed how he changed the term(s) he describes himself in (both in terms of subcultural identity and his identity as a trans man), depending on whom he is talking to:

I will use similar terms to myself and to other people, so long as those people are people that I know, and people that are safe and accepting. But if the other person is an unknown quantity, then I tend not to say very much at all. (Alex, 38 - Bear, Geek, Daddy, Chub, Queer)

Furthermore, specific situational contexts (such as specific GBQ community spaces) influenced how Stephen emphasised/suppressed his identities:

I'd also say it was very situational as well, like if I was at [a specific 'Bear'-associated bar] I would be more open with my identity as the cub or within the kink sort of thing than, you know - if I was at a straight bar, I'd be more covered

up or a bit more reserved and watching how I danced or whatever. (Stephen, 24 -

Bear, Cub, Jock, Queer)

Discussion

The discovery and adoption of subcultural identities by GBQ men were illustrated

to incorporate elements of discovering identity as a concept, self-guided exploration of

one's own identity, learning the language and discourse around subcultural identities, and

embracing/resisting identification by others. Furthermore, identity in general (and

subcultural identities) emerged as a construct that was by no means stable but rather was

found to evolve in terms of meaning, language used to express it, and in terms of how

identity interacted with social context.

Several participants referred to associating with groups of similar people in a way

consistent with previous research on gay subgroups and peer groups (Clausell & Fiske,

2005; Willoughby et al., 2008). Additionally, the subcultural identity terms actively self-

identified with or referred to by participants were consistent with previous quantitative

research on subcultural identities in Australia (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Prestage et

al., 2015). The elements of resisting identification and labelling as a particular

subculture(s) or suppressing aspects of personal identity reflect a similar resistance or

downplaying of identity illustrated by GBQ men in Adams et al. (2014). Reflecting the

group circumstance hypothesis from Jetten et al. (2017), the perceptions of certain

subcultural groups that participants identified with (or were labelled as) were stated to

influence their self-perception and wellbeing, especially in regard to feeling accepted in

social circles.

The current study provides new insights on the ways in which GBQ men adopt

subcultural identities and how these identities can be expressed and shift within different

social contexts in their everyday lives. Furthermore, this study provides insight on

subcultural identities that have not received as much attention in previous research, such

as 'Chub', 'Gaymer', and 'Otter'; placing attention on these identities alongside more commonly-known ones provides a richer picture of the diversity of GBQ subcultural identities. The findings of the current study provide further cultural understanding of GBQ communities and highlight how GBQ men are not necessarily a single homogeneous group and how subcultural identities can be an important part of their life experiences. Exploring how subcultural identity is integrated, expressed, and emphasised or suppressed in different contexts provides a basis for understanding how the impacts of stigmatised contexts and discrimination may relate to certain subcultural identities (or combinations thereof), particularly those potentially more exposed to stigma.

Having greater culturally situated knowledge is important to informing policies and support programmes aimed at improving wellbeing, such as social support initiatives to foster community connectedness or social inclusion, health promotion efforts that speak to the lived experiences of GBQ men (Fertman & Allensworth, 2017), or support-related initiatives that target particular subcultural groups. For example, health promotion for subcultural groups such as 'Bear', 'Leather', or 'Pup' could consider utilising community spaces, events, and specific terminology tailored around those subcultures wherein those identities are more likely to be expressed openly to others. There are few examples of health promotion campaigns such as these, tailored at specific GBQ subcultural groups, such as the 'Go Bear Not Bare' ad campaign from 2012, run by ACON with Harbour City Bears in Sydney, Australia (Forgan-Smith, 2012). Policy makers and health promoters should consider and be aware of how health needs and experiences may vary across different GBQ subcultural groups in order to understand where is best to situate which kinds of interventions, including whom to include and address with certain interventions. Furthermore, exploring factors such as stigma and the ways in which different subcultural identity groups are perceived in future research may inform how these experiences and perceptions relate to the health and well-being of GBQ

men who identify with particular subcultures, which may further inform health promotion initiatives.

Study Strengths and Limitations

This study is among, to the best of our knowledge, the first to explore GBQ subcultural identities through a ground-up empirical approach centred on the perspectives of the individuals and communities who actively identify with and utilise subcultural identity terms in Australia. A strength of the current study is that it avoids placing specific emphasis on certain subcultures or behavioural outcomes when examining subcultural identities, allowing for any information or emphasis to naturally emerge for certain subcultures.

The study focused only on those who identified with one or more subcultures and who were willing to participate in an interview. For these reasons, these participants could be considered more open about their identity and more connected to gay cultures. We did not collect data from individuals who do not identify as GBQ but engage in similar behaviours (such as men who have sex with men but identify as straight) nor from those who do not openly identify with a GBQ subculture. As such, the study findings represent an insider perspective of GBQ identity and subcultures and should be considered within that context. It is important to note that certain subcultural groups may be more private in how they express or discuss their identity and practices and may be less willing to participate in interviews to share their experiences. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that these groups have been fully accessed and different methods of accessing these groups (such as utilising individuals within these communities to reach other members) may be needed for future research to reach a larger range of participants. Further research should also consider exploring the perspectives of non-GBQ-identifying men who have sex with men as a comparison or for alternate perspectives of subcultural identities.

Additionally, the study involved limited representation of different Australian states and territories (participants were primarily from Victoria with a few Queensland participants), thus reducing the potential information that may be gathered around location-based differences or the comparison of each state's social environments that may influence how subcultural identities are discovered or expressed in specific states. Furthermore, only one participant was above the age of 40, curtailing meaningful exploration of the perspectives of older GBQ men, in order to better understand potential age-related or generational contexts for identity development and expression.

Conclusions

This study utilised an empirical qualitative approach to examine how GBQ men in Australia discover their sense of identity, and how they adopt and express subcultural identities. The findings demonstrate variations in how GBQ men adopt subcultural identities (such as seeking out subcultural groups, comparisons with others, or being labelled with subcultural identity terms by others), how subcultural identities can be expressed within different social contexts and how they may change over time. Overall, these findings provide further insight into understanding gay cultures and subcultures, particularly around the lived experiences of subcultural identities which may be useful for those seeking greater cultural knowledge of these communities as well as those seeking to engage with GBQ communities in a culturally appropriate manner.

Declarations

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Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

All research procedures reported in this article were approved by the La Trobe University

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Availability of Data and Material

Not applicable

Code Availability

Not applicable

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data

collection and analysis were performed by Jake D. Franklin, under the supervision of Dr

Adam Bourne and Dr Anthony Lyons who provided advice on analysing and interpreting

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Chapter 6 – Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the diversity of GBQ communities through subcultural identities, how these identities are characterised and defined by those who use them, and the experiences of GBQ men who utilise subcultural identities including their adoption and expression. To achieve this, a total of 15 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying men in Australia. An inductive thematic analysis was utilised to examine patterns of meaning in the content of the interviews. This chapter summarises the findings of the research in relation to each of the research objectives, highlighting the unique contributions to the literature, as well as discussing the strengths and limitations of the research, and the implications of the study for health promotion practice and future research.

6.1 – Findings of the Research

6.1.1 – Diversity of GBQ Subcultural Identity

The first research objective related to examining the potential diversity of subcultural identity that GBQ men perceive within their communities, which was addressed in Paper 1 (see *Chapter 4*). There was a broad (but not exhaustive) range of GBQ subcultural identities that were addressed within the study, including more-common subcultures, like 'Bear' and 'Twink', as well as lesser-known subcultures, such as 'Chub' and 'Guy Next Door'. Participants were asked to characterise and describe the subcultural identities that they apply to themselves, in addition to a list of 11 subcultural identities presented in the interviews (see *Appendix E*). The descriptions of the 11 subcultural identities (plus another four identities that participants brought up during the interviews) is presented in *Table 3*. Each description of the specific GBQ subcultural identities was synthesised solely from participant responses based on the characteristics identified and the descriptions they gave. To the extent of the author's knowledge, there has not been any research participant-derived definitions previously provided of GBQ subcultures from

Australian-based research. Elements for some of the definitions provided by participants for particular subcultural identities align with descriptions given in overseas research, such as the physical characteristics and broad descriptions of 'Twinks' and 'Bears' (Willoughby et al., 2008), and interests associated with 'Gaymers' (Shaw, 2012). However, there were numerous terms in the current study that have not appeared in other studies such as 'Chub', 'Geek', 'Guy Next Door', and 'Gaymer'; conversely, there were terms within previous research that were not present in the current study, such as the majority of terms (e.g., 'Artsy' and 'Goth') used by Willoughby et al. (2008). In comparing the current study and overseas research, some similarities (e.g., consistent framing of 'Twink' and 'Bear') and potential differences (e.g., differences in terms used) in GBQ subcultural identities emerge. The differences between the current study and previous Australian research (e.g., the use of 'Wolf' as a term; Lyons & Hosking, 2014) also suggest potential differences in subcultural identities over time or reflect the previous studies' use of pre-existing terms and descriptions of subcultural identities from prior and/or overseas research.

Furthermore, alternative terms for certain subcultures were discussed by participants (i.e., the use of 'U = U' to describe HIV-positive men as opposed to the more controversial term of 'Poz'). The relationships between subcultural identities that are considered similar or related (e.g., 'Bear', 'Cub', 'Otter', and to a lesser extent, 'Daddy') were addressed by participants when describing these subcultural identities, reinforcing the links between these subcultures that have been illustrated in previous research (e.g., Lyons & Hosking, 2014; Quidley-Rodriguez & De Santis, 2016). A particularly noteworthy finding is that some GBQ men appear to identify with more than one subcultural identity. Indeed, every member of the interview sample identified with at least two subcultural identities and some participants identified with four or six different subcultures. This multiplicity of subcultural identities is a clear demonstration of how

diverse and intersectional GBQ communities and subcultural identities can be, and of how broad one's own identity can be to self-identify across multiple GBQ communities or identity categories. The intersectionality reflected in the current study highlight serves to multiple potential sources of minority stress (e.g., identifying as a sexual minority and as potentially stigmatised subcultural identities such as 'Chub' or 'Poz') which may in turn exacerbate health related outcomes in a manner similar to that documented by Ramirez and Galupo (2019).

6.1.2 – Understanding, Defining, and Attributing Meaning to Subcultural Identity

The second research objective focused on exploring how GBQ men understand, define, and attribute meaning to subcultural identities, including the importance and function given to subcultural identities in community life, as addressed in Paper 1 (see *Chapter 4)*. In terms of understanding and defining subcultural identities, participants were asked to describe and characterise both their self-identified subcultures and several presented in a list during the interviews (see *Appendix E*). These responses were synthesised to form descriptions of each subculture discussed in the interviews (see *Table 3*), and the characteristics identified by participants were grouped into five categories. These categories are discussed in detail within Paper 1 (see *Chapter 4*) and were able to be summarised according to the following: physical traits (e.g., age, weight, body hair); gender expression and gender norms (e.g., perceived masculinity/femininity and mannerisms); roles and preferences in sexual contexts (e.g., kink preference, insertive/receptive role, power dynamics); hobbies and interests (e.g., recreational activities such as video gaming and exercise); and social interaction and association (e.g., subculture-specific communities and events, levels of social confidence).

Each of these categories are reflected across multiple subcultures (e.g., 'Bears' are characterised by physical traits and perceived masculinity) and provide a useful framework for describing the types of traits that those identifying with certain subcultures

may share. Some of the categories reflect characteristics and elements of subcultural

identity that have been reported and explored in previous literature. These include gender

expression and norms (i.e., masculinity; Barrett & Barrett, 2017; Manley et al., 2007),

physical traits (e.g., age and hirsuteness; Moskowitz et al., 2013), as well as sexual

preferences and power dynamics (e.g., kink and fetish activities; Wignall & McCormack,

2017).

Furthermore, the participants discussed the functions that subcultural identities

hold within their everyday life, as well as their general importance. Subcultural identities

were seen as a method of social connection, but also 'social filtering', allowing someone

to easily describe themselves using a term (or set of terms) that carry certain connotations

or expectations of what they may be like. For example, someone identifying as a Gaymer

could be stating an interest in video or tabletop gaming, whilst someone identifying as a

Bear could be expressing that they have a certain body type or level of body hair. This

especially applies in online spaces such as Grindr™ (Grindr LLC, 2020), where profile

text is limited, and profile options can be used to quickly identify certain subcultures in

order to concisely convey one's identity; this is reminiscent of the construction and re-

construction of identity discussed by gay men on Grindr™ as reported by Jaspal (2016).

This also allows for users to quickly gauge whether they might like to engage with

another user, if they have similar identities or meet personal preferences, and has

connotations for both social connectivity and reducing risk when engaging with new

people.

Additionally, subcultural identities were also discussed as reflecting queer history

and culture and likened to a form of coded communication and labels for GBQ men that

originated during the period in which homosexuality was criminalised in Australia.

Subcultural identity terms were discussed by participants in terms of their utility for

connecting people with similar interests and traits, especially through the use of terms that

are mutually known within GBQ communities. As illustrated previously, prior research on GBQ subcultural identities has focused on drawing links between men who identify with specific subcultures and health outcomes, such as between 'Leathermen' and HIV Risk (Moskowitz et al., 2011) or between 'Twinks' and 'Cubs' regarding physical and mental health outcomes (Lyons & Hosking, 2014). However, relatively little attention has been given toward understanding how GBQ men understand, define, and attribute meaning to subcultural identity, as noted by Quidley-Rodriguez and De Santis (2016). The findings of the current study help to directly address this important gap in knowledge and further contribute to the understanding of GBQ subcultural identities. Furthermore, the attribution of meaning to subcultural identities in general reflect the evaluation process as described by Identity Process Theory (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014) through which different elements of identity are given value and meaning.

6.1.3 – Developing a Sense of Identity and Adopting GBQ Subcultural Identity

The third objective of the research was to examine how GBQ men develop their sense of identity and adopt a subcultural identity, which is a focus of Paper 2 (see *Chapter 5*). Participants were asked within the interviews to talk about how they discovered GBQ identity and subcultural identity, how they came to self-identify within the subcultures they chose, and their experiences in developing and refining their sense of identity. The most prominent theme that emerged from participant responses was self-guided exploration, particularly how participants developed their understanding of identity and of themselves through gathering information and seeking to learn more about how their own interests and characteristics aligned with others they observed. Elements of this self-guided exploration, as described by the participants, included being exposed to labels and terminology around GBQ communities and subcultures, actively seeking more information or for different terms and subcultures that one may relate to, and comparing

oneself to others to determine how well they 'fit' with the characteristics of certain communities or social circles.

For some participants, their journey of self-guided exploration involved exposure to subcultural identity terms in online spaces (e.g., one participant recalled learning about subcultures after taking an online quiz) or being labelled with a certain subcultural term by other people. The subcultural identities selected by participants were framed in a number of ways such as simply being apparent from one's interests (e.g., one participant identified as a 'Geek' because of their interests in comics, etc.), as a form of acceptance of labels given by other people, or for certain subcultural identities as a way of identifying more broadly (e.g., one participant identified as 'Otter' as they felt they did not fit the perceived criteria for any other subcultures). This third framing is particularly interesting as it potentially represents both identifying and not identifying with a subculture at the same time (or altering one's expression of identity for the sake of communication) and has not been examined much, if at all, in prior research around GBQ subcultural identity yet potentially relates to several subcultural identities that may be considered more broad or vague in definition (i.e., 'Otter' and 'Queer'). Furthermore, this suggests that, at least for some people, there may be a strong desire to belong or fit in somewhere that may necessitate adopting a particular subcultural identity. The process of exploration and discovery of identity discussed by participants can be considered a reflection of the assimilation-accommodation process described under Identity Process Theory (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014) and provides further insight into how information regarding specific subcultural identities may be integrated into an individual's identity structure, leading to the potential adoption of that subculture by the individual.

6.1.4 – Changes in GBQ Subcultural Identity Over Time and Contexts

The fourth research objective was to investigate whether an individual's subcultural identity may change over time or within different contexts, as explored in

Paper 2 (see *Chapter 5*). Several participants perceived both identity in general and GBQ subcultural identities as being more fluid concepts that are constantly evolving or changing as time goes on and with new subcultures constantly emerging. Furthermore, participants emphasised that the ways they self-identify and express their identity also evolve over time as they learn more about GBQ subcultures and about themselves, and as they become more comfortable expressing aspects of themselves that may relate to their subcultural identities. Additionally, changes in the participants' traits over time (e.g., age, interests, and/or body mass) were stated to influence how they self-identify, with some participants adopting new subcultural identities or relinquishing other identities according to how relevant or representative they viewed them to be at the time. This potentially ever-evolving nature of identity suggests that the ways in which identity and subcultures are currently understood could become outdated over time, which may further suggest that identity research may need to be similarly evolving or regularly replicated to gauge how subcultural identities have changed in meaning over time.

In addition to evolving with time, participants highlighted that identity may change based on contextual factors, and how one openly identifies can be dependent on their current context and the people they are around. For example, several participants pointed out a difference between how they identify and express themselves at work compared to when they are with friends, mainly downplaying their GBQ subcultural identity (or identities) at work or emphasising other aspects of themselves like hobbies and interests (especially around social circles based on particular interests, like 'Gaymers'). Furthermore, the concept of downplaying parts of one's identity to avoid social rejection or harm was addressed, with several participants mentioning suppressing parts of their identity or avoiding using terms related to the subcultures they identify with unless they were around others who share that identity.

Geographical location was also mentioned as a factor, with one participant explaining how they avoided identifying as a 'Bear' in Perth due to connotations and experiences with the community there but decided to identify with the subculture upon moving to Melbourne, having more positive experiences, and feeling more comfortable and confident doing so. This element of suppressing or managing one's subcultural identity (or identities) has received little attention in previous research on GBQ subcultures but provides additional insight into the experiences of discrimination and harassment, plus the strategies used to prevent or avoid these experiences, reported by men identifying with subcultures such as 'Cub' in the existing literature (Lyons & Hosking, 2014). In addition, the suppression of subcultural identities or other elements of identity discussed in the current study reflect the potential expectation of harm and discrimination and the concealment of sexual identity discussed within Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003; Mongelli et al, 2019); the current study may therefore bring additional understanding to how intersectional and subordinate identities may be concealed or suppressed due to minority stress or perceived risk of harm.

6.1.5 – Expressing GBQ Subcultural Identities

The fifth and final research objective was to explore the ways in which GBQ men express their subcultural identity, including through their behaviour. This was addressed primarily in Paper 2 (see *Chapter 5*) but is also partially acknowledged when discussing characteristics of different subcultures in Paper 1 (see *Chapter 4*). There were several ways that participants talked about expressing their subcultural identity across both papers, including engaging with the community related to their subculture(s) and attending events specific to subcultures (such as 'Leather'-related and fetish-related events that included 'Pups'). Furthermore, these identities were expressed by participants openly using terminology related to their self-identified subculture(s) in social contexts and by utilising the profile options on gay men's geo-social networking applications such

as Grindr™ (Grindr LLC, 2020) and Scruff™ (Perry Street Software, 2020) to share their identity and interact with others in these online spaces.

Several subcultures were linked to specific social or sexual behaviours as a form of expression and were characterised in part by these behaviours (e.g., wearing the appropriate fetish-related gear for the 'Leather' and 'Pup' subcultures, or engaging in video- or tabletop gaming for 'Gaymers'). In addition, the 'Gaymer' and 'Geek' subcultures were perceived by participants to exhibit lower social confidence or competency in social situations, with a preference for online communication discussed as a possible form of expression or behaviour attributed to these subcultures. Whilst some of these forms of expression (such as the wearing of 'Leather' and 'Pup' gear) have been explored in prior research (e.g., Moskowitz et al., 2011; Wignall & McCormack, 2017), the perceived lower social confidence attributed to 'Geeks' and 'Gaymers' (which may potentially be attributed to other subcultures not captured in the current study) does not seem to have been discussed explicitly in previous research on GBQ subcultures and presents a novel finding for the current study. Given that the social status and conditions of a group may influence the wellbeing of its members (Jetten et al., 2017), this suggests that it may be useful for future research to further examine ways in which particular GBQ subcultural groups and the men within them are treated within the wider GBQ community, as well as the implications this may have on their health and wellbeing.

6.2 – Implications for Health Promotion Practice

The findings of the current study advance knowledge and understanding of GBQ communities and some of the subcultures within these communities. These findings may be useful for those in the field of health promotion and advocacy, mental health, training and education of health professionals, and any field that requires cultural knowledge and sensitivity. The current study highlights the diverse nature of GBQ communities. It also demonstrates that these communities are not a homogeneous group, as often perceived,

but involve a collection of numerous intersectional and heterogeneous subcultural groups that should be considered in practice. The roles that subcultural identities may have in the lives of GBQ men, as well as the importance these identities are given, should be considered as a potential factor for their overall physical and mental health. This is especially important given that subcultural identities can be considered by some men as an important part of their overall life experiences, or as an active part of their social and/or sexual lives.

Furthermore, GBQ subcultures can vary significantly on characteristics (e.g., 'Bears' and 'Chubs' typically have a higher body mass index and may be older), and each subculture may have different health risk profiles based on these characteristics, which should be accounted for when designing targeted health promotion campaigns or assessing the health of the broader GBQ community (i.e., in health-related research and in health assessments within clinical settings). In addition to physical health factors, those working in health promotion and mental health should also consider the impacts of stigma and discrimination and the extent to which GBQ men who identify with particular subcultures (such as 'Chub' or 'Poz') may be at greater risk of experiencing discrimination or harassment, and their associated effects on mental health, due to the stigmatised nature of some subcultures.

Overall, those working in health-related fields should consistently develop and refine their knowledge of other cultures, including GBQ communities and subcultures, as culturally-situated knowledge is essential to informing the development and tailoring of health promotion programmes (Fertman & Allensworth, 2017). Culturally-appropriate knowledge regarding GBQ subcultures include terminology related to common subcultures (e.g., 'Bear', 'Twink', etc.), the types of characteristics related to these subcultures, the importance that men assign to their identities, and the potential differences in health related to both the characteristics of these subcultures (e.g., body

type, sexual activity) and the potential experiences of the men who identify within them (e.g., experiences of stigma, discrimination, and harassment). Each of these dimensions can be important considerations when designing support programmes to improve the wellbeing of GBQ men, such as encouraging community connectedness through social support programmes, or having a presence at related community spaces and events when targeting specific subcultures (as demonstrated by ACON's 'Go Bear Not Bare' advertising campaign; Forgan-Smith, 2012), as well as the development of resources such as Maki (2017), in order to directly engage with those identifying within those subcultures.

6.3 – Strengths and Limitations of the Research

A particular strength of the current study is that it is, to the best of the author's knowledge, the first qualitative psychological study to explore GBQ subcultural identities in an Australian context, using an evidence-based approach and responses directly sourced from men who utilise subcultural identity terms. Several combinations of subcultural identities were able to be addressed due to all participants individually identifying with more than one subculture, and the interviews were designed to account for this multiplicity of subcultural identity in a way that has not been explored in quantitative research. In addition to selecting one or more subcultural identities from the provided list, participants had the ability to give their own terms if they identified with a subculture that was not present in the list, with the interviews designed to account for any additional terms that arose, allowing for a further broader range of identities. Given this approach, the study acknowledged and incorporated a wider range of subcultural identities than what has been covered in previous research without necessarily focusing on a specific subculture, as has been a relatively common practice in previous work. This also allowed for subcultures that may be lesser-known or less covered in the research (such as 'Otter', 'Gaymer', and 'Chub') to be explored in some depth. Similarly, there

were no emphases placed on specific behaviours or health outcomes (such as sexual

behaviour and HIV risk, as seen throughout the literature). Rather, open-ended questions

were designed to allow participants to bring up behaviours they deemed most relevant to

their identity. Furthermore, the interviews were designed in a way that allowed for

participants to clarify and refine their thoughts and responses throughout the interview,

and to explore their experiences and perceptions in their own terms and in an open

format.

Although there were many strengths to the research, there were also a few

limitations to the study, particularly around data collection and sample recruitment that

limit the diversity of the research sample. Firstly, as covered in Papers 1 and 2, the

decision was made to only recruit and interview men who identified as gay, bisexual,

pansexual, or queer as their sexual orientation; and who identified with one or more

subcultural identity (including any additional terms written in by the participants). This

decision was made in order to recruit participants that may be more involved with GBQ

communities in general, meaning that the study adopted an insider approach to exploring

and understanding GBQ subcultural identities and the findings of this study should be

considered regarding that specific context. This means that the outsider perspectives of

anyone not identifying as those sexual orientations (such as asexual men, or heterosexual

men who have sex with men) or not identifying with any subcultures were not explored

and comparisons therefore cannot be made about how these perspectives may differ.

A second limitation of the study was that, despite advertising for participants from

anywhere in Australia, and that participants from most Australian states completed the

expression of interest survey, the majority of those who self-booked and attended an

interview were located in Victoria ($n = 13$). The remaining two participants were based in

Queensland. This prevented the gathering of information about how subcultures and

overall contexts for GBQ communities might vary in other states and territories of

Australia. Previous research has identified variations in sexuality-based identities due to differences in geographical locations (Brown-Saracino, 2015). However, this also means that considerable information was gathered about the Victorian-specific context for GBQ communities, and some participant responses included talking about experiences with certain subcultures outside of Victoria and Queensland, providing a starting point for future research to explore state-based differences.

Although the study was advertised with no criteria or restrictions for recruitment (beyond adults who self-identified as GBQ men), there was a considerable lack of engagement from certain demographics that lead to a less diverse final sample. There were no criteria that screened participants based on ethnic background, however the majority of participants who completed the expression of interest survey identified as Anglo-Celtic or European; this was also the case for those who self-booked and attended an interview as part of the final sample. Approximately one-fifth of participants who expressed interest in a face-to-face interview identified under an ethnic background other than Anglo-Celtic or European, but many of these either booked an interview but did not attend or did not book an interview. It is possible that the lower engagement from more diverse ethnic backgrounds may be due to not using targeted social media advertising or directly approaching cultural communities to recruit; it may also be due to relying on participants to book themselves for an interview through an online calendar webpage, or other limitations of how the study was framed. Having such a limited range of ethnic backgrounds included in the study means that a considerable range of diverse perspectives and intersectional identities are not accounted for, the sample is not representative of the urban Australian population, and the findings should be considered in the context of a primarily Anglo-Celtic/European perspective.

Similarly, despite the study being advertised as open to men over the age of 18, only one participant over the age of 40 self-booked and attended an interview, with over

half of the sample aged 18 to 30 ($n = 8$) and the rest aged 30 to 40 ($n = 6$). Thus, there

remains a need to gather the perspectives and experiences of GBQ men over the age of

40. This is a valuable demographic to include, as it would allow for the perspectives of

people from multiple generations to be explored and could therefore help to account for

any variation in subcultural identities (and related terminology) over time and between

age groups. Considering that age was among the common physical characteristics

attributed to specific subcultural identities (particularly 'Daddy' which is characterised

strongly by older age), it will be particularly important to account for those over the age

of 40 in future studies. Drawing on these perspectives is important in the exploration of

diverse perspectives related to subcultural identities and how the understanding, adoption,

and experiences of them may differ between age ranges.

6.4 – Recommendations for Future Research

As discussed above, there were limitations to the current study that can be

addressed in future research in a number of ways. Firstly, future research should make a

greater effort to recruit a more equal set of age ranges, especially those over the age of 40

who may be more difficult to recruit. The use of purposive sampling for future interview-

based research may be of benefit to ensure that perspectives are gathered for as broad and

representative an age range as possible, which in turn may allow for potential

comparisons to be made between age or generational groups regarding their

understanding of GBQ subcultural identities and the terminology used to describe them.

As previously mentioned, prior research has found variations in sexuality-based

identities in different geographical locations (Brown-Saracino, 2015), and the current

study collected the majority of data from Victoria, Australia. Further research should be

conducted in other areas of Australia and seek to recruit equally from each state and

territory as much as possible, including different urban and rural/regional areas. This

would allow for the exploration of further potential variations in perspectives and

experiences related to GBQ subcultural identities across geographical locations (including comparing urban and rural locations) and broader local cultures.

Furthermore, the perspectives of those who do not identify as gay, bisexual, pansexual, or queer (e.g., those who identify as asexual) or who do not identify with any GBQ subcultures should be collected in future research as both a point of comparison and to examine outsider perspectives on GBQ communities and subcultures. Future research may make comparisons between perspectives by including both insider and outsider perspectives and experiences, which in turn may further help determine how GBQ subcultures are understood more broadly.

Additionally, future research could benefit from collecting further in-depth information from participants that identify with a subcultural identity, including characteristics identified in the current study (e.g., collecting information about physical characteristics such as weight and body hair, as well as hobbies and sexual activity preferences). Collecting this information not only provides richer demographic information about the types of people who identify within each subculture, but also allows for greater mapping of the kind of people likely to identify with a particular subculture, or even combinations of subcultures. For example, comparing the participant-derived characteristics of a 'Bear' with the self-reported characteristics of those identifying as a 'Bear' may illustrate further characteristics beyond the description created in the current study. Considering that the current study was designed to be broader and more generalised in its approach to GBQ subcultural identity, future qualitative research may benefit from expanding upon the content of the current study or focussing on particular aspects of subcultural identity (such as contextual changes in identity) in greater depth.

The current study only examined subcultural identities in gay, bisexual, and queer-identifying men. Future research examining subcultural identities among other sexual

orientation populations (e.g., lesbian, bisexual, and queer-identifying women) could provide valuable insight into the extent that sexuality-based subcultural identities may be used by these populations, which may in turn allow for comparisons in the lived experiences of subcultural identities between sexual orientation populations (Brown-Saracino, 2015).

Finally, changes in subcultural identity over time were suggested in Paper 2. Potential longitudinal research could be conducted by tracking people over a span of years and gauging their perceptions and expressions of their identity (including subcultural identities), as well as the importance and roles these identities have in their lives. This would allow for greater exploration of how subcultural identity may become more or less important to an individual at different points in their lives, or between different contexts, as well as how their identity may evolve and be expressed differently as their lives change.

6.5 - Conclusion

The current study is, to the best of the author's knowledge, the first Australian-based qualitative study to examine GBQ subcultural identities from the perspectives of those who utilise them. It specifically examined the diversity of subcultural identities, how they are understood and given meaning, how they are adopted and expressed, and how they change over time and contexts. The findings of Paper 1 illustrate that GBQ communities are incredibly diverse by capturing a (non-exhaustive) portion of the numerous subcultural identities that comprise these communities, as well as providing evidence-based descriptions of numerous subcultural identities derived from the characteristics and behaviours that participants attributed to these identities. Paper 1 also highlighted the importance that subcultural identities have as both a social filter and a reflection of queer history. The findings of Paper 2 indicated that there were numerous elements and pathways related to how GBQ men explored and adopted different

subcultural identities, that the ways subcultural identities are expressed can vary and change depending on contexts, and that these identities and expressions can be fluid and not fixed over time. The findings of the current study further contribute to the understanding of GBQ subcultural identity by providing valuable perspectives of the lived experiences of subcultural identity, which in turn provide a foundation for further exploration of GBQ subcultural identities in Australia and elsewhere. Furthermore, the current study outlines several recommendations for culturally-sensitive health promotion and further research, which are eagerly encouraged by the author. The need for further research is clearly indicated.

Appendix A - Expression of Interest Survey Consent Form

The research is being carried out in partial fulfilment of Master of Applied Science by Research under the supervision of Dr Adam Bourne. The following researchers will be conducting the study:

Chief Investigator: Dr Adam Bourne (Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society)

Secondary Investigator: Dr Anthony Lyons (Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society)

Student: Jake Franklin (Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society)

Research funder: This research is supported by a Master's scholarship provided by La Trobe University.

1. What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a study of subcultural identity in Australian same-sex attracted men. We hope to learn how Australian same-sex attracted men understand identity, what it means for them, and what sort of language is used to describe their identity.

2. Do I have to participate?

Being part of this study is voluntary. If you want to be part of the study, we ask that you read the information below carefully and ask us any questions.

You can read the information below and decide at the end if you do not want to

participate. If you decide not to participate this won't affect your relationship with La Trobe University or any other listed organisation.

3. Who is being asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate because:

- You have responded to our advertisement, either by contacting us or using the web link.

4. What will I be asked to do?

If you want to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer some questions related to yourself for screening purposes. This survey should take no more than approximately 15 minutes.

5. What are the benefits?

There are no individual benefits of you taking part in this study. However, the expected benefits to society in general are an improved understanding of identity in Australian same-sex attracted men that may be helpful for health promotion and further research.

6. What are the risks?

With any study there are (1) risks we know about, (2) risks we don't know about and (3) risks we don't expect. If you experience something that you aren't sure about, please contact us immediately so we can discuss the best way to manage your concerns.

We do not foresee any risks associated with this study.

7. What will happen to information about me?

We will **collect** information about you in ways that will reveal who you are.

We will **store** information about you in ways that will not reveal who you are.

We will **publish** information about you in ways that will not be identified in any type of publication from this study.

We will **keep** your information for 5 years after the project is completed. After this time we will destroy all of your data.

The storage, transfer and destruction of your data will be undertaken in accordance with the Research Data Management Policy (See here).

The personal information you provide will be handled in accordance with applicable privacy laws, any health information collected will be handled in accordance with the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic). Subject to any exceptions in relevant laws, you have the right to access and correct your personal information by contacting the research team.

The answers you give will be used to create an overall summary of the types of people who took part in the study. None of that information will be identifiable to you, and will only be used to generate statistics on demographics like age, education, etc. The summary will be included in any written version of the study and data, including any published documents that may be created from the results.

8. Will I hear about the results of the study?

We will let you know about the results of the study by giving you the opportunity

to be contacted when the results of the entire study are completed. If you wish,

we will provide you with a short summary of the overall findings.

9. What if I change my mind?

You can choose to no longer be part of the study at any time until four

weeks following the collection of your data. You can let us know by:

1. Calling us; or

2. Emailing us

Your decision to withdraw at any point will **not** affect your relationship with La

Trobe University or any other organisation listed.

When you withdraw, we will stop asking you for information. Any identifiable

information about you will be withdrawn from the research study. However, once

the results have been analysed we can only withdraw information, such as your

name and contact details. If results haven't been analysed, you can choose if we use those

results or not.

10. Who can I contact for questions or want more information?

If you would like to speak to us, please use the contact details below:

Dr Adam Bourne (Associate Professor - Australian Research Centre in Sex,

Health and Society)

Telephone: 03 9479 8732

Email: A.Bourne@latrobe.edu.au

11. What if I have a complaint?

If you have a complaint about any part of this study, please contact the Senior

Research Ethics Officer with the following details:

Ethics reference number: HEC19350

Telephone: 03 9479 1443

Email: humanethics@latrobe.edu.au

Appendix B – Expression of Interest Survey

Note: This survey was administered online and therefore conditional responses and skips are noted in the version below. A '(!)' denotes a response that does not meet inclusion criteria. If a participant gave any of these responses, they were automatically redirected to Block 7 (Survey close – Ineligible).

Any '[TEXT ENTRY]' responses were screened manually by the research team.

Block 1 (Participant Information and Consent Form) – See Appendix A

Block 2 (Demographics Part 1)

How old are you? – [TEXT ENTRY]

How do you describe your gender?

- Male

- Female (!)

- Trans-masculine

- Trans-feminine (!)

- Nonbinary (!)

- I use a different term (please say what) – [TEXT ENTRY]

- Prefer not to say (!)

How do you describe yourself?

- Heterosexual (!)

- Gay

- Bisexual

- Pansexual

- Asexual (!)

- I use a different term (please say what) – [TEXT ENTRY]

- Prefer not to say (!)

Are you currently living in Australia?

- Yes

- No (!)

[IF ELIGIBLE, PROCEED TO BLOCK 3]

Block 3 (Demographics Part 2)

Which state/territory do you live in?

- Northern Territory

- Queensland

- New South Wales

- Victoria

- South Australia

- Western Australia

- Tasmania

- Australian Capital Territory

What is your ethnicity?

- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander

- Chinese

- Indian

- Anglo-Celtic

- Southern European

- Eastern European

- Other European

- Middle Eastern

- African

- Latin American

- South East Asian

- Other Asian

- Other (please specify) - [TEXT ENTRY]

- Prefer not to say

What is your highest level of education?

- Did not finish high school

- High school graduate

- TAFE

- Graduate Diploma

- Bachelor's degree

- Master's degree

- Doctorate

- Other postgraduate degree

[IF ELIGIBLE, PROCEED TO BLOCK 4]

Block 4 (Self-Identified Subcultural Identity)

Do you identify as any of the following, or use similar terms to describe yourself?

(Select as many as apply)

- Twink

- Bear

- Cub

- Otter

- Jock

- Geek

- Gaymer

- Daddy

- Chub

- Pup

- Pig

- Leather

- Poz

- Chaser

- Muscle

- Queer

- Drag

- Military

- Guy next door

- I do not identify with any of these terms (!)

- Other (please specify) – [TEXT ENTRY]

[IF ELIGIBLE, PROCEED TO BLOCK 5]

Block 5 (Interview Participation)

Would you be interested in taking part in a one-to-one interview where you would talk more about how you identify, as well as what your identity means to you?

- Yes, an online interview

- Yes, a face-to-face interview

- No (!)

[IF YES TO EITHER INTERVIEW TYPE]

What are your contact details?

- Phone – [TEXT ENTRY]

- Email – [TEXT ENTRY]

Do you consent for your responses to this questionnaire to be used in the study?

- Yes

- No

[IF ELIGIBLE, PROCEED TO BLOCK 6]

Block 6 (Survey Close – Eligible)

Thank you for completing this expression of interest form. We do value your time and energy in taking part. Your interest in the study has been recorded and you have been added to the list of potential participants.

Depending on the number of participants available, you may or may not be selected for an interview. If you have been selected, the research team will be in touch shortly to arrange your interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like to withdraw your consent to participate in the study, please contact Dr Adam Bourne on 03 9479 8732 or via email at A.Bourne@latrobe.edu.au - you are welcome to withdraw from the study for up to four weeks after your interview.

Thank you again.

[END OF SURVEY]

Block 7 (Survey Close – Ineligible)

Thank you for completing the expression of interest form. We do value your time and energy in expressing interest in taking part. Unfortunately, you do not meet the inclusion criteria for this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr Adam Bourne on 03 9479 8732 or via email at A.Bourne@latrobe.edu.au.

Thank you again.

[END OF SURVEY]

Appendix C – Advertisement for Expression of Interest Survey

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY | Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society

Exploring the diversity of identities among same-sex attracted men

Researchers at La Trobe University are seeking volunteer research participants to be involved in a study about the diversity of identities among same-sex attracted men in Australia (such as Bear, Cub, Twink, Pup, and more). You will be asked about identities you know, how you identify, and what these mean to you.

Would the research study be a good fit for me?

The study might be a good fit for you if you are:

- aged 18 years or older
- identifying as male (trans-men are welcome to participate)
- openly identifying as same-sex attracted (e.g., gay, bisexual, pansexual, etc.)
- living in Australia

What would happen if I took part in the research study?

If you decide to take part in the research study, you would:

- Take part in a face-to-face or online interview
- Be asked questions around how you think about yourself, how you describe yourself, the terms you use, and what they mean to you.

Who do I contact if I want more information or want to take part in the study?

You can sign up for the study here: https://bit.ly/2TNKuZB

If you would like more information or are interested in being part of the study, please contact:

Name:	Jake Franklin
School/Department	Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
Email:	J.Franklin@latrobe.edu.au
Phone:	03 9479 8858
Ethics Approval Number	HEC19350

Version 3, dated: 25 September 2019

Appendix D – Interview Participant Information and Consent Form

The research is being carried out in partial fulfilment of Master of Applied Science by Research under the supervision of Dr Adam Bourne. The following researchers will be conducting the study:		
Role	**Name**	**Organisation**
Chief Investigator	Dr Adam Bourne	Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
Secondary Investigator	Dr Anthony Lyons	Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
Student	Jake Franklin	Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
Research funder	This research is supported by a Master's scholarship provided by La Trobe University.	

1.   What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a study of identity in Australian same-sex attracted men. We are interested in understanding how gay and bisexual men in Victoria describe themselves, and what aspects of the gay community they identify with most. For example, how is it that some men describe themselves (or are described by others) as a 'Bear', or a 'Twink', or a 'Gaymer', and what does this mean to them?

2.   Do I have to participate?

Being part of this study is voluntary. If you want to be part of the study, we ask that you read the information below carefully and ask us any questions.

You can read the information below and decide at the end if you do not want to participate. If you decide not to participate this won't affect your relationship with La Trobe University or any other listed organisation.

3.   Who is being asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate because:

- You are aged 18 years or older

- You identify as male or trans-masculine

- You identify as openly same-sex attracted

- You live in, Australia

- You have completed the expression of interest survey.

- You have consented to an interview and provided your contact details to us.

4.   What will I be asked to do?

If you want to take part in this study, we will ask you to take part in a private, one-to-one interview. You can choose between a face-to-face interview at the La Trobe CBD campus, Bundoora campus, or an online interview. We'll ask you some questions related to how you think about yourself, including the terms you use and the section of the gay community you feel most connected to. For example, what does it mean to be a Bear or a Twink or a Gaymer (etc)? How did you come to think of yourself this way? The interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

5.   What are the benefits?

There are no individual benefits of you taking part in this study. However, the expected benefits to society in general are an improved understanding of identity in Australian same-sex attracted men that may be helpful for health promotion.

6.   What are the risks?

In the interviews you will be asked about identity, including how you identify, how you came to identify the way you do, and what this means to you.

Although it is unlikely, for some people, talking about these topics may bring up some challenges. If you feel that talking to someone about these topics is likely to be upsetting or distressing to you, we would encourage you not to take part in an interview. During the interview, you will be free to skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, and this will not make your interview any less useful.

If you feel you need to seek help, we recommend you contact Switchboard, either via phone on 1800 184 527 or online at https://www.qlife.org.au/resources/chat (available from 3pm - 12am every day).

If you decide that you no longer want to take part in the interview, you will be able to withdraw your consent (see "What if I change my mind?" below).

7.   What will happen to information about me?

Your interview will be transcribed. Data collected from the interviews will be reported in a thesis and may also be reported in a variety of other ways, such as in journal articles, presentations, on websites, or in the media.

We will not **collect** information about you in ways that will reveal who you are.

We will not **store** information about you in ways that will reveal who you are.

We will not **publish any** information that might lead to you being identified.

We will **keep** your information for 5 years after the project is completed. After this time, we will destroy all of your data.

The storage, transfer and destruction of your data will be undertaken in accordance with the Research Data Management Policy (https://policies.latrobe.edu.au/document/view.php?id=106/).

According to the policy, your interview data will be kept confidential at all times. Your interview transcript and audio recording will be stored in password protected files at La Trobe University. Any hard copies that are made of your interview transcript will be stored in locked filing cabinets at La Trobe University. Only staff working on the project will have access to these. These documents will be stored securely for a minimum of five years, after which they may be securely destroyed.

Any information that could be used to identify you will be removed from your interview transcript. We will also refer to you by a fictional and unrelated name (a pseudonym) in any quotes that we use from your interview. In reports arising from this research, all information will be de-identified with no reference to identifiers such as names, places or events that would otherwise compromise your confidentiality.

The personal information you provide will be handled in accordance with applicable privacy laws, any health information collected will be handled in accordance with the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic). Subject to any exceptions in relevant laws, you have the right to access and correct your personal information by contacting the research team.

8.   Will I hear about the results of the study?

We will let you know about the results of the study by giving you the opportunity to be contacted when the results of the entire study are published. We will keep these contact details separate from the other information you provide.

9.   What if I change my mind?

You can choose to no longer be part of the study at any time until four weeks following the collection of your data, at which point the transcript will be de-identified and we will no longer be able to link it to you. You can let us know you wish to withdraw by:

1.   Completing the 'Withdrawal of Consent Form' (provided at the end of this document);

2.   Calling us; or

3.   Emailing us

Your decision to withdraw will **not** affect your relationship with La Trobe University or any other organisation listed.

When you withdraw, we will stop asking you for information. Any identifiable information about you will be withdrawn from the research study. However, once the transcripts have been de-identified after four weeks, we can only withdraw information, such as your name and contact details. If results haven't been analysed, you can choose if we use those results or not.

10.   Who can I contact for questions or want more information?

If you would like to speak to us, please use the contact details below:

Name/Organisation	Position	Telephone	Email
Dr Adam Bourne	Associate Professor – Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society	03 9479 8732	A.Bourne@latrobe.edu.au

11.   What if I have a complaint?

If you have a complaint about any part of this study, please contact:

Ethics Reference Number	Position	Telephone	Email
HEC19350	Senior Research Ethics Officer	+61 3 9479 1443	humanethics@latrobe.edu.au

Consent Form – Declaration by Participant

I (the participant) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the participant information statement, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study, I know I can withdraw at any time until [four weeks] following the collection of my data. I agree information provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presentation and published in journals on the condition that I cannot be identified.

I would like my information collected for this research study to be:

[_] Only used for this specific study

I consent to participate in a(n):

[_] Face-to-face interview

[_] Online interview

[_] I agree to have my interview audio recorded

Participant Signature

[_] I have received a signed copy of the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form to keep

Participant's printed name	
Participant's signature	
Date	

Declaration by Researcher

[_] I have given a verbal explanation of the study, what it involves, and the risks and I

believe the participant has understood;

[_] I am a person qualified to explain the study, the risks and answer questions

Researcher's printed name	
Researcher's signature	
Date	

* All parties must sign and date their own signature

Withdrawal of Consent

I wish to withdraw my consent to participate in this study. I understand withdrawal will

not affect my relationship with La Trobe University of any other organisation or

professionals listed in the Participant Information Statement. I understand the researchers

cannot withdraw my information once it has been analysed.

 I understand my information will be withdrawn as outlined below:

✓   Any identifiable information about me will be withdrawn from the study

✓   The researchers will withdraw my contact details so I cannot be contacted by them

in the future studies unless I have given separate consent for my details to be kept in a

participant registry.

✓   The researchers cannot withdraw my information once it has been analysed,

and/or collected as part of a focus group

I would like my already collected and unanalysed data

[_] Destroyed and not used for any analysis

[_] Used for analysis

Participant Signature

Participant's printed name	
Participant's signature	
Date	

Please forward this form to:

CI Name	Dr Adam Bourne
Email	A.Bourne@latrobe.edu.au
Phone	03 9479 8732
Postal Address	Building NR6 La Trobe University Victoria 3086 Australia

Please forward this form to:

Appendix E – Interview Schedule for Semi-Structured Interviews

<u>SECTION 1 – DEMOGRAPHICS</u>

Note: This section is a repeat of the Expression of Interest survey questions, for the sake of accuracy and to allow any changes in responses

- Welcome participant and thank for their time

- Give hard copy PICF [IN PERSON] or display via screen share [ONLINE]

- Recap key study information and confirm understanding:

- Purpose of study

- One hour interview – welcome to skip/return to questions & pause

- Able to withdraw at any time up to four weeks from interview (give exact date for that specific participant)

- [IN PERSON] Obtain consent with PICF signature – Keep only the signature page

- Ask for consent to record interview – If not given, turn off and put away recorder

[RECORDING START – IF CONSENTED]

- [ONLINE] Obtain verbal consent on recording using exact wording from PICF

[INTERVIEW START]

1. How old are you?

2. How do you describe your gender?

3. What are your pronouns?

4. How do you describe your sexual orientation?

5. What is your ethnicity?

6. What is your highest level of education?

7. How would you describe your identity from the following terms?

Twink	Bear	Cub	Otter	Jock
Geek	Gaymer	Daddy	Chub	Pup
Pig	Leather	Poz	Chaser	Muscle
Queer	Military	Guy next door	I do not identify with any of these terms	

Other (specify)

[PROCEED TO SECTION 2]

SECTION 2 – UNDERSTANDING OF IDENTITY

1. What does the word "identity" mean to you?

2. What comes to mind when you hear the word "identity"?

3. What do you think forms your identity?

4. Have you heard of the following terms? What do you believe they mean?

   - Twink

   - Bear

   - Cub

   - Otter

   - Pup

   - Gaymer

   - Daddy

   - Jock

   - Geek

   - Chub

   - Queer

Prompts:

   - Any stereotypes/archetypes?

   - What does someone who identifies as [IDENTITY] look like?

   - Any specific behaviours?

5. Are there any other terms like this that you know of?

   - **IF YES**: Please describe them

   - **IF NO**: NEXT QUESTION

6. How seriously do you think these identities are taken by other people?

Prompt: Within the community versus outside the community

7. How many other people do you know share similar identities to you?

[PROCEED TO SECTION 3]

<u>SECTION 3 – EXPERIENCE OF IDENTITY</u>

1. How important do you consider the following to your identity?

   - Gender and sexual orientation

   - Physical appearance

   - Religion

   - Ethnicity

   - Career

   - Hobbies

   - Sexual preferences

2. How did you come to realise the identity terms you use?

[Multiple identities – When participant identifies with more than one subcultural identity]

3. When would you emphasise one identity over the others?

Prompts:

   - Interactions

   - Conflicts

   - Challenges

   - Situational changes

   - Which is your primary identity?

   - Experience: Last time you introduced yourself as your identity configuration?

4. Have there been any times where your identities have clashed?

   Prompt: (E.g., religion and sexual orientation, or career and hobbies)

5. What do you believe is the biggest influence of your own identity?

   - Internal

   - External

6. How does the language you used to share your identity to others change from how you describe yourself?

7. How has the way you describe yourself changed over time?

8. In what way do you think your identity influences your behaviour?

Prompts:

- Interests/activity preferences

- Social interaction

- Sexual behaviours

- Health behaviours

9. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

[END RECORDING AND INTERVIEW]

- Thank participant again

- Remind of right to withdraw consent or specific information

  o Remind of exact date to withdraw by for that participant

  o Remind of interview recording – will be de-identified for transcript

- Notify of reimbursement for their time – Digital gift card

  o URL will be sent to their given contact email within 24 hours of interview

- Ask if there are any final questions or concerns

  o Contact details for Dr Adam Bourne in PICF if any questions/concerns after the interview

  o [IN PERSON] Offer to see participant out of building and direct them to nearest public transport if needed

Appendix F – Ethics Approval

Note: The following is the text version of the ethics approval, as sent to the chief investigator of the research (Dr Adam Bourne), with the initial working title of the research project.

Dear Dr Adam Bourne,

The following project has been assessed as complying with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. I am pleased to advise that your project has been granted ethics approval and you may commence the study.

Application ID: HEC19350

Application Status/Committee: Science, Health & Engineering College Human Ethics Sub-Committee

Project Title: Exploring the diversity of identities among same-sex attracted men

Chief Investigator: Dr Adam Bourne

Other Investigators: Jake Franklin, Anthony Lyons

Date of Approval: 27/08/2019

Date of Ethics Approval Expiry: 27/08/2024

The following standard conditions apply to your project:

- Limit of Approval. Approval is limited strictly to the research proposal as submitted in your application.

- Variation to Project. Any subsequent variations or modifications you wish to make to

your project must be formally notified for approval in advance of these modifications

being introduced into the project.

- Adverse Events. If any unforeseen or adverse events occur the Chief Investigator must

notify the UHEC immediately. Any complaints about the project received by the

researchers must also be referred immediately to the UHEC.

- Withdrawal of Project. If you decide to discontinue your research before its planned

completion, you must inform the relevant committee and complete a Final Report form.

- Monitoring. All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the University Human

Ethics Committee.

- Annual Progress Reports. If your project continues for more than 12 months, you are

required to submit a Progress Report annually, on or just prior to 12 February. The form

is available on the Research Office website. Failure to submit a Progress Report will

mean approval for this project will lapse.

- Auditing. An audit of the project may be conducted by members of the UHEC.

- Final Report. A Final Report (see above address) is required within six months of the

completion of the project.

You may log in to ResearchMaster (https://rmenet.latrobe.edu.au) to view your

application.

Should you require any further information, please contact the Human Research Ethics Team on:

T: +61 3 9479 1443| E: humanethics@latrobe.edu.au.

Warm regards,

Human Research Ethics Team

Ethics, Integrity & Biosafety, Research Office

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