

**RECONCEPTUALISING RESEARCH USING AN INSIDER ACTIVIST  
APPROACH TO SEEK SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AROUND ISSUES OF  
GENDER**

**(University of Southern Queensland)**

A Dissertation submitted by  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION**

I certify that the ideas, analyses, and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

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Signature of Candidate Date

## **ENDORSEMENT**

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Signature of Supervisor/s Date

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Signature of Supervisor/s Date

## **Author Note**

As one of the intentions of this study has been to expose and challenge people's belief systems, values, and practices, much of the material collected and generated by the study is of a sensitive nature. In order to keep the location and community members' identities confidential, figures incorporating newspaper articles with photographs of community members have been removed from the chapters and included as an addendum – or blind chapter – at the end of the dissertation. (This does not apply to the examiners' copies of the dissertation.) The addendum can be made available upon request.

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## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This study investigates what can be learned from the journey of an insider activist researcher seeking social transformations around issues of gender in an isolated rural Australian community. The analytic component of the research couples an ongoing process of coming-to-know with a need to address a community issue. Thus, whilst initially inspired by the researcher's desire to understand and address boys' schooling underperformances, the study has evolved to become a multi-focused and multi-purposed research act. Specifically the study builds links between school-based performances and community constructions of gender; pursues a transformative agenda; and reconceptualises the boundaries of qualitative research and the role of the researcher.

Conceptualised as a study of human complexity, it makes use of bricolage to merge and extend feminist, poststructuralist, critical, and cultural understandings of hegemonic masculinity and research/er positionality. It deepens understandings of the multiple ways that individuals perform their gendered lives, publically critiques hegemonic masculinity, and documents and problematises the pitfalls and potential of insider activist work and its capacity for transcending power asymmetries.

The researcher draws on case study traditions (Merriam, 1998), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1995, 2003; Wodak, 2002a, 2002b), reflexive dyadic interviewing techniques (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), critical ethnography (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) and autoethnography to mine and analyse sources of evidence purposefully collected from the local newspaper, online forums, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, local school reports, and the lived experiences of community members past and present. The research is also informed by aspects of radical (Giroux, 2001, 2003) and public pedagogy (Ayers, 2010; Hill, 2010; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010). This led the researcher to publish a letter in the local newspaper problematising, what she considers to be, a phallogocentric discourse of white male entitlement being perpetuated by a revered local icon. The community dialogue triggered by her interventionist act is documented and analysed for its transformative potential.

The study exposes links between hegemonic masculinity and the subjugation of females, homophobia, femiphobia, poor schooling performances, anti-social practices, and high-risk behaviours. By developing a conceptual framework and a process for disclosing and dislocating ideological hegemony and its associated power imbalances, the research adds to knowledge in the fields of gender and education, social justice, and nascent activist pedagogies.

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