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Can't you act like a man? : support in educational setting for children with non-mainstream sexual and gender identitites

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CAN'T YOU ACT LIKE A MAN? SUPPORT IN EDUCATIONAL SETTING FOR
CHILDREN WITH NON-MAINSTREAM SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES

by

Brad Tapley, BA, Ryerson University, 2006

A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in the Program of
Early Childhood Studies

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CAN'T YOU ACT LIKE A MAN?

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Master of Arts
Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to explore and restory the early experiences of a man who grew up with a non-mainstream sexual identity. Young children may be exploring non-mainstream gender and sexual identities. Resources should be in place to support these children, both at home and in school. By identifying gender and sex as constructs, heteronormative assumptions on appropriate behaviour are challenged and similarly deconstructed. Disempowerment is illuminated throughout this narrative and information provided by civil rights groups, school boards and prominent researchers are woven with the participant's thoughts, his early experiences and recommendations for the future.

A narrative research design was used to develop my participant's personal story. Multiple methods of data collection were employed and individual voice was honoured. Full participation was encouraged whereby the participant made suggestions on how to improve the research process and the overall strength of his story. Additionally, as a teacher, the participant has shared his experiences and advice on including children with non-mainstream sexualities in the classroom. By exploring the narratives of an adult who has experienced invisibility and marginality as a child, I hope to increase our understanding of the importance of supporting young children with non-mainstream sexual and gender identities and the detrimental effect that the lack of support can have upon young children's formation of identity.

Key words:

Heteronormativity
Gender non-conforming behaviour
Children & Sexuality
Constructionist
Critical Theory

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My journey would have been much less painful if, in those earlier years, I had received some sense that my feelings were not horrible and deviant, some hint that there were others like me, or some examples of healthy adults with a homosexual orientation. Perhaps a teacher or counsellor could have provided that assistance, but they did not, and so for a long time I struggled alone. (A lesbian educator (no name) at a teachers' forum on 'gay/lesbian concerns in the schools', as cited in Marinoble, 1998)

Focus of Research and Significance

Most psychologists view people as having many forms of identity that follow an orderly developmental path. Children's *sexual* identity is said to develop from birth (Chrisman & Couchenour, 2002; Weeks, 1985). By the age of three, children are said to form a *gender* identity, (a sense of maleness or femaleness) and simultaneously learn gender-role norms (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). From age three to seven, there is a marked increase in sexual interest and gender-role activities, where children develop a concept of marriage and long-term relationships and practice adult roles like "playing house" (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002). Assumptions are made as to what constitutes "normal" development.

Unlike most developmentalists, critical theorists are interested in the notion of ambiguity, in particular as this notion relates to bodies, genders, sexualities and practices that appear to defy "traditional forms of categorization" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 99). Judith Butler, as a prominent feminist and queer theorist, has questioned the traditional categories of identity (gender, sex, sexual orientation and race) and in the process has "reinvented" much of feminist theory, becoming one of the founders of queer theory (Wilkins, 2004). In her influential book *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender is neither "natural nor innate", but instead identifies it as a social construct (Sullivan, 2003). She explains this idea in terms of the effect of reiterative acts. For example, when people repeat certain acts over and over, they give off the appearance that

they are in some way stable and fixed, but in fact this perception is an illusion. She argues that gender reality is only real as far as it is performative, which means that, “it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1990b, p. 278).

Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. (Butler, 1990b, p. 273)

By illustrating the artificial, conventional, and historical nature of gender construction, Butler attempts to critique heteronormative assumptions. These include punitive rules (social, familial, and legal) that force individuals to conform to hegemonic, heterosexual standards for identity; practices and behaviours that situate heterosexual discourse as dominant and monolithic (Felluga, 2003).

The constructed nature of gender is illuminated by Butler in order to provide equity and voice to oppressed identities, to those that oppose the artificial, yet strictly enforced rules that govern heteronormativity. Butler argues that if those rules are not essential than they have no claim to justice or necessity. “Since those rules are historical and rely on their continual citation or enactment by subjects, then they can also be challenged and changed through alternative performative acts” (Felluga, 2003, p. 2).

Given the argument that sexual and gender identity are not fixed, but rather are social constructions, I argue that it is important to frame supports for young children within this understanding. Children’s non-mainstream sexual and gender identities (those that are not heteronormative) are as valid as any other identity and should be supported no less than children adopting “mainstream” identities. Supporting all children and all forms of diversity is necessary because for children to grow up with secure senses of self, they need to see themselves

represented in the world (Kilbride, 1997). In Canadian society, we have dichotomized our ideas of sexuality to only allow those who exist in the extremes, for example heterosexuals and homosexuals. So, for children who are exploring possibilities about their sexual and/or gender identities the answers are already provided for them and in the elementary years a heteronormative discourse is omnipresent, as the message we send is that a heteronormative lifestyle is the most acceptable behaviour with little or no discussion on homosexuality (Depalma & Atkinson, 2006).

I believe elementary school supports should be available for young children exploring non-mainstream sexual and gender identities in order to help them feel accepted. Growing up as a child with a non-mainstream sexual identity and feeling unsupported, I wonder how my own school environment might have been altered to decrease my own feelings of invisibility and marginalization. I remember a school that did not openly acknowledge gay or lesbian identities. Instead of being supported, I was often met with hostility regarding what people assumed was my non-mainstream sexual identity.

For this study, I chose to speak with my partner, Terry, about his early childhood experiences in particular his recollections of growing up as child with “non-mainstream” sexual and gender identities. I begin this paper with a discussion on the research questions used to guide my inquiry and follow up with an overview of the narrative approach. Through the narrative approach, I gathered his stories and collected his personal experiences from his childhood and we discussed whether or not he felt he was supported. In the section on methodology, the narrative research design will be further elucidated along with some philosophical and ethical considerations. The following narrative will be comprised of three sections. The first will detail my partner’s early experiences, giving a background of his

formative years. The second will show how his early events affected his later life actions. And the third will focus on Terry today. With that being said, the narrative is not temporal in form, but instead events juggle between different times and places, intermixed with Terry's recommendations for including children with non-mainstream sexual and gender identities, having been a teacher for over ten years. At the end of the paper I will speak about dissemination, future research possibilities and the importance of this research, to both my partner and I.

Research Questions

One of the research questions I explored is: "How did my participant interpret his early experiences; did he felt supported or unsupported and how did these experiences affect his behaviour?" I also explored the question, "What are Terry's recommendations regarding supports that are needed and available today for young children, aged 5 to 12, with non-mainstream sexual identities?" I will define all the terms in this second question to provide a point of reference from whence my discussion will ensue.

While my participant shares many recollections about support (or lack thereof) in his family and amongst his peers, for the purposes of this paper I will focus primarily on supports available within an elementary school context. Although, it is my belief that supports in the home should be available for these young children, the challenge lies in being able to step into families' private spaces and ask them to question their values, some of which are intrinsically linked to their religion. As a public space, the school provides an arena whereby curriculum and policy may be affected.

I have defined supports as resources made available for individuals to aid them in their social and emotional development. These supports may be available directly (for example, sexuality education, teachers opening up discussions on certain topics or in relation to messages received from family, peers and school personnel) or indirectly (for example, books, posters or information found on the Internet). As well supports can take the form of relationships like ones with peers, teachers, and family. Children with non-mainstream sexual identities may grow up feeling different and isolated from their surroundings. These supports are necessary to help them feel accepted. This is important since there is evidence that gay and lesbian youth are at higher risk from adverse health conditions; for example, there are higher rates of suicide amongst gay and lesbian youth (Plöderl & Fartacek, 2005).

“Young children” includes all children in elementary school, ranging from ages 5 to 12. Although it is my belief that children younger than age five require supports it is simply beyond the scope of this paper.

“Non-mainstream” will refer to all sexual identities, except heterosexual and gender-conformed identities. Sexual identity is not to be confused with sexual orientation. Janmohamed argues that sexual orientation,

...describes our emotional, psychological and sexual relationships with others. Sexual orientation is different from sexual behaviour because it refers to feelings and self concept and individuals may not express their orientation through sexual behaviour. (Janmohamed, 2006, p. 5)

Sexual orientation will be defined as the attraction one has for the same or the opposite sex, while sexual identity is the internalization of one’s attractions and relates to self-concept. For young children this is not to be confused with sexual behaviour. As well, although many researchers such as Ellis & Symonds (1987), von Krafft-Ebing (1906) and Bloch (1908) have

argued that non-conforming gender identity has been found to have causal links to later homosexual identity (as cited in Gottschalk, 2003), and gender identity will be explored to some degree through interviews, my primary objective is to explore my participant's early recollections of his non-mainstream sexual identity.

Overview of the Narrative Approach to Research

For this study I have chosen a narrative research design. Narrative research, according to Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach and Zilber (1998), refers to any study whereby narrative materials are analyzed. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literary work) or in a different manner (for example, field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of the research or a means for the study of another question. It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Connelly and Clandinin also explain this approach; "...researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences" (as cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 474). Furthermore, according to Clandinin and Connelly, an individual's experiences, "are both personal – what the individual experiences – and social – the individual interacting with others (as cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 479).

I chose this type of qualitative approach as it allows for an in-depth data collection process whereby the richness and detail of one individual's story can be gathered. For instance, in keeping with the narrative approach I chronicled the researcher-participant process (situating myself within the design as well), through our interviews, periodic meetings to discuss ways in which my participant informed my research, my personal journals and informal discussions. I

feel, in doing so the process was less forced, something that would not be easily realized using a quantitative methodology.

Thus, as the researcher in this approach, I am also part of the process. This notion of the researcher's involvement in the process is also in keeping with Denzin's version of the narrative approach, which has much in common with the interpretive view of social science. For example, as Creswell (1998) explains:

In the interpretive view, biographies are, in part, written autobiographies of the writers, thus blurring the lines between fact and fiction and leading the authors to "create" the subject in the text. Biographers cannot partial out their own biases and values; thus, biographies become gendered class productions reflecting the lives of the writers. These points, Denzin (1989a) alleges, need to be acknowledged by the biographers and reflected in the written biographies. (p. 50)

Interpretive researchers start out with the assumption that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. Interpretivist genres are varied and include critical theory and social constructivist/constructionist paradigms. Interpretivist paradigms concern themselves with subjective meanings, for example, how individuals or members of society apprehend, understand and make sense of social events and settings and "how this sense-making produces features of the very settings to which sense-making is responsive", the concern for reflexivity (Gephart, 1999).

As is also in keeping with the narrative approach, as discussed by Creswell (2005), the participant in this study was directly involved in the research process by examining, clarifying and adding to the transcripts, thus allowing him to participate to a greater degree and increase the strength of his story; "member-checking."

How do sexual and gender identities fit into the narrative approach? Many theorists believe that personal narratives constitute individual identity (Bruner, 1991; Fisher-Rosenthal, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1991; Rosenthal, 1997). The belief is that “stories imitate life” and provide an “inner reality to the outside world” and simultaneously, these stories form and assemble the narrator’s reality (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7). “The story is one’s identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7). These stories, in character with the idea of performative acts outlined by Butler, are social constructs and as such neither fixed nor stable. The narrative approach’s emphasis is on subjective notions of identity, providing in-depth explorations of individual experience and reconstructing their stories into a coherent narrative. If these stories are seen as fabrications and not universal, like notions of gender and sexual identity, then this approach advocates for the validity of all individual accounts since no one construct is more or less accurate than any other. However, when exploring narratives which illuminate practices that disempower children the importance of certain stories over others becomes evident.

Narrative researchers often adopt a particular theoretical framework (Creswell, 2005). Critical theory, the paradigm I have chosen as a lens to guide my inquiry, explores, “the historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles; and a critique of society and the envisioning of new possibilities” (Fay; Morrow & Brown as cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 80). Researchers adopting this perspective assume social reality is constituted through history and is produced and reproduced by people (Myers, 1997). People can consciously act to change social and economic circumstances; however, due to social, cultural and political domination, one’s ability to make these changes is constrained (Myers, 1997).

In this study I employ critical theory to explore the inequities regarding homosexual and heterosexual discourse in one man's childhood, present and future. Heterosexual discourse, whether it be interpersonal relations between teachers or resources that are available to children that predominantly (even exclusively) detail heterosexuality throughout history, is shown as normal in schools, while homosexual discourse is not discussed and is made invisible. This systemic inclusion of only heterosexuals in the dominant discourse is referred to as heteronormativity (although the term heterosexism has been used synonymously). Heteronormativity can be defined as "organizational structures in schools that support heterosexuality as normal and anything else as deviant (De Palma & Atkinson, 2006, p. 334). Equally, systemic exclusion is, "the absence of affirming policies, rules, role models, mentors, internship programs, recruitment, advancement to highly visible positions, messages, merited awards, and images about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer members" (Hill, 2006). This inequity or imbalance is communicated to young children, for example, "heterosexism and homophobic stereotypes and myths can be perpetuated through daily pedagogical practices and everyday interactions between educators and children" (Robinson & Jones Diaz as cited in Robinson, 2002, p. 423).

The participant of this study, my partner, Terry Gallant (Terry has given permission to use his name in this study) reflects upon how this imbalance affected him. After "restorying" and exploring themes in my participant's narrative, I will compare my participant's recommendations with current policies and curriculum documents provided by the Toronto District School Board, and the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Methodology

As stated earlier, for the purposes of this research, I have adopted a particular type of qualitative methodology, narrative inquiry. I chose this approach as I am interested in the personal account of an individual and how this can inform my research question. To answer my research question on how my participant interpreted his support, or lack of support, during his childhood, I gathered his personal experiences from multiple recalled episodes and private stories and recreated his biography or more specifically, his personal experience story (Denzin as cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 476). My participant shared many experiences, both personal (behaviours he purposefully changed in order to feel less discrimination) and social (experiences he had with his family and peers).

After collecting my participant's stories I went through a process of "restorying" to reconstruct his narrative; "By restorying, the researcher provides a causal link among ideas" (Creswell, 2005, p. 480).

Narrative researchers engage in multiple forms of data collection (Cresswell, 2005). I conducted in-depth interviews, noted observations and wrote journals of my personal reflections from the discussions and day-to-day interactions that took place between the research participant and me. Through an in-depth analysis of this specific case, my own disclosure and an overall synthesis of our process, I have illuminated the areas under question, how my participant interpreted his early experiences, and the supports needed and available for children with non-mainstream sexual identities.

Criteria: Validity as Authenticity

When social inquiry becomes the practice of a form of practical philosophy – a deep questioning about how we shall get on in the world, and what we conceive to be the

potentials and limits of human knowledge and functioning – then we have some preliminary understanding of what entirely different criteria might be for judging social inquiry. (Guba & Lincoln, 2003, p. 276)

A “virtual cult” has been created around criteria. Classical social scientists would prefer all human studies to be limited to those in which generalizations can be drawn, based on such criteria. Unlike positivist values, interpretivist-paradigm inquirers are increasingly concerned with feeling and emotion in their research (Guba & Lincoln, 2003). It is important to approach the narrative with empathy. This involves the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner. For this analysis, this extends itself to being able to situate oneself in another’s perspective and to appreciate the cultural and social phenomena that potentially may have influenced their discussion. I believe that the most important research is that which captures our individual accounts, explores meaning and sheds light on ways to support children, for what is greater than the moments we share together, our lives, our dreams and our passions.

Sample

I believe it’s important to provide some explanation as to why I chose an adult versus a child as my research participant. The difficulty lies in societal attitudes towards sexuality in the early years. After several discussions with my professors and colleagues, I felt that conversations with children about early sexual identity were “off limits.” I see this as being the case for three reasons. Firstly, it may potentially be seen as unethical for me to discuss this topic with young children because children may be seen as sexually ignorant, vulnerable and innocent

(DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). We can link this societal attitude to the Piagetian notion that children develop in a step-wise fashion and are only developmentally able to learn certain things at certain times (Piaget & Smith, 1995). However, “this dominant discourse of childhood, which perpetuates white, Western and middle-class values... fails to adequately acknowledge the importance of sociocultural factors such as gender, class and ethnicity, as well as historical contexts” (James & Prout; Cannella; Gittins; Dahlberg et al as cited in Robinson, 2002).

Secondly, gatekeepers would likely be resistant towards my explorations with children because of our societal belief that sexuality and children equals child sexual abuse (CSA) (Bancroft, 2003). Although CSA is of vital importance and our actions should be directed towards the protection of children, abuse is not experienced by all children who display sexual behaviour or interest in sexual topics. And thirdly, a point which links to my first point to some degree is the view that children are “unformed persons within the field” (Hogan, 2005, p. 27). In fact some view children as “adults-in-the-making” and as such not entitled to rights or freedoms in the present, but only for the future. By seeing children as capable humans perhaps such dialogue will be possible in the days to come.

However, these caveats should in no way discredit the sample I chose. I have purposefully chosen my sample for the many suitable qualities he possesses (Creswell, 2005). Terry’s identification as a gay male and his recollection of some early identification of a non-mainstream sexual identity were the main qualities needed in order to carry out this study effectively. Other qualities that set Terry out as an ideal participant include his great story telling abilities, his ability to remember his early experiences in great detail and his experience working as an elementary school teacher for over ten years. Additionally, Terry and I have a high level of comfort with each other. We have been together as partners for just less than three years and we

have both grown considerably during this time. We believe that this growth would not have been as significant if we were not together. For example, Terry and I both had difficulties managing our anger in the beginning of our relationship, but after time and a lot of communication we are much better at managing our difficult feelings and have found strategies to deal with challenging situations. I personally feel a heightened level of trust and safety. The intimacy we share is significant to this study, more specifically the narrative approach and to the collaboration process. Collaboration happens when, “the inquiry actively involves the participant in the inquiry as it unfolds” (Creswell, 2005, p. 483). In some cases this may be challenging given the time needed to establish relationships with research participants. For Terry and I the process was accelerated. Our level of comfort with each other has eased the process of negotiating and easily allowed for multiple methods of data collection.

At the outset of this study, Terry was provided with a consent form. The form explained the study, the possible harms and informed him that he would be video recorded (although for the purposes of this study, the visual data was not analyzed). As well, Terry showed interest in participating in this research project on several levels, thus allowing for a fuller understanding of Terry’s unique perspective. I will expand on the degree to which he is involved in the sections that follow.

Self-Disclosure and Reflexivity

Throughout the interview I have reacted, in my own ways, to what Terry has disclosed. I have shared similar experiences growing up as a gay male myself. I cried on one occasion after journaling, reflecting on my youth, my feelings of isolation. I think now, about children in schools who may be experiencing similar circumstances and wonder, “How can I let them know

that they're not alone?" This is all evidence of the personal significance this research has, not only for Terry, but for me as well. I recognize, that I am not able to be objective in my analysis of Terry's experiences. In fact this whole process is completely subjective. But as such I believe it has a lot of strength for we are able to illuminate our shared history in a meaningful way. Denzin (1989) expresses this idea clearly:

A story that is told is never the same story that is heard. Each teller speaks from a biographical position that is unique and, in a sense, unshareable. Each hearer of a story hears from a similarly unshareable position. But these two versions of the story merge and run together into a collective, group version of the story that was told. (Denzin, 1989, p. 72)

As is characteristic with the interpretive tradition, the final product will be a blend of our voices.

Control, Ownership and Voice

Conversely, the relinquishing of control and the honouring of voice are two principles of great importance when constructing a narrative. In the case of this research project, Terry's involvement did not end after the interviews were finished. Fortunately, Terry was eager to be part of the research process on multiple levels. He has had a chance to add his comments to the transcript before a preliminary analysis. Additionally, it was up to Terry to decide whether the conclusions I made were accurate and whether they portrayed Terry's real-lived experiences. So although my subjective lens may have 'muddied' my perceptions of Terry's experience he always had the final say on whether his voice rang true. Through this process Terry became an active research participant. Consequently, I am not the owner of this research project. I share ownership with Terry. This idea will be further discussed in sections on data analysis and dissemination.

Data Collection

Data was collected in our home in order to explore Terry's recollections, specific moments in his life that stand out as relevant to the research question under analysis, for instance, experiences Terry recalls which illuminate whether he felt supported growing up as a child with a non-mainstream sexual identity. Our home was chosen as the setting since that is where Terry and I feel the most comfortable and it is my belief that without this particular environment Terry's related experiences may not have been so easily forthcoming.

In keeping with the narrative approach, multiple methods were used to collect data from Terry (Creswell, 2005), including informal discussions, field notes, and additional thoughts Terry added to transcripts, although the instrument of choice for this research project was the one-on-one interview. This is a data collection process whereby researchers ask, "questions to and [record] answers from only one participant at a time" (Creswell, 2005, p. 215). Three interviews were conducted with Terry with each ranging between sixty and eighty minutes in length. The one-on-one interview is particularly effective when working with individuals who are articulate and can share ideas comfortably. This tool presents itself as an ideal choice, not only for the type of inquiry but as a tool to be used with this participant. By using open-ended questions, the participant can voice his experiences in an unconstrained fashion (Creswell, 2005). Additionally, the interview protocol was used as a guide, to help direct conversation, but there was ample room made to allow the participant to explore his ideas, without restriction (see Appendix A for copies of the interview guides).

I created my initial interview guide to focus on Terry's background, more specifically his relationships with his family, peers and environment and what it was like to grow up in Moncton, New Brunswick. Situating Terry within a larger context is important for the first interview to

establish a level of comfort as well as to develop a preliminary understanding of the participant's history. During each interview I took notes to either discuss with Terry openly in the interview, help solicit my own experiences or perceptions or keep to explore at more length in my personal journals. With that being said, the data collection is not restricted to what is collected through the in-depth interview. I wrote a journal after each interview and once a week to document my own feelings, recollections and perceptions of the research process. In so doing, I recognized myself as a participant equally available for analysis although I chose not to include my own entries as part of this paper. I did this for two reasons. One, I felt the process of journaling aided me in clearing my own thoughts and helped me to focus, with greater detail, on Terry's own particular story. My lens is coloured by my own life experiences so to increase the trustworthiness of this research this element needs to be recognized. And secondly, the journals served to help me create my second and third interview guides, which I believe became more relevant and rich from having explored my own ideas and feelings after each interview and preliminary transcript analysis. As a brainstorming tool I felt journaling was very useful. Additionally, Terry and I had informal meetings where Terry could discuss his feelings about the research process. Some of this non-interview data was included in this paper as Terry's reflections upon the research process were helpful in providing a richer context to the overall narrative by showing the participant as multi-faceted, for example making clear statements about his early experiences but also being critical of his own interpretations (See Appendix B for copies of the informal discussions).

Analyzing Narrative Data

If we are to make 'memory itself the subject of study', our interviews must be carefully contextualized, with attention to who is speaking, what their personal and social agenda

is, and what kind of event they are describing. We need to unearth the underlying assumptions or ‘problematic’ of the interview, and to analyze the subtexts and silences, as well as the explicit descriptions in the interview. (Sangster, 1997, p. 306)

In keeping with particular principles of narrative research, I am using a holistic-content approach for data analysis. This approach will enable me to incorporate both critical and constructionist perspectives (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). This will allow for both a critical exploration of ideas related to early identity development as well as the deconstruction of early experiences by not adhering to any fixed expectations as one would find in a positivist paradigm where relations between independent and dependent variables are sought out. By applying this understanding and interpreting the multiple meanings of written texts (transcripts) I have sought to acquire a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under inquiry.

When first analyzing the transcript, Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest that one reads over the material several times until a pattern emerges. It is important to read emphatically and with an open mind. As well, it is important to let the narrative speak to you. Secondly the researcher should note their overall impression with the text. If there are exceptions to this impression, note them as well (Lieblich et al., 1998). Denzin (1989a) suggests several steps when analyzing data for the purposes of creating a biography. From the interviews, stories and epiphanies, themes will emerge and the researcher needs to look into the database to find “concrete, contextual biographical materials”, for example, a public embarrassment involving family (p. 147). Narrative categories and sections within the story are isolated and larger meanings are determined. After identifying themes or epiphanies (which will be further addressed) from a preliminary analysis, the researcher prompts the participant to expand in certain areas of the stories in subsequent interviews. As well the subject is asked to theorize on their life. In the end

the biography is reconstructed and factors which have affected the subject's life are identified (as cited in Creswell, 1998).

Epiphanies are interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives. In them, personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person's life. Their effects may be positive or negative. (Denzin, 1989, p. 70)

For example, from Terry's first interview he had an epiphany over an early experience with his mother. I analyzed this specific situation and elucidated the circumstances in more detail in subsequent interviews to help reconstruct the narrative. This interplay of data informing the research questions and inquiry and vice versa is essential to acquiring rich, detailed and relevant descriptions of Terry's lived experience.

While issues of voice and ownership are evident in data collection, they are equally important in data analysis. As Creswell (2005) suggests, I have sought to ensure the accuracy of my participant's voice by, "using extensive participant quotes and the precise language of [my participant]" (p. 484). Furthermore, Terry has read through the final copy of the narrative and offered suggestions and changes he felt were important to ensure his voice was not lost (Creswell, 2005).

Presentation of Data

In order to put Terry's thoughts and reflections into a coherent narrative, I went through a process of "restorying" whereby I gathered Terry's stories, analyzed them for key elements of the overall story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scheme), and then I rewrote the story to place it in a chronological sequence (Creswell, 2005). When Terry told me his story the lack of sequence was evident. After all, our thinking process isn't chronological since our thoughts are guided by many different factors including emotion and the unpredictability of recurring memory. "By restorying, the researcher provides a causal link among ideas" (Creswell, 2005, p. 480). Additionally, narrative research does not contain any specific section on literature. Instead the literature and research will be incorporated throughout this narrative and the final sections of this paper (Creswell, 2005).

Restorying: "Terry's Story"

The only thing that I can remember is thinking that I wanted to touch his moustache, but I knew that that wasn't appropriate...

I remember seeing that man with the moustache and thinking I can't tell anybody how I feel. I intrinsically knew that it was wrong because in society you never read a book about how 'Billy has two daddies' or something like that in 1969. That just wasn't read or even written for that matter. It was a peace and love generation as long as you were straight (Terry remembering a neighbour who visited his house when he was five).

Terry Gallant grew up in East Coast suburbia: Riverview, on the outskirts of Moncton, New Brunswick. He was the oldest of three boys, son of a pharmacist and a nurse. His family, neighbours and friends were all Catholic and they attended the same church. Terry's father was distant and didn't involve himself in his children's lives. On the other hand, his mother was very

involved. Terry had a very strong relationship with his mother, but perhaps that came at a price. His mother, “wore the boots” in the family (as Terry recounted) and was very critical of Terry’s behaviour. He believed that some of her traditional beliefs about what constituted appropriate behaviour may have come from her involvement with the Catholic Church.

Terry was a child who liked to involve himself with non-traditional activities. He liked to build houses and valued community over rough and tumble play, which the other boys enjoyed. Several times his mother chastised Terry for behaving in ways she believed were gender-inappropriate. She compares Terry to his younger brothers, feeling responsible for Terry’s gender non-conforming behaviour and changing ways in which she acted to ensure his brothers did not become like him. Even in school, after Terry had created a dollhouse of which he was very proud, his peers ridiculed him, calling him names. Terry grew up in an environment that didn’t tolerate his difference, but instead silenced him and his ability to express himself.

I remember going to sleep as a child, as a teenager, especially as a teenager, going to sleep, crying myself to sleep at night because I thought, “Why am I gay? Why did I become this? Why am I like this?” And I knew it wasn’t something I chose. Why wasn’t I born with a big ‘G’ on the front of my forehead saying that I’m gay, so the responsibility of either coming out or hiding it is not on me?

But Terry wasn’t only a creative, gender non-conforming child, he was also a child struggling with his sexual identity. In a world of silencing, Terry couldn’t live his identity, out of fear of persecution, from his family and peers. He shared this silence with his cousin, another child experimenting with his sexual identity and equally silent. Yet even in this place of shared interest, with his cousin, Terry still did not feel completely safe. There was always the fear of someone finding out the truth and the possibility of being rejected by his family. Unable to

explore and be who he was, this child grew up, hiding everything he could and changing what he couldn't; his mannerisms, his actions were all changed to conceal his true identity.

Terry taught elementary school for many years and throughout his career he has learned a lot about good practice and healthy child development. His insight from his experiences helps to tie his narrative together and provide valuable suggestions on how to help children with non-mainstream sexual identities now and in the future; for the silence and rejection which Terry experienced is a silence that still exists in many spheres.

Themes

Two Extremes: Terry's Mother and Father

I remember being five and watching my parents working at breakfast and thinking that I want to run away and I ran away and I went up the hill. I took all my stuff in that little pillow case at the end of a stick, like I'd seen on TV and I decided to run away and my parents said, "Well have a good life. Goodbye." They knew I wouldn't go far. And I remember going up there and just thinking that I knew I was different, in so many ways. I just didn't seem to fit in.

As a child, Terry's relationship with his father was distant. Terry remembers his father in superficial ways that provide evidence for the distance between them. For instance, Terry would remember going to see his father as he worked in the drugstore. A big part of his experience was just seeing his father, "behind the counter wearing the white smock." His mother would encourage his father to be more involved with Terry, but nothing would come of it. Terry doesn't remember any conversations with his father. Even today, the conversations he has with his father tend to the impersonal. "As a child, I could never talk to him about personal things. That was mom's domain." Coupled with Terry's experience of his father as distant are feelings of disrespect. Terry spoke at length about a childhood event, which hurt him deeply:

When we moved into our new house my mother ran out of boxes so she put all my stuffed animals and toys I had, like the little farm kit with all the little animals, into the garbage bags. My mom said to my dad, ‘Don’t throw those out. They’re not garbage’. Well they all went to the garbage and I lost all my childhood toys.

Terry’s parents had travelled to Europe and brought him a gift from Switzerland. Terry goes on to describe this specific toy, part of the collection that was thrown out by his father:

I remember him bringing home a cable car, an electric cable car that you would hook up to the top of the door and you would use a control and it would go up the string or whatever and that got thrown out. It still makes me upset. I want that very toy, something to give to my own child someday.

Although Terry’s relationship with his father was distant he recognized that his father, periodically, brought Terry to play golf. Unfortunately Terry did not enjoy playing golf. This mismatch of interests will be shown in greater detail when Terry’s childhood activities are discussed in the pages to follow.

Terry’s mother, in contrast, was a dominant, at times overbearing force in Terry’s childhood. Terry saw his mother as, “a very strong woman. She’s the one who wears the boots in the family.” Terry’s mother often made most of the decisions in the family, while his father took a reclusive position because, Terry felt, he didn’t have any desire to involve himself with these types of activities. He let his wife ‘steer the ship’ so to speak.

Terry reflects upon two experiences that show his mother as impatient and forceful. Perhaps one might even say that Terry and his mother’s approaches to the world were drastically different. For his mother there was a right way and a wrong way of behaving. As will be

demonstrated later through Terry's early recollections, these beliefs are inextricably linked to notions of gender-appropriate behaviour.

I remember being 5 years old and being at the community pool and trying to jump in the water and being scared and my mother just got frustrated and said you know like, 'Jump in. All the other kids can jump. What the hell's wrong with you? Just jump in. Get it over with.' She didn't have the patience.

Well his brother chased me home. The older brother came to the door, to my parents' house and he wanted to talk to me because I took his brother's boots and all that. And my mother wanted me to go outside and I didn't want to. I was scared to death. And she basically said, "Be a man! Face the music," and pushed me outside.

Terry's mother would be classified as authoritarian in her style of parenting. "They are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). These parents control their children through disempowering. Generally to disempower means to deprive of power, authority, or influence, to make weak, ineffectual, or unimportant. Even though Terry finds courage and strength through some of his difficult experiences with his mother, there are also many examples that illustrate how Terry had been effectively disempowered. Terry's mother had a fixed notion of the ways in which Terry should behave, but this expectation did not coincide with Terry's actual behaviour and so she took action to ensure that his behaviour would cease. Terry's mother, in Terry's words, wanted him to be, "a little tomboy."

Policies that protect and empower children with non mainstream gender and sexual identities as well as ones which promote strong parent-teacher relationships are found within the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) "Equity Foundation Statement" (Toronto District School Board, 2000). If these policies were part of the infrastructure of the school board in

Moncton in the 1960s and 1970s things may have been different for Terry. In relation to children with non-mainstream sexual identities, a section is reserved specifically in defense of their interests, “Antihomophobia, Sexual Orientation and Equity” (Toronto District School Board, 2000). The policies are extensive and cover many facets of the school system. Policies range from ensuring inclusive practices in classrooms by examining and challenging heteronormative and homophobic curriculum in the classroom, providing visual displays or posters, which detail the contributions of gays and lesbians, past and present, and eliminating barriers and encouraging diverse groups of openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people to apply for teaching and non-teaching positions (Toronto District School Board, 2000). I feel the policies provided in their statement are exemplary and create an infrastructure that supports teachers, parents and other professionals too, which in turn better supports all students.

Specifically, and relevant to the present discussion on Terry’s parents, the Toronto District School Board’s policy regarding parent involvement needs consideration. This TDSB policy asserts that it is important to provide many opportunities to promote two-way communication between parents and their child’s school (Toronto District School Board, n.d.). These may include, but are not limited to, ensuring that parent-teacher conferences do not conflict with parents’ schedules or language barriers, communicating about children in terms of their strengths, not only weaknesses and providing clear language information about school and board policies. However, what was missing in this document was how parents of children with non-mainstream sexual identities were being supported or whether supports even exist. I believe it is important that schools aid parents, like Terry’s mother and father, in navigating this potentially difficult terrain. Some parents may have some very strong, negative beliefs towards gender non-conforming children or children with non-mainstream sexual identities. How the

schools are reaching out to families and ensuring that children are being supported is not apparent.

Without these bridges, parents like Terry's may be left without any option than their own traditional ideas on how children should behave. With that being said, Terry wished to note that when speaking about his mother it's important to recognize that the world isn't comprised of just good guys and bad guys. In fact we all have good and bad within ourselves. He wanted to make sure his mother wasn't framed as a bad person. Maybe she wasn't the best fit with Terry, and maybe she didn't have the best resources at her disposal to support a child like Terry, but, Terry felt, "you can't judge people in the past, or events in the past with today's values."

He Eats Like a Man: Gender-Appropriate Behaviour

It is important for children to be provided with an environment that helps them to create positive body images because, according to Chrisman & Couchenour (2002), "healthy sexual development begins at birth" (p. 2). Young children learn about sexuality from their families even without their families' intention (Chrisman & Couchenour, 2002, p.3-4), for instance how a mother and father communicate with one another and/or share affection. It is also important for childcare teachers and directors to be knowledgeable about children's curiosity with respect to sexuality. As well, they should be prepared to provide sensitive and appropriate support for parents or other family members. This will allow families to fulfill their responsibilities as children's primary sexuality educators (Chrisman & Couchenour, 2002, p.6).

[My parents] tried to force me into baseball and mom jokes even now she says, "You know, I remember you playing baseball and you were more interested in picking the flowers in the field than chasing the ball around."

Terry's mother wanted to be a modern mother, a mother who accepted her child, whether or not she agreed or disagreed with his passions or interests. But often through Terry's childhood her attempts to become modern were left to the wayside and a more rigid and specific behaviour was required of Terry. The picking of flowers was not manly enough. The fear of the bully was not manly enough. In fact many of Terry's behaviours were simply not manly enough and Terry was left feeling the odd one out. Terry's mother even felt responsible for her son's non-mainstream behaviour. This is shown in the following quote when a friend asked his mother about Terry's five-year old brother, Mario:

Someone asked her and I don't know if she realized I heard her say that, but she said, "Oh, you're not making clothes for Mario? You're buying clothes?" And she goes, "Oh, I'm not going to make the same mistake." I think she meant I'm going to raise him as a boy. I'm not going to do anything to jeopardize having a little sissy.

(Terry reflecting on his mother's discussion with another woman, when he was 10)

Terry's mother saw that her son was more effeminate than other children and believed that she had caused this behaviour. In her mind this gender non-conforming behaviour was unacceptable. She felt by making clothes for Terry, she had created an effeminate boy. She believed she had made a mistake. She believed effeminate boys are mistakes.

By looking at the topic of gender through a critical feminist lens one would assert that gender roles are upheld by patriarchal powers to maintain unfair power dynamics. Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. While generally providing a critique of social relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on analyzing gender inequality and other themes including discrimination, stereotyping, oppression and patriarchy (Butler, 1990a). For the case of Terry's mother, one would see her actions as a means of maintaining the status quo, a place where men and women

are cemented into repeating stereotyped behaviours. Anyone or anything that tries to upset that balance needs to be reprimanded and forced to see the error of their ways. Disempowerment is a tool that members of the dominant power use in order to subjugate anyone they see as dissenting. For example, children ridiculing each other with words like, “faggot” or “dyke” (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

Additionally, gender non-conforming behaviour has been linked to the development of later life homosexuality (Ellis & Symonds, 1897; von Krafft-Ebing, 1906; Bloch, 1908 as cited in Gottschalk, 2003). This notion has been circulating amongst professionals for several years. What has been found in schools today is that members of the medical community are subtly reintroducing homosexuality as a mental illness (Mass as cited in Gottschalk, 2003) by diagnosing gender variance as a mental disorder. The concern with this discourse is whether children with non-mainstream sexual/gender identities are being seen as treatable or simply as children with difference, difference that exists within all children. Gender non-conforming behaviour is being seen as pathological because mental health professionals are reluctant to accept the reality of gender variance. Why not see girls who are interested in ‘rough and tumble’ play simply as girls interested in ‘rough and tumble’ play, nothing more? Children who become visible in their early years due to extreme gender non-conforming behaviours are at risk of having their difference illuminated and pathologized. Calling one type of behaviour ‘homosexual’ not only separates and labels that individual, but it deters other children from involving themselves in non-conforming ways (Gottschalk, 2003). When thinking about gendered behaviour, as in the case of Terry’s mother, we must examine our attitudes and ask ourselves “what is normal” and “who decides what is normal?” Equally important, we should observe our own actions and ask whether they are stigmatizing children as abnormal?

Terry's mother reinforced her ideas of what constituted "normal" behaviour by applauding boys who acted in ways she believed were gender-appropriate, for instance, her two other sons, Mario and René, both five years and eight years younger than Terry, respectively. Terry remembers his mother's enthusiasm at her other sons' behaviour:

And they would make a big fuss about him eating like, 'Oh my god he eats like a man.' That was a big thing. Playing hockey and them being tough kids and talking about how many stitches he got in his forehead when he was using the Crazy Carpet to go down the staircase and ended up into the wood stove. That was kind of like, "boys will be boys."

Even today Terry recognizes these attitudes in his mother. "Mario's son Drake, can be quite active and all, but mom just laughs and says it's payback time. But she also loves it because he's a real little boy." Does that mean that Terry wasn't a real little boy? Terry acted in ways that may have been different from the norm, but does that mean he was any more or less a boy? In fact Terry's mother wanted to have daughters. She wanted to be able to teach them to knit, sew, make curtains and even crochet, but if Terry was interested in any of those things, his mother didn't encourage him at all. Terry recalls a recent event where his mother showed her disdain over Terry's purchase of rug hooking kits for his students:

I remember my mother sitting there, and almost smirking. Well, she *was* smirking. I felt like she looked at me as if, "What are you doing? You're a man."

To provide some context to the time and place of this narrative I believe it's necessary to discuss, to some length, the role of the Catholic Church and attitudes in the 1960s. For instance, as Terry describes, the sixties were a time of peace and love, "as long as you were straight." In

the case of Terry's mother, the Church had an especially significant role in regard to gender roles:

She wanted to support me in what I wanted to do. But then she kept getting that tug: Boys are boys and girls are girls and the Catholic Church. That's the way it is and the young boy gets older and he becomes a man and he gets married, to a woman and has kids. And he's a man who drives the car and pays the mortgage. A man provides for the family. And that's her traditional idea.

How are children interpreting these traditional ideas of how people should interact both across genders and sexually? And are they receiving satisfactory supports to allow them to create healthy understandings of their worlds? What we find today in North America is a society deeply ambivalent about children and sexuality as a fundamental part of themselves. In the case of sexuality education, one form of possible support, this discord and ambivalence has paralysed the school in its ability to provide youth with a meaningful education about sexuality. Even though, "our sexuality shoulders the burden of immense individual and social significance, a meaningful sexuality education is the right of all people" (McKay, 1997).

For example, Renée Depalma and Elizabeth Atkinson solicited the views of American college students on issues of sexuality and sexual orientation. They created four web forums with certain topics for discussion around gay and lesbian issues. Based on their responses to these topics, Depalma and Atkinson created categories that summarized the key attitudes revealed by the respondents. They found that respondents saw children as asexual beings and that homosexuality was overly sexualized (Depalma & Atkinson, 2006). It was of Terry's opinion, that his mother felt the same way. He believed that when she thought of homosexuality, she saw only the sex part and not the myriad of factors that comprise a relationship between two

members of the same sex. Respondents, in DePalma & Atkinson's study (2006), silence children and professionals seeking to open discourses on homosexuality by believing that discussions about sexual orientation are not suitable for children. This is explained further:

This silence is often echoed by a prevailing view in the public arena that sexual orientation – including diverse family patterns – is not an appropriate focus for education, in spite of significant evidence demonstrating continuing disadvantage for non-heterosexual pupils and teachers” (Depalma & Atkinson, 2006, p.333).

Terry felt the Catholic Church could have taken another approach when it came to accepting difference and opening communication about homosexuality. “They don’t even take the stand of, love the sinner, hate the sin. Ignore the sinner and ignore the sin, or condemn the sin.” In fact, gay children and adults are not tolerated by many members of the Catholic Church. These children and their needs are invisible. For example, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops still holds that members of the same sex cannot join together in marriage (USCCB, 2003). The message sent to children is that same sex relationships are inferior to that of opposite sex relationships. Even Catholic Cardinals have opposed the passage of anti-discriminatory legislation on behalf of gays and lesbians (Anderson, 1997). If such discrimination and ignorance exists, how can gay and lesbian people feel supported by the Catholic Church? Terry’s needs were not met and he altered his behaviour in order to align itself with a gender-appropriate way of behaving. But this strict and narrow order of the world is not without its effects:

I even thought that every time I had an epileptic seizure it was God punishing me because I was having gay thoughts. Having a crush on the guy in the next pew at church (Terry

shrugs and opens his arms wide as if to say this is his punishment), having sexual thoughts during the Lord's Prayer, which gay or not gay I think every kid's gone through that. But, having those thoughts, God was punishing me and I had epilepsy.

“Finish It!” Being Unsupported by the Norm: Heteronormative Discourse

Terry made forts with other children and while they were more interested in tearing down and conquering other forts, Terry liked to set up the space in the home fort. He believed that building a sense of community mattered most. He enjoyed being in the home and designing the space. At the end of grade seven, Terry had even created his own house in the basement of his parents' house. It was a dollhouse and something he was very proud of. Unfortunately, it was also something that was not readily supported by his family or his peers. For instance, Terry narrates, “My mother would go to my brothers' hockey games, but with things like my dollhouse, she wouldn't watch me or help me build.” He remembered his father coming downstairs while he was working on his project and watching what he was doing. He recalls how, “It just felt odd.” He felt disconnected from his father. Their interests were too far apart.

I have never really felt any encouragement or support for the arts with my own parents. They did not really support my artistic endeavours. I wanted to go to Queens in Kingston and study Fine Arts, but that was out of the question. Not practical. It is a bit ironic because my aunts and uncles are very artistic and some are celebrated and locally famous.

In the following anecdote, Terry shows us a specific situation in which his mother and father showed resistance to supporting him in his creative activities:

I built a house out of Lego, like a Cape Cod style home about this big (shows about a two foot distance between hands) when I was like nine. I put lights on it and fake snow on the roof. I made this big Christmas display and wanted to put it by the tree, but mom didn't

want it there and it ended up on the TV and all that. People would come in and say, 'Wow, is that ever neat'. And my mom would say, 'Yeah. Whatever... Terry made that.' My dad wouldn't say anything.

In fact when it came to the dollhouse his mother's only support was in getting Terry to finish his project. He remembered his mother's words, "Finish It!" He noted this message from his mother as encouragement. That was the extent of his mother's involvement. Terry did finish the dollhouse and he entered it into a local craft contest. The following quotes summarize Terry's experience:

I was all excited because I won. I won a hundred dollars I think it was. I had built something and it was neat. I think deep down, I knew if it got out, if everybody in the class knew I built a doll house, I would have been teased to death over it.

I remember telling Christine (Terry's best friend at the time) not to tell anyone about it. Someone had inadvertently seen the picture in the paper and it got out. Then my worst fears were realized, because someone said, "Ew, you like to play with dolls. Doll house Terry, such a, such a faerie." Something like that. But I think that happened over 5 minutes, and then it was over, but it completely crushed me.

And finally I ended up telling a couple of the guys that I don't play with dolls, it was like construction and I built the dollhouse for a little girl who lived behind us whose brother died recently, well that year. It wasn't my intent when I started building it, honestly...

It was as if these former male friends made fun of me and betrayed me. I must say that in Junior High, everyone was a bully and a victim on some level. It was a cruel time and not always consistent.

Heteronormativity can be defined as "organizational structures in schools that support heterosexuality as normal and anything else as deviant (De Palma & Atkinson, 2006, p. 334).

These ideas are maintained not only by what is said and done, but also by not including certain discussions in the official discourse. Often it is asserted that adults are ‘protecting’ young children by not mentioning sexuality in the early years, but the question is raised: Who is being protected? For instance, a married, heterosexual, female teacher in a class may be referred to as ‘Mrs.’ and wear a wedding band. This teaches children who live in non-mainstream family types that their experience is unspeakable (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000). Additionally, for children who are exploring their sense of identity, role models are not available for them to draw from. An example that illustrates a potential challenge for a young person with a non-mainstream sexual identity is how a teacher might approach a unit on weddings. Although the definition of marriage has recently changed in Canada (Bill C-38, 2005), there is the possibility that teachers will teach this topic in the heterosexual way, with a man and a woman (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000). These kinds of images, values and beliefs surround young children. Sadly, for children questioning or exploring their identities, models aren’t available to help them affirm their own beliefs and understandings.

These heteronormative practices shape all children, which can cause further harm for children with non-mainstream sexual identities. For instance, Renold (2003) found that towards the end of the primary school years, boys would outwardly demonstrate fear and loathing towards homosexuals. At the same time they became highly aware at how anti-gay talk would produce, “acceptable heterosexual masculinities” (Renold, 2003, p. 188). Unfortunately, due to the sensitivity of discussing non-heterosexuality with primary school children, only views that the boys instigated were recorded by Renold. A finding that is very disconcerting about the talks with these boys was that above and beyond the negative attitudes towards homosexuality, there

was also a subordination of all things 'feminine' (Renold, 2003). Renold points to a professional challenge:

Head teachers and teachers are thus placed in a difficult position to openly discuss children's emerging gender and sexual identities and knowledges in ways that can challenge the more prevailing heteronormativity of boys' (and girls') peer group cultures and indeed draw upon the services or formulate the policies needed to support children's more painful and oppressive practices of gender-based and sexualised forms of harassment. (Renold, 2003, p. 190)

Terry wasn't supported by his peers for his dollhouse. Instead, he was met with ridicule. During Terry's career as a teacher, he found that students, even to this day, harbour negativity towards homosexuality, but when these children were confronted with it they knew that politically it was not something you should be against. Students are also aware that discrimination is not tolerated and that there can be consequences to their actions. He believed that children who put on an "anti-gay" attitude are often doing so out of the desire to be accepted, not out of any real adversity to gay and lesbian individuals.

Terry believes that one way to counteract discrimination towards homosexuality is through exposure and familiarity:

I know one student who was homophobic. His mother taught with me. He made a homophobic comment and she talked to him and she said, "Well do you like...", and she started naming people and they were all people that he really looked up to and she said, "well, gay, gay, gay and gay." (He counts on each of his fingers) And he was just floored and he discussed it after and he said, "Well, why don't we know that?" The only gay they see is naked people at the Pride parade...

Unfortunately, openness of gay and lesbian individuals is still only seen on certain stages and even then the numbers are few:

I think there needs to be more openly gay people in society. 'Coming out' makes it sound like a bad thing, like being gay is something to be hidden. Actors are now more openly gay, even ones who play mainly straight characters. However, in hockey and football and other sports, it would be unimaginable for someone to be openly gay. I find that very sad. Imagine a very popular NHL hockey player who would be openly gay – the role model for young gay kids and their homophobic schoolmates. I also notice a difference at certain ages. In elementary school, kids tend to be less accepting if they have not been exposed to gay role models. I think of my 7 year-old nephew's comments compared to my 12 year-old nephew. Even though both were probably exposed to the same situations, the older nephew is able to discuss and understand more readily.

Terry feels exposure is only part of the solution and the question still remains, "How might Terry's parents have been better supported in order to support him?" During his childhood, his father was completely absent and his mother, although able to help since she held similar interests, did not involve herself. What does one do with these attitudes? How might one interpret this experience? For Terry, there is evidence that these experiences have had lasting effects.

How Terry Changed Himself

I realized that if I'm gonna be accepted there's certain things in life that I just can't do.

Averting Femininity

When I see a very effeminate guy, the big queen in the bars or something, I look at him and I think, 'Ah, for fuck's sakes, can't you beef it up a bit? Can't you act a bit more like a man?' It gets on my nerves. And why do I think that way? Live and let live. That's what I really believe.

I think back to my own childhood, to a cliché my mother said to me. "If your friends jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?" But what if it wasn't only your friends? What if your mother and father were jumping too? In fact, what if it seemed everyone around was jumping and yet there you were standing on the bridge. It can be awful lonely standing on the bridge by yourself. And all you would have to do to fix it is jump, even if jumping meant changing your identity. Social pressure is difficult, if not impossible to resist without adequate resources, for example, supportive parents. So here is a child seeing everyone around them laughing, even "smirking" at all things feminine. Well maybe it's easier to laugh with them, even though you may be laughing at yourself.

According to psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, in his theory of life span development, he explains identity formation as, "the integration of identity, social roles, and the broader cultural context" (as cited in Gardiner & Kosmitzki 2002, p.142). He notes this as a stage that occurs during adolescence. While identity conflict may occur at this age, identity formation begins from an early age (Weeks, 1985). As young children we have preferences. Who hasn't heard of the 'fussy' child who will not eat their peas? Children are explorers and throughout their development they make choices. These choices begin to define them, their preferences, their

likes and dislikes. While individuals do experience identity conflict during adolescence, early years' experiences shape these later events. What is evident, from Terry's narrative, is the degree to which these early experiences have had a lasting effect on Terry's later-life identity.

Anything that was seen to be effeminate was shunned... I enjoyed drafting, all those things, but anything that was moderately feminine, like picking colours for something that you were making, or in art class, I just kinda pulled away from it.

Maybe with time a person may be able to reflect upon their attitudes and wonder: Hey, where did that come from? Or, whose voice is that? For Terry and his experience, it was his mother's voice that he linked to his aversion to all things feminine:

I think to myself: Be a man, you know, stop flailing around like a little fairy. And yet I think about it and God, what's wrong with me? You know, like, why am I saying that? That's not who I am.

What should not be underestimated is the degree to which one's desire to fit in socially, to be accepted, can change a person's identity. We are social creatures. Much of our identity (if not all of it) is inextricably linked to a social understanding of the world, ourselves and others. While in the case of Terry's family and peers, we can see examples of Terry being rejected. But what about times where there are no specific incidents? For instance, what about invisibility in the schools? Terry draws from his own experience as a teacher, here in Toronto, and how certain topics just weren't talked about (being a teacher in 2002):

We don't even discuss religion in the public schools. It's taboo to even compare religions. And say to a Muslim child, "Oh well you're going to be absent tomorrow because it's Eid or Ramadan. What is that about?" That's taboo. Most teachers won't talk about that. That

just irks me. We're not allowed to preach religion, but you're allowed to explore and talk, discuss and compare. Otherwise it breeds ignorance and racism.

Terry uses his story of a Muslim child as a metaphor for the experience of a gay child. For teachers in schools the topic is simply something they don't want to bring up. He explains the reason for this is that teachers don't want to get into "hot water" with parents. This attitude of "why rock the boat" just adds further to the non-descript quality that homosexual discourse has taken in society and to the invisibility of gay children in schools.

Decoys

I remember gradually as I got older thinking about that with girls. Not because I wanted to be with a girl, but because I knew socially it would never happen with a boy (Terry discusses how his fantasies of boys changed to fantasies about girls).

Berger explains "passing" as, "the process by which homosexuals present themselves to the world around them as heterosexuals" (as cited in Fox, 2007, p. 37). Passing behaviour is seen when individuals change their behaviour in order to "pass" as one of the community from which they don't feel they have been accepted. We exist as social beings. Our social identity is formed through interactions with our environment, ourselves and other people. Our drive to be accepted by others is commonplace for most people, for some having been accepted and now being comfortable within themselves, while others, having not been accepted and potentially suffering on an emotional level. It would seem most people lie somewhere in between these two extremes.

It is argued that lack of attention to sexuality in its diversity reinforces a climate that tolerates homophobia and causes children and adults to have difficulty in understanding and integrating their own, unique identities, potentially leading some individuals to suicide (Douglas as cited in Wallis & VanEvery, 2000). Elementary school education is important to help

researchers and activists to create a society that accepts and promotes diversity of various kinds. This is not to argue against heterosexual discourse in primary schools. Rather heterosexual discourse should be acknowledged and the notion of schools as asexual spaces dismissed. “As long as primary schools are believed to be asexual environments we will not be able to provide real protection (from sexual abuse, from bullying, from self-hatred, from discrimination) for all the children who need it” (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000, p. 420).

The Tolerance.org website (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.), a web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in Montgomery, Alabama, provides valuable resources to aid professionals in supporting children with non-mainstream sexual identities. On their site they reported the findings of a national survey on gay and lesbian youth. This American study, the 2005 National School Climate Survey, found that 75% of students heard derogatory remarks while being at school. Words such as “faggot” or “dyke” were common with expressions like “that’s so gay” meaning “stupid” or “worthless” (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

For gay youth, rejection of homosexuality is a common experience. In fact, in schools it is often not talked about, but in whispers and rumours, which in turn further isolate the gay child. For gay children, the negative attitudes about homosexuals are insidious and deeply troubling. It is sometimes easier to just change one’s own behaviour in order to stay hidden, to ward off the ridicule and contempt they see on a daily basis. For instance some gay youth will date the opposite sex, just so they can “pass” as one of the majority:

I remember going to Cathy Nagle’s parties where people would have girlfriends. I remember having a girlfriend. That didn’t last very long.

For some the changed behaviour may include postures or mannerisms, to appear less gay. In my situation, I was told repeatedly, that I ran like a girl. In order to stop the ridicule I changed

how I ran, so I could “pass” as any other boy. Eventually these changes became so ingrained that I eventually knew no different. Terry discusses how he changed how he sat:

...even the way I spoke, even the way I sat... even the... just sitting. You want to sit with your legs crossed, you got to sit with your hands like this (puts hands together in front of him) or on your side.

So who are the “passing” ones? If one changes their behaviour to the point where the old behaviour no longer exists and even, in the case of femininity, is complete averted, then who is that person? I often ask that question of myself.

In Hiding: Secrecy & Invisibility

...I would walk with him, but not much, he had his own friends and all that. He was a jock, hockey player, and I remember walking home and thinking about him and looking at his house and imagining living there with him or doing things with him or if I knew him and everybody knew that I knew him you know, ‘cause he was so popular. I think it was almost like he was a superstar. I thought he was really cute and I wanted to kiss him, be with him. I wasn’t always after the superstars either, but with him it was like that.

When “passing”, much behaviour that is changed is external, like the people you choose to date or the way you cross your legs. These are devices that individuals employ to appear, on the outside, like everyone else. But changing one’s behaviour is not the only form of passing. Gay youth hide (Swann & Anastas, 2003; Tharinger & Wells, 2000). They still have their sexual identity, but it becomes an internal world, a world with many rules. It can be a very lonely place. Like in the quote above, it can be an elaborate fantasy life, something that can’t be seen, or experiences (experiments) had in secrecy:

And we wanted to kiss and I had a crush on him. I remember, like I really liked him. I was infatuated with him. And we ended up going into the ditch across the street and thought no one would see us, which, the homes are all on a hill, and both sides of the street are hills and you look down into the ditch so it would probably be the most visible spot in the whole neighbourhood. We thought that because it was a ditch no one would see us. And I remember we kissed... and I think a neighbour saw us (Terry remembering a boy he knew in grade 2).

It had to be done in secret. It had to be hidden because he believed it was wrong. Terry recalled how he was scared at the thought that someone had seen him. Fear motivates children to live a life in secret. The fear of being found out; their true identity revealed. Perhaps it's not so difficult to imagine when one hears about a child whose mother was domineering and critical of his feminine behaviour, who wasn't supported for his interests and instead was laughed at by his family and friends, and who lived in a time where even the thought of others finding out about his gender non-conforming behaviour was potentially devastating. When a child is unsupported maybe the best option is to remain secretive in order to ward off any further resistance. But for Terry, being found out, in his mind had more damaging consequences:

I thought they would kick me out of the house. I'd be on my own and living on the streets because I heard about that happening to people. You see that in movies and you read that in books or news reports about street kids living on the streets because they're gay and they ended up getting kicked out of their house. I was aware of that. In hindsight, I know my parents would not have kicked me out of the house.

But when Terry was growing up that was the only model he had. If you tell your parents you're gay then you get kicked out. At the time you didn't hear about children who told their parents they were gay and the family worked it all out. He simply didn't hear those messages when he was a kid.

The Tolerance.org website outlines five strategies to support the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and queer high school students. First, they believe it is important to provide explicit support systems for LGBTQ students. For example gay-straight alliances or clubs can be created that bring together students of all sexual and gender identities. It is the law center's belief that students who participate in these groups will be less likely to miss school and more likely to feel they belong. Secondly, it is important that teachers and fellow students serve as allies and role models. For instance, students can challenge comments like, "That's so gay" and ask if they are speaking in reference to a homosexual or if there's some more suitable term to use. This shows that certain language will not be tolerated.

The recommendations provided by this resource fall in line with some of the policies provided by the Toronto District School Board. One of them being the importance of employing inclusive and respectful curricula so students can see themselves reflected in the curriculum, even if teachers hold beliefs that homosexuality is wrong (Toronto District School Board, 2000). Teachers are working for the students and they need to ensure their success. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, with their policy on preventative bullying coincides with the law center's fourth recommendation to include anti-gay bullying in anti-harassment policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

And finally, when looking at the macro level, across Canada, we need to advocate for province wide anti-discrimination laws. More specifically, the exemplary policies that are outlined in the TDSB's Equity Statement need to be elevated to the Ontario Ministry of Education and beyond, to the Ministries of Education across the country. By doing so principals and districts are given the backup they need to fight hate and promote tolerance, and teachers,

like the one mentioned by Terry in the following quote, are mandated to foster a climate which respects and promotes acceptance of children with non-mainstream sexual identities:

I can remember an incident in Grade 10. I was an art student, and my homeroom ended up being in the art room. Our art teacher was a great guy. He was one of those special teachers who was very involved in the school. He was also the hockey coach, so he helped to bridge the gap between the art students and the 'jocks'. I always thought of him as very open, but one day someone made a comment about a student being absent or something. This student was very effeminate. I can remember the teacher making a snicker at the parody the student made. I interpreted this as intolerance, even though I may have been wrong. But this incident just further confirmed that the best place for my sexual identity was in the closet.

Terry disagreed with one recommendation provided by the Tolerance.org website. He felt that creating groups specifically for gay and lesbian students with straight students, only further illuminates their difference, since the purpose of the groups construction is for the children with non-mainstream sexual and gender identities. He felt the LGBTQ students would feel further isolated, but perhaps this is just one step of many to move from a place of tolerance to one of acceptance, one of many strategies to improve the visibility of LGBTQ students.

In the Shadows, Just Like Me

And I remember him saying, 'well if you had a girl with you right now, what would you do?' And it was basically, "Well I would kiss her on the neck", and then my cousin would kiss me on the neck and then touch me down there.

But Terry wasn't completely alone in his secrecy. Terry's cousin's family would stay over at his family home and vice versa. This occurred often during his pre-adolescence into his adolescence. During these stays the two of them would share a bed and they would experiment, either in Moncton, or his cousin's home, Prince Edward Island. Terry's family and his Aunt and

Uncle's family were quite close and would take many trips together. It was on one of these trips that Terry heard his family being particularly discriminatory towards gay people in a house on Prince Edward Island.

They said: It was this big, sodomy, orgy house, but it was probably just a couple living there that were gay. I interpreted their reaction as being disgusted. All I wanted to do was go inside this house and meet these people.

I was very intrigued (at the idea of gay people living in this house). I think that's one of the things that made me think, "Well, I'm not the only one." I remember looking at my cousin and I'm sure he thought the same thing.

But even though there was safety, being with another who was like-minded, at least on the surface, there was still a great deal of secrecy. Terry discusses his feelings being with his cousin:

I felt scared. I remember feeling scared because I wanted to do stuff. I wanted to kiss him. He's a very handsome boy, a man now. I mean he's very good looking. And I wanted to kiss him and I thought if I kiss him on the lips with tongue and stuff like that well is he going to go, 'Oh my god, you're gay!' And then rat me out so to speak. So as long as he suggested something then I was fine with it.

By experimenting with his cousin, Terry made himself vulnerable. Within this relationship there was silence. What the experience was for Terry was never communicated to his cousin out of fear that he would be further rejected by others around him. Even to this day the silence, with his cousin, remains:

And when I was home one summer from Yellowknife, Marc (pseudonym) was there. I even thought, "Are we going to say something about that?" We never did bring it up.

Silent Until Now: Terry Today

I can remember different incidents with my parents in the past and different problems I've had. I remember not talking to them about problems and then, after the problem has passed and I end up talking to them I wonder why I didn't talk to them in the first place. It was so much simpler, so much easier and they brought so much insight to different things.

Why do we remain silent? Why do we choose to say some things to some people, but not to others? More specifically, why was it so difficult for Terry to tell his parents about his problems with school? And even today, after 40 years, Terry only just recently came out to his family. Through silencing and disempowerment children develop fear of communicating their feelings. They are scared of being rejected, of being made to feel bad about themselves in some way. For some the fear is that their mother might laugh at them or berate them, telling them they need to toughen up and be more like a man. These fears are completely legitimate and speak to the supports needed by young children. Without these supports children will hide and live their lives in fear.

I know as an adult, I realized, as I get older and now I'm there, I do my own thing and basically the hell with the rest of the world. If I want to be artistic, if I want to play with Lego, I'll do it. Whereas years ago, those were things that I'd have to question.

In fact this silence is not only evident in marginalized individuals. It is a societal condition, deeply ingrained in our attitudes, even our abilities to deal with sensitive topics. For instance, in schools, teachers still find it difficult to question and open dialogue around sexuality. In the United States, Price, Dake, Kirchofer & Telljohann (2003) found that fifth-grade teachers were open to answering questions around topics like puberty or how one contracts HIV, but when topics like homosexuality came up, some teachers simply would not answer. In Weaver, Byers, Sears, Cohen & Randall's (2002) study of 4200 parents in New Brunswick it was found that 94%

of them approved of sexual health education (SHE). In fact 65% of parents believed that age-appropriate SHE should begin by grades 4 and 5, and 33% by kindergarten to grade 3, including topics like homosexuality.

Yet, still there are those few that view sexuality as corruption rather than as an opportunity to seek out equality and promote tolerance (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000) and that children, as innocent 'asexual' beings, are too young to be included in such 'adult' discussion around sexuality (Robinson, 2002). The evidence indicates that sexuality, nevertheless, exists in both formal and informal practices in primary school and that heterosexuality is taught explicitly and *implicitly* from an early age (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000).

Lucia F. O'Sullivan states, "there is substantial evidence that educating children about sexuality matters does not produce adverse consequences, such as prompting early onset of sexual behaviour" (O'Sullivan, 2003, p. 24), even though this evidence has had little if no effect upon eliminating concerns about exposing children to sexual information. Moll argues that, "sexual knowledge was necessary for children to interpret behaviour and protect themselves" (as cited in Frayser, 2003, p. 270). He saw more harm in lack of knowledge versus knowledge. When there is an absence of adequate language for and the permission to engage in discussions around sexuality, children are left without lessons on appropriate sexual behaviour. Instead, the only alternative is to patch together a distorted understanding of sexuality through the Internet, television, and music videos (Frayser, 2003, pp. 269-270).

Terry lived most of his life in silence, not telling his family and many friends about his sexuality. In fact Terry's first long-term relationship is the one he is in right now, beginning less than three years ago. Up until then he had only casual encounters with men, but even that was a rarity. It was not until recently that Terry decided to come out to his family, to break the silence.

He explained this coming about for two reasons, although he conceded that more factors may have been at play:

Ok, well one aspect I think was the fact that I don't like to lie to my family. Telling my family that you're my roommate is kinda hard. I think also it's kind of foolish – I mean, my Uncle Terry lives in Toronto, and he has a roommate and he's forty years old. I had uncles or great uncles like that. You read between the lines, I mean, why not be upfront?

I think one of the things too is the thought that the worst thing that could happen in coming out to my family is losing my family and being alone, completely alone. Sure you have friends, but friends are fleeting, friends move away. And now, I'm not alone. I have family.

And perhaps it was a combination of several factors. I believe Terry is in a different place than where he was for the past two decades. He lived in Yellowknife for over ten years, and worked in schools that frowned upon the local gay community. Terry even mentioned to me that his father had said to him that he believed he was now where he needed to be, in Toronto. Terry believed this was his father's way of saying that Terry was with his community, the gay community. I also believe that Terry feels much safer now, in a loving relationship where he is completely supported. We share a lot with each other and are very intimate. Like Terry said, he has family now and after several years is finally able to feel safe enough to break the silence and feel empowered in who he is.

Terry's Past, Present and Future

During our interviews, Terry and I spoke at length about his experience, being a teacher and how gay children are being supported in schools. Terry taught for over ten years, with all grades at the elementary/junior-high level and is currently a pedagogical consultant, a role where

he advises teachers on ways to improve their practice. He agrees with a recommendation provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, n.d.), that communication needs to increase in the classroom between teachers and students and that homophobic comments need to be challenged. He noted that there are resources, such as books on diverse families for young children, but in the older grades, “You wouldn’t talk about that.” He believes for there to be any sustainable change in this area, revisions need to be made at the administrative level:

I think you need a district and government policy. I think if you have guidelines, if you have certain elements in the curriculum, I think then it’s something that is seen as the Bible for teachers in education.

Similar to the sentiment expressed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Terry believes changes need to be made to the Ontario curriculum to be inclusive of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gendered and queer (LGBTQ) community and admits that he is not aware of any in-depth discussion on gay and lesbian issues to date. Upon further research no LGBTQ issues were discussed within the Ontario elementary curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004 & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). The silence is insidious and these suggestions are believed to aid in opening dialogue and fostering a climate which respects and values members of the LGBTQ community.

The Moral of the Story: Alleviating the Pain of Invisible and Silenced Children

When looking over Terry’s narrative, the invisibility of gay children, of gender non-conforming children invades many spheres. In the beginning we saw a young child whose mother berates him for his gender non-conforming behaviour. His mother can only see one type of behaviour that fits a model that suits her understanding of the world; a model taken partly,

perhaps, from her connection with the Catholic Church. Wherever this idea came from, Terry's behaviour was effectively made invisible, by being told his actions were not appropriate. So while Terry's mother and others around him with gender-fixed notions of appropriate behaviour chose to blind themselves from the diverse reality they are situated within, Terry turned his rejected self inward and hid from the world. Terry made himself invisible by trying to "pass" as gender-conformed and "straight", through consciously and unconsciously changing his behaviour.

There's nothing worse for me as a teacher, and an adult then to shy away from the answer that the kids are looking for. I really believe there's not enough dialogue in the schools about that. I think the suicide rate is really high. We don't know probably how high because some kids who commit suicide we don't know that they're gay.

After investigating the research literature I found there to be a lack of information/writing in the area of support for *young* children with non-mainstream sexual identities. Although I could speak at length about the taboo nature of sexuality in the early years and the heteronormative climate found in elementary schools, I could not find many research efforts concerned with providing *young* children (5-12) with support. When gay and lesbian issues were raised, often it was in reference to gay and lesbian parents, not children, or for youth. Even today, it seems young children are invisible.

Dissemination

First and foremost, dissemination, for the purposes of this research, is at the discretion of both the researcher and the research participant. We are co-owners of this piece of work and have equal rights to its distribution and also the right to decide whether it is distributed or not. Terry and I are in agreement that this information would be of particular interest to certain politically-oriented groups in society. For instance, Egale Canada is an organization that advances equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-identified people and their families. Egale supports many initiatives, fundraisers, projects and conferences which deal with the LBGTQ community. Potentially, we could share our information at such a conference. As well, since much of this research is oriented around supports in the school we might be able to attend an educational conference which advocates for children's rights. By presenting our findings, we hope that professionals would be able to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of supporting all children, regardless of their sexual or gender identity. Our findings could be presented as a poster presentation. By attending these conferences together and sharing our findings in a way which highlights our collaborative process, the unique way of doing research that one would find between two intimately close individuals would be demonstrated.

Next Steps

When exploring support for young children with non-mainstream sexual identities we need to ask ourselves, "What do these children look like?" The research seems to say that any child could be a gay or lesbian child (Gottschalk, 2003). Then perhaps the scope of future research should include supports that are available for any child who is exploring the multiple faces of identity.

Additionally, in Canada we are fortunate since the Supreme Court finds that all students, regardless of a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation, should be free from discriminatory harassment (The Alberta Teacher's Association, n.d.). I believe it would be helpful to research into whether policies are in place in other provinces and whether they are being put into practice across Canada, in Ontario and here in Toronto.

And finally, I believe we need to take a concerted look at our strategies we employ when working with families who have children with non-mainstream sexual and gender identities. As Terry noted, teachers are often scared to bring up discussions around sexuality with their students out of fear of what parents may say or do. If this is the case then how prepared are teachers to speak with parents about a child they may have who may be "non-mainstream"? There is evidence that community partnerships are valued by the TDSB (Toronto District School Board, n.d.), but any discussion around supporting LGBTQ students is not to be found. Some may even ask whether teachers should get involved. I respond with an enthusiastic, "Definitely"! For I believe, as the saying goes, it takes a community to raise a child and we are all responsible to provide each other with compassion, respect and support. I believe, for future research, this avenue would benefit from some exploration.

Afterward

I feel it's invaluable to add a final reflection on this research process and the individuals involved. Terry and I have been together for almost three years and we were just recently married in July of 2007. Terry and I are a family, and through marriage we have been able to bring together all the members of our family and show them that non-mainstream sexual identities need no longer be hidden, but instead celebrated and that our type of family works too.

What stands out as unique in this process is that I was the researcher while Terry was the research participant. We talked at length about this process, the pros and the cons. I will speak about one of each. A positive aspect of doing research between partners was the degree to which Terry felt comfortable disclosing personal information. We share a great deal of intimacy in our relationship and we agreed that that has allowed Terry to share his stories with greater ease versus a researcher who had no personal history with Terry. Through trust building the process of collecting Terry's personal narrative has been accelerated. As well, Terry and I both grew up as gay children and have had similar experiences feeling unsupported by our own families and peers in different ways:

I know that you've gone through things where you were less supported with family and so I feel very confident in discussing that with you. And if you were a researcher who I didn't know I wouldn't know that so I may not feel as comfortable discussing different elements.

On the other hand, Terry still found it difficult to be completely open about his experiences. He explains this for two reasons. One he was concerned with my opinion of his family. This can be heard at times where Terry would add to his responses in ways that would soften his statements. Terry also reported that he was conscious of his actions and was careful not to purposefully edit things out.

Well one of the weaknesses I think is the fact that when I discuss things about my parents or my family, in the back of my mind I'm always thinking, well I don't want to create this image of this evil person or these evil people because they're going to be part of your family.

Furthermore, Terry felt guilty at times for some of the statements he was making. Terry wanted to be fair in what he was stating and how he was portraying his family and experience. Terry even conceded that he may have felt some guilt from speaking about his family in negative ways. I don't believe that this is unique to research between partners, but more it speaks to a human condition and our subjective experience, not forgetting that there is no one truth, but rather an interpretation, one of many.

For myself, I feel the most valuable part of this research experience lies in its potential to bring about a cathartic process for its members. There were many times where I would go over Terry's transcripts and have moments where I felt so connected with what Terry was saying that I was, in my own way, reconciling my own embittered feelings from not being supported myself as a gay child. As well, Terry would read my own reflections and add new ideas. He also felt that he learned many things about himself, like how he averted femininity, sought out validation and was silenced. By becoming aware of these moments in our lives, or as Denzin (1989) terms "epiphanies", I believe Terry and I are able to make sense of where we've been, understand where we are now and feel empowered to create a healthy and sustainable tomorrow, for ourselves and our children.

Overall this process has increased our intimacy. I feel I understand Terry more now than when this project began. My compassion for him has been heightened.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide #1

1. What was it like growing up in Moncton, New Brunswick?
2. Did your family move around during your childhood?
3. Can you tell me about your family?
4. What was it like growing up with two younger brothers?
5. What was your family's routine? Like when you were in school how was the day organized?
6. What was your relationship with your mother like when you were a child?
7. And now?
8. And how was your relationship with your father?
9. And now?
10. I know you like Kayaking. What made you first interested in Kayaking?

Interview Guide #2

1. I remember we were talking casually about a month ago, about your early childhood and you told me you remember having a crush when you were very young. Can you tell me a little more about that?
2. You said in our last interview that you remember around grade six or seven as a time where you definitely knew you were gay because you felt strong sexual attraction to boys in your class. Can you tell me a little more about that?
3. What were the attitudes of individuals towards homosexuality in your community like your family or other adults?
4. You spoke about creating a dollhouse with your friend, Christine and getting a negative reaction at school. Can we look at that in more detail? Like what was said and what your life was like during that difficult time. You say even your friends didn't understand. What happened to those relationships?
5. How is your view on sexuality different now than when you were a child? Has it even changed?
6. Can you provide me with more examples on... feeling isolated? Feeling accepted?
7. I think your experiences with your mother are fairly significant. From our last discussion you revealed that on more than one occasion your mother pushed you to do activities which you didn't want to do. Activities that are considered 'gender appropriate'. You even state that your mother wanted you to be a tomboy.

Interview Guide #3

So for this interview I am not going to cover any new material but rather expand upon ideas already discussed in past interviews and attempt to fill in the blanks.

1. In our last interview, you recollected about a man you knew as a young child and how you wanted to touch his moustache. You said, "I remember seeing that man with the moustache and thinking I can't tell anybody how I feel". Can you tell me more about what you were feeling then with regards to this new revelation?
2. How might you support that child in your own practice? As a teacher? As a father?
3. Let's revisit the dollhouse one last time. You spoke about how Christine was the only one who supported you with you dollhouse. Why didn't any of your other female friends know about this project?
4. I know you were quite proud of your achievement. How might you have been better supported with your dollhouse, by fellow students, friends, family, teachers and overall environment or society at large?
5. You have spoken at length about not feeling validated by your mother, for example with your artistic expression. In what ways have your mom's attitudes about gender-appropriate behaviour affected you as a child?
6. How have they affected your attitudes towards homosexuality?
7. How could your mom have been better supported to have provided you with better support?
8. And how about your father. How could he have supported you better during your childhood?
9. And how could he have been better supported?
10. You waited until two years ago to come out to your family. Can you explain why you decided not to tell them until that point?
11. As a teacher, you have worked with many diverse, young children. How are young children with alternative sexual identities being supported in schools? How about young children exhibiting gender-nonconforming behaviours? How do you support these children?
12. How can teachers be better supported in their practice?

13. How has this research process helped you? Put things into perspective? Forgiveness for parents?
14. We are partners. We are about to get married and here we are; I, the researcher and you, the research participant. How do you think our relationship makes this type of research different from other types of research? Can you outline some strengths and weaknesses inherent within this type of research?

Appendix B

March 30, 2007

Terry's going over the transcript right now and he commented on the stuff on dollhouses and he said he would like to build another one... actually many and he'll open a shop when we move to London... He is London obsessed. :P

Just back from making (and eating) some grilled cheese sandwiches (with ham)... Terry's almost done the transcript and I am feeling quite fatigued... what a day! So this meeting is informal... just checking up on how he feels about the interviews... weaknesses, strengths and possible directions, but no questions are written down... informal, right? :D

Tell me why you were upset? (I noticed he was upset reading the document)

He thought of all the toys he lost when he was a kid. (Stopped him because I thought this could be in the next interview... I still need to go over the transcript)

What have you like about this process?

He liked the fact that he's talking about his childhood and he has a captive audience... in other words I have to listen and I don't interrupt unlike I have done before like the hat in the bedroom...

I said, "personal attacks aside"... and he said it's not a personal attack... it's how he feels.

(Long pause)

He liked rereading it...

Ok... what do you find is a weakness to this type of study...

When reading the transcription he feels he doesn't have a good mastery of the English language... he also notices that I will ask a question and he will sometimes not answer it

I said so the listening goes both ways

Where do you want this research to go?

He makes a strange noise intentionally to have me record it... I say something like I'm writing that he's acting like a chicken

And he says no because that will manipulate the result.. make it less scientific (I think interesting... and explain why)

He says the whole idea of perception is interesting and how he sees his past and he questions his experiences and whether they are completely true... he thinks maybe sharing with his mother, but maybe she'll go over the deep end...

Any ideas about specific experiences... epiphanies to flesh out... explain relevance of epiphanies... (long pause)...

He can't think of anything right now

Is there anything that you feel was left out to be touched upon next time?

A lot of things relating to his being a kid, sexuality...

So maybe they will be covered anyways...

Anything else come up from going through the transcript?

No... not that he can think of... right now.

One last thing... how did you feel about me as a researcher and the interview?

(long pause)... he thought it was strange... he almost forgot who I was... like I was a student or a doctor and I wasn't his partner... a very sexy doctor.. don't write that!

Is that all?

Yeah

I tell him that I was going to lead him into exploring my role, but I told him since he said he was satisfied that I didn't pursue... respecting his feelings

He said in response that he just isn't feeling well now, but that's not what I had meant by that...

😊

April 24 2007

Terry just went over the second part of the second interview and is writing to a greater extent.

Why did you feel like writing more this time?

I don't know.

What have you liked about this process?

I like that I can look back at things and reanalyze the way I see things in the past. And I came to a realization or an epiphany.

What is that?

Well I just found out something about myself. In the whole incident with the drafting material with the gift and my mother and saying that that was what I wanted when I didn't was because getting that gift represented validation or an acceptance. And when I didn't get the gift that I wanted I realized I really wasn't being heard or listened to. And I think that's when I started forging my own way and my own identity.

Brad's thoughts: I just thought that it was probably a time where you began to be silent about your desires and needs. And this shows itself today when you get upset you don't say it. What do you think of that... Terry said he thought of that too and he agrees.

Ok... what do you find is a weakness to this type of study... or what do you think needs to be improved or how can I be more inclusive of all perspectives? Or how can you be?

Well I think the weakest thing about this whole study is that it is my perception and only mine and another factor is time.

Ok. What do you mean?

Because we sometimes rebuild memories and they may not be accurate.

So the validity of it?

Yeah, the validity of our memories. Even though whether something happened or not is not important it's how interpretation affects our actions... the difference between science and history.

Where do you want this research to go? How would you like it to be disseminated?

You mean like made into a movie? What do you mean?

Like who would you like to share this with and would you like to be part of that process?

Well share it with the academic community, but I wouldn't want to share it with my family because I think it will hurt them.

Is there anything that you feel was left out to be touched upon next time?

Not that I can think of. Um.

Anything else come up from going through the transcript?

I found it very difficult to write what I was saying because I would analyze the transcripts as I wrote them down.

One last thing... how did you feel about me as a researcher and the interview? Like this interview compared to the last one.

I think it was better because last time I think you shared frustration when I thought you wanted an answer that I didn't give. And also sometimes when I felt my voice wasn't being heard.

What do you mean?

In the sense I think in some situations I think you were debating me on things.

Really? I can't remember that so maybe we should revisit the first transcript and clarify that situation, but like you said I didn't do it for the second interview.

It wasn't a very big thing in the first interview. It was minor. I think at some point you forgot you were conducting and interview.

What do you mean?

You were no longer an interviewer you were my boyfriend.

But I think that is of value as well.

May 21, 2007

Terry has just woken up. He went over the final interview last night and made some of his comments.

Why did you feel like writing less this time?

I feel I wrote less because I explained myself better.

What have you liked about this process?

I liked examining my perceptions of my childhood.

How so or what aspects of that did you enjoy?

Finding out why I have certain attitudes nowadays.

An example?

With regards to effeminate men.

What do you think needs to be improved or how can I be more inclusive of all perspectives? Or how can you be?

I wonder if seeing the questions first would be better.

Why do you think that would be better?

Because it would allow me to collect my thoughts and organize them.

I fear it would take away from the accuracy of the statements because when you prepare other concerns are at play.

Where do you want this research to go? How would you like it to be disseminated? Can you see a use for this research?

I can see it being a use to the academic community in studying homosexuality and children.

You know how I see it being useful and what I said to you before. It's archiving the past and where we have been, as a reminder of where we don't want to go again. Do you agree with that?

Yep.

Is there anything that you feel was left of the interviews. Any final thoughts? Any advice? Any personal wish even? This is your chance...

I guess I wish kids would not have to go through what we've had to go through. And I'm not sure things have changed that much... in that respect.

But in the schools you say things have changed...

Yeah they have but I think we're in a transitional stage. I think that remembering back at last Saturday (a bbq we went to) and people were discussing how they knew gay people and that gay people were great. The whole discussion seemed like an attempt to show acceptance, but you wouldn't have a discussion like that about black people or Jewish people...

Right, but did we?

Yeah...

It takes a while to get to the normal space, where it's just accepted. Gay people are so great... and so are straight people...

Terry: And black people are great too and Jewish...why are we discussing this?

Anything else come up from going through the transcript?

That things are not always black and white. For instance, my mother can be seen as a bit of a bully, but she's also a very caring person.

I think that's interesting and really an cultural obsession to put things in terms of good guy/bad guy, but we're all good guys and bad guys... we have it all within us... shades of gray.

One last thing... how did you feel about me as a researcher and the interview? Like this interview compared to the last one.

After having read the transcripts I see how you try to keep me on track which is a good thing. I think you showed a little more patience.

How so?

In letting me explain things even if it wasn't the answer you wanted.

Anything else to add or are you done?

No. I'm done.