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POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

**Katrine Cuillerier**

-----  
AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

**M.A. (Education)**

-----  
GRADE / DEGREE

**Faculty of Education**

-----  
FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

**Framing a Curriculum of Queered Performances(s):  
Problematizing the Language of "Tolerable" Queerness within Mainstream Classrooms**

TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

**Nicholas Ng-A-Fook**

-----  
DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

-----  
CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

**Patricia Palulis**

**Awad Ibrahim**

**Gary W. Slater**

-----  
Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

**Framing a Curriculum of Queered Performance(s):  
Problematizing the Language of “Tolerable” Queerness  
within Mainstream Classrooms**

**Katrine Cuillerier**

Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of expressions and representations of heteronormalized gender and sexuality discourses constructed by a group of students and educators involved in a pilot program at an eastern Ontario vocational high school. These performances of stereotyped queer identities or experiences overpower and silence the performances of identities outside the norm. Moreover, by defining what queerness is through a heterosexual frame, mainstream curricula defines what is acceptable (in education), and what is perceived as unwanted deviant queerness. Within this study I will reiterate the students' and educators' responses, reactions and opinions on a range of queer issues, and through autoethnography and *currere* methodologies, I will analyse my past and present reactions to queerness within the classroom in order to inform pedagogical strategies that one could possibly approach issues of heteronormalization in the future.

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I dedicate this thesis, with love, to my family.

# Framing a Curriculum of Queered Performance(s): Problematizing the Language of “Tolerable” Queerness within Mainstream Classrooms

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## Introduction

### Framing the Tangible: Opening Elevator Doors

Patiently, I wait.

Looking up at numbers counting down one-by-one, they stop and I step forward into the metal box that will frame my world for the next while. Standing there, I shift my weight from one foot to the other. A gentle instrumental arrangement of "*The Girl from Ipanema*" comes wafting down from hidden speakers, interrupted suddenly by the sounds of sliding metal doors as they open to reveal a woman with eyes familiar. Smiling, looking straight ahead, she joins me on the lift.

I turn to look at her and open my mouth to talk. Interrupted by the opening of elevator doors, I look out to what floor this is. Without warning I am hit with a tableau of times past...

Fear.

Suddenly I can't catch my breath, I feel like I've been running for miles. I am in pain. A stranger has lassoed ropes around my chest and is pulling on them, tightening the ropes with all their strength. This pain immobilizes me, disables me, runs through me and surrounds me.

I think to myself, how did I get to this place? How can I not be in charge of my own reaction? This pain is all too visceral for me. Like a parasite, it grows within my gut, feeding off of me, multiplying, and strengthening its hold.

I flashback to what has just happened and what feels like hours takes only minutes.

Today is my first day as a teacher in Canada. Like the first days of school as a student, I feel hyped up on a mix of nerves and exuberance. The feeling swells with thoughts: what will the students I teach be like? Will I be a good teacher? Will they like me? I'm wide-eyed and my brain is on high-alert. I feel like I'm taking everything in. The harsh light of the fluorescents, students' footsteps and rumbling of ambient gossiping, and the smell of stale dust and stains in the classroom's carpet seem realer than real.

Students start to trickle in, first one, then another – then two more, done.

Talking amongst themselves one student gets angry with another and yells at him:

“You're such a *FAG!!!*”

There. That's what happened. This wave of blinding pain has come from a simple word comprised of three simple letters: F-A-G. My mind is lost in an ocean of nothingness, swept off to sea in a turbulent current. All while my body is doing nothing, standing helplessly, watching from the shore.

Struggling to swim back to myself, I think, “What will happen if I say something to him?” “Will he turn around and be like the bullies in high school and direct his harsh words at me?” I hesitate, even though I am accepting of my sexuality, my identity and I proudly wave the rainbow flag at pride parades and announce to everyone: “I'm a lesbian!”

I do nothing.

I stay silent.

And the ropes tighten that much more.

The doors close shut and the elevator resumes its journey. I blink a few times to clear the last remnants of the memory and look around. The woman is no longer there. I am standing in her place.



Though creatively conceived and imaginatively articulated, the narrative contained within this vignette captures the essence of what I am attempting to do in this thesis: explore the formation of the “tolerable” (what is allowed) and the “deviant” (what is not allowed) in LGBTQ identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer etc.) within educational settings. Through explorations of this and other narratives I hope to open these closed spaces and suggest curricular and pedagogical means by which educators could contest these restrictions and normalizations of identities.

The research study that my thesis is based on is part of a larger project created in 2008 as a joint community service-learning project between the *Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)*, *Community Service Learning Project* and the *Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa*, and an eastern Ontario vocational high school. Entitled *Empowering Marginalized Youth: A Culturally Responsive Media Studies Program*, the program derives its goals from the Character Development Initiative of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. The Character Development Initiative was proposed and developed in 2006 with the overarching goals of constructing positive school environments where all persons (students, teachers, administrators and support staff) behave toward one another with “care and respect.”

As stated by the Ministry of Education’s website, the Character Development Initiative (2009) specifically aims to:

- Improve academic achievement;
- Improved interpersonal relationships;
- Provide safe and orderly schools;
- Reduce behavioural problems;

- Improve life preparation;
- Improve employability skills;
- Provide positive school cultures;
- Provide responsible citizenship in classrooms, schools and communities.

Reflecting these Character Development Initiative goals, the *Empowering Marginalized Youth* program aims to give students skills to be critical of media and to challenge the marginalization and/or validation of their voice(s). Previous to engaging in the program, the high school students enrolled in this project had poor attendance records, low credit accumulation, experienced socio-cultural marginalization from the school curriculum, and/or were labelled “at risk” by their respective student success team (Gay, 2002). The research I will be using from this program was collected during the 2008-2009 school year from two grade 10 Communications Technology classes at an Ottawa-area vocational high school (one class had five students, the other had four).

Through exploring students’ development of multiple literacies in digital and real-world application of skills, the overarching goals of this program are to produce a media studies curriculum that could empower and engage “at risk” students. A research team comprised of Nicholas Ng-A-Fook (as the principal investigator), Tracy Norris (as a co-investigator) and myself produced and administered a curriculum that implemented differentiated instructional strategies. Encouraging freedom in the self-creation of social action projects, students established a weekly school news broadcast, becoming actively engaged citizens within their school and communities (Cresswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This freedom to create and design their (the students’) own program was limited only by the available media (i.e. digital video or online computer blogging) and the integration of

the *Ontario Ministry of Education Character Development Initiatives*, a focus on social justice issues, and the Ontario curriculum expectations.

Using qualitative methods, the research produced from this study consisted of daily teacher/field researcher journals as well as personal journals, digital screen captures of student and teacher blogs, and interviews with students, educators and administrative persons involved in the study. Through an in-depth analysis in this thesis, I hope to demonstrate how educational performances of “queer” or the “other” are viewed as two different possible constructions of genders and sexualities: 1) the “tolerable,” allowed performance; or 2) the “deviant,” unwanted performance. The tolerable performances are those that fit within the heteronormalized frame of gender and sexuality and are typically those that are stereotyped. The deviant performances are performances that do not fit into the hegemonic norm of gender and sexuality. Individuals who are in the deviant category are those most often facing discrimination, harassment or bullying. By analysing how and why the tolerable and the deviant are (per)formed within schools, my hope is to better understand why these performances of gender and sexuality are transformed in this way.

Similar to the limiting aspect that mass media causes on youth, creating the deviant or trivialized individual, I will look at how this dynamic of hegemonic discourse and social “truths” affects queerness, creating the tolerable while dismissing the deviant (as discussed by Henry Giroux in his 1998 book *Channel Surfing*). Additionally, I will also propose more nuanced ways one can complicate narratives of “tolerable”/“deviant” gender and sexuality within the contextual frames of educational curriculum, language and discourse.

In my analysis of the narratives produced through my study, I will address the following research questions:

- What performances of gender and sexuality did I observe within the educational setting of this program?
- How is gender and sexuality socially constructed (by those involved with this program) through language within an educational/classroom setting?
- How are these performances fashioned? Additionally, how might queering such performances help educators and policy makers to understand potential ways to transgress such instituted boundaries?
- How might we understand these questions autoethnographically?

To answer these questions I will travel through and draw upon a range of theoretical perspectives and methodological strategies. While separated into different chapters, it is my intention that exploring both my queer life and my teaching life remains an organic experience, to be read as a fluid encounter. Simultaneously intimate and out of reach, my teaching life and queer life raise broader questions about the curriculum of perceived and performed sexual and gender otherness. In the subsequent chapters, I flow through these spaces of my life, merging theories, narratives, poems, thoughts, and ideas. The first two chapters (and the following intermission) are devoted to exploring the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis, from queer to trans- theory and into the educational (curriculum) theories. These chapters act as a review of pertinent literature of my theoretical viewpoint and are intended to give an understanding of how I construct my queer/teacher identities.

By means of provoking contemplation of these identities showcased through narratives, I endeavour to investigate the discourses that surround heteronormalized gender and sexuality in the classroom. Discussions of these normalized discourses are synthesized and analyzed, flowing through dialogues and echoing the popular culture that influences both students and educators. Dialects of *tolerable normalization*, deviancy and silences spread through these conversations on queered recognisability, spilling forth into discussions of how queerness and queered topics could be approached in a non-heterocentric and queer perspective. I conclude with the hope that individuals, not just queer or pro-queer supporters, will address these issues and continue these conversations candidly in the classroom and at schools.

## Chapter 1

### Framing Querying, Queering, and a Pathing Not Straight

The house is quiet as I tiptoe to my bookcase. Shadows bound by pale moonlight guide me through the darkness. I gently step to avoid known spots in the floor that creak. I am cautious not to wake up my parents – their room is downstairs from mine.

I reach up to a shelf, removing a book on Osiris and ancient Egyptian tomb paintings. Flipping it around, I remove a second book, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*; I had threaded the two books' pages through each other. You wouldn't notice anything out of the ordinary if you were looking at the bookshelf; my Egyptians were good at hiding treasure.

I sneak back to bed and flick on a flashlight, delving into a world that I can only dream about.

#### Holding Flashlights to Memories

My thesis was written through exploring narratives from my queer identity in conjunction with my teaching identity. To study this, I must first establish current opinions and conceptions of what being queer is, and what constitutes queerness to me. This is a necessity when writing about gender and sexuality because queer (as a noun, verb and adjective) is a fluid creation. The term queer is so fluid that if you ask ten random students or teacher to give you a definition of "queer," you will most likely come back with ten different answers.

A similar situation came up at the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice* last year (2009) in a booth created by Patti Lather and Janet Miller that parodied Lucy's psychiatric help booth (from

the *Peanuts* comics), entitled “Dr. Lather and Mrs. Miller: Lesbian Dating and Qualitative Research Advice Booth.”

Shortly after concluding my presentation at the conference, an older woman in the audience leaned forward in her seat and asked me, “Why did you identify yourself as **queer**? Why don’t you call yourself a lesbian? Don’t you know the **history** of that word?”

“Yes” I responded. “Yet I like the ambiguity that queer affords me. If I call myself a lesbian there is historical baggage that comes with that word that I feel separate and removed from.”



The next night I found myself sitting in a circle with Patti Lather, Janet Miller and a group of other women (queer, bi- and lesbian identified). Turning to Janet I asked her, “With all of the different ways of identifying oneself in the LGBTQ spectrum, how do you identify yourself?”

“It depends on the day” she answered laughingly. “Right now I call myself queer, but every few years I change it up – keep things fluid. I’ve been calling myself queer for about the past five years and that’s the longest I’ve stayed with one term.”

Patti then leaned over and joined our conversation adding, “For me it depends on who I’m talking to and where I am.”

Even when you expect conformity, “*every situation is different.*” This phrase was drilled into my head in every official document and in every meeting I ever attended as a JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme teacher. While it’s intended to guide foreign teachers in their experiences in Japan, I feel that it is equally suited for describing queerness and everything that falls within the ever-expanding acronym: LGBTTQQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, queer, questioning, and intersex). I am sure that I have forgotten one or many letters that form the acronym; on the flip side I have included many letters that some do not acknowledge belonging in it or the order of the letters (currently the most common and politically correct in Canada is LGBT or GLBT).

To those who say that I have missed something or included too many, I respond with: “every situation is different.” Who are we to tell a community of people they cannot call themselves something? Who are we not to recognize a group of people as a community? If we did this, would we not be stunting our socio-cultural evolution as humans?

The word *queer* is what I call myself. I have reappropriated this socio-cultural artefact from my past, claiming it from those who once – and still do – use/d this word in hate, anger and disgust. In using the word queer, I recover emotions and a community, making something positive out of a negative. Whether or not I was born queer or came to be through socialization, or taking up queerness as a political category (as Butler, 2008, would put it), or even a combination of the three, it doesn’t matter. Being queer gives me an instant community and history through a minority of genders and sexualities as diverse as the spectrum of colours that symbolically mark the rainbow flag we wave in solidarity.

In order to understand what queerness is for me, I need to explain my past and invite you, the reader, to swim through my narratives. If you are to understand how *every situation is different* for my queerness, you must come and explore these moments with me. However, one must be cautious when exploring one's identity through memories. If one slips too far into re-imagining moments there is a valid concern of the commoditization of memories, creating them into an object. Therefore I strive to avoid this narrative plot at all possible times. Nonetheless, it is hard not to get lost in memories, making them even bigger than the original event. These memories then have the potential to create a discourse that overpowers others, similar to the "martyr/target/victim" paradigm that Eric Rofes (2004) suggests, silencing other memories and discourses with the powerful emotions one attaches to it.

Yet these discourses are unavoidable: powerful emotional attachments of certain memories will reproduce and replicate these sensations to shape the present, like a feedback loop echoing out from the past. Due to this emotional transformation by the one who remembers, the narratives involved become a fiction (Hendry, 2007), a moulding of relived pasts though today's circumstances and knowledge. In a sense they become a story we tell ourselves, emotional moments of nostalgia echoing into the present. These stories of our pasts will forever remain fictions as narratives are told from an individual's present perspective, thus will never fully tell everything that occurred. Our pasts become like an ocean of interconnected water, flowing through each other, bringing heat and/or fridity.

When one uses these narratives from memories to construct an identity, it results in a fluid creation that connects these various fragments of past with the person as they are now. As Gloria Anzaldúa (1988) shows us, "identity is not a bunch of little cubby-holes stuffed

respectively with intellect, race, sex class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river – a process” (pp. 252-253). Like my queerness and queer life, my memories and the construction of their narratives are a fluid creation. At once they are complementary and contradictory, acting like waves coming in and out, shifting and affecting me (and themselves) at various times and in multiple ways depending on the context (Wright, 2003, p. 811). These fluid creations travel throughout this thesis, flowing and spilling from one section to the next; inking an indelible hydrosphere of connected words, thoughts, and emotions.

I dip in and out of these memories; dangle my feet in and out of their water, feeling the current dancing smoothly past them.

**Come For A Swim...**

### ***SPLASH!***

**There is a cool breeze out here; it was warmer closer to shore.**

**The sapphire-blue water is misleading, making the deepest water seem much shallower than it appeared when you first got in.**

**Goosebumps travel up your arms to your shoulders.**

**You shiver.**

**Sea-birds circle above you hoping that through your swimming you stir up a tasty morsel they can pounce on.**

**Their squawking grows faint as you notice something travelling on a current below your feet.**

**You dive down feeling the need to take a closer look...**



In high school we never talked about homosexuality, it wasn't even an option put forward to us in sex education. Relationships, according to the books and videos the teachers showed us, were always with someone of the opposite gender.

But we all knew about it, I would always hear the other girls in the hallways or bathrooms gossiping, "Ms. G is so gay. She's such a dyke; she has a picture of another woman on her desk." Or, "I saw Ms. L walking down the street into a house with another woman. Oh my god, she's a lesbian!" It wasn't so bad; these comments were few and far between and they were directed at the teachers, not someone like me.

Then one day at school, the little brother of a close friend came out as gay. By the end of the next day the whole school knew. By the end of that week he had stopped coming to classes because he had been beaten up so badly that he couldn't get out of bed. This was all done by some of the boys in his class who he, at one time, called friends.

Immediately after that I stopped thinking of myself as a lesbian. I no longer omitted that part of my identity; I buried it so far into the depths of my soul that even I sometimes forgot it was there. After that I started to feel fake.

*fake*

This feeling of being fake or being a fraud in one's own body, I have now discovered, is very common for those who are closeted. The formation of internalized homophobia or internalized stigma is a type of cognitive dissonance where the individual cannot merge their conflicting conscious and unconscious views about their sexuality or gender due to some part of society or their upbringing (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Pitman, 1999; Weinberg, 1972). These feelings are compounded by the realization that not everyone in the world is treated equally. The handling and description of a person suffering from internalized homophobia has been highly criticized, as at present the individual is labelled as the one who has a problem and not the society that has created the circumstances for the negative connotation (Herek, 1994, 2000). Shidlo (1994) has suggested that all lesbians and gay men experience this developmental phenomenon, to different degrees, as a consequence of living in a homophobic and heterosexist society.

There is an invisible privilege that the dominant sexuality is granted and heterosexual identities are a given, which Michel Foucault (1990) refers to as "heteronormativity." As a result, heterosexual individuals do not have to admit their sexuality and proclaim this to themselves or others. How many times has someone come out to you as *heterosexual*? Termed the invisible knapsack of privilege by Peggy McIntosh (1988), the dominant in society have the ability to do things openly, in a way that is considered normal, and do not fear hate or persecution in their choices in relation to their sexuality.

Heteronormativity was first popularized as a widespread phenomena by Michael Warner in a 1991 paper that later became the introduction to his 1993 book, *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Referring to a societal ideology that to be deemed "normal" one must be

heterosexual in both “gender and identity” (xvi, 1993). In theorizing on heteronormativity, Warner draws upon Adrienne Rich’s (1986) concept of “compulsory heterosexuality,” Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), and Foucault’s (1990) “Other Victorians,” among others. The creation heteronormativity and the non-normal sexuality of the queer individual is elaborated upon by Foucault (1990), where he illustrates that with society’s current (repressed) views of sex it becomes, “condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence... the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression” (p. 6). Echoing Foucault, Warner (1993) states that society will only overcome

heteronormativity, “by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world” (p. xvi) and say publicly against the powers that be, challenging both official laws and heteronormalized humanistic values.

“Inside” was written during a turbulent time for me shortly before I started teaching as part of this research study. The poem acts as a reflection of my internal struggle I had with being open with my own sexuality within a school

### Inside

Secret agent  
Trapped within my (body’s) borders  
Needing a passport to get out but can’t apply  
Don’t have the paperwork yet  
Looking to the inside  
Spying on myself

Slowly starving in this place  
Hoping to rise like the phoenix  
Waiting to use my wings  
To fly beyond these borders  
Unknowing I’ve clipped my wings  
Sabotaging myself

A mouse in the maze of my mind  
Where’s the cheese?  
New walls always appearing  
Magically moving  
Cornering me  
Stopping myself

setting. I was very conflicted on whether or not I should come out to students. Before this period of being involved in this research study as an educator, I had been employed as a teacher in a junior high school in Japan. At this time I did not come out to students as I feared for my job security if my sexuality was revealed. Students as well as teachers constantly told extremely homophobic jokes, inspired by famous television comedians (for example the “comedian” Razor Ramon Hard Gay レイザーラモンHG). The poem is a reflection of my time in Japan where I wanted to be true to myself, yet always stopped from “coming out” to even my closest (Japanese) friend.

With “coming out of the closet” (the phrase

Lying in bed, staring at the ceiling I knew what I had to do. I had been thinking for years how this moment would happen – I was going to come out to my mom. She will be the first person I have ever told this to, I feel like she’s the safest choice in people to come out to. If she reacts badly then at least my friends won’t find out.

I’m worried how she will react. After enough of those victim-making after school television programs of children being kicked out of their houses by their parents to live on the streets, I genuinely believe that this will happen to me. I’ve already packed up my most valuable keepsakes.

So the time comes, I sit beside my mom and ask her if she had a spare moment to talk and I tell her: I’m a lesbian.

She looks at me and responds, “Are you sure?”

I feel numb with pain and my jaw freezes. As if I hadn’t thought this one out as much as I had. As if I hadn’t thought about this every day, asking myself why did I have to be different? As if I hadn’t known I was a lesbian since my first serious crush in grade five. As if I didn’t force myself to play straight, pretending to have crushes on guys only to have it viscerally hurt me every second.

denoting the act of publicly being open about one's queer sexual or gender identity), there are numerous phases. Some people may joke that they have one foot still in the closet. Yet within the queer community there is great contestation (and anger) as to what defines being "out." Does one come out by acknowledging their queerness to themselves, or is one "out" with the first person they tell? Can one be out if they allow others to figure it out for themselves? Is one only out if they have told every person they know?

Coming out is an intense process that touches the most intimate parts of one's identity, as Khayatt (2007) illustrates:

Coming out is a process. It is not a one-time moment in one's life. It is a political move because, whether one is aware of it or not, it forces one into a community that shares a history, if nothing else. Coming out is a process that privileges one part of an identity and compels the individual into being reduced (even just momentarily) to this one facet at the expense of the whole person. In other words, when I come out as a lesbian, you do not see as clearly that part of me that is a woman of colour, my history of privilege, or my able-bodied, if aging, being. Coming out highlights one aspect of a whole person, and in emphasizing it, makes the person, which is perhaps why we say: "I am a lesbian" rather than I perform "lesbianly." Simply put, coming out forgets the individual behind the category. (p. 73)

When I first started to come out, it was as a lesbian to my mother. A turning point in my personal recognition of my own sexuality, I feel as though this process will never be finished – every time I meet a new person I have to repeat this process again. Every time I start again, there still is a part of me that feels frightened of people's reaction. Cautious of what has come before, I fear echoes in the back of my mind tearing at my subconscious. Echoing

through my words, this response is repeated in the introductory narrative and my visceral reaction to the word “fag.”

## Chapter 2

### Framing a Queerly Theoretical

The frame that seeks to contain, convey, and determine what is seen (and sometimes, for a stretch, succeeds in doing precisely that) depends upon the conditions of reproducibility in order to succeed. And yet, this very reproducibility entails a constant breaking from context, a constant delimitation of a new context, which means that the “frame” does not quite contain what it conveys, but breaks apart every time it seeks to give definitive organization to its context.

(Butler, 2009, p. 10)

#### Looking Through Doorways

As I watch the elevator doors open and close, they frame new worlds and experiences, peoples and emotions. The doors give me boundaries, a way to look at experiences from afar, creating a life-size diorama. A snippet in time that cannot be reproduced for it loses context with each retelling. Moments freeze as the doors close again, spurring memories and speculation, attempting to depict what was seen. Their metallic swishing sounds, doors sliding, opening their barriers, frames the outside world for one to look out and evaluate, should I get off? Is this the right place for me? Shall I step out into this stor(e)y?

These frames, as Judith Butler (2009) describes, look to, “contain, convey, and determine what is seen,” – they are the theories that guide the mind, the memories that shape the mind, and the societal norms that govern bodies (p. 10). Yet one’s mind and body need contexts in order to understand what is being framed – for without context, the images, emotions, senses become a jumble, white noise, unable to be understood.

Within an academic literary construction, the theories and words of others give context and meaning. These writings afford pedagogical opportunities for the frame(s) to be translated across time, space and cultures. Yet to use these theories to understand and describe these frames, one first needs to familiarize oneself with the body of knowledge that the theories entail.

Consequently, when conducting a literature review of the educational theorists working within sexuality and gender and the performance and outsider/insider perceptions of gender and sexual identities outside of the norm, as we see in the following section, one finds that gay and lesbian voices are most often profiled, thus leaving the less mainstream queered gender and sexualities, for the most part, out of research studies. In order to move beyond a gay and lesbian-centric framing of educational research, I have decided to situate my theoretical framework at the interdisciplinary crossroads of curriculum, queer and trans-theories, and thus queering the queer of the frame's context, and giving the reader possibly a new frame to look through.

Queering  
 To queer  
 Make something different  
 Always a process  
 Never finished  
 It is the journey

Queering  
 Or is it a query?  
 Am I questioning queerness?  
 Am I asking readers a question?  
 Or am I questioning myself?  
 Questioning identity?

### **Theories of a Queered Identity**

What do theorists have to say about the queer identities? What is the history of the word and what potential baggage may it hold for me in using the term in conjunction with my thesis? In order to comprehend the various ways language constructs queerness in the classroom, one must understand how various queer theorists have situated and interpreted queer(ed) identities through major historical points in the twentieth century. One needs to focus on the twentieth century, as there is the greatest upheaval and struggle to describe what was/is queer identity theory, starting with the naming of heterosexuality in 1890s (Katz, 2007). After the creation of the unyielding classifications of what heterosexuality and homosexuality is in the medical community, lesbian, gay and queer individuals have been struggling to reconceptualise what is term “queer” is. Judith Butler (1993) articulates:

If the term “queer” is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. (p. 227)

Therefore, one can see that queer theory or the “queer” identity is not in a constant or solid state. Rather a way to reflect and imagine a shifting identity or social/political contexts of a specific historical timeframe. In the following section I will explore when this conceptualization surfaced within queer theory.

Emerging in the late 1980s (Seidman, 1993; 1996), queer theory was a response to the stalemate in the debate surrounding the ontological studies of sexuality and gender

(Green, 2007) and the ever increasing institutionalization of gay and lesbian studies (Epstein, 1996; Seidman, 1993; 1996; Warner, 1993). Seen as "...another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual," queer theory draws heavily upon feminist poststructuralists and the work of French postmodernists, such as Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault (de Lauretis, 1991, p. iv). Queer theorists developed a critical approach to gay and lesbian studies as well as the institutional factors that produced the modern homosexual (Jagose, 1996). Many of the "foundational" theorists of queer theory (Butler, 1993; Fuss, 1991; Warner, 1993) became conscious of a troubling epistemological similarity between the regulatory heteronormative medical and psychological discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the scholarship of gay and lesbian studies. Lillian Faderman (1981) discusses the construction of the lesbian identity within the scholarship of gay and lesbian studies. This was a direct result of the backlash of sexologists against the second wave feminism movement and resulted in the solid, crystallized formation of the lesbian identity of the mid-twentieth century. The main focus of gay and lesbian studies was the liberation of the gay and lesbian subject/history from the homophobic discourses that sought to silence or erase it within the academy.

One such example of disregarding academic discourses of homophobia is Donna Haraway's 1985 essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (2006). The *Manifesto* is groundbreaking in its dealing with "gender" as a self-convinced fiction, what Haraway terms the cyborg. Additionally, this text has contributing greatly as a founding scholarly text to Trans- theory, even if it does not address the growing and ever-present homophobic/trans-phobic discourses on the (non)gendered individual. This is most evident when Haraway declares that, "[t]he

cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world” (p. 104). If one sees gender as an essentializing frame then Haraway works to push/break the boundaries of utilizing gender as a frame of identity. Instead when looking at identity one might move towards performativity. However, queer theorists have stated that this removal and “liberation” of queerness from these discourses replicate the social control from the regulatory regimes of power that encased queerness before its so-called “liberation” (Butler, 2000; de Lauretis, 1991; Fuss, 1991). Therefore queer theory seeks not to revive these “silenced” voices, but rather to be, “...a moment of their interpellation into a discursive field of symbolic domination” (Green, 2007). Thus queer theory is in search of ways to interrupt these discourses of power from within.

This historical period is a dividing point in queer theory from its French theorists’ background. Theorists started to reject the “self” or individual subject, distancing itself mainly from the work of Foucault on the identifiable queer person. However, this comment is not designed to lessen Foucault’s contributions to the field of queer theory. Many theorists have articulated the significance of Foucault to queer theory. Without his works to follow, queer theory might never have evolved to become its own entity outside of gay and lesbian studies (Halperin, 1995; 2002; Stein and Plummer, 1996; Warner, 1993). While Foucault (1990) centered his theorising on the recognition of a recognizable queered individual identity through a medical discursive regime of truth of the homosexual “species” with a specified “...past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (p. 43). Queer theory sought to distance itself from sexologist and medical discourses and

the concrete definition of the queer individual these discourses created.<sup>1</sup> The space of promise that queer theory opened up is elaborated on by David Haperin (1995) when he states:

[Queer] does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relation among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, models of self-constitution, and practices of community. (p. 62)

In his study on the institution's role in the "self" in *Madness and Civilization* (1988), Foucault observed that the experts' discourses (sexologists, physiologists, psychologists etc.) prescribed and severely influenced individual's sexuality and desires. Exhibiting the regulatory regimes of power of the experts, and how they exude social control. As Foucault states, "knowledge" and "power" are inseparable.

While Foucault worked within the theory of a stable definable "self," queer theory works through radical feminism and anti-identity political theories to reject the positivist knowable "known" of the gay and lesbian "self" that gay and lesbian studies produced (Epstein, 1996; Stein and Plummer, 1996; Warner, 1993). Employing poststructural theories,

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<sup>1</sup> As this chapter focuses on the representations of the queer identity or self within queer theories I have focused on Foucault's theorizing on the use of a stable queer embodied identity. However, it must be noted that he also studied and discussed the production of queered discourses and the properties of the power relations they created and flowed through. The study of the discursive production of queerness that Foucault provoked is still very prevalent within queer theory and will be elaborated upon in later sections and chapters. Yet in the representation of the queer individual within academic theory, Foucault (1990) used a more "physical" essentialized identity.

queer theory has created a space of fluidity that destabilizes preconceptions of the “self” and deconstruction of normalized per(form)ances of identity that before were locked identities (Jagose, 1996; Seidman, 1996). This deconstructing of normalized identities has been further elaborated by Adam Green (2007), who states that, “...the very promise of queer theory rests in its strong deconstructionist position,” and that it is “not a theory of the self, but it is a theory surely relevant to selves and the discursive determinants that characterize late modernity” (p. 42). In other words, there is no true queer “self,” no one true identity that can be used for studies, and no one true voice that represents all those identifying within the LGBTQ spectrum.

Despite the fact that queer theory asserts that there is no one true queer “self”, there exists a queered identity of individuals (Green, 2007). This queered identity has been theorised by scholars through two main perspectives of the “self”: constructionist and essentialist (Jagose, 1996). Constructionism sees the identity as fluid and formed through the socialization of the identity where queerness is constructed through different cultural meanings and different histories/historical contexts. Therefore queerness is not identical across time and space. Queerness, in effect, is a product of the process of identity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For essentialism, the queer identity is intrinsic, fixed and a universal phenomenon with a unique culture and history. “Essentialists hold that a person’s sexual orientation is a culture-independent, objective and intrinsic property while social constructionists think it is culture-dependent, relational and, perhaps, not objective” (Stein, 1992, p. 325). However, to rely on only one or the other calls us to consider the following questions: 1) how queer theory can exist as an emancipatory agent if there are no

commonalities across time and space; and, 2) how can queerness be expected to be universally intrinsic and fixed when gender and sexuality are per/formed differently around the world?

To better explore these questions in relation to my thesis, I feel that I need to shift my theoretical viewpoint to incorporate trans- theories on identity (specifically queer) and gender.

### **Trans- (gender/late/form) Theories on Identity and the Problem of Being Gendered**

Following the work of Susan Stryker *et al.* in a recent issue of WSQ (2008), I have decided to title this section trans-, rather than trans or transgender as the placement of the hyphen and the construction of the word “trans” with a “-”, “...marks the difference between the implied normalism of ‘trans’ and the explicit relationality of ‘trans-,’ which remains open-ended and resists premature foreclosure by attachment to any single suffix” (2008, p. 11). As such, trans- provokes one to imagine the possibilities of what can be combined with it to create an identity.

Gender is a method of classifying social, psychic, cultural, etc. experiences, of comprehending how one is to act and interact within society and construct their self. Gender is almost always the first question one asks when a child is born: “Is it a girl or a boy?” In North American mainstream culture, there is the assumption that there are only two (distinct) gender categories: girl/woman and boy/man. Additionally, one assumes that gender is the same as one’s designated sex at birth, those who are female will mature into women and

those who are male mature into men. From the very moment an infant is sexed (and gendered) they are socialized in ways that encourage them to present themselves in public with the gender that corresponds with their birth sex (trucks and “rough” sports for boys; *Barbies* and “light” activities for girls).

On the United Nation’s World Health Organization (WHO) webpage titled: *What do we mean by “sex” and “gender,”* it gives definitions for what it calls a “hard to understand” difference. WHO’s definition is as follows: “sex” is the “biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women”; whereas “gender” is the “socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women” ([www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/index.html)). Where the problem lies for individuals who challenge their gender are the “aspects”/“characteristics” that WHO gives for sex and gender.

The four examples for sex characteristics that WHO give are:

- 1) Women menstruate while men do not;
- 2) Men have testicles while women do not;
- 3) Women have developed breasts that are usually capable of lactating, while men have not;
- 4) Men generally have more massive bones than women.

The four examples for gender characteristics that WHO give are:

- 1) In the United States (and most other countries), women earn significantly less money than men for similar work;
- 2) In Viet Nam, many more men than women smoke, as female smoking has not traditionally been considered appropriate;

- 3) In Saudi Arabia men are allowed to drive cars while women are not;
- 4) In most of the world, women do more housework than men.

(WHO, 2010)

In addition to the assumptions of how an individual interacts with others, behaviour, and the roles and “responsibilities” one takes on (such as parenting and occupational jobs), gender is also performed through voice, hair, clothing, and our mannerisms. Gender provides us with the blueprint of how we fit into society. These social conventions are reinforced at every turn – in schools, at home, and on television, and reproduce “proper” ways to look and act. Our gender informs us as to who we are and how we should be. Yet all of this is under the assumption once we are sexed as infants, this creates concrete borders where one’s gender is prescribed dictated. What happens when one questions their gender?

For a long time I have considered myself a masculine or butch female. As a child I identified as a tomboy. I am often called “sir” and am confronted in women’s bathrooms with uneasy looks and comments such as, “you’re in the wrong bathroom; this is the women’s room!” I would respond that I was in the right one. Nonetheless, I am always left with a sense of unease after these encounters. I have short hair and wear masculine clothes. I have bound my chest several times and have even considered “packing.” I spent an entire week in South Korea living as a “man” to see if I could “successfully” perform as male. Yet for a “gender outlaw” in Canada, my, and others’, behaviour is frequently met with confusion, apprehension, or hostility from those around us (Bornstein, 1994).

However, this is not to say that I do not perform a feminine role as well. For it is this particular reason that I currently identify as queer as I feel that the term lesbian still constricts individuals to a mainstream performance of gender. Calling oneself a lesbian brings with it baggage, decades of attempting to define the community to the exclusion of many (for example, bisexual and transgender individuals). Additionally, this is why I have chosen to situate my work primarily within the more “radical” space of trans- studies. As I feel that the gay/lesbian-centric positioning that is currently used within many queer and educational theories lacks the openness to more uncommon theoretical underpinnings. I enjoy the space that trans- theory allows me in challenging tolerable performances of gender and sexuality in education.

Transgender embraced its current meaning in 1992 with the publication of Leslie Feinberg’s pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come*, Feinberg used transgender as an adjective to create a political association of those who were considered different from the norm in terms of gender in order to pull together and fight for “social, political, and economic justice” (Stryker, 2006, p. 4). In *Transgender Liberation*, the word transgender became an “umbrella term for an imagined community encompassing transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, tomboys, and anyone else willing to be interpolated by the term, who felt compelled to answer the call for mobilization” (Stryker, 2006, p. 4). Similar to how the word queer has become, in many circles, an umbrella term for LGBTQ.

As an academic field, trans- studies first emerged as a school of thought at the junction of feminism and queer studies in the 1980s, and as a backlash against (stable)

constructions of gender identity (Haraway, 2006; Stryker, 2006). While trans- studies still has connections to the theories that shaped it, the scholarship that has come forth exists as “subjugated knowledge” (Foucault, 1980). One of the main focuses of trans- theory is the challenging of static genders constructed through a heterosexual matrix and the performance(s) of genders (Butler, 2008). Another major focus of trans- theorists is the problematization of the “homonormativity” existing within feminism and queer studies that privileges particular queered (social) views, that in turn create an “unthinking blindness” to certain aspects of queerness (Stryker, 2006). Trans- theory has been critiqued as a “threat” to gay/lesbian identity politics and constructions of gender, specifically to “women’s communities.” As trans-, “...exposes not only the unreliability of the body as a source of [lesbian-feminists] identities and politics, but also the fallacy of women’s universal experiences and oppressions” (Koyama, 2006, p. 704). Trans- affords individuals recognition of the value of an individual experience and translates that into an understanding of queer identity as a broad range of experiences.

At the turn of the last millennium, the transgender body was seen as a postmodern construct of gender, offering opportunities for rebirth and becoming in gender theories (Felski 2006; Haraway, 1983). Trans- theory falls into a postmodernist lens. Furthermore, it does so to push the modernist epistemology that regards gender as social, linguistic, or physiological representation of a stable knowable category of sex (Davis, 2008, p. 123; Halberstam, 1998; Stryker, 2006). The category of sex therefore becomes the “story we mix about *how* the body means” (Stryker, 2006, p. 9). Within this thesis, I examine stories of

categorization and their impacts on the social, cultural, physical, spiritual, physiological, etc. constructions of gender and sexuality.

### Reviewing Queerly: A Curriculum Literature

I remember when I was about five years old knowing that I was somehow different from my friends.

Playing the courageous warrior, I would destroy the dragon, waiting for the princess to fall madly in love with me and live happily ever after.

Playing house with friends I assumed the role of the husband, dressing up in ties, waiting for my wife to tuck our kids into bed.

I didn't want to be the same as the other girls I knew; I didn't like boy bands and I didn't go around gushing with friends over who was the hottest.

However that started to change the older I got and went to school more. Slowly but surely, I came to learn, (un)consciously, that I shouldn't be too different. I should be a "good/proper girl" and one day fall in love with the prince I longed to become and the husband I longed to be. I feared anything too different, distancing myself from this difference and forcing myself into a space that I was not ready for.

In schools, I still feel uncomfortable talking about sexuality and gender. This place reminds me too strongly of an urge to conform to the norm instilled from past years. These feelings have been echoed by numerous academics on their own experiences for the public schooling

system. Yet emerging from this discomfort and resistance to conformity are a group of academics who have attempted to tackle these difficult issues surrounding gender and sexuality.

So, what is queer in educational theory?

The following review of literature focuses on curriculum scholar conversations that surround gender and/or sexuality in educational settings. While trends flow through all of the articles, they are by no means similar in their approaches and conclusions. This is mainly due to the very active debates surrounding gender and sexuality and queerness' fluid nature.

Queer educational research in the late twentieth century primarily focused on the regulatory relationships existing between privilege and power that Adrienne Rich (1986) described as "compulsory heterosexuality" (p. 41). Various educational researchers continue to study the force that heterosexism and homophobia have within the classroom. As well, these researchers proposed strategies to normalize gay and lesbian identities in order to have these identities become more familiar in the classroom, bringing them into the mainstream (Britzman, 1995; Griffin, 1992; Harbeck, 1992; Khayatt, 1998; Pinar, 1998).

Much of the dialogues and discussions within this period of academic literature surrounded the issue of whether or not teachers should be open about their sexuality. These authors question whether educators should *come out of the closet* about their sexual orientation to their students. Numerous studies and narratives were written at this time describing the perceived impact and the immeasurable value of the openness of the gay or lesbian teachers. The vast majority of queer educators discussed in studies during this period

opted to perform “straight” identities. However, those who did decide to “open” up about their sexuality fell most often within mainstreamed normalized performances of identities or tokenism within their workplaces (Eyre, 1997; Jennings, 1994; Khayatt, 1998; McNaron, 1997; Tierney, 1997).

Taking its roots in liberal feminism, the ideas, theories, and goals that appeared during this time called for normalcy and ultimately equality for everyone. This liberalistic slant during this period is best summed up by the conclusions Didi Khayatt (1998) reached on a study that examined educators’ reasons for being “open” about their sexuality. She found there were four common reasons for educators to be “open”: 1) to be a positive role model for all students; 2) to be supportive of lesbian and gay students; 3) to disrupt heteronormativity; and finally, 4) to stop the institutionalization of homophobia.

Yet, as Michael Warner (1999) critiques, the dilemma with these liberal movements common with this period is that this exploration and yearning for normalcy often resulted in the desexualizing of queer persons. The paradox of desexualizing of sexuality is best expressed by Deborah Britzman (1998). She asks, “What becomes unthinkable when sexuality is thought to have a proper place” (pp. 63-64)? This desire for the “normal” has resulted in the unexpected compromise of allowing hetero/normative socio-cultural values to solidify within queer(ed) culture. This congealing has excluded future non-normalized sexual and gender identities from mainstream or common queer(ed) culture, removing the queerest of the queer.

Building through the liberalistic goals of normalization from the previous decade, the focus of research and essays from the early twenty-first century highlighted anti-oppressive and anti-homophobic curricula. Drawing attention to the ideals of social justice, multiple government-funded initiatives were implemented. Projects such as *Safe Spaces*, *Gay-Straight Alliances* and the *Character Development Initiative* brought an increased awareness to the explicit pro-diversity curricula (Clarksean & Pelton, 2002; Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Khayatt, 2000; Kumashiro, 2002; Lugg, 2003; McCaskell, 2005).

However as this was happening, classroom discourse surrounding sex and sexuality came to be seen as corruptive. If sex was talked about in the classroom, students were encouraged to “just say no” and to abstain until they were “ready,” rather than having issues surrounding sexuality and sex candidly discussed. Unwittingly, through this extreme model of safe-sex education, as well as a fear of being politically incorrect and offending minority groups, the null curriculum expanded, leading to a desexualisation of queer individuals through silence. When the teacher controls or prohibits what is said (or not) about sex in the school, the teacher is making a judgement on what is legitimate in school and society in regards to, “the self and its desires, dreams, and fantasies” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 111). Consequently, when teachers create discourses that theorize sex as corruptive to the self, these narratives further complicate adolescent formations of sexual identities.

These issues that have been the focus of discussion in the early twenty-first century have led academics to call for a change in the conception of: 1) how students’ and educators’ sexual and gender identities are viewed; 2) how pro-diversity/anti-homophobic curricula are

under-representing certain sexual and gender groups; and, 3) theories surrounding the performance and (re)production of sexuality and gender in educational settings and within curricula (Talbert, Rofes & Rasmussen, 2004). The scholarship emerging from this period has been characterised by a backlash against the previous liberalistic ideals that shaped past educational research.

### **(Queering) Curriculum Theory**

In titling this section, I have used the signifier “(Queering)” in parentheses before “curriculum theory” intentionally. Though I do not intend to infer that queerness can be in any way physically divided from queer curriculum theory, this is a deliberate strategy inspired by Maxine Greene (1994) to bracket that facet from the theories with which it intermingles. By using the parentheses, I am attempting to strategically fragment my queerness from the ideas and focuses that will form my theoretical positioning within curriculum theory. However, as my lens or the process of performing the methodologies will be queered, I will feel it there, even if it is in parentheses.

In pondering the question “What is curriculum theory?” William Pinar (2004) states: “[it] is a distinctive field of study, with a unique history, a complex present, an uncertain future” (p. 2). Pinar goes on to articulate that, “as a distinctive interdisciplinary field...curriculum studies may be the only academic discipline within the broad field of education... [It] has its origin in and owes its loyalty to the discipline and experience of education (p. 2). In turn, curriculum studies seeks to explore, illuminate and describe the

“explicit” (what is openly taught), “implicit or hidden” (what is unspoken, but taught), and “null” (what is not taught) curricula (Eisner, 1994).

As with any field of study that spans long periods of time, curriculum studies has undergone many waves of transformations. The most recent shift was signalled by Joseph J. Schwab (1969), when he declared that the curriculum field was “moribund,” calling attention to the need for a shift in the discipline. This change came in the 1970s to mid 1980s, with the rise of a group of academics called the “reconceptualists,” on whose scholarship (as well as the “post- reconceptualists”) I will be focusing within the theoretical workings of my own study (Thorton, 2004).

Pinar (1978), one of the primary architects of the reconceptualization movement of curriculum studies, expressed that the two central themes of this movement were its “value-laden perspective” and “politically emancipatory intent.” While Pinar has examined what the two major premises of the movement have been, when discussing the details of reconceptualism, he discusses to a large extent what the movement is not.

Positioning themselves within feminist thought, the pedagogical works of curriculum scholars from the reconceptualization movement are, “...simultaneously autobiographical and political” (Pinar, 2004). Compositions of autobiographical curriculum works are experiences cracked open, filled with conflicts, a “curri/culum,” – what Ted Aoki (2005) illustrates as the tensions between the “plannable/unplannable,” the “predictable/unpredictable,” and the “prescriptive/nonprescriptive” (p. 426). These narratives are a “self-reflexive praxis of being and becoming in the world” that are embedded in post-

structuralism and postmodernist ways, allowing one to cross borders of identity, knowledge and understanding (Asher, 2005, p. 1086).

Yet while one's own autobiographical identity *flows* between transitions in life (Miller, 2006). In turn, Janet Miller (2005) cautions the essentializing ability that attaching a concrete definition has on sexuality and gender in one's self-narratives. Through the creation and reproduction of these unambiguous meanings within educational settings and beyond, one assures the hegemony of the heteronormative landscape. This then closes any venue for the performance of identities outside the norm. One's self-narrative must remain a fictional moment of our own re/telling. Gaining meaning in self-reflexivity, one must avoid translating these fictions into canon, informing how others should deal with similar circumstance (Hendry, 2007).

As Maxine Greene (1971) suggests, curriculum needs to engage in an "interior journey." She describes that journeying toward such interiority:

Not only may result in the effecting of new syntheses within experience; it may result in an awareness of the process of knowing, of believing, of perceiving. It may even result in an understanding of the ways in which meanings have been sedimented in an individual's own personal history...But then there opens up the possibility of presenting curriculum in such a way that it does not impose or enforce. (p. 211)

Nonetheless, "the personal is political," and therefore one must be aware of the "cultural capital" institutions such as schooling reproduce and distribute (Hanisch, 1969; Apple, 1990). The cultural (racial, sexual, physical, gender-focused, etc.), "...preservation and distribution...create and recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be

maintained without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination” (Apple, 1990, p. 3). This hidden curriculum of subjugation creates what is deemed the “socially legitimate knowledge” (Apple, 1990). This knowledge invalidates any other discourses outside of the norm, negating any voice of an individual who attempts to use it.

The hegemonic culture of the hidden curriculum that Michael Apple (1990) discusses is further apparent when looking at late twentieth and early twenty-first century queered (chiefly gay and lesbian-centric) educational scholarship (see Britzman, 1995; Khayatt, 1998, 2000; Kumashiro, 2002; Pinar, 1998) about homophobia and heterosexism in schooling that creates, reinforces and regulates a pervasive environment of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1986, p. 41). I will therefore reflect on challenges posed to sexual and gender by the norm within the *Empowering Marginalized Youth* program through analyzing self narratives.

### **Framing Language: “Regime(s) of Truth” and the Normalization of Discourse**

[T]o call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable. The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend. Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things.

(Butler, 2009, p. 9)

If there is an omnipresent hidden curriculum of heterosexism and homophobia in schooling culture, as discussed in the previous section, then what produces it? How is this culture regulated and emulated so that it encompasses all aspects of school life, whether it is the teachers, students, or curricula? What is the framing process that manipulates sexuality and gender in school into a controlled form?

To answer these questions, one needs to look at the language that creates this hegemonic culture and this discourse that invokes particular shared assumptions via, “a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking)” (Belsey, 1980, p. 5). These discourses fix societal values and systems into a duality of what is acceptable (what is correct) or unacceptable, even unimaginable (Britzman, 2000).

Yet the “truths” created through discourses about what is right and what is wrong can be problematic as language is not a transparent, unbiased form of communication. As Nietzsche in his 1873 paper *On Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense* (2006) asserts, in language there are no “pure truths”, that is, no language exists without the bias of the speaker. One always shapes what she or he sees into metaphors, echoes of what one perceives as the truth, and through their repetition the language and the words that shapes it become fixed meanings – society’s “truths.” Yet these “truths” do not even have to be as complex as heterosexist language, they are as simple as the, “trees, colors, snow, and flowers” we see on a (semi-)regular basis. These terms, Nietzsche elaborates, “...possess nothing but metaphors for things – metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities” (Nietzsche *et al.*, 2006, p. 116). To answer the question: “what then is truth?” Nietzsche (2006) responds:

[Truth is] a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions – they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (p. 117)

While this concept of “truths” is vital to understanding “truths”, it is not a complete answer Foucault counters. Through introducing relationships of power, Foucault (1980) builds on Nietzsche to answer the question “what is truth?” as:

Truth is of the world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

For Foucault, “truth”, creates two conflicting discourses, one concentrating on production and regulation, the other with its truth – referring again to its regulation, but speaks more specifically to the violence, masks, and power that form it. Truth is then something that socio-cultural groups create (un)intentionally as a result from the desire for representation or knowledge through an interplay with power. The desire for the creation of the “self” and the “other”, to create sameness and uniqueness, constructs a relationship of truths and power

rather than truths and meaning. Diprose (2001) states that this language of hegemonic cultural representation is a:

Linguistic convention informs experience by universalizing different perceptions under a single concept; giving the expressed perception the status of truth involves forgetting that truth is constructed; and imposing one's own cultural perspective on others involves denying the possibility of other perspectives. (p. 153)

Yet as Bhabha (1994) discusses, it is not just the hegemonic cultural perspective one must look at in unearthing these “regimes” of truth, but also the processes of “ambivalence” that afford these “truths”/stereotypes opportunities to persist. “For it is,” as Bhabha (1994) tells us,

...this force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. Yet the function of ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power – whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan – remains to be charted. (emphasis in original, p. 95)

Yet, if one knows that the typing through this “truth” will continually persist through its Othering effect, how are “truths” created in the first place?

This “regime” of truth that Foucault (1972) explains, is a societal creation that reflects one's set of traditions, values and beliefs. He identifies the creation of truth in

contemporary western society through five methods: 1) concentration of truth on scientific discourse; 2) accountability of truth to economic and political forces; 3) the “diffusion and consumption” of truth by means of community systems; 4) the distribution and monitoring of truth by economic and political institutions (i.e. schooling, media); and, 5) “ideology struggles” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131, 132). Therefore as the “truth” is constructed and regulated by means that affects aspects of every one’s life, in order to study these discourses of truth one must be ever-aware of their position within the generation and consumptions of discursive regimes.

Additionally, with the creation of truth (what is right, valid, moral), comes the creation of false (what is wrong, invalid, immoral). This creation of a “false” generates a system of exclusionary power, one that dictates the very knowledge and social-cultural structures that are considered “fundamental” aspects of society. In describing the creation of truth and false within discursive regimes, Foucault (1972) states:

[I]f we place ourselves on the level of a proposition, inside a discourse, the division between true and false is neither arbitrary, nor modifiable, nor institutional, nor violent. Putting the question in different terms, however—asking what has been, what still is, throughout our discourse, this will to truth which has survived throughout so many centuries of our history; or if we ask what is, in its very general form, the kind of division governing our will to knowledge—then we may well discern something like a system of exclusion (historical, modifiable, institutionally constraining) in the process of development. (p. 218)

In order to clarify his standpoint on what is “truth,” Foucault (1980) gives us two “propositions” about “truth”:

“Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.

“Truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth. (p. 133)

Yet, to call into question what is “truth” and the fixed nature of “truths” can be problematic.

As Butler (2005) states:

To call into question a regime of truth, what that regime of truth governs subjectivation, is to call into question the truth of myself and, indeed, to question my ability to tell the truth about myself, to give an account of myself... [S]elf-questioning of this sort involves putting oneself at risk, imperilling the very possibility of being recognized by others, since to question the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate, is, in relation to the present regime, to risk unrecognizability as a subject or at least to become an occasion for posing the questions of who one is (or can be) and whether or not one is recognizable. (p. 23)

Consequently, I only exist as the result of social and cultural conditions (“truths”) that I didn’t invent myself. As Butler (1997b) states in her key theoretical work on power and subjectivity, *The Psychic Life of Power*:

[T]o persist in one’s own being means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one’s own. [...] Only by persisting in alterity does one persist in one’s “own” being. Vulnerable to terms that one never made, one persists always, to some degree, through categories, names, terms, and classifications that mark a primary and inaugurative alienation in sociality. (p. 28)

To understand this, one must recognize that one's subjectivity, their opinions, beliefs and desires are created and shaped through discourse. Identities and the performances of individuals exist as they are assigned to us and spontaneously acknowledged by us. Society shapes the individual and their meaning through discourses of "truths" and power. For instance, Butler (1997b) discloses, "no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent" (p. 7). At the core of these "truths," we form our identity, our connections to particular societies and our direction within society.

This is the crux of what I see as a problem in high schools, highlighted in narratives explored in later chapters of this thesis. If *society shapes individuals their meaning through discourses*, then discourses that contain normalized versions of gender and sexuality will normalize identity. These discourses frame one's identity into borders, shaping it through fixed "truths" and creating tolerable and deviant individuals.

## A Pedagogical Intermission

### Verses of a Teacher

Before discussing my observations and narratives, I would like to interrupt this thesis for just a moment for a brief interlude. I became a teacher through the establishment of this study and yet I was an academic and researcher. With this division of identity, there develops a fragmentation and a paradox of sorts. I want to see how events play out (as the ethnographer), but in spite of that I wish to interfere (as the teacher). I want to help shape students and lead them in their intellectual and emotional (and moral) education. Yet I am concerned with the influence I have and how this resonates with student performances of identity (see chapters on the observer effect and silencing).

I wrote the following poem in response to this tension I felt. As a public intellectual and an academic in training, I advocate for LGBTQ rights and fight against heteronormativity (as well as any normalization of our socio-culture) while as a teacher, in some ways I was asked to “tow the party line.” I say this because as a teacher, one is expected not to disrupt the classroom and create *too many* waves. While I was open with my sexuality in the classroom, it was something that I did not discuss. Looking back at one of the interviews of one of the students I taught, I have realized that I may have been too silent (“she was *gay?!?*”). *Inside the Actors Studio* was written during the middle of my time teaching and was composed as a response to the navigation of my choices as a queer teacher and the struggle I felt with being vocal or not in opposition to the norm.

Inside the Actors Studio

Provoking students' emotions  
 Chipping away patriarchy  
 Long dead men silently ruling us

Don't question what teachers tell you; don't question how teachers act  
 Stand up; don't talk; sit down; raise your hand  
 How do you like your **Soylent Green**?

(Un)expected reactions  
 (Un)familiar labyrinths  
 (De)colonizing brains

Welcome to my safari  
 Exotic locals, familiar sights  
 Want to bag a big one?

Wearing camouflage to blend in  
 Students glancing performances of heterosexuality  
 Victory in the theatre?

Creating sameness so you can connect with me  
 Except we are not the same  
 Or are we?

Difficult knowledges; difficult pedagogies; difficult performances  
 Knapsacks of invisible privilege not being fully unpacked  
 It can't hold it all, they'll need another

Foucauldian subjects  
 Orderly ribbons binding, tied by defiant bows  
 Enduring within struggle, struggling to endure

I chose to write *Inside the Actors Studio* by using several references to academic ideas and theories, as I felt as an academic, it would more successfully portray what I was feeling and struggling with. Starting the poem, I state that I want to provoke students' emotions; in spite of that, I end with the line "*enduring within struggle, struggling to endure*" as a reflection that while I want to I struggle, it is not always possible to reach my goals.

In the first verse, I discuss the patriarchy and "*long dead men,*" these men I identify are part of the hegemonic socio-political system that spans Western countries. For instance, men like John Dewey (1916) whose book *Democracy and Education* still informs and reverberates through curriculum design today, yet it does so through a male-centric gaze. While not a bad thing, it does create a white (straight) male-created field and is reflected in the explicit curricula (what is taught), as well the implicit (what is implied) curricula and the null (what is left out) curricula.

I got the idea for verse two ("*don't question*") when teaching during my placement as a teacher education student. I was placed in an economics grade twelve class, for someone who failed OAC (grade thirteen) math, this seemed like a poor placement for my skills. Numerous times I was left alone (by my supervisor) during mathematical parts of the class. One time I put an incorrect solution on the blackboard. A student raised her hand and pointed out my error. Jokingly I said, "Well how about that – I'm wrong" and changed the answer (as I was wrong). Another student immediately raised their voice and said to the first student that there was no way a teacher would be wrong and that the student must be wrong. I told them that, no it was my mistake and that I was wrong. The second student suddenly

began to tear up and said, teachers can't be wrong, teachers are never wrong. I felt like I crushed her view on teachers a bit that day. The second and last lines of this verse allude to the act of conformity, reflecting the 1973 cinematic cautionary tale, *Soylent Green*. In this movie the government and mass media dictate what food people should eat (called "Soylent Green"). Only to be revealed at the end of the film that the food is recycled people.

I have followed that verse with three pairs of words that can be read two ways, reflecting the struggle with students' reactions to and navigations through non-mainstream discussions.

Next, I invite the reader onto a safari, a trip typically used for locals far away from home filled with unfamiliar things. I had hoped, in my class, that I would invite heterosexual students into discussions with a queered theme. I used the line: "*Want to bag a big one?*" to ask myself to reflect on whether I would go on my own (reverse) safari into the world of "straightness" and provoke the really hard to talk about discourses (see verse seven).

In the fifth verse, I link to that same thought of me going into this "straight" world. As discussed previously, Adrienne Rich (1986) has identified that there exists a "compulsory heterosexuality," especially with teachers. I acknowledge that sometimes I rest within the knowledge that because I am an invisible other, I blend in and don't have risk my identity openly if I choose not to. Yet through performing a heterosexual identity, I will forever be an actor, someone assuming a role of another, and how can I be proud of myself, my identity for doing that?

In creating this faux-heterosexual teacher identity I craft an identity through using Trinh T. Minh-ha's (1998) "*inappropriate/d Other*," (as well as her 1988 article *Not you/like you*) I position myself as the same as my students' sexuality, while still keeping the *difference* in my identity (while it may not always be visually apparent). Like the "compulsory heterosexuality" of the teacher, I make my own assumptions that the students I interact with are heterosexual, yet I can never truly know this until they explicitly tell me.

In the seventh verse I employ Deborah Britzman's (1998) concept of "*difficult pedagogies*," these educational discussions that are most often avoided in the classroom, which focus on pain, grief and death, through topics such as rape and HIV/AIDS. These topics are made especially difficult due to the emotional connection and the uncertainty of who may be impacted by such topics – whether it is the student or the educator. Hongyu Wang (2008) suggests that these topics can be cleansing to the individual and that these moments of "red eyes" (crying) need to be employed in some circumstances to provoke feelings and compassion toward others in the classroom.

In the same verse I allude to Peggy McIntosh's (1988) invisible knapsack(s) of privilege – in her most famous essay, McIntosh gives fifty typical events that she can perform without any difficulty due to her white privilege. For example, in number eight she states: "I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race." This concept of invisible backpacks of privilege can be extended to copious variations of privilege and has been copied numerous times (heterosexual privilege, male privilege, ably privileged, etc.) in a similar fashion to McIntosh's on the internet by bloggers, social networkers and zinners.

In the last verse, I use a combination of Foucault (1995) and Judith Butler's (2005) thoughts on power and its ability to bind people(s) together through its effect. In the second line, I discuss how this power not only binds communities of people together through the effect of labeling them (i.e. gays, lesbians, rich, poor), but it also can tie the individual. These "knots" which seem stable and concrete are in fact deceptively straightforward to undo, if everyone involved in their tying would attempt to untie them. However, this would only work if everyone worked together – this may seem Universalist in an "*every person is created equal*," utopia sense. Through desiring an end to hatred and inequality, we yearn to untie these "*defiant*" bows – one knows the finish line but not the path to get there; and it is due to this knowledge we (humanity) endure these struggles (and rebel against them).

This intermission provides a break of sorts, an interval separating the parts of a whole, a linking chapter between literature reviews and the methodologically-fuelled chapters that lay beyond. A performance of autoethnography and *currere* wrapped into one, simultaneously self and other, past, present and future.

### Chapter 3

## Framing a Queer Eye for the Straightjackets of Methodology

### Frames of Reading

In order to address the questions I put forth within this study, I will use an autoethnographic methodology. During the initial stages of researching in conjunction with the *Empowering Marginalized Youth* program I decided to conduct an ethnographic study of gender and sexuality in the classroom. However, when I started to teach I felt it would be beneficial to the frankness of the classroom if I would be open about my own sexuality. Therefore, I altered my methodological frame to autoethnography as this study is directly influenced by me and influences me. By being openly queer throughout my teaching and research, I cannot divide my “self” or the “auto-” from my culture or “-ethno-” and “-graphy” (field of study) (Ellis, 2004).

As one cannot separate their “self” from the culture they exist in, I feel that I cannot remove my “self” from the culture within which this study exists. Even if this study’s culture subsists in the “other,” I feel that I have been seduced by the relationship between the “self” and “other.” Even if I attempted to suppress my own connections to the culture of the study, the self inevitably leaks out (Okely, 1992).

As a methodology, autoethnography suggests that one can work to represent the tension between the autobiographic longing (to the self) and ethnographic yearning (to the other). This assertion centres on the textual familiarity between the text and the reader, as

well as an epistemological familiarity between the self and the other. This familiarity between the text and reader springs forth a textual intimacy that is unique to autoethnographic writing, discussed by Gergen and Gergen (2002), who write that “autoethnography reduces the distance between writer and reader...First person expression of private matters brings us into a space of intimacy” (p. 15). Autoethnography affords for an epistemological familiarity between the self and the other. As Russell (1998) states “the autoethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and other” (p. 4). Diffusing borders of those involved in this (inter)action through an intimate dance between the self and other.

In playing with this dance, the researcher is afforded pedagogical opportunities to enter into areas of unknowing and becoming. This creates a vulnerable state, Laura Jewett (2008) maintains, which enables the research to go beyond solely ethnography into a blurring of autobiography and ethnography.

That is not to say that my writing will be that of an autobiography. As numerous theorists (Edgerton, 1996; Ellis, 2004; Jewett 2008; Kaplan, 1998; Russell, 1998) have stated, while autoethnography contains autobiographical elements it is not an autobiography. In writing an autoethnography I do not want to merely tell a story for one to gain understanding, rather I wish to provoke through the aesthetics of writing and language an emotional identification in the reader that could help put themselves “in the place of the other” (Bochner and Ellis, 1996, p. 22).

Yet, while I yearn for my audiences' connection to the "other" to understand gender and sexuality in school-based situations, as discussed previously, there is no true "self" in terms of (queered) gender and sexuality. Additionally I do not wish to create a queered representation of the "other," which could possibly essentialize gender and sexual identities into what is or is not queer(ed) and create the "tolerable" in my writing. In order to avoid typing identities, I will utilize the *currere* method as it affords me the time necessary to "slow down" and look at and analyse gender and sexuality through my own construction(s) (Pinar, 2004). Through examining my opinions on the past, the past I have recorded into my data sources and imagining future consequences and effects of the "tolerable," *currere* affords me an intellectual opportunity to understand the present and put forward possible directions one may take when faced with the "tolerable."

*Currere* was fashioned (primarily) by William Pinar in the 1970s as a reflexive strategy to understand, "curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text." The yearning to use *currere* methodology comes from the desire to gain an awareness of how the involvement of academic studies blends with one's awareness and comprehension of her or his life (Pinar *et al.*, 1995). The word *currere* takes its origination from Latin and is defined as:

[T]o run the course. Thus *currere* refers to an existential experience of institutional structures. The method of *currere* is a strategy devised to disclose experience, so that we may see more of it and see more clearly. With such seeing can come deepened understanding of the running, and with this, can come deepened agency. (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. vii)

Søren Kierkegaard articulates this nicely. “Life can only be understood backwards,” he stresses, “but it must be lived forwards” (cited in Habermas, 2003, p. 4). Through Kierkegaard’s sentiment, one can understand how *currere* works in terms of the separation of understanding and living. As Elliot Eisner (1995) elaborates, *currere* is a result of the characteristics of one’s real-world experience and her or his biographic narrative. “Our experience” he reminds us, “is influenced by our past as it interacts with our present” (p. 26). Yet as Slavoj Žižek (2005) explains, we are not “born into” our social roles. “What I will become” he maintains, “depends on the interplay between contingent social circumstances and my free choice...” (pp. 129–130). In other words, these experiences and their interplay with the choices one makes in the present is not a predetermined role.

The steps one follows to carry out *currere*, as Pinar describes, is shaped into the four following moments: 1) the regressive, recalling past moments in time, be they narratives, emotions, sounds, sights, etc., yet this moment will always be shaped by present biases; 2) the progressive, looking forward to imagine the future; 3) the analytical, by asking: “How is the future present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both?”; and finally, 4) the synthetical, bringing all of the moments together to inform the lived present (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 520).

However, while the *currere* method is an invaluable reflective tool, it does have its limitations. As Madeleine R. Grumet (1976) writes, while *currere* is derived from psychotherapy, it is not psychotherapy.

*Currere* is not a form of therapy designed to treat symptoms. It cannot employ self-reflection to the degree that psychoanalysis

does to free the subject from the chains that objectivise him by liberating him from behaviours overdetermined by unconscious impulses, defences or repetition compulsions. Habermas maintains that in the analytic situation the very understanding of the causal connections in one's own life history dissolves them. The self that was the object of its history regains subject status in self formative process. While *currere* cannot share the magnitude of this claim, it can adopt both its developmental goal and methodological assumptions that by bringing the structures of experience to awareness, one enhances the ability to direct the process of one's own development. (Grumet, 1976, p. 115)

Therefore *currere* provides an extremely valuable tool to help analyse one's past to aid their present personal growth. This tool has been utilized by numerous academics within the field of curriculum theory, including: Nicholas Ng-A-Fook (2003; 2005; 2009a; 2009b), Janet Miller (2005), Reta Ugena Whitlock (2007), Eric Rofes (2005), and Hongyu Wang (2004) as well as numerous others.

In the following chapters, I will strategically use *currere* methodology, in conjunction with autoethnography, to analyse and synthesize my experiences and narrative of my teacher life and my queer life, and to construct my arguments.

### **Frames of Narratives**

The documents I will be drawing on for my study will include personal field journals, digital screen captures and interviews conducted and gathered from the *Empowering Marginalized Youth: A Culturally Responsive Environmental Education Media Studies Program* project. The writings contained within these documents form a *métissage*, as discussed by Cynthia

Chambers, Dwayne Donald and Erika Hasebe-Ludt (2002), and originating from the word Métis (a Canadian word denoting a person of native Canadian and French heritage). The creators of métissage call it a “site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy and pedagogical praxis” (Chambers, Donald, Hasebe-Ludt, 2002). I suggest that by treating the documented narratives as métissages, I can strategically weave the narratives strands, stringing them together.

As a field coordinator conducting the *Empowering Marginalized Youth* project, I wrote daily field journals and recorded information on: 1) description of the settings (classroom, school, student interactions); 2) description of activity taught or engaged with students and how it corresponds to the *Character Development Initiative*; 3) students’ lived experiences of activity; 4) attendance of students; 5) unit plan development and assessment (in terms of Ontario Curriculum expectations); and, 6) reflections on teaching and or discussions with other teachers or field coordinators. Inside these six sections, I recorded personal narratives, memories of conversations and personal opinions on events.

The field journals gathered from my involvement in the *Empowering Marginalized Youth* project span a period from Friday September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to Thursday April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009. While the project did extend into May (and into the 2009-2010 school year), my involvement with the daily teaching of the classes did not. Therefore any journals created after this time cannot be used by me in my analysis, as the narratives that are used in this thesis are my own.

The *Empowering Marginalized Youth* project was conducted in an Ottawa-area vocational school in the back room/prep area of one of the school's computer labs. The room contained three desktop computers, previously installed by the school, and two iBook (laptop computers), as part of the project. On occasion, students from other classes, who were looking for a quiet work room, would work on the desktop computers (occasionally joining class discussions). As seen in the photographs taken by a student, the classroom was small and there was not much room in which to do filming. Numerous times, students left the room to film outside, in the hallways or in the library. While the room was small (as were the two classes: four and five students respectively), it did facilitate more discussions and allowed for students to arrange the chairs in a circle to discuss ideas with everyone looking at each other.



Figures 1 & 2: Photos taken of classroom by a student during wear pink "Diversity Day."

Within this project, screenshots from a social network site created specifically for the class (through [www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com)) were used to document the students' progress on their blogs/social networking site, which was a main aspect of the planned curriculum of the classroom. A screen capture or screenshot is a digital image that can be used to record what is displayed temporarily on a computer screen. The captured image can be used to relate to others what a website contains and when used consecutively with other images of the same website over time, the capture can show the website's evolution. The names "screen capture" and "screenshot" can be used interchangeably. The following is an example of a screen capture of one student's blog site:

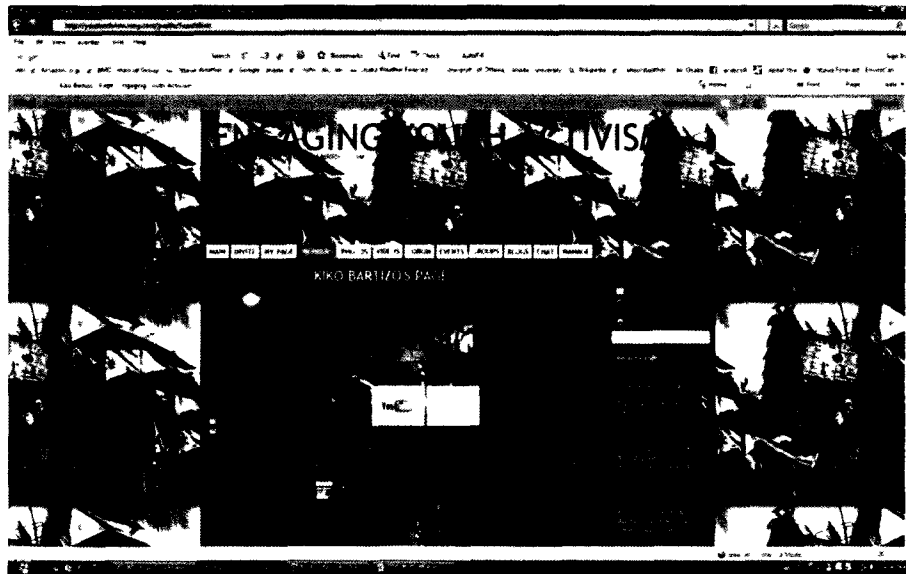


Figure 3: Screen capture of student's blog.

At the conclusion of the first year of the project's implementation, several interviews were conducted with all students, teachers and support staff involved. A range of questions

were asked regarding the project, the student-teacher interactions as well as about the school's culture as a whole.

### **Frames of Analysis**

In the formation of my analysis using a theoretical perspective, I would like to clarify my strongest influences. I believe that for any change to be produced for those who identify themselves as queer, a temporary strategic essentialism needs to be applied, as this offers queer individuals to rally through solidarity that rarely exists (Chakravorty, 1993). Also, because of the standpoint of queer persons as an oppressed group, I believe this affords LGBTQs to view themselves in power dynamics in a different way from heterosexual people, thus enabling queer individuals to have another vantage point to criticize dominant heteronormative discourses and power (Hartsock, 1998).

Additionally, I understand there are many political and social consequences educators may face by giving their narratives on sexuality and gender diversity that challenge the established norm within an institution such as the school system (Donahue, 2007). Furthermore, while Canadians may feel we are an open and socially aware country, I recognize that sexism, misogyny, heterosexism, homophobia and racism are common problems within schools today and that youth violence (in relation to queer sexuality and gender) is on the rise, especially in Ontario (Delaney, 2006). Coming from this queer-feminist-poststructuralist vantage point (see previous reviews of literature), I plan to use the narratives in a way that allows them to speak for themselves – every “relevant” narrative that

was recorded in the field journals has been recreated in its entirety in the pages of this thesis. Yet how did I come to pronounce which narratives were “relevant” to be analysed?

As stated in the previous section (“Frames of Narratives”), daily field journals were created to record various aspects of the *Empowering Marginalized Youth* project. After my participation in the project was finished, in June 2009, I commenced coding the journals. To code the journals, I employed an open coding similar to Kristina Llewellyn (2006) and Pamela Sugiman (2006), leaving the coding to where the narratives would take me. By reading through every journal multiple times, I would look for any reference to gender or sexuality (queer or not). If a reference was found, the journal was marked on the top with a brief description of the episode, whether the event was overtly referring to gender or sexuality and the journal was placed into a file separate for the other journals. Once I had gone through the journals multiple times to make sure I had not missed anything, I then took the file of “possible narratives” and re-coded them on relevance to my thesis topic in order to find any episodes that displayed an overt heteronormative or homophobic discourse. These journals were placed in a secondary “to use” folder and weighted according to how useful they would be for the various sections I had hoped to include in my thesis.

After identifying each episode I wished to create into a narrative for use in the thesis, I spent time reading and re-reading all of my jot-notes, quotes, anecdotes and recollecting memories, creating a rough script of what happened (Llewellyn, 2006). Through this script I placed myself into the moment of what had happened, reliving what others said, my responses and emotions tied to those moments, thus creating the narratives. Additionally, in

order to protect students' and teachers' anonymity and for ethical reasons, any names and identifying details about the student or teacher have been changed for this thesis.

However, I have been biased in my selection of which narratives to include and which to discard. I incorporated narratives that were moments of greatest discomfort and upheaval for me, which provoked further thought and reflection of how I view queer(ness) and myself in the classroom. They are sites of violent emotions that, I felt, demanded my deconstruction. As such, the re-telling from journal entry to narrative reflects this.

For example, in looking at a segment of journal entry from Tuesday December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008 one can see how the narrative was created.

Journal entry without changes:

- [Male student] made some comments near the end of class about [female student] sexuality
  - She said she had posted a YouTube video similar to Katrine's and got 1000s views in a week
  - He implied through gestures that she must have given blow jobs for that view count and was certain men masturbated to it
  - [The teachers] commented that those comments were not acceptable

Completed narrative:

The period is almost over; the bell will ring in another five minutes. The other teacher and I are gathered, sitting in chairs, talking with the student about the project for the next unit. During the period I had shown a video I had created over the previous weekend depicting what I was expecting them to create, and now the students are discussing what they would like to accomplish visually for the next project.

“I posted a video like that on YouTube once,” one student said. With a lightly joking voice and a smile she continued, “In the first week after posting it the video had over a thousand views.”

“Ya right.” The male student replied sharply. “You must have been doing a little something extra for them to watch.” Raising his hand as if he were holding something to his mouth, he jerked the imaginary object in and out of his mouth.

All of our faces went blank. I looked shocked over to the other teacher, wondering how to approach this.

Leaning forward in his seat, the student continued, “All the guys watching it were probably masturbating to it too.” A smug smile reached his face as he leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest.

(Continued next page)

“That’s not acceptable language,” the other teacher said, her eyes wide. “That was highly inappropriate,” she continued.

I sat there nodding my head up and down, my fingers fidgeting with each other.

The bell rings to end the class. The students get up from their seats; I walk over to the female student. “You okay?” I ask.

“Ya,” she answers. Turning her head away from me, her hair covers her eyes. She drags her feet exiting the room, disappearing into the noisy hallway.

I pinch my nose at my temple and let out a large sigh. I turn to the other teacher, she looks at me. Her eyes appear just as frustrated as I feel.

As one can see, there is sharp difference, not just in the length of the passage, but in depth of description and emotions tied to the words in the journal without changes and the created narrative. I believe this affords the reader pedagogical opportunities to more fully explore and experience what happened during the project, placing themselves into my (queer) shoes. As well, the construction of these narratives becomes an exercise in *currere* for me, allowing me to reflect more fully on the events as the narratives take much time and consideration to produce. These narratives frame one’s recognition of the trends that flow through the formation of tolerable and deviant sexualities and genders (Butler, 2009).

## Chapter 4

### Framing Classroom Inter/act/ions

Today I'm watching two students as they walk around in the hallways interviewing school staff about the standardized literacy test that they participated in last week. On the way out from successfully interviewing the principal, the vice principal saw the three of us in the hallway turning the corner and called one of the students that was with me into his office.

The student turned to me, his eyes wide with fear and panic. Grabbing the thin fabric athletic headband, that was keeping his longer curly hair out of his face, he ripped it off his head in a rush and pushed it into my hands. "Yo, hide this for me." He whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

Curious and silent, I stood at the doorway and watched as the student entered the vice principal's office. I watched as the vice principal held out his palm to the student and looked at him expectantly, curling his fingers back and forth waiting for the student to give him something.

The student blew out a large annoyed breath, pivoted on one foot and turned back to me. Reaching into my hand he took the head band back and placed it into the vice principal's waiting hand. "How many is this sir?" he asked.

"A lot," he answered, putting the thread of fabric into one of his desk drawers. Then out of the side of his mouth he quietly told him, "You'll get them back when you graduate."

Forcing a stilted laugh out, the student joked that there must be a big ball of the headbands in the vice principal's desk.

After leaving the office and closing the door, I turned to the student and arched my eyebrow, silently asking him what that incident was all about.

Turning to me and raising his shoulders as we walked, he answered, "It really sucks miss, I'm the only guy in school that wears them but they don't let me."

Stopping in the middle of the hallway, I turn to him asking, "Do any female students wear those sports headbands?"

"Ya, they do." He replied.

A bit shocked and a lot curious I asked, "Are the female students given a hard time about wearing the headbands at school?"

"No, not at all." The student shook his head negatively.

Completely shocked now, I told him that what the vice principal and others were doing was gender discrimination and that it's not right.

"Ya, I got a petition together of like one hundred names just so that I could wear the band to keep the hair out of my face. The petition was just for me and no one else and the office said that I still couldn't wear them." He shrugs unenthusiastically, giving me a look as if to say 'can't beat them', and we continue to walk on toward the next interview.

### **Tolerating "That's Just the Way it is": Representation, Gender, and Sexual Performances in Schools**

Come on, come on. / That's just the way it is. / Things'll never be the same. / That's just the way it is. / Aww yeah.

We gotta make a change.... / It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes. / Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live / and let's change the way we treat each other. / You see the old way wasn't working so it's on us to do / what we gotta do, to survive.

(Shakur & Hornsby, 1998)

Youth is a material problem; it is a body – the individual body and the social body of generations – that has to be properly inserted into the dominant organization of spaces and places, into the dominant systems of economic and social relationships. As a body, it has to be located in its own proper places and its movements have to be surveyed and constrained. And as a body, its gendered and racial identities have to be neatly defined, its behaviour regulated and its sexuality policed.

(Lawrence Grossberg, as quoted by Giroux, 1998, p. 1)

How did this all start?

Frozen and silent, drowning in my own thoughts, I trudge slowly against the current watching everyone else fly by.

How did this all start?

I can easily recall the students' voices that buzzed through the classroom, mixing and melding with the energetic click-clacking of computer keys. These intricate webs of conversation jumped from one topic to another, seemingly without even a gossamer thread to tie them together. Swiftly flying between fibres, the conversation swirled and landed on the topic of relationships. As if waiting for this topic to commence, one student (who self-identifies openly as lesbian) bounded exuberantly into the discussion, "Do you want to see a picture of my girlfriend?" she asked. Reaching inside her shirtfront, she uncovered her hidden treasure, a pendant with a photo etched onto it. Students clambered over each other to get a closer look at the clandestine image, ever increasing their buzzing.

While she explained to me (the teacher) why she felt compelled to conceal the pendant from her family and friends,

another student (male) remarked that this student's girlfriend looked quite "butch." I asked him if it mattered to him if someone in a relationship looks masculine or feminine.

"You can't have two feminine lesbians in the same relationship; one of them has to be the man," the female student interjected. "Because I look feminine I had to find a girlfriend who could be the man."

Time immediately slowed for me, the buzzing stopped, and I could no longer hear the click-clacking of computer keys. I felt like I couldn't breathe; all the air had left my lungs. I was stunned. In my third year of teaching and my first in which I was open about my own queer sexuality, I was encountering the same discourses surrounding sexuality and gender that I had dealt with in high school.

Immediately I responded to the students on their views of gender and sexuality, thinking that this was one of those fabled "teachable moments" where every element of the classroom connected perfectly – where, in an intimate dance of knowledge and understanding, both students and teacher experience an honest act of learning. I leaned forward. "You know that in lesbian relationships there are partners who are femme-femme and butch-butch," I declared, strong in my conviction.

All of the students turned, stunned-shocked looks on their faces. "You don't know what you're talking about," the (lesbian) female student continued, "...you don't know anything about how lesbians are really supposed to be."

Shocked into silence, the conversation took flight onto a new topic without me, leaving me stranded, wondering not only what had happened, but how all of this had happened.

Ah. That's how it started.

This moment of stunned silence and my reflection and interest in my reaction provoked me into action, launching the idea of this thesis. Now looking back more closely at this moment, I have a better understanding of how those students fashioned their

comprehension of lesbians. Initially, I thought that the female student had forced the common/mainstream label of butch/femme on her lesbian identity. Yet now, when I look back at the statement that “one of [the lesbian couple] has to be the man,” I realize that the students involved in the conversation, produced what Judith Butler (2004) calls a “normative” heterosexual social performance of gender.

I suggest that the two students who were chiefly involved in the conversation have replicated what is allowable or acceptable for queer(ed) sexuality or gender. They shrouded their words in a heterosexual matrix, replicating the language and norms that often confine gender and sexuality within the institution of schooling. Additionally, through labelling her own relationship within heteronormalized boundaries, the lesbian student recreated what Trinh T. Minh-ha (1998) calls “the Inappropriate/d Other,” articulating her sameness to other (hetero-) students and establishing “I am like you,” while still retaining the “I am different” in her identity. Thus (un)intentionally, she strategically performed her identity in relation to the existing heteronormative matrixes.

The imposing of the allowable or acceptable on the performance of queer(ed) identities showcases how society recognizes normalized LGBTQ identities. Consequently, alternative aspects of queerness (which can be any Other-ed persons, identities, issues, etc.) are often overlooked, ignored or altered in educational settings.

Therefore, I suggest that there is a mainstream privileging of specific gay and lesbian persons’ stereotyped/normalized identities which, as a consequence, has warped, manipulated and exploited notions of all queer(ed) persons, consequently requiring society

to define what is allowable in gender and sexuality and allowing for restrictive concepts such as the *good homosexual*. I have termed this perception of queer(ed) gender and sexuality as *tolerable queerness*. The formation of a tolerable identity goes to the extreme of what Janet Miller (2005) calls the creation of an *authentic* queer identity or experience. When utilized as the only acceptable performance of identity, this desire for performing an authentic identity within a heteronormative matrix results in a rejection of the identities performed outside of what is categorized as the tolerable.

An example of the tolerable queerness that I continue to see within school social dynamics is that many students and educators deem it acceptable or allowable if an effeminate gay male is involved in the drama club. However, if this same individual were to join the football team (stereotyped as a macho sport), he would become *deviant* or unwanted. Furthermore, because of his choice to participate in something *unallowable*, he may face discrimination, harassment or bullying.

When exploring what to call this performance of normalized queerness, I wondered how I could express my experiences and thoughts in a concise enough manner. How could I string together words to express something powerful, yet still be simple? It is late at night. I am in front of my computer searching the Internet. I by chance stumble upon the following quote by Anais Nin (1974): “When you make a world tolerable for yourself, you make a world tolerable for others.” While I am fairly sure she did not mean for her words to be seen as negative, this quote made me reflect. If one fashions the world to one’s preference, to make it a utopia, one makes it the same for everyone else. However, while that may seem

comfortable, the newly fashioned world is only a utopia for the person that made it that way – for everyone else it is something that they have to endure in order to take part.

The use of “queer” within tolerable queerness arose from a personal need to use the signifier in place of using the acronym LGBTQ. While understanding that my perception of queerness and what it means is not the same for everyone, I believe the term is one of the few succinct ways one has to describe such a diverse culture, society, group, and people. In her attempts to give words to the fluid nature of what “queer” is and what using the signifier can do, Eve Sedgwick (1993) expresses that queer:

[S]pins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, post-colonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting and identity-fracturing discourses. (pp. 8-9)

In my research, I am attracted to the “identity-constituting” and “identity-fracturing” ability of “queer” that Sedgwick uses. By operating through stereotyped imagery and language, the tolerable produces and teaches loaded concepts that distort and oversimplify gender and sexuality. The tolerable frames queer discourses in narrow and seemingly stable definitions of heteronormalized recognition. These frames then legitimize the so-called knowledge of the hegemonic heterosexual person, reproducing the stereotyped imagery and language (Butler, 2009).

Consequently classrooms that replicate the tolerable within the explicit, hidden or null curriculum generate a discourse that may look/represent a toleration of queer. Yet this curriculum falls short of being comprehensively inclusive enough to avoid stereotypic

representations of queer(ed) gender and sexuality in the classroom. Subsequently, students questioning their sexuality or gender may attempt to fashion their own identity to fit the stereotypical “authentic queer,” further replicating the tolerable. Such curricular discourses fail to open up spaces for the multiple fluid dynamics of performances of gender and sexuality within classrooms.

If one understands that the identity of the other is formed through a subtractive definition of the norm(al), then the tolerable is formed as a mirror reflection of the norm. The tolerable takes all of society and mainstream’s dominant humanistic values and laws, and moulds this other into something more palatable – an outsider on the inside. Through a seemingly visceral need for the familiar, the sexual other only achieves its mainstream discursive meaning through a predetermined hetero template of sexuality. This desexualizing or heterosexualizing of queer sexuality makes mainstream more comfortable with how it views queerness. The tolerable does not then challenge the definition of the norm in any way. This un-queer queered identity allows mainstream society to joke at the latest queer comedic relief character in sitcoms or movies. The tokenizing of queerness removes the opportunity to provoke any sort of “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2006). As these identities and performances of tolerable queerness become more mainstreamed and more widely displayed, more are inadvertently drawn into the norm, compounding its effect. This makes it difficult to conceptualize any diversity outside of the norm and creates problems for those who do not prescribe to the strict stereotyped dual gender roles of “male” or “female.” Potentially creating the deviant and socially undesirable behaviour by what is left out of the normalized discursive “Regime of truth” (Foucault, 1980). This Regime reinforces

normalizing “truths” that individuals unconsciously subscribe to creating concrete socio-cultural barriers to identities. For this reason, I suggest that curricular discourses need to employ fluidity, rather than to rely on predetermined socially created terminologies, which with their rigor and precise connotations construct (at first glance) “clear” boundaries defining what is tolerable.

This strict categorization of what is sexuality and gender in educational setting can cause confusion and risk to queer or questioning youth’s identities. Jen Gilbert (2004) articulates, this strictness may originate from adults whose feelings of uneasiness stem from their inability to, “tolerate the ambiguity of a fugue state” (p. 239). Adults seek to place these societal boundaries on youth as they reproduce the same boundaries placed on them by others. Furthermore, it allows the adult to better understand the student through their socio-cultural lens. The firm categories of gender and sexuality create a hetero-comfortable atmosphere in the classroom where the teacher’s own sexuality or gender is not called into question. As a result, in order to avoid queries and retain their power over youth, the tolerable is promoted into language and actions. Consequently, one of the strongest influences within this structure of power in the classroom is the creation and illusion of the panopticon-esque, omniscient teacher. Relations between students and that teacher can reproduce and magnify this pervasive socio-culturally constructed norm of representation that in turn legitimizes and transforms the assumed heterosexuality of the teacher into the landscape of the classroom, what Adrienne Rich (1986) describes as “compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 41). In other words, teachers, are always viewed as heterosexual by outsiders, be it a student, parent or other school staff. This creates an oppressive atmosphere

within schools (and society) for those who are not heterosexual. Teachers who are heterosexual do not have to “come out” as such, their sexuality is assumed. Whereas queer teachers grapple to correct assumptions of those around them, and when these teachers decide to be open about their sexuality, they are most often received with shock.

“Compulsory heterosexuality” extends much further than just teachers as students too face this restrictive belief. In a January 2010 feature article of *Xtra!*, Natasha Barsotti, discussed her recent trip to Newfoundland to promote an anti-homophobic workshop, where she was received with statements that there were no gay or lesbian students in their schools. Faced with strong backlash from school support staff as well as teachers she was most angered by the fear of even opening up a dialogue. One guidance counselor went even as far as saying, “You’re opening up a door. You’re talking about homosexuals. You know as well as I do, I’m going to have dozens of kids going home tonight saying they’re queer” (Barsotti, 2010). This experience, Barsotti elucidates, left her livid and bewildered at the same time. Barsotti observed what many queer activists and theorists in education are currently stressing an urgent need to address the heteronormalization of the classroom and schooling at large. Not only are those involved assumed to be heterosexual, but there is a fear of even introducing queer(ed) topics into the classroom.

However, when queer discourses are used by either educators or students, there exists what Deborah Britzman and Jen Gilbert (2004) refer to as a “hidden curriculum of consciousness-raising that plays out...” and, “attempts to offer knowledge of difference, its interest in stories of subjection and overcoming – may repress the more radical qualities of narratives of social difference” (p. 81). These “stories of subjection and overcoming” are

extremely powerful and have percolated into society at large reinforcing what constitutes queerness. Even while I recognize the power that these stories hold, I still find myself giving into this discourse. Looking back at many of the narratives created through my journals, I notice that my voice highlights subjection and overcoming. I am silent in some, feeling helpless in others. The self-hated and fear of difference that I faced while closeted is still reinforced by heteronormative language and guides my reactions. I have listened to these discourses for so long that they have become my discourse, my identity. For Britzman and Gilbert this reaction typifies one of the greatest issues facing educators wishing to bring a queer discourse into the classroom. If educators do not step beyond the limiting normalized version of queerness, this discourse will be reproduced by future generations.

This characterization of queer youth in this discourse of powerlessness has been theorized by Eric Rofes (2004) as the “Martyr-Target-Victim” paradigm. He expresses that these dominant narratives trap the queer person or identity within the mainstream stereotypes of the “at risk” gay teen, creating a culture of fear of gay bashing, suicide and self-mutilation (p. 51). These queer identities are viewed as subordinate to the heterosexual norm, establishing the queer individual as one who will forever be at risk. This is further propagated in mass media where on television shows like *Law and Order: SVU* (season 11, episode 14) queer characters are portrayed as either victims because of their sexuality or as the perpetrator of the crime (and blaming their violence and aggression on their sexuality). By watching negatively stereotyped characters such as this, queer youth are inundated by graphic imagery of what can or cannot be and how they should or should not act. In addition to the fictionalized accounts of queered individuals are international media frenzies that

surround hate crimes of queer bashing/murder, such as Matthew Shepard in 1998 and the anti-homosexuality bill of Uganda in 2009. The former of which provoked me to stay in the closet well into my twenties due to fear of a similar thing happening to me.

Yet television is not the most central key to the propaganda of the “Martyr-Target-Victim” paradigm within the classroom. For that one should turn to how queer individuals and their lives are portrayed within the textbooks that are in everyday use in schools. By looking at these textbooks one can see that queer students are portrayed largely as, “victims of harassment, bullying, depression, self-destructive behaviour, and societal discrimination” (Macgillivray & Jennings 2008, p. 181). With the inundation of various popular mediums stating that queer individuals are “at risk,” it is easy to see how students (queer or not) see being “at risk” as an accurate representation a queerness.

Classroom discourses of individuals “at risk” are so strong, with their connotations and emotional connections, that they overpower any other discourse before it can fully form. Society “tolerates” these discourses, confining these “at risk” students to their fear, while showing them that seemingly their only option to escape it is to conform to the tolerable. These discourses serve as warnings to these students. If you are too queer, too different, too proud in your identity, you cross a border into unwanted deviant queer behaviour and either you can go back to being within the hetero-comfortable definition of queer or else suffer the consequences. Even if the violent language or actions are inflicted upon you, it is socio-culturally your fault as “you were asking for it” by being too queer.

### Pop Culture Echoing Representations of the Tolerable and Deviant

“Miss, I think you should grow out your hair,” one student tells me.

“Why?” I ask. Confused by the turn in the conversation, five minutes before the bell rings for the end of the period the class and I were reviewing what the students still had to finish for their unit projects.

“Because short hair makes you look like a lesbian.” The student answers me.

“Just because a woman has short hair doesn’t mean they are a lesbian.”

“That not true – it’s like a guy acts all girly it means he’s gay”

As I start to explain to the student stereotyping in gender and sexuality the bell to change class periods rings and the student runs off.

What does it mean to be queer? Is there a way of talking, acting, cutting one’s hair, identifying oneself that screams “I’m queer!!!”? What does it mean to be straight? Does one have to say what they are and give themselves a discourse in order to just be? What does it mean to be female, male, bisexual, transgender, intersex, two-spirited or any of these labels? How can society justify putting a label on something and creating borders, where in nature these borders do not truly exist?

Language rules, defines and gives meaning to our lives. Without language humanity would not exist, not evolved, nor would we have survived. Therefore I can understand the need to label to communicate ideas across divides. Yet in doing so we attach certain connotations to the words we use. For example, ice cream reminds people of happy summer days and sweet tastes in their mouths and fire conjures up images of heat and smoke stinging your eyes. Yet without connected mental imagery, communication across socio-cultural groups would be near impossible. However, it is through the evolution of certain negative and concrete imagery that creates trouble.

These discursive connotations and respective social boundaries limit performances of sexuality and gender to stereotyped mainstream popular culture-created representations – for example, the gay male best friend who helps with fashion choices (*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*), the jock lesbian who excels at sports, and the bisexual woman who has a few too many drinks and decides to “experiment” (*Girls Gone Wild*).

While gay and lesbian identities become normalized and “tolerable”, other queer sexualities and genders are left out in the cold. Bisexuality, transgender, and intersexuality become ignored, silenced or erased or treated even more violently. These individuals become demonized, outcast from social discourse, especially in school settings. The creation of the deviant homosexual being started in the late nineteenth century through the use of medical and physiological discourses, and a *need* to explain homosexuality (Foucault, 1990). This need to explain and label persons so they fit into boxes and borders which mainstream groups can easily understand has warped and altered many performances of sexuality and

gender into something at first glance *clear*. Yet if one does not fit the marking of this label, the individual may become the deviant queer.

For those who identify as bisexual, one of the greatest obstacles to overcome in the face of deviant sexualities is bisexual erasure. Facing discrimination from both the straight and queer communities, bisexual erasure can mean one of two things: first, the claim that a bisexual person is in fact a closeted homosexual individual, wanting to appear heterosexual (conversely, bisexual individuals are heterosexuals wishing to “experiment” with their sexuality). Secondly, and more commonly seen in the queer community, is the tendency for bisexuals to be labelled heterosexual when their partner is of the opposite sex and homosexual when their partner is of the same sex. Elizabeth Friedland (2009), an advocate of LGBT rights, expresses her frustration with being termed bisexual in her essay *Putting the “I” in “Bisexual”*:

Bisexual.

I hate that word. I cringe when I say it, when I hear it, when someone uses it to confirm or deny my sexual identity. It’s the equivalent to “mulatto.” It’s icky and outdated and strangely detached from feeling. Bi gives me the creeps.

Bi is everything uncertain, everything in-between, everything fence-straddling. Bi is being unable to make up your mind. Bi is not committing fully. Bi is being too afraid to step all the way out of that proverbial closet, or bi is following the latest pop culture trends, clamouring for attention at the bars or having one too many shots. Bi is a hanging chad, an unsigned contract, a half-answered email.

Never – or, at the very least, rarely – is a bi a legitimate, understood, accepted sexual identity.

(n.p.)

Other common biphobic deviant performances of bisexuality seen in high school individuals and discourse include “bisexual chic” and “lesbian/bisexual until graduation” (the latter is more common at university but has moved into younger age groups).

Bisexual chic is the creation of a trendy, in-vogue performance of bisexuality. Often seen in pop culture and, in recent years, most often performed by female individuals, bisexual chic works to gloss over issues of sexual politics and health. Recently, bisexuality chic has become even more prevalent in the music industry with the world-famous kiss between Britney Spears and Madonna at an award show (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIVSU7AhVP0>), as well as Katy Perry’s 2008 hit “*I Kissed a Girl*”.

Excerpt from Katy Perry’s *I Kissed a Girl*

This was never the way I planned, not my intention / I got so  
brave, drink in hand, lost my discretion / It's not what I'm used  
to, just wanna try you on / I'm curious for you caught my  
attention

I kissed a girl and I liked it / The taste of her cherry ChapStick  
/ I kissed a girl just to try it / I hope my boyfriend don't mind it

It felt so wrong, it felt so right / Don't mean I'm in love tonight  
/ I kissed a girl and I liked it / I liked it

No, I don't even know your name, it doesn't matter / You're my  
experimental game, just human nature / It's not what good girls  
do, not how they should behave / My head gets so confused,  
hard to obey

(Perry, *et al.*, 2008)

Growing out of the same fashionable sentiment of bisexual chic is lesbian/bisexual until graduation, a term used to describe women in high school and university who temporarily

adopt a bisexual or lesbian identity for “experimentation,” avoiding attention from the opposite sex or even attempting to seem more desirable with the opposite sex. Lesbian/bisexual until graduation is associated with immaturity; social conventions dictate that one “grows out” of this phase by the time they graduate.

For transgender individuals, almost their entire sexual and gender identity becomes deviant. While parts of the trans- community have become tolerable through the arts-based performance of gender and sexuality of drag queens (and kings to a certain extent), they are only “allowable” to perform when they are in character – many outside of their “character” become viewed as gay, lesbian, or straight.

Washrooms, sex/gender education and gym locker rooms dismiss the transgendered and intersexed individual. Especially for intersexed persons, through the process of naming, as *Fixing Sex*, author Katrina Karkazis (2008) details an escalating inclination to twist social matters into biomedical issues. This is a trend that sexologists from the middle of the twentieth century executed on gays and lesbians, as the saying goes: history repeats itself. This medical discourse of the deviant results in the queer individual seen as having a problem that can, and more often should, be fixed, whether by medicine, psychotherapy or surgery.

Yet the deviant is not solely a medical or socio-cultural device. Mass-media and pop culture icons are (at times) just as responsible for the creation of the deviant queer. Consider the following narrative:

There are three of us walking down the empty hallways, looking for empty classrooms with unoccupied teachers to interview about the most recent compulsory literacy test. The two students, both male, are walking in front of me carrying the video production equipment.

One gets close to the other when passing him on the stairs and accidentally brushes his hand against the other's genitalia region.

"Whoa Mike!" the student stops, turning to look at the first one. "You must really want to touch my balls," he exclaims.

"Naw dude. You're the one that wants to touch men and get it on with them!" Mike responds.

They both laugh it off and Mike asks "No homo?" offering his fist to be pounded in a sign of apology and respect.

"No homo." The second student replies, pounding his fist with the one offered.

Stunned I stop and ask them, "What just happened?"

"Miss, it all cool now." Mike offers.

"What's this *no homo*? What happened to the jokes people used to use to insult each other – like yo' mama...?"

"That's how it used to be but now everyone [men] – like on TV, movies and that stuff – use sex with men to insult each other." Mike explains.

"Oh." I reply.

According to the highest rated definition on *Urban Dictionary*, "no homo" is a "phrase used after one inadvertently says something that sounds gay," and gives the example of: "His ass is mine. No homo" (EJL, 2004). As "*That's Gay*", a recurring segment by Bryan Safi that explores gay issues and stereotypes on Current TV, satirically declares:

Are you terrified that people may think you're gay? No worries, hip hop has coined a phrase to get you out of the stickiest situations. Just throw in a “no homo” and you can say pretty much anything you want! (Safi, 2009)

With lyrics by hip hop superstars like Lil Wayne on his bestselling album “Tha Carter III” or like Kanye West on “Run This Town” signing: “it’s crazy how you can go from being Joe Blow, to everybody on your dick – no homo,” one can see the influence these celebrities have on mainstream youth lexicon (Weiner, 2009).

Other occurrences of the viewing of queerness as the deviant that I saw by students I taught mainly fell into two categories: the queer individual as the desexualized being and the objectifying (sexually) of a lesbian student by other (male) students. Between the two, the one that affected me the most was the desexualisation of some queer individuals making them into deviants.



Today is Chinese New Year and the teacher in the classroom connecting to the back room where this program is led has taken today off to celebrate. On days like today where the other classroom is empty, it turns into a quiet workspace for students who are not filming or don't want to be interrupted.

It's quiet with no one in the other room.

I hope that it will stay that way.

Sarah is bored. I can tell because she's getting that far off look that people, students especially, get when they really would rather be doing anything else. She has finished the “fun part” of the unit – filming herself reading a written response letter, now she has to edit.

Sighing loudly, her eyes roll upwards, another sigh.



“Hey Sarah, do you want to go onto one of the computers in the other room [they have internet] and look for some pictures you could use in your film?” I ask her.

She slowly gets up; her arms seemingly filled with lead drag along the desk, the chair-back and then the doorway. A breath later and she’s yelling between the two rooms: “Miss, can you come help me?”

I get up and make my way into the other classroom. Michelle is searching through Google Images, looking at pictures of her favourite singers. “That’s the singer whose song I’m going to put in my video.” She says and asks me if I’ve ever heard him sign. I answer telling her I didn’t even know who he was.

“What does this have to do with your dad?” I ask her, the point of putting the pictures in the video was to go along with the letter she wrote – a letter where she tells her father that she loves him. “Do you want to use these pictures [I point to the computer screen at a picture of a half naked sweaty male singer] to represent your letter?”

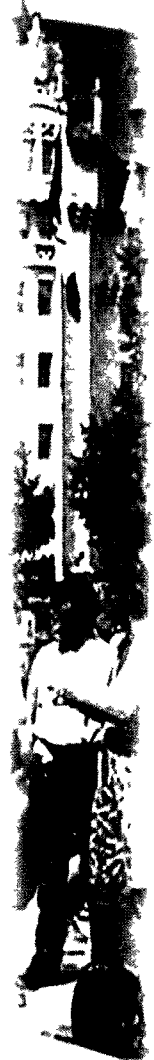
She laughs. “I didn’t think of that! [Laughs] I don’t think that will be too good for the video, but can I still put them up on the blog?” she asks.

I nod my head, “sure.”

Turning back to the computer, Sarah plugged “I love you” into the Google Images search. Scrolling through the answers she came upon the following image:



“Ewww, fags, that’s disgusting!” She yells, moving away from the computer screen; her face scrunches up and she presses together her lips in a grimace.



Wide eyed I turn to her. My mouth drops open and I breath in a stilted breath.

And then I'm talking, or I think so. To this day I can't remember what I said. My lips are moving and words are coming out, but I can't hear them over the blood rushing in my ears. I know that I admonished her but I think it was less the "learning experience" I advocate and more of a "NO! Don't you **dare** say that!" But at this point I'm still reeling from what she just said and the hateful tone she said it in.

After telling her that, which in retrospect did nothing to affect her and she probably just let it slide off of her, she saw a second picture:



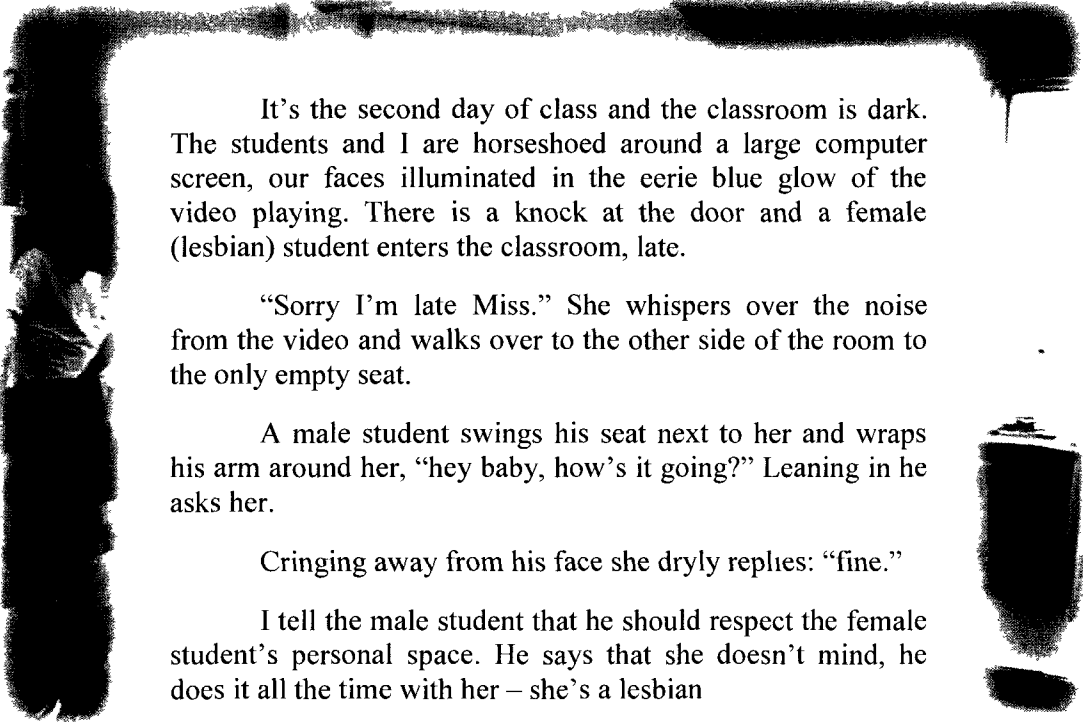
"Urgh... **dykes!**"

I looked at her thinking didn't she just hear me? I stood up and walked back to the other room, feeling defeated. I couldn't deal with her after that and needed to breathe. She crossed my line.

For this student I believe that her reaction may have been a repercussion of the idea that it is only socially tolerable to see queer sexuality as non-sexual beings, allowing the individual to become "less threatening" to the individual's heterosexuality. This extreme negative reaction covers up any fascination or curiosity they may have about homosexuality or queerness. Additionally if one creates a queer eunuch, there is no worry that seeing their

interaction may provoke any curiosity about their own sexual identity. Through the act of homoerotic intimacy, the two couples became the deviant.

The next instance of the creation of the deviant individual that most commonly occurred during the *Empowering Marginalized Youth* program was the treatment of a lesbian student by other students in one of the classes I taught. She expressed to me that she had a difficult time at the school and was often bullied as she was (is) an out lesbian. However, what was more disturbing for her (and me) was that as a lesbian she was “expected” to allow male students to touch her inappropriately, because “she’s a lesbian, it doesn’t mean anything.” The male students saw lesbian identities as tolerable if they prescribed to the mainstream (pornographic) media representation of the lesbian sex object (waiting for male consumption).



It’s the second day of class and the classroom is dark. The students and I are horseshoed around a large computer screen, our faces illuminated in the eerie blue glow of the video playing. There is a knock at the door and a female (lesbian) student enters the classroom, late.

“Sorry I’m late Miss.” She whispers over the noise from the video and walks over to the other side of the room to the only empty seat.

A male student swings his seat next to her and wraps his arm around her, “hey baby, how’s it going?” Leaning in he asks her.

Cringing away from his face she dryly replies: “fine.”

I tell the male student that he should respect the female student’s personal space. He says that she doesn’t mind, he does it all the time with her – she’s a lesbian

The female student's eyes go wide looking for my reaction. An awkward silence envelops the class as she slowly moves away from him and everyone resumes watching the movie.

After class she tells me when all the students have left, "I don't like it when he puts his arm around me or hugs me, I feel uncomfortable and icky."

Would you like for me to talk to him about it, I ask her.

"Ya, but don't make a big deal of it with him. I don't want to cause any trouble." Her voice wavers and she leaves.

Later I spot the male student in the hall after class and tell him what the female student told me and remind him that we all should respect personal boundaries, especially at school.

He shrugs his shoulders. "She's a lesbian, it doesn't mean anything."

I must look at him blankly because after a moment of silence he continues: "If she was straight then I wouldn't do it, but because she's gay it's okay to hug her and touch her. It doesn't count when a guy touches a lesbian. She doesn't mind, she likes it."

He turns and walks down the hall.

What bothers me about the event contained within this narrative is that the male student dismisses the concept that there may have been any inappropriate behaviour on his part. Even after telling him that the other student did not like it when he put his arm around her, he acted as though, because of her sexuality, it was socially acceptable to act that way because the action(s) wouldn't be seen as a "sexual" advance.

However, it is not the actions of the male student that vexes me the most, as I have faced similar discourses all my life. What I am concerned about is the creation of the

silences that comes as a reaction to these injurious words. What part do these silences play in the creation of tolerable discourses? Are these silences a key part of the educational experience? Should teachers address these silences publicly in the classroom?

### **Toxic Silences and the Debate Surrounding “Words that Wound”**

[T]he peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.

(Mill, 1869, p. 10)

Is speech necessarily more powerful than silence? Must silence imply subordination, marginalisation or oppression?

(Jackson, 2008, p. 230)

Silence.

One may think it weird that in talking about (queered) language in schooling I have included a chapter devoted to silence. Yet silence... is more important than most realize. Whether positive or negative, silence (and silencing) is a vital and powerful aspect of language – it speaks volumes without saying anything at all. Yet, if you were to walk done the busy hallways of a high school in Canada, silence is probably furthest from your mind when thinking about how you would define the atmosphere. Within education and the classroom, from the time I was a student to more recently as a teacher, the act of creating

silence has always been something that concerns me. Silence, resulting from silencing, is formed through acts of power, domination and subjugation of one over another.

When a student says: “that’s so gay”, “you’re gay for them” or “you’re such a fag”, do students really understand the power and meaning that goes with these statements? Or, are they bystanders, quasi-innocents caught up in the tsunami that is popular opinion and being cool? When I asked a student whom I taught if he understood the connotations that such a word has he shrugged his shoulders. Continuing he said: “but Miss, everyone is saying it, and if I don’t they will look at me weird and treat me bad. Instead of being the person making fun of someone, I would be made fun of.”

I worry that students aren’t free to speak their mind – that they have been told “no” once too often. What is left out with this silence? Are teachers reacting too harshly? Could these comments be innocent utterances in the first place?

As Foucault (1995) discussed in *Discipline and Punish*, the body (or the individual) will forever remain within a system of power. For it does not matter if the individual is exercising their power or having power exercised upon them, she or he will always exist within a system of power. Through exploring this system of power in relation to silencing voices surrounding homosexuality, homophobia, and heterosexism, a debate occurs on how teachers should react and disallow or allow these acts of silencing to continue. Termed “words that wound,” this idea that speech can act in ways equivalent to physical pain, inflicting *wounds* was discussed by Mari Matsuda *et al.*, in *Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (1993).

Initially used by Delgado and Matsuda to describe racism and hate speech against black Americans, Judith Butler, in her 1997 book, *Excitable Speech* used the theory to state that any words used in hate could create verbal injuries. Butler shifted the focus of these verbal injuries to an investigation of the performances of language, agency, and more importantly, homophobia. In her introduction, Butler comments that, “we ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of it injurious trajectory” (p. 1). She continues that we are “linguistic beings,” and that language is a necessary and fundamental element of our ability to exist and thrive as a society. Yet it is through this dependence on language that one becomes vulnerable to it, as “if we are formed in language, then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it” (p. 2). Relating back to the Foucauldian idea that humans never exist outside of power. Moreover, if society and culture exist through the language one uses, this language will forever hold power over us.

This power that language has over us can be used in nefarious ways, for example, homophobic slurs used to hurt. However, as Butler (1997a) points out, the creation of these “linguistic injuries” that comes from this power:

...raises the question of which words wound, which representations offend, suggesting that we focus on those parts of language that are uttered, utterable, and explicit. And yet, linguistic injury appears to be the effect of not only of the words by which one is addressed but the mode of the address itself, a mode – a disposition or conventional bearing – that interpellates and constitutes a subject. (p. 2)

In other words, many words are given meaning in the context they are used and the tone/way the words are uttered. One can see this in the various ways the word “queer” is used. Within my research, I use queer as an umbrella term to recognize individuals within the LGBTQ spectrum, whereas, some use the word “queer” as a hateful slur and negative identifier.

Butler (1997a) continues on the context of words, stating:

To argue, on one hand, that the offensive effect of such words is fully contextual, and that a shift of context can exacerbate or minimize that offensiveness, is still not to give an account of the power that such words are said to exercise. To claim, on the other hand, that some utterances are always offensive, regardless of context, that they carry their contexts with them in ways that are too difficult to shed, is still not to offer a way to understand how is invoked and restaged at the moment of utterance. (p. 13)

Shifting this idea to the classroom, one can see how a debate could spring up on whether a teacher should ever “interrupt power” of “oppressive” voices that use these wounding words (Applebaum, 2003). In her 2003 article, *Social justice, democratic education and the silencing of words that wound*, Barbara Applebaum wrote about her experiences teaching in a religious school and the issues she saw arising from the use of words that wound by students. She states that the use of such speech is “an instrument of subordination as much as it is an expression of [a] viewpoint,” and that any “speech that supports and is supported by dominant ideologies becomes, at the moment of utterance, the reproduction of power” (p. 157). Thus heterosexist language, even if it is not overtly homophobic, reproduces the hegemonic power of hetero-centric society.

Applebaum states that at the moment of utterance of these “words that wound” the teacher should exert her or his power over the classroom and silence the discourse so as not to allow the speech to “injure” or “hurt” any students. She states that she does this suppressing in order to create a more democratic classroom. Yet in the act of silencing she exerts her power as the panoptical teacher, evaluating her students’ language and reaching a judgement on what is permissible to say in the classroom.

One issue that has been noted in Applebaum’s argument is that, in her view, all silence is negative and signifies that the silenced individual is too harmed to speak. Yet as Butler (1997) articulates, the act of labelling an individual through violent language “may also produce an unexpected and enabling response” (p. 2). As the use of language in the act of naming gives a social definition to an individual and the group – building a community, “one ‘exists’ not only by virtue of being recognized, but in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*” (p. 5).

Additionally, as Cris Mayo (2005) imparts, one possible repercussion of creating taboos surrounding “words that wound” is that particular words such as “faggot” or “dyke” also become taboo, without an explanation as to why these words carry negative connotations – even if it is not the words but the ideological forces and attitudes that cause the harm for the most part. Consequently, students may not learn why such words are harmful; the word(s) then become “unremarkable” while the taboo surrounding them prevents a more comprehensive discussion of why these words created issues in the first place. In time, students become trained to repress particular terms and language without gaining an understanding of the possible damaging ability of homophobia heterosexism.

Additionally, as the character of the classroom is created through language, emotions, meanings and cultural connections, the silencing of utterances outside of what one considers “right” and “proper” can be potentially risky. These silences may create incomplete classroom identities and characters and a state of imbalance that seeks to fill itself up with the most accessible language and discourse available. Typically, the most readily available language and discourse that move into the void are normalized mainstream languages – a muted echo of the heteronormalized and homophobic. This creates the problem of attempting to differentiate this discourse from the liberalistic “everyone is equal,” blurring the two together and gradually shifting general classroom discourses further into heteronormativity.

Yet, as Jackson (2008) stresses, “must silence imply subordination, marginalization or oppression?” (p. 230). In regard to this question, Huey-li Li (2005) observes, the expression of knowledge and understanding through speech and that the silent individual is subordinated in an unjust relation are culturally-based assumptions. Additionally, he notes the reasonable pedagogical value of silence, where the individual increase their logic, clearness, quality and effectiveness of communication when allowing for time to reflect.

Therefore it is not silence and silencing that teachers need to be more conscious of within educational-based situations. Instead, one must become aware of how this heteronormalization is constructed and reproduced. As deCastell (2005) explains:

...if our students are the *source* of such ignorance and hostility, rather than merely the enunciators of what schools and universities have taught them, we might hope to deploy schools and universities as gatekeepers in practices of their eradication.

However, if students are merely the mouthpieces for the official discourse that protects and preserves a political condition of radical social inequity, do we not...unwittingly suspend critical insight into state power and silence when we displace power and violence onto individual citizens of whose right to speak the state is thereby constituted as neutral arbiter? (p. 54)

Similar to deCastell (2005), I wonder why a systemic problem such as homophobia and heterosexism is being treated as a personal problem. That said, I can sometimes understand why people would like to treat the problem as such. In doing so, it makes the issue someone else's for which they must find a solution and makes life less complicated. Opening up and addressing the issue of homophobia and heterosexism within the classroom is risky. It risks identities, risks one's safety, and risks becoming someone different, outside of the norm.

Yet it is through these risks that the educator may provoke their discussion of these issues of homophobia and heterosexism. In questioning the production of their own silence on these issues one may be closer to understanding why these important topics are treated as toxic in many classroom discussions.

### **Opening Up: Queer Teachers, Queer Language**

[M]arginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation; in fact...it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance...a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not found just in words but in the habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving to the center – but rather of a site

one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

(hooks, 1990, pp. 149-150)

At the core of its meaning, the tolerable seeks to place concrete borders and restrictions on queerness, a concept which frequently bases its theories in fluid places without borders. However, one can find a launching point for resisting the tolerable by bringing fluidity to queer spaces and moments in the classroom that subsume time, space, culture, language and spirituality. Through the employment of a heteronormalized discourse, queerness has become a fixed and a universal phenomenon with a unique culture and history. Created by either an intentional by-product of a pro-queer strategic essentialism perspective yearning for a community or homophobic labelling, the discourse(s) binds queerness in schools. Yet, by walking away from this persistent baggage that essentialist thought has brought to the signifier queer, educators can help to remove the constrictive elements of the tolerable by employing moments of "everyday queerness." These moments bring queerness out of its shadowed obscurity and instigate frank and open conversations, illustrating to both students and educators that queer is not a limited definition of who a person is or what that person can be.

"Everyday queer" narratives are one of the main ways to stop queerness from slipping into the stereotyped tolerable by making queerness more accessible and common in classroom discourses. However, I must caution that in order to adopt "everyday queerness" into the classroom, both educators and students must be open to the possibility of strong

emotional responses as well as encountering the unknown. “Everyday queerness” comprises all aspects of the queer(ed) identity/culture and, as such, educators especially should find ways in order to bring non-gay/lesbian-centric materials into the curriculum or non-stereotypical mainstream thought. Both students and educators should be encouraged to think honestly about themselves and to challenge the normative boundaries that tolerable queerness forces on society.

In addition to having educators and students open up the classroom as a site for dialogue on diverse aspects of queerness, I feel that queer educators have an important role in personalizing conversations and demystifying many parts of the LGBTQ spectrum. I feel that the goals of bringing “everyday queerness” into the classroom can be more readily achieved if more queer educators come out of the closet to their students and talk candidly about queerness. While educators as well as students need to be careful in order not to create “authentic” tokenistic queer identities,” I feel that the risk is lessened if queer(ed) discourses are viewed not as something different or alien to the classroom, but rather just part of its everyday structure. Once queer educators choose to be candid in their self narratives, they have the task of deciding when the right moment to be honest is. This can be seen as just as challenging, as the classroom contains a unique *terroir* in its ability to place-make and place-fracture.

Like many words, the term *terroir* has shifted meanings throughout time and has come to represent the intangible place-specific border-like elements to culture and identity. In its most common meaning and translation from French, *terroir* refers to the detailed place characteristics that result in the perfect tasting glass of wine. Elements such as what climate

the vine was planted in or what elevation the grape was picked at affect the unique taste characteristics of the wine. However, and I digress, this brings the troubling visual image into my brain of a grape picker stuck on top of an Everest-type mountain searching for a mythical grape with the right *terroir* to create the perfect tasting glass of wine.

As educators, that is what we are all looking for. Well (maybe) not wine, but this mythical teaching moment that at first glance seemed so far out of reach, it may very well have been atop Mount Everest. We hope that when we reach it and live the moment, when the “grape” is picked, that we are in some way, shape or form creating an enriching classroom experience for all. With its full-bodied texture, taste, aroma... the conversation produces an “Aha!” moment in the students that is so place/space/taste unique that it could only have happened at that one instant, in that one location, and with all of those exact elements mixing themselves into that one perfect tasting glass of wine.

For openly queer teachers trying to provoke a moment through the use of their own “everyday queer” narratives, I believe this situation is a little different. Not only is the teacher looking for the perfect “Mount Everest grape,” but the particular vine that the grape grows on now is located in the middle of a corn field. That is to say, with the tolerable silences created by so many voices and actions from outside the (queer) margins, many teachers may feel alone in this effort to bring “everyday queerness” into schools.

The main issue surrounding the moment of a decision to use one’s “everyday queer” narrative in shaping the classroom’s *terroir* is the process of determining which moment. Jacques Derrida (2002) theorizes on this process, where he states: “...if one anticipates the

future by predetermining the instant of decision, then one closes it off, just as one closes it off if there is no anticipation, no knowledge ‘prior’ to the decision” (p. 231). For example, if an educator anticipates or envisages that she or he could face only rejection, job loss or being ostracized from society by sharing an uncommon narrative, it stops the decision from ever happening in the first place and the moment is lost before it ever can exist. Yet are we waiting for a “teachable moment” that may not ever exist? By anticipating that I can use “everyday queerness” in my speech, am I in fact closing off other queered moments? What happens when teachers throw out the complexity of the ideal moment and just teach and welcome whatever might happen?

One way of affording opportunities for “everyday queerness” to take place in the classroom has been demonstrated by Jen Gilbert (2006) who, drawing on Derrida, invites educators and students to welcome queer moments within us and in the classroom. By saying “yes to who or what turns up,” one accepts “everyday queerness” in any form it may take, whether it be positive or negative. While it is hoped this does not provoke a *terroir* that only encourages stereotyped performances of queerness, the unconditional hospitality does open the door to other performances of queerness.

Gilbert (2006) asks educators (and in turn everyone) to invite queer moments and discomfort into one’s pedagogy. In doing so, she hopes that these foreign moments will provoke internal moments of reflection on how one perceives their role in the production and transmission of discourses such as tolerable queerness. To accomplish this, Gilbert utilizes Derrida’s (2000) deconstruction of the law(s) of hospitality. Stating that one should internally receive *unconditionally* anyone or anything into the classroom/ourselves before

the moment of welcoming happens. Derrida refers to this unconditional hospitality as “the law,” a universal, absolute and singular. For Derrida, unconditional hospitality is meaningless without its plural and dialectic other: “the laws,” or “...the conditions, the norms, the rights and duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men and women who give a welcome as well as the men and women who receive it” (p. 77). These *law(s)*, are as Derrida states create or instil constraints or boundaries on the hospitality, as if one does not one risks hospitality becoming, “...abstract, utopian, illusionary, and so turning over into the opposite” (p. 79). Thus constraining all those involved into a concrete, unchangeable system.

Gilbert shapes Derrida’s theory of welcoming the foreign(er) in relation to queerness and queer issues in education. Here she asks readers, “Is there anything more foreign in education than [queerness]” (p. 28)? In referencing her study with Deborah Britzman (2004) on current discourses surrounding queerness in teacher education classrooms, Gilbert suggests that the language and existing hospitality of the classroom is confined to “consciousness-raising,” thus “repress(ing) the more radical qualities of narratives” (p. 81). With the purpose of disrupting this current state of suppression of social difference, Gilbert attempts to provoke “complicated conversations” (Pinar, 2006) to welcome what may come within her classroom by showing LGBTQ movies.

Yet it is through this hospitality to queered moments that Gilbert finds her own thoughts provoked to consider other narratives and discourses while watching the movie *Y tu mamá también* with her class. Through analysing her internal narrative, Gilbert asserts that educators need to “see hospitality as necessarily emerging from the conflict between what

we *imagine* and what we *can* do, to insist that our commitment to justice and human rights does not, and indeed cannot, lie flush with social practices” (emphasis added, p. 33). Consequently, it is through this tension between the two (“what we imagine to do and what we can do”) that educators need to tarry with in order to move into non-normative places.

Both educators and students are central in the place-making of the *terroir* in the classroom, and, as such, both are equally responsible for the language, emotions, meanings and cultural connections of the classroom’s “sense of place.” Therefore if no one makes an initial effort to challenge the tolerable landscape and change the place of the classroom, heteronormativity, heterosexism and restricted performances of gender and sexuality will forever remain a key part of the curriculum of the classroom. How can a teacher expect her or his students to be open and honest within their narratives, when their teacher is not honest? If a place is created through the language associated with it, can the classrooms’ *terroir* ever be fully realized if those participating in its making are not honest within their narratives?

I do recognize that in many situations being open about one’s queerness or queer issues in the classroom can feel impossible to the educator in question; this is especially true for those individuals living outside the tolerable. Additionally, there still exists a lot of school and societal-based hatred and intolerance toward queer persons who are visibly out. So I understand that this is not a decision to be taken lightly. For instance, in November of last year, two lesbian mothers were attacked while picking their son up from school in Oshawa, Ontario (CBC News, 2008).

In my experiences of trying to create a classroom around the principles of unconditional hospitality, I have come across what a colleague and I call “gay banter.” This form of queer language that is simultaneously innocent and wicked encompasses phrases such as “that’s so gay” and “you’re such a fag.” I struggle with the more negative aspects of “gay banter,” as I find them to be insulting and hurtful verbal bullying. However I pause to think: Do educators have the right to regulate the openness of the class and its language? If one puts an end to a student’s use of the more negative language of “gay banter,” would this stop this same student from opening up with teachers entirely?

I also question whether my own openness about my sexuality has altered classroom dynamics in a way that has permanently shifted the language surrounding queerness into cautious silence. Passing by a student and teacher talking in between class periods, I overheard the student say: “You know that thing I told you yesterday about Katrine’s lesbian-ness. Don’t tell her, I don’t want her to know.” I wonder if this student would have been comfortable to express his opinion on queer sexualities if I had not been his teacher. As such, I believe that silencing any language in the classroom (positive or negative) will have a damaging effect, and will reinforce mainstreamed tolerable identities both queer and not.

Seeing as the *terroir* of a classroom is created through language, emotions, meanings and cultural connections, the silencing of narratives outside of the normalized discourse can be potentially risky to all those involved, as these silences can generate incomplete places. Within these incomplete places the equilibrium of the classroom *terroir* is in a state of imbalance and seeks to fill itself up with the most accessible language and discourse available. Typically, the most readily available language and discourse that move into the

void are normalized mainstream versions of gender and sexuality; this usually means heteronormativity and tolerable queerness will fill the vacuum.

Therefore, in order to move past what has become the tolerable within the classroom, I believe curriculum theory must go beyond the hidden laws of humanism that mainstream curricular discourse has created and reinforces. For there to be concrete change in the tolerable, educators and students alike must both be invested in the outcome and be hospitable to it. I believe we must push past the edges of these borders through the brackets that enclose them, into spaces that allow for any and all languages, discourses, and performances of identity without fear or judgment clouding them. Only within these radically queer spaces of unknowingness and becoming can heteronormativity and the tolerable in education be truly challenged.

## Chapter 5

### Opening Elevators Doors Redux: Taking Steps Beyond

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

(Eliot, 1944, p. 69)

As the doors slide open one final time, I realize I have come to my destination. Stepping off the elevator, I appreciate the journey I have taken, the places I have seen and the emotions that have uncovered a new awareness. Yet through all of my travels, I realize that the hallways and visages I have seen framed through the doorway of the elevator, are similar to where I first got on. I walk around, looking at people, listening to their conversations and become conscious of the fact that this is where I started. I see echoes of what I thought it once was, yet through the experiences and knowledge I have gained through time I am seeing this place for the first time.

I have decided to start my final chapter with a quote by T. S. Eliot, as, in the way the quote starts, “We shall not cease from exploration,” and when we believe that we are finished we end up again at the beginning. Similar to T. S. Eliot’s colonialist themes used in the conceptualization of “exploring” and “discovering,” the queered discourse has been colonized by its heteronormalization. Trapped and bound by the language of the more common (dominant) discourse, queerness currently yields to its tolerization within schooling. As such I feel that the issues raised in this thesis are not and cannot ever be finished or concluded through only discussing them in such a manner. What I have offered

in this thesis will not produce an end to this problem. Claiming so would be a mistake and would ignore the fact that this is not just a problem in the classroom, but within society at large. In this thesis, I have presented a real-world problem through the theoretical and have, I hope, problematized it, but to call this an end would be very short-sighted.

While I don't believe there will be an easy conclusion to this issue, I do believe that there are steps one can take to confront heterosexism and homophobia in schools, removing the hate and disproportionate power relationship. To conclude this thesis, I will outline some possible ways, in addition to the suggestion to use "everyday queer language," that schools (teachers and administrative staff) could use to complicate and problematize tolerable and deviant performances of school queerness.

First, it is very limiting when schools hold assemblies on issues such as homophobic bullying and have a "token" gay individual come and speak for all LGBTQ persons on the queer "experience"; for them to say that this has solved any problems is unrealistic. (The principal of the school involved with this study stated in an interview that, "a majority of the kids who were in that room will look at some of those issues differently because they were part of that discussion.") Similarly, it is just as restrictive for anyone to say they are bringing *awareness* to "diversity" by celebrating "diversity day," or by wearing pink shirts (the colour of gay, male, solidarity, reappropriated from the pink triangles used to designate gay males in Nazi concentration camps). While both of these ideas seem good steps towards "acceptance" of LGBTQ individuals, I feel that they do the exact opposite, trivializing and shrinking the queer identity/experience into a single embodied person or colour.

I am not overly pessimistic by stating this, just realistic. For I do feel that there can be real change created in schools. I believe that through the act of sharing narratives, language and discourses surrounding queerness, mainstream perceptions can be reconceptualised. Yet there is a long road ahead, and the journey does not end when a school assembly closes or with the wearing of a pink shirt. It is an ongoing process and should be seen as such.

Secondly in order to create a tangible change, educators (queer or not) need to reconceptualise perceptions, shared narratives and discourses surrounding queerness. This can be done in numerous different ways. As Jen Gilbert suggests (2006), one can accomplish this through the use of queer-positive literature or through the introduction of queer(ed) moments into classrooms, while simultaneously welcoming these moments of queerness within ourselves can create this change. As educators existing in a mainstreamed institution, one must be aware that we are complacent in the reproduction of normalcy if we do not actively challenge it. This issue will not go away and, as stated previously, we cannot treat a societal problem on a personal level and expect everything to be resolved.

Additionally through the act of engaging students' emotional reactions to strenuous narratives, educators can disrupt the dominant powers that surround the tolerable. This is best described by Hongyu Wang (2008), when she suggests that through the use of Britzman's (1998) approach of "difficult pedagogies" one can provoke strong emotional responses in students and incite complex conversations. By approaching normally taboo classroom topics such as violence, rape, HIV/AIDS and death, Wang intends to trigger strong emotional responses. Calling these reactions "red eyes," she alludes to the belief that

by using this method, students end up crying as an emotional response to the conversation. As educators, Wang cautions that one should realize that education does not stop with just the cheerful aspects of society. The world we live in is not faultless and should not be expressed as such. If educators limit education in the classroom, it leaves the student with blank areas in their knowledge. These areas become filled by any available means – gossip, mass media or normative discourse(s). While students do experience discomfort during these conversations, the unease can guide one to a greater understanding of the topic at hand.

While some may see this as too extreme an approach to challenging normalcy within classrooms and the education system, I say that the intense moments suggested by Gilbert and Wang are highly valuable. However, if the students don't know that these spaces of difference in sexuality and gender exist, educators must give students the base to provoke these conversations. Educators must recognize their position in the creations of these "regimes of truth" and discourses of normalization. The frames in which gender and sexuality are seen in education must be challenged. This is not something that can be left alone with the expectation that the problem will have solved itself the next time one revisits it. As previously stated, this is a societal problem and will be a long and arduous task and the solution will not end by keeping this revolution limited to the education system.

While one may recognize that change needs to occur, society keeps taking steps back. Recently (April 2010) in Ontario, a new sex education curriculum was shelved, this new curriculum that was set to revise the out of date one and include queer issues. Yet as I listen to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty reaction to religious opponents, "it's become

pretty obvious to us that we should give this a serious rethink”, I recognize that perhaps I should rethink my optimism as well (CBC, 2010).

A warm breeze blows past me and I can't help but smile. Walking home from work, I watch as people enjoy this warm spring.

My pocket vibrates. Reaching in, I grab my cell phone.

“Hello?”

“Hi Katie.” My mom says. “Have you read the newspaper today?”

“No.” I answer hesitantly.

“You should read it. The government is putting a stop to the new sex education curriculum, the one that includes gay and lesbian issues.”

“*What!?!?*”

I can't hear the rest of the conversation. Blood rushes to my head and my vision narrows.

*Nothing will ever change.*

Images of other (queered) school curriculums stopped before their implementation flow through my thoughts.

Hanging up with my mom, I open the front door to my apartment building. As I walk into the elevator and press my floor's number my world blurs and my cheeks get wet.

I look up with red eyes.



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