See Me, Hear Me ... Queerly Visible: Conversations about family and school with non-heterosexual parents and their children

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DVD (Included)

We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience (PowerPoint presentation)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the schooling experiences of non-heterosexual parents and their children. It incorporates a multi-layered narrative and arts-influenced methodology to interrogate issues surrounding silence and queer visibility within a school setting. Leveraging visual arts and performance as both a means of data generation and data representation, this research illustrates how dominant cultural practices and narratives surrounding school and family perpetuate heteronormative ideology, while excluding and silencing non-heterosexual parents and their children.

These claims are based on analysis of schooling and family stories as represented by parents and children. The stories were generated by employing a multi-layered narrative arts-based research methodology that was derived from narrative inquiry, arts-informed research methods, and a/r/tography. Using queer theory as a theoretical frame and at times a foil, the dissertation problematizes the normalization of school and family both within the school system and the larger community. This research employs queer theory to question and disrupt assumptions about non-heterosexual parents and the queer families they construct.

The dissertation rests on the invisibility of non-heterosexual identities both within a school and family context and interrogates what happens when school life and home life are incongruent to one another. The stories represented within this thesis provide a window into the experience of parents and children who on a daily basis run the risk of not being "seen" by their teachers, school administrators, and the broader school community.

Signed declaration

I declare that:

• this thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university;

• to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.

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Terrah Keener

Acknowledgements

Dedication

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my partner Pattie LaCroix. Her unwavering support was the light that kept me going during those darkest hours of writing. Pattie you gave me the gift of time; time to discover myself as an academic and as an artist. Thank you. I also want to honour my sons Ellis and Damen who are the heart and soul of my work.

In addition I also dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother, S. Patricia Keener, who was a career educator and who reminded me every day, through her actions, that we can make a difference and it is possible to change the world.

Prologue

The conversation begins …

In the Beginning … after the birth of my oldest son, I had the good fortune to become part of a "mothers group" that consisted of other lesbians who were, as I was, experiencing motherhood for the first time. We would meet weekly and share stories about breastfeeding, the perils of interrupted sleep, the pros and cons of cloth diapers, who was napping and who wasn't, when we could drink wine again, stroller maintenance … the list of mindless topics was endless. And amid all of this we feasted, mostly on baked goods and chocolate – anything to keep our sleep-deprived bodies in an upright position.

Among the topics of the mundane, the issue of school emerged. I was astounded: as we were celebrating milestones like smiling and sitting up, out of the blue I would be asked, "What are you going to do about school?" My world was still an hour-by-hour struggle; school seemed ages away. Yet these women, these mothers, these lesbian mothers, were already apprehensive about how the school system was going to welcome their children, our children, our families.

This topic resurfaced often; it was not going away. I wondered if my partner and I were being too cavalier by not obsessing about our son's educational experience, which was still five years away. Yet as our son turned one, then two and three, the conversations around school only intensified and a tone of urgency and panic began to accompany these discussions. Inevitably, the idea of home schooling, and/or alternative private schools began to take on some appeal with many of the mothers. I began to make inquiries. I spoke to parents who had children in the public school system. I asked them if they were aware of children from same-sex families in their children's school. The usual response was "no" and was inevitably followed by: "The teachers are great, I have liked *most* of them" or "My child's teacher is nice to all of the parents", or "You'll have no problems, the teachers are really good at making sure to treat everyone the same." These seemingly benign exchanges between myself and these parents left me stunned; there appeared to be no real effort to acknowledge and or incorporate difference. I began to get an indication of the silence and denial that might be ahead for our children. I had no confidence that any thought was being given to how children with non-heterosexual parents were going to be included in the public school system. I began to see that there was a real threat that my son's family experience would be driven into the shadows of sameness. I didn't want our son to be treated like everyone else, I wanted his difference to be recognized, not swept

under the rug. Panic began to form in a tight little ball in the centre of my chest. I was now feeling the same angst-ridden panic that my sister lesbian mothers had been expressing for the past three years. How could I have been so complacent? Yes, sleep deprivation probably played some role. However, I was now "getting it."

In my admittedly informal enquiries, I discovered that nobody, specifically teachers and school administrators, had ever asked queer parents, let alone their children, how they were experiencing school. It was as if their, our, experiences were of no consequence. I worried about my son's future – I realized that we had to be prepared to swim upstream in the current of homophobia and heteronormativity. The conversation that began with the seemingly innocuous question—"what are you going to do about school?"—catapulted me into a more formal inquiry, which became my dissertation, exploring the schooling experiences of non-heterosexual parents and their children.

Chapter 1
Introduction: What is the Story?

Experience is complex and multi-dimensional. Yet, when one is identified with a marginalized population there is a risk that others will create a story about your experience, based on their assumptions about who you are. The consequence, potentially, is that that story can become *the* story that defines you in the eyes of others. Chimamanda Adichie (2009) describes this as the "danger of the single story" (p.4). She argues that "to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (Adichie, 2009, p.4). Adichie illustrates her "single story" in terms of how North Americans have created a story about her through their perceptions and assumptions about the "African" experience. Adichie (2009) warns us that "The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (p. 5). Once that "story" has been told and adopted as a "truth," it can be very hard to unravel it, or to retell it in another way. This research seeks to tell many stories in a variety of ways to challenge teachers, school administrators, and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) community to question the stories they have created about non-heterosexual parents, their children, family, and school.

This project began as a simple question from a group of lesbian mothers: "What are you going to do about school?" This question sparked a conversation, which then led to further conversations about same-sex parented families and, as time went on, these discussions created more questions. It became a conversation without end. Yet these conversations rocketed me on a most incredible journey that allowed me to continue to interrogate "What are you going to do about school?" with people who were themselves grappling with this question while at the same time engaging with the school system. The stories that emerged through my conversations with parents that did not identify as heterosexual or as I have termed, non-heterosexual parents[1], and their children about school were emotional, insightful, and at times cautious and cynical. I was honoured to have been allowed entry into their lives as they wrestled with the complexities of being a non-heterosexual family within a school system and a community that has been built upon, and actively maintains a heteronormative[2] ideology (Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009;

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[1] The use of *non-heterosexual* is further explained on page 13.
[2] Heteronormative refers to an attitude that maintains that heterosexuality is the "norm".

D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006; Burgess, 2005; Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Passy, 2005; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Sears, 1999).

As is reflected in this dissertation, there were many points of light that altered my trajectory at different moments in my journey, leading me to combine emerging methodologies in both the representation and analysis of my research. This dissertation integrates the spoken word, visual art, and performance to create spaces for the conversation and stories to be heard, seen, experienced, and contemplated. I originally set out to investigate how school practices, including language, identity, social inclusion, pedagogy, curriculum and policies, inform school climate and affect the schooling experiences of non-heterosexual parents and their children. What this project morphed into is an interrogation of the issues surrounding family, non-heterosexual identity, parenting, and social inclusion within the public school system, (Primary to Grade 12).

Genét Kozik-Rosabal (2000) states that every day queer parents and their children are:

> rendered invisible through curricula, school policies, social events, students clubs, and general conversation. Under the guise of treating everyone equally, educators persist in believing that each child has an equal chance to learn in an equally safe environment. Nothing could be farther from the truth (p. 380).

Students bring with them a host of differences, ranging from varied learning styles to diverse cultural backgrounds and experience (McLaren, 2007; Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Greene, 2003; Sears, 1999). Treating all students as if they all have the same needs, educationally and/or emotionally, is a conscious act of negating their experience. Hulsebosch, Koerner, and Ryan (1999), conducted a study in which they interviewed six educators who had been identified by lesbian parents as "responsive to them (lesbian parents)" (p. 185) and/or had a reputation for being inclusive. One teacher was "floored" (p. 185) that she had been identified as "responsive" because she "treats everyone the same" (p. 186) and another said she was surprised because she just didn't "make a big issue of it" (p. 186). In each case, the teachers were surprised that they had been singled out as being supportive because in reality they had not acknowledged the different family constructs nor had they actively attempted to make the lesbian parents or their children feel welcome. The teacher's silence was being interpreted by the parents as support and since the teachers were not hostile to them (the parents) or the children, it was perceived as a welcoming environment.

It is well established that schools reflect dominant society and perpetuate "ideological and political imperatives of the group in power" (Jeltova & Fish, 2005, p. 21) and this is accomplished by framing "knowledge" through the lens of prevailing groups and systematically ignoring the experience of groups outside of the governing ideology (Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009; D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006; Burgess, 2005; Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Passy, 2005; Temple, 2005; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Sears, 1999). As such, Temple (2005) notes, "schools have been called one of the major heterosexist institutions" (p.274). Heterosexism is defined as the "pervasive and systemic belief that heterosexuality is the normal, inevitable and true form of human sexuality" (Airton, 2009, p. 135). As a result, heterosexism works as an omnipresent agent to support and promote heterosexuality (Temple, 2005; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Warner 1999a, 1999b, 1993; Seidman, 1996; Khayatt, 1995; Jennings, 1994; Rich, 1980). Seidman (1996) describes heterosexuality as "a social and political organizing principle" (p. 9), while Adrienne Rich (1980) has advocated that heterosexuality be "recognized and studied as a political institution" (p.637). Judith Butler (1990) has adopted Adrienne Rich's term "compulsory heterosexuality" meaning that society is ideologically framed by heterosexuality. Butler's (1993) discussion on citationality furthers her notion of compulsory heterosexuality by describing how we as a society, for example, perpetuate sexual and gender "norms" by drawing upon established sexual and gender references to interpret our world and, in turn, inform our practices. In the classroom this can play out in a multitude of ways. For example, Kathleen Quinlivan and Shane Town (1999) describe three heteronormative practices that schools actively engage in to maintain the status quo or validate compulsory heterosexuality. They are;

> . . . maintenance of silence surrounding sexualities in general and homosexuality in particular, the pathologization of (homo) sexuality, and the policing of gender boundaries to ensure that young men and women adhere to *expected* and *appropriate* gender behaviour (p. 510).

Quinlivan and Town (1999) emphasize that all three practices are interrelated and are enacted, and reflected, both in the classroom and in the curricula in the interest of maintaining heteronormative gender and sexual behaviours. One does not have to scratch the surface too deeply to uncover examples that reflect these practices. For example, the statement "boys will be boys" is often heard in the school yard and in the classroom as a means for excusing "aggressive" male behaviour. But, by dismissing seemingly inappropriate behaviour we are both perpetuating and rewarding stereotypical male behaviour, and we are engaging in creating a "single story" about boys. Consequently this

simple and often thought benign statement "boys will be boys" draws a line in the sand delineating gender boundaries and acceptable gendered behaviours which can then effectively silence those boys and girls who do not fit neatly within those borders. As well, when teachers and school administrators do not address homophobic name calling such as "faggot" and "that's so gay," they are sending the very strong message that homophobia is acceptable, silencing all those who dare to transgress those unspoken sexuality boundaries (Airton, 2009; Pendleton Jimenez, 2009; Athanases & Comar, 2008; Lindsay, Perlesz, Brown, McNair, de Vaus & Pitts, 2006; Clarke, Kitzinger & Potter, 2004). Kozik-Rosabal (2000) asserts that "schools enforce and reproduce the vestiges of a heterosexist, patriarchal ideology that negates the existence of many people's lives, especially those in gay families" (p. 371). In order to explore and make sense of the schooling experiences of parents and children who do not fit into heteronormative categories related to gender, sexuality, and family, it is imperative to challenge the silence and make visible the seemingly invisible.

LGBTQ, lesbian, gay, queer … which is it?

When beginning this research I grappled at length with the language, or descriptors, that I would use to describe the participants and the families that they have constructed. The politics surrounding sexual identity is extremely personal and contentious. Diana Fuss describes identity as a process of expression: "Identity always contains the specter of non-identity within it, the subject is always divided and identity is always purchased at the price of the exclusion of the Other" (in Seidman, 1993, p.130). Eve Sedgwick (1990) explains identity as a progression of identifying *with* and *against*, meaning that the exploration of sexual identity can be fraught with loss and contradiction which can make it challenging to find one's place. Glorianne Leck (2000) warns that "labels about sexual identity can be dangerously narrow and unhelpful in relating to the whole unique individual" (p. 326), which in turn can lead to the creation of a "single story" regarding non-heterosexual identity.

From a personal perspective, I have had my own internal battles around labels such as gay, lesbian, dyke, and queer. When I first came out as a lesbian in the early 1980s in New York City, the lesbian community was struggling to get out from underneath the shadow of "gay," which represented a predominantly white male experience. Although lesbian was preferred over gay it was quickly being replaced by the more politically radical identity of dyke. As a young woman coming out I embraced *dyke* because I felt it gave me

strength and screamed to the world that I was not part of the heterosexist status quo which at the time was very important to me. In my social and political circles in the 1980s, the debate around the use of gay, lesbian and queer was already going strong. As part of the Womanews[3] collective in the early 1980s, literally hundreds of hours were devoted to language and identity, focusing on terminology that did not define women in terms of male identity. Consequently expressions such as dyke and queer were being embraced. Although I identified myself as a dyke and a queer, I eventually began to distance myself from the collective because a dogma was emerging that defined who could legitimately call herself a dyke and/or a queer. I became disheartened, and somewhat disillusioned, because I believed that decisions regarding identity were deeply personal and should not be laden with constraints. I found this stifling.

Living in New York City in the 1980s was a very heady time and AIDS was dominating the social and political scene. I watched as AIDS claimed life after life, seemingly unchecked as it ravaged the gay male community and decimated the arts and theatre community of which I was a member. As I watched my friends and colleagues literally waste away and die, I turned my sadness, fear, and anger to AIDS activism. In 1986, I joined The American Run for the End of AIDS (AREA) a 10,000-mile run around the perimeter of the United States by one man, Brent Nicholson Earle. AREA's goal was to raise the visibility of AIDS and to help raise money for local AIDS organizations in the States and communities that we ran through. We stopped in hundreds of small towns and large cities across America. The stories that people shared spoke of prejudice, isolation, and sad lonely deaths. I was witness to a very heartbreaking and angry moment in our history.

When I was on the road with AREA, we adapted our language around sexual identity according to the "norms" of our host community. We were acutely aware of the social and political ramifications of using terms such as gay, lesbian, dyke, and queer because in many communities these words were associated with hatred and violence. For example, in a small town in Montana we attended an AIDS fundraising event at a local pizza parlor; the owner, a gay man, covered the windows of his restaurant with brown paper to ensure that nobody could see in and shoot at us (with guns). The "community" at that event called themselves homosexual, and the word "gay" was only said in a whisper. The fear was palpable. In respect to our host community, when we were with them, we consciously also used the term homosexual and avoided terms such as lesbian or gay. I'm

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[3] Womanews was a radical feminist newspaper that began in 1979 in New York City and was run by the Womanews collective, which is still in existence today.

not sure I would make that same decision today. However, those experiences confirmed my conviction that sexual identity is deeply personal and I cannot assume to understand, and more importantly judge, how people choose to identify or disclose, or not, their sexual identity. My experience as a *dyke* living in New York City was shaped by the social and political landscape of a metropolis that embraced freedom, anger and outrageousness. One could not help but feel that New York City was the centre of the queer movement. But as I experienced life outside the city, and met people who were carving out a "queer" life in small American towns across the United States, I came to appreciate and embrace the fluidity of labels. What has stayed with me over the past 25 years since the American Run is that how I choose to describe or identify myself is sinuous, and as I grow older I do not feel that I need to justify my rationale for using certain labels or for even using certain labels interchangeably.

Yet, fast forward to this dissertation and 2012 and the debate enveloping identity and language still rages. From my time in New York City to my life now as a mother, a spouse, and an academic living in the conservative province of Nova Scotia, Canada, I am once again pondering how to express my identity. But I now have the added responsibility of establishing terms in which to describe the experiences and identity of others. My first impulse was, of course, to consult the literature. This exercise was akin to the opening of the proverbial Pandora's Box. I could wallpaper my house three times over with the vast amount of writing and paper devoted to the topic of language and sexual identity categories. Yet as I waded through Butler (2004b, 1993, 1990), Halberstam (2005), Jagose (1996), Sears (2004, 1999, 1992), Warner (2005, 1999a, 1999b, 1993), Sedgwick (1995), Foucault (1978), Khayatt (1995), Silin (1997), and Ahmed (2006a, 2006b) to name a few, I distilled the argument down to two, albeit divergent points of view: 1.) Sexual identity categories such as lesbian and gay are important and should be leveraged to disrupt the heterosexist status quo, and 2.) Sexual identity categories should be blurred and terms such as queer should be leveraged to disrupt the heterosexist status quo. Obviously this is a highly contentious and contested debate, and I do not mean to simplify the arguments put forth by scholars whom I respect and admire, but it is not in the scope of this dissertation to expand this debate. Yet, in order to be able to write about my research it was vital that I incorporate consistent terms to act as descriptors for my participants and the families that they have created. Many of the participants identified as lesbian and gay and only a few referred to themselves as queer. I felt it was cumbersome to incorporate all of these labels. As a compromise I integrated the expression *non-heterosexual* because the overwhelming consensus by all of the participants was that they were *not heterosexual*, thus the term *non-*

heterosexual resonated with me. Inserting *non-heterosexual* as a descriptor allowed me space to depict one facet of the participant's identity; but I would be naive to assume that my participants describe themselves solely in terms of their sexuality.

As I experimented with the expression of *non-heterosexual* I became dissatisfied with it as my only term. It felt one dimensional; it lacked tension. *Non-heterosexual* needed a foil. Consequently I incorporated *queer* as my other descriptor. Annamarie Jagose (1996) describes queer as a term that "questions conventional understanding of sexual identity by deconstructing the categories, oppositions and equations that sustain them" (p.97). Michael Warner (1999a, 1999b) extends this discussion by claiming that queer troubles or disrupts normal; normal meaning heteronormative practice and ideology. Patrick Dilly (1999) says that "to queer something is to analyze a situation or a text to determine the relationship between sexuality, power, gender, and conception of normal and deviant, insider and outsider" (p. 458). Living and creating outside the boundaries of the status quo has become an important "place" of exploration, as such a central theme throughout this dissertation is the disruption of "normal" and the display of difference. To this end I integrated *queer* and *non-heterosexual* as descriptors for the participants in this research. Identity labels have the potential to unite and to divide at the same time (Warner, 1999a, 1993; Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990), although *non-heterosexual* may feel like a benign expression as compared to the more edgy term *queer,* it still has the same power as *queer* to divide people and experience. Though my reasons for using *non-heterosexual* and *queer* are different, I do use them interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

The other term I had to grapple with was "family." Again a definitive definition of family, like sexual identity categories, is an expression that is debated in family and sociology of the family literature. For a time I toyed with the concept of "chosen family" as described by Kath Weston. Weston (1990) portrays the *chosen family* as a family construct that is not solely defined by biology but is also inclusive of close and purposeful non-biological relationships. But as I began writing, that term did not work for me. It seemed clunky and inappropriate. Upon reflection I decided to remain with the term *family*[4] simply because it was the descriptor that was consistently used by all of the participants. As a concession I made the decision to add either *non-heterosexual* or *queer* in front of *family* to signify that I was referring to a family structure outside of the heterosexual "norm."

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[4] The concept of family is more fully explored in Chapter 2.

Reading this thesis

This research was designed with three main audiences in mind: teachers, school administrators, and the queer community. This may appear ambitious, foolhardy, and/or too broad based. I agree there is the potential risk of diluting the research text in my attempt to "speak" to three disparate audiences; yet, by mixing my method of data generation, presentation, and analysis, there is something for everyone. I made the conscious decision not to identify when I am speaking to one audience over the other. As well, there are times that I am speaking to mixed audiences. My hope is that components of my dissertation will have a life beyond its covers and at that time I will specifically target particular audiences. I discuss this in more depth in Chapter 5.

This dissertation is comprised of mixed methods and media that I have leveraged for the generation, representation, and analysis of my research. As is outlined in Chapter 3, while I initially explored and designed a narrative inquiry, as my work continued, it became apparent I needed to expand beyond the traditions of narrative. Once I opened up my inquiry, and my mind, I was led to the work of arts-informed research and a/r/tography. Stephanie Springgay and Rita Irwin (2005) captured my imagination by describing a/r/tography as a research practice that allows for an academic and artistic generation, representation, and analysis of educational research.

With a/r/tography I found a home for myself in which I could dwell both as an artist and as an academic. Springgay and Irwin (2005) discuss that the act/ivity of interweaving art and text is not to analyze or describe the art, but rather to provide space for "conversation *with*, *in*, and *through*" (p.899), thus allowing art and text to intermingle yet providing space for deeper "reading" into the art and the words. This has greatly informed how I have structured this work, both in its conception and representation. To start, I have included my personal journey through a series of *ASIDE's* that are inserted before the major chapters. Each *ASIDE* are a means for me to contextualize the motivation and at times, the content that propels this research. I grappled with how to title these autobiographical pieces and I chose the term Aside because it reflects a theatre device that is leveraged to communicate the interior monologue of a character to the audience, thus providing added depth and insight about the character's actions and motivation. For example the first *ASIDE* "The conversation begins …" provides a snap shot into a series of events in my life that was the catalyst for this research. Each *ASIDE* presents a different facet of my experience as a lesbian, a queer, a parent, an academic, and an artist as I traverse the turbulent waters of my research. As well throughout the dissertation I have

inserted images from the exhibit, 'We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience'[5]. The images are not always directly referenced on the page they appear but provide the reader with an additional perspective in which to *see* and *read* the text.

In Chapter 2, *A Frame*, I establish queer theory as the theoretical foundation in which this research resides. Using queer theory as a frame and as a theoretical lens, I discuss the social and political underpinnings of family and school. The institution of family and school dominate our everyday lives and in this chapter I attempt to disrupt the heterocentric monolithic stature that permeates both family and school. While queer theory provides a theoretical springboard for this discussion, I also challenge the reader to not allow queer theory to limit how we perceive or contemplate the actions of the queer parents in this research.

In Chapter 3, *Queer Storied Lives*, I outline my multi-layered narrative and arts-informed research methodology. In this chapter, I describe my impetus for developing a research methodology that was appropriate for drawing out the particulars of the stories of my participants. To begin, I introduce the notion of research as fiction; thus creating an opening for establishing research texts as an interplay between text and reader (Leavy, 2009; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, and Bickel, 2006; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005; Burns, 2004; Thomas, 2004; Springgay & Irwin, 2004). I then establish narrative inquiry as my base method, which is shaped by elements of arts-informed research methodology and a/r/tography, establishing each as a method and as a practice. Narrative inquiry, arts-informed research methods, and a/r/tography, each have a broad reach with many points of entrance; but, through each I have carved out my own path to help me to excavate and sculpt my data to be seen, read, and heard.

My data is represented in two separate sections; *Interlude Part 1, See Me: Stories Displayed* and *Interlude Part 2, Hear Me: Stories Told, Stories Performed*. Building upon my multi-layered narrative and arts-influenced methodology I have incorporated both a visual arts component and a performance piece. I use the practice of community art, through facilitated workshops, to generate visual data about the experience of creating non-heterosexual family constructs within a heterocentric society. The art generated from this research activity culminated in a community art exhibition, 'We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience' which was exhibited at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As established in Chapter 2, queering family became a focal point for this research, and through a visual medium the participants were able to explore their experiences and feelings around creating and living as a family that challenges the heterocentric status quo.

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[5] The exhibit, 'We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience', is described in Chapter 3.

The art work generated for this exhibit is presented through a series of photographs included in this dissertation. As well, I have included a slide presentation of the exhibition and a copy of the catalogue that I produced and published for the exhibit.

In *Interlude 2, Hear Me: Stories Told, Stories Performed*, I present my interview data as a performance script, 'Queerly Inside and Out in School . . . conversations.' Inspired by verbatim theatre and ethnotheatre, the script was developed by weaving together segments of my transcribed audio interviews. The interviews centred on the schooling experiences of queer parents and their children in Nova Scotia, Canada. The performance is presented as a series of conversations and the dialogue and the characters are taken verbatim from the transcripts. Images from the exhibition 'We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience' are incorporated into the set. The script is included in its entirety.

In Chapter 4, *What are the stories?: A discussion,* I identify *queer visibility* as the overarching theme for both the art and the performance. Queer visibility within the framework of this research is described as an act of establishing and maintaining a queer visible presence in and out of school. The interrogation lies in the questioning as to *how,* and possibly, *why* this desire for a queer visible presence exists. Within queer visibility, emerged two other sites of inquiry--the use and positioning of homophobic language and the schooling stories as told by the children. The discussion interlaces the particulars between the script and the art work.

In my final chapter, Chapter 5, *Now What?* I present a discussion about what the parents in the interviews, and as represented in the script, identified as important next steps for schools. In this section, I re-address the original research question, "What are you going to do about school?" This segment echoes each parent's desire and hope for a more inclusive school community for their children and for their families. I end with a discussion of how and where I want to take this work. I believe that this research has the potential to be a powerful tool for promoting a more open and inclusive space for queer parents and their children within a school setting.

My experiences as a lesbian, a queer, a mother, a spouse, a sister, a daughter, an academic, and an artist have influenced my actions, my beliefs, and my work. Through this work, I have been humbled by the stories that have been shared with me and I recognize the enormous work that there is yet to be done.

Am I queer enough?

I remember the moment when I realized that I was pregnant. It was not seeing the little plus sign on the home pregnancy test strip and it was not the first ultrasound where we saw our son's heart beating for the first time. It was one morning as I was brushing my teeth. I was five months pregnant and showing. I looked into the mirror and I saw a pregnant woman. It was the first time that I did not see a lesbian, a dyke, a queer in the mirror. Long before I came out, and long before I knew what lesbian meant, my reflection always looked *queer* to me. This morning was different; my reflection was of a pregnant woman. Who was this pregnant woman?

Being pregnant was my first experience of truly being in my "femaleness." In women's washrooms, I have always felt like an imposter when looking in the mirror to check my hair or, on those odd occasions, fix my lipstick. I do not consider myself "butch;" in fact my partner likes to imagine herself in that role. I am not androgynous in appearance; quite the opposite: I have a stereotypical female body, wide hips, and large breasts. But until I was pregnant I had not really been present in my female body. I realized that my female body always felt a bit queer … not really me. And suddenly here I was five months pregnant and experiencing my femaleness in a very primal way. It was surreal. Was I still queer?

As I looked down at my very pregnant belly there was no denying I was female. It felt as though I was experiencing being female for the very first time. I felt oddly free. Actually odd is the operative word, it felt odd not to feel totally self conscious about my body. A pregnant body does not need explanation, nor can you hide a pregnant body, and I have always hid my body. I was either not thin enough, fit enough, fem enough or butch enough – there was always something my body was lacking … falling short. However with a big pregnant belly, all of that suddenly fell away. It was not a conversation I have ever had with other lesbian birth mothers. In fact, it is not a conversation I have ever had with anyone. How does one explain that at the ripe age of 38, I was experiencing my femaleness for the very first time? It was not a topic that I wanted to explore with queer friends, because I was not prepared to explore this too deeply. And with my straight friends I was sure they would listen politely and then ask: "Do all lesbians deep down think they are men?"

I read an article in 'People' magazine about a trans man who had kept his female reproductive organs so that he and his female partner, who was not able to conceive, could have a baby. I would have liked to have had that conversation with him. I think I probably could relate on some level with his diaspora about gender and childbirth.

What I found most fascinating as I embarked on the last four months of my pregnancy was how people responded to me. To start, I was visible. I had never been so visible; at first it was uncomfortable because pregnant bodies are open to a lot of public scrutiny. Complete strangers feel that they can comment on your state of gestation by offering all sorts of free advice and insights as to the gender and weight of your baby. Men and women opened doors for me, offered me their seats on buses and generally just tried to accommodate my condition, my pregnant condition. It was kind of fun. I have never been viewed as someone who needed a seat or the door opened for them; you do feel oddly special. I felt a little guilty. I felt that if they knew I was queer they probably would not be so considerate. I felt as though I was hiding. It was a weird closet to be in. What I soon realized was that they were not really seeing me; they were only seeing the pregnant belly. I could have been in leather chaps, chains and shaved head and I honestly don't think anyone would have made the connection that I might be queer. Pregnancy equaled heterosexual. Shit, was I still queer?

It became an obsession: I made a point to come out to every Tom, Dick and Jane who spoke to me. I came out to the grocery clerk, the cook at the diner, the gas station attendant, the boy who delivered our takeout. It was important. I needed to be visible on my terms. My pregnant belly was not going to render my queerness invisible. When Michael Warner talks about acts of heterosexual assimilation in terms of queers birthing and raising children, I can only think he assumes that lesbians who give birth actually bask in heterosexual privilege or somehow have entry into the heterosexual world of procreation. That's not my experience. My pregnancy from conception, through gestation, and even birth, in no way mirrored that of my heterosexual sisters. I think the most profound difference was I suffered angst over the "wonder" of my femaleness; whereas my heterosexual female friends described their pregnancies as a time that they felt completely present in their bodies. Although I did truly enjoy the miracle of being pregnant, I did feel a loss of identity. My experience was not heterosexual and my experience was not queer. I felt queer in many senses of the word; but, was I *queer enough* was what left me pondering my pregnant belly.

CHAPTER 2

A Frame

SNAP SHOTS, REMARKS AND SONG

These snapshots and remarks are bits about the everyday life of our family. The snaps were taken after a canoe trip to explore the area we have recently made our home. The remarks are all Bruno's. Some are funny and some are embarrassing, but they are often a window into his thoughts about our world.

The lullaby "Everything Possible" by Fred Small, we first heard performed by "The Flirtations" in the early nineties in Halifax. I was very moved by it and thought it would be a wonderful piece to sing to a child if only I could be a father; which at the time seemed impossible. I sang it to Bruno the first night he spent with us. Two weeks later he sang it to us.

Photographs by Bruno Callahan-Cross, Thomas and Tim Callahan-Cross

Text by - Bruno Callahan-Cross

This research examines the stories of non-heterosexual parents and their children as they create, re-define, and find their way, within and through, two exceptionally political and contentious institutions … family and school. It could be observed that by identifying as non-heterosexual, queer parents are re-configuring the image of family by just existing (Brandzel, 2005; Epstein, 2005; Hicks, 2005; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Ryan & Martin, 2000; Sears, 1999). Yet, depending on your orientation to the issue of "queer" families, one could also argue that non-heterosexual parents are not re-defining family but emulating heteronormative conventions of family (Boellstorff, 2007; Edelman, 2004; Warner, 1999a, 1999b). In fact, it is this oppositional tension that fuels heated debates within the queer community regarding the political intentions and/or motivations of queers who choose to create families that include children (Prasad, 2007; Brandzel, 2005; Epstein, 2005; Warner, 2005, 1999a, 1999b; Edelman, 2004; Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh, 2004; Butler, 2002).

This debate draws on Michael Warner's critique of normal. Warner (1993, 1999a, 1999b, 2005) argues that the gay and lesbian political movement is becoming myopic in its goal of same-sex marriage, "the lesbian and gay movement threatens to become an instrument for the normalization of queer life. Nowhere is that more visible than in the presentation of the gay marriage issue" (Warner, 1999a, p. 80). It is not a stretch to assume that Warner might extend this same analysis to queers who chose to include children in their families. Yet, I contend that to be queer and to be a parent is not about striving for normalcy but about resisting hetero-normativity. In this chapter I will expose key elements of this debate by interrogating issues of family, schooling, and "normative" ideology and practices through the lens of queer theory and storying as a means to support the theoretical framework from which this research rests.

Why queer theory?

I have wrestled with queer theory. It has both challenged me and inspired me. Just as I have been awed by certain queer theorists, I have also fought with them. Yet through my struggles with queer theory it became increasingly clear and important that this work reside within a queer theoretical frame. I have applied the aspects of queer theory that fit with this research and I have also stretched other facets of queer theory in an attempt to broaden the conversation on what is *queer* in queer theory, a debate that has been widely written about (Warner, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Grace, Hill, Johnston, & Lewis, 2004; Wilchins, 2004; Glick, 2003; Hall, 2003; Dilley, 1999). As I established in the previous chapter, the use of *queer* in the context of this dissertation is purposeful and is imbedded within the text to characterize a state of consciousness. My use of the term queer builds upon a number of critiques of queer, beginning with Warner's (1993) description of queer as a rejection of "a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (p. xxvi). Warner positions *queer* not as an adjective but more as a verb, an action or act; the act of resisting "regimes of normal." While Grace, Hill, Johnston, and Lewis (2004) define queer as:

> a shifting and changing way of knowing the world and being in it. There is a push-and-pull to Queer since it simultaneously depends on and at the same time rejects fixed identities, subjectivities and communities (p. 303).

Grace et al. (2004) describe queer as a way of *being* in the world, not as a certain type of *being* in the world. This is a very important distinction, and one that Sara Ahmed (2006a, 2006b) deeply interrogates in her work on "orientations." Ahmed (2006b) describes queer

as a "spatial formation … bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space" (p. 67), and explains that how we reside in a space is more accurately described as an orientation, and "orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed" (Ahmed, 2006a, p. 545). Ahmed (2006b) forwards her argument that sexual orientation is not solely determined "by object choice, but as involving differences in one's very relation to the world – that is, in how one 'faces' the world or is directed toward it" (p. 68). Queer is active, queer is a state of being that influences our actions. Although I am drawn to the queer agency that these descriptions are advocating, I am by no means so naïve as to think that this agency does not come with huge risks. Inherent in each of these illustrations of queer is a rejection or a moving away from the dominant culture, or as Warner (1993) so succinctly said "resistance to regimes of the normal." "Normal" as a concept has a very broad reach and there are varying discussions of what constitutes normal. Warner (1999a, 1999b) describes normal in relation to heterosexuality only in the sense that "heterosexual desire and romance are thought to be the very core of humanity" (1999a, p. 47), thus heterosexuality is considered normal or the norm and all other ways of being are measured against this established norm. Amy Villarejo (2005) takes the concept of normal a bit further and describes it as "normativity": "What I really mean is the terror of the normative; in its most benign form it appears as a bullying instance toward obedience to social law and hierarchy" (p. 69). While Ahmed (2006b) explains:

> The normative dimension can be redescribed in terms of the straight body, a body that appears "in line." Things seem "straight" (on the vertical axis), when they are "in line," which means when they are aligned with other lines (p. 66).

The "other lines" can be assumed to represent dominant discourse and culture, and to come "in line" means to be in alignment with the dominant culture. Queer theory advocates for bodies to move away from the "straight line," or "tarry with the normative" (Villarejo, 2005, p. 70). Elisa Glick (2003) describes queer theory as "denaturalizing discourses, deconstructing power relations by asserting the incoherence and contingency of identity categories and cultural regimes of normal" (p. 123). Donald Hall (2003) suggests that queer theory "asks us to recognize and grapple with the implications of the multiplicity and variability of identities … and not only *among* but also *within* us all" (p. 176). Dilley (1999) expands this:

> Queer theory is not simply about the studying of people whose sex lives are not heterosexual, or even the positionalities of those people: at its core, it is about questioning the presumptions, values, and viewpoints from those positions (marginal and central), especially those that normally go unquestioned" (p. 462).

What resonates for me is this notion that queer theory can be a very personal and temporal journey into how we position and reposition ourselves within the dominant culture. It can be a coming to or a going away from, or a "push-and-pull" as we "grapple" with the "multiplicity and variability of identity."

The positioning of queer and queer theory against dominant culture is contentious, and in fact, herein lay my challenge and consequently my struggle with queer theory. One of the ostensibly defining tenets of queer theory is the debate concerning liberation politics and practices versus acts of assimilation (Somerville, 2005; Warner, 2005, 1999a, 1999b, 1993; Villarejo, 2005; Halperin, 2003). Assimilation and liberation politics is housed in the notion that:

> stigmatized groups, gays and lesbians, were always tempted to believe that the way to overcome stigma was to win acceptance by the dominant culture, rather than change the self-understanding of that culture" (Warner, 1999a, p. 50).

Consequently, queer theory's rallying cry is that queer bodies will only be able to shift dominant culture and discourses by striving for *liberation* from the binds of binary categories, a moving away from the "straight line." Whereas certain acts, *act* being defined as "to carry out or perform any unit or sequence of social behaviour" (Jary & Jary, 2000, p. 4), are perceived as aligning with or assimilating with dominant culture and are thus discounted and not considered queer. To a certain extent I agree with this line of thinking but, I see an inherent danger in queer theory if its framework is leveraged as a means to judge who is queer and who is not. In essence it sets up a new binary: liberation/assimilation: *liberation* being the queer ideal and *assimilation* being seen as performing normative or socially sanctioned, heterosexist-based behaviours, or non-queer. Youdell (2010) describes this as a juncture where "queer lives are valorous over gay and lesbian lives which are positioned as heteronormative" (p. 88).

Queer theory has historically challenged binary systems that hegemonic discourses engage to categorize people (Somerville, 2005; Warner, 2005, 1999a, 1999b,1993; Johnson, 2004; Wilchins, 2004; Hall, 2003; Kirsch, 2000; Jagose, 1996). Queer theory clearly postulates that "fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power" (Gamson & Moon, 2004, p. 50). Dilley (1999) states that "queer theory rejects such binary distinctions as arbitrary, determined and defined by those with social power" (p. 460). The binary equation is a rubric of opposites, and when there is binary opposition, one part of the equation is "usually marked in a negative way" (Fairyington, 2004, p. 33), meaning that "binary terms are perceived as hierarchical, with one term valued (or 'privileged') and the other devalued (or 'marginalized')" (McPhail,

2004 p. 5). The binary system of categorization draws upon a structuralist orientation to semiotics. Binary opposites grew out of Saussure's work on signification. Saussure believed that "meaning is structured as a relation of difference between elements, that a word has its meaning not because of what it refers to, but because it does not mean the same as other words" (Innes, 2005, p. 513). Working from a notion of essentialism, binary opposites define the *natural* as juxtaposed to the *unnatural*. For example, heterosexual/homosexual, heterosexual represents what is natural or essential, yet "is dependent on its so-called opposite (homosexuality) for its identity" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 51). Yet, from a deconstructionist point of view, Derrida would claim that in the binary heterosexual/homosexual, heterosexuality is a derivative of "what it is not;" meaning that in order for heterosexuality to have meaning, or power, it must then encompass what it excludes, in this instance homosexuality (Ahmed, 2006a, 2006b; Sedgwick, 2005; Sullivan, 2003; Butler, 1993, 1990). Thus heterosexuality can never be discrete from homosexuality, which jeopardizes the essence of binary opposites by agitating the presumption of opposition between heterosexual and homosexual. This agitation allows us to think beyond the binary and recognize the fluidity and flux inherent in sexual identity. Queer theory proposes that these lines or slashes in the binary system be blurred, that people's identities are messy and fluid (Crowder, 2007; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Warner, 1999a, 1999b; Butler, 1993, 1990). Elizabeth Atkinson (2001) proposes the idea of "seeing the slash as representing both a severing and a joining/healing between different, but not opposed positions" (p. 310). By superimposing a deconstructive framework on binary configurations, we are replacing the essentialist perspective with the view that "there is no objective reality or truth, that instead truth and realities are multiple, subjective, and socially constructed" (McPhail, 2004, p. 6). Meaning that binaries are not static and that the relationship between the terms have been constructed culturally, historically, and socially (McPhail, 2004; Sullivan, 2003; Warner, 1999a, 1999b, 1993; Butler, 1993, 1990). Binary opposites attempt to establish *normal* while queer theory endeavors to remove *normal* from our lexicon.

If queer theory is challenging us to move beyond binaries as a means to express or describe identity, then I question the positioning of acts of liberation against acts of assimilation. In the context of this dissertation, my burning question is *who* determines what is a liberatory act and what are the criteria for categorizing such acts? In turn, what is the measure for acts of assimilation? There is a danger of oversimplifying this debate and naming all acts that *appear* to emulate heterosexuality – such as marriage and procreation – as assimilating heteronormative structures. This then becomes a very limiting and one-

sided conversation, weighted heavily, with prejudice, on assumptions of intent and motivation about certain acts, practices, and politics that are deemed conforming or assimilating. The risk is that we then create a single story of what is queer and or who can identify as queer. This debate has the potential to create an oppositional duality, liberation/assimilation, thus establishing a myopic and problematic binary which institutionalizes a divisive dichotomy between *genuine* queers (liberation) and *faux* queers (assimilation). For example, I was recently informed by a self-identified queer academic, that parents who identify as lesbian or gay may not also identify as queer. This judgment is based on the sole fact that they have created a family that includes children. Consequently, terms like parent and marriage are quickly relegated to the assimilation category without much thought or analysis. I agree that these terms are problematic; hegemonic images of heterosexuality and gender immediately spring to mind when one speaks, writes, or hears the word *parent* and/or *marriage*. As a culture we are bombarded with images of heterosexual romantic love, heterosexual marriage, and procreation, but where does that leave queers, non-heterosexuals, who want to marry, procreate, adopt, and create families that include children? I like to think that as a queer parent, I am challenging the status quo and expanding terms such as parent and marriage. I am a parent, I am a spouse, and I am queer; one term does not, nor should not, cancel out the other. Just as this research challenges what constitutes queer, it in turn also challenges the agency we have to identify ourselves, or not, as queer.

What is queer in family?

As discussed, queer theory recognizes that gender and sexuality are complicated and proposes lines of inquiry that challenge traditional nomenclature (Ahmed 2006a, 2006b; Villarejo, 2005; Warner 2005, 1999a, 1999b,1993; Halperin, 2003; Pinar, 2003; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Sullivan, 2003; Atkinson 2001; Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1993, 1990). Within the structure of family and school, normative assumptions about gender and sexuality can create uncomfortable and even unlivable spaces for parents and children who do not conform to these prescribed beliefs. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (2010) describes families that identify outside of the heterosexual norm as:

> border families" and "border sexualities:" families and individuals who are situated within and on the borders of mainstream heteronormative monogamist society and simultaneously in a zone of marginality and "deviance" constructed and defined by the mainstream Center. (p. 5)

Pallotta-Chiarolli describes this as place of being an "insider/outsider." As Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh (2004) note, "Children enter into the classroom as public citizens: their private lives seemingly inconsequential to their participation, unless they fail to fit neatly within dominant identity frameworks" (2004, p. 153). Judith Butler asserts that:

> sex and gender are the *effects* rather than the causes of institutions, discourses and practices; in other words, you as a subject do not create or cause institutions, discourses and practices, but they create or cause you by determining your sex, sexuality and gender" (Salih on Butler, 2002, p. 10).

Butler (1993, 1990) argues that identity, or our identification with identity, is based upon repetitive actions that are executed within a framework of socially sanctioned norms.

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler, 1990, p. 185).

In her introduction to *Undoing Gender* (2004b), Butler contends that gender is a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (p. 1), and that it is never performed without an audience, real or perceived. In other words performative acts of gender are, or may be, scripted by social constraints and played to, or for, those perceived enforcers of normative social behaviour. Since gender and sexuality form the double helix of family, it is not a stretch to consider performativity also encompassing the domain of family, which in turn means that the performative acts of family would also be subject to or limited by the "mainstream Centre." Janet Finch (2007) builds upon Butler's notion of performativity and describes what she has termed "displaying family." Finch (2007) describes that the need, or the desire of displaying a family image as the:

> process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions constitute 'doing family things' and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family' relationships (2007, p. 67).

Finch believes that the diversity of "contemporary families" necessitates a need for this act of display … "it seems very likely that the need for display is greater as relationships move further away from those which are readily recognizable as constituting family relationships" (2007, p. 71). In the context of this research, I would argue that in the case of non-heterosexual family configurations this "need for display" is an act of survival to ensure that their *queer* family experience is acknowledged and not engulfed in silence. The performative nature of displaying family is purposeful, and represents a queer way of being in the world.

The word "display" lends itself to a certain amount of agency. When you "display," you are consciously choosing what you want to reveal, and in the context of non-heterosexual families this agency allows individual family members to actively manage their *queer* identity. However, I think it would be naive to think that one can actually manage or control how one is perceived by others and this is especially true when identity is counter to hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality. Lindsay, Perlesz, Brown, McNair, de Vaus and Pitts (2006) write about "discreditable social identity" (p.1063), which positions that individuals who claim and express identities that do not fit "idealized, normative categories and roles" (p. 1063) never gain "full social acceptance" (p. 1063). If we were to look at display and agency in terms of Butler's (2004b, 1999b) ideas on enacted identity and recognition we would see that the actions associated with displaying family are all based on normative social practices of family. According to Butler (2004b), "the social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood" (p.1), meaning our perceived agency is predicated on the constraint of social norms.

How we choose to describe *family* is greatly informed by our social and cultural connections. As a result the characterization of "what is a family" has become an increasingly fluid concept. According to Judith Stacey (1996):

> Under postmodern conditions, processes of sexuality, conception, gestation, marriage, and parenthood, which once appeared to follow a natural, inevitable progression of gendered behaviors and relationships, have come unhinged, hurtling the basic definitions of our most taken-for-granted familial categories – like mother, father, parent, offspring, sibling, and, of course, "family" itself – into cultural confusion and contention. (p. 35)

The *contention* lies in society's steadfast adherence to assumptions about the universality of the family structure. Morgan (1996) advocates that "family represents a quality rather than a thing" (p. 186). He suggests that we use the term family as an adjective rather than a noun to "refer to sets of practices which deal in some way with ideas of parenthood, kinship and marriage (p. 11). Perlesz et al. (2006) use the term *doing family* as a lens in which to explore how non-heterosexual parents create "novel structures and ways of functioning" (p. 176).

The term family is often used without a disclaimer; it is taken for granted that family is heterosexual. Yet academic literature on "the family" is reticent to provide a succinct definition. The definition of what is a family is underscored by the social and historical milestones that have shaped, and continue to influence, family structures (Riedmann, Lamanna, & Nelson, 2003; Ward, 2002; Beaujot, 2000; Morgan, 1996; Stacey,

1996, 1990). In Canada, the term *family* takes different configurations depending on whom, or what institution is defining it. For example the federal government of Canada, for the purpose of the 2006 census, defines a family as "a household comprised either of a married or a common-law couple and with or without children, or a household comprised of a lone parent and at least one child in the home." Yet the United Church of Canada describes a family as "persons who are joined together by reason of mutual consent (marriage, social contract, or covenant) or by birth or adoption/placement" (Ward, 2002, p. 5). Consequently the characterization of "what is a family" has become an increasingly fluid concept; yet we are still drawn back to traditional images and activities of family.

Kerry Daly (2005), in his lecture celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Vanier Institute of the Family, made the statement that:

> Discussion of family is political, and it is contentious and it can divide … family debates permeate our cultural discourse – both religious and political – and are central to our collective definition of who we are (p. 1).

Daly (2005) claims that there are two dominant story lines that pervade the discourse on family, and each portrays the family in a negative and precarious state:

1.) 'Family is Fragile' feature stories that highlight breakdowns in society that contribute to escalating family abuse, divorce, juvenile delinquency, addictions, to name a few.

2.) 'Family is in Decline', which emphasize stories that illustrate how society is dismantling our notion of family; for example same-sex marriage.

These story lines, according to Daly and other scholars, have been circulating for centuries and get their momentum, or their "teeth," from an assumption that the family has only one face, a "single story" of being and that is:

> an intact nuclear unit inhabited by a male breadwinner, his full-time homemaker wife, and their dependent children … For this *modern* family is precisely the form that many today mistake for an ancient, essential, and now-endangered institution (Stacey, 1999, p. 6).

Stacey (1999) claims that society has an unfounded, nostalgic memory of family. According to Morgan (1996) "essentialism and biologism" (p. 193) are central to the perpetuation of traditional notions of family, meaning that marriage, the girder of family life, is predicated on the "essentialist foundation of ontological sexual difference" (Prasad, 2007, p. 196).

Within a queer space, *family* is also a highly contentious issue and one that seems to get stuck in ideological conversation about same-sex marriage and/or state-sanctioned marriage. Prasad (2007) claims that (traditional) marriage should be contextualized

through two lenses: 1.) "as an institution that governs cultural bodies" and 2.) "How it traverses with other social systems that construct our heterogeneous realities" (p. 197). I recognize that there are many standpoints from which to examine marriage and it is not the purpose of this dissertation to fully interrogate the highly contested practice of marriage. Because marriage and family are closely associated, it is important to shed light on some of the debate, within the context of queer theory, surrounding same-sex marriage. The nucleus of this debate harkens back to the liberation/assimilation dichotomy.

To get back to the two points outlined by Prasad, the main argument surrounding same-sex marriage is the concept of the "state" legitimatizing queer lives. Critics of same-sex marriage caution about the heteronormalizing ramifications of the state-sanctified legitimacy of queer relationships. Warner (1999a) claims, "As long as people marry, the state will continue to regulate the sexual lives of those who do not marry" (p. 96). Warner (1999a) has suggested that same-sex marriage will potentially create a good queer/bad queer dichotomy, meaning legitimate (married good queer)/not legitimate (unmarried bad queer). While Dennis Altman (2011) warns that if same-sex marriage is seen as a vehicle for social equality then queers who choose not to marry are at risk of becoming invisible. Thus same-sex marriage becomes a source of tension within a queer theory discourse because queer theory challenges assimilation politics and asserts that queer bodies can only change dominant discourses, such as marriage, by striving for liberation from practices such as marriage. This argument hangs on the assumption that queers who choose marriage are driven by a desire to prove "legitimacy" as productive and valued members of society by embracing, and maintaining, hegemonic practices of marriage and family, thus perpetuating a "single story" about marriage. Butler (2002) expands Warner's argument on legitimacy by contemplating the viability of marriage as a byproduct of sexuality, meaning that sexuality (heterosexual) is the road to marriage, which is synonymous to valued, legitimate, and lawful. Butler acknowledges that there is heated political discourse surrounding same-sex marriage; yet she cautions that we do not let politics override a more critical consideration of marriage … "a politics that incorporates a critical understanding is the only one that can maintain a claim to being self-reflective and nondogmatic" (2002, p. 20). Butler (2002) also argues:

> For a progressive sexual movement, even one that may want to produce marriage as an option for nonheterosexuals, the proposition that marriage should become the only way to sanction or legitimate sexuality is unacceptably conservative (p. 21).

Butler acknowledges that the debate is complex and challenges the fact that the discussion is incomplete because it does not call the "defining framework into question" (2002, p. 40).

Butler highlights a much overlooked facet of the debate and that is a more universal questioning about the institution of marriage needs to be deliberated. Amy Brandzel (2005) locates the discussion of same-sex marriage within the context of citizenship. She claims that citizenship "encompasses a wide variety of practices, institutions, and ideas" (Brandzel, 2005, p. 173) and that it is also "exclusive, privileged and normative" (p. 173). Brandzel (2005) positions "marriage law as the primary site for the production of normative citizenship and a key mechanism by which the U.S. nation-state produces a properly heterosexual, gendered, and racialized citizenry" (p. 177). Brandzel acknowledges that the debate around same-sex marriage has disrupted the heterocentric view of marriage but, like Butler, she advocates for a more radical critique of the systems that ostensibly regulate and police our lives and that we need to queer citizenship. As well, Riggs (2007) cautions that the desire to be "included or provided space within existing legal, political, and social frameworks rather than challenge such frameworks … can promote assimilation" (p. 186).

I would argue that the question to consider is: how can we queer marriage? Prasad (2007) states that "It remains the case that marriage, notwithstanding its virtues beyond religion, or lack thereof, is amongst the most influential institutions bearing upon people's lives" (p. 205). Prasad challenges queer theory's view of marriage as an act of assimilation. She leverages the term queer marriage as opposed to same-sex marriage: "The queer marriage is not so much concerned about the anatomy of those engaged in marriage as it is preoccupied with destabilizing the normalization of heterosexual patriarchy" (Prasad, 2007, p. 206). Pallotta-Chiarolli (2011) takes the concept of queering marriage one step further by calling for a "queerification of marriage" (p.308) which she describes as the acknowledgment of the "existences, experiences, and expertise of border sexualities, genders and families that do not fit the heterosexual/homosexual duality or the mal/female binary" (p. 308). Meaning that we need to broaden the debate and critique around sexual and relationship diversity. Like Butler (2002), Brandzel (2007), and Riggs (2007, 2011), Prasad (2007) and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2011) advocate that the nucleus of the debate resides in the examination of the role of marriage in our society. This is not a simple discussion and with it comes ideological debates around religion, gender, culture, and class, to name a few. But, if one positions marriage within a queer theory framework and can expand the liberation/assimilation binary, then Prasad's idea about queer marriage has merit, because she is arguing that "queer marriage" disrupts hegemonic notions of marriage. Because queer theory attempts to "tarry with the normative" (Villarejo, 2005 p. 70), and transgress heteronormative assumptions, it only seems reasonable that there are

multiple means by which to accomplish this. Queer theory postulates that gender and sexuality are not static categories but are continually influenced by both external and internal forces (Prasad, 2007; Warner, 2005, 1999a, 1999b, 1993; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Wilchins, 2004; Hall, 2003; Kirsch, 2000; Butler, 2002, 1993, 1990; Jagose, 1996), providing that there is agency in identity. If agency is one of the mitigating components behind expanding identity categories, then that agency must be extended beyond *categorization.* In turn, "acts" such as marriage or procreation can also be seen as a means in which to accomplish the objectives of queer theory. Boellstorff (2007) states that "one could argue that same-sex marriage is radical, since it appears to threaten aspects of the gender norms that help constitute at least some heteronormative discourses" (p. 236). Prasad (2007) challenges us to reframe same-sex marriage (queer marriage) in order to destabilize the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In order to attempt this, those who are clinging to the single story regarding marriage and same-sex marriage must open themselves up to the possibility that there are multiple ways in which to "be" married, and that the reasons that people choose to get married are numerous and diverse.

As previously outlined, my challenge with queer theory is how this framework can counterintuitively leverage binaries; binaries being *the* social construct the queer theory is purported to oppose, to frame debate and even action. By including liberation/assimilation as a component of the discussion about identity and how queer bodies position themselves within and around the dominant culture, queer theory is placing limitations on what is *queerly* possible, such as the reframing of family. Although Riggs (2011) argues that "there is something eerily assimilationist about claims to gay marriage" (p. 345), Boellstorff (2007) challenges that "same-sex marriage is not necessarily an assimilationist act reinscribing monogamy and the nuclear family, any more than queer subjectivity necessarily inscribes a medicalized discourse of deviant homosexuality" (p. 242). Does this not perpetuate the restrictive dogma that queer theory is striving to get away from? I ask, again, "who defines what is a liberatory act and what is an act of assimilation?" Like Prasad (2007) and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2011) I think that it is critical that we reframe and *queer* institutions such as marriage and family. For example, when two women identify as being "married" they are broadening the interpretation of marriage and expanding it beyond the essentialist view of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Even if they bring children into their union, they are building a construct that disrupts and challenges the heterocentricty of marriage and family. Simply, a family construct that does not revolve around a heterosexual union is laden with a host of challenges surrounding legal and social considerations that frame our everyday lives. As more queers make

choices around marriage and children, the need and/or desire for challenging and expanding the tenets of queer theory and the "queerification" of marriage will become more paramount.

The context of school

Heterosexist practices in the school system foster an environment of silence and invisibility. One of the most prevalent ways queer sexuality is rendered invisible, in schools, is by simply not acknowledging it and allowing it to disappear into a heterosexist curriculum (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Meyer, 2010, 2009; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010; Youdell, 2010, 2005, 2004; Pendleton Jimenez, 2009; Rasmussen, 2006a, 2006b; Ellis & High, 2003; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Sears, 1999, 1992; Khayatt, 1995; Epstein, 1994a,1994b; Carlson, 1992). According to Pendleton Jimenez (2009), "In schools, boundary maintenance against queers works within a broad framework of removing bodies, emotions and sexuality from classrooms" (p.172). Kozik-Rosabal (2000) states, "Schools are breeding grounds – intentionally or not – for heterosexist ideology that actively works against even the marginal legitimacy of gay families" (p. 382). Deborah Youdell (2004) contends that "schools and sexuality are constructed as fundamentally discrete and that the people who populate schools - students and teachers - are constructed as intrinsically non-sexual" (p. 479).

Historically, within a school context, content regarding sexual orientation and gender has been confined to the sexual education curriculum where there is a large body of work devoted to the examination of sex, sexuality, and gender. It is not in the purview of this dissertation to expound on this large body of literature, yet it is important to note that sex education has a deep history of perpetuating and legitimizing sexual hierarchies and inequalities based on sexual orientation and gender (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010; Youdell, 2010, 2005, 2004; Pendleton Jimenez, 2009; Irvine, 2007; Luker, 2006; Rasmussen, 2006a, 2006b; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Moran, 2000; Sethna, 1998; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Khayatt, 1995; Epstein, 1994a, 1994b; Carlson, 1992; Sears, 1992). For the purposes of this research, and the focus of the following section, my interest lies in how non-heterosexual identities are included, or not, within a school context.

In North America and other parts of the world, the 1960's and the 1970's experienced a radical departure from the tight social and sexual constraints of the post war era of the 1950s (Jones, 2011; Rubin, 2008; Sethna, 1998; Bailey, 1997; Miller, 1995; Smith, 1990). Politics and culture intermingled to give birth to movements such as women's liberations, the civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and the gay rights movement which was sparked by the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969 (Jones, 2011; Rubin, 2008; Bailey, 1997; Sethna, 1998; Miller, 1995; Smith, 1990). Although this era is credited for opening the doors for sexual expression, debates regarding the content and context of sexual education in public schools remains highly politicized and widely contested by both conservative and liberal factions (Jones, 2011; Sethna, 1998; D'Emilo & Freedman, 1997; Sears, 1992; Carlson, 1992). Sears (1992) has summarized this highly charged debate by distilling it down to what he believes is the essence of the argument.

> Lexical distinctions surrounding the term "sex" and "sexuality" give people a general means to discuss and evaluate the consequences of sexual activity and sexual knowledge, but through this process ontologies of moral absolutism often develop that divide people into perverts/queers and straights/innocents (p. ix).

No longer is there space for the radicalism of the 1960s and the 1970s. Indeed, Sears argues that "moral absolutism" has become the basis for sex education curriculum and is "in fact an instrument of social control" (1992, p. 27). Foucault (1978) traces this "divide" between sex and sexuality back to the 17th century.

> The seventeenth century, then, was the beginning of an age of repression emblematic of what we call the bourgeois societies, an age perhaps we still have not completely left behind. Calling sex by its name thereafter became more difficult and costly (p. 17).

Foucault highlights this as a beginning point when there appeared to be a coordinated effort to "extinguish the words that rendered it (sex) too visibly present" (p. 17) and that "prudishness was able to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the interplay of prohibitions" (p. 17). Queer theory and sexuality theorists argue that "prohibitions" continue to fuel volatile political, international, national, and local debates about (but not limited to) sexuality (including heterosexuality, homosexuality, and LGBTQ rights), gender, contraception, venereal disease, HIV/AIDS, and abortion (Jones, 2011; Elia & Eliason, 2010; Irvine, 2007; Luker, 2006; Stein, 2006; Sethna, 1998; D'Emilo & Freedman, 1997; Sears, 1992; Carlson, 1992).

Sex education in Canada and the United States had its early beginnings in what was termed the social hygiene movement in the early years of the 20th century (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Luker, 2006; Stein, 2006; Sethna, 1998; D'Emilo & Freedman, 1997; Carlson, 1992;

Sears,1992). The central focus was to "slow and eventually eradicate the spread of venereal diseases as well as to instill sexual morality into youth" (Elia & Eliason, 2010, p. 31). At the centre was that "(hetero)sexual sublimation beyond marital sex is necessary to maintain hygiene . . .unhygienic deviation includes masturbation, solicitation, prostitution, homosexuality, promiscuity, premarital sex, excessive sex, sex with the diseased or feeble minded" (Jones, 2011, p. 139). For example, in 1905, The American Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis formed to promote sexuality education in public schools that was in keeping with the Victorian view that cleanliness was linked with moral purity (Jones, 2011; Carlson, 1992). The society advocated for the teaching of sexual hygiene as a means in which to prevent the spread of venereal disease and other forms of degenerate diseases (Jones, 2011; D'Emilo & Freedman, 1997; Carlson, 1992; Sears, 1992). Their main message was one of abstinence; to avoid sexual contact with those in society that were deemed "unclean" or even "feeble minded". The prevailing moral undertone was that "sin" was closely linked with "sickness" (Carlson, 1992, p. 38), a theme that continues to surface in debates around HIV/AIDS and non-heterosexual identities. Consequently early sexual education emerged as having two main goals: to stop the spread of venereal disease and to promote sexual morality, morality as proscribed by hegemonic mores around gender, and heterosexuality.

From its inception, sex education has not, nor is it currently, principally about sex but rather the potential dangers that sex poses to the status quo (Moran, 2000; Sethna, 1998; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Sears, 1992). School-based sex education has been predicated on the dangers of sexual activity and its potential threat to marriage, the institution of the family, and gender (Sethna, 1998; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Carlson, 1992; Sears, 1992). Sex is seen as having the capability of disrupting dominant culture and consequently upsetting social order (Luker, 2006; Sethna, 1998; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Carlson, 1992; Sears, 1992). "Dominant culture" in the context of sex can be interpreted to infer heteronormative practices, which means that non-heterosexual behaviours and identities were/are perceived as a direct threat to hegemonic notions of marriage, family, and society. Consequently queer identities historically, and currently, have been and are heavily regulated. Some of the most visible debates in North America and abroad have focused on decriminalizing homosexuality and most recently (in some countries) legalizing same-sex marriage. In many parts of the world, non-heterosexual identities and behaviours are still pathologized and criminalized, punishable by lengthy prison terms and even death (Ottosson, 2008). Although countries such as the United States, Canada, England, and Australia, (to name a few), have decriminalized

homosexuality and no longer categorize it as a mental illness there continues to be an ideological struggle regarding equality and visibility for queer identities. Within a school context, educators have had to continually fight against discriminatory legislation. For example, in 1988, England ratified Clause 28 which mandated that schools could not "intentionally promote homosexuality" (Miller, 1999, p. 503) which meant that school curricula, in order to be compliant, had to position queer identities as deviant from heterosexuality (Miller, 1999; Epstein, 1994a,1994b). Clause 28 unleashed a fury and educators fought back (Epstein, 1994a, 1994b). As well, in 1981, the United States federal government passed the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) which mandated that school sex education programs promote abstinence-only-until-marriage (AOUM) (Jones, 2011; Hess, 2010). AOUM rests on the principle that "In a moral society, sexual activity is sacred and should be restricted to the confines of heterosexual marriage" (Hess, 2010, p. 264). The trajectory of sex education surrounding non-heterosexual identities and behaviours has been, and continues to be, predicated on the political dogma of the government in power and the social climate of the community in which the school resides.

The study, 'Hatred in the Hallways: Violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students in US schools' (2001), conducted by Human Rights Watch, concluded that:

> The entrenched societal prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth is based on rigidly enforced rules dictating how girls and boys should look, walk, talk, dress, act, think, and feel. The social regime in most schools is unforgiving: Youth who break these rules will be punished. Their peers enforce the rules through harassment, ostracism, and violence. School officials condone this cruel dynamic through inaction or in some cases because they, too, judge gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth to undeserving of respect. (p. 37)

It has been well documented that schools have a vested interest in maintaining the hegemony of heterosexuality, by pathologizing homosexuality and policing gender norms (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Meyer, 2010,2009; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010; Youdell, 2010, 2005, 2004; Pendleton Jimenez, 2009; Sears, 2009, 1999, 1992; Luker, 2006; Rasmussen, 2006a, 2006b; Ellis & High 2003; Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Human Rights Watch 2001; Quinlivan & Town 1999; Sethna, 1998; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997). Elizabeth Meyer (2010) claims that "Schools play a key role in teaching and reinforcing the dominant values of culture and this holds especially true in areas of gender and sexuality" (p. 3). While Griffin and Ouellett (2003) have gone as far to state that,

> Right wing conservatives, left wing liberals, and middle of the road progressives understand the importance of schools as major socializing forces in the lives of young people and that what students learn in schools, in both the explicit and

hidden curriculum, has a huge impact on larger societal expectations, norms, and values. Conflicts over institutionalized and culturally embedded norms for gender and sexuality expression are at the center of this divide and are at the root of debates about sex education, condom distribution, homosexuality, and gender role non-conformity in schools (p. 106).

It has only been since the 1980s that LGBTQ youth have been identified as a population in need of more research and support (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). According to Griffin and Ouellett (2003), early literature in the 1980's focused on the clinicalization of LGBTQ youth and described them as an "at risk" population, and were identified as at "increased risk for suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, low self esteem, dropping out of school, homelessness, violence, HIV infection, and prostitution" (p. 108). By categorizing them as "at risk," LGBTQ youth were seen as the "problem" while ignoring the macro issue of hegemonic attitudes about gender and sexuality (Quinlivan & Town, 1999).

> According to Sears (1992),
>
> Sexual ideology is more than the observance of certain sexual mores or expression of particular sexual beliefs; sexual ideology reflects the hegemonic power that dominant social groups have to control the body politic (p. 15).

Sears claims that the church, the media, and schools are "important agents of transmission of sexual beliefs and values" (p.15). Debbie Epstein (1994b) argues that "schools provide a site for practicing heterosexuality within the context of developing conventional gender roles" (p. 5). The "practice" of heterosexuality is deeply embedded with the sex education curriculum. For example, in 1950, in Ontario Canada, a Family Life curriculum was introduced that very purposefully set out to educate high school students in how to "produce stable nuclear families, modeled after white middle-class Anglo-Saxon heterosexual norms" (Sethna, 1998, p. 58), where "normal psychological maturity was expressed in sexual chastity, marriage and childrearing" (Sethna, 1998, p. 58). Within this construct there was no room for interrogating sexual identities, or gender identities that deviated from the heterosexist notions of gender and sexuality. Sears (1999) claims that "students are socialized into this make-believe world of self and other" (p. 5). This encompasses the binary configurations such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and masculine/feminine. These binaries, as discussed earlier in this chapter, serve to mute and/or to render invisible the diversity or the possibility of diverse sexual orientations within the classroom. Heterosexuality is the only option, thus establishing, and promoting a heteronormative structure and school environment. As stated earlier in this chapter heteronormativity is the organizing principle that institutes heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as its binary opposite (Valocchi, 2005; Sears, 1999; Warner, 1999a, 1999b,

1993). Stephen Valocchi (2005) claims that these sets of norms delineate heteronormativity,

> . . . work to maintain the dominance of heterosexuality is maintained by preventing homosexuality from being a form of sexuality that can be taken for granted or go unmarked or seem right in the way heterosexuality can. As a result, the dominance of heterosexuality often operates unconsciously or in ways that make it particularly difficult to identify (p. 756).

Heterosexuality is so completely embedded in the curriculum it does not need to be overtly discussed. Instead all discussions surrounding sexuality point to heterosexuality or the assumption of heterosexuality. Kozik-Rosabal (2000) claims that "Every day, decisions about curricula and social events are based on the assumption that human beings are inherently heterosexual" (p. 371). Epstein (1994b) claims, "At its most general level, there is a presumption of heterosexuality which is encoded in language, in institutional practice and the encounters of everyday life" (p. 198). It is an inverted silence, one that enables heterosexuality or heterosexism while suppressing homosexuality. Richard Friend (1993) describes two methods, *systematic exclusion* and *systematic inclusion*, as means in which schools reinforce heterosexism and homophobia. Friend (1993) describes systematic exclusion as the conscious act of "ignoring or denying the presence of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, rendering them invisible" (p. 212). Systematic inclusion, purposefully portrays non-heterosexual identities in a "negative context" (p. 215), by either pathologizing them or framing it as a "sexual behaviour only" (p. 215) which completely negating the more complex issues that surround non-heterosexual identities.

The consistent theme is silence; school curricula and school culture do not actively acknowledge and or include individual expressions of gender and sexuality, (this of course can be applied to other areas of difference such as race and social class), to the point of rendering some students, teachers, and parents as invisible. But how is this done? Is it as simple as not recognizing the individual, or is it a more systematic process of exclusion? Youdell (2004) argues that "school practices are permeated by enduring hetero-normative discourses that inscribe a linear relationship between sex, gender and (hetero-) sexuality within the heterosexual matrix" (p. 481). Youdell (2005, 2004) builds upon Butler's work on "discursive performativity" and "discursive agency" as the theoretical framework from which school communities operate from for creating identity categories that then "constitute subjects" (2004b, p. 481) such as heterosexual or non-heterosexual. Through performative practices, and the interpretation of these performative practices, identities are constructed by, and for, individual school community members. These *identities* have the potential of including or excluding within a school context. Performative practices operate

from a historical, political, and social standpoint, meaning, that within a school environment, there is a bias to "perform" and interpret these practices as a method to maintain the hetero-normalizing status quo. Youdell (2005) argues,

> Categorical names are central to the performative constitution of the subject who is unintelligible, if not unimaginable, without these. To be called, for example, 'dyke', is to be simultaneously interpellated as a subject and as a particular (but equivocal) sort of subject. It is also to be simultaneously subjected to relations of power circulating within the discursive matrices that frame a particular context (p. 252).

Youdell claims that individuals become subjects as a result of the social structures (categories), or even arguably the constraints, in which they are exposed or live. These structures work to both constitute a subject as legitimate (hetero-normalizing) and or non legitimate (non-heterosexual). Rasmussen (2006a) discusses the concept of recognition and explores the question, "what it means to have certain faces that appear to be unrepresentable in particular pedagogical settings" (p. 474). She leverages the "the face" as a metaphor for the capacity to affirm (recognize) certain sexual identities over others. Rasmussen (2006a) argues that schools actively engage in the "framing of intelligibility" (p. 480) both positive and negative, about different expressions of sexual identity. Within this frame, some identities, specifically non-heterosexual identities, run the risk of not being recognized, or rendered non-credible. In a school context, the act of "recognition" is often demonstrated by what is included in the official curriculum. For example, authors that are studied in a literature class are recognized as "important" writers by the simple fact that they are written into the curriculum; they are considered credible. This is not to infer that the chosen writers do not deserve to be recognized as notable authors. Rather, the question that needs to be explored is: "Who was not chosen, or who is not represented?" Along this vein, Rasmussen also challenges educators by saying, "It is necessary that non-normative faces not be occluded from the frame of representation. Simultaneously, educators must not take representation within curriculum as evidence of inclusion" (2006a, p. 484). Maxine Greene (1995) discusses the concept of "small" and "big" visions of schooling. Greene's position is, "The vision that sees things *small* looks at schooling through the lenses of a system – a vantage point of power or existing ideologies" (p. 11). Greene contends that the "vision that sees things *big* brings us in close contact with details and particulars that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable" (p. 10). In relation to Rasmussen's argument, the "big" school will continually interrogate and challenge the lens of intelligibility from which it frames identities and consequently constitutes subjects.

Sears (1999) challenges elementary educators to teach queerly:

> Teaching queerly is not teaching about sex. It embodies educators who model honesty, civility, authenticity, integrity, fairness, and respect … it is creating classrooms that challenge categorical thinking, promote interpersonal intelligence, and foster critical consciousness (p. 4).

Sears has broadened the perception of what is *queer* by defining it as a strategy to model and incorporate authentic inclusion practices in the classroom. In the same vein, Sears (1999) challenges educators to question and reframe hegemonic ideology, which includes heteronormative practices that shape and inform school curriculum, pedagogy, and relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Sears calls this looking at "schooling upside down" and asks educators to explore "taken for granted assumptions about diversity, identities, childhood, and prejudice" (1999, p. 5). As queer theory has posited, queer is about blurring the boundaries that bind people to presubscribed categories such as male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. It stands to reason that in order to be able to queerly realign heteronormative ideology, we need to rethink elementary education. As Kathy Bickmore (1999) notes:

> As public institutions, schools touch nearly every child and provide powerful sanction for certain knowledge. Elementary teachers have the capacity to help children learn how to share public space with people similar to, and different from, themselves (p. 15).

This can only happen, however, if we consciously and critically re-evaluate what constitutes legitimate knowledge and incorporate the lived experience of students in school curriculum and pedagogical practices.

Deborah Britzman (1995) asks the question, "What is required to refuse the unremarked and obdurately unremarkable straight educational curriculum?" (p. 151). Britzman (1995) explores this question by interrogating discourses of difference and the portrayal of the "subject of difference as a disruption" (p. 152) within a classroom and a school setting. Britzman (1995) argues that education disavows difference and that queer theory offers "methods of critiques to mark the repetitions of normalcy as a structure and as a pedagogy" (p. 153). Britzman (1995) describes normalization as a "problem of culture and thought" (p. 154) and that within the enculturation of "normalization" there is an expanse of knowledge and experience that is dismissed and even deemed "unthinkable." Britzman (1995) offers the notion of a queer pedagogy; a pedagogical framework that is "interested in exploring what one cannot bear to know, one interested in the imagining of a sociality unhinged from the dominant conceptual order" (p. 165).

Sears (1999) and Britzman (1995) both identify that the dominant curricula categorizes and minoritizes subjects, in this case students, by actively heteronormatizing educational practices, discourses, and thought. A question that continually arises in discussions on curriculum is, "What is taught in schools? What is not taught? What should be taught by whom, and how?" (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 295). By asking these questions, educators are challenged to reflect upon the dominant discourses that influence and shape school curricula, including sex education, and the school environment. Sefa Dei (1994) advocates for schools to become "working communities," meaning it is not enough for schools to call themselves communities – they must actively be engaged in building an inclusive community that is open to all students. Sefa Dei (1994) argues that "Through a coalition we can build linkages in order to transform public schooling and to legitimatize the multiplicity of cultures that exist within the school system" (p. 298). I am drawn to the concept of envisioning the school as a working community because it is only by purposefully attempting to create linkages, between its members, that the school community will engage in authentic reflection and recognize the array of diversity within its membership.

One of the tools that schools have leveraged in building inclusive communities is federal, provincial, and local human rights policies. These policies help to shape and maintain inclusive classrooms and school communities. Canadians are protected by both the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian Human Rights Act came into effect in 1977 to safeguard Canadians from discriminatory practices based on "race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, disability, sexual orientation, or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted" (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1977). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into being in 1982 and is a constitutional document protecting the basic human rights of all Canadians (The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1985). The Human Rights Act, while an extremely important document is most applicable to federally regulated industries like the airlines, banking, and natural resources targeting discriminatory employment practices, whereas the Charter guarantees fundamental humans rights such as freedom of speech, the right to vote and equality before the law and protection from discrimination (Hurley, 2005; UNAC, 2002).

Sexual orientation was not originally included in either of these two documents. The Canadian Human Rights Act did not include sexual orientation until 1991 (Hurley, 2005). Whereas, The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom still has not written sexual orientation into the Charter (Meyer, 2010, 2009; Hurley, 2005; UNAC, 2002). Although,

the Charter was established to protect historically marginalized populations, it was not until 1985 that the government revised the equity rights provision, section 15, to specifically identify protected populations.

> Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s 15, 1985).

Sexual orientation is blatantly missing. It was not until 1995 (Egan v. Canada) that the Supreme Court of Canada heard a case challenging section 15, the equity rights provision, based on sexual orientation. Egan v. Canada was a landmark case concerning sexual orientation and same-sex benefits; the Supreme Court found "sexual orientation to be an "analogous" [comparable] ground of discrimination for section 15 purposes" (UNAC, 2002). As a result the Supreme Court ruled that sexual orientation be "read" into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This ruling for the first time acknowledged, within a federal and legal context, that sexual orientation should be protected as a human right. Although the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Act are federal statutes it must be noted that individual provinces have retained the right to adopt, or not, "sexual orientation" into their own provincial Charters and Human Rights Acts (Meyer, 2010). For example Nova Scotia did not include sexual orientation in its Human Rights Act until 2000 (Hurley, 2005).

Since Egan v. Canada, there have been numerous precedent setting cases that have successfully challenged the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to expand the rights and protections for Canadians that identify as non-heterosexual (Meyer, 2010, 2009; Hurley, 2005). One of the most important was in 2005 when the House of Commons voted to extend equal marriage rights for same-sex couples and on July 20, 2005, the Canadian Senate passed it into law (Egale Canada, 2005). At the time, Canada was only the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage (Egale Canada, 2005). This was a momentous occasion in the history of same-sex rights and freedoms and within a school context this has resulted in the adoption of new policies and practices that address the rights and protections of non-heterosexual students and staff.

In Nova Scotia, in an effort to create and promote safe and inclusive schools, all nine Nova Scotia school boards have adopted a Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH) framework (HRSB, 2007). RCH frameworks encompasses both policies and procedures regarding inclusive and equitable delivery of all school programs, services, and resources, which includes, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual

orientation, social class, and ability (HRSB, 2007). Although each school board has adopted an RCH framework, the documents differ in terms of approach, language, and depth and this is especially evident in the handling of sexual orientation. For example, the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board (1999) specifically protects the rights of non-heterosexual students and staff by clearly describing unacceptable homophobic behaviours and language:

> Sexual orientation harassment includes but is not limited to:
>
> > 4.3.1. Inappropriate or derogatory comments or expressions, "humour" or behaviour based upon gender and/or sexual orientation.
> >
> > 4.3.2. Inappropriate, derogatory or offensive written, graphic of behaviour displays.
> >
> > 4.3.3. Inappropriate, derogatory or offensive graphics or slogans displayed on clothes.
> >
> > 4.3.4. Gender based insults or homophobic remarks or gestures.
> >
> > 4.3.5. Inappropriate personal or telephone or electronic communications regarding an individual's sexual behaviour, gender, or sexual orientation (p.4).

Whereas, in the Strait Regional School Board's RCH policy (2004), sexual orientation is mentioned only once in a section titled, 'Protection of Students: Child Abuse, Discrimination and Sexual Harassment' the section simply reads:

> The Board condemns and refuses to tolerate any child abuse, sexual harassment, and discrimination which may be based on age, race/colour, religion/creed, sex, sexual orientation, physical disability, mental disability, irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease, ethnic, national, or Aboriginal origin, family status/marital status, source of income or political belief, affiliation, or activity (p. 16).

The difference between the two policies is stunning, a reflection on the differing social and political climate of each school board. The disparity in how sexual orientation and gender is addressed indicates that the school boards are under no obligation to specifically address and or protect the rights of queer students and staff. This is especially poignant considering that same-sex marriage is federally recognized and legally sanctioned.

Although legislation and policies provide a foundation from which to build inclusive school communities, there has been a palpable lag time between when legislation goes into law and social change. For example, in British Columbia (BC), the Human Rights Tribunal presided over a case between Peter and Murray Corren, (a same-sex

couple) and the BC Ministry of Education; the Corren's accused the BC Ministry of Education of discriminating against LGBTQ youth and the children of non-heterosexual parents by not including sexual orientation in the curriculum (Corren and Corren v. BC Ministry of Education 2005). Murray Corren, a BC teacher, argued that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has affirmed that all lesbian and gay people are entitled to full rights of Canadian citizenship, which includes marriage, yet that reality is not reflected in school practice, curriculum development, and school policy. As a result of the tribunal an agreement was reached that the BC ministry Education would "review the B.C. educational curriculum in all subject areas regarding inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-identified (LGBT) people" (Egale, 2006). Although this is considered a victory it is a stark reminder that heterosexism, within a school context, must be continually challenged in order to make visible the diversity of queer identities.

I recognize that there is a growing body of literature interrogating how national, provincial, and municipal legislation and school polices regarding sexual and gender minorities, influence and shape school communities. However, that is not the focus of this dissertation. Instead, I have included an overview of the relevant legislation and policies that inform the school environments in Nova Scotia.

Schools play a pivotal role in the "socialization of children's identity and behaviour, including their gender roles, social attitudes, and interpersonal relationships" (Mercier & Harold, 2003, p. 36). School environments function as sites for the reproduction of cultural norms such as homophobia, heterosexism, and sexism (Talburt & Rasmussen, 2012; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010; Pendleton Jimenez, 2009; Rasmussen, 2006a, 2006b; Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Clarke, Kitzinger, & Potter, 2004; Ellis & High, 2004; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Ngo, 2003; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Sears, 1999); consequently the intersection between school and queer families can become a precarious state of balance.

The participants in this research did not describe schools that subscribed to a "working community" model. Instead, stories were shared about schools that were unable and even unwilling to acknowledge non-heterosexual identities and queer family structures, both within a model of systematic exclusion and inclusion. As well, the RCH policies appeared to offer little or no support to them. According to Kozik-Rosabal (2005):

> Schools are breeding grounds – intentionally or not – for heterosexist ideology that actively works against even the marginal legitimacy of gay families. Schools continue to support – intentionally or not – pervasive and damaging misinformation about gay children and their families. Schools are made up of people who – intentionally or not – continue to deny the prevalence of harassment aimed at gays (p. 382)

This is the reality that queer parents and their children face when they enter the Nova Scotia school system. It is the hope of this research to unsettle the heterosexist ideology that permeates our public school system, and to inspire alternate ways of envisioning school culture, curricula, and pedagogy.

Listening towards a methodology

I have hiked through the rainforests of British Columbia, Canada, and become very lost. The dense vegetation makes it very difficult to follow a trail that is mostly marked by moss and low-hanging fir branches. When I would feel that I had completely lost the path, I would pause, usually under the sheltering canopy of a Douglas fir. The life, the industry that was buzzing in that one tree, was nothing short of miraculous. Cliché as this may sound, there would always be a moment as I sat in the shadow of that imposing tree when I felt I suddenly understood all of the mysteries that surrounded me. It was a peaceful and satisfying feeling. But then something else, away from the tree, would catch my eye; a falling leaf, a buzzing fly. My thoughts would then linger on the leaf or the fly and my moment of clarity would be erased.

My journey into this multi-layered, narrative, arts-based, queer inquiry reminded me of my meanderings through the rainforests in BC. Navigating my way into, through, and around my research questions was akin to trying to find that "path" through the rainforest with its lush and seemingly impenetrable flora. In the beginning, I found it challenging to situate my research within the rich and diverse landscape of art, stories, queerness, school, and family. With every turn I made in the literature, I discovered yet another path forward, but then the path would become overgrown and I would need to go back and try again. I paused and contemplated under the fir tree many times.

As I attempted to locate my research in narrative and queer inquiry, I was continually brought back to my original intent, which was to explore and bring to "light" the schooling and subsequent family experiences of queer parents and their children. If, as Margaret Atwood (2006) has asserted, "stories are who we are," what better tool for probing the schooling experiences of queer parents and their children than through their stories. Stories can be re-told, re-experienced, and even re-invented to get glimpses of the "particulars" that have, and continue to, shape and frame our lives. I began to follow the "story" trail which meandered in and around various methods of telling, showing, and representing stories.

Method

The Inquiry

I conducted this inquiry in two distinct phases:

1. Participant interviews
    a. Non-heterosexual parents (Self identified)
    b. School age children (5 years and older)

2. Community art project and exhibition

The following outlines each phase with a description of participants, recruitment, and ethical considerations.

Participant Interviews

The criteria for participation included self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer parent or legal guardian of at least one child who is attending school. Recruitment was through word of mouth, utilizing snowball sampling techniques for linking up with interested queer families (Patton, 2002). Other avenues of access included Nova Scotia-based LGBTQ email distribution lists.

The following LGBTQ email distribution lists were engaged to assist with recruitment[6]:
- Rainbow Playtime group
- Gay Dads
- Family Pride Camping Association
- Nova Scotia Rainbow Health Coalition

Interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2008 with parents who self-identified as non-heterosexual and their school age children (ages five years and older).

A total of seven households participated, which included thirteen parents and ten children. Three out of the thirteen parents identified as male with the remaining ten identifying as female. The children ranged in age from seven years to seventeen, four of the children

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[6] See appendix A, *Recruitment Flyer*

were male and six were female. The households resided in both urban and rural Nova Scotia, Canada.

The interviews were conducted in three stages:

- Family
- Parent(s)
- Child(ren)

Prior to the initial family interview, I conducted a phone interview with the parent or parents where I described the project, outlined the interview process, and explained the consent procedures.

Family Interview:
- Included parent or parents and school age children
- 60-90 minutes in length
- Audio taped and transcribed

Parent Interview:
- Follow-up from family interview, and included a more in-depth discussion of key research questions and issues raised from family interview. Child(ren) not present
- 60-90 minutes in length
- Audio taped and transcribed

Child(ren) Interview
- Follow-up from family interview, and included a more in-depth discussion of key research questions and issues raised from family interview.
  - Children were given the option of being interviewed with or without a parent present. Some of the younger children preferred to be interviewed as part of the larger family interview, and did not want a separate interview, whereas other children preferred to be interviewed separate from their parent or parents.
- 40-60 minutes in length
- Audio taped and transcribed

Ethical Considerations:

Participation in the research was voluntary and based on a signed consent form. Each potential participant received an invitation package containing a summary outline of the research[7] and a consent form[8]. There was a consent form for each member of the family

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[7] See appendix B, *Participant Information Sheet*
[8] See appendix C,D, & E for consent forms

including an additional consent form for permission to interview a minor child without a legal guardian present. The identities of all the participants were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used to ensure that anonymity was protected. The pseudonyms have been used consistently throughout the dissertation including as character names in the performance piece, 'Queerly Inside and Out in School … conversations'.

Ethical Challenges:

Gaining ethics approval proved to be a very challenging and frustrating process. The University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at first denied approval for interviewing children under the age of 12 years old. HERC claimed that it would put a child at risk (undue stress) to discuss issues or details about the construct of her/his family. I was stunned. Their assumption that a child would incur psychological stress as a result of talking about their family and their family experience indicated that the members of HERC were hanging onto the archaic notion that non-heterosexual identity was deviant and something to protect children from. HERC's stance about the potential harm to children was, in my mind, yet another example of how society continues to marginalize and pathologize non-heterosexual identity. In essence, HERC was epitomizing the heteronormative ideology that the families in this research confront everyday in school and in their communities. Their decision further validated the need and importance of my research.

The decision by HERC ignited a heated response from both the Director of the Eastern Canada Doctoral Program Divisions and my primary supervisor. A written appeal was crafted and was scheduled to be presented in person to the members of HERC by my primary supervisor with the support of a child psychologist,(speaking in support of my research), from the University. Two days before the scheduled meeting, for reasons that were not divulged to my supervisor or to myself, the committee reversed their initial decisions and allowed for children under the age of 12 years to be interviewed. This process delayed my research by more than four months[9].

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[9] HERC's initial constraint on whom I could interview had the potential of severely limiting my pool of research participants. At the time of my ethics submission, many of the queer families in Nova Scotia either had young children in elementary school (many under the age of 12 years), or older children (from past heterosexual relationships), that were now young adults and no longer in school. The heart of this research lay in working with queer families that had children who were currently in the public school system, hence the ruling from the ethics committee had the potential of derailing my research.

The initial response from the ethics committee underscored the importance of challenging the silence surrounding the family and schooling experiences of queer parents and their children. HERC's ruling illustrated how institutions actively perpetuate heterosexist ideology by "policing" ideology and practices that challenge those norms. What was most disappointing about my experience with HERC is that I had expected them to review my application from a place of informed openness and acceptance about people who do not identify as heterosexual. I was naive. This story is still incomplete, however, my hope is that the completion of this dissertation will pave a smoother, and more informed, path for others who want to do similar work and need the approval of their institutions in order to carry out their research.

Community art project and exhibition

The community-based art project was created through a series of facilitated workshops and culminated in a public exhibition, 'We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience.' The exhibition was held at Pier 21, Canada's Immigration Museum, and was on display from November 8, 2008 until November 29, 2008.

The criteria for participation included self-identifying as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer parent or legal guardian of a child or children of any age, or the child of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer parent or legal guardian. Recruitment was through word of mouth, utilizing snowball sampling techniques for linking up with interested queer families (Patton, 2002). Other avenues of access included Nova Scotia based LGBTQ email distribution lists.

The following LGBTQ email distribution lists were engaged to assist with recruitment:
- Rainbow Playtime group
- Gay Dads
- Family Pride Camping Association
- Nova Scotia Rainbow Health Coalition

Facilitated workshops

Facilitated workshops were held at the Chocolate Lake Community Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia. A total of four workshops were held during the month of April in 2008[10] with 29 adults and 14 children participating.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the research was voluntary and based on a signed consent form. Each potential participant received an invitation package[11] containing a summary outline of the research and a consent form[12]. There was a consent form for each member of the family including an additional consent form for minor children that was signed by the parent or legal

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[10] The workshop process is described in Interlude I, p.
[11] See appendix F, *Recruitment Flyer*
[12] See appendix G, H & I for consent forms

guardian and the child. Consent forms were also used to obtain permission to video tape and photograph workshops. Participation in the workshops was not contingent upon being photographed and or videotaped. As such, participants were free to choose not to be photographed and or videotaped without prejudice. As well, permission was obtained to display the completed art in the final exhibit and for future use in the dissertation.

Participants were also informed that their identities could be kept confidential and pseudonyms would be assigned if needed. However, all of the participants (except for two) specifically asked that their real names be used in association with their art work. As part of the process, participants were asked to include a brief narrative about their work which included a title and how they wanted to be identified in the context of the exhibition. Two participants chose to be listed as anonymous, while the remaining included either their first and or last names. Their signed narratives, along with their signed consent forms served as a record of their consent to use the name or names that they provided in the final exhibition.

CHAPTER 3

Queer Storied Lives …

STICKS & STONES

My family is about love; not being queer. I love that I am a woman, a mom and a lesbian. Some people may have issue with us and families like ours – it is their loss. Their life and world is smaller for it. My world is full and big and complete.

Linda Wilke

To begin, I knew that I wanted to conduct my research as a narrative inquiry. As was stated in Chapter 1, my research questions lie in school as experienced by non-heterosexual parents and their children, and a narrative inquiry felt like the obvious choice for collecting their stories. While the conceptual framework of this research is grounded in queer theory, which provides an approach in which to interrogate and understand how non-heterosexual parents and their children experience school, narrative inquiry presented as the appropriate methodological tool for compiling and analyzing the research data. Yet, as I began to listen to the audio transcripts of the participant interviews, it became increasingly clear that the data, the stories generated from the interviews, was incomplete. Their words, though powerful, felt limiting as the sole means for data generation and data presentation. The stories needed a broader platform so that they could be seen, experienced, as well as heard. To more fully capture the particulars of the experiences of queer parents and their children, I began to explore the blending of inquiry methods that included visual arts, performance, and narrative. Because my theoretical approach to queer theory is based on the premise that *queer* is a very personal, and temporal journey into how we position and reposition ourselves within the dominant culture" … as we "grapple" with the "multiplicity and variability of identity" (Hall, 2003, p. 176), it was critical that I build a methodology that could tease out the particulars and the nuances of the stories that went

beyond their words. Ruth Leitch (2006) claims that "sensory and embodied dimensions of experience lie below the threshold of consciousness and are thus often impossible to articulate in words" (p. 551). To get at the details and the subtleties of the stories, I needed a mixed methods approach that pulled from the visual arts as well as from more traditional forms of narrative. What evolved was a research methodology that I have termed a *multi-layered narrative and arts-informed inquiry*. This approach is derived primarily from narrative inquiry, however, I have incorporated elements of arts-informed research methods, and a/r/tography. I extracted facets from each of these methods to shape a methodology that allowed for optimal flexibility to permit my participants to express their stories in multiple and seemingly more complete ways.

What follows is a map of my methodological journey in my quest for developing a research methodology that reflected the tenets of queer theory and was attuned to the nuances and particulars of the stories of my participants. I begin with positing the idea of research as fiction, setting the stage for establishing research texts as interplay between text and reader.

Influenced by a/r/tography, which is an "inquiry process that lingers in the liminal spaces inside and outside-the between-of *a(artist)and r(researcher) and t(teacher)"* (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008, p. 84), I have blurred the roles of researcher as artist and as teacher. Consequently this dissertation interweaves research, art, and education challenging me, as the researcher to be present at different point throughout the process. Although this is not an ethnographic study there are elements of autoethnographic pieces inserted through the *Asides*. As well, an artefactual component has been incorporated as evidenced in the community art exhibition, and the performance piece. Narrative inquiry, arts-informed research methods, and a/r/tography, each have a broad reach with many points of entrance, and through each I have carved out a path to help excavate and sculpt the data so that it can be seen, heard, and experienced as alive and in the present.

Stories … fact or fiction?

Aristotle wrote that the essence of any story is the *fabula*, or the plot of the story, and he claimed that the *fabula* must encompass a combination of events connected by relationships of temporality and causality. Yet, as we seek to uncover the fabula of a story, we, the story teller and the listener, render our own points of view on the reality we wish to represent, retell, and hear (Pavis, 1998). For example, as authors of our own life stories, we have the discretion to change the characters, the plot or the fabula and the outcomes, to accommodate a particular situation or experience. Thus, one moment in time has the

potential to spin off into multiple story lines. The question then becomes: what story do we tell, and which stories are important to us and why?

John Dewey (1934) claims that experience "occurs continuously" (p. 36); that life is not a "uniform uninterrupted march or flow" (p. 37) and that *experience* is based on a culmination of one's life histories. Dewey (1934, 1925), like many scholars interested in the phenomena of experience, identified that when we retell an experience "one property rather than another is (was) sufficiently dominant so that it characterises the experience as a whole" (Dewey, 1934, p. 37). Narrative inquirers write extensively about this issue, highlighting that each retelling of an experience (story) uncovers yet another perspective embedded within the experience (story) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Olson & Craig, 2005; Neilsen, 2004; Crites, 1971), meaning that depending on the circumstances of the retelling of a story, "one property" can shift and expand to fit a specific purpose or circumstance. This can be especially tricky when working with stories as a data set because it calls into question the credibility of the data and or the inferences drawn from the data. If the mandate of research is epistemological in nature, then the pursuit of stories as a means to generate data poses potential conflict in achieving that desired outcome. Because how can a story ever be established or demonstrated to be true? But, if we view knowledge as evolution and not exactitude, then we open ourselves up to the odyssey of personal stories.

John Spindler (2008) explores the concept of fiction and scholarly writing using Lawrence Stenhouse's definition of research, "systematic enquiry made public" (p.19) as his backdrop. Spindler (2008) emphasizes that in order to make a research text public, the researcher must "craft" the text, inferring that the research text is actually *created* by the researcher. To support his claim he cites Clifford Geertz, who offers that anthropologists glean understanding and meaning from cultures through writing, which he refers to as a "fiction:"

> They [anthropological writings] are thus fictions; fictions in the sense that they are "something made, something fashioned" – the original meaning of fictiõ – not that they are unfactual or merely "as if" thought experiments (Geertz as cited by Spindler, 2008, p. 20).

Spindler (2008) furthers this claim by stating that there is "no absolute distinction between fiction and non-fiction" (p. 20), and that research texts are "inevitably fictional since they have been 'fashioned' and 'moulded' by their writers" (p. 20). The idea that research texts are "something made" or "something fashioned" opens the door for a more expansive canvas in which to present research. But this hinges on the premise that educational research is not about reducing "human experience to knowledge claims of certainty"

(Leitch, 2006, p. 553), but about "seeing truth and knowledge as individual, contextual, contingent and always in process" (Leitch, 2006, p. 553). In order to "see" the deeper meaning of experience, then one has to extend beyond the literal and explore alternative ways in which to present, or "fashion" data that exposes the context and process of experience.

Elliot Eisner (1995) has asked the question "What counts as research?" (p. 3). He answers his own question by stating:

> I believe the answer turns on our conception of understanding. As I see it the primary tactical aim of research is to advance understanding … Perhaps we should expand our conception of research as well as our conception of what helps us come to comprehend (p. 3).

Eisner posed this question in an essay supporting the design and implementation of "artistically crafted research." Eisner challenged the educational community to explore "different forms of representation to uniquely influence our experience and thus to alter the ways in which we come to understand the world" (1995, p. 1). He advocated for the use of visual arts as a means to "reveal what would be hard to grasp in diachronic forms such as language and number" (1995, p. 1). Spindler (2008) furthers this argument by drawing upon the work of Barone, Best, Clough, Kiesinger, and Richardson, who emphasize that educational enquiry "aims to enhance meaning rather than reduce uncertainty" (Spindler, 2008, p. 22), by leveraging the "particulars" of research data to illuminate more "general issues."

As I established in the beginning of this chapter, it is the "particulars" of a story that expose the deeper meaning of experience. This belief expands upon Freire's (1987) notion of *reading the world*:

> The *texts,* the *words,* the *letters* of that context were incarnated in a series of things, objects, and signs. In perceiving these I experienced myself, and the more I experienced myself, the more my perceptual capacity increased (p. 30).

Freire describes the awakening of embodied knowledge, which is expressed by Lietch (2006) as "a way of knowing that goes beyond the intellectual … to include emotions, culture, physical sensation and life experiences" (p. 552). Freire couples *reading the world* with also *reading the word* and that in order to comprehend the world which we inhabit, we need to be able to do both: interpret language and signs. Eisner claims that by including an artistic visual element to research, we create the sensation of an "all-at-onceness" (1995, p. 1), which invites the viewer to "read the form" (p.1), to interpret signs,

as a means to awaken us to a deeper sense of feeling, knowing, and understanding. Peter Clough (2009) claims that in qualitative enquiries:

> We are always working at the very boundaries of visibility, where imagination must take over from measurement, and when we arrive – though it is seldom that; more, rather, a pause – we hold only vapid certainties … (p. 347).

If the objective of qualitative research is to make visible certain elements of the human condition, then I would argue that the boundary between fact and fiction has no choice but to be blurred, because at some point the imagination must fill in the gaps. Margret Vickers (2010) believes that "there is no specific place where scholarly work ends and the use of fiction and fiction writing techniques begins" (p. 561). Vickers (2010) supports her claims by putting forth the idea that:

> All forms of textual representation, traditional empirical reporting, or otherwise, involve some degree of fictional work, even those that conform to more familiar modes of representation. This is because of the need for authors to undertake various editorial and authorial workings when selecting, editing, and shaping what is presented (p. 561-562).

Vickers builds upon Spindler's (2008) notion that the research text is *crafted* by the researcher, and assumes that at least a modicum of subjectivity is inherent in the process of *crafting* a research text. The tension surrounding fiction and data representation is one that I am drawn to as a researcher because it is integral in the assessment of the validity of my "findings." As a writer, an artist, and an academic, I have had to navigate the tensions around textual representation, blurring the boundaries of research as fact and fiction – discovering as Clough (2009, 1999) has so eloquently put it-- research is *messy*.

Stories as narrative inquiry

The stories that we tell help us to uncover and sculpt the experiences that frame our lives. Clandinin and Rosiek state, "These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities" (2007, p. 35). By telling a story we are connecting others to experiences that help shape and frame who we are in the world. In the re-telling, we re-craft the experience to communicate not so much what really happened but what we want the listener to know, or take away, about the happening. Crites (1971) suggests that all experience is "imaginative constructions," and that different depictions of an experience can co-exist. Thus one moment in time has the potential to spin off into

multiple story lines. It is these stories, these moments in time, that are at the heart of this research.

Narrative inquiry operates on the premise that experience is expressed in "lived and told stories" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) describe a story as "a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (p. 375). According to Bell (2003), "we produce and communicate stories within a social context" (p. 4), meaning that the stories we tell are accessed within existing cultural frames of reference. Bell applies this mode of thinking to her research about narratives of race and racism, claiming that, "While stories about race and racism may derive from individual experiences, they also communicate cultural assumptions and habits of thinking that transcend the individual and idiosyncratic" (2003, p. 4). This is in line with Riesman's (1993) assertion that stories interweave personal narratives within a broader hegemonic social context. Gee (2005) more specifically breaks down the parts of our stories by referring to what he has termed 'Big D Discourse:"

> In the end, a Discourse is a "dance" that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times, and places and in the here-and-now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination. Like a dance, the performance here-and-now is never exactly the same. It all comes down, often, to what the "masters of the dance" (the people who inhabit the Discourse) will allow to be recognized or will be forced to recognize as a possible instantiation of the dance (p. 28).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to this as the tension between individual experience (narratives) and the established 'grand narratives' that tell larger societal and cultural stories. It is important to acknowledge the tension that is created by external forces; however, narrative inquiry is nested more in the individual *particulars* of individual stories and or experience. According to Pinnegar and Danes (2007), "narrative inquirers embrace the power of the particular for understanding experience" (p. 24). Narrative inquiry positions the *particulars* as important components to the perspective and the interpretation of the story. The included and excluded specifics (although we may never know what has been excluded), are indicators of what is important to the teller at that given moment. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) go on to argue that "It is the particular and not the general that triggers emotion and moves people …" (p. 8). Thus it is the particulars of a given event or experience that motivates the teller to re-tell her story and it is the particulars in the re-telling that is the foci of narrative inquiry.

Riessman (1993) claims that "Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (p. 2). From Riessman we can argue that we assemble our past, our different parts of ourselves, into personal stories that help shape us and connect us to others. The building metaphor indicates that we have the agency to use, and discard, past events that correspond or support the story we want to tell. This agency means that we can re-shape events and outcomes, (temporality and causality), to tell the story that is important to us even though it may be contrary to what others see as our experience.

This notion that we may tell, or re-tell, stories that are contrary to what others might perceive as our "true" experience is an idea Crites explores. Crites defines this phenomenon as a "double storied type of self deception" (1971, p. 126). He describes these dueling stories as a means to justify certain actions or consequences:

> A person has two images or scenarios in mind, the one so unacceptable – so unflattering or heart-breaking, or even on the other hand, so liberating – that the other image or scenario is artfully fabricated in order to suppress it. The story that cannot be faced is the real story, in the sense that it continues to assert itself in motivating one's course of action, with the more acceptable scenario constantly being put forward as a cover story to rationalize the course of action, however awkwardly it may be made to fit. (Crites, 1971, p. 126)

I am intrigued by the concept of a *cover story*; but, I am uncomfortable with how Crites assumes that one story is "real" and the other is "fabricated." This is actually contrary to Crites previous assertion that all experience is "imaginative construction;" if this is what he holds as true then how can there ever be a "real" story? The word "real" places value, or a judgment on our stories, meaning that there is a right way and wrong way to re-tell our life stories. Olson and Craig (2005) expound upon Crites's depiction of a cover story and describe cover stories as scripts that get woven into the re-telling of stories that help us to bridge the divide between the stories that we want to "reveal" and the stories we are expected to disclose. They acknowledge that the many stories that construct our past experiences create numerous intertwining story lines that make up our lived experience. Olson and Craig (2005) do not regard the cover story as a form of self-deception but a process of weaving different, and maybe divergent, aspects of an experience into a story or multiple stories, thus broadening the definition of the cover story.

For me the key word is "reveal." What is revealed in the cover story? What is it that the teller wants to cover and uncover as she interweaves the past into the present story? Carl Leggo (2008) claims that "We tell stories of our lives, and we reveal ourselves in

intimate ways" (p. 3). Again this brings us back to the particulars; which details of the story were included, embellished, fabricated, downplayed, or excluded? Simply the stories that we tell, or re-tell, are constructed in a way that makes sense to the teller and has meaning for the listener (Leggo, 2008; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Olson & Craig, 2005; Bell, 2003; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Crites, 1971). As Bell (2003) recognized, we re-tell our stories within a cultural and social milieu, and depending on the time and place, which is fluid, our stories can change with time. This brings us back to Crites's (1971) initial claim that all experience is "imaginative constructions." Is the act of re-telling a conscious form of self-deception? I think a more appropriate term would be to call the re-telling as the "present" story. By this, I mean this is the story I tell today; it may change tomorrow because of my mood, my circumstances, and or the audience. As Olson and Craig (2005) describe, the story may run contrary to what the listener believes is "true" but it does not mean that the teller is purposefully attempting to replace one experience with another.

> Bruner (1991) argues that:
>
> Unlike the construction generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative construction can only achieve verisimilitude. Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and narrative necessity rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false. (p. 5)

Bruner (1991) suggests that a story, in order to be "heard," must be about how an "implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from …" (p. 11). Ira Glass, writer and storyteller supports this by stating:

> The most powerful thing you can hear; and the only thing that ever persuades any of us in our own lives, is when you meet somebody whose story contradicts the thing you think you know. At that point, it's possible to question what you know, because the authenticity of their experience is real enough to do it (A Storied Career, 2006).

In the context of queer parents and their children, the canonical script is the backdrop of hegemonic heterosexist discourse and practice that frame family and school. The "breach" can simply be their presence in the system; merely by attending school, arguably the queer parent and their child disrupt the social and cultural norms that support heterosexuality as the dominant, foundational ideology underpinning of family and school. The family construct that the non-heterosexual parent and their child display to the teachers, the administration, and other students, irrevocably questions the heteronormative behaviours

and practices of that school community, thus breaching the canonical script that defines family and school culture, which according to Bruner just begs this story to be told.

To illustrate the multiple perspectives that narrative inquiry brings to the phenomena of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe what they term as a "metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 50). Their dimensions include *temporality*, the *personal and social,* and *place. Temporality* is a comprehensive description of time, encompassing the past, present, and future. Time is seen as continuous and that "every experience both takes up something from the present moment and carries it into future experiences" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 69). The *personal and social* relate to the interconnectedness of people and their circumstances in a given experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) add that we are all shaped by the "existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form the individual's context" (p.69). Within this dimension, it is important to recognize the relationship between the participant and inquirer. The narrative inquirer is also working within the context from which she is living, working, and researching (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). *Place* refers to the "concrete and physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 69). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) put special emphasis on *place* because the bearing of *place* on experience is fundamental to how one internalizes and re-constructs that experience. The most obvious locale of *place* in this inquiry is school; because of the social, political and cultural collateral that surrounds school and the school community, school (place) greatly informs and shapes the stories of non-heterosexual parents and their children as they talk about school. I would also argue that *place* in this research is nested in how non-heterosexual parents and their children situate themselves within the discourse of queerness and family. As discussed previously, Ahmed (2006a) described a queer sense of *place* in terms of orientation; orientation being a "matter of how we reside in space" (p.543):

> Queer is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a "straight line" … Sexuality itself can be considered a spatial formation not only in the sense that bodies inhabit sexual spaces, but also in the sense that bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space (Ahmedb, 2006, p. 67).

As I listened to my data for the particulars, it became increasingly clear that this notion of how queer bodies occupy space, or what I have termed queer *visibility*, emerged as a consistent theme. Queer visibility became a re-occurring *place* of reflection and tension for

parents as they told and/or re-told their stories of creating a queer family presence in their child's school. Queer visibility in the context of this research has many manifestations and I was challenged with how I could adequately communicate the particulars, and ramifications of queer visibility as expressed by the participants. I was led back to the work of Janet Finch and her discussion about the art of "displaying family." Finch (2007) describes the "need" to display family as an activity that is consciously acted out. The phrases *display* and *act out* increasingly took on more meaning as my research progressed and it became progressively more important for me to be able to illustrate, and expose, the joy, the vulnerability, the challenges, the despair, and the strength of queer parents and their children as expressed to me through their stories, their words.

To get underneath the particulars of *temporality*, the *personal and social,* and *place,* I needed to broaden the scope of narrative inquiry by opening up my research to alternate forms of representation. As I established in Chapter 1, this research is aimed at multiple audiences (school administrators, teachers, and the queer community). To be able to effectively appeal to these various perspectives/audiences, it was critical that I was not limited by a single mode of data generation or representation. As well, to avoid the risk of creating a single story about the schooling experiences of queer parents and their children, it was important to chart a research path that allowed for data to be generated and represented in multiple forms. I needed also a means of working in my own experience, including an arts-informed methodology seemed the appropriate evolution for my research.

The inquiry deepens …

My challenge with arts-based research was finding a specific framework and even language that best described my mode of inquiry. It was important for me to find a form of arts-infused inquiry that was, as Patricia Leavy (2009) describes, "predicated upon evoking meaning not denoting them" (p. 14). Leavy (2009) claims that "arts-based practices allow research questions to be posed in new ways, entirely new questions to be asked, and new non-academic audiences to be reached" (p. 12). Because I had already begun a narrative inquiry, I needed to incorporate an arts-infused method that worked with, and deepened, the narrative component of the research. As a result I was drawn to the methodology of *arts-informed research* as described by Ardra Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2008):

> Arts-informed research is a mode and form of qualitative research in the social sciences that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived. The central purposes of arts-informed research are to enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible (p. 59).

The distinction between *arts-informed research* and *arts-based research* is important for its applicability for my work. Although I have observed that at times the terms are used interchangeably, there is some tension within the practice of arts-based inquiry on how *art* is leveraged as a research methodology. Shaun McNiff (2008) defines *art-based* research as thus:

> Art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both the researchers and the people they involve in their studies. These inquiries are distinguished from research activities where the arts may play a significant role but are essentially used as data for investigations that take place within academic disciplines that utilize more traditional scientific, verbal, and mathematical descriptions and analyses of phenomena (p. 29).

As well, Leavy (2009) distinguishes art-based research as a practice that may incorporate narrative analysis, poetry, music, performance, dance, movement, and visual art, but she specifically states that these art forms cannot be mixed; the methods, she states, "are not interchangeable" (p. 259). Leavy, like McNiff, argues that the discipline of the art form utilized in the research must be integral to the inquiry and that there are specific methodological parameters that must be applied to the making of the art in order for the art to be considered valid research. Although Leavy advocates for a certain aesthetic lens to be applied to arts-based research, she does acknowledge that the dichotomy *good art* versus *good research* is a discussion worthy of serious debate. Carl Leggo challenges us to shift the question from "Is this good arts-based research?" to "What is this arts-based research good for?" (Leggo as sited by Leavy, 2009, p. 17). To answer "What is this arts-based research good for?" it is important to get back to the original intent of the research. Barbara Milech and Ann Schilo (2004), in their discussion about protocols for evaluating a research thesis that incorporates art and or media, outline a method that they term 'The Research-Question Model'- a process by which "both the written and the creative component of the thesis are conceptualized as independent answers to the same research question" (p. 7). Art evokes an emotional response; it has the potential to push us to new awakenings. In the context of educational research, an emotive response, on its own, cannot always adequately interrogate the research question or questions. However, if the researcher can substantively marry the distinct components of the research, meaning the art and the text, then one can answer, "What is this arts-based research good for?" (Leavy, 2009; Milech & Schilo, 2004). This brings me back to the beginning of this discussion and that is the distinction between arts-informed research and arts-based research. I

acknowledge that there are multiple perspectives on this discussion; Susan Finley (2008) claims that:

> Arts-based research is difficult to characterize because its forms and methods vary according to location, diversity of participants, and the range of ways through which researchers, artists, and participants describe, interpret, and make meanings from experiences, as well as by multiple forms of representation available to artist-as-researcher (p. 79).

However, for the purposes of this dissertation I will be leveraging the term *arts-informed inquiry* to describe my work because it knits together both academic and artistic activities to inform the theoretical underpinnings of the research (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Burns, 2004; Halifax, Brown, Compton & O'Connor, 2004; Milech & Schilo, 2004; Neilson A, 2004; Neilson L, 2004; Springgay & Irwin, 2004). Leah Burns (2004) describes arts-informed research as a way of "being and understanding (the known) in the world, in relation to other ways of being and understanding (the unknown)" (p. 219). Arts-informed research is not just about methodology but about a way of positioning oneself as a researcher and an openness to explore different ways of knowing (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Burns, 2004; Halifax, Brown, Compton & O'Connor, 2004; Milech & Schilo, 2004; Neilson A, 2004; Neilson L, 2004). But to further the discussion on arts-informed inquiry, I will be incorporating the language of those scholars who have greatly informed my development as an arts-informed inquirer.

> Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner (1997) ask and answer the question:

> What does it mean to say that an approach to educational research is arts-based? Two criteria apply … First, arts-based research is engaged in for a purpose often associated with artistic activity; arts-based research is meant to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities. Second, arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or *design elements* that infuse the inquiry process and the research text (p. 95).

Barone and Eisner go on to claim that arts-based research "at its best is capable of persuading its percipient to see educational phenomena in new ways, and to entertain questions about them that might have otherwise been left unasked" (1997, p. 96). Arts-based research, and specifically arts-based research in education, which is the focus of this dissertation, opens up spaces in which to broaden the reach of the inquiry. Susan Finley (2008) maintains that "Arts-based research makes use of diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world" (p. 79). Eisner (2008) argues that the arts are essential to "enriching our awareness and expanding our humanity" (p. 11), which he believes is an integral component to expanding or building knowledge. Eisner (2008) supports this argument by describing the contribution of art to knowledge as art's ability to help us

become "aware of our capacity to feel" (p. 11) by connecting us with emotions that "enable us to discover our own interior landscape" (p. 11), which Eisner (2008) believes is key to being able to see and interpret the world in new ways. Lorri Neilson (2004) asks:

> What of the aesthetics of knowing? If we are to find a way to live between earth and sky, we must learn to surrender to new and large stories, ones that continually bring us to the edge of deeper questions (p. 46).

It is those "deeper questions" that challenge us to broaden how we perceive and interrupt the world … contributing to our sense of knowing. L. Neilson (2004) also describes arts-based research, or in her words *aesthetic work*, as a means in which to "interrupt the ordinary" (p. 47), which within a queer theory context can be construed as a means to disrupt heteronormative ideology. Springgay and Irwin (2004) also speak to this notion of interruption: "Aesthetic inquiry is an ongoing process that lingers in the sensual spaces of experience, simultaneously creating and disrupting meaning, being, and becoming" (p. 82). I take this to mean that arts-based research or aesthetic inquiry recognizes that knowledge is relational and not a fixed destination, and Nielson (2004) refers to this sense of knowing as "generative and not acquisitive" (p. 48). How we arrive at *knowing* is an important exploration for my research. The participants' stories present multiple opportunities for the recipients to re-orient themselves to the concept of family and it is only by interrupting the ordinary that the recipient can see, or even follow a different or new line that orients them away from the "straight line."

A/r/tography takes this discussion a step further and looks beyond the product, the art, and focuses on the process (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005):

> To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through a process of art making and writing. It is a process of double imaging that includes the creation of art and words that are not separate or illustrative of each other but instead, are interconnected and woven through each other to create additional meanings (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899).

Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, and Bickel (2006) describe a/r/tography as a practice-based research methodology which is situated in "rhizomatic relationality" (p. 71). "Rhizomes resist taxonomies and create interconnected networks with multiple entry points … Rhizomes are interstitial spaces between thinking and materiality" (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 71). Rhizomes speak to resonance, which recognizes that process and end product are equally significant, each informing the other. It allows for a flux and fluidity between what we see and how we experience what we see. Irwin et al. (2006) describe rhizomatic relationality as "embodied living inquiry, an interstitial relational space for creating, teaching, learning, and researching in a constant state of becoming" (p. 71). Here, space is

clearly multiple, fluid, and relational, not essentializing. A/r/tography offers space and time for reflective interactions between the art, the artist, and the viewer/reader. Irwin and Springgay (2008) also compare relational space within a/r/tography with complexity theory.

Complexity theory works from the premise that "understandings emerge from the associative relations among complex interactions" (p. xxvi). Irwin and Springgay (2008) suggest that how we make meaning of images and text "is contingent upon the relations between artist (or in this case let us say a/r/tographer), art work, text, and audience and social, cultural, economic, and political contexts" (p. xxvi). A/r/tography, unlike arts-based research, recognizes that the art and text created through inquiry are not created in a vacuum and cannot be constricted by its discipline. Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer (2006) argue that:

> A/r/tographical work is rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess which are enacted and presented or performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. (p. 1224).

A/r/tography is a way of interweaving aesthetic inquiry and artistic practices with analytic text as means to "convey meaning rather than facts" (Springgay et al. 2009, p. 903). As such, a/r/tography provides the opportunity to follow what Irwin and Springgay (2008) describe as the "unfolding" of the phenomena. From a very early stage in my research, my work began to shift to places I had not anticipated. The stories my participants shared transported me to the edges of what I now envision as great folds in the fabric of their stories. My choice was to leap above the folds or to take the time to probe deeper, unfolding/revealing the particulars of their experience. Irwin and Springgay (2008) describe this as an "interstitial space, open and vulnerable where meanings and understandings are interrogated and ruptured" (p. xx). It was at this juncture that my research evolved into what I have termed a multilayered arts-informed inquiry, which includes a visual arts and performance component.

In keeping with Dewey (1925):

> The goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant (p. 411).

What resonates with me as a researcher/writer/artist is that the research text, whether it is visual, read or performed, garners its meaning from the interpretation of the reader, the

audience, the receiver of the text. When presenting a research text, be it visual, spoken, or written, it is vital that the audience is considered in the designing of "artefact," artefact being the representation of the research text. The interplay between audience and text can only be controlled to a limited extent, which lends an air of ambiguity to the meaning of the text. As established earlier in this chapter, *ambiguity* is not a comfortable space for most researchers; that said, I have come to the belief that the aim of educational research is to "enhance meaning rather than reduce uncertainty" (Spindler, 2008, p. 22) and that it is important to be able to dwell in the margins of ambiguity, trusting that the research text has many interpretations, many of which we cannot control. This brings me full circle back to the notion that a research text is "inevitably fictional since they have been 'fashioned' and 'moulded' by their writers" (Spindler, 2008, p. 20). L. Neilson (2004) claims that "knowing is fiction, and fiction is a form of knowing" (p. 45). As a writer and an artist, this concept resonated with me and in order for me to move forward with my research I needed to construct a methodology or a hybrid of methodologies that would allow me the latitude, and grace, to generate data and position my research text(s), within the margins of truth and fiction. I approached each phase of this project as an organic living text and as such it seemed appropriate to incorporate different methodological elements to address discrete aspects and phases of the research. What follows are the arts-informed components of my inquiry.

INTERLUDE

PART 1

See Me: Stories Displayed …

The Fridge

When I think of family, my family as a child, and my family as an adult, I see the pictures and memorabilia plastered on the door and sides of my refrigerator. I remember when my brother replaced his old fridge with a stainless steel one, he was heartbroken to learn, after installing it in his kitchen, that it did not hold magnets. Where was he going to display all of the photos, postcards and tacky travel magnets he had collected over the years? He said his kitchen felt cold. He and I, and my sister, grew up with a fridge that displayed the many layers of our family. Even after we had all moved away, my mother's refrigerator was always covered with old and current pictures of her children, grandchildren, and friends. There were newspaper articles, political cartoons, irreverent decals, postcards from friends, and various other sundry items. My mother's fridge was always a good read. The grandkids loved seeing what was new on Grandma's fridge. For me my mother's fridge encapsulated her many passions. For example, it wasn't a stretch to see she was a huge President Obama fan because the entire bottom quarter of her fridge door was covered with a poster of President Obama. Above that was a newspaper article about Mia Moore, from her precious University of Connecticut women's basketball team, shooting a three-point basket. Next to that was a schedule of her Inland Wetlands board meetings, of which she was the chair, and then there was a picture of her friends toasting with a glass of wine out on her deck overlooking the river she lived on and loved. There were, of course, numerous pictures of her four grandchildren at various ages scattered in amongst all of her political, sports, and friend artifacts. She hated removing anything from her fridge, so there were articles on top of articles, and pictures on top of pictures. The only pictures that did not get covered were those of her much loved grandchildren.

In the summer of 2010, after a two year battle with cancer, my mother began to lose that fight and required 24-hour care in her home. The refrigerator, her refrigerator, became a giant note pad where we posted instructions about her oxygen tank, her medications, her schedule of care, important phone numbers, and her "do not resuscitate" order … her fridge became a beacon for her illness. I remember when my sister and I decided to enlist the use of the fridge to post all of this information; it meant that we had to remove her "life" from her refrigerator to make room for this new chapter. We felt as though we were erasing her.

My sister and I silently and gently removed each item. I re-read every article and studied every picture. Inside I was weeping as I tried to commit to memory every detail that was displayed on her fridge, all the particulars of her life. I knew that they would never go back up. I also knew that she would never again be in her kitchen to see the "new" fridge. I drew comfort and great sadness from this, comfort that she would never see her life dismantled, and sadness because she would never even be aware that we did this. The fridge looked out of place in the kitchen it screamed of illness and death. It was unsettling.

In protest, I began to replace a few of the pictures of the grandchildren and placed them around the lists and the schedules. A few days later I noticed that a few more pictures had made their way back to the fridge; no doubt my sister and brother also missed my mother's life in pictures on the fridge. We were not ready to let her go just yet.

Within hours of my mother's death, my sister ripped the lists and schedules off the fridge, sending the carefully placed magnets hurtling across the kitchen. I can still hear the sound of the glass ladybug magnet as it ricocheted off the edge of my mother's stainless steel kitchen sink and then rolled under her stove. We were never able to retrieve that magnet nor did we ever put the fridge back the way it was. Instead, all that remained were the few pictures of the grandkids we had replaced – scattered haphazardly on the fridge door.

Even in my mother's illness, her fridge was a snapshot of her life. What was once a chronicle of her grandchildren, her friends, her causes, her political views, and her travels, became a window into the loss of her fiercely independent life.

We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience
A Community Art Exhibit

The process

Eisner (1995) states that:

> Artistically crafted research can inform practicing educators and scholars in ways that are both powerful and illuminating. Research with no coherent story, no vivid images, and no sense of the particular is unlikely to stick. Coherence, imagery, and particularity are the fruits of artistic thinking (p. 5).

To illuminate the particulars of the stories by queer parents and their children, I integrated a community arts exhibition into my inquiry. Deborah Barndt (2008) defines *community arts* as "the engagement of people in representing their collective identities, histories, and aspirations in multiple forms of expression" (2008, p. 351). Within an educational context, community arts draws from the rich history of participatory art practices which have been used to explore the production of knowledge from a historical, social, political, and personal perspective (Selkrig, 2011; Bickel, Springgay, Beer, Irwin, Grauer & Xiong, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Barndt, 2008, 2004; Walsh & Mitchell, 2004). Barndt (2008) argues,

> When people are given the opportunity to tell their own stories-whether through oral traditions, theatre, visual arts, music, or other media . . . they affirm their lives as sources of knowledge, and they stimulate each other in a synergistic process of collective knowledge production (p. 354).

Queer parents, and their children, share the collective identity of operating within a heterocentric society but that is where the similarity ends. As previously discussed, queer family constructs are complex and cannot be defined by a "single story." Integrating visual images, as part of a community arts project helps to make visible the diversity of queer family experience. Leavy (2009) contends that "Visual art challenges viewers in an immediate and visceral way while remaining open to a multiplicity of meanings" (p 263).

Finley (2008, 2003) suggests that arts-based inquiry methods have the potential to "expose audiences to life experiences that they would not encounter except vicariously, through their adaptation to an art medium" (p. 79). As well, Weber (2008) argues that "Images literally help us to adopt someone else's gaze, see someone else's point of view, and borrow their experience for a moment" (p. 45). Leavy, Finley, and Weber position art as a mechanism in which to shift or open up a recipient's view of the world; in other words, how they *see* and *read* the world. I agree.

In the spring of 2008, I held a series of workshops inviting parents who identify as non-heterosexual and their children, and/or extended family, to participate in one or more creative sessions with the aim of generating original pieces of art that illustrated their experiences of creating and being a queer family within a heteronormative culture and society.

In my conversations with potential participants, many expressed that they were not artistic and were apprehensive about their ability to "create something." I stressed that the objective of this project was not to create "fine art" but an opportunity to express, in alternative forms, their experiences of being a "queer family" in our current society. In these conversations I always very carefully chose my words because I did not want to lead the participants in any one direction.

To help the participants bridge their fear of "art," I began each workshop with a free flowing finger painting session. I laid out pieces of finger painting paper on long tables and invited the participants to take part in a ten minute free form finger painting session. I did not give them time to think about what they wanted to do; the only direction I gave them was to plunge their hands into the paint and just start covering the page. The children, of course, dove into the paint, whereas the adults would start by tentatively dipping one finger in at a time. The texture of the paint and the paper was so satisfying, however, that within a few minutes even the most reticent participant was elbow deep in paint. By the time the participants had finished their finger painting creations, they were suddenly bursting with ideas for their projects. I kept all of the finger paintings and incorporated them into my piece for the show, *Reflections, Refraction* (Original, p. 77).

To assist the participants in their artistic journey, I provided a wide variety of art supplies that I hoped would allow them to experiment with their ideas in a range of forms. I also invited the participants to incorporate more personal items such as photographs. I posed four questions to help us begin our visual journey:

- What is important to you as a family?
- How do you want to be *seen* as a family?
- How is your identity shaped or framed by your family?
- What is the story you want to tell?

Families were not limited to these questions; they were free to choose how they wanted to frame and show/tell their story. I had small and large tables arranged for the participants to use as their art stations and many of the families established "family" tables. At times there was a lot of conversation as participants explored the different art supplies, and other times all you could hear was the cutting of paper. The children were very excited to show each other their creations,

while the adults were at first hesitant, which I think reflected a lack of artistic confidence. But once the adults began to see each other's work, their confidence grew and I heard animated conversations about parenting, adoption, sperm donation, same-sex marriage, school, homophobia, and glue sticks. The energy was contagious. Most of the art was completed within one workshop. As noted on page 45, upon completion of each piece, the artist\participant wrote a description or narrative about their work and indicated how they wanted to be identified or credited. The narratives and credits were displayed alongside their art work.

The process of creating and displaying their art work was transformative for many of the participants. The power lay not just with the finished product but with the process inherent in creating an artistic work. The participants did not define themselves as "artists" but by giving them a space and "permission" to engage creatively they were able to get inside themselves in ways they did not think was possible – the result was magical.

The exhibition

The premise for publicly displaying the art work was to invite the public into the conversation of 'what constitutes family.' As such, the viewing public was encouraged to contribute to the discussion by adding their stories to the exhibit. I leveraged the metaphor of the refrigerator as a 'snapshot into family' as an entry point for the public to enter the conversation. My rationale was/is that many of us display important family objects like children's art work, photos of friends and family, holiday mementos and other objects that have sentimental value or are significant to us on our refrigerators. I invited the public to include a piece of their own family story by adding to the "family album" on the refrigerator. Craft materials and magnets were supplied and many people sat down at the kitchen table and crafted their story on a magnet and left it behind as a piece of their family legacy.

Through the simple act of "showing" our stories, this exhibit explores the extent to which *queer* sexuality and *queer* family structures play a part in the way in which non-heterosexual parents, and their children, navigate and negotiate individual and family identity. The stories displayed throughout the exhibit spoke to the multiplicity of *queer* experience as lived by each participant/artist. Each piece challenges the viewer to expand her/his own personal narrative about what it means to *belong* and *live* within a society that is based upon assumptions of conformity.

The title of this exhibit purposefully incorporated the word "queer." Queer in this context "defines a strategy, an attitude … Queer articulates a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality, and the family" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 43). As I discussed in Chapter 1, *queer* dares us to examine, or re-examine, how we view and/or define the roles in which society assigns us based on perceived gender, race, ethnicity, social class and sexuality. My use of the word *queer* in this context was about empowering a notion of *difference* that enlightens and enriches us by broadening our receptivity about our beliefs in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality.

The images and narratives from this project have been presented at two conferences, *The International Cultural Research Network International Conference,*

Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University (2010), and the *Canadian Association for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference*, Ottawa: Carleton University (2009). As well, the images and narratives were incorporated as part of the keynote address for the book launch of *'Who's Your Daddy? And other writings on queer parenting,'* edited by Rachel Epstein, at MotherTongue Books, in Ottawa, Ontario, October 18, 2009. In addition I have been invited as a guest lecturer at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (2010, 2012) and Brock University in Saint Catherines, Ontario (2010) to present this project.

The proceeding pages contain a series of photos from the exhibition. Every art piece, including the title and the narrative written by the artist/participant(s) is represented. A DVD which includes a PowerPoint presentation of the exhibit *We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience* and a PDF of the catalogue that I produced for the exhibition is also included.

REFLECTIONS . . . REFRACTIONS
Terrah Keener

The art work featured in this exhibit was produced during a series of community workshops. *"We are just like every other family"* was a phrase frequently echoed by participants as they designed and created their art. Yet, many of the pieces highlight *difference* and the desire for the recognition of *difference*. What was ultimately created appears contradictory to the sentiments expressed in the workshops.

Reflecting on the space between what participants said and what they actually produced, I found myself questioning the intent and the societal pull to the preface "*We are . . .*
In this piece, I position *We Are* as an exploration of "sameness" as it relates to expressions of family. *Are We*, figuratively, is the inverse of *We Are* and challenges us to examine the feelings and motivation behind the statement *We Are . . .*

This piece represents my reflection upon the creative process that led to the development of the thoughtful and inspiring art that is featured in this exhibit. Because of this I incorporated pieces of the workshop process in this installation. Finger paintings created by participants border the piece's central questions and phrases clipped from magazines capture my ruminations about the tension between societal pressure for conformity and the desire to express difference.

TIRED OF EXPLAINING
Catherine Watson, 40
Sian McKenna, 43
Mothers of Charlie (age 3)

Our experiences of family have involved great feelings of joy and wonderment; a fierce and exhilarating love for our son and an immense sense of fulfillment. Yet when we reflect on our experiences we must also acknowledge the frustrations that we have had in being different; in not fitting neatly into a government agency's computer interface; in not fitting into people's cookie cutter idea of what a family looks like. That we had to adopt our own son is just ludicrous. There is real pain in not being acknowledged as your child's parent. It is frustrating and often annoying to have to come out over and over and over again, always wondering, and often worrying that the grocery clerk/waiter/government official/doctor/mom at the playground/nice little old lady passing the time of day is going to be cool with who our son is and what his family looks like. We don't want to go around screaming "Hey there! Did you know we are lesbians and this is our son?" We'd probably be accused of being too radical if we did. And although we want people to acknowledge our difference, we don't really want to be defined by it. We have many more things in common with any other family raising a young child than we do real differences.

NO MAN'S HANDS
Catherine Watson,
40
Sian McKenna, 43,
mothers of Charlie
(age 3)

THIS BOY'S LIFE
Catherine Watson, 40
Sian McKenna, 43
mothers of Charlie (age 3)

TRUE COLOURS
Catherine Watson, 40
Sian McKenna, 43
mothers of Charlie (age 3)

GROWING LOVE, COMMUNITY, AND SADIE

Lara Morris
Renée Hartleib
Sadie Morris (age 3)

This piece depicts activities that are important to our family (gardening, nature, traditions, time together, and playgrounds!). It also reflects values that inform our parenting and are a foundation for us (kindness, respect, cooperation, community, and being present). We hope you enjoy our art project!

FAMILY TIES
Lynn MacDonald

In queer families the ties that bind us are not only ties from our families of origin. We certainly have these ties, but we are fortunate to have others as well. We have a unique kind of extended family with other queer families (some with and some without children). Children of same-sex couples have relationships with each other that are very "cousin-like" in nature...and it makes for a full and wonderful life.

SNAP SHOTS, REMARKS AND SONG

Photographs by Bruno Callahan-Cross,
Thomas and Tim Callahan-Cross
Text by - Bruno Callahan-Cross

These snapshots and remarks are bits about the everyday life of our family. The snaps were taken after a canoe trip to explore the area we have recently made our home. The remarks are all Bruno's. Some are funny and some are embarrassing, but they are often a window into his thoughts about our world.

The lullaby "Everything Possible" by Fred Small, we first heard performed by "The Flirtations" in the early nineties in Halifax. I was very moved by it and thought it would be a wonderful piece to sing to a child if only I could be a father; which at the time seemed impossible. I sang it to Bruno the first night he spent with us. Two weeks later he sang it to Thomas.   It is a regular now and is affectionately referred to by Bruno as the "Put Away the Dishes" song in reference to the first few lines "We have cleared off the table; the leftovers saved, washed the dishes and put them away". We all especially love the chorus.

MEMORY BOX
Phillip
Shannon
Rvan (15 months)

As a little boy, my father gave me a wooden box that my grandmother used to keep her good silver. To me, this box was very special and something that belonged to a grandmother I did not have the chance to meet. I used this box to save all the special things I gathered in my life. From a special pencil given to me by my Grade 5 teacher to ribbons and other awards I received. I also kept special stones I found on the beach or shells. This box represents our Family Memory Box. It contains reminders of special times and our hopes and dreams for the future. It's about our family and things that are special to us.

LOVE NOT LOOKS
Terry Hay
Carole MacIntyre
Dylan Hay

The pokemon figures depicted are Toxicroak and Croagunk. (Croagunk is the smaller one). Our art director (Dylan) was trying to convey that a family is built on LOVE...not looks (Dylan's own words).

STICKS & STONES
Linda Wilke

My family is about love; not being queer. I love that I am a woman, a mom and a lesbian. Some people may have issue with us and families like ours – it is their loss. Their life and world is smaller for it. My world is full and big and complete.

All we wanted to do was have a baby and make a family. We made this baby ourselves (with a little help). Still we needed to pay $1400 to adopt her and make it real to the rest of the world. It doesn't seem right.

BIRTHING THE CERTIFICATE
Barbara Casey

At the time of our daughter's birth, the provincial legislation was amended to offer legal rights to same- sex parents and their children. It was a heady time in British Columbia. For many, it was a day we thought would never dawn.

But dawn it did. Our daughter was one of the first wave of children in BC to enjoy those benefits. For our family, this certificate is a reminder of moving forward and backwards at the same time. It is a reminder that words are powerful; that the battle is never really over and that silence is never the strongest voice.

BEING HOME

Tracey Rickards   *Carla Rasmussen*
Kelly Costello   *Jeremy Costello*
Hilary Costello   *Ted Costello*

Our family is a patchwork of people, spirits and personalities. We love with respect, trusting each other to support one another, to love one another, to be there for one another.

Tradition and rituals are important to us as a way of cementing the bonds and the memories. We're not wildly flamboyant – we just "are". We work, we play, we cry, we celebrate while being home.

WHY?
Romero Da Rocha
Luiz Andrade
Adriano Andrade Da Rocha

Twenty first century and society still is having a hard time understanding our love.

CARNIVAL
Luiz Andrade
Romero Da Rocha
Adriano Andrade Da Rocha

We are a happy family of all colours!

NEGOTIATING THE LANDSCAPE
Anonymous

2 lesbians raising a daughter reflect on the complexity of negotiating a multiplicity of landscapes. Picture us everywhere, any two moms with their eight-year-old daughter.

WE ARE FAMILY

Susan McKay
Nancy Colwell
Cali McKay
Tyler McKay

Your family are the people who love and care for you. They are who you say they are.

Love makes a family; nothing more is required, and nothing less.

ARC-EN-SOL (RAINBOW SUN)
Kim Vance
Patty (age 9)
Marcus (age 6)

This piece symbolizes connection to place, colour, identity, emotion and words. As a single lesbian mother of two adopted, multi-racial, and special needs children, my identity and our family is multi-layered and diverse. Shells and ocean represent real entities in our lives but are also metaphors for fluidity and ebb and flow of family dynamics and structure.

The rainbow speaks to our connection to queer communities, but also to diversity, in a more general sense, and our family's connection to Africa, the "rainbow" continent. The sun (or sol) is symbolic of light and our connection to the earth and universe, which we honour as a family.

FAMILY CONSTELLATION
Pattie LaCroix

Our family is triumphant. A consciously constructed celebration of life. Family is seen through the lenses of ideology, culture, process and situation. My family is defined from a legacy of meaning sometimes extremely particular sometimes broadly embracing. We have purposefully created a family that celebrates the vast constellation of what it means to be a family. When I think of my family I think of joy. The joy that is rooted in love that is intentional. The joy that tends to a garden which magically has the potential to nurture the best in all of us.

I CUBE
LOVE NOTE
Patty (9 years)

MY BIG GAY FAMILY
Nancy Newcomb
Sharon Beasley

Left to right:

Piper the wiener dog

Sharon – Mom

Nancy – Mom

Natalie – 17 months

Emily – 15 years

Lily – Super beagle

THE ROLL OF THE DICE
Lesbian mother & son (age 8)

We first experience and learn love within the embrace of our family. We do not choose our family; it is a *roll of the dice.* It can change and evolve. Family is not a celebration of biology – family is the celebration of unconditional love. It is that love which nourishes us.

THE BRUDDER BOX
Box created by Gabriel Jackson-Lynn (age 5)
Supported by, Monica Jackson, Marjie Lynn,
Adrian Jackson- Lane

Adrian is Gabe's big brother and his idol. The world for Gabe rotates around Adrian. He decorated this box thinking about what brudder would like.

AN OFFICIAL FORMULA
Deborah Ferguson
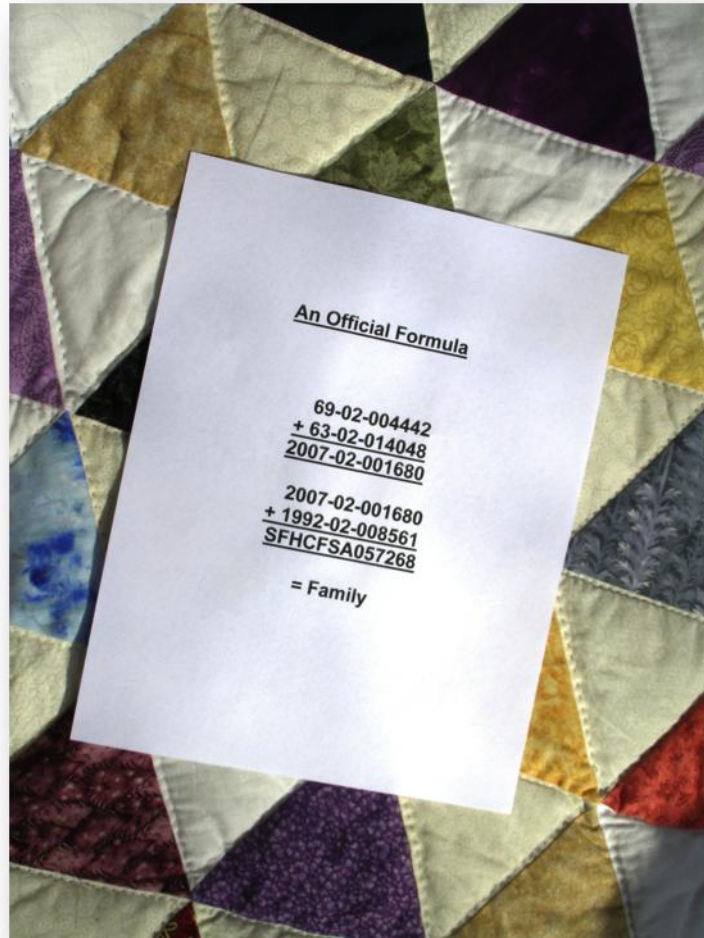
An Official Formula

69-02-004442
+ 63-02-014048
2007-02-001680

2007-02-001680
+ 1992-02-008561
SFHCFSA057268

= Family

We are an official family according to the laws of our country, but what were we before- an unofficial family?

This official formula was constructed with our birth certificate numbers "added" together to equal our marriage license number in the first equation.

In the second equation, the result of the first equation is "added" to our child's birth certificate number, thus equaling the adoption file number.

Numbers don't lie; these numbers add up to Family.

INTERLUDE

PART 2

Hear Me: Stories Told, Stories Performed …

ASIDE

Playing Queer

I had the opportunity to pilot the script, 'Queerly Inside and Out at School … a conversation' at the International Cultural Research Conference in May of 2010. I had originally thought that I might mount it as a full production with trained actors; however, I have a vision that this script will have a life outside of this dissertation and is flexible enough to be performed by actors, as well as an unrehearsed spoken story. I decided that the conference was a wonderful opportunity to pilot the script as an unrehearsed spoken story. It was a fascinating experience.

The response to participate in the production was overwhelming and I was able to cover off all of the roles. But this left no one to "be" the audience. As with most unanticipated scenarios, this actually worked out brilliantly. I took on the role of reading the voice-overs and the stage directions, when appropriate; as well I advanced the images which I projected on a screen. Each "actor" wore a large sign around their neck so that they were easily identifiable. I clustered the actors so that they were roughly where I would have had them on a stage. Without any preparation, I was impressed with the effort that each "actor" put into attempting to follow the stage directions so that they could capture the subtleties of each character in their inflection and body language.

After the last line was read, there was a hushed quiet. The silence was finally broken when one of the "actors" exclaimed "that was hard!" Another participant asked "How so?" Another participant, not the one who put forth the first exclamation, said "I felt that my character was making a 'big deal' about nothing. But, as we got deeper into the play, I began to really feel her anger in a real way." "Yeah" chimed in another participant, "I began to feel my character's pain – It was uncomfortable because I knew it was real." The conversation continued along this vein. They all agreed that there was power in playing the part of a gay father or lesbian mother, or the child of gay or lesbian parent. Many, specifically those who outed themselves as heterosexual, found the experience profound. The dialogue and the playing of a part was an access point from which they could garner a more complex perspective about what non-heterosexual parents and their children experience when they

make a conscious decision to be queerly visible. It sparked a conversation that was "hard," thoughtful, and reflective.

The response by the participants was all that I could have hoped for, yet I left feeling vaguely deflated and slightly depressed. Upon reflection, what was eating away at me, slowly, was that the first response by many of the participant/actors is they felt that their characters were being overly sensitive and making "much out of nothing." It reminded me how the blatant homophobia experienced by the research participants, and also experienced by myself, is not considered a "real" prejudicial transgression. Although the reflections by the participants/actors reinforced the need for the continuation of my work, it was hard to observe colleagues and educators cling to their myopic view of non-heterosexual identities.

Queerly Inside and Out in School … conversations
A performance

The process

Johnny Saldaña (2003), a playwright and qualitative researcher, challenges researchers who struggle around issues of representation to ask:

> Will the participant's story be credibly, vividly, and persuasively told for an audience through a traditional written report, video documentary, photographic portfolio, Web site, poetry, dance, music, visual arts installation, or ethnodrama? If it's the latter, then a qualitative researcher playwrites with data (p. 219).

When we tell or re-tell a story we are doing so for an audience, and some may argue that this is not a "performance" but an everyday activity that people engage in regularly (Leggo, 2008; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Olson & Craig, 2005; Bell, 2003; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Crites, 1971). Storytelling is a means for communication between people; some stories are told for the sole reason of imparting information and others for establishing or situating an identity, a place within a community (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Olson & Craig, 2005; Bell, 2003; Gray, 2003; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Crites, 1971). Ross Gray (2003) claims that every "social act can be viewed and understood as performance, situated in historical process, contingency and ideology" (p. 256). Our stories are not incidental; they are alive because of the social, political, and historical context in which they are conceived. Eric Peterson and Kristin Langellier (2006) write about the "performance turn" in narrative inquiry, claiming that narrative is both about "a making and a doing" (p. 173). Peterson and Langellier (2006) interpret Butler's concepts on performativity by claiming that narrative is performative in that it "produces that to which it refers … Narrative is performative in that the bodily capability for narrating constitutes or realizes a narrative (what is done) by its exercise (the doing)" (p. 174). It is important not to confuse concepts of performativity with performance. Yet, in terms of narrative, there is a congruency between the act of representing research data as performance and performativity in the sense that both are revealing a phenomena that is steeped in a social and political and historical context. It is difficult to discern what is authentic about the story being represented and what is socially and politically constructed. The twist however is that performativity is a deeply personal, yet for many, an unconscious

experience, whereas a performance is public and purposeful, allowing space for the audience to see, hear, and contemplate what has been performed. What is salient here is the notion of "space," allowing space and time for contemplation. Antonia Pont (2011) refers to this space as "the poles of autobiography and fiction" (p. 18) and it is "between these poles - in oscillation! - that the activity of *thinking* proper would occur" (p. 18). This undulation provides room for both truth and fiction, (as discussed in Chapter 3), to intermingle, thus creating openings for deep interpretation and reflection (Pont, 2011; Žantovská, 2010).

If the purpose of educational research is "to advance understanding" (Eisner, 1995, p. 3), as posited in Chapter 3, then I consider it my responsibility, as a researcher, to ensure that my inquiry is accessible. Transforming the written word to a spoken text, a performed text provides an opening for experiencing the data in a more visceral capacity. To accomplish this I bring together the traditions of verbatim theatre and ethnodrama. Together, these genres provide a theatrical foundation and tradition from which to represent, and make accessible, my interview data.

Verbatim theatre has its roots in documentary theatre which is genre that commonly explores historical and or political events that have had a broad social impact (Fisher, 2011; Chou & Bleiker, 2010; Lane, 2010; Lippert, 2010; Žantovská, 2010; Hutchinson, 2009; McManus, 2009; Reinelt, 2009; Freeman, 2007: Hughes, 2007). By incorporating pubic accounts through media, interviews, and public documents, documentary theatre provides a public and visual platform for interrogating and defining political and social issues or moments (Fisher, 2011; Chou & Bleiker, 2010; Lane, 2010; Lippert, 2010; Žantovská, 2010; Hutchinson, 2009; McManus, 2009; Reinelt, 2009; Freeman, 2007: Hughes, 2007). A powerful example of this was the 'Laramie Project' in 2000, which was a theatrical work that explored the social and political aftermath of the murder--motivated by virulent homophobia-- of Mathew Sheppard, an out gay student at the University of Wyoming (Lippert, 2010; Freeman, 2007). The focus of the 'Laramie Project', which was created from extensive interviews with the community, court documents, and archival media events, was to interrogate the entrenched systemic homophobia and homophobic narratives that surrounded Laramie before and after Matthew's death. It was not meant to solely "document" the events but to represent an interpretation of the events for the audience to contemplate and reflect upon (Fisher, 2011; Lane, 2010; Lippert, 2010; Žantovská, 2010; Hutchinson, 2009; McManus, 2009; Reinelt, 2009; Freeman, 2007). Verbatim theatre, on the other hand,

leverages, as its name suggests, verbatim material or as Donald McManus (2009) describes, "Verbatim theatre is a genre of drama that uses pre-existing words as text" (p. 141). In this context "pre-existing words" refer to primary sources of information such as interview transcripts, letters, and court transcriptions (Fisher, 2011; Chou & Bleiker, 2010; Lane, 2010; Lippert, 2010; Žantovská, 2010; Hutchinson, 2009; McManus, 2009; Reinelt, 2009; Freeman, 2007: Hughes, 2007). Verbatim theatre uses these texts, word for word, to explore the "darker recesses of the socio-political area, projecting voices and opinions which otherwise go unheard" (Lane, 2010, p. 59). Although verbatim theatre "promises a more direct and authentic access to actual lived experience" (Fisher, 2011, p. 112), there is room for some artistic agency in directing how the text is arranged, thus shaping and influencing the audience experience of the text (Fisher, 2011; Chou & Bleiker, 2010; Lane, 2010; Lippert, 2010; Žantovská, 2010; Hutchinson, 2009; McManus, 2009; Reinelt, 2009; Freeman, 2007: Hughes, 2007). McManus (2009) argues that,

> Verbatim theatre is not about truth in the sense of the most accurate imitation of real utterances . . . rather, it is about the truth revealed in the words themselves, which have validity because somebody really said them (p. 148).

Verbatim theatre provides an opportunity for the audience to question and engage with the words that is dynamic and potentially transformational.

Within a more traditional educational research setting Johnny Saldaña (2006, 2003, 1998), has coined what he describes as ethnodrama or ethnotheatre. "Ethnotheatre employs traditional craft and artistic techniques of formal theatre production to mount a live performance event of research participants' experiences and/or researchers' interpretations of data for an audience" (Saldaña, 2003, p. 218), which then creates an "entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative" (Saldaña, 2003, p. 220). Ethnodrama, like verbatim theatre is a means to interrogate those interstitial spaces that a/r/tography speaks to. The dialogue and interaction between characters in an ethnodrama display the relational aspects of people, place, and situation or as Irwin and Springgay (2008) describe it, "where encounters between subjects, thoughts, and actions propose new assemblages and situations" (p. xxxi). Both verbatim theatre and ethnotheatre provide a theatrical platform, for research data, to represent the human condition, thus creating a space in which to advance and/or deepen understanding. The difference being that ethnotheatre allows for more creative agency in fictionalizing dialogue

and characters while verbatim theatre leverages "authentic and unaltered words of various real-life agents" (Reinelt, 2009, p. 13).

Leveraging verbatim theatre

As I immersed myself in my interview transcripts I felt as if each participant was continuing and/or expanding upon the conversation I had just taken part in with the previous participant. Everyone was talking about the same two things: "creating family" and what I have termed "queer visibility." As explained in Chapter 2, I was surprised that the framework for many of my conversations was focused on the notion of "creating family" and upon deep reflection I realized that I needed, wanted, to explore this idea of creating family in more depth. Thus the idea for the community art exhibit, "We Are: Expressions of Family a queer experience" was launched. Although it is impossible to parse out the separate elements of the themes, *creating family* and *queer visibility*, I felt as though *queer visibility* needed its own alternative platform in which to illustrate the complex experiences of queer visibility within the school system.

As I worked with this theme, it became clear that the conversations that were swirling around in my transcripts were assembling themselves into one long conversation, representing multiple perspectives and experiences. The voices of my participants were not talking to me, they were talking to each other. Their voices clamoured to be heard-- not as discrete experiences, but as a collective of stories … spoken and performed stories where the inflection of their tone, their physicality, could be heard and experienced. Guided by the tenets of verbatim theatre, and the spirit of ethnotheatre, I began to arrange my data, word for word, into conversations, conversations between parents and children who had never met, yet each had something to add to the other's story. As each character spoke, an assemblage of stories began to unfold, revealing the shared experience of conscious and purposeful queer visibility in school.

Not all of the interview participants are represented in *Queerly Inside and Out in School … conversations*. At first I attempted to ensure that all of the participants had at least a cameo appearance in this dramatic representation. But, I found that the script became too long and many sections sounded repetitive. As I contemplated how to edit the script, I reflected on my rationale for representing my data in a dramatic form. I was concerned that the power of the participants' stories would get lost among a jumble of words on paper. I wanted their

stories, their words, to be heard, to be seen, to be experienced. Just as I felt that the visual images in the art show allowed an opening for accessibility into the lives of queer parents and their children, I felt that a performance offered yet another opening in which to access the schooling stories of queer parents and their children. As I established in Chapter 1, the stories of non-heterosexual parents and their children are not being told, or heard, and the focus of this research was to give voice to their stories. Consequently, as I began to edit and arrange the stories, I kept in the words of those participants that I felt echoed the sentiments of many of the participants. As a result, a few of the participants were edited out of the final script. These cuts were agonizing because I felt as though I was rendering them invisible. I struggled with this but in the end I feel that I have created a script that captures the challenges, the joys, and the disappointments as experienced by my participants in the public school system. But more importantly, they challenge us to hear and to see the complexity of their experience, daring us to remain unchanged.

What follows is the dramatic script, *Queerly Inside and Out in School …* *conversations.* The dialogue and the characters are taken directly from my transcripts. At no time did I combine personalities to create composite characters, nor did I add words. Deviating a little from the strictest forms of verbatim theatre, my edits were restricted to deleting words, such as "and," "ah" and "um" to aid in conversational flow. I took care to retain individual nuances in tone and inflection from the original audio taped transcripts. This is reflected in the stage directions as well as the use of bold lettering to indicate a stronger emphasis on specific phrases.

Images from 'We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience' are incorporated in the staging of this performance. The images serve as a visual cue, framing the dialogue between characters. These images remind and/or illustrate to the audience that there is more than one way to "read" the conversations that they are seeing, hearing, and witnessing. Similarly, the visual cues add depth to the words and act as a reminder of the lived-ness of the words being spoken.

Queerly Inside and Out in School … A Conversation

Cast: (All the characters are real people, and their words are their own, but their names have been changed to protect their identities)

Anne & Pricilla – Parents to Erin

Ayla – Age 14, is the daughter of Janet and Sara (not featured) and is an out lesbian.

Christine - Partner to Jane, (not featured) and the mother of Alisha, age 13 (not featured) and Dylan, age 7 (not featured).

Erin – Age 8, is the daughter of Anne and Pricilla

Janet – Partner to Sara (not featured) and mother to Ayla and Sheila, age 17 months (not featured).

Maggie & Sylvie – Parents to Trudy, age 16 (not featured).

Mark & Iain – Parents to Max, age 7 (not featured)

Sam & Amanda - Parents to Nathan and Luke, age 4 (not featured)

Nathan – Age 15 is the son of Amanda and Sam

Pujita – Age 14 is the daughter of Sahil

Sahil – Single father to Pujita and Anil, age 12 (not featured)

Setting:

The stage is dark. The actors are in place, with heads bowed. On the stage are three large multimedia screens. The screens are placed UC, RC, and LC. The screens are angled so that they, loosely, form the top portion of a hexagon. Slowly an image becomes visible on UC screen. As the image begins to take shape a voice-over begins.

Woman's Voice	STICKS AND STONES

My family is about love; not being queer. I love that I am a woman, a mom and a lesbian. Some people may have issue with us and families like ours – it is their loss. Their life and world is smaller for it. My world is full and big and complete.

As voice-over ends a new image, "Why?" fades up RC. As image comes into focus voice-over begins.
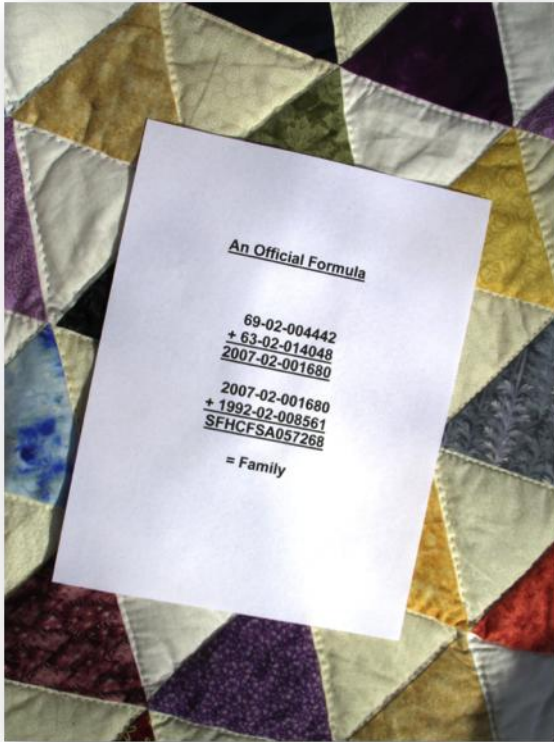

Man's voice	WHY?

It is the Twenty first century and society still is having a hard time understanding our love.
As voice-over ends a new image, "An Official Formula," fades up LC.

An Official Formula

69-02-004442
+ 63-02-014048
2007-02-001680

2007-02-001680
+ 1992-02-008561
SFHCFSA057268

= Family

Woman's Voice	AN OFFICIAL FORMULA

We are an official family according to the laws of our country, but what were we before - an unofficial family?

This official formula was constructed with our birth certificate numbers "added" together to equal our marriage license number in the first equation.

In the second equation, the result of the first equation is "added" to our child's birth certificate number, thus equaling the adoption file number.

Numbers don't lie; these numbers add up to Family.

After the voice- over, all images remain on screens for 5 beats. Sticks and Stones fades from UC screen and the image of school fades up in its place. The school remains on UC screen for most of the play. The RC and LC screen alternate with very slow fades, "Sticks and Stones", "Why?" and "An Official Formula".

As the lights come up on the actors, their figures appear as shadows against the school image. Nathan, Erin, Ayla, and Pujita stand away from the others and from each other, their heads remain bowed unless speaking.

Interlocking spots fade up on Anne and Pricilla, (DSR). They face each other in conversation. The physical closeness of Anne and Pricilla in and out of their spotlights should signify that they are a couple. Anne can sound strident at times, while Pricilla appears more reflective.

Anne   I wanted her teacher to know on the first day that we're together, it's part of that indoctrination that you feel you have to do, to the school system, to the administration, to all of those people. It's like, here we are … Erin has two mothers.

Pricilla   The first day of school … we made ourselves visible.

Anne   I've had conversations with every teacher that Erin has had. I make a point to say, not only do I identify Erin as having two moms, but I identify us as a chosen family, that we chose together, as a couple, to have Erin…I make a very distinct political statement about saying, this is a family that we have created.

Janet steps into the conversation. Janet is very self-assured and speaks with clarity. She is in her own light (DSC). She moves closer to Anne and Pricilla to be a part of the conversation.

Janet: Ever since Ayla went into primary, we've always made a point of meeting with her teachers to say, here's our family structure. Our expectation is that Ayla is not going to be treated any differently. We want them to be aware of it, so that when it's Mother's Day and she's making two cards, I don't want somebody to say, oh, you can't have two moms.

Pricilla: It's all about visibility.

Light warms up on Pujita, UR and Erin, RC. Pujita has a bubbly personality and is very social. Erin has a no-nonsense type attitude, and appears somewhat irritated. As Pujita speaks, the adults freeze.

Pujita   I tell everybody … unless I don't feel like they need to know.

Erin   I only want to tell my best friends …

Light fades on Pujita and Erin.

Light warms on Mark and Iain (DR) – Fade up interlocking spots. They remain in their light, Anne, Pricilla, and Janet direct their attention to Iain and Mark, being careful not to have backs totally to audience. Iain has a very warm and social personality. Mark is more reserved and measured in his responses.

Iain: Before we met the principal, a co-worker who knew Max's primary teacher personally told her about me. Right away, they knew we were coming, they knew Max's name, they knew both of our names… they were well prepared.

Mark: When we met her, she wanted to know how we identify ourselves. She took a lot of interest in making sure that when special occasions come up, they make sure they have two things for us, and it was really, really wonderful. We never felt different.

Conversation now includes all speakers. Speakers become animated with each other.

Pricilla: I don't want to make anyone … well, I won't say that, I do want to make people be uncomfortable, just a little bit. Because it's just, here I am, and it isn't that I want people to believe in a certain way … or be for or against anything. I just want to stand up and be counted as often as I possibly can, in as many settings as I possibly can. That's my political belief about educating the masses so that people don't assume by looking at me, that I'm the stepmom, or that I have a husband at home. I don't like people assuming. You know, to me, it encourages and supports my lifestyle, the more people that see that there's different ways of doing it.

Spot light now fades up on Erin RC. As she speaks, the adults freeze.

Erin: A lot of the kids, when I tell them, they actually think I have a stepmother and a mother. And I say to everyone in the class, I don't have a stepmother, I don't have a stepmother … **I don't have a stepmother**!

Light fades on Erin.

UC near Janet in separate light. Christine has a pretty positive outlook. However, there are times when her "battle fatigue" is very obvious.

Christine: We've been very fortunate … **I think** … with the kids' schooling experiences. Like when Alisha started school, she was supposed to go to the little elementary school down here. I met with the principal to say this is who we are. Alisha is coming here, she has two moms. We don't want her singled out, but we do want people to be aware, we want you to be watchful if there are comments being made, or she's being teased at all, we expect them to be addressed in the same way any other kinds of teasing or harassment might be addressed. Just the way she reacted to me … her body language … there was **no way** I was going to put her there.

Anne: The way our school conducts information sessions, is with all of the parents present. The teacher usually makes a presentation, and there's an opportunity for questions and answers. I talk about my desire, in front of all those parents and that teacher, for Erin's education to be inclusive and accepting of her family context and for us to be able to have a kind, safe, and comfortable dialogue.

Christine: I was teaching at an elementary school in Farmington at the time, so I just went there, and applied for an out-of-area request, and I brought her there with me.

The light fades on actors, actors are back lit. Two spots warm up on Amanda and Sam, (DCS), they are in interlocking spots. Their dialogue only includes each other. They are very animated. Both Amanda and Sam have a lot that they want to "unload." They are exasperated and somewhat cynical.

Amanda: So we have the orientation day for primary, and Sam and I go. *(Pause)*

There was a questionnaire, and some of the questions were … does your son or daughter know their address, do they know their phone number, those kind of developmental things. And then the last question – do you have any special concerns about your child starting school? So we wrote, **YES!**

We want to know your philosophy when topics of family come up … how is that covered? … Have you thought about ways in which you're going to include **our family … since Nathan has two moms?**

Sam: *Assumes the role of the teacher, signified by a prop, or an attitude. Rhetorical tone.* Well, what do you mean?

Amanda: Well, when Mother's Day rolls around, and you're making cards for the moms, what's going to happen? *Knowing laughter is heard from other actors.*

Tone very reflexive, almost as if eyebrows are raised.
Is our son going to make one card? … Do they have the option of making two cards? … How do you deal with blended families? … In what ways do you

talk about what makes a family? … You know, is there ways in which you can, you know, put visuals and share stories about what that looks like? … Because being different, you might want to make sure that there's some reflection of **us** in the classroom … In what ways do you think you're going to do that?

Sam: *Still responding as teacher.* Oh, of course I'll make everyone feel welcome, and you know, you can always bring your concerns to me.

Amanda: *Sarcastic tone.* I said, **no, see, I'm trying to not have concerns**.

Light fades up on Nathan DL. Nathan is quiet, somewhat reflective yet slightly preoccupied. As he speaks, all adults freeze.

Nathan: I remember that one day, when I was younger, we were having Mother's Day, we were making cups, and my teacher brought up that I had lesbian parents. And she's like, whispering. And I was like, why are you whispering? (*Taking on the role of the teacher in a loud whispers)…* "well you have two mothers, do you want to make two cups?" … And I was like, just talk to me straight out.

I started making two cups, and kids kept on asking me, why do you have two cups? Why do you have two cups? And I didn't know what to do because I was so freaked out that the woman was like whispering about it, so I just automatically said, oh … I have a stepmother. And I used that one throughout all of elementary school.

Light fades on Nathan.

Lights fade up on all actors; they all seem to join in the conversation. Actors respond and react to each other.

Sylvie is soft spoken yet is a bit bemused by her experiences

Sylvie   When you are in the school system you feel out situations … and when you determine that it's safe, you tell a particular person … then it becomes okay.

Janet   I would say generally our experience has been positive, but in a way I think part of that is because from the very get go, we made it clear that **we're not going to put up with any crap!**

I did not want Ayla to ever encounter somebody who would diminish her, because of her family.

Sylvie   Well, no kid wants to be told that their family is deviant …

Maggie   *UL, Maggie is rather hesitant in her responses.* Or weird.

Amanda	We had the parent-teacher conference, and we said, we're new to this community and we're a lesbian couple, and …
Sam	*Sarcastically.* You outed us.
Amanda	She goes, oh, I don't think I've ever had … a lesbian couple … lesbian parents before.
Sam	*Sarcastic.* That you know of.
Amanda	She goes, yeah, I suppose you're right. And I said well, I can't believe we're the first.

Light warms Pujita, Erin and Nathan. Adults freeze.

Pujita	For me, it's hard sometimes, but most of the time I don't really care … we're not really different than any other family.
Erin	When I talk to people and they ask stuff, like about my parents or something, I just say parents and mom, or something. But I don't actually indicate that I have two moms.
Nathan	If a kid found out and said that my parents were lesbians, and make 10 people hate me, I can just go and find another group. It's not really going to faze me. But I could see how it would hurt other kids who don't understand, or are like very self-conscious about it … **And I was for a long time** …

Pujita, Erin and Nathan fade. Adults continue their conversation.

Sylvie	I taught for a couple of years with one of Trudy's coaches, and he thought I was her stepmother. I don't know that he ever made the connection between the two women who'd show up at her games. I think he believes that I'm married to Trudy's father.
Janet	Now, we did have a phone call home one year, grade five or grade six, they were talking about families, and Ayla had drawn a picture, and had written on the top, in rainbow colours, my lesbian family … It was going up on the wall for open house, and so the teacher actually called just to make sure we were okay with that. We're like, yeah, we're fine with that, but you know, he wasn't sure …

Lights fade on actors. They are back lit.

The stage fades to dark. The screen fades into muted soft colour. 2 beats, "Birthing the Certificate" fades up on UC screen.

Woman's Voice	BIRTHING THE CERTIFICATE

At the time of our daughter's birth, the provincial legislation was amended to offer legal rights to same-sex parents and their children. It was a heady time in British Columbia. For many, it was a day we thought would never dawn.

But dawn it did. Our daughter was one of the first wave of children in BC to enjoy those benefits. For our family, this certificate is a reminder of moving forward and backwards at the same time. It is a reminder that words are powerful; that the battle is never really over and that silence is never the strongest voice.

Image fades 5 beats after voice finishes. School image returns to UC screen, RC and LC screens now alternate between, "Stick and Stones," "Why?," "An Official Formula" and "Birthing the Certificate." Light fades up UR on Sahil

Sahil speaks with conviction with little inflection in his voice.

Sahil	The kids were playing basketball at recess time, and I happened to be at the school, and they were taking shots at the basket, and one of the other kids that was playing basketball was trying to throw the basketball into the hoop, and another kid said, you're hitting like a gay – you're hitting like you're gay – I asked the kid, what does that mean? And he didn't know, he just heard it on the playground.

So I spoke to the child's parents with regards to educating their son about the fact that speaking like this might be offensive to some children because my son was there and his father is gay.

They were very receptive to that. They said that they have no issue with homosexuality at all, and that it's just kids being kids, and that their kids surely have never been taught that … That day I came home and I talked to my son and daughter about terms like faggot, fairy, fruit … and how these terms are offensive.

Light fades to a warm glow on Sahil. Lights fade up on Amanda and Sam.

Amanda   Nathan was being called faggot … it was a big problem on the bus, so we came in to talk to his teacher. Her response "they don't know what they're saying." I said, "Do you know that?"

It's true that they may not know all the ins and outs, but do you feel like they're saying it so that they can make him feel included or are they saying it to be mean? And if they're saying it to be mean, then I would like it addressed, because it is a direct hit on **WHO I am.**

Sam   I mean, regardless of whether they're trying to talk about his parents or not, it's a shitty thing to say.

Amanda   It just happens to hit home if you're same-sex parents.

Light fades to a warm glow on Amanda and Sam. Lights fade up on Christine and Janet.

Christine   Name calling is pretty insidious … teachers are perhaps not even aware of what's going on … On the other hand, teachers don't know how to address it. At the high school where I teach, teachers walk by comments that are homophobic all the time.

Janet   Slurs are still ignored in the school yard. That really drives me crazy! Because man, if somebody uses the "N" word in the school yard, let me tell you, there would be a consequence to that, but they can say, "oh, you're so gay" or call you "faggot," and nobody really pays attention to it.

Christine   I worry about how that language affects my daughter and son in school. I know there are things people say that must be hurtful to them, but I don't know what you can do other than provide, you know, as positive a home environment as we can, and I'm sure there are things that happen at school, and things that kids say at school, that we never know about.

Light warms on Ayla and Pujita. Adults freeze.

CS near Janet. Ayla is reflective with a tinge of sadness and or resignation in her voice.

Ayla   People say gay in a derogatory fashion.

Pujita	You hear faggot and dyke, and everything like that, all the time. People say, oh, he's a faggot or whatever … not on purpose … it's in my normal vocabulary now.
Ayla	I've gotten used to it. I mean, everywhere I've gone, people do that, and nobody does anything.

Lights fade on Ayla and Pujita. Adults continue conversation.

Janet	My oldest daughter has encountered issues in school where I have intervened. There was the time that she had the issues with bullying. We talked to her about going in to speak to her teacher, but that was when she was eight years old. I think that for me, advocating on her behalf has changed. She's becoming a young adult, and I want to respect her viewpoint. But then again, if I felt in any way, her safety was at risk … **I would intervene!**
Amanda	I would really love Nathan's school to provide a safe environment for people to be themselves.
Janet	I want Ayla's world to be opened at high school.
Amanda	Nathan's been bullied at every level of school, and it has not been addressed in any concrete way.
Anne	Do I think the teachers are really critical thinkers? No!
Janet	I see education as a process of opening up your mind, and challenging thinking … I'm not sure Ayla's getting that.
Amanda	I think schools do **not** have the capacity to see individuals.
Anne	Education for me is about critical thinking, it's about pushing the envelope … Do I feel it happens in general in our education system? … I think if it happens, it's a blessedly rare occurrence.

Lights dim on actors. Amanda remains lit.

Amanda	So, what do I want from school?

As each actor speaks, spot fades up and remains on actor. Words are rapidly called out.

Anne	Inclusive language
Sahil	Embrace diversity
Sam	Safe

Iain	Belonging
Pricilla	School as community
Mark	Support

Lights fade on all actors except Amanda.

Amanda	… a safe environment for people to be themselves

Lights fades out on Amanda – stage is dark 2 beats. Light comes up on Janet.

Janet	It isn't a safe environment

Lights dim on actors; they stand motionless with heads bowed. Ayla, Nathan, and Pujita form a small group CS. Adults freeze.

Ayla	In sex ed. we don't talk about it.
Pujita	Our health teacher does.
Ayla	We talk about how a baby is made.
Pujita	She just talks, she goes on and on about everything.
Ayla	Our Sex ed. teacher won't say penis.
Pujita	She started talking about Matthew Sheppard, and about gay people and lesbian people …
Nathan	I don't think the school is that open … but it's one of those things where, I've brought it up, everybody knows that I have two parents that are lesbian … it's not a huge deal.
Ayla	I'm out as a lesbian in my school.
Pujita	I joined the Gay Straight Alliance, one of my friends is gay … I don't have a problem with that. We talk about what it's like, and me having a gay father … because he could be one someday.
Ayla	Lots of people, like, shot me down … there was a girl in my class, and we used to kind of hang out, and she told her parents that I was gay, and they went, **no, she thinks** she's gay.
Nathan	I don't think it's about the kids as much as it is the parents.

Ayla	(*Exasperated and in the tone of her friend*) No, I'm pretty sure she's gay … (*In a patronizing parental tone*) No … she thinks she's gay. How can she know at that age?

Nathan	Kids today can walk through the school and say they're openly gay, maybe they might be teased, but they'll still have friends. It's just their parents who will reject them, not talk to them and stuff like that … It's good to have a strong support group **outside** the family.

Lights dim on actors except for a soft glowing light on Amanda.

Amanda	So, what do I want from school?

Light fades on Amanda.

Interlocking spots on Mark and Iain.

Mark	On a Saturday morning, Max came up to wake us, and we played word games with rhyming and so on. So we were rhyming and Iain said a word like day, or way, and then Max said gay … and then he apologized, and said, "I'm sorry I said a bad word." I immediately said, oh, that's not a bad word. He said, "yes it is, I'm really sorry." I said well no Daddy and Papa are gay, and as soon as I said the word, it was like I slapped him … his reaction was very, very visceral, I'm guessing that it's probably something he heard a negative vibe about in the playground.

Iain	… and we talked more about the fact that we're gay …

Light fades on Mark and Iain. Spot fades up on Sahil.

Sahil	Another time at a birthday party at our house for my son. He was about eight or nine, we were playing charades, they were kids from his class, and I asked them to write something down that we could use to play charades. Most of them wrote like dog, cat, movie actor, but one kid wrote down, to act like you're gay, and another one wrote down, act like you're a fruit. Now, maybe I was a little overly sensitive and too quick to jump at things, so I asked what does it mean to act like a fruit, and I truly believe this, he said it meant be an apple or a peach, or banana, or something like that, – he had no idea of the derogatory term of fruit … it was very innocent. But the boy that wrote, act like you're gay, he knew exactly what it meant. We didn't do that charade, but I did speak to the parents of that child after. Because the parents knew that I was gay.

I felt I had to speak out. I don't think they were educated on the words. Even my own children, until they were seven or eight didn't actually hear the word gay. All they knew was that they had two parents the same-sex that loved them. Many kids that live in same-sex families don't know – all they know is that they have two mommies or two daddies, and that their parents love them. .

Lights fade on Sahil.

The stage fades to dark. The screen fade into muted soft colour. 2 beats, "My Big Gay Family" fades up on UC screen.

Woman's Voice   MY BIG GAY FAMILY

Left to right:
Piper the wiener dog
Janet – Mom
Sara – Mom
Sheila– 17 months
Ayla – 15 years
Lily – Super beagle

Image fades 5 beats after voice finishes. School image returns to UC screen, RC and LC screens now alternate between, "Stick and Stones," " Why?," "An Official Formula," "Birthing the Certificate," and "My Big Gay Family."

Actors are in semi darkness, their spots warm up when they speak. They are not reacting to each other, speaking more to the audience.

Light warms Erin.

Erin   I was coloring a valentine for my parents after lunch, and Lindsay and Mariah walked up to me, and Lindsay read the card, and she read, "to Anne and Priscilla" and then she asked who's Anne and Pricilla? And I said, they're my mom, and she said, which one's your mother and which one's your stepmother?

                    It started getting annoying, and then I got mad at them, and I said, it ain't no big deal. And I almost yelled, I was really mad at them … I don't want them to ask so many questions.

Anne and Pricilla are in interlocking spots.

Anne   I go to the school events, I go on the school trips, I volunteer to decorate the gym, and I feel like I know a lot of the parents in Erin's class. And aside from **one situation**, it's been a non issue.

Pricilla   I don't think any of the adults I have met, either who work for the school or as a parent, **with that awful exception**, you know, cares in the least … *Pause*

                    They did a big mural outside the office, it's massive, and everyone had to bring pictures in of their family. And we are in the middle … at the very top, I can always find us, we are so easy to find. Our picture might be a tiny bit bigger than the others, it's very, very clear, there are two women's faces with a child. And I love that they put us there … I love it, because I walk by there all the time, and I notice it … it's all about being visible.

Lights dim on Anne and Pricilla. Sam and Amanda are in interlocking spots.

Sam   They were desperate for volunteers, so we put our names up.

Amanda   Never got a call. About, around November, I called the school and I said, are you guys still looking for volunteers? I said, I haven't gotten a call, because at that point I was working, but I had my Wednesday mornings free and my Thursday afternoons free.

Sam   And I was working evenings and weekends, so my days were always free.

Amanda   I was keen to do any of the literacy and book stuff, and that kind of thing. Anyway, I said, you have a call for volunteers. I still haven't received a call.

Sam   *Assumes the role of school administrator*. Really? Oh, I'll get somebody to check in on it. They'll give you a call.

Amanda   I asked other parents if they had been called, and yes, they had.

Sam   Called a lot.

.

Amanda Fine. I can hear you don't want me there. Fine. You can't say it – **fine!**

Lights dim on Sam and Amanda. Maggie and Sylvie are in interlocking spots

Maggie Tell the church story …

Sylvie Maggie and I went to church one Sunday, and a retired principal who is now a consultant and has done some work with our staff, was there, sitting a couple of rows behind us. And I noticed him, and you know, we acknowledged each other. He was in the school a couple of days later, and he said, oh, that must have been your daughter I saw you with the other day. And I was trying to think …

Maggie Did he mean Trudy, our daughter …

Sylvie I realized, he's talking about Maggie.

And so, then Trudy and I ran into him one night at the Mall, and I thought, he's going to think she's my granddaughter.

Maggie It's interesting how people perceive us.

Sylvie And contextualize us

Lights dim on Maggie and Sylvie. Sam and Amanda are in interlocking spots.

Amanda Nathan's school got a grant to build up the parent resources in the school library, they sent out a request of what books we could recommend.

I listed books, not just about gay families or gay issues, but also books about adoption.

Not a single one of the books that we put forward, out of the 500 books that were bought for the library, were from our list.

Sam Not one.

Amanda They had a big sort of celebratory day, and I said, I don't see any of the books that we recommended?

Sam *Rhetorical taking on the role of the librarian:* Really? We must have just missed that.

Amanda So, as much as we were "welcomed" in the community, there were certain things that we couldn't be a part of.

Lights dim on actors except for a soft glowing light on Amanda.

Amanda   So, what do I want from school?

2 beats and lights fade up on all adults.

Sahil   What I would really like, is to have the school very open, accepting, embracing diversity, and having my kids working with the teachers, and their fellow peers towards diversity. Not only about sexuality issues, but we are visibly a minority, we're Indian, we're brown skinned. I want my kids to be actively involved with promoting tolerance of anything, tolerance of differences. I would expect that my kids' school would embrace that concept.

Anne   More than anything I would like to see more inclusive language. I want there to be an enlargement of vocabulary, so that all kids benefit, they know life isn't to be pigeon-holed.

Pricilla   I don't want to be a special piece of curriculum. I just want to be the same piece, or the same aspect of the curriculum as anybody else.

Janet   I guess for me, it's that we do exist, and we need to see that reflected in our school system. We need to recognize the diversity around sexual orientation in families as well as every other issue of diversity … I don't think we're included in that yet.

Mark   For me, I like the openness. I feel I can go in and talk to them about anything. I feel I belong – it was one of the concerns I had in the beginning … of how we were going to fit in.

Christine   I think we should have books that address the topic, you know, in a positive way that kids have access to, and not just one book, there should be a variety of books, and not just health books … like fiction … It becomes normalized, and then it's not an issue, it's just part of the fabric of the story.

Anne   I think if I could choose anything, it's to weave into the fabric of the curriculum examples of diverse families across the spectrum, including my profile.

Lights fade on actors except for Janet, Christine, Nathan, Ayla, and Pujita. They interact as if in conversation with each other.

Nathan   Last year we had a Respect Diversity Day, and that was sort of a vague representation of discrimination in general.

Pujita   We did a survey in our school, and one of the questions was, how safe do you feel this environment is for gay and lesbian, bisexual people?

Nathan   It was just that day. There'd be student leaders and they talk about how really you can't just judge people by how they look and what they do, and stuff like

that. It really just skimmed everything. People aren't going to change their mind on one day, or just really in general, a couple of people that I know who are racist they're going to stick to what they think.

Ayla   We all wrote letters to the principal. I told him that people just don't understand what it is to be gay. Maybe we should include some education about being gay … something … just tell them what it is, because nobody knows.

Pujita   The response 10 being the highest, one being the lowest, was six. And that's not very high.

Ayla   I didn't get a response yet. He said he'd get back to me.

Light fades up on Janet.

Janet   The principal acknowledged her letter because I think he had to, and he said he would speak to her … but he never has.

Ayla   I'd like the school to talk about something about being gay and a teenager. Like, I mean, they all get it from me, but they have to come to me and ask me if they have any questions, and often you know, they feel stupid or they just don't want to, or they couldn't care less … teachers just don't bring it up.

Janet   It's disappointing, even if he doesn't want to do anything about it … He's not listening to her.

Light fades on Janet.

Pujita   The thing with our school is, our principal is lesbian.

Nathan   One day for diversity? … It's pretty much a day that nobody goes to school, because they know that it's just going to be a day of not doing anything.

Pujita   She really encourages all of the things that we do, like we're going to take a field trip to the Queer Youth centre … she's totally for it.

Ayla   I couldn't care less about school. I go there, I have my school friends, I do my school work, I come home, and that's behind me.

The stage fades to dark. The screen fade into muted soft colour. 2 beats, "Family Constellation" fades up on UC screen.

Woman's Voice   FAMILY CONSTELLATION

Our family is triumphant. A consciously constructed celebration of life. Family is seen through the lenses of ideology, culture, process and situation. My family is defined from a legacy of meaning sometimes extremely particular sometimes broadly embracing. We have purposefully created a family that celebrates the vast constellation of what it means to be a family. When I think of my family I think of joy. The joy that is rooted in love that is intentional. The joy that tends to a garden which magically has the potential to nurture the best in all of us.

Image fades 5 beats after voice finishes. School image returns to UC screen, RC and LC screens now alternate between, "Stick and Stones,"" Why?," "An Offical Formula," "Birthing the Certificate," "My Big Gay Family," and "Family Constellation."

Stage remains in semi darkness, spots warm on actors as they speak.

Amanda   So, what do I want from school?

Christine   I think there needs to be, I don't know where you put it, whether it's in teacher training programs or whether it's part of an interview process, or requirements for hiring, that teachers have to do sensitivity training around gay and lesbian issues … I think it's incumbent on our board to be doing that, and make it a requirement.

Janet   Nova Scotia spends the lowest amount per capita on students, and I'm thinking, we're not going to change any of this, or not significantly, without a greater commitment to supporting our teachers through education.

Christine	Teachers are part of creating school culture, and if they're insensitive to the issues and feel uncomfortable to address negative comments that come up in their classroom, or in the hallways, then you know, their silence is as loud as anything else.
Sahil	I would like teachers to provide exactly the same discussion that they have about heterosexuality with regards to possibilities of lesbian or gay lifestyles as well … It's not that everybody grows up and they get married, and they're heterosexual.
Christine	If teachers were able to be openly gay or lesbian … what a difference that would be.
Sylvie	I've taught for 25 years, and not one kid has ever asked me. And I think it's either because they've already made assumptions … Or they don't really want to know.
Anne	As a teacher you just don't come out in school. Some schools you can, but a lot of them you can't.
Sylvie	I'm certainly aware of more lesbian/gay teachers than when I started, but I don't think very many of them are making that known … And I don't know that they should.

Lights dim on actors. Light fades up on Pujita.

Pujita	I wrote a poem about homophobia.

Homophobia.

You call them gay, but why?
Why does it matter so much who humans are attracted to?
Everyone has the right to be themselves,
otherwise no one would be themselves.
You may not be gay, but your friend could be.
Think of all the people you're hurting when you say, oh, that's so gay.
There's still a lot of homophobia going on in the world,
and you can make a big difference.

Light fades up on each actor as she/he speaks.

Amanda	Do you have any special concerns about your child starting school? So we wrote, **YES.**
Anne	I wanted her teacher to know on the first day that we're together.

Janet:	Before Ayla started school, ever since she went into primary, we've always made a point of meeting with her teachers to say, here's our family structure.
Pricilla:	It's all about visibility.
Nathan	And I didn't know what to do because I was so freaked out that the woman was like whispering about it, So I just automatically said, oh … I have a stepmother. And I used that one throughout all of elementary school.
Mark	I said well no Daddy and Papa are gay, and as soon as I said the word, it was like I slapped him … his reaction was very, very visceral. I'm guessing that it's probably something he heard a negative vibe about in the playground.
Iain	… and we talked more about the fact that we're gay …
Christine:	We've been very fortunate … **I think** … with the kids' schooling experiences
Pujita	I tell everybody … unless I don't feel like they need to know.
Amanda	Have you thought about ways in which you're going to include **our family … since Nathan has two moms?**
Maggie	It's interesting how people perceive us.
Sylvie	And contextualize us.
Sahil	So I spoke to the child's parents with regards to educating their son about the fact that speaking like this might be offensive to some children because my son was there and his father is gay.
Janet	We made it clear that **we're not going to put up with any crap!**
Erin	And I say to everyone in the class, I don't have a stepmother, I don't have a stepmother … **I don't have a stepmother**!
Christine	Just the way she reacted to me … and her body language … there was **no way** I was going to put her there.
Ayla	We all wrote letters to the principal. I told him that people just don't understand what it is to be gay … I didn't get a response yet.

Lights dim on all actors except for Amanda.

Amanda	So, what do I want from school? *Pause*

I think a bare minimum would be it's safe. And I don't think that's too much to ask … And in the end, that they teach you something … something that is invaluable to that individual.

Stage goes to black.

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The End.

</div>

CHAPTER 4

What are the Stories? A discussion

In the beginning, as outlined in Chapter 1, I set out to unravel the "single story" (Adichie, 2009) about the schooling experiences of non-heterosexual parents and their children. At first, I focused solely on schooling experiences but what I quickly learned is that school and family cannot be separated; one informs the other. In hindsight it makes perfect sense that in my pursuit to unseat the single story I found a plethora of stories that took me on journeys that I could not have anticipated. My conversations that I thought would revolve around the specifics of schooling, such as curriculum and school policies, morphed into lengthy, deeply personal, and emotional discussions about the structure of queer families and the challenges of finding a place within a profoundly entrenched heterocentric school culture. What I heard and observed was a desire by the parents to create, or at least lay the foundation for, as positive a school experience as they could provide, or hope for, for their children. Parents wanted to ensure that their children felt safe and included as part of the school community.

Historically, schools have not been safe spaces, physically or emotionally, for non-heterosexual youth (Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Clarke, Kitzinger, & Potter, 2004; Ellis & High, 2004; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Sears, 1999; Khayatt, 1995), a fact of which many queer parents were/are acutely aware. It was not a stretch for the parents to worry that their queerness would impact negatively on their children. In an effort to make certain that their children were safe and not marginalized, the parents purposely created and maintained a "queer" presence or as I have termed were "queerly visible" within the school community.

In this chapter, I will explore the concept of "queer visibility" within a school, and at times, a community context, as constructed by the parents and the children in this project. The exploration will include data from both the script, 'Queerly Inside and Out in School' and the art exhibit, 'We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience.' While the overarching theme in this chapter is *queer visibility*, I have also identified three key sites where ancillary particulars emerged that helped to support, complicate, and deepen my discussion on queer visibility. Throughout this chapter the discussion will intersect and intertwine around the

areas, or sites, of the covering statement, homophobic language, and the children's counternarratives. At first I attempted to write a separate chapter on each topic in relation to the theme of queer visibility, however, this became a daunting undertaking because each topic was intricately linked to the other and it became impossible to treat them as distinct subjects. The discussion about queer visibility is layered and complex and as such I felt that it could not be simplified by artificially drawing boundaries around the multiple entry points into the discussion. I do understand that it is important to chart a path for the reader; consequently, I have incorporated the use of subheadings to indicate the introduction of a new site of interrogation and/or to change the direction of the discussion.

As with every story there is a beginning, middle, and an end. I begin this chapter with what became my entry point for the analysis of my data, *the covering statement* or *statements*, and I end with the stories, or the seemingly counternarratives from the children. In reality there will never be a true end to this story, but as the researcher and writer it is my job to create a cohesive discussion in which to engage the reader, and this has required me to make tough choices about what data to include in my discussion, and what to save for post dissertation inquiry. In the end, I chose those elements of the stories and the art that challenge teachers, school administrators, and members of the queer community to recognize that the experiences of queer families within the school community are complicated and diverse and cannot be distilled into a single story.

Covering statements

The entry point for many of the initial conversations with the parents in this research opened with declarative statements such as "we have had a positive experience … I think" or "I hope that you are finding that we are having a positive experience in our children's school." I would usually let these types of statements hang in the air for a few beats and then I would invite the parents to tell me about those experiences. The stories that would then unfold told of schools that tolerated anti-gay language, did not include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or queer issues in any part of the curriculum, and schools that silenced students, and parents who attempted to bring forward LGBTQ concerns.

Quite possibly the opening sentiments *we have had a positive experience* or *I hope that you are finding that we have had a positive experience in our children's school*, could be interpreted as a form of a cover story (Olsen & Craig, 2005; Crites, 1971), as described in

Chapter 3. Crites (1971) believes that we re-tell stories in order to make the past more palatable for the present, while Olsen and Craig (2005) assert that cover stories are narratives that help us to bridge the divide between the stories that we want to "reveal" and the stories we are expected to disclose. The parent's declarations about positive school experiences appear to be a means for positioning their stories as a "truth" because the converse, as possibly lived out by their children, was too painful to contemplate. In turn these pronouncements regarding a positive school experience are being used as a cover or maybe a deflection from the actual lived experience of their children.

This is evident in Christine's statement:

Christine: We've been very fortunate … I think … with the kids' schooling experiences. Like when Alisha started school, she was supposed to go to the little elementary school down here. I met with the principal to say this is who we are. Alisha is coming here, she has two moms. We don't want her singled out, but we do want people to be aware, we want you to be watchful if there are comments being made, or she's being teased at all, we expect them to be addressed in the same way any other kinds of teasing or harassment might be addressed. Just the way she reacted to me … her body language … there was **no way** I was going to put her there. (Original, p.112)[13].

Christine begins with, "we've been very fortunate … I think" yet the description of the events that follow tell a story about a school administrator who was not welcoming, and possibly not accepting of Alisha's non-heterosexual family construct. In fact, the reaction of the school administrator was so extreme for Christine that she chose not to enroll her daughter in that school. In less than a paragraph Christine has completely unraveled her opening statement or cover statement, "We've been very fortunate." Christine has created what Crites (1971) describes as a "double storied type of self deception" (p.126) which is based on the premise that the actual lived story is "unacceptable" (Crites, 1971, p.126). If this is indeed the motivating factor behind Christine's opening statement, then I can only speculate that Christine, in some way, did not want me or the research to conclude that their "difference" as a family was impacting, in a negative manner, on the schooling experiences of their children. Kissen (1999) came to a similar conclusion in her research on lesbian and gay parents and school, "Despite their understanding that heterosexism is not their fault, they often feel responsible for the abuse their children might suffer" (p.168). Christine's covering statement, "We've been very fortunate" may be her attempt to create a shield from homophobia for her

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[13] "Original" references this dissertation and indicates the page where the text first appeared.

children, which in turn creates a new story and truth about the schooling experience of her children. As previously established in Chapter 3, "in the re-telling we re-craft the experience to communicate not so much what really happened but what we want the listener to know" (Original, p.49) which brings us back to the question, "Is the act of re-telling a conscious form of self deception?" (Original, p.52) or to take it a step further: "Is it an untruth?"

> Foucault (1990) posits truth in the form of confession:

> For a long time, the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his ties to the commonweal (family, allegiance, protection), then he was authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself. The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power (p.59).

Foucault contends that truth is constructed through a labyrinth of social and political power structures. Bruner (2002a 2002b,1991) elaborates on this notion of constructed truth in his discussion of "reality construction" explaining that an individual's representation of reality is influenced by "cultural products like language, and other symbolic systems, [that] mediate thought" (1991, p.3), as well as by the network of friends, family, and colleagues one surrounds her/himself with. Foucault writes about a "truthful confession" whereas Bruner describes it as reality constructed through personal narrative, both are describing the same process; the confession then becomes the story, which is professed as a *truth* or the *real* story. Narrative inquiry works from this premise: that we make sense of our experiences and our lives through the stories that we tell (Clandinin, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Clandinin and Connelly, 2006, 2000; Gee, 2005; Bell, 2003; Riesman, 1993; Crites, 1971), so the idea that a sense of authentification is a byproduct of constructing reality through narrative is especially salient when unearthing the layers of covering statements. Bruner (2002a) claims:

> Self is probably the most impressive work of art we ever produce, surely the most intricate. For we create not just one self-making story but many of them, rather like T.S. Eliot's rhyme *We prepare a face to meet / the faces that we meet* (p.14)

Bruner goes on to explain that we attempt to consolidate the "faces" into one identity, "for it is not just who and what we are that we want to get straight but who and what we might have been" (2002a, p.14). The act of proclaiming a covering statement such as "We've been very fortunate … I think … with the kids' schooling experiences" could be perceived as Christine's attempt to construct the reality that her children have had a "queer positive" experience at

school. Dewey (1925) describes this as "inner experience" (p.172). He describes inner experience as a process in which we, as individuals, try and order our lives:

> It implies a new worth and sense of dignity in human individuality, a sense that an individual is not a mere property of nature, set in place according to a scheme independent of him, as an article is put in its place in a cabinet, but that he adds something, that he marks a contribution (p.172).

Covering statements and this sense of individualism can be seen in Anne and Pricilla's exchange:

> *Anne*   I go to the school events, I go on the school trips, I volunteer to decorate the gym, and I feel like I know a lot of the parents in Erin's class. And aside from **one situation**, it's been a non issue.

> *Pricilla*   I don't think any of the adults I have met, either who work for the school or as a parent, **with that awful exception**, you know, cares in the least … *Pause* (Original, p.121).

Anne and Pricilla in a few short lines contradict Anne's proclamation that "it's been a non issue." It is as though Anne's volunteer work at the school erases that "one situation" or that "awful exception." Anne is positioning her volunteer work as a means in which to control or order her family's experience at school. What is interesting to note is that in Anne and Pricilla's attempts to assert their individualism, they were really playing into their need to legitimatize their family experience. Consequently, what is revealed is the tension between conscious queer visibility and a deep-seated desire by the parents to have their family structures viewed as legitimate by the school community. I use the word "legitimate" with trepidation, because it is a very loaded concept specifically within queer theory. Michael Warner (1999a, 1999b) equates legitimacy and normalcy as one and the same, and according to Warner (1999a) "The point of being normal is to blend, to have no visible difference and no conflict" (p.60). I would argue that Anne and Pricilla were not striving to "blend," but were actively displaying their difference within the context of school activities such as volunteering as a means to establish legitimacy within their child's school. Ahmed (2006a) argues that when we attempt to inhabit a new space, such as fitting a non-heterosexual family structure

into a heterocentric school system, it:

> involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar, such that it is still possible for the world to create new impressions, depending on which way we

turn, which affects what is within reach. Extending into space also extends what is "just about" familiar or what is "just about" within reach (p. 7-8).

Anne and Pricilla's actions and queer visible presence were/are in a sense endeavoring to shift the unfamiliar (queer) into the familiar (heterocentric). They are extending the reach of what is considered a "legitimate" family structure within their child's school community.

> *Janet:*   Ever since Ayla went into primary, we've always made a point of meeting with her teachers to say, here's our family structure. Our expectation is that Ayla is not going to be treated any differently. We want them to be aware of it, so that when it's Mother's Day and she's making two cards, I don't want somebody to say, oh, you can't have two moms (Original, p. 110).

Janet, in this instance, is stating her expectations; consequently she is gravitating towards occupying a new and potentially unfamiliar space with Ayla's teacher. Ahmed (2006a) argues that "The work of inhabitance involves orientation devices, ways of extending bodies into space that create new folds, or new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space" (p. 10). By shifting our orientation to or from a space that does not include who we are in the world, we create movement that allows for a new space to be created. If we couple Bruner's (1991) idea that "We prepare a face to meet / the faces that we meet" (p. 14) with Ahmed's notion of inhabitance and space we can see that the parent's desire to be queerly visible in their child's school was an attempt to create a new and livable space for their children within a system that has historically been defined by heteronormative practices and ideology.

Covering the art?

Covering statements were articulated in the workshops for the community art exhibit, 'We are: Expressions of family a queer experience'. The participants frequently commented, *"We are just like every other family."* When probed as to what was meant by this statement, it transpired that "every other family" referred to heterosexually constructed families. Yet, the art that was created compounded the covering statement. Many of the pieces in the exhibit highlighted difference, complexity, and the desire for the recognition of difference. The artefacts created for the exhibit inhabited another level of queer visibility. The space between what participants said and what they actually produced, I found myself, as with the participant interviews, questioning the intent and the possible gravitational pull to frame their work with the covering statement "We are just like every other family." Many times it was just on the tip of my tongue to ask "Are we?" Instead, I held my breath and let the process unfold, allowing the space and time for the participants to explore and express their family story.

In the piece 'My Big Gay Family,' four stick figures are featured, and a rainbow flag, which is considered a universal symbol for Gay Pride, is prominently placed above the heads of the figures. The narrative that accompanies this piece simply names the members of the family:

> Left to right:
> Piper the wiener dog
> Janet – Mom
> Sara – Mom
> Sheila – 17 months
> Ayla – 15 years
> Lily – Super beagle

Upon first glance this picture appears to represent a very traditional heterosexual nuclear family, two parents and two children. The parents even look to be female and male, the far left figure looks traditionally female with a blue skirt and matching blue bikini like top, while the figure next to her looks more traditionally male with pants and a short sleeve shirt. It is the title, 'My Big Gay Family," and the naming of the adult figures as female that signals to the viewer that this is not a heterosexual family unit. This image highlights the tension between

the covering statements, "We are just like every other family," and the desire to occupy a queer family space. The primitive quality of this piece is reminiscent of a child's drawing depicting her family, yet the inclusion of the Gay Pride flag, and the title, 'My Big Gay Family' challenges traditional, heterocentric notions of family. If the goal was to illustrate "we are just like every other family" the piece would have simply been titled "My Family" or "My Big Family." The Gay Pride flag that flies over the heads of the figures is an important element to consider in this piece: it is the placeholder for queer visibility. The flag is extending our notion of the familiar (Ahmed 2006a, 2006b). Sandra Weber (2008) claims that an image has two levels of meaning, denotative and connotative. Weber, based on the work of Roland Barthes, defines the two terms as:

> The denotative meaning of an image refers to its literal, descriptive meaning – the apparent truth … while the connotative meanings refer to the cultural and historical context of a specific image, as well as to the social conventions, codes, and meanings that have been attached to or associated with that image (p. 42-43).

The viewer approaches a specific image through a variety of lenses or as Weber has delineated, internal (denotative) and external (connotative) realities mesh as a viewer looks first at the literal meaning, the "apparent truth," and then layers that interpretation with social and historical signifiers. But what happens when the denotative and connotative interpolation are at odds? For example, in "My Big Gay Family," we first see a traditional family and then as we read the image more deeply we see that the parents are both female and that the word "gay" and "family" are in the title. What happens then? The concept of family has been disrupted or troubled; the viewer is then left with choices, to either contemplate an expanded notion of family or move on. Either way the viewer has been affected by the piece.

Weber (2008) states "an image can be a multilayered theoretical statement, simultaneously positing even contradictory propositions for us to consider" (p. 43). The piece 'Snap Shots Remarks and Song' incorporates eight captioned photographs. Each photo captures a familied moment, illustrating the evolving relationship between two fathers and their son. The artist includes photographs of both Dads and their son Max. The

photographs depict typical family portraits yet captions such as, "I know Daddy you just like to look at the hot guys," and " Oh, if I don't have to be gay like you guys then I'm going to marry Kayla," force the viewer to stop and re-examine the family photos. The potential to re-read the images is clearly apparent. Seija Ulkuniemi (2007) claims family photographs are a source of autobiographical narratives and a means of "self discovery and memory work to build identity" (p. 46). In this piece, the artist incorporated family photos with a narrative that spoke both to the everyday activities of parenting, such as singing a lullaby to their son, to comparing hot cars and hot men. Lines such as "I know Daddy you just like to look at the hot guys" are unabashedly displaying the "queer" nature of their family.

Another piece titled 'No Man's Hands' is a photograph of the hands of two mothers and their young son. The hands are placed one on top of the other with the top hand prominently featuring a wedding band. The image, at first glance, is unremarkable; yet the starkness of the title, 'No Man's Hands,' challenges the viewer to look more closely at the image, and because there is no accompanying text with this piece, the viewer is left to make her/his own conclusions as to what the artist is communicating. At the opening of the exhibit, I observed many people lingering over this photograph, standing very close to the image and

examining the hands. The prominent placement of the silver wedding band signifies that there is a relationship between the owners of the three sets of hands in the image. Yet the gender of the hands is difficult to determine, and there is only one wedding band displayed, leaving the viewer to question who is actually portrayed in this image, and what exactly is their relationship to one another. In a sense, this image feels incomplete, but in its incompleteness, the viewer is being challenged to look beyond the literal and to ponder the possible alternative family constructs that the image could represent.

In the pieces, 'My Big Gay Family,' 'Snap Shots, Remarks and Song,' and 'No Man's Hands,' the viewer is oriented away from the heterosexual objects of marriage and family and challenged to turn in a new direction. Ahmed (2006b) explains that orientation is the "effects

of what we tend toward" (p. 554) and argues that certain objects, for example, in heterosexual culture, are:

> available to us because of lines that we have already taken: our life course follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of being directed a certain way (birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, reproduction, death) (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 554)

It is not until we disrupt our orientation to certain objects such as marriage and family that new lines can be forged or "make new futures possible" (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 554). Visual art has the capacity to jar and disrupt because it is intimate. In the scenario of the public exhibit, the viewer has the option to turn away from the piece and continue on their "straight" line, or the viewer can turn towards the "new" object and make room for new possibilities.

Being queerly visible … the conversation continues

In an attempt to establish a queer and non-assimilating space into the heterocentric culture of the school, the parents in this research from day one at school actively outed their queer family structures. The initial exchanges with teachers and school administrators set the stage, so to speak, to carve out a queer presence within the school.

Anne	I wanted her teacher to know on the first day that we're together, it's part of that indoctrination that you feel you have to do, to the school system, to the administration, to all of those people. It's like, here we are … Erin has two mothers.
Pricilla	The first day of school . . . we made ourselves visible (Original, p. 110).

Anne and Pricilla clearly articulate that there is a "real" need to introduce and identify one's queer family to the school community. Anne's somewhat strident use of language, "it's part of that indoctrination that you feel you have to do. It's like, here we are. . . Erin has two mothers," is a good example of how parents physically and emotionally attempted, from the beginning, to construct and inhabit a queer space within the school.

Janet	I would say generally our experience has been positive, but in a way I think part of that is because from the very get go, we made it clear that **we're not going to put up with any crap!** (Original, p. 113).

Like Anne and Pricilla, Janet leaves nothing to chance. Although Janet postulates that their school experience may have been positive, her declarative statement at the end of her sentence indicates that she believes that she was able to influence that "positive" outcome by stating her expectations in clear and plain language. Another way to view this is that Janet has firmly, and publicly, established a queer presence in her daughter's school which she believes will shield her daughter from homophobia.

Anne, Pricilla, Christine, and Janet appear to take on a battle-like stance as they disclose and/or publicly display their queer family structures. If I draw again on the notion "We prepare a face to meet / the faces that we meet" (Bruner, 1991, p. 14), the parents can be said to be approaching the school community as a potential hostile entity and consequently adopt a discordant tone in preparation to meet the school head on.

Anne	I've had conversations with every teacher that Erin has had. I make a point to say, not only do I identify Erin as having two moms, but I identify us as a chosen family, that we chose together, as a couple, to have Erin … I make a very distinct political statement about saying, this is a family that we have created (Original, p. 110).

Anne uses phrases such as "I make a point; I identify us as a chosen family; this is a family that we have created" to position her expectation of *how* she wants her family perceived and to justify *why* she is publicly displaying her queer family structure. Anne specifically uses the phrase "political statement" to purposefully situate her family outside of the heterocentric view of family. It was important for her to communicate to the school community that Erin was not the product of a heterosexual union. It could be that Anne did not trust "them" to see her queer family structure or maybe Anne wanted to ensure that assumptions were not made regarding how her family came into being. Anne's spouse Pricilla echoed a similar sentiment.

Pricilla:	I don't want to make anyone … well, I won't say that, I do want to make people be uncomfortable, just a little bit. Because it's just, here I am, and it isn't that I want people to believe in a certain way … or be for or against anything. I just want to stand up and be counted as often as I possibly can, in as many settings as I possibly can. That's my political belief about educating the masses so that people don't assume by looking at me, that I'm the stepmom, or that I have a husband at home. I don't like people assuming. You know, to me, it encourages and supports my lifestyle, the more people that see that there's different ways of doing it (Original, p. 111).

Pricilla is clear: she does not want anyone to mistake her for anything other than Erin's lesbian mother. Pricilla's fear, or experience, is that not demanding to be recognized as a lesbian mother will render her invisible and she will be assumed to be something that she is not, such as a step mother or even a heterosexual. Anne and Pricilla both speak freely about their "politics" and their words and actions articulate their commitment to creating space, within a public arena, for family structures that do not fit into the heteronormative ideal of family.

Anne and Pricilla employ the strategy of "coming out" as a means for queering their family. For decades LGBTQ politics have centered on the activity of coming out, of being visible.[14] "The movement has veered between deploying identities that emphasize similarities to the majority, striving to be a " model minority," and deploying identities that stress differences from the heteronormative mainstream, seeking to transgress" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 5). Although Anne and Pricilla's acts may not be perceived as a radical act of transgression, I would argue that neither is it an act of assimilation. It could be argued that Anne and Pricilla are displaying their queer family structure as a guise to demonstrate to the school community that they are no different from their heterosexual counterparts. However, the act of coming out in a public forum, such as a class meeting, opens them up to public scrutiny and possible negative retribution. They are taking a calculated risk. Bernstein and Reimann (2001) claim that "if we are to resist heteronormativity and engage in a more democratic queer politics, a variety of family structures must be visible" (p. 11). Anne and Pricilla's decision to be queerly visible in their daughter's school is most likely extremely complex and is built upon years of living and working within a society that is founded on heteronormative practices and ideals. Because they both portray their actions as "political," I interpret these actions to be liberatory acts. Yet, it must be noted that my claim that Anne and Pricilla are actively queering family as a means of transgression against the status quo is likely a minority view within the realm of queer theory. As I stated in Chapter Three, the mere fact that Anne and Pricilla parent a child, in the eyes of many queer theorists, places them squarely as assimilists of heterosexual culture. According to David Eng (in Shonkwiler, 2008) "the possession of a child, whether biological or adopted, has today become the sign of guarantee not only for family but also for full and robust citizenship" (p. 550). "Full and robust citizenship" implies that queer parents have access to, and experience, the respect and privileges afforded to their heterosexual counterparts. It does not. Queer parents approach

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[14] The Stonewall Riots in 1969 in New York City is often credited as the beginning of the "gay revolution" and a new militancy regarding LGBTQ visibility (Miller, 1995).

school from a deficit model, meaning they assume that their children will be subject to homophobia unless they intervene and carve out a safe space for them. Their only defense is to create a queer visible presence, which strategically and coincidentally challenges the school to recognize and acknowledge their difference. In the case of Anne and Pricilla, they are not positioning themselves to blend in; they are actively displaying their difference and demanding acknowledgement of their difference.

> *Amanda:* So we have the orientation day for primary, and Sam and I go. ***(Pause)***
>
> There was a questionnaire, and some of the questions were … does your son or daughter know their address, do they know their phone number, those kind of developmental things. And then the last question - do you have any special concerns about your child starting school? So we wrote, **YES!**
>
> We want to know your philosophy when topics of family come up … how is that covered? … Have you thought about ways in which you're going to include **our family … since Nathan has two moms?**
>
> *Sam:* *Assumes the role of the teacher, signified by a prop, or an attitude. Rhetorical tone.* Well, what do you mean?
>
> *Amanda:* Well, when Mother's Day rolls around, and you're making cards for the moms, what's going to happen? *Knowing laughter is heard from other actors.*
>
> *Tone very reflexive, almost as if eyebrows are raised.*
> Is our son going to make one card? … Do they have the option of making two cards? … How do you deal with blended families? … In what ways do you talk about what makes a family? … You know, is there ways in which you can, you know, put visuals and share stories about what that looks like? … Because being different, you might want to make sure that there's some reflection of **us** in the classroom … In what ways do you think you're going to do that?
>
> *Sam:* *Still responding as teacher.* Oh, of course I'll make everyone feel welcome, and you know, you can always bring your concerns to me.
>
> *Amanda:* *Sarcastic tone.* I said, **no, see, I'm trying to not have concerns** (Original, p. 112-113).

What is most poignant about the above exchange between Amanda and Sam is that the last line, "no, see, I'm trying to not have concerns," encapsulates the core motivation behind

many of the parents' fervent desire to display their queer family structure; that by being out they hope to divert potential conflict or prejudice towards their children by the teachers and or administrators. Sam and Amanda did not hold anything back. They live in a small rural town in Nova Scotia and they entered the school system with their eyes wide open. Although the stories that were retold to me were laced with humour, the underlying sarcasm and hurt were apparent. When I arrived at their home for our first interview, they presented me with a large stack of school pictures and report cards, and they informed me that we were going to start at the beginning and we were going to work our way from kindergarten to grade 9 … they were hungry to tell their stories. They made no pretense that their experience had ever been positive.

Amanda	Nathan's school got a grant to build up the parent resources in the school library, they sent out a request of what books we could recommend.
	I listed books, not just about gay families or gay issues, but also books about adoption.
	Not a single one of the books that we put forward, out of the 500 books that were bought for the library, were from our list.
Sam	Not one.
Amanda	They had a big sort of celebratory day, and I said, I don't see any of the books that we recommended?
Sam	*Rhetorical taking on the role of the librarian:* Really? We must have just missed that.
Amanda	So, as much as we were "welcomed" in the community, there were certain things that we couldn't be a part of (Original, p. 122).

The librarian's response to Sam indicates a closed school community. Even though Amanda and Sam maintain a queer presence at their son's school, the teachers and administrators actively refuse to "see" them. The refusal to include library books that address LGBTQ issues and/or adoption positions the school as a non-inclusive environment that does not recognize the diversity of the students and families that participate within the school community. According to Michael Apple (1996):

> Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a *selective tradition,* someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. What *counts* as knowledge, the ways in which it is organized, who is empowered to teach it, what counts as an appropriate display of having learned it and – just as critically – who is allowed to ask and answer all these questions, are part and parcel of how dominance and subordination are reproduced and altered in this society. (p. 22)

I highlight this because it is important to remember that the actions of teachers and school administrators are not necessarily always born from independent thought. Ahmed (2006 b) suggests that the "body gets directed in some ways more than others" (p. 15) and that there is a "collective direction" that is followed by communities, or in this case, institutions. The librarian in the case of Amanda and Sam is part of a community, the school community, which requires its members to follow a certain path. "Becoming a member of such a community, then, might also mean following this direction, which could be described as the political requirement that we turn some ways and not others" (Ahmed, 2006 b). Both Apple (1996) and Ahmed (2006 b), are describing systems that are deeply embedded into our social fabric that inhibit us to be open to the "unfamiliar." In the arena of education, as experienced by Amanda and Sam, there is little or no recognition of a non-heterosexual or queer experience.

Sears (1999) has challenged educators to *queer* their classrooms to make room for all children's experience:

> Queering education means bracketing our simplest classroom activities in which we routinely equate sexual identities with sexual acts, privilege the heterosexual condition, and presume sexual identities. Queer teachers are those who develop curricula and pedagogy that afford *every* child dignity rooted in self-worth and esteem for others. Queer teachers imagine the world though a child's eyes while seeking to transform it through adult authorship (Sears, 1999, p. 5).

Sears (1999) believes that teachers, specifically elementary teachers, "unmindfully enforce compulsory heterosexuality" (p. 11), which is levied on students, and parents, in a variety of hurtful and oppressive ways. In the situation of Amanda and Sam, the school simply refuses to acknowledge their queer presence. This lack of acknowledgment extends into the classroom, and the library, by excluding their experiences from the classroom and the curricula. This exclusion creates a culture of silence which can be insidious, and for Amanda and Sam it resulted in being summarily excluded from all school activities.

Sam	They were desperate for volunteers, so we put our names up.
Amanda	Never got a call. About, around November, I called the school and I said, are you guys still looking for volunteers? I said, I haven't gotten a call, because at that point I was working, but I had my Wednesday mornings free and my Thursday afternoons free.
Sam	And I was working evenings and weekends, so my days were always free.
Amanda	I was keen to do any of the literacy and book stuff, and that kind of thing. Anyway, I said, you have a call for volunteers. I still haven't received a call.
Sam	*Assumes the role of school administrator*. Really? Oh, I'll get somebody to check in on it. They'll give you a call.
Amanda	I asked other parents if they had been called, and yes, they had.
Sam	Called a lot.
Amanda	Fine. I can hear you don't want me there. Fine. You can't say it **fine!** (Original, p. 121 - 122).

The silence, homophobia, and exclusion that Amanda and Sam experienced were what the other parents in this research dreaded. This fear of exclusion drove many of them to vigilantly maintain a queer presence. Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann (2001) assert that "Queer families create multiple sites where presumably private and personal decisions regarding visibility are made" (p. 13) And as Finch (2007) has described the need, or the desire, of presenting a family image as a means to "convey the message *this is my family and it works*" (p. 70). As was discussed previously in Chapter 2, Finch (2007) describes the purposeful presentation of one's family as the act of "displaying" family. The action by non-heterosexual parents of presenting their queer family structure to their child's teacher and/or to the school administrators is a very deliberate "display of family," thus rendering them queerly visible and by doing this they are, in effect, challenging the school to "see" them and to acknowledge them.

Sam and Amanda made no attempts to cover their hurt, anger, and frustration and this same thread can also be seen in the visual art. The most explicit example of this is 'Tired of Explaining.' In this piece the artists, using cartoon art and text bubbles, depict various scenarios that they have been in where they have been met with ignorance and incredulity when presenting their queer family structure. One example is the cartoon featuring a doctor (see image, lower right corner in green). The title of this cartoon is titled 'Alarmingly Mystified Doctor '

Doctor	So. Please tell me again you take care of the baby during the day and then another mother has him at night? There are two mothers! I do not understand how this can be.
Mothers	We are a couple.
Doctor	You mean this baby is a product of artificial insemination? But he is perfect – that is amazing!!!

Another example is the cartoon titled, 'Exasperated Man at the Social Insurance Office' (see image, upper left corner in blue)

Man	Well, there <u>has</u> to be a father!
Mothers	No. There does not have to be a father.

The artists also included additional text:

> There is real pain in not being acknowledged as your child's parent. It is frustrating and often annoying to have to come out over and over and over again, always wondering, and often worrying, that the grocery clerk/waiter/government official/doctor/mom at the playground/nice little old lady passing the time of day is going to be cool with who our son is and what his family looks like (Original, p. 77).

At the opening of the exhibition I observed many viewers spend a lot of time reading the text included in this piece. Some would nod their heads in agreement and even laugh. Conversely, I overheard comments such as "this is too cynical" or "it's not really that bad." The content of this piece unsettled many viewers, to the point that some actually discounted the artists' experiences. This piece challenged viewers to reflect on the status quo, which for some was too painful and resulted in an outright dismissal of the work.

'Tired of Explaining' embodies the sentiment "this is my family and it works" as described by Finch (2007). By constantly coming out over and over again the artists in this piece were continually placing their queer family structure on display by illustrating and or illuminating to "others" as to how this structure could work or function. The onus was on the artists or mothers to explain how a queer family structure can exist, and even be viable, outside of the heterocentric model of a family.

Another angle in which to consider Finch's notion of "this is my family and it works" is by examining this concept through the lens of legitimacy, legitimacy being the desire to inhabit a new space by endeavoring to shift the unfamiliar (queer) into the familiar (heterocentric). In the pieces, 'Growing Love, Community and Sadie,' and 'Being Home,' the artists consciously use familiar (familiar meaning recognizable or common) family activities, such as play and family meals, as a backdrop in which to disrupt the heteroconstruct of family. 'Growing Love, Community and Sadie' incorporates images of nature, gardening, making music, books and playtime. There are also snippets of text scattered throughout the image with words such as love, moms, grow, and family. According to the artists:

Figure 2.

This piece depicts activities that are important to our family (gardening, nature, traditions, time together, and playgrounds!). It also reflects values that inform our parenting and are a foundation for us (kindness, respect, cooperation, community, and being present) (Original, p. 79)

This piece integrates familiar or recognizable activities, such as playing and

time together, as a lens through which to frame the artists' queer family as a construct that is legitimate … that works.

'Being Home' is another piece that incorporates familiar or common family activities as a vehicle in which to display a queer family structure. The images in this piece highlight family meals and family traditions.

> Tradition and rituals are important to us as a way of cementing the bonds and the memories. We're not wildly flamboyant – we just "are." We work, we play, we cry, we celebrate while being home (Original, p. 87).

Both 'Growing Love, Community and Sadie' and 'Being Home' emphasize Morgan's (1996) notion that "family represents a quality rather than a thing," meaning that family should not be defined by its structure or the makeup of its members, but more accurately delineated by family practices. Morgan (1996) describes family practices as being part of the everyday and are "relationships and activities that are constructed as being to do with family matters" (p. 192) and that they "also have some kind of emotional dimension, some sense of personal or moral significance" (p. 192). Both 'Growing Love, Community and Sadie' and 'Being Home' highlight family relationships and ordinary, everyday activities. Yet, within these everyday activities, the artists, in both pieces, clearly identify their family structures as non-heterosexual. It could be argued that the artists have diluted their queerness by highlighting everyday family activities, in an attempt to blend in with or assimilate heterocentric family norms. The text associated with each piece could also be read as a means in which the artists are attempting to legitimatize their family structures. The description in the text could be interpreted as a way to say "look, we are just like you (heterosexual): we play, we eat, we celebrate just like every other *normal* family." I believe this to be simplistic. To begin, queer theory asserts that dominant discourses, such as family, must be challenged by liberating ourselves from the social constructs that encourage the perpetuation of heteronormative practices and ideology (Villarejo, 2005; Warner, 2005, 1999a, 1999b 1993; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003). As Warner (1993) argues, queer theory "rejects a minoritizing logic of

toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of normal" (p. xxvi). Consequently, socially sanctioned practices such as marriage and parenthood must be disrupted in order to accommodate a queer perspective and to not be viewed as assimilation. The tension lies in what constitutes a "disruption" within these practices. It would be easy to make a sweeping judgment that the content of, 'Growing Love, Community and Sadie' and 'Being Home,' reflect an assimilist tone but I would challenge queer theory to look deeper. In a North American context there are "everyday" activities that many families, regardless of structure, potentially participate in on a regular basis; for example, school, meals, vacations, sports events, religious holidays, to name a few. Is it not myopic to think that non-heterosexual families need to reinvent these activities in order to *queer* them? In the case of 'Growing Love, Community and Sadie' and 'Being Home,' the simple act of identifying each member of the family, which publicly identifies two mothers, disrupts the notion that family consists of a mother and a father and is heterosexual. The art work was publicly displayed; the artists signed their names and in no way attempted to hide the fact that their family was queer. I would argue that the act of creating and displaying art work that centered on their non-heterosexual family structure was liberatory; it disrupted the normative notion of family. Consequently, these pieces "extended the reach of what is considered a legitimate family" by inhabiting a new space within a familiar space.

It is important to look closely at the particulars surrounding the display of queer visibility. The particulars are what "fill" in the stories, and give them context and meaning. For me the acts as described by the participants or illustrated by the artists portray a level of "re-orienting" the listener or viewer, challenging them to reflect and potentially be directed towards, new ideas about non-heterosexual identity and family. These are liberatory acts. They are challenging the listener and the viewer to turn away from "objects given to us by heterosexual culture" (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 554), and turn towards a different orientation (Ahmed, 2006a, 2006b). Obviously the listener and or the viewer can chose not to turn away or to turn towards a new orientation, but the potential is always there.

"Hey faggot"

> Students hear "that's gay" and "faggot" and "lesbo" every day at school, mostly from other students. It's the air they breathe, the sea of language they swim. Most students go along with it – some of the LGBTQ students even use this language sometimes, and not in a fun way. The vast majority of LGBTQ students find it upsetting … It's the

day-in, day-out saturation of school culture with such language that undermines the spirits of LGBTQ kids. It's hearing a word that applies to a core aspect of your identity used as a synonym for "stupid" 50 times a day. As educators, sometimes we tell ourselves, "it's not serious. Kids don't even mean homosexual. They just mean "stupid." How would we like hearing "teacher" or "parent" used as a synonym for "stupid" 50 times a day? (Taylor, Peter, McMinn, Schachter, Beldom, Ferry, Gross & Paquin, 2011, p. 10).

The significant usage of homophobic language in school emerged as a contested site in which parents became hyper vigilant at maintaining a public queer presence. Anti-gay, homophobic language was a universal area of concern for both parents and children. The emotions expressed by parents and children regarding the flagrant use of homophobic language ranged from deep disappointment to resignation. The stories told depicted teachers and administrators allowing the blatant use of homophobic language in school. According to King and Schneider (1999), "The instance of abusive talk based on presumed sexual orientation in schools is astoundingly common. The follow up and correction by teachers who hear such talk is troublingly rare" (p. 126). Although both parents and children were hurt by the overt use of homophobic language, the reactions of the parents were vastly different than the reactions of the children. In many cases, the parents confronted the language where the children had resigned themselves to its usage.

Sahil The kids were playing basketball at recess time, and I happened to be at the school, and they were taking shots at the basket, and one of the other kids that was playing basketball was trying to throw the basketball into the hoop, and another kid said, you're hitting like a gay – you're hitting like you're gay. I asked the kid, what does that mean? And he didn't know, he just heard it on the playground.

So I spoke to the child's parents with regards to educating their son about the fact that speaking like this might be offensive to some children because my son was there and his father is gay.

They were very receptive to that. They said that they have no issue with homosexuality at all, and that it's just kids being kids, and that their kids surely have never been taught that … (Original, p. 115).

Sahil's story is unsettling because it is clear that if he had not been on the playground and overheard the homophobic references, the remarks would have gone unchallenged. It is impossible to gauge the reverberations, positive or negative, that Sahil's actions had on the

children and the parents that day. Yet, it is probably safe to surmise that if Sahil had not been present that day, the anti-gay language would not have been addressed. Equally important is the fact that homophobia is rife in the context in which children are educated and therefore this violence against the children of non-heterosexual parents, which also targets LGBTQ children, is of grave concern regarding safety and self-esteem. Here, schooling can be seen to actively affront and impinge on the well-being of children. What is troubling is that the parents' response to Sahil was to distill the homophobic and hurtful language to the sentiment "kids will be kids." This attitude devalues the lives and experiences of non-heterosexual parents, their children, their family constructs, and, of course, resonates loudly with other children who may be questioning their own sexuality. The assumption that children do not know that this language is hurtful is naïve at best.

Amanda	Nathan was being called faggot … it was a big problem on the bus, so we came in to talk to his teacher. Her response "they don't know what they're saying." I said, "Do you know that?"
	It's true that they may not know all the ins and outs, but do you feel like they're saying it so that they can make him feel included or are they saying it to be mean? And if they're saying it to be mean, then I would like it addressed, because it is a direct hit on **WHO I am.**
Sam	I mean, regardless of whether they're trying to talk about his parents or not, it's a shitty thing to say.
Amanda	It just happens to hit home if you're same-sex parents (Original, p. 116).

Althanases and Comar (2008) argue that "Name calling, in this framework, is never "just words" but words purposefully chosen to achieve particular goals" (p. 13). Amanda and Sam attempt to confront Nathan's teacher on her assumptions, challenging her to honestly reflect on the use of homophobic language by children. Amanda and Sam, like Sahil, illustrate how homophobic language affects and hurts them as queer parents. Nathan's teacher has clearly chosen not to recognize the hurtful and hateful meaning behind homophobic name calling. Petrovic and Rosik (2007) make the distinction between "not noticing something and turning a blind eye" (p. 207). I would argue that Nathan's teacher is choosing to "turn a blind eye." Even though her default response is "they don't know what they are saying," she is refusing to look beyond what I see as her "single story" about homophobic name calling. She is clinging

to this position even though Amanda and Sam are being bluntly honest about how this language hurts them and how it is hurting Nathan.

<div style="margin-left: 2em;">

Mark   On a Saturday morning, Max came up to wake us, and we played word games with rhyming and so on. So we were rhyming and Iain said a word like day, or way, and then Max said gay … and then he apologized, and said, "I'm sorry I said a bad word." I immediately said, Oh, that's not a bad word." He said, "Yes it is, I'm really sorry." I said, "Well no Daddy and Papa are gay," and as soon as I said the word, it was like I slapped him … his reaction   was very, very visceral,

I'm guessing that it's probably something he heard a negative vibe about in the playground.

Iain   … and we talked more about the fact that we're gay … (Original, p. 119).

</div>

Max, at the age of seven, has clearly been indoctrinated in the belief that "gay" is a "bad" word and is used only when you want to hurt someone else. This exchange between Max and his Dads is significant on many levels. First, it contradicts the notion, as positioned by Nathan's teacher, that "they don't know what they are saying." Max's knee-jerk reaction to using the word "gay" is to apologize immediately; indicating that he has learned that to be gay or to be called gay is analogous with other mean or hateful words such as *stupid, idiot, retard,* etc. What is interesting is that Max has accepted the nomenclature that gay is a "bad word" yet he is unclear about its exact meaning. Maybe Max has witnessed others being teased at school or maybe he has even been the target of homophobic language. Max may have even observed his teacher address the use of gay and maybe she has even positioned it as a "bad" word.

What is most chilling about the exchange between Max and his Dads is the extreme reaction to the statement "Daddy and Papa are gay." Max did not equate *gay* with the sexuality of his parents, and when it was presented to him he was unable to separate the very negative connotations that the word gay has come to mean from his fathers. I read this exchange as evidence that the discourse at Max's school has leanings towards a minoritizing orientation, meaning that the language about sexuality focuses on establishing heterosexuality as the norm and the ideal, which in turn excludes the experiences of those who do not identify as such (Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Britzman, 1995; Sedgwick, 1990). Elizabeth Meyer (2007) also

describes this as "systemic inclusion and systemic exclusion" (p. 22). Systemic inclusion involves presenting information about non-heterosexual identities as deviant and systemic exclusion as the process of silencing positive images and or discussions about non-heterosexual identities (Meyer, 2007). If a teacher's response to words such as *gay* is to simply say that it is a bad word, then that teacher is engaging in both systemic exclusion and inclusion. By labeling the word *gay* as "bad," that teacher has silenced any discussion about non-heterosexual identities and rendered those identities as non-desirable. How does this impact on how Max internalizes and even describes the relationship between his Dads? There is now a sense of violence associated with the *gay* identity of Max's parents. The conflict that Max is experiencing is not a shared tension that his classmates that live in heterosexually constructed families experience; which, I would argue, positions the family and school experience of Mark, Iain, and Max clearly outside of the "straight lines" of the dominant culture. The mere existence of Max and his Dads is contributing to queering Max's classroom and the schools' concept of family.

> *Christine*   Name calling is pretty insidious … teachers are
> perhaps not even aware of what's going on … On the other hand,
> teachers don't know how to address it. At the high school where I
> teach, teachers walk by comments that are homophobic all the
> time (Original, p. 116).

During my interview with Christine, she recounted many incidents where she challenged students at the school where she taught, on their use of homophobic language. Her colleagues expected her to address these issues because she was the "lesbian" on faculty. There appeared to be an unspoken sentiment that it was "understandably" too uncomfortable for the heterosexual members of the faculty to tackle homophobia. This became emotionally and spiritually draining for Christine and many times during our conversations she became visibly emotional as she described her frustrations and her fatigue of being the only teacher at her school willing to address homophobia, as it was seen as her cause and her cause alone. Surprisingly, Christine makes excuses for her colleagues by stating that "teachers don't know how to address it." Although this may be partially true for some, I find it troubling as a blanket statement. Again as Petrovic and Rosiek (2007) remind us, "a distinction can be drawn between not noticing something and turning a blind eye to it" (p. 207). Christine's colleagues have made a conscious choice not to address homophobia with their students. The action or inaction of Christine's colleagues signals an unwillingness or even a disbelief that

homophobia is a legitimate prejudice. The lack of response by the teachers in Christine's school implies, to the students and to the broader school community, that homophobia is acceptable. Again like Amanda, Sam, and Sahil, Christine has personalized the effect of homophobic language in an attempt to put a face on homophobia, and yet her colleagues have still chosen to "turn a blind eye."

> *Janet* Slurs are still ignored in the school yard; that really drives me crazy! Because man, if somebody uses the "N" word in the school yard, let me tell you, there would be a consequence to that, but they can say, "Oh, you're so gay", or call you "faggot," and nobody really pays attention to it (Original, p. 116).

Janet was extremely frustrated that the school did not treat or view homophobia with the same seriousness as racial prejudice. Banks (2002) has stated that homophobia is the "last respected prejudice of the century" (p. 2), and Pinar (2007) claims that "In a profession (education) presumably dedicated to diversity and equal opportunity, queers remain the last legitimate target of straights" (p. 2). As we know, language wields extraordinary power because it has the ability to regulate and control through the discursive act of naming and categorizing people (Meyer, 2007). Discursive practices that identify and name heterosexuality or queerness do so in order to determine who belongs and who does not, or who is "deviant".

> *Christine* Teachers are part of creating school culture, and if they're insensitive to the issues and feel uncomfortable to address negative comments that come up in their classroom, or in the hallways, then you know, their silence is as loud as anything else (Original, p. 126).

Teachers are not just a part of the school culture, they are the purveyors of school culture. When a teacher does not address homophobic slurs and lets them slip "quietly" into the background, that teacher is actively enforcing heteronormativity. I agree with Christine that when a teacher does nothing to address blatant homophobic prejudice, that inaction and/or silence loudly resonates with students, sending the message that identities that do not conform are not valued.

> *Christine* I worry about how that language affects my daughter and son in school. I know there are things people say that must be hurtful to them, but I don't know what you to do other than provide, you know, as positive a home environment as we can, and I'm sure there are things that happen

at school, and things that kids say at school, that we never know about (Original, p. 116).

Christine clearly has no expectation that the school will address anti-gay language, thus she knows that her children are subject to homophobia on a regular basis. What is most telling is that Christine is a teacher in the same school that her children attend. If she feels powerless to initiate change, then what is the effect on her children?

Ayla	People say gay in a derogatory fashion
Pujita	You hear faggot and dyke, and everything like that, all the time. People say, oh, he's a faggot or whatever … not on purpose … it's in my normal vocabulary now.
Ayla	I've gotten used to it. I mean, everywhere I've gone, people do that, and nobody does anything (Original, p. 116-117).

Ayla and Pujita have clearly resigned themselves to the everyday use of homophobic language. Pujita, the daughter of a gay father, has adopted the language herself and has even rationalized that the other kids are not really using it in a derogatory manner. What is interesting about Pujita is that she is a very active member in the Gay Straight Alliance at her high school and positions herself politically as a "straight ally," yet she is able to justify the use of homophobic language. Butler in *Precarious Lives* (2004a) asks the simple question "Does anybody stand by the words they utter?" (p. 129). Although 'Precarious Lives' is a book of essays written in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, exploring the moral, political, and psychological ramifications around "heightened vulnerability and aggression" of the United States, the question can be applied to this discussion on anti-gay language.

> The structure of address is important for understanding how moral authority is introduced and sustained if we accept not just that we address others when we speak, but that in some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails (Butler, 2004a, p. 130).

I highlight this because it speaks to the relationship between the speaker and the receiver. Ayla and Pujita have acquiesced to the blatant use of terms such as gay and faggot; there appears to be no rallying cry to try and stop this within their schools. Both Ayla and Pujita have released the "utterers" of these words from any responsibility. When words such as faggot are slung in a derogatory manner at an individual or a group of people, it is a defining moment. In the flick

of a word, the identity and the assumptions around that identity are established. Consequently when homophobic slurs become commonplace, as indicated by many of the participants in this research, the existence of the parents and their children become precarious, unsafe, and potentially dangerous (Althanases & Comar, 2008; Butler, 2004a).

Ayla's story as an out lesbian in her school underscores this position of precariousness.

Ayla	I'm out as a lesbian in my school.
Ayla	Lots of people, like, shot me down … there was a girl in my class, and we used to kind of hang out, and she told her parents that I was gay, and they went, **no**, **she thinks** she's gay.
Ayla	*(Exasperated and in the tone of her friend)* No, I'm pretty sure she's gay … *(In a patronizing parental tone)* No … she thinks she's gay. How can she know at that age? (Original, p. 118-119).

Ayla's expressed lesbian identity and her words are questioned and even rendered as non-credible. Butler (2004a) refers to the act of "what we hear" (p. 5) as a powerful tool for discerning what we believe to be real. She challenges us to "hear beyond what we are able to hear. And it means, as well, being open to narration that decenters us from our supremacy …" (p. 18) Ayla attempts this by writing a letter to her principal.

Ayla	We all wrote letters to the principal. I told him that people just don't understand what it is to be gay. Maybe we should include some education about being gay … something … just tell them what it is, because nobody knows.
Ayla	I didn't get a response yet. He said he'd get back to me.
Janet	The principal acknowledged her letter because I think he had to, and he said he would speak to her … but he never has.
Ayla	I'd like the school to talk about something about being gay and a teenager. Like, I mean, they all get it from me, but they have to come to me and ask me if they have any questions, and often you know, they feel stupid or they just don't want to, or they couldn't care less … teachers just don't bring it up.
Janet	It's disappointing, even if he doesn't want to do anything about it … He's not listening to her. (Original, p. 124).

Perhaps Ayla's principal is unwilling to go to that place of being off centre, or maybe he is just unwilling to hear her. Consequently Ayla's experience, her very existence in that school, is imperceptible to him. And as an extension, Ayla's parents, Janet and Sara, also fade out of sight. In turn the principal's silence is a means of communicating that homophobia is not a legitimate claim or a real experience. This reinforces the parents' decision to actively display their family structures because the consequences of not being visible can truly render them as non-existent. And once they are relegated to the margins, all of the issues that surround their queer experience, such as the flagrant use of anti-gay language, are also swept aside.

How does this play out in the visual art?

I have had the privilege, as a guest lecturer, of showing elements of the exhibit 'We Are: Expressions of family a queer experience' to graduate and undergraduate classes in faculties of Education. During each lecture, the piece 'Sticks and Stones' became a central point of discussion and debate. The students focus on the use of "Dyke Mommy" which is incorporated into the piece. Students claim they find the term "dyke" offensive and derogatory and they are surprised that a lesbian would purposefully feature this word. In my discussions with the students, they would articulate that the piece felt like a "slap in the face" or that the incorporation of "Dyke Mommy" "demeans" the art. What eventually emerged, after much heated debate, is that the students felt that the inclusion of the seemingly derogatory term "dyke" marginalized the artist and in turn her family. This is significant because the students assumed that the focus of the art exhibit was to illustrate that queer families are just "like everyone else," meaning just like heterosexually structured families. What the students could not seem to accept was that the artist did not appear to want to present as "just like everyone else." 'Sticks and Stones' challenged their assumptions about difference and pushed them to consider why someone would purposefully want to be seen as different. By incorporating "Dyke Mommy" into the piece, the artist was unabashedly displaying her queer difference, which was very unsettling for many of the students.

The piece "Why" elicited a similar response. Behind the black prison bars the artist incorporated words such as *faggot* and *AIDS*, perpetuating in the minds of the students negative stereotypes of gay men. Again the students were uncomfortable that this piece appeared to be "negative." They questioned why this piece was included because it did not feel "family oriented" and that the artist appeared to be angry. The students were very resistant to the idea that the artist's experience as a gay man, which included homophobia and AIDS, also informed his experience as a father. In the words of one student: "The artist is explicitly displaying his sexuality." When questioned, the student admitted that he felt it was inappropriate for a father to be so open about his sexuality.

In both 'Sticks and Stones' and 'Why,' the artists purposefully wove in language that reflected their experiences as lesbians and gay men and as parents. They, the artists, chose to be queerly visible in a way that challenged the viewer to consider the stark realities of their "queer" experience. Yet it also challenged the viewer to reflect on their own homophobia. I challenged the students to seriously contemplate what was it that was so uncomfortable for them in these pieces, that they were willing to discount the experiences of the artists? In this case, the artists were appropriating what the students assumed was homophobic language. It was disorientating for them to consider that individuals who identify as non-heterosexual may want to describe themselves as *dyke* or *faggot,* words that they see as demeaning and possibly hurtful. On one hand, it was admirable that the students were sensitive to language but, by the same token, they had closed themselves off to the idea that individuals can exercise individual agency and describe themselves with whatever descriptors or words fit for them. I would argue that the students were clinging to the "single story" that difference is acceptable only if that difference does not agitate their view of the world.

The use of homophobic language was a site of frustration, anger, hurt, and resignation for many of the participants. For many, it is a battle that has been raging for decades and for others it is, sadly, the beginning of a long road. For me, it was discouraging because I felt that the school system had not made any progress since I was a teacher twenty years ago. As a high school teacher in New York City, I was confronted with what I termed institutionalized heterosexism every day. I battled with my colleagues about the obsessive and derogatory use of *faggot*, *gay* and *lesbo* in the hallways and in the classroom. My school prided itself on our "no tolerance" policy on prejudicial language and discrimination; however, discrimination was defined on the basis of racial, ethnic, and religious differences – sexual orientation was

blatantly omitted. My colleagues failed to see how calling someone a "faggot" or "lesbo" was prejudicial or hurtful. But what was most troubling is that my colleagues viewed themselves as progressive, liberal educators, yet they were not able to see beyond their heterosexual orientation and acknowledge the needs and feelings of those who did not identify as heterosexual. As Christine experienced, my colleagues could not respond to my personal appeals, as an out lesbian and colleague, to examine our school's culture regarding abusive anti-gay language. It was disheartening to hear from Christina that not much has changed over the past twenty years.

The effects of anti-gay language levied against LGBTQ youth in school has been well documented (Althanases & Comar, 2008; Clarke, Kitzinger & Potter, 2004; Sykes, 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Lock & Steiner, 1999), but what about the children of non-heterosexual parents? How do they experience and internalize this abuse? Ayla and Pujita claim that it is "normal" but how are they really receiving these slurs? Clearly, they are targets of the same abuse. I would argue that children from queer families are perhaps as much at risk of being as adversely affected by homophobic language and, in turn, acts of bullying as their LGBTQ peers (Casper 2003; Casper & Shultz 1998). Because children from queer families might not self-identify as being part of the LGBTQ community, there is a danger that they could become an invisible minority whose needs could be easily overlooked. By observing homophobic language and bullying in their school, children who have parents that identify as non-heterosexual may not feel that their school is an inclusive and safe place for themselves and their families. If children from queer families choose not to disclose the identity of their parents because they fear that they could become targets of homophobic bullying or abuse, they then run the risk of becoming invisible. Within such a context it is conceivable, therefore, that the school system may not recognize how homophobia and heterosexism impacts children who may not identify as non-heterosexual but are part of a queer family unit. Often the excuse for not addressing non-heterosexual identities and homophobia is due to the prevailing notion that all children are heterosexual (Sears, 1999). However it has been well-documented that homophobia hurts everyone. By recognizing that children in the school system come from a wide range of backgrounds, including from non-heterosexual family structures, it broadens the discussion and provides further rationale as to why homophobia needs to be acknowledged as a legitimate prejudice, meaning then that homophobia is not an acceptable practice and that steps must be taken to curb its practice.

Queer visibility coming full circle … what do the children have to say?

Erin   I only want to tell my best friends … (Original, p. 111).

This seemingly simple statement by Erin encapsulated a common theme among many of the children that I interviewed. On the topic of queer visibility, the children's voices became the foil to their parents' stories. The parents' narratives around queer visibility became "the" story that framed their schooling experience and there was an assumption, by the parents, that their desire, and need, for a queer visible presence within the school community was also shared by their children. My conversations with the children did not support this assumption. My discussions with the children were laced with caution, confusion, and frustration. While the parents were actively striving for a queer visible presence in their children's school, the children were just as consciously discerningly selective about *when*, *how*, and *who* they disclosed their queer family structures to. The openness that their parents were working so hard to create was followed by profound back-peddling by their children.

Pujita   I tell everybody … unless I don't feel like they need to know (Original, p. 111).

Pujita's use of the phrase "unless I don't feel they need to know" is significant because she is indicating that she employs a criteria for determining who *can* and *cannot* know. Is her criteria simply close friends or is there some other benchmark that she uses to determine how safe it is to be "known." Pujita's Dad, Sahil, has created a very out queer life, and in turn Pujita is a strong supporter of the Gay Straight Alliance at her school. But, Pujita's reticence to disclose her queer family structure at school appears to be in contradiction to the open environment that her father has tried to create. Sahil is a single dad raising two children, on his own, in the euroheterocentric province of Nova Scotia. Sahil admitted that he has pulled away from the Indo-Canadian community in Halifax because of their intolerance of his sexuality; a move which he believes has impacted negatively on Pujita. Obviously Pujita's experience is complicated, and her experience, specifically in school, is layered with issues of race, religion, and sexuality.

> *Pujita*   For me, it's hard sometimes, but most of the time I don't really care … we're not really different than any other family (Original, p. 114).

Pujita appears conflicted on how to navigate school and her peers. It is probably safe to assume that within her school community, Pujita is dwelling in the margins of the heteronormativity, white Eurocentrism, and the Indo-Canadian community. One of her coping strategies is to claim – and, I would argue – cling to, the notion that, "we're not really different than any other family," which in essence is another version of the covering statement "we are just like everyone else." Pujita uses this statement as a prop. I do believe that she desires this claim to be true. Yet, if she really embodied the statement "we're not really different than any other family," then would it not make sense that she would not be so guarded about who she discloses her queer family structure to?

> *Erin*   When I talk to people and they ask stuff, like about my parents or something, I just say parents and mom, or something. But I don't actually indicate that I have two moms (Original, p. 114).

Erin comes from a household where both mothers are queerly visible in their community and work life; consequently, Erin is surrounded by other queer families in her social circle. On the surface it appears counterintuitive that Erin would be reluctant or discerning to whom she would reveal her family structure, yet she is obviously getting a message that it might not be safe or prudent to disclose this information. Erin's parents, Anne and Pricilla said they were both surprised when Erin, from day one at school, demonstrated a reluctance to openly talk about her queer family structure at school. Outside of school, Erin does not exercise this same caution. Erin's reticence to identify her queer family structure can be attributed to her ability to "read" and interpret the social and political policing that surround gender and sexuality in elementary school. Erin's behaviour in school is, of course, heavily influenced by this. However, it is interesting that the "lessons learned" at school do not spill over into her life outside of school. It could be argued that Erin has recognized the need to lead a double life. If we remember back to Bruner who said that "We prepare a face to meet / the faces that we meet" (Bruner, 1991, p. 14), Erin on some conscious and possibly unconscious level, has begun to prepare that heterosexual "face" as a strategy for navigating school.

Erin	A lot of the kids, when I tell them, they actually think I have a stepmother and a mother. And I say to everyone in the class, I don't have a stepmother, I don't have a stepmother … **I don't have a stepmother**! (Original, p. 111).

In this exchange, we get a glimpse of the frustration that Erin faces when she does try to explain her queer family structure. Erin's classmates are unable to envision a family structure that does not fit the heteronormative mould that they have been "schooled" in. The question that needs to be asked is where is Erin's teacher? Why has it been left up to Erin, at the age of eight, to explain how family structures do not have to be "one way?" I would argue that Erin has been placed in the role as teacher because her own teacher has remained silent on the topic of non-heterosexual families and quite possibly diversity in general. Erin's experience is not dissimilar to what Ayla experienced when she came out as a lesbian in her school.

Ayla	I'd like the school to talk about something about being gay and a teenager. Like, I mean, they all get it from me, but they have to come to me and ask me if they have any questions, and often you know, they feel stupid or they just don't want to, or they couldn't care less … teachers just don't bring it up (Original, p. 124).

Ayla, like Erin, has been put in, or even forced into, the role of teacher. Ayla is old enough to recognize that this is an unfair position for her to be in. Consequently Ayla takes it a step further and challenges her principal to acknowledge her experience and to address the silence that surrounds queer identity in her school.

Ayla	We all wrote letters to the principal. I told him that people just don't understand what it is to be gay. Maybe we should include some education about being gay … something … just tell them what it is, because nobody knows.
Ayla	I didn't get a response yet. He said he'd get back to me (Original, p. 124).

Both Erin and Ayla's stories highlight the resistance of teachers and school administrations to acknowledge the diversity of experience within the student body. By not recognizing student experience, in this case, Erin's queer family structure, and Ayla's non-heterosexual identity, the respective teachers and school administrators are communicating to Erin and Ayla that their experience is not valid. Yet, we would be naive to assume that only Erin and Ayla are experiencing this silence. This message has resounding effect on all students who do not fit neatly into the dominant culture.

Nathan: I remember that one day, when I was younger, we were having Mother's Day, we were making cups, and my teacher brought up that I had lesbian parents. And she's like, whispering. And I was like, why are you whispering? (*Taking on the role of the teacher in a loud whisper*) … "well you have two mothers, do you want to make two cups?" … And I was like, just talk to me straight out.

I started making two cups, and kids kept on asking me, why do you have two cups? Why do you have two cups? And I didn't know what to do because I was so freaked out that the woman was like whispering about it, So I just automatically said, oh … I have a stepmother. And I used that one throughout all of elementary school (Original, p. 113).

As Kozik-Rosabal (2000) noted, and also quoted earlier in this chapter, "Safe and inclusive learning spaces in classrooms become sites where gay families become invisible and disappear in a heterosexist curriculum" (p. 369). Although the parents in this project worked very hard to **not** become invisible, Nathan's experience is a stark example of how in a very brief, possibly 30-second exchange with his teacher, his family structure was rendered invisible for the next six years. Nathan's mothers, Amanda and Sam, worked exhaustively at creating a safe space for Nathan, yet his reality was one of secrecy and shame. From grade one, Nathan felt he had to adopt an alternate story about the structure of his family. What choice was he given? His teacher set the stage by whispering "you have two mothers" which in turn signaled to Nathan that he should probably not be forthcoming about his "two mothers." Is the teacher afraid that she would be asked questions by the other children on "how" Nathan could have two mothers? Is she fearful that once she named Nathan's non-heterosexual family structure that it would lead to a discussion about sexual identity? Bickmore (1999) identifies that many elementary teachers view sexuality and homosexuality as "unsafe" content for the elementary classroom; as a result, the topic is avoided. Or was she

so homophobic that she was unable to legitimatize Nathan's family by publicly recognizing it? All of these questions do not shed a very positive light on the context in which Nathan's teacher speaks. However, her actions set into motion an enduring sense of fear for Nathan. What is significant is that nine years later, the story about the two cups is still a powerful narrative in Nathan's life. He retold it to me as though it had just happened, full of emotion and anger. That brief exchange, in grade one, shaped how Nathan would navigate school for almost a decade. Even though Nathan is now in his first year of high school, there are a lot of residual negative feelings about his early years in school, which has left him cynical and cautious.

Nathan   If a kid found out and said that my parents were lesbians, and make 10 people hate me, I can just go and find another group, it's not really going to faze me. But I could see how it would hurt other kids who don't understand, or are like very self-conscious about it. … **And I was for a long time** … (Original, p. 114).

Ayala has also been scarred by her years in school. She has experienced school both as an out lesbian and the daughter of lesbian parents.

Janet   Now, we did have a phone call home one year, grade five or grade six, they were talking about families, and Ayla had drawn a picture, and had written on the top, in rainbow colours, my lesbian family … It was going up on the wall for open house, and so the teacher actually called just to make sure we were okay with that. We're like, yeah, we're fine with that, but you know, he wasn't sure … (Original, p. 114).

I can only speculate as to the reason or reasons why Ayla's teacher felt he needed to confirm with her parents that it was "okay" to display Ayla's family picture that was titled "My Lesbian Family." Perhaps he was uncomfortable with the word lesbian being displayed in his classroom, or maybe he was afraid of the reactions from other parents. The fact that he called signals that he was not comfortable with Ayla publicly displaying her queer family structure; his phone call was his way of whispering "you have two mothers." Was he hoping to keep Ayla and her queer family a secret, or did he feel that Ayla and her family should be silent, invisible? It is not a stretch to consider that his reaction to Ayla regarding her family picture may not have been positive and it may even be presumed that he conveyed his discomfort or negative judgement to Ayla. The question that needs to be asked is how did Ayla process the feelings that she was reading from her teacher? Like Nathan's experience,

these incidents add up in a child's mind and shape and inform how forthcoming they will be about their families and their experiences.

> *Ayla* I couldn't care less about school. I go there, I have my school friends, I do my school work, I come home, and that's behind me (Original, p. 124).

Ayla, like her parents, consciously presented and maintained a queer presence at her school. It did not seem to matter how visible or vocal she, or her mothers were, her teachers and her principal refused to recognize her non-heterosexual identity and experience. As a result, Ayla has very low expectations about her school's ability to care about her. Like Nathan, Ayla has developed a very cynical, and I would argue cautious attitude towards school.

> *Pujita* We did a survey in our school, and one of the questions was, how safe do you feel this environment is for gay and lesbian, bisexual people?
>
> *Pujita* The response 10 being the highest, one being the lowest, was six. And that's not very high.
>
> *Pujita* The thing with our school is, our principal is lesbian.
>
> *Pujita* She really encourages all of the things that we do, like we're going to take a field trip to the Queer Youth centre … she's totally for it (Original, p. 123 -124).

Pujita has described her school as one that appears to actively encourage students to explore issues around homophobia, specifically about how it impacts the school environment and youth. Her principal is even an "out" lesbian - why then is Pujita cautious about "outing" her queer family structure? I would argue that it is because the school has not gone far enough. It is admirable that the school supports a Gay Straight Alliance and that the school principal has a visibly queer presence at the school. But unless the school commits to addressing the systemic issues surrounding sexuality and gender, the school climate will never feel totally safe for full disclosure for students such as Pujita.

Nathan, on the other hand, attends a school that treats diversity as a special event.

> *Nathan* Last year we had a Respect Diversity Day, and that was sort of a vague representation of discrimination in general.

Nathan	It was just that day. There'd be student leaders and they talk about how really you can't just judge people by how they look and what they do, and stuff like that. It really just skimmed everything. People aren't going to change their mind on one day, or just really in general, a couple of people that I know who are racist they're going to stick to what they think.
Nathan	One day for diversity? … It's pretty much a day that nobody goes to school, because they know that it's just going to be a day of not doing anything (Original, p. 123-124).

Setting aside one day for diversity is tokenism at best. Nathan's description of how this "day" is received by his fellow students exposes a school culture that does not value the diverse experiences of the students and the families that make up the school community. Nathan's parents, Amanda and Sam, vigilantly established and maintained a queer visible presence all through Nathan's elementary years and even into high school. They confronted and challenged his teachers to "see" and acknowledge their queer family structure. Yet the school actively resisted Amanda and Sam's challenges. The result of the school's inaction is far reaching. The most telling consequence is Nathan's comment, "One day for diversity? It's pretty much a day that nobody goes to school, because they know that it's just going to be a day of not doing anything" (original). The school's entrenched homophobia, and I would even argue xenophobia, has created a culture, and potentially a generation of young adults, who do not recognize and value difference.

Ayla	In sex ed. we don't talk about it.
Ayla	We talk about how a baby is made.
Ayla	Our sex ed. teacher won't say penis (Original, p. 118).

Ayla's description of her "sex ed." class is especially telling, because it exposes a setting that is steeped in heterocentric ideals; yet the teacher, who is male, cannot even utter the word penis when talking about heterosexual procreation. If this teacher is unable to discuss the basics of human reproduction, it is not a stretch to assume that he is not going to recognize, let alone discuss, non-heterosexual identities.

I highlight these three scenarios because they provide a snapshot of the school environments that the children in this research have to navigate. What is most worrisome about these "pictures" is that all three schools have created an environment where the children of openly queer parents feel alienated and unheard. This feeling of alienation is precisely what Erin's mothers, Anne and Pricilla were hoping to circumvent when they established a queer visible presence at Erin's school.

> *Anne*   I talk about my desire, in front of all those parents and that teacher, for Erin's education to be inclusive and accepting of her family context and for us to be able to have a kind, safe, and comfortable dialogue (Original, p. 112).

Clearly Anne's objective was to pave the way for Erin, to ensure that her experience was recognized and not swept into the shadows. Sadly, Erin's teacher(s) did not understand that Erin would need support in order to be as "out" as her mothers. Erin needed her teacher to take the initiative and "queer her classroom" and create a space for exploring "taken-for-granted assumptions about diversity, identities, childhood, and prejudice" (Sears, 1999, p. 5). If Pujita's school were to queer its classrooms, then the activities undertaken by school groups such as the Gay Straight Alliance would have more meaningful context and more lasting influence. This would help Pujita to trust that she could speak freely about the diverse worlds that she straddles.

Concluding thoughts on queer visibility

School is one of the first public institutions that parents and children have to try and successfully navigate (Casper & Schultz, 1999). "Schools, as institutions, play a central role in the socialization of children's identity and behaviour, including gender roles, social attitudes, and interpersonal relationships" (Mercire & Harold, 2003, p. 36). As such, school becomes a very powerful force in a child's family and social life and this "force" in the family dynamic can be especially poignant if the child and or their family structure do not neatly fit into socially sanctioned "family norms" (Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Clarke, Kitzinger, & Potter, 2004; Mercier & Harold, 2003; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Sears, 1999). Casper and Schultz (1999) make the important observation that, "School and home can be very different in their world views, yet it is important that there be some common threads

connecting them for children and families to grow and flourish" (p. 2). As Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh (2004) note,

> In the classroom, an ostensibly public space, queer bodies often occupy a double bind. There is resistance to infusing curriculum with gay and lesbian content. Yet, the same queer bodies can, and often are, subjected to trauma and violence of publicly sanctioned pejoratives and are negatively marked within school spaces (p. 152).

In order to create a safe space for queer families within the school system, schools must acknowledge the heteronormative behaviours and values that marginalize and silence queer parents and their children. As noted previously, "Safe and inclusive learning spaces in classrooms becomes sites where gay families become invisible and disappear in a heterosexist curriculum" (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000, p. 369). It has been well documented that schools operate from the vantage point of dominant groups (Temple, 2005; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; ; Sears, 1999; Apple, 1996; Khayatt, 1998), and again according to Kozik-Rosabal (2000), "Schools respond to the political dictates of the group in power; they do not usually shape or lead our societal vision for the future" (p. 370). In the case of broadening the definition of the family, at least in the Canadian context, our schools are being pushed to a new standard by the passage of same-sex marriage in 2005. Just as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has affirmed that all lesbian and gay people are entitled to full rights of Canadian citizenship, which includes marriage, we need to ensure that those same rights of citizenship extend to the school and are reflected in school practice, curriculum development, and school policy. The stories represented in this research describe classrooms, teachers, and school administrators who are uncomfortable and at times unwilling to provide safe and inclusive school communities that acknowledge non-heterosexual identity and experience.

Part of the school experience is how one fits in, and how one adjusts to school culture. One of the motivations behind the parents' desire to be "queerly visible" was an attempt to oblige teachers and administrators to acknowledge their queerness or otherness. It was felt that this heightened visibility would ensure that their "otherness" would not be turned against them or in any way marginalize their children. Acts of queer visibility were most prominently displayed by very publicly and consciously naming their queer family structures. Lindsay, Perlesz, Brown, McNair, de Vaus & Pitts (2006) write about "discreditable social identity" (p. 1063), and argue that individuals who claim identities that do not fit "idealized, normative categories and roles" (p. 1063) never gain "full social acceptance" (p. 1063). In the context of school the tension around non-normative identity lies in the perception that the non-

heterosexual parent will be compared, and possibly contrasted negatively, to the heterosexual parent (Clarke, Kitzinger & Potter, 2004), and as explained by Lindsay et.al. (2006), there is a "chance that their undesired difference may be exposed and discredited" (p. 1064). This ongoing apprehension motivated the parents, in my research, to create what they hoped was a positive queer presence in their child's school. By positive, I mean that they were actively involved in their child's education and the school community. In a sense they were striving to became what Hulsebosch, Koerner, and Ryan (1999) termed "good parents;" parents who "show up at the school and support what the teachers are trying to do in the classroom" (p. 190).

The concept of displaying family structures and activities as outlined by Finch (2007) is extremely poignant for this body of work. The term "display" has many connotations and it would be easy to simply apply the concept of display to the art exhibit where there were tangible pieces of art on public display that a viewer could see, read, and look at over and over again. And quite clearly the pieces of art incorporated elements of displaying family structures and illustrating experiences that the artists purposefully wanted to share with a public audience. Being able to identify acts of display is the easy part; what is most cogent is not so much the act of display but understanding the motivation, or the *why*, behind the desire to display one's family structure. The *why* is what is at the crux of this research, and it is the uncovering of the *why* that will give strength to the multitude of stories that shape and inform the experiences of queer parents and their children. By recognizing the breadth of stories as retold by queer families, the "danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009) is greatly diluted.

The resistance that many of the families faced within their children's schools could be interpreted as the inability of the teachers and the school administration to let go of the single story that they held regarding family and in turn non-heterosexual identity. The parents and the children told stories of teachers and school administrators that were unwilling to "see" their queer lives or "hear" their stories about invisibility. The parents used the only weapon they had, and that was themselves – their sheer existence as queer parents. The parents challenged teachers and school administrators to teach and to "see" differently. Unfortunately, it does not appear that the teachers and school administrators took up this challenge and this is re-enforced in the stories by the children. As the parents presented and maintained a queer presence, the children were just as actively maintaining a low profile in order to maneuver

through the system as unscathed as possible. They were witness to, and the recipients of, the blatant homophobia that was allowed to flourish within their classrooms and schools.

Pricilla: It's all about visibility (Original, p. 110).

If only it was as easy as Pricilla claims. The queer families who participated in this research, whether it was through interviews or the making of art, all appeared to share the common goal of creating a queer visible presence both in school and in the larger community. This is a laudable goal. Yet the reader may come to the end of this chapter and wonder what did the efforts of the participants actually accomplish? Is society more accepting of non-heterosexual family structures and identities; are schools more inclusive of non-heterosexual identities? My goal was not to answer those questions for the reader. I set out to disrupt the notion that there is a "single story" depicting the schooling experiences of non-heterosexual parents and their children and that the actions of the participants, being queerly visible, were liberatory acts that disrupt hegemonic heteronormative thought and practice. My research and findings are guided by my conviction that educational research should open us up to deeper reflection on issues and topics that influence and shape how students and their families experience the educational system. By providing alternate platforms for the stories to be seen, heard, and experienced, I have created a unique space for which readers and viewers are able to "listen" with all of their senses attuned. This extra space allows time for the stories to be contemplated on many different levels-- cognitively, intuitively, and even viscerally.

Stories have the ability to connect people, and my hope is that this work will connect teachers, school administrators, and members of the queer community in a way that can positively deepen their relationship with each other. What I observed was a disconnect between what the parents, and the children, needed and desired and what the teachers and school administrates felt they could give. I purposely did not include teachers and school administrators in this work because I did not want the experiences of queer parents and their children to be diluted by "explanations" from the teachers and school officials as to why they did not or could not create a more inclusive school environment for non-heterosexual identities. My hope is that teachers and school administrators, and even members of the queer community, can openly listen and reflect upon the stories included in this work.

Homophobia
By
Pujita

You call them gay, but why?
Why does it matter so much who humans are attracted to?
Everyone has the right to be themselves,
otherwise no one would be themselves.
You may not be gay, but your friend could be.
Think of all the people you're hurting when you say, oh, that's so gay.
There's still a lot of homophobia going on in the world,
and you can make a big difference.
(Original, p. 126)

Chapter 5

Now What?

Just as I was completing the writing of my dissertation, Egale Canada (a Canadian LGBTQ human rights organization) released its findings of a national climate survey conducted with schools across Canada. The focus of the research was to "identify the forms and extent of students' experiences of homophobic and transphobic incidents at school, the impact of those experiences, and the efficacy of measures being taken by those schools to combat these common forms of bullying" (Taylor & Peter, with McMinn, Schachter, Beldom, Ferry, Gross & Paquin, 2011, p. 13). The outcomes of this research are consistent with the findings of the work presented in my research.

The survey found:

- LGBTQ students are exposed to language that insults their dignity as part of everyday school experience and youth with LGBTQ family members are constantly hearing their loved ones being denigrated.

- LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ parents experience much higher levels of verbal, physical, sexual, and other forms of discrimination, harassment, and abuse than other students.

- Most LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ parents do not feel safe at school.

- The situation is worse on all counts for female sexual minority students and youth with LGBTQ parents and even worse for trans students.

- Many students, especially youth of colour, do not have even one person they can talk to about LGBTQ matters.

- Many schools have a well-developed human rights curriculum that espouses respect and dignity for every identity group protected in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* except for LGBTQ people.

- Teachers often look the other way when they hear homophobic and transphobic comments and some of them even make these kinds of comments themselves. (Taylor, et. al, 2011, p. 27)

I highlight this survey because it reinforces the urgent need for teachers and school administrators to re-think how they include queer identities into their classroom and schools. Obviously, it is not enough for parents and children to disclose, very publicly, their queer identity, because as was experienced by the participants in my research, those disclosures are

not acknowledged or taken seriously. As discussed in Chapter 4, we (educators, parents, government bodies, etc.) must challenge ourselves to reorient the role of school communities and how we develop and deliver public education. I would argue that the first step would be for teachers, school officials, and the community to let go of their "single story" about school. I would gamble that we all hold "a" story about school which is based on our own schooling experiences as a child, and I would also bet that we have a tendency to remember those school experiences with some reverence. We must reflect more deeply on our schooling experiences, acknowledge the single story that we cleave to, and then let it go. School in the 21st century needs to be rethought and retooled. Educational research supports this claim; reflective and critical educators are not calling for us to go backwards – they are urging us to re-envision how we educate … how and why we teach. How much more evidence do we need?

I applaud Sears's (1999) call for educators to *queer* their classrooms. Sears (1999) challenges educators to question and reframe hegemonic ideology, which includes heteronormative practices that shape and inform school curriculum, pedagogy, and relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Sears calls this looking at "schooling upside down" and asks educators to explore "taken for granted assumptions about diversity, identities, childhood, and prejudice (1999, p. 5). I would even challenge school officials to take it one step further and adopt *queer pedagogy* as their over-arching school philosophy, which incorporates the methods and ideology of *queering* one's classroom as described by Sears (Pendleton Jiménez, 2009; Sears, 2009; Meyer, 2007; Bickmore, 1999; Britzman, 1995). Britzman (1995) describes queer pedagogy as:

> … one that refuses normal practices and practices of normalcy, one that begins with an ethical concern for one's own reading practices, one that is interested in exploring what one cannot bear to know, one interested in the imagining of a sociality unhinged from the dominant conceptual order (p. 165).

Within queer pedagogy there is room for multiple identities in the classroom and space for critically reading and interpreting the world (Freire, 1970). In order to "queer" pedagogy, the classroom and the school community must become a place where students are able to "be" their identities, meaning that they do not hide in the margins but are visibly themselves. This has the potential to oblige educators into a position of authentic inquiry, meaning that the lives lived by the students and families of the school community are "authentically" incorporated into the curricula and woven into the fabric of the school community.

Advocating for educational reform is not a new idea and historically there have always been voices agitating, and pushing through changes, to the educational system. The changes thus far have not been radical enough. We need to completely overhaul the entire public education system. I do recognize that we are working within a political system that is not prepared to disrupt the hegemonic ideology and traditions that shape and inform our current educational philosophy and practice. However, inspired by the words of Robert Kennedy, I do know that individuals can catapult change:

> It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a [person] stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.

In keeping with the spirit of Robert Kennedy's words, I believe that research in this dissertation has the potential to spark change, even if that change occurs one teacher and one classroom at a time.

I start with the parents. The parents included in this research, as represented in the play, have had many years to evaluate and reflect upon their experiences and encounters with teachers, school administrators, and the school curricula. As a result, they have also spent a considerable amount of time thinking about what needs to change in order to create a more inclusive school environment for non-heterosexual identities and queer family structures.

Sylvie	Well, no kid wants to be told that their family is deviant …
Maggie	*UL, Maggie is rather hesitant in her responses.* Or weird
Sahil	What I would really like is to have the school very open, accepting, embracing diversity …
Anne	More than anything I would like to see more inclusive language....
Pricilla	I don't want to be a special piece of curriculum …
Janet	I guess for me, it's that we do exist, and we need to see that reflected …
Christine	I think we should have books that address the topic, you know, in a positive way that kids have access to, and not just one book . . .

Anne	I think if I could choose anything, it's to weave into the fabric of the curriculum examples of diverse families across the spectrum, including my profile.
Christine	Teachers have to do sensitivity training around gay and lesbian issues … I think it's incumbent on our board to be doing that, and make it a requirement.
Janet	Nova Scotia spends the lowest amount per capita on students, and I'm thinking, we're not going to change any of this, or not significantly, without a greater commitment to supporting our teachers through education.
Sahil	I would like teachers to provide exactly the same discussion that they have about heterosexuality with regards to possibilities of lesbian or gay lifestyles as well …
Christine	If teachers were able to be openly gay or lesbian … what a difference that would be.
Amanda	I think a bare minimum would be it's safe. And I don't think that's too much to ask. And in the end, that they teach you something …something that is invaluable to that individual.

When presented so simply, it feels unfathomable that teachers and school administrators would not commit to change. So, where does this leave this research? I believe that this work has a role in assisting educators to recognize the need to re-vision how we conduct school and educate children. This work will have no impact if it stays between the covers of this dissertation. It is important that the stories from this research continue to have a life beyond this dissertation and that more stories are collected and represented. To start, I envision that the script, 'Queerly Inside and Out in School … conversations' can be leveraged as a workshop conducted with teachers, school administrators and members of the school community. In 2010, I piloted this script at a conference, using conference participants as the actors; I was able to witness the profound effect the script had on the actors who participated. Participating in the performance opens the "actors" up for a powerful and reflective experience. By presenting this as a workshop, there would also be an opportunity to hear and collect additional stories from teachers, school administrators, and the school community about their experiences in the classroom around non-heterosexual identity and family. I consider the script a living document, meaning that it will never be finished – it will always be

open to further contributions. In the tradition of Verbatim Theatre, the conversation remains alive and open.

To begin, I have identified the Nova Scotia Department of Education, Nova Scotia Teachers Union, Egale Canada (LGBTQ human rights organization), The Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) as key stakeholders to help further this work. My goal is to leverage their conferences and professional development sessions as a means to disseminate this work out into the schools and the universities. Hopefully, by making this work accessible, other supporters will be inspired to take this work on or back to their own communities.

I envision a similar trajectory for the community art exhibit. The community art exhibit could be replicated in any community. In fact, its power lies in reflecting the stories from the local community. When the larger community is invited to view the art, they are taking in the stories of their neighbours, friends, colleagues, co-workers, family members, etc, and it is hard to discount their stories when they know, or know of, the artists. As well, I would still use the images from my dissertation to help inspire others to take the challenge of facilitating a similar event.

What's next?

As outlined above, I plan to operationalize elements of this research in order to ignite a movement towards *queering* our schools. It is critical that we create educational environments that "challenge categorical thinking, promote interpersonal intelligence, and foster critical consciousness" (Sears, 1999, p. 4). To keep this work moving forward, I would like to broaden my scope to include teachers and administrators. My hope is that by participating in conferences and professional development seminars, I will connect with a school community or even a classroom teacher who is willing to shift their practice to encompass queer pedagogy. I see this as a potential longitudinal study, one that could potentially greatly inform future educational practices. As well, I will continue to contribute to academic literature on the topic of school and non-heterosexual identity, queer families, and queer pedagogy.

Epilogue … what I am left with?

My youngest son, Damen, asked me when he was three years old if he had to keep his penis forever. Needless to say this was not a question that I was prepared to answer. In fact, I was so caught off balance by this question that I did the typical parent maneuver of deflecting by asking an inane question like "where are your socks?" But, when he asked it again a few days later, I felt I owed him an answer, so I said "yes," which I immediately regretted. I was surprised at my "knee-jerk" reaction to his question. Actually, I was shocked that my answer was so "status quo." I should know better, I was wimping out on a gender discussion with my three-year-old son. I felt inadequate about how to help him navigate this question – he just felt too young to engage in a conversation about gender, or more specifically, a conversation about transitioning. To back up just a bit, by the age of two, Damen began exploring gender boundaries in ways that my oldest son never did. For example, Damen would put on a dress and twirl in front of a mirror and exclaim "I'm so beautiful" and if strangers called him a girl, he would reply: "I don't care if people think I'm a girl." At seven years old, he still is experimenting and pushing limits; yet, as he gets older he is becoming more attuned to the external social pressures to conform. He will publicly proclaim "I don't like girl things" as he clutches his purse and is dressed in pink skinny jeans and a sparkly pink sweater. It breaks my heart.

School has become a huge concern for us. However, both of our boys attend a small community school that includes other kids with queer parents and Damen's teacher is an out gay man. In this we are very fortunate. Yet the prevailing ideology and practice is still heterocentric, which is reflected in the books both boys bring home and the lack of LGBTQ content reflected in the curricula. A couple of years ago I was very happy dwelling in my own covering statement that "we have been fortunate." But today I am not so comfortable with that story. I need more than acknowledgement that I exist. I need to hear and see a commitment to shift teaching practices and school philosophy to those that authentically include the diverse experiences of the entire student body. I will continue to be queerly visible in our children's school and agitate for change, but I now have an expectation that the school will become visibly queer.

Oh, and now when Damen asks if he has to keep his penis forever, I just smile and answer: "It is up to you."

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"Queerly Inside: Narratives about schooling by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer parents and their children"

You are invited as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer (LGBTQ) parent with a school age child or children to participate in a research project about schooling.

My name is Terrah Keener and I am a doctoral student with the University of South Australia. I am conducting research for my doctoral thesis *"Queerly Inside: Narratives about schooling by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer parents and their children*." I am looking for self-identifying LGBTQ parents with at least one school age child to participate in this research.

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of LGBTQ parents and their children as they navigate within and around a school system that may or may not recognize their family construct. This exploration will include a critical examination of school climate and how it impacts on issues of family, identity, social inclusion, school curriculum and school policy.

As participants you will be invited to share your experiences and thoughts about your child's or children's education in one 60-90 minute conversational interview with myself. As well I would like to invite your child or children to also share with me their experiences of schooling in a separate 60-90 minute interview.

If you are interested in participating in this project or would like more information please contact me, Terrah Keener, at (902) 835-7817 or by email keener.lacroix@ns.sympatico.ca.

"Queerly Inside: Narratives about schooling by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer parents and their children"

Currently in Canada there is little research examining the collective experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) parents and their children in school. The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of LGBTQ parents and their children as they navigate within and around a school system that may or may not recognize their family construct. This exploration will include a critical examination of school climate and how it impacts on issues of language, identity, social inclusion, school curriculum, school policy, and family.

I am looking for LGBTQ parents with school age children to participate in this research. Individual interviews will be conducted with each parent and each child. The interviews will be conversational in nature and approximately 60- 90 minutes in length and will focus on issues of identity, social inclusion, and school environment. Participation in this research is voluntary and individuals are to free to withdraw from this project at any time without prejudice.

As well I invite participants to share with me a photograph, a drawing or a creative piece of art as an alternative and supplemental expression of your "story". This component is not required for participation in the research project; you may choose to only be interviewed. All photographs, drawings or creative pieces that are shared with the researcher may become part of the thesis.

Each conversation will be audio taped and transcribed in full. The audio tapes will be transcribed by the researcher or a confidential transcriber and all identifying markers will be removed. Tapes and transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Once the audio tapes have been transcribed they will be erased and typed transcripts will be kept for a period of seven years upon which time they will be shredded. Each participant will be assigned a non-identifying number and a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

This research is being supervised by Dr. Vicki Crowley, School of Communication, Information & New Media, University of South Australia, Vicki.Crowley@unisa.edu.au , and Dr. Blye Frank, Division of Medical Education, Dalhousie University, Bfrank@tupdean2.med.dal.ca. The University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

If you are interested in being part of this study or would like more information please contact Terrah Keener at (902) 835-7817 or by email: keener.lacroix@ns.sympatioc.ca.

Thank you for your interest in this research.
Terrah Keener PhD (candidate)

Project Title: Queerly Inside: Narratives about schooling by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer parents and their children

Researcher's name: Terrah Keener

Supervisor's names: Dr. Vicki Crowley & Dr. Blye Frank

- I have read the Participant Information sheet, and the nature and the purpose of the research project have been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand that I may not directly benefit from taking part in the project.

- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future. I also understand that I can ask that my response to specific questions not be audio taped.

- I understand that I will be audio taped during the interview.

- I understand that the audio tape will be stored in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and only the researcher, the transcriber and the thesis supervisors will have access to my audio taped interview.

- I understand that the tapes will be destroyed following the completion of the research and that the transcribed coded transcript of my interview will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home for seven years and will then be shredded.

- I understand that the data is owned by the researcher.

- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

Name: _____

Signed:_____

Date:_____

I have explained the study to the participant and consider that she/he understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date:_____

CONSENT FORM- PARENT/GUARDIAN

Project Title: Queerly Inside: Narratives about schooling by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer parents and their children

Researcher's name: Terrah Keener

Supervisor's names: Dr. Vicki Crowley & Dr. Blye Frank

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and the nature and the purpose of the research have been explained to me and my child. I understand and agree for my child _____ to take part.

- I understand that my child may not directly benefit from taking part in the project.

- I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study at any stage. I also understand that I can ask that answers to specific questions not be audio taped.

- I understand that my child can stop the interview at any time.

- I understand that I can accompany my child at the interview.

- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

- I understand that my child will be audio taped during the interview

- I understand that the audio tape will be stored in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Only the researcher, the transcriber and the supervisors will have access to my child's audio taped interview. The tapes will be destroyed following the completion of the research. The typed coded transcript of my child's interview will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home for seven years. The data is owned by the researcher.

Name of Parent: _____

Signed:_____

Date:_____

I have explained the study to the participant and consider that she/he understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date:_____
APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM - MINOR

Project Title: Queerly Inside: Narratives about schooling by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer parents and their children

Researcher's name: Terrah Keener

Supervisor's names: Dr. Vicki Crowley & Dr. Blye Frank

- I have read the Participant Information sheet or have had the Project Information sheet read to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand that I may not directly benefit from taking part in the project.

- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future. I also understand that I can ask that my answer to specific questions not be audio taped.

- I understand that I can have my parent(s)/guardian with me during the interview.

- I understand that I will be audio taped during the interview

- I understand that the audio tape will be stored in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Only the researcher, the research typist and the supervisors will have access to my audio taped interview. The tapes will be destroyed following the completion of the research. The typed coded transcript of my interview will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home for seven years. The data is owned by the researcher.

Name: _____

Signed:_____

Date:_____

I have explained the study to the participant and consider that she/he understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date:_____

"Queerly Inside: Multi-layered narratives about schooling and family by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer parents and their children"

Queerly Inside: Multi-layered narratives about schooling and family by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer parents and their children is a multi-dimensional narrative doctoral research project that investigates two aspects in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer parents,(LGBTQ) and their children: The first is schooling, what happens *to* and *within* an LGBTQ family once they cross that threshold into their children's school; The second is the notion of family and how does one *create, do* and *experience* family in a non-heterosexual context. Text based narratives and original art work, (created by research participants), will be interwoven to give "voice" to a new and emerging story about identity and inclusiveness.

Currently in Canada there is little research examining the collective experiences of LGBTQ parents and their children in school. The aim of this research is to explore the extent to which non-normative sexuality and family structure features in the way in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer LGBTQ parents, and their children, navigate and negotiate individual and family experience and identity within the broader society and in their children's school. Much is already known about the impact of homophobia on the lives of LGBTQ children and teachers, however, little research exists on how schooling and education is understood and experienced *within* new family structures such as *non-heterosexual* family and parenting formations.

To explore the breadth of issues that LGBTQ parents, and their children, consider, grapple with, and possibly confront in relation to the everyday practices of family and schooling, this qualitative research project will incorporate:

- Individual and family narratives by LGBTQ parents and their children
- Community-based art exhibit featuring original art work and text produced by LGBTQ parents and their children
- Examination of relevant and public, school policies regarding diversity and professional conduct.

Narratives about school
Self-identifying LGBTQ parents with school age children are invited to participate in this research. Narratives will be collected through conversational style interviews conducted by the researcher. Participants will be asked to share their experiences in both a family and individual interview. The family session will include a parent or parents and all children who are currently attending school (40-60 minutes in length). An individual, follow-up meeting will be held with the parent or parents to further explore the issues that emerged in the family

interview (40-60 minutes in length). Participation in this research is voluntary and individuals are to free to withdraw from this project at any time without prejudice.

Each conversation will be audio taped and transcribed in full. The audio tapes will be transcribed by the researcher or a confidential transcriber and all identifying markers will be removed. Tapes and transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Once the audio tapes have been transcribed they will be erased and typed transcripts will be kept for a period of seven years upon which time they will be shredded. Each participant will be assigned a non-identifying number and a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Community Art Exhibition
This community-based art project that will bring together LGBTQ and their children, to create original pieces of art work, visual and text based, that express and or represent their experiences of creating "family". Art work will be generated through workshops that will be held in the spring of 2008. Participants will be invited to work together as a family, or as an individual, to creatively explore ideas of *doing*, *being* and *creating* family.

The art work will be displayed in a public exhibition at a venue that is accessible to the general public. The exhibit will be open to the public for a minimum of two weeks. A printed catalogue, which will include all images from the exhibition, will be produced for distribution at the venue. Participants will own the copy write to their art, and all original art work will be returned to the participants at the conclusion of the research. Participation in the exhibit is voluntary and individuals are to free to withdraw from this project at any time without prejudice.

This research is being supervised by Dr. Vicki Crowley, School of Communication, Information & New Media, University of South Australia, Vicki.Crowley@unisa.edu.au , and Dr. Blye Frank, Division of Medical Education, Dalhousie University, Bfrank@tupdean2.med.dal.ca.

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: Vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au

If you are interested in being part of this study or would like more information please contact Terrah Keener at (902) 880-7735 or by email: keener.lacroix@ns.sympatioc.ca.

Thank you for your interest in this research.

Terrah Keener PhD (candidate)

**Consent for the use of original artwork for the purpose of public display
Adult**

Project Title: Queerly Inside: Multi-layered narratives about schooling and family by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer parents and their children

Researcher's name: Terrah Keener

Supervisor's name: Dr. Vicki Crowley, Vicki.Crowley@unisa.edu.au & Dr. Blye Frank, Bfrank@tupdean2.med.dal.ca

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and the nature and the purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand that I may not directly benefit from taking part in the project.

- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

- I grant permission for my original art work to be shown in a public art exhibition as part of the research project.

- I grant permission for my original art work to be reproduced in a catalogue which will be part of the art exhibition and the research project.

- I understand that my original art work may be reproduced in the final thesis.

- I understand that I will own the copy write of my original art work and it will be returned to me upon the completion of the study.

- I understand that I may be videotaped during the study.

- I understand that the video tape may be used in the final art exhibition and as part of the final thesis.

- I understand that the video tape will not be used beyond the scope of the art exhibition and the research project.

- I understand that the video tape will be stored in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and only the researcher, and the thesis supervisors will have access to the video tape.

- I understand that the tapes will be destroyed following the completion of the research.

- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

- Participants need to be aware that if they reveal information causing the researcher to feel that anyone is the subject of abuse or neglect or is engaged in illegal activities, the researcher will have the responsibility to report this information to the proper authorities.

Name of participant: _____

Signed/Date:_____

I have explained the study to subject and consider that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date: _____

Consent for the use of original artwork for the purpose of public display
Minor

Project Title: Queerly Inside: Multi-layered narratives about schooling and family by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer parents and their children

Researcher's name: Terrah Keener

Supervisor's name: Dr. Vicki Crowley, Vicki.Crowley@unisa.edu.au & Dr. Blye Frank, Bfrank@tupdean2.med.dal.ca

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and the nature and the purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand that I may not directly benefit from taking part in the project.

- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

- I grant permission for my original art work to be shown in a public art exhibition as part of the research project.

- I grant permission for my original art work to be reproduced in a catalogue which will be part of the art exhibition and the research project.

- I understand that my original art work may be reproduced in the final thesis.

- I understand that I will own the copy write of my original art work and it will be returned to me upon the completion of the study.

- I understand that I may be videotaped during the study

- I understand that the video tape may be used in final art exhibition and as part of the final thesis.

- I understand that the video tape will not be used beyond the scope of the art exhibition and the research project.

- I understand that the video tape will be stored in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and only the researcher, and the thesis supervisors will have access to the video tape.

- I understand that the tapes will be destroyed following the completion of the research.

- Participants need to be aware that if they reveal information causing the researcher to feel that anyone is the subject of abuse or neglect or is engaged in illegal activities, the researcher will have

the responsibility to report this information to the proper authorities (*Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. 1998 (with 2000, 2002 and 2005 amendments).
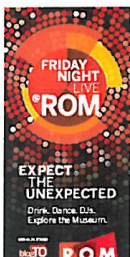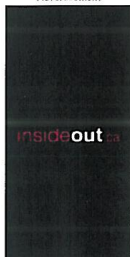
Name of participant: _____

Signed/Date:_____

I have explained the study to subject and consider that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date: _____

APPENDIX I
CONSENT PARENT/GUARDIAN

Consent for the use of original artwork for the purpose of public display
Parent/Guardian

Project Title: Queerly Inside: Multi-layered narratives about schooling and family by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer parents and their children

Researcher's name: Terrah Keener

Supervisor's name: Dr. Vicki Crowley, Vicki.Crowley@unisa.edu.au & Dr. Blye Frank, Bfrank@tupdean2.med.dal.ca

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and the nature and the purpose of the research have been explained to me and my child. I understand and agree for my child _____ to take part.

- I understand that my child may not directly benefit from taking part in the project.

- I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study at any stage.

- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

- I grant permission for my child's original art work to be shown in a public art exhibition as part of the research project.

- I grant permission for my child's original art work to be reproduced in a catalogue which will be part of the art exhibition and the research project.

- I understand that my child's original art work may be reproduced in the final thesis.

- I understand that I will own the copy write of my child's original art work and it will be returned to me upon the completion of the study.

- I understand that my child may be videotaped during the study.

- I understand that the video tape may be used in the final art exhibition, and as part of the research project.

- I understand that the video tape will not be used beyond the scope of the art exhibition and the research project.

- I understand that the video tape will be stored in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and only the researcher, and the thesis supervisors will have access to the video tape.

- I understand that the tapes will be destroyed following the completion of the research.

- Participants need to be aware that if they reveal information causing the researcher to feel that anyone is the subject of abuse or neglect or is engaged in illegal activities, the researcher will have the responsibility to report this information to the proper authorities (*Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. 1998 (with 2000, 2002 and 2005 amendments).

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Signed/Date:_____

I have explained the study to subject and consider that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date: _____

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Halifax exhibit celebrates queer families
ART / Art show held at historic immigration museum

Ralph Higgins / National / Wednesday, November 26, 2008

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An historic Halifax site is the setting for a very modern exhibit called We Are:

WE ARE. Queer families created the artwork on display at Haliax's Pier 21. This piece uses cut-outs of magazine headlines and paint. (Ralph Higgins photo)

Expressions of Family — a Queer Experience. As an immigration museum, Pier 21 may seem like an odd choice for an exhibit that explores and celebrates queer families, but it has long been a place of welcome, explains Kim Reinhardt, the museum's chief curator.

Between 1928 and 1971, Pier 21 was an Immigration facility where over one million people got their first glimpse of Canada. One in five Canadians has a connection with Pier 21, and it was even recognized as one of Canada's "seven wonders" by a CBC survey.

Pier 21's community mandate is to encourage "cultural groups to create their own exhibitions and tell their own stories, while celebrating themes related to immigration, cultural diversity, cultural heritage and identity." So it seemed like a perfect fit when curator Terrah Keener was looking for a space to showcase the creations of the workshops she had been facilitating. Many of her friends were skeptical about the reaction she would have from Pier 21, but Keener says "the whole experience has been fabulous and everyone there has been extremely supportive."

The idea for the exhibit began when Keener was doing research for her doctoral dissertation on the experiences in school of children of queer parents. A queer parent herself, Keener was intrigued to explore the questions that arose during conversations between children and parents about how they present themselves to the largely heterosexual world, and how they define family for themselves. Last of all was: What is the story you want to tell? In a series of four workshops, parents and children create visual representations of their family life and of themselves. These vibrant creations are on display in the new Rose and Ralph Chiodo Harbourside gallery at Pier 21.

In one corner of the gallery, a monitor plays a video taken during the actual workshops. The artwork created by the queer families is displayed on walls, stands and even refrigerators of a mock kitchen. As might be expected, there are lots of brightly coloured drawings, collages, photos, and cartoons. Many of the works are humourous and happy, but some are moving pieces evoking the difficulty caused when queer families are not recognized. Visitors are encouraged to take part in the exhibit by putting a sticky note on the refrigerator at one of the mock kitchen sets. Most of the messages are very simple: "Love is all that matters," "I love my Dads."

INTERACTIVE. Visitors are encouraged to write a message on a sticky note and post it on the exhibit's fridge in the mock kitchen. (Ralph Higgins photo)
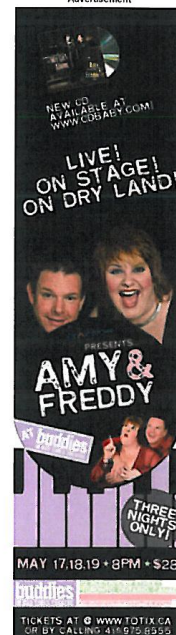
As curator Reinhardt states in the introduction to the exhibit catalogue, "Seldom are the stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer Canadians and their families given a voice in the narrative of the Canadian mosaic. We Are thoughtfully celebrates an expanded understanding of family life in Canada and the mosaic of Canadian society."

We Are: Expressions of Family — a Queer Experience runs until Nov 27.

Tags: halifax, pier 21, queer families

Entertainment

Fawcett case
Lawanda Jackson, a former employee of Los Angeles' UCLA Medical Center, pleaded not guilty to charges she sold information from actress Farrah Fawcett's medical records to the National Enquirer. IMDB.COM

We are family

New exhibit looks at the experiences of LGBTQ families living in Nova Scotia

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Terrah Keener wants to open up the discussion more to the experiences of being a non-heterosexual parent.

And the Halifax artist feels this will be accomplished, with the opening of a new exhibit at Pier 21's Ralph and Rose Chiodo Harbourside Gallery, titled We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience.

"What I really wanted to do with this is broaden how we look at families and challenge people to re-think, maybe, how they define family and what they think makes up a family," explained Keener, the curator for this community-based art exhibit, which opens on Saturday.

"I want to see everyone come out to see it (too). It's important for, let's say, the general public to see it, but it's also important for people in the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and

queer) community to see it."

The roughly 30-piece exhibit is the work of LGBTQ parents and their children who are mostly from Nova Scotia.

The artwork expresses and represents the wide range of experiences they face as a family, and includes photographs, photo illustrations, collages and three-dimensional boxes.

Keener said an exhibit like this is new to galleries. She only knew of one similar to this that travelled around the United States and was entirely photography-based.

"You can't paint the brush that all gay and lesbian families are the same," said Keener, who has a partner of 13 years, and two sons aged seven and three-and-a-half.

"We all have very different experiences and we have created our families differently."

A free public opening reception and family fun day will be held at Pier 21 on Saturday from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. to officially open the exhibit, which will be on display until Nov. 27.

At the opening, visitors can meet the families featured in the exhibit and participate in craft and activities.

"It's just impor-

tant for the community to see it and see their experiences," Keener said.

"So often, our experiences are left out of things. Our voices, our stories, are not included in a lot of discussions around Canadian identity."

> **"What I really wanted to do with this is broaden how we look at families ... "**
> Terrah Keener, curator

RYAN TAPLIN/METRO HALIFAX

Terrah Keener, curator of We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience, hangs one of the works appearing at the exhibit at Pier 21.

If you go

- WHAT: We Are: Expressions of Family a Queer Experience
- WHEN: Opening Saturday with an opening reception from 2 to 4 p.m. The exhibit remains on display until Nov. 27.
- WHERE: Pier 21's Ralph and Rose Chiodo Harbourside Gallery.

Photographers focus their lenses on loved ones

ART A new show titled Intimate Portraits II is opening today at ViewPoint Gallery in on Barrington Street in Halifax.

The exhibit is the work of 14 photographers who have taken portraits of people close to them — from mothers and fathers, to sons and daughters — and put them on display at

the gallery for visitors to see.

"We're hoping people would recognize their own special people in their lives by looking at these photographs," said Dartmouth's Laura Siddiqui, one of the photographers taking part in the month-long exhibit.

"There's a quality of the photographs that they would see and would be familiar to them."

Siddiqui has two photos in Intimate Portraits II. One is of her sister in a kitchen, and the second of her husband during their honeymoon in Montreal.

The exhibit is on display until Nov. 30, with an opening reception tomorrow from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

PHILIP CROUCHER/ METRO HALIFAX