

“IT’S HOW TO MAKE A BABY”: EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS
RE/CONSTITUTING HETEROSEXUALITY THROUGH SEXUAL HEALTH

by

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ABSTRACT

Sexual health education, in explicitly linking kids with sexual knowledge, threatens pervasive discourses on the non-sexual child. In order to mediate this conflict, many sexual health programs privilege a scientific approach, attempting to desexualize sexual health by emphasizing the ‘facts’ of puberty and (hetero)sexual reproduction. In this project, I draw on observations from three sexual health workshops in a grade 5/6/7 elementary classroom in Vancouver, BC and two rounds of interviews with six boys who attended those workshops. I examine the story the educators constructed in order to teach sexual health, highlighting their reliance on both a ‘gay is okay’ and a scientific discourse. I argue that by locating their discussion of homosexuality within a values framework and so actively striving to depict it as acceptable, the educators constituted homosexuality as a social identity that *requires* acceptance. Likewise, by subsuming references to heterosexuality within their lesson on (hetero)sexual reproduction, the educators framed it as an always already accepted scientific fact. I then employ a poststructuralist discourse analysis to explore the ways the boys both took up and deviated from these discourses when constructing their own stories of sexual health.

PREFACE

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author. I received a certificate of approval (full board) for this research project from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board on April 10, 2012 and from the Vancouver School Board on May 14, 2012. I also received approval (minimal review) for an amendment to this project on January 24, 2013. The reference number for this study is H12-00479.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Transcription Symbols (also explained on page 58)

/ represents an interruption

// represents both boys talking at the same time

Abbreviations

Opt: Options for Sexual Health BC

SHEC: Sexual Health Educator Certification

PLOs: Prescribed Learning Outcomes

IMB: Information, Motivation, and Behaviour

CAVE/SAR: Comfort, Attitude, and Values Evaluation/Sexual Attitudes
Reassessment

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Chapter One: Stories of Sex and Sexuality

And inasmuch as knowing and doing are linked, what we *see* in nature, in the world, and in human bodies is very much caught up in questions of a social and political order – that is, in what we *want* to see.

Roger N. Lancaster, *The Trouble with Nature: Sex in Popular Science and Mass Culture*, 2003, p. 37, emphasis in original

Introduction

Sexual health education is typically the first, official instruction that kids¹ receive on topics related to sex and sexuality in school. These classes are constituted as the appropriate context for kids to learn about this material. As such, sexual health classes are often considered the legitimate spaces for answering difficult and at times contentious questions and for debunking schoolyard myths (McKay, 2004). Many researchers have studied the multi-faceted and meaningful interactions that teachers and students have about sex and sexuality long before these classes. For instance, several scholars have examined the ways that kids participate in gendered and heterosexualizing processes within school (Davies, 1993; Epstein, 1997; Kehily, 2002; Renold, 2006), arguing that kids learn about sex, sexuality, and gender implicitly from the educational environment and curriculum. While these studies focused on the learning that happens when sex and sexuality were not the explicit focus of the lesson or interaction, I concentrate on the learning that is re/produced² when sex and sexuality are *the* topics of the class.

¹ I use 'kids' instead of 'youth' or 'young people' because that is how my participants self-identified. See below for more about my methodology.

² I use re/produced to indicate the performativity of these processes. I want to signal that we reproduce these discourses and systems of power as we discursively produce them. I am focusing on the idea that they are cyclical processes that occur simultaneously.

I began this research project by asking how young peoples' understandings of sex, sexuality, their bodies, and relationships are affected by a program that intentionally strives to be inclusive of non-heterosexuals. I have previously worked as a sexual health educator, during which time I developed and led classes for groups of girls in grades 4-6. I endeavoured to create workshops that the girls would find empowering. I wanted our time together to challenge the ways they typically thought about gender and sexuality and how they viewed their bodies. While writing lesson plans that attempted to open up space for non-dominant bodies, relationships, sex, and sexualities, I became aware of how crucial my choice of language was to the messages I wanted to convey. Moreover, I realized how complicated it is to create that type of space. From my experiences in these classes, I became interested in kids' experiences of sexual health education that is specifically presented as progressive. In Vancouver, there are a number of organizations that espouse sex-positive values and, as a result, present themselves as progressive.

To pursue this research, I connected with Ramona³, a grade 5/6/7 teacher at Eastside Elementary school whom I met through a professor I am currently involved with on a research project.⁴ Every year Ramona organizes a sexual health workshop for her students, typically through educators involved in SHEC, the certification program led by Options for Sexual Health BC (Opt), a progressive sexual health organization. Ramona was eager to be involved in my project, for she views sexual health as an important element of her students' education. Moreover, as a former

³ Every person's name and the name of the elementary school that appears in this study are pseudonyms.

⁴ After obtaining a certificate of approval from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, reference number H12-00479, and the Vancouver School Board.

graduate student, she was quick to encourage research into this field. She assisted me in securing permission from the principal, who was also very supportive. Ramona distributed and collected the consent/assent forms, which only boys returned. I was surprised at this gendered response and explore it further later in this chapter.

Eastside Elementary is a small public school⁵ in East Vancouver that, like Opt, cultivates a progressive image. Part of this image is a result of their emphasis on diversity. Eastside Elementary demonstrates their diversity through references to the percentage of students with special needs (11%) and who are ESL learners (27%). Moreover, they note the large number of immigrant families who send kids to the school, stating that “the largest groups by ‘language spoken at home’ are English, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Tagalog” (Vancouver School Board, 2011). In addition to their focus on diversity, Eastside Elementary School’s presentation of a progressive image is especially evident in their school mission and school plan, both of which rely on discourses framed against standardized schooling. Their mission statement declares:

Together, as a community, we bring alive our commitment to develop each child’s potential in all domains through our unique philosophy. It is built on mutual respect, continuous progress, cooperative learning and opportunities for leadership within a child-centered multi-age classroom (Vancouver School Board, 2011).

It highlights every child’s potential to learn and contribute to the school’s shared educational community. Likewise, their school plan emphasizes the importance of emotional learning and social responsibility. Kids are students and leaders,

⁵ Eastside Elementary had 432 students enrolled in the school year 2012/2013.

positioned to facilitate the learning of younger kids with whom they share a class. I consider Eastside Elementary to be a progressive public school based largely on its community approach to education.

The two educators Ramona invited to lead the workshops, Shauna and Jane, are both White, youthful, cisgendered, heterosexual women. They frequently collaborated and were using the workshops at Eastside to finish their practicum with SHEC. They led the workshops every Wednesday afternoon for three consecutive weeks in Ramona's classroom. Since I am a former sexual health educator, Shauna and Jane were enthusiastic about my involvement, as well as a bit nervous. Though they expressed considerable interest in my professional perspective, I tried to present myself in their workshops in a way that would not remind them that another sexual health educator was in the class. I sat in back and worked on not displaying my reaction to the material as they were teaching.

After my first round of interviews, I narrowed my research question to better address what I had observed during the workshops and heard from the boys. I re-worked my question: how was the naturalness of heterosexuality simultaneously re/produced and challenged during the SHEC educator-led workshops at Eastside Elementary School?⁶ I then returned to Eastside to conduct another round of

⁶ A note on language: in our interviews, we went back and forth between the words heterosexual, homosexual, straight, and gay. I use the words the boys used to reflect the ways they talked, not to indicate fixed identity categories. When I am not explicitly referencing the workshops or our interviews, I use the word the queer instead, to unsettle the idea of stable categories of sexuality and gender.

interviews with the same boys.⁷ I employed a poststructuralist analysis of these interviews due to its focus and perspective on how identities are formed and performed through discourse. As Bronwyn Davies (1993) explains, “discourses shift in meaning according to context and to the positioning of the subjects within them. Further, the discourses and practices through which we are constituted are also often in tension, one with another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings which are inscribed in their bodies and in their conscious and unconscious minds” (p. 11). I drew on this understanding of discourse during my analysis by interrogating the ways the boys constructed binaries and the tensions among the multiplicity of discourses they had available to them as they told their stories of sexual health.

Desexualization Through Science

Science as a Story

In mainstream North American society, there is a common view that science tells the ‘truth’ of the world. Another perspective argues, as Lancaster does, that science tells a subjective version of *a* story of the world. Lancaster examined the ways science gets deployed to explain nature and, in the process, how it becomes naturalized and politicized. He contends, “...‘nature’ can be discovered, brought into existence, made intelligible, and acted upon only *historically*, by social, perceptive beings” (Lancaster, 2003, p. 291, emphasis in original). In *The Trouble with Nature*, Lancaster (2003) focuses on the nature of desire and proclaims that far from being

⁷ I received approval for an amendment to my certificate from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board on January 24, 2013.

objective when telling the story of sex, science “plays an important role in the varied imaginings of contemporary sexual culture” (p. 20). In North American society, science occupies a privileged position of assumed legitimacy; therefore, discourses that employ science to construct meanings for sex and sexuality are often understood to possess the ‘truth’ of sex.

Despite being framed as objective and value-free, science is a discourse that re/produces hierarchies. Some acts, bodies, people, relationships, and families are constituted as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ while others are relegated to the margins of society and viewed as precarious. However, there is no singular, scientific story of sex and sexuality; rather, there are many mutable versions, and the way we tell these stories greatly affects their meanings. As Donna Haraway(1989) argues:

Not just anything can emerge as a fact; not just anything can be seen or done, and so told. Scientific practice may be considered a kind of storytelling practice – a rule-governed, constrained, historically changing craft of narrating the history of nature...Any scientific statement about the world depends intimately upon language...(p. 4).

Sex and sexuality are not based on indisputable facts; they are ideas we construct through the stories we tell.

Historical Context

Michel Foucault (1978) plumbed the trajectory of *scientia sexualis*, examining how sexuality as enacted through a scientific discourse came to replace confession as the embodiment of “the truth of sex and its pleasures” (p. 68). As Foucault (1978) claims, “the essential features of this sexuality...correspond to the functional requirements of a discourse that must produce its truth” (p. 68). Furthermore, “the

history of sexuality – that is, the history of what functioned in the nineteenth century as a specific field of truth – must be written from the viewpoint of a history of discourses” (p. 69). Building on Foucault’s work in this area, Jeffery Weeks examined the socio-cultural development of sexuality with a focus on how sexual meanings are discursively produced. He claims, “the meanings we give to ‘sexuality’ are socially organized, sustained by a variety of languages, which seek to tell us what sex is, what it ought to be – and what it could be” (Weeks, 1986, p. 7). Lancaster, Haraway, Foucault, and Weeks all argue that science is not able to settle definitively on the authoritative story of nature because there is no singular ‘truth’. Instead, “nature, even in its ‘firstness’ is in no small part what we *make* of it” (Lancaster, 2003, p. 37, emphasis in original). Thus, despite scientific attempts to singularly define sex, it “only attains meaning in social relations” (Weeks, 1986, p. 84).

Sex and sexuality, which are often told as biological stories, are historically contingent concepts (Foucault, 1979; Kehily, 2002; Weeks, 1986). Over the past few decades, there has been a growing trend toward the acceptance of sexual diversity (Weeks, 1986). Therefore, sex and sexuality are taking on different meanings now more than previously. However, discussions around sexual diversity are also conversations about power (Weeks, 1986). “Every culture has to establish – through both formal and informal political processes – the range and scope of the diversities that will be outlawed or banned. No culture could function with a sexual free-for-all, but the pattern of these constraints is exceedingly variable across time and space”

(Plummer, 1984, p. 219). This diversification of “sexual meanings has accentuated the problem of how to regulate and control sexuality” (Weeks, 1986, p. 105).

As the stories of sex and sexuality become more complicated and potentially controversial, many educators rely on a scientific approach in order to depoliticize sexual health. Overwhelmingly, in North America, science is understood as “directly reflecting the truths in nature, as being objective and value neutral, and therefore above reproach” (Letts, 1999, p. 97). Science and nature become synonymous, in part as a result of how persistently science is used to explain nature (Lancaster, 2003). Moreover, since science is framed as objective, its version of nature is rendered as legitimate. Given its legitimacy, many view science as able to objectively address contentious issues. At the same time, “The ‘science of sex’, like every other science, is enmeshed in the web of social relations”, which is possibly why it has been deployed on many sides of various polemical arguments over the decades (Weeks, 1986, p. 119). Enacting a scientific story in order to ‘tell’ sex is one way of re/producing hierarchies that participate in regulating and controlling sex and sexuality.

Teaching sexual health, especially in schools, can be controversial since it has the potential to include conversations about sex, sexuality, masturbation, and other themes that many adults prefer to keep outside of classrooms (Epstein et al., 2003). As a result, frequently sexual health educators focus on the ‘facts’ of sexual health. Rather than delving into the more controversial issues, educators elaborate on the ‘scientific’ aspects of puberty and reproduction in order to teach sexual health from an ‘objective’ standpoint. Diorio (2006) discusses this trend:

Puberty is a common topic in school teaching about personal development, health, and sexuality. Puberty readily has been incorporated into the curriculum because it is seen as safe and significant. It is a safe subject for teaching because it is assumed to be scientifically defined apart from social contestation; it is significant because of its apparent universality (p. 105).

By emphasizing processes that are understood to be exclusively scientific, rather than social, educators in effect desexualize sexual health. In general, the interest in desexualizing schools stems from discourses on the non-sexual child which frame kids as innocent and vulnerable (Epstein and Johnson, 1994, p. 217). Many educators (not to mention parents/guardians, politicians, and the media) are committed to ensuring that kids' innocence is protected by not exposing them to sexual themes too early (Epstein et al., 2003).

The Non-Sexual Child

Kids are not inherently sexually innocent, and they have not always been positioned as non-sexual. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault examined the processes by which children became framed this way. When "population" emerged as a political and economic issue in the eighteenth century, sex was brought into the public sphere. "Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it" (Foucault, 1976, p. 26). Children's sex was not exempt from this process. Foucault (1976) argues, "things were said in a different way; it was different people who said them, from different points of view, and in order to obtain different results" (p. 27). Far from imposing silence on the issue of children's sex, the way 'truths' were produced was transformed. "There is no binary division to

be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case" (Foucault, 1976, p. 27). The questions become 'who positions kids as non-sexual?' and 'what discourses do they employ to construct that version of the story?'

In her study on the historical construction of childhood over the past century, Christine Piper concluded that innocence, historically, has been associated with lack of sexual knowledge (Piper, 2000, p. 32). Children were constructed as innocent in opposition to more knowledgeable and experienced adults. Piper (2000) argues, "What is still apparently authoritative is an image of childhood...which has no conceptual 'room' for a child whose sexual activity is, to a lesser or greater extent, self-willed" (p. 40). Drawing on Piper's work, Emma Renold (2006), writing more recently, states, "The 'child' and 'sex/uality' not only continue to be presented as oppositional and incompatible, but unthinkable when it comes to children of primary school age (4-11) years old" (p. 490). This construction marks sexual health education as controversial, for educators intend to provide kids with sexual knowledge, in direct opposition to the assertion of their innocence. Girls are considered more vulnerable to the perils of sexual knowledge (Epstein et al., 2003; Kehily, 2002; Piper, 2000, 39). The different ways in which burgeoning sexuality is understood and validated work to establish different expectations and, in response, different safeguards for boys and girls. It is possible that these constructions

affected the gendered response to invitations to participate in my study, for it is considered more acceptable for boys to talk about sexual topics than girls.

The Hidden Curriculum

Despite aims to preserve the innocence of children, schools regularly perpetuate a (hetero)sexual curriculum (Bickmore, 1999; Epstein et al., 2003; Kehily, 2002; Letts, 1999; Renold, 2006). The everyday school structures and routines participate in positioning certain subjectivities and bodies as visible and acceptable while relegating others to the less visible, more vulnerable margins (Kehily, 2002). “At its most general level, there is a presumption of heterosexuality which is encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life” (Epstein and Johnson, 1994, p. 198). Scholars have deemed this implicit learning the ‘hidden curriculum’ (Atkinson, 2002; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Epstein, 1997; Kehily, 2002). Many have researched the potential, unanticipated effects of the hidden curriculum with respect to gender and sexuality (Atkinson, 2002; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Epstein, 1997; Kehily, 2002; Letts, 1999). They concur that long before educators claim to incorporate sex and sexuality into their curriculum, learning is laden with an underlying assumption of the naturalness of heterosexuality (Atkinson, 2002; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Epstein, 1997; Kehily, 2002; Letts, 1999). Part of the power of the hidden curriculum is that this heteronormativity⁸ underlies and encompasses all learning in schools. Furthermore, these heterosexist undertones

⁸ When I refer to heteronormativity, I am referring to an institutionalized system of power.

persist despite explicit attempts to desexualize the curriculum and the environment for students.

One of the ways scholars have researched the hidden curriculum is through studies on gendered childhoods. For example, Davies (1993) examined the ways gendered subjectivities are discursively produced during primary school by conducting a narrative-based study using focus group discussions, reading, and story writing with kids in three different primary schools. She analyzes the tensions in their conversations, how they positioned themselves in relation to each other, and used story to access processes of meaning making. Davies examines how gendered representations tend to invoke heterosexuality: “Heterosexuality is continually constructed in the children’s talk as they separate and heighten the difference between themselves as male and female” (1993, p. 123). In constructing gendered childhoods that reify a male/female dichotomy, the kids also participated in re/producing heteronormativity. As Judith Butler (1990) notes, “The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality” (p. 30). Heterosexuality is a system that relies upon and assumes the binary gender.

Examining the presence and impact of heterosexism in the hidden curriculum of sexual health is a separate project. Desexualization is a complicated task for sexual health education since such education covers topics that are explicitly sexual. It directly threatens the image of the non-sexual child by proposing to increase their sexual knowledge, an activity that is antithetical to the standardized construction of childhood. In order to mediate that conflict, educators

attempt to de-sexualize sexual knowledge by instead emphasizing the biology or 'science' of sex. Researching in the British context, Epstein and Johnson (1994) argue:

In most cases...sex education is not about sexuality at all. It focuses on certain biological, procreative functions (and their 'plumbing') and on sex as danger, a constraint reinforced in the National Curriculum (p. 217).

Similar to Diorio, they note that kids learn biology and reproduction as if those are scientific facts that do not implicate sex and sexuality. In the context of sexual health, positioning kids as non-sexual is especially important and difficult due to the immediacy of the threat of sexuality and the ineluctability of certain sexual topics. This is where my research begins: I argue that a scientific discourse is deployed to 'hide' the implicit, value-laden messages re/produced by the hidden curriculum.

Methods

Research Question

As mentioned above, I initially entered the field with a broad research question; however, following my first round of interviews, I considerably narrowed my focus. Originally, I asked how young people's understandings of sex, sexuality, their bodies, and relationships are affected by a program that intentionally strives to be inclusive of non-heterosexuals. Drawing on the data I generated in the first round of interviews and my observations during the workshops, I directed my attention to a related but more focused question: how is the naturalness of heterosexuality simultaneously reproduced and challenged during the SHEC educator-led workshops at Eastside Elementary School? To pursue my research questions, I attended Shauna and Jane's three sexual health workshops as an observer and

conducted two rounds of friendship pair interviews with six boys from Ramona's grade 5/6/7 class.

In this section, I discuss my decision to pursue qualitative methods for this project and why those methods best fit the objectives of the study, including how my queer and feminist lens shaped these objectives. Next I explain why I chose to conduct observations in the classroom and interviews in friendship pairs. I then examine the data that I generated and my process of analysis. Before I delve into these topics, I will first interrogate the ethics of conducting research with young people.

The Ethics of Research with Young People

Reflecting on ethics is integral to every step of the research process. Ensuring the ethics of research can be especially complicated when working with young people. As Loutzenheiser (2007) explains, "The idea of an ethical research would mean that power structures can be equalized or the researcher or the participant would be able to function as wholly conscious knowing actors who can be done with the process of interrogating position, subject/object, or binaries" (p. 12). Since working with young people necessarily entails a power imbalance based on age and other factors, conducting ethical research is already problematic. Though I do not fully share Loutzenheiser's views on the impossibility of ethical research with young people, I do acknowledge the many challenges she broaches. Below I address the specific obstacles to conducting ethical research with young people and draw upon the guiding principles Gesa Kirsch provides in *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research* to suggest a practical approach.

Loutzenheiser (2007) begins by recognizing the lack of research that explicitly concentrates on students' perceptions and that understands that young people can articulate their own experiences (p. 5). I intentionally designed my study so that the kids' experiences of sexual health would be the focus of the research. I did not pursue interviews with any of the adults involved in the sexual health workshops in order to further prioritize the boys' perspectives. This objective was crucial, for conducting interviews is only the first step. Qualitative researchers view their participants as experts; however, there is a tendency for adults to discount the opinions of young people (Loutzenheiser, 2007). Therefore, when working with young people, it is important to remember that "listening to students or young people requires an additional step of acknowledging that they have something to say and are able to build theories about their lives" (Loutzenheiser, 2007, p. 6). By creating space for the boys to discuss their experience of the workshops, I was signaling that the boys are capable of articulating their own perspectives. I relied upon the ways the boys explained their understanding rather than privileging the educators' stated intentions with the lessons or my own conclusions drawn from my observations of them.

Recognizing young people's agency and capacity to speak their own experience is the foundation of an ethical research project, but it does not ensure it. Kirsch develops several principles for ethical research, including some that reflect the language and goals of Institutional Review Boards, such as: "avoid inflicting harm; avoid invading privacy or violating confidentiality; avoid embarrassing or otherwise stigmatizing participants in ways not covered by federal laws and

regulations” (Kirsch, 1999, p. 90). However, attention to ethics necessitates reflexivity and critical work beyond the stated requirements of IRBs. Kirsch (1999) takes up the challenge of creating a feminist ethics – ethics that are not only the result of IRBs, but instead are created through the process of interrogating “the related problems of interpretation and representation as they concern ‘others’” (p. ix). Salient among the principles Kirsch discusses are the need to foster self-reflexivity, goals that benefit the participants, and collaboration.

Critical self-reflexivity, a cornerstone of queer and feminist studies, is fundamental to ethical research. Kirsch often discusses the importance of reflexivity. According to Kirsch, one integral component of reflexive research is to interrogate the impact of our research on those we are researching. “That is, researchers need to take into account the effects of their research on participants, on public discourse, and on policymakers” (Kirsch, 1999, p. x). In this way, reflexivity is necessarily linked with the goals and results of the research. As Kirsch (1999) notes:

To be sure, situating ourselves in our writing is an important step in rethinking traditional research procedures, but researchers also need to change the fundamental nature of research processes, making them more reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and beneficial for participants (p. 83).

As I discussed in the introduction, my location as a former sexual health educator inspired my initial interest in this project. By reflexively examining my position as a graduate student researcher and sexual health educator, I was able to approach my research with both theoretical and practical aims. Concerning the latter, I am invested in curricular development for sexual health that better corresponds with

the ways that kids are actually learning about sex and sexuality. To attend to this objective, I practiced collaborative research, the last principle I will discuss.

Working collaboratively is a common feminist ideal aimed at destabilizing some of the researcher-participant hierarchies as well as actively practicing the belief that participants are the experts of their experience. I pursued my research collaboratively in several ways. First, I met with Ramona and Shauna prior to the workshops in order to discuss their goals in relation to the needs of the students and how my research interests could work with what they were envisioning. Shauna and Jane were both near the end of their certification training and keen to receive feedback, especially from a former sexual health educator. Likewise, Ramona is a teacher who values sexual health and was interested in understanding how her students were making meanings during these classes. I have planned to give a presentation of my findings to them after completing this thesis.

Fostering a collaborative research space with the boys was also important to me, though it was a bit more difficult, for they were not participating in the same way as the adults. I asked the boys to assent to the research in addition to obtaining consent from their parents and guardians, which provided them the opportunity to decide on their participation. I also had conversations with all of the boys about what a thesis is and how sitting in their class taking notes and interviewing them was helping me write my thesis. Moreover, I made plans with each friendship pair to return to the school once I finished my analysis and began writing, at which point I could discuss what I was writing about, how I was thinking about using their interviews, and invite them to raise issues and ask questions. Lastly, I asked the

boys to choose their own code names. Pseudonyms are standard for ensuring confidentiality. However, by allowing the boys to create their own names, I was providing an opportunity for them to name themselves in a way that they cared about. Overwhelmingly the boys chose names that I would not have picked for them. When I checked in with them about their names during the second round, they were all still excited about their selection. That excitement signifies another way that the boys ensured their participation, and opens the possibility that they might recognize and reflect on themselves in the research some day.

While conducting ethical research with young people does pose specific challenges, I have found that one of the best ways to address those issues is to value the agency of the kids. By approaching the research with the understanding that the boys are capable of speaking their experience in the same way as adults, I was able to create a study based upon the ethical principles that I believe contribute to rigorous qualitative research.

Qualitative Research: A Focus on Meaning Making

Research on sexual health education with young people predominantly focuses on 'behavioural outcomes'. These studies measure patterns over times such as rates of STIs, pregnancy, and condom use (Bourton, 2006; Ingham, 2005; Ross, 2008; Smylie et al, 2008; Wackett and Evans, 2000). While these types of studies are critical for compiling data regarding frequency and scope of certain sexual activities, their strict focus on quantifiable outcomes neglects a consideration of young people's comprehension and perception of sexual health programs. By focusing solely on value-laden behaviours, researchers imply that for young people,

the imperative learning regarding sex and sexuality revolves around information that facilitates 'responsible' behaviours or decreased sexual activity. In this regard, these studies are *not* interested in the way young people think, feel, or understand sexual health.

Qualitative research shifts the focus to the participant's understanding and their processes of meaning making. "Qualitative research methods are powerful because...they allow the studied people to define what is central and important in *their* experience" (Van den Hoonaard, 2012, p. 2, emphasis in original). In this study, my emphasis is on the ways the boys re/produced and challenged discourses the sexual health educators articulated during the workshops. In order to access this type of information, I needed to engage with the young boys. According to Given (2008), "qualitative approaches are typically used to explore new phenomena and to capture individuals' thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of meanings and processes" (p. xxix). Qualitative methods are best suited for exploring meaning and gaining a deeper understanding of an issue (Van den Hoonaard, 2012, p. 3). In qualitative research, the participants are the experts. Since my aim was to work with the boys to understand their process of meaning making, I decided that qualitative methods would best suit my project.

Qualitative Research and Queer, Feminist Theory

My interest in qualitative methods is based in my theoretical framework. As a queer and feminist researcher, I approach my work informed by and questioning certain principles and ideas. In using the word queer here, I wish to draw upon Lisa Loutzenheiser's writings on the topic. Loutzenheiser (2007) explains "*Queer* not

only denotes a rejection of the fixed identity constructions of gay, straight, bisexual, or transgendered, it also calls into question the normativism of heterosexual” (p. 111, emphasis in original). Quoting Gamson, she continues “*Queer*, then, is defined by its very deviation from norms of sex and gender and ‘is always in flux; queer theory and queer studies proposes a focus not so much on specific populations as on sexual categorization processes and their deconstruction’ ” (Loutzenheiser, 2007, p. 111, emphasis in original). Queering my research means that I seek to explain how heterosexuality is constituted as naturalized and normalized. I focus on the processes of construction of subjectivities and binaries rather than what could be seen as ‘end results’, questioning the idea that we ever finish constructing identities. For this reason, I employ a poststructuralist analysis.

Queer studies and feminism influence every aspect of my work, from the formulation of my research question to the way that I conduct interviews with my participants to my understanding of ethics and my responsibility to the people that I work with during my study. Moreover, my position as a queer and a feminist researcher shapes my work in many overlapping ways. Importantly, both feminist and queer studies are invested in deconstructing naturalized binaries and identities. For both, there is often an emphasis on research that extends beyond the academy. Davies (1993) explains that “Central to any feminist deconstruction is an excitement about discovering the very mainsprings of power that have held women and other marginalized groups in place...to know how oppression is achieved is the essential first step to knowing how to change it” (p. 8). Davies focused on the discursive construction of a naturalized gender binary. As I will discuss below, I used a

poststructuralist discourse analysis to examine this effect with the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Since any analysis of heterosexuality presupposes a discussion of gender, I also incorporate an interrogation of the ways the educators and the boys participated in re/producing and challenging a boy/girl binary.

Observation and Friendship Pair Interviews

Within qualitative studies, there are multiple methods with which to work. For my project, I elected observation and interviews for several reasons. My research question focuses on both the discourses enacted by the instructors during their lessons as well as on how the boys made sense of those discourses when discussing their experiences of the workshops. As such, I needed to be present in the class in order to observe the instructors' behaviour and use of language as they taught as well as to create a space to talk with the boys afterwards.

Our interviews were highly contextualized events. We were discussing the specific sexual health workshops that the boys had just participated in, we were in a classroom in their school, and my questions often referenced specific moments from the workshops. "The processes through which subjectivities are constituted are imbricated, not only in ways of speaking and ways of making meaning, but also in the contexts and relations in which particular acts of speaking take place" (Davies, 1993, p. 9). Combining observation with interviews allowed me to contextualize the discourses the boys referenced when making sense of the material.

The workshops were held every Wednesday afternoon from 1:30-3pm for three consecutive weeks in November 2012. I sat at a table behind a couch of boys, taking notes. Observation is "best used when the researcher wants to see what is

happening...[it] can help demystify what is actually going on as opposed to what one might hope or assume is happening” (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 129). I was specifically interested in the students’ reactions to the material and the instructor’s linguistic presentation of the information. By being present during the sessions, I was also able gather data which informed my interview guides.

I conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews in friendship pairs with six boys. The first round was held during the two days following the second workshop – the last workshop in which the instructors presented information. The second round took place two months after the workshops. In the second round, I was able to validate the boys’ responses from the first interviews and probe deeper into areas that became significant during analysis of the initial interviews. More specifically, I was able to pursue the narrower version of my research question. Interviews are a popular qualitative method of research. They “allow people to explain their experiences, attitudes, feelings, and definitions in their own terms and in ways that are meaningful to them” (Van den Hoonaard, 2012, p. 78). Semi-structured interviews, specifically, allow for flexibility while providing a thematic guide to the conversation (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p. 124). Since I had topics of interest that I wanted to discuss, which had mostly emerged from the workshops, but wanted to leave space for the boys to provide their own language and take the lead, semi-structured interviews were the best fit for my project.

As mentioned, I conducted interviews in friendship pairs. This format is a specific type of group interview that is well suited to research with young people. Since there is always a power imbalance stemming at least from the age difference

between research and participants in studies with young people, researchers need to be aware of how their presence as adults impacts the generation of data. Creating a context wherein there are two young people and one researcher is a way to partially address the issue of this imbalance. Thus, interviewing in friendship pairs can facilitate a sense of ease in an unfamiliar setting. While promoting a sense of safety in an interview is certainly a benefit, it is also important for a researcher to be wary of their potential impact on participants. When participants feel comfortable, they may be more likely to divulge information they would not be apt to share otherwise. For this reason, I was always clear about my role as a researcher, especially given my 'youthful' appearance.

One of my main reasons for pursuing friendship pair interviews is that they allow for the co-construction of data (Currie and Kelly, 2012). The interactions between the boys became a critical part of the data. Importantly, the different pairs generated data that reflected varying levels of co-construction, partially due to the distinct types of friendship shared by the boys involved. Due to the structure of the interview, they had the space and flexibility to disagree, collaborate, change their minds, and influence the trajectory of the interview (Currie and Kelly, 2012). Related to this point, interviews in friendship pairs can also yield illuminating data on the shared process of meaning construction. As my aim is to examine how students construct meaning, it was necessary to gather data that permit this level of analysis.

There are several unique challenges to group interviews. Since the interview extends beyond just the researcher and participant, confidentiality becomes a risk,

especially given the age of the participants (Currie and Kelly, 2012). However, I concentrated on topics that one would expect to be discussed in peer-to-peer conversations after a sexual health class. That way a breach of confidentiality would not pose a serious threat to the confidentiality of the boys.

Perhaps the most obvious obstacle is transcription. Transcribing a group interview involves disentangling voices and is a far more complicated process than transcribing a one-on-one interview (Currie and Kelly, 2012). The boys, especially the pairs of good friends, talked over and interrupted each other regularly. These tendencies were only exaggerated when they became excited about what we were discussing. Their ways of conversing with each other and with me became part of the data. As such, the benefits of interviewing in friendship pairs, including the flexibility and access to co-construction of meaning, outweigh the challenges.

Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis

Upon leaving the field, I had two sets of interviews for each friendship pair, fieldnotes from the workshops, the educators' lesson plans for the first two classes, and the Ministry of Education's Guidelines for Health and Career Education. I received Shauna and Jane's lesson plans a few weeks after the workshops were over. I was able to use them to note the ways Shauna and Jane were intending on leading the classes and to make their learning objectives explicit.

After transcribing all of my interviews, I analyzed the lesson plans, the Ministry's guidelines, and my fieldnotes for the presence of discourses that the educators drew on to structure the workshop. Two principal discourses emerged as significant: a 'gay is okay' discourse and a scientific discourse. I had immediately

noted the presence of a scientific discourse when I was observing the second workshop; however, the importance of the 'gay is okay' discourse did not become apparent until my analysis of the first interviews. After highlighting these two discourses, I analyzed the interview data, noting where the boys took up and deviated from them. I employed a poststructuralist analysis because "it enables us to see the possible worlds that the text constitutes" (Davies, 1993, p. 14). I analyzed the texts the educators were explicitly working from to develop and lead their lessons as well as the texts I generated from my observations of the workshops and interviews with the boys.

Given my commitment to poststructuralist feminism, I analyzed my data for the various discourses articulated by the educators and the ways the boys' processes of meaning making both re/produced and challenged those discourses, noting the tensions. In both rounds of our interviews, the boys often held multiple views simultaneously and engaged with these two discourses, which almost never ran parallel, in a variety of complicated ways. Since poststructuralism makes visible discursive tensions, this form of analysis allowed me to focus on disjunctures while examining how the educators' dual emphasis on a 'gay is okay' discourse and a scientific discourse influenced the boys' construction of the heterosexual/homosexual binary as well as the boy/girl binary.

A Brief Preview of My Thesis

Diorio (2006) argues "there appears to be no research on the effects which teaching about puberty may have on homophobic attitudes and behaviours on the part of young people..." (p. 106). In my study, I investigate some of these effects in

regard to school-age boys by analyzing the stories of sexual health that both the educators and the boys developed with a focus on their construction of a heterosexual/homosexual binary. This study has implications for the ways we teach sexual health education to kids, especially concerning the use of 'science' as an objective approach and our current mechanisms for encouraging tolerance. In the following chapter, I examine how Shauna and Jane constructed their story of sexual health. In Chapter Three, I focus on the ways the boys both took up and deviated from the educators' discourses in the process of discussing anatomy and explaining erections. Finally, in Chapter Four, I examine the ways the boys both re/produced and challenged the educators' discourses when establishing a heterosexual/homosexual binary.

Chapter Two: The Educators' Story of Sexual Health

[Sexual health] seems just to be, like, a subject that people just don't talk about, I don't know why. They just don't. It's kind of weird, in a way, but it just doesn't get talked about really.

Emuman

Second Interview, January 30, 2013

Introduction

In this chapter, I make visible the story the educators constructed in order to teach sexual health, with particular focus on the 'gay is okay' discourse and scientific discourse. I examine how Shauna and Jane created their story of sexual health by describing both what they decided to incorporate as well as the aspects they refrained from developing. Rather than understanding their silences as fixed boundaries demarcating the extent of learning, I propose that these silences also communicated meanings. As Foucault (1976) notes,

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies...There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (p. 27).

In determining what topics to cover and how to frame them, the educators articulated a particular version of sexual health. All the workshops engaged with themes related to heterosexuality and homosexuality; however, neither term was explicitly mentioned. This omission constitutes one of the significant limits they constructed. The educators alluded to homosexuality frequently through indirect references to homosexual/homosocial behaviour and gender non-conformity, while heterosexuality operated as an invisible, naturalized and always already accepted

norm. Shauna and Jane also implicitly constructed the boundaries of their story through the organization of the lessons. Almost all of the topics related to homosexuality were contained within the first workshop, which focused on values. On the other hand, the educators principally discussed heterosexuality during the second workshop, which covered puberty and reproduction. In the first workshop, Shauna and Jane placed a significant focus on establishing the value 'gay is okay'. However, they did not discuss heterosocial behaviour in the same way. In so actively striving to depict gay as okay, the educators ended up also depicting gay as a requiring this kind of acceptance. Conversely, they framed heterosexuality as already acceptable in a way that was not as explicit. The delineation of their workshops contributed to their framing of heterosexuality as naturalized/normalized and homosexuality as socialized/differentiated.

In this chapter, I examine the three workshops, describing how Shauna and Jane presented the material in each and the ways they consistently privileged a 'gay is okay' discourse in the first workshop and a scientific discourse in the second and third. I develop this discussion around an examination of how they simultaneously challenged and reified the heterosexual/homosexual and boy/girl binaries in how they presented science as the legitimate story of sexual health. Since my research question hinged on the impact of a progressive sexual health organization, I first situate Shauna and Jane within this type of organization by examining how Opt constructs a progressive image of sexual health education.

The Construction of a Progressive Image

The *Canadian Guidelines on Sexual Health* (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008) published by the Public Health Agency of Canada establish the baseline codes for sexual health instruction across the country. According to the *Guidelines* “Sexual health education is the process of equipping individuals, couples, families, and communities with information, motivation, and behavioural skills needed to enhance sexual health and avoid negative sexual health outcomes” (p. 9). The Public Health Agency concurrently stresses the encouragement of ‘healthy’ behaviours and the reduction of ‘unsafe’ practices. As such, the priorities of the Public Health Agency, as expressed through the *Guidelines*, are consistent with the Information, Motivation, and Behavioural (IMB) Model, which is the most widely incorporated theoretical framework in sexual health education in Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p. 34). Additionally, in British Columbia, the Ministry of Education publishes its own guidelines for every subject and every grade in the form of Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs). Health and Career Education encompasses sexual health in BC, and the PLOs reflect the mandates of the Public Health Agency.

Options for Sexual Health BC (Opt) is a non-profit provider of sexual health services established in 1961 in British Columbia and Planned Parenthood’s largest Canadian affiliate (Options for Sexual Health BC, 2012). They have three main services: clinics, a confidential 1-800 line for sex-related questions, and sexual health education programs, all of which are required to operate within the general parameters set by the *Guidelines*. While Opts’ educators create their own lessons

based on their own understandings of sexual health, they are not permitted to teach 'beyond' the Ministry's mandates.

Opt employs several educators who work for them, including the educators they train through their certification program SHEC (Sexual Health Education Certification). Schools and other organizations can book these educators to lead workshops for \$150/hour. The question is, why would schools choose to pay an Opt educator \$150/hour to lead a workshop instead of teaching a sexual health class for free based on the PLOs established by the Ministry and the Public Health Agency?

Opt sets themselves apart by presenting a progressive image. This image likewise extends to their certification program. Though Opt never explicitly labels themselves as an alternative or progressive organization, they consistently imply this attitude through the description of their objectives and services. For instance, according to their website, Opt aims "To provide comprehensive education, accurate information, support for *sexual expression* and *reproductive choice*, and confidential clinical services that help British Columbians enjoy healthy sexuality throughout life" (Options for Sexual Health BC, 2012, emphasis added). Furthermore, "Options for Sexual Health envisions a society that celebrates healthy sexuality, its *diversity of expression*, and a positive sexual self-image for individuals throughout life" (Options for Sexual Health BC, 2012, emphasis added). Therefore, they designate themselves as progressive by embracing a sex-positive discourse. Options for Sexual Health BC emphasizes the importance of such sex-positive and progressive ideals as diversity, sexual self-images, sexual expression, reproductive choice, and healthy sexuality. While they do not directly claim to be progressive or alternative, their ideals deviate

in important ways from the standard IMB model. Originally developed by Fisher and Fisher in 1992 (Bazargan et al., 2008), the IMB model “focuses comprehensively on the set of informational, motivational, and behavioral skill factors that are conceptually and empirically associated with the performance of sex-related problem-prevention and wellness-promotion behaviors” (Barak and Fisher, 2001, p. 327). Instead of explaining sexual health as part problem prevention and part ‘healthy’ behaviour promotion, Opt prefers a holistic approach. Through the services they provide (low-cost clinics, birth control counseling, a confidential information line, all ages sexual health education) and the language they choose to describe themselves, Opt establishes their organization as progressive.

Opt developed the SHEC program based on their mission and its ideals reflect their own. For example, prior to enrolling in SHEC, prospective educators have to attend a CAVE/SAR (Comfort, Attitude, and Values Evaluation/Sexual Attitudes Reassessment). Opt runs these multi-day events on the assumption that “becoming aware of their values, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings, participants become increasingly comfortable with a wide variation of sexual attitudes, behaviours, and practices” (Options for Sexual Health BC, 2012). Requiring attendance at this event, which highlights sexual diversity and open discussion of sexual topics, is another way that Opt establishes themselves as a sex-positive organization. Thus, through their interactions with the certification program, they are further able to construct a progressive image of sexual health education.

Shauna and Jane built their own lessons, working from the PLOs developed by the Ministry of Education and the manuals they received during their training

from Opt. The Ministry's curriculum planning is broken down into two columns: one side lists the prescribed learning outcomes and the other side provides a checklist for "suggested achievement indicators" (Ministry of Education BC). For grades 5/6/7, the main topics are puberty, healthy relationships, communicable diseases, peer pressure, and reproduction (Ministry of Education BC). More specifically, the Ministry underscores the following themes: the notion of 'healthy', as it relates to relationships and individuals; identifying, categorizing people and behaviours according to gender, and ultimately normalizing the changes associated with puberty; gendered reproductive systems and their role in conception; risk reduction as it relates to certain communicable diseases (such as HIV); and bullying – how it's illegal and context-dependent methods for coping with it (Ministry of Education BC).

The Workshops

Shauna and Jane designed lessons that incorporated the sex-positive attitude of Opt without going beyond the Ministry's PLOs. They approached all the workshops with an affirming mindset. They were cheerful, they talked about how cool the body is, and they encouraged the kids to join them in their enthusiasm over sexual health. Shauna and Jane conducted three workshops in Ramona's class, spreading their main content out over the first two. In the first workshop, they introduced ideas and organized exercises regarding friendships and values; while in the second, they covered puberty and reproduction. Shauna and Jane left the third workshop for a review, which they handled in the form of a jeopardy game and time for questions. For each lesson, they developed their own PLOs, culled from the multiple ones provided by the Ministry of Education.

The First Workshop: Gay is Okay

Before the first workshop, Ramona, Shauna, and I met at Eastside Elementary to discuss what type of lessons would best suit the needs of Ramona's students. Given the age of the kids, Ramona and Shauna agreed that it made sense to concentrate on topics like decision-making and friendship before addressing puberty and reproduction.

In their lesson plan for the first workshop, which they labeled 'Decision Making and Gender Identity', Shauna and Jane highlighted three of the PLOs from the Ministry of Education's guidelines. They were:

Assess their own interpersonal skills as they apply to building and maintaining positive relationships with family and friends...Assess the influence that peers have on individuals' attitudes and behaviour...Identify characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships (Shauna and Jane's lesson plan and Ministry of Education BC).

Based on these PLOs, Shauna and Jane structured the first workshop to facilitate a conversation on the kind of values that promote healthy friendships. Their aim was for the students to leave with an understanding of their core values, the impact of those values on their decision-making and their friendships, and the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships (Shauna and Jane's lesson plan). Key to this lesson was their encouragement of a positive view toward homosociality and gender non-conformity. However, rather than emphasizing homosociality in order to deactivate the homosexual potential in same-gender interactions, Shauna and Jane used it as one of their proxies for discussing homosexuality. Through their focus on homosociality and gender non-conformity, they endorsed a discourse of 'gay is okay' in an attempt to present gay people as just like everyone else. They

articulated this discourse primarily through the examples they chose to highlight during activities, which I discuss below, and the way they challenged the kids to reflect on their attitudes toward gender non-conformity, homosociality, and homosexuality.

On the day of the first workshop, I was waiting with Shauna and Jane in the corner of the classroom while the students finished up their work. Ramona's classroom was brightly colored, and the walls were adorned with student artwork. A quarter of the room was slightly sequestered. Sectioned off by bookshelves and a couch, this corner had a fireplace, a whiteboard, a big notepad on an easel, and a carpet. The sexual health workshops took place in this corner of the room.

Shauna and Jane had just finished elaborating their first lesson that morning and were nervous to start. Ramona gathered the class together on the carpet in front of the whiteboard, and they began their introduction, which was brief and casual. They wanted this workshop to be highly interactive, so they were going to start with a values thermometer. In this type of activity, all of the students stand up in a group; one side of the classroom is labeled 'I agree' and the other 'I disagree'. Shauna and Jane read off statements and gave time for the kids to shuffle about the carpet. It was a silent activity. Ideally, it is meant to get everyone moving around a bit and give the educators a quick read on the class.

Shauna and Jane read six statements to the class, starting with ones that addressed vegetarianism, recycling, lying, and teasing. Their final two statements depicted homosocial and homosexual situations, though neither of these words appeared in their lesson plan. The first of these statements claimed: it is okay for

girls to hand hold with girls and for boys to hand hold with boys. The entire class stepped over to the 'I agree' side of the carpet. While they rearranged, Shauna and Jane called on different kids to explain their decisions. The kids unanimously agreed that it was okay for girls and girls and boys and boys to hold hands; however, many qualified their acceptance by projecting into the future or situating it within a certain age group. Several kids confessed that they *wished* same-gender hand holding was okay, implying that the reality was more complicated than they could demonstrate by separating into I agree/I disagree. A few kids added that it was okay for little kids, indicating that, as they got older, the meanings of same-gender hand holding shifted. They explained that when they were little, kids held hands with their friends to make sure they didn't lose each other. Now that they were older, though, holding hands was imbued with less practical and seemingly less innocuous meanings. Furthermore, one boy made the point that it was okay for boys to hold hands with their dads and their siblings. Though Shauna and Jane may have intended to challenge the students to reflect on their feelings and thoughts regarding homosexual behaviour, his comment underscored how the same gesture could be understood homosocially, homosexually, or even familially, depending on the intention and people involved.

While their first statement suggested homosexual behaviour, handholding can also be viewed as a homosocial activity. Their last statement was more explicitly homosexual: it is okay for a man to marry another man. Though they did not reference any sexual acts, marriage is commonly understood as a union between sexual partners. Again, the entire class agreed; however, there was more hesitation

this time. Religion was raised as the main source of tension. One boy explained that he was Catholic and Catholicism does not permit gay marriage, but he believed that it should be okay. His acceptance was thus couched in his choice to deviate from the religious instruction of his church. In unpacking this statement, Shauna and Jane challenged the kids to consider how they would respond if they were their grandparents. Everyone except for one or two kids crossed over to the other side of the carpet.

Shauna and Jane seized on the stark difference in the ways the kids responded as themselves versus their grandparents to discuss how rules change over time and how we can change how we feel over time as well. They used this point about shifting values as the foundation for the rest of the workshop, which emphasized the importance of values in 'healthy/unhealthy' relationships. While the possibility of values shifting over time challenged the naturalization of dominant discourses and opened up space for non-conforming opinions, it also placed acceptance of homosexuals and homosexual behaviour in a precarious position. If attitudes toward homosexual people were so different when the kids' grandparents were their age, what prevents another shift in values from taking place? The other side of an argument that seeks to convince kids that there is nothing inherently 'wrong' with homosexuality is the idea that there is also nothing inherently 'not wrong' with it. Later in this chapter, I will contrast this depiction of homosexuality with the educators' construction of heterosexuality as unchanging.

The educators used the values thermometer activity to introduce the entire concept of values. From there, they moved into a brainstorm of where values come

from and what shapes them. They handed out cards with different values on them to the kids. The board was divided into a chart: healthy/unhealthy. The kids were instructed to place their cards where they thought they belonged. Instead of upholding a strict dichotomy, the educators worked with the kids to examine the ways certain values could be part of a healthy or an unhealthy relationship, depending on context and intention. For instance, one of the kids challenged the statement: one person tries to change the other person. They argued that if you were attempting to educate your friend about something, then it wasn't unhealthy – it was a positive aspect of your friendship. Shauna and Jane affirmed the kids' engagement in breaking down the binary of healthy/unhealthy by telling them how well they were doing in critically thinking about these questions.

I was struck during this activity at the way the students participated in challenging the categories of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy'. Throughout the discussion, they moved multiple values from their spots on either side of the board to the more nebulous area in the middle. The kids re-worked their ideas about humour, lies, fighting, and about situations where one person tries to change the other. Moreover, they added bossiness to the board, positioning it in the middle as well. This activity sparked debate among many of the kids. For instance, one kid argued that bossiness was similar to bullying and should be filed under 'unhealthy'. Another kid responded by asserting that someone could react bossily in order to dissuade a friend from "doing something bad"; therefore, it really could be a 'healthy' part of a friendship. Ultimately, the kids conceded that friendship was not clear-cut; they could not easily delineate positive and negative elements.

The last game of the first workshop was a two-part activity. The first part was silent. Shauna and Jane instructed the kids to close and cover their eyes. They read off six questions and wanted everyone to think of their best friend and raise their hand if they would still be friends with that person if they did the following things. The kids made a big show of covering their eyes, sometimes putting their entire heads inside their shirts. This time only two examples did not imply homosexuality, which the educators accessed through gender transgressive behaviour. Their first two questions were: 1) would you still be friends with your friend if they stole and 2) if they picked on someone. These were the two that received the most tepid responses. For stealing, only a couple kids responded that they would. For the latter, there were several kids with hands up, but they were shaking their hands, signaling uncertainty.

The other four questions all implied, or could have depending on the gender of the friend, gender non-conformity, which became conflated with homosexuality. The educators asked about friends taking dance lessons, cutting their hair off, only hanging out with boys, and only wearing dresses. Though it is entirely possible that the questions would not call forth scenarios relating gender non-conformity in general or to homosexuality in particular, they did highlight four often-referenced acts of gender transgressions among kids. For girls, cutting off all their hair and only hanging out with boys is usually associated with tomboyism, which is widely accepted in the pre-pubescent years. However, as tomboys 'mature', they are expected to transition into 'appropriate', heterosexual, cisgendered females. In a study on the space that sports may open up for tomboy-identified lesbian women,

Palzkill (1990) found that during puberty “It is conveyed to the girl either openly or subtly that she, as she is, is in complete contradiction to the concept of the female role in our society” (p. 223). If girls remain tomboys through puberty, their past behaviour can become re-interpreted as a marker of homosexuality or, more recently, trans identity.

Similarly, for boys, taking dance lessons and only wearing dresses can evoke the image of a ‘sissy’. Through her ethnographic study of gendered play during childhood, Barrie Thorne (1993) observed, “when applied to boys, ‘sissy’ conveys not only immaturity but also gender and sexual deviance. Kids use the term and its loose array of synonyms to label boys who seem effeminate in dress and mannerism, who avoid or perform poorly at sports, and/or who frequently play with girls” (p. 116). Being a sissy in pre-pubescent years is not as socially acceptable as being a tomboy, for it is considered more likely to signify “eminent adult homosexuality” (Sears, 1999, p. 9). Though dance lessons could refer to any number of kinds of dance, including masculine types, the statement left it open to interpretation. In her study on the uses of ‘fag’, Pascoe (2007) argued that one situation in which the fag epithet, which escalates from the sissy label, was not associated with dancing was when the dancers are African American. Black dancers are not considered to be fags (or sissies); instead, they are cool (Pascoe, 2007). In this regard, there was an unstated mark of whiteness in the way that Shauna and Jane introduced dancing into the questions, and in the way the students understood the reference.

Gender identity and sexuality are not the same; many people who identify as queer sexually present themselves as cisgendered. However, heterosexuality is a system that relies upon binary gender to function. Butler (1990) examines this relationship, arguing: “The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire” (p. 30). In her study of primary school-age kids’ gendered constructions of self, Renold (2006) adds to this argument: “to be a ‘real’ boy or girl would involve desiring or growing up to desire the opposite sex, such is the power of the heterosexual imaginary” (p. 493). Without two clearly defined and oppositional genders, heterosexuality would not be intelligible. Therefore, when the educators referenced gender transgressions, they were threatening the assumption of heterosexuality and signaling the specter of the sexual Other. Moreover, by alluding to gender non-conformity in order to cultivate a discussion on ‘gay is okay’ values, they were implicitly conflating gender and sexual identity. This conflation may ultimately distract kids from considering the possibility and intelligibility of non-dominant gender identities, perhaps subsuming such expressions into discourses on sexual identity.

The second part of the final activity addressed the same six questions that Shauna and Jane read for the silent-response part. They split the class up into small groups, and each group discussed reasons why they would and would not be friends with their best friend if they did what was indicated. Then the groups reported back to the rest of the class. While the kids were working in groups, I sat near the one that

was debating how they would feel if their best friend only wore dresses. In mainstream North American society, dresses are associated with femininity and would therefore evoke the image of a sissy for boys. There were three boys and one girl in this group. I later interviewed two of these boys – Milton and Black Jack. In the next chapter, I examine the discussions the boys had in class and in our interview about this topic, underscoring the tensions in the multiple views they simultaneously held. I juxtapose the layers of their self-presentations with the different audiences they had – each other, their teacher, the sexual health educators, and myself. Throughout their many presentations, they worked to establish legitimacy both as boys and as good students by concurrently emphasizing their heteromascularity and their acceptance of difference. This last value is akin to what the educators stressed during the workshop. They encouraged the kids to agree with same-gender handholding and marriage not because it's natural, but because believing that 'gay is okay' and accepting that gay people are just like everyone else is the right value to hold, especially for respectful kids at progressive Eastside Elementary.

The Second Workshop: Body Science

During the second workshop, Shauna and Jane immediately established their intention of privileging a scientific approach by introducing the lesson as “body science” and informing the kids that they were all “body scientists”. They constructed their story of sexual health primarily through their reliance on a scientific discourse and through their curricular choices. Since they decided to incorporate the topic of reproduction after they created the lesson, the only written

PLO for their second workshop was to “describe the physical changes that occur during puberty”, which was pulled directly from the Ministry of Education’s guidelines (Ministry of Education BC). Likewise, they followed the Ministry’s guidelines for describing the human reproductive system, which mandate instruction only on the role and function of gender-specific reproductive systems and conception (Ministry of Education BC).

In this section, I examine the educators’ story of sexual health as they told it in the second workshop, emphasizing the boundaries they erected through silences. Moreover, I make visible how the educators’ processes of telling this story both challenged and re/produced binary notions of a gendered childhood and adolescence while also contributing to the naturalization of heterosexuality.

When I arrived at the second workshop, Shauna and Jane were dividing the board into three sections: female body, all bodies, and male body. Shauna got to work drawing diagrams of male and female external and internal anatomy on chart paper. She flipped them over and taped them to the board. In the center under ‘all bodies’, she drew a blank, gender-neutral person in marker. Then most of the kids took seats on the carpet while several boys fought for spots on the couch before giving up and spreading out. I sat in the back of the class next to Leon the Lion at a small table behind the couch of boys.

Shauna and Jane began the workshop by justifying the necessity of co-ed sexual health classes based on a heterosexual assumption. They informed the kids that it would be best if they knew about the other gender’s body as they grew up, implying that there would be a point in their lives when they would have a different

kind of interest in that body. They then established a scientific discourse as the legitimate framework for discussing sexual health. As I mentioned, they introduced this lesson as body science, which they explained as what our bodies look like during puberty as they change into adult bodies. They primed the class to respond scientifically to their questions by positioning the students as body scientists. They reinforced their emphasis on the scientific discourse by reminding the kids to use their science words, referring to the kids throughout the workshop as body scientists, and congratulating them for performing that identity correctly.

The workshop consisted of an anatomy lesson, an activity examining gendered changes during puberty, and a discussion of (hetero)sexual reproduction. These processes were taught as scientific facts, divorced from social meaning. Diorio (2006) notes, "...students are encouraged to understand their bodily development in terms of this transition. Reproductive capability and, by implication, heterosexuality, become purposes rather than just frequent outcomes of bodily development. Students learn that heterosexuality is a natural component of a well-developed person" (p. 106). Their decision to focus on puberty and (hetero)sexual reproduction for this lesson reflected the ways that a scientific framework can shape the types of material viewed as appropriate for a sexual health class. Science is seen as tool for telling the objective story of sexual health; therefore, the stories that rely on a scientific discourse become privileged.

Shauna explained that they would begin with anatomy, which is our body parts, but that everyone's body was different and the pictures they were going to show did not represent what people are supposed to look like. Throughout the

workshop, they made a concerted effort to normalize different reactions to the material, different bodies, and different paths through puberty. Normalization was integral to their workshop; in fact, there was a note in their lesson plan that read: “Normalize EVERY change” (Shauna and Jane’s lesson plan). They were invested in affirming the kids’ experiences of puberty as “Healthy and normal” (Shauna and Jane’s lesson plan). Again, as Diorio (2006) argues, puberty is viewed as a universal experience and a scientific fact of human development. By normalizing the kids’ experiences of puberty, the educators were expanding the possible meanings of it. At the same time, they used the words ‘healthy’ and ‘normal’ to privilege experiences they had positioned as scientific.

In the first part of the class, Shauna and Jane instructed the kids to work together to label as many body parts as they could. Most had participated in sexual health education workshops the previous year, and many had attended one by Shauna, so they were often working from recall. Shauna and Jane encouraged the kids to use scientific terms, and they never mentioned any slang. The educators’ insistence on scientific language established an important limit in their story – that science is *the* way to speak about sexual health. For instance, when discussing bodies, they talked about genitalia, the os, the vas deferens, erections, and the testicles without mentioning words that the kids were more likely to have access to. When the students followed suit and answered their questions using these science words, they were rewarded. For example, breasts were the first body part the kids labeled. Jane commended them not only for accurately identifying breasts, but, importantly, for using the ‘appropriate’ term. She remarked, “[I’m] really glad you

are using your science words”, which she contrasted to “baby words” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012).

Shauna and Jane facilitated the lesson by labeling all the body parts the kids couldn’t remember. They started with the male body, identifying the scrotum, testicles, vas deferens, the urethra, the urethral opening, the bladder, and the anus. When they transitioned to discussing the female body, they prefaced it by remarking, “It’s a little bit more complicated [than the male body]” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). Shauna pointed to the vulva and asked the class for its name. When someone responded with vagina, Shauna reminded the kids that they were body scientists in explaining the common conflation of vulva and vagina. They went on to label the vaginal opening, the urethral opening, and the anus before the kids got stuck. The educators coached them through by admitting, “female genitals are harder” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). Through these comments, the educators admitted to the existence of a hierarchy between the female and male body. They positioned the female body as less accessible than the male and recognized, as well as affirmed, that we, as a society, are less comfortable discussing the female body. Ultimately, with much help from Shauna and Jane, the class succeeded in identifying the labia, the clitoris, the ovaries, the os, the fallopian tubes, and the uterus. When Shauna and Jane not only labeled the clitoris but explained to the class that it “has even more nerve endings than the entire penis in that one tiny spot”, they were participating in breaking some of the silence around desire that Michelle Fine exposed in her trailblazing 1988 article (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). Fine (2003) argued, “The authorized sexual discourses define

what is safe, what is taboo, and what will be silenced” (p. 53). In her work, Fine (2003) referenced sexual health education that neglected to celebrate female sexuality, examining how desire was silenced. However, while the educators used a scientific discourse to legitimate the clitoris as both important and powerful, they also mis-labeled the clitoris, identifying instead the clitoral head. This was a moment in which the scientific discourse worked to challenge the invisibility of female sexuality while also reifying it by misnaming the clitoris.

Shauna and Jane organized their puberty game by the same three categories of male body, female body, and all bodies. In their lesson plan, they described the activity: “Hand out cards with puberty changes to students [and] have students place cards in the proper category...Go through card piles and briefly correct any miscategorized cards” (Shauna and Jane’s lesson plan). They handed out cards to several volunteers, instructing them to place the card with the corresponding body. Once the kids had finished, Shauna and Jane began to go one card at a time through the three piles, explaining the change in more depth and re-locating ‘misplaced’ cards. Their objective for the activity was to teach the students to “be able to describe sex-specific and all-bodies physical changes associated with puberty” (Shauna and Jane’s lesson plan).

During this activity, they again strived to normalize what the kids may be going through by speaking of ranges of possibilities. These efforts worked to expand ideas around what is normal. Moreover, they participated in disrupting the intransigence of the gender binary by incorporating the all bodies category. This category signified that there was a lot uniting the kids as they went through puberty

and opposed representations that primarily depict puberty as solidifying gendered differences. In fact, most of the changes were stacked under or ultimately re-assigned to this category. By including the all bodies category, Shauna and Jane thus de-emphasized gendered differences. At the same time, they made a point to address specific 'misplaced' cards, which reinforced gendered ideas about certain aspects of puberty. Therefore, through this game of classifying and re-classifying, Shauna and Jane challenged the idea of gendered puberties while simultaneously gendering specific elements of it, such as erections.

Theories of gender intensification suggest that kids begin to understand their roles as tied to their gendered identities during puberty (Hill and Lynch, 1983). Shauna and Jane's workshop presented another option for kids. Their discussion, which in large part focused on the changes that all bodies go through, underscored similarities instead of cementing gendered identities. They talked to the kids about how body hair, sweat, voice changes, growth spurts, and emotional changes can be part of everyone's experience during the transition to adolescence. This approach constructed puberty as primarily a kid experience rather than a time that girls and boys embody distinctly. While going through this category and again normalizing ranges of possibilities, Jane picked up the erections card from the pile. One of the kids had placed it with all bodies. Jane started to explain that erections were not for all bodies, as I started scribbling in my notebook. Shauna noticed, and we made eye contact, which was not typical. During the workshops, I did my best to sit in back and not make my presence too explicit. After Shauna and I shared a look, she interrupted Jane and made a quick comment suggesting that women can also have

erections. In this moment, I wondered what impact my presence had on her decision to interject. In their lesson plan, erections are filed under male puberty changes. It was possible that when I turned to write after Jane's comment, Shauna felt scrutinized and re-worked their presentation of it on spot. She concluded by stating, erections "could go under all bodies, but we're going to talk about it specifically with males" (Author's fieldnotes, November 2012). This comment hinted at the possibility of female erections; however, by deciding to exclusively discuss erections as male, Shauna and Jane stopped short of articulating female erections as intelligible – a meaningful limit. The undeveloped and seemingly contradictory messages in the presentation relegated erections to a nebulous space that the boys struggled to articulate during our interviews.

When they presented their section on sex, Shauna and Jane similarly opened up the possibility of a non-dominant discourse before establishing a boundary through silence. Just as Shauna indicated that women could have erections but they were only going to talk about male erections, she presented sex as a varied, multi-faceted activity that means different things to different people, before adding "but today we are going to talk about sexual intercourse" (Author's fieldnotes, November 2012).⁹ The expansive potential with which Shauna first introduced the idea of sex was reigned in by the exceedingly narrow version they developed as their only example during the class. They limited their story to heterosexual and reproductive sex. Their decision to privilege one story of sex over another was understood as upholding their obligation to teach reproduction. Explaining how to have sex is not

⁹ In the workshops, sexual intercourse was defined as a male penis in a female vagina.

officially allowed by the Ministry of Education's PLOs. Rather, they mandate that educators "accurately describe how conception takes place" (Ministry of Education BC). In this framework, (hetero)sexual intercourse is not a story of sex but the story of reproduction. Thus, the educators' reason for eschewing the complex ways that people enact sex for the singular story of heterosexual penetrative intercourse was the necessity of teaching (heterosexual) reproduction.

They told an almost disembodied story of (hetero)sexual reproduction. The major players were body parts divorced from actors and an anthropomorphized sperm and egg. They told the story from the perspective first of the penis and vagina, and then the egg and sperm, granting each of them agency of decision-making. They described how a penis *enters* a vagina and then the egg *chooses* which sperm to let in because all the sperm want in, even though these are actions and thoughts that these parts are not usually understood to be capable of having. The educators continued by explaining that if the egg and sperm are genetically compatible, they will grow together. Notably, in their story, the egg chooses the sperm, which is a significant departure from conventional discourses that position the sperm as an explorer out to conquer the egg (Martin, 1991). They ended by telling the kids that conception is when the sperm and egg meet while pregnancy is when they arrive at the uterus together. Instead of entirely masculinizing conception, the educators awarded women a role in the process.

The Third Workshop: The Question Box

The question box is a common sexual health educator tool for creating opportunities for students to pose anonymous questions and one that I was a big

proponent of when I taught. Shauna and Jane left their question box in Ramona's classroom for the entire three weeks that spanned their visits. During their last workshop, they went through all of the questions before beginning the final activity: a jeopardy-style sexual health review game. In this section, I will highlight their answers to two questions in order to demonstrate how they attempted to challenge heterosexist and gendered conceptions of sex as well as how they constituted the kids' sexuality within an imagined future and relied on a scientific discourse to justify their 'progressive' responses to controversial topics.

As I discussed in the last section, Shauna and Jane taught within the Ministry's PLOs and thus did not delve too deeply into the complexities of sex in the second workshop. I was then not surprised when a student asked: "how do you have sex?" The story of reproduction not only neglected to explain what Shauna hinted at as the different things that sex can mean to different people but it also definitely failed to offer any practical guidance. In responding to this direct question, Shauna and Jane reiterated their earlier, vague stance that "there are so many different types" and it "means different things to different people" (Author's fieldnotes, November 2012). However, they added some concrete terms like oral, anal, and digital, which, presumably, the kids could go look up on the Internet later since they did not explain them.

Shauna and Jane justified their lack of explicit detail by projecting this type of learning into the future. They told the kids that they would learn more about sex in grade 9. The Ministry of Education allows for further explanation in high school but, importantly, does not permit it beforehand. Thus, according to the Ministry of

Education's PLOs, kids in grades 5/6/7 are not yet sexual. As Shauna and Jane explained, "we learn about it as we get older" (Author's fieldnotes, November 2012). They were positioning the kids as non-sexual and therefore not yet in 'need' of the information that they had expressed interest in discovering. Despite their stated curiosity, the kids were seen to be without a claim to that knowledge. They would learn it when it was necessary for them to know it; however, it was not up to the kids to determine when it was necessary. Adults would make that call for them.

Shauna and Jane challenged typical depictions of sex as heterosexual by mentioning that it means different things to different people. Though they never delved into this nebulous comment, they still opened up space for non-heterosexual sex to be a possibility. However, the vagueness with which they suggested the possibility of non-heterosexual sex compared to the wealth of information they provided regarding heterosexual, reproductive sex produced a conspicuous imbalance in the workshops. They constructed heterosexual sex as a real possibility but refrained from discussing non-heterosexual sex as such.

The next question raised by the kids in the review session that I want to address was: what is masturbation? Masturbation can still be considered a controversial topic in sexual health education, especially in public schools. At the same time, promoting masturbation is often important to progressive, sex-positive educators. Shauna and Jane's response to this question shows that the educators grappled with these contrasting interests. To mediate them, they couched their support of masturbation in a scientific discourse, informing the kids that "we know from science that masturbation appears in the womb" (Author's fieldnotes,

November 2012). Since the story of masturbation goes all the way back to the womb, it must be “natural and normal” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). Lancaster argues that discourses on nature in particular are abound in origin stories, which proclaim to tell the ‘truth’ of any particular tale by tracing it back to the beginning (Lancaster, 2003). Masturbation doesn’t just have an origin story, however. Shauna and Jane explained that we have learned from science that “touching the genitals in a way that feels good” can help with insomnia and stress relief (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). According to science, masturbation, which almost everyone does at least once, has healing powers.

By matter-of-factly describing masturbation as an activity for everyone, Shauna and Jane challenged the gendered discourse that traditionally positions masturbation as exclusively male. Moreover, they challenged sex-negative perspectives that admonish childhood masturbation. In order to do so, however, they had to situate the story scientifically. Masturbation can be for everyone, but, seemingly, only because science says so. Furthermore, their insistence that everyone masturbates at least once, which was consistent with their method of normalization, marginalizes non-sexuality or asexuality, subjectivities that are not well-understood or respected during adolescence.

Shauna and Jane’s story of sexual health contained many progressive elements that are notably absent from more standardized curricula. For instance, they differentiated between a vulva and a vagina, they de-emphasized gendered differences during puberty, they described conception as an egg choosing a sperm, and they affirmed masturbation in addition to presenting it as an every-gender

activity. However, they were noticeably silent on many issues, establishing significant boundaries in the telling of their story. For instance, they set the limits of their story at discussing homosexuality only through the discourse of 'gay is okay' and at teaching sex as heterosexual reproduction through a scientific discourse. In the next chapter, I examine the ways the boys interacted with these discourses and silences when articulating their own stories of sexual health.

Chapter Three: The Boys Tell the Story of Bodies and Erections

I thought it was interesting what age they said puberty would start cause like we're nearly through that age so...yeah. Like two more years and then I'll, and round then I'll like have puberty, and it's just like 'woa'.

Leon the Lion

First Interview, November 23, 2012

Introduction

In the last chapter I examined the story of sexual health that Shauna and Jane developed in the workshops with particular focus on their use of 'gay is okay' and scientific discourses. In the next two chapters, I focus on my interviews with the boys. I am interested in the ways these boys relied on Shauna and Jane's story to make meanings based on their experiences in the workshops and of sexual health. The boys often naturalized heterosexuality by constructing their stories of bodies through the lens of (hetero)sexual reproduction. Within that frame, most of what they had learned during sexual health was explained as necessary for the purposes of procreation; for instance, gendered differences had to exist so (heterosexual) people could make babies. I am also interested in the disjunctures between the story the educators told in class and the stories the boys told me in our interviews. As I noted in the last chapter, there were boundaries Shauna and Jane established predominantly through their silences when articulating their story. The main disjunctures I address occurred at these boundaries, when Shauna and Jane's story stopped providing enough information for the boys to draw on in response to my questions.

In this chapter, I begin by addressing the way the boys understood the relationship between science and sexual health. I then examine how the boys both took up and deviated from the educators' discourses in their own processes of meaning making by highlighting how they discussed bodies and erections. First, I describe each friendship pair and contextualize our interviews.

The Interview Context

Our interviews were social interactions during which the boys displayed their access to multiple discourses by performing as respectful students and as heteromasculine boys. The ways they interacted with me in general shifted from the first round of interviews to the second. Since the first round followed at the end of the workshops, it is possible that they saw it as an extension of Shauna and Jane's lessons. For instance, the boys often began the interviews by ensuring me that they had thoroughly enjoyed the workshops. My distance from the educators was clearer to the boys by the end of the first round, as they no longer spoke about me as connected to Shauna and Jane. Still, my position as an adult and a researcher influenced our interactions during the interviews. In the next two chapters, I return to the idea of performance and consider the ways that boys enacted various presentations during our interviews.

The boys and I met in a small office across the hall from their classroom. It had a small table with kid-sized chairs around it and floor to ceiling windows. I sat in the chair by the door, and the boys sat next to each other completing a half-circle. I chose that set-up to prevent the more formal appearance of a panel interview. I conducted the first round of interviews in the two days following the second

workshop and returned two months later for the last round. Below, I list the six boys in their friendship pairs as well as how they self-identified their age and race/ethnicity.

Table 1: Friendship Pairs

Pseudonym and Friendship Pair	Age	Race/Ethnicity
Doodle Dude Pair One	11	Canadian/Scottish/Kiwi
Leon the Lion Pair One	11	Irish/Scottish/British
Spider Monkey Pair Two	11	White; German/Scottish/Croatian/Finnish
Emuman Pair Two	12	He left it blank ¹⁰
Milton Pair Three	11	Vietnamese
Black Jack Pair Three	11	Indian

Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion volunteered to do the first interview. We jumped into a comfortable conversation quickly as they told me about the medieval-fantasy series they were writing and illustrating together. In the last workshop, Leon the Lion showed me the stacks of paper that he had amassed while working on it. They had been friends since kindergarten, and their closeness showed in the way they interacted during our interviews. They finished each other's sentences, joked together, and made reference to shared knowledge. Leon the Lion took the lead in the first interview and, at times, Doodle Dude would yield to his judgment. Initially,

¹⁰ As he was filling out the card, Emuman explained to me that he did not think he had a race. This is most likely because, as a white boy, his race is consistently unmarked in North American society.

Doodle Dude mostly parroted Leon the Lion in a singsong voice; they rarely disagreed. Their dynamic shifted slightly in the second interview. Doodle Dude was much more actively involved, enthusiastically answering questions on his own from the start of the interview instead of easing in by joining with Leon the Lion's comments. Moreover, they rarely interrupted or talked over each other in the second interview.

I came back to Eastside the Friday after the second workshop to interview the other two pairs for the first time. Spider Monkey and Emuman were also close friends, though they were not as close as Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion. They had known each other since kindergarten as well, but they didn't spend as much time together as they used to because they were both busy with multiple extracurricular activities. Still, they played soccer together and liked to hang out in school, especially at recess. They alternated leading the conversation. In our first interview, Spider Monkey held back from talking too explicitly about some of the more sexual topics; however, he seemed to be much more comfortable by the second round. Emuman was at ease the whole time, except when we discussed a fight that broke out in their friend group. He was very invested in downplaying the severity of that incident.

Unlike the first two pairs, Milton and Black Jack weren't very close. They were classmates who had just started becoming friends in the past year. They liked to eat lunch together and talk about current events, like Justin Bieber's love life. My interviews with them were the shortest. They did not interact or talk over each other as much as the other pairs, except when they got excited about a specific topic.

Milton tended to dominate our conversations. Black Jack was a lot quieter and usually added his opinion on the matter in as few words as possible. Again, this dynamic shifted when they began talking about a topic that they were enthusiastic about, such as sex.

In general, there was a significant amount of cross talk during the interviews, especially when the boys were excited. In my transcripts I use / to denote an interruption and // to demonstrate that both boys were talking at the same time. I will now examine the ways they re/produced and deviated from the educators' discourses when discussing anatomy and erections by drawing on specific moments from our interviews.

The Boys' Story

My fieldnotes from the second workshop are overflowing with comments about the educator's use of science. Still, I was surprised by the similarity of language with which the boys described the lesson to me. During our interviews, the boys consistently re/produced the story that Shauna and Jane had articulated in the workshops, thus participating in the confirmation of science as the legitimate story of sexual health. This repetition was most common when they were tasked with answering questions that primarily required recall. For example, they tended to use scientific terms to define bodies and sex, and they emphasized naturalized distinctions between males and females, attributing these differences to (hetero)sexual reproduction. However, when I pushed the boys to delve deeper into specific topics, they often strayed from Shauna and Jane's story. These deviations were disjunctures between the two stories, and they indicate the limits of Shauna

and Jane's story. They also represent the uncertainty the boys grappled with when conversing at the boundaries between the two stories.

Body Science

The boys did not explicitly present themselves as the body scientists Shauna and Jane had asked them to be. However, they did perform as good students by predominantly responding to my questions with scientific language. They signaled their role of body scientists through their continual association of sexual health with scientific knowledge.

LS: So, how does science fit into all of this?

Spider Monkey: Well, it's body science. You get to learn stuff and like what changes your body makes and...

Emuman: Uh, yeah, well it's like a type of science I guess. Like, there's // science

Spider Monkey: // Biology, probably {inaudible}.

Emuman: Different types of sciences, it's kind of like one type of science – body science.

(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

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*Black Jack:* Well, it's body science, // so

*Milton:* // So, like

*Black Jack:* / It's pretty much, like, scientists study the body so, like, they

*Milton:* / We can learn how, like, what the body does to prevent certain things or how the body works

*Black Jack:* Yeah.

*Milton:* and like why it does it so

*Black Jack*: Yeah. So, like. Science. Body science.  
(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

The boys varied in their opinions about this (more obvious) role science played in their education. Spider Monkey lauded the educator's use of scientific terminology, contrasting it with a program that had come to Eastside a few years previous and taught him slang. In both of our interviews, he brought up the same example, describing how he had learned the "improper" word for an erection and shaking his head in disgust. During the second interview, he elaborated and explained how he felt relaying this 'wrong' term to his dad.

*Spider Monkey*:...you know, your parents, you're going to get the talk about the birds and the bees, and my dad gave me that talk and he asked me one of the questions because I think he knew that there was a sexual health thing in grade 5, and so he asked me and like, "what is, what is it when your, when blood flows to your penis. What is it called?" And, what they used then [they] said it was a wood penis, and I'm just like. And now I'm just like – that's so improper! Or, like a stone penis, they actually said. And now I'm learning scientific things, erections, so. Yeah. It's good to learn stuff.  
(Personal interview, January 30, 2013)

For Spider Monkey, the scientific terminology was proper and legitimating. He felt more confident discussing sexual topics when he was equipped with the scientific language to do so. The educators' emphasis on body science suggested that science provided the appropriate language and framework from which to understand bodies. However, scientific language can be hard to remember and even more difficult to relate to the emotional, embodied experience of being a kid. The inaccessibility and inflexibility of this framework, especially for school-age kids, can distance them from their bodies.

Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion, though particularly adept at recalling the terminology of the second workshop, pointed to a potential downfall of the use of scientific wording.

*Leon the Lion:* /It's all even like the names. The names are very scientific. Like the vans difference. It probably means something in Latin or something.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah, big fancy words that we probably won't remember.  
(Personal interview, November 22, 2012)

Like Spider Monkey, they implied a link between scientific terminology and legitimacy, which they do through referring to the words as “big” and “fancy” and associating them with Latin, but they were less empowered or convinced than Spider Monkey was by this type of discourse. Instead of celebrating the legitimacy they gained through knowledge of the ‘appropriate’ terminology, Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion observed that they were less likely to remember it. They also indicated social distance by using “fancy” and “Latin”. By labeling body science with those words, they were signaling the distance between these scientific words and themselves. In spite of these claims, they, like the rest of the boys, incorporated the language of the workshops in their story of body parts and pubertal changes.

At times the boys struggled to remember what part did what in the body. This was especially true when I returned two months later for follow-up interviews. However, even when they were nebulous on the details, they recalled the scientific terminology Shauna and Jane had used during the workshops. Though they did not necessarily always understand the details of ‘body science’, they were able to remember and repeat the ‘science words’. Therefore, despite the fact that the boys had forgotten many of the specific elements of sexual health by the second round of

interviews, they continued to articulate what they did remember through a scientific discourse.

## Bodies

The boys' reliance on a scientific discourse was especially apparent when they described bodies. They tended to rattle off a list of parts using their science words, often constructing a gendered binary based on the different reproductive roles of males and females.

When Doodle Dude, Leon the Lion, and I first started talking about bodies, they were a bit confused and discussed activities that could make bodies look different, such as doing pushups and eating right. I prompted them to talk about gendered difference, and Leon the Lion relaxed into the conversation, "Oh, well that's easy" (Personal interview, November 22, 2012). Together the boys explained anatomy to me, distinguishing between male and female bodies in terms of their capacity to reproduce. As they continued labeling parts, they performed as good students and repeated the language from the workshop.

*LS:* So what about the difference between female and male bodies?

*Leon the Lion:* Oh, well that's easy. Female bodies have the womb and everything.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah, they've got the (pause). Yeah. The womb.

*Leon the Lion:* And male bodies have the scrotum.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah.

*Leon the Lion:* And the penis and everything.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah.

*LS:* What is everything?

*Leon the Lion:* Um.

*LS:* Do you remember any of the other body parts they talked about?

*Leon the Lion:* Testicles, uh, vans difference

*Doodle Dude:* The breasts.

*Leon the Lion:* or something...

*LS:* Do you remember any of the other female body parts?

*Leon the Lion:* Uh, the clitoris...The vagina, the os, the (pause) what else?  
(pause) Oh, the...

*Doodle Dude:* The ova.

*Leon the Lion:* Wasn't it ovum?

*Doodle Dude:* The ovum which produces the ova and then there's like the sperm.

*Leon the Lion:* That's the male body (laughing).

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah (laughing)...

*Leon the Lion:* There's like the (pause) vulva.

*Doodle Dude:* Vulva, yeah.

*Leon the Lion:* It's like //what people call the vagina.

*Doodle Dude:* //That's called the skin.

*Leon the Lion:* But the vagina is inside and then there's like the anus.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah, that's for everyone.  
(Personal interview, November 22, 2012)

Together Leon the Lion and Doodle Dude recalled most of Shauna and Jane's lesson, including the distinction between the vulva and the vagina. When Doodle Dude mentioned sperm in the same sentence as ovum, Leon the Lion policed the

convergence, laughing at his friend and correcting him. The boys invoked a gendered binary during their conversation and subtly directed the purpose of that binary toward reproduction through their use of “womb”. The boys labeled the womb, not the uterus, when distinguishing between males and females. The womb, unlike the uterus, is exclusively associated with reproduction. By immediately mentioning it and using it to establish their distinction, the boys were suggesting the importance of reproductive roles to gendered differences.

What Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion intimated, Spider Monkey and Emuman made explicit. They primarily positioned males and females as distinct given their relationship to reproduction.

*Spider Monkey:* Well, I know that, that like girls have the ovaries that produce the eggs and like, well, now like that, uh, girls and boys produce different stuff and um. Yeah, like

*Emuman:* They’re also different. They produce different things for a baby. Like, um, the girls produce the eggs and the boys produce the

*Spider Monkey:* Sperm.

*Emuman:* Sperm.  
(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

When I pressed them to recall other body parts, Emuman confessed to being notoriously bad at remembering names. He barely participated during this part of the interview. Spider Monkey, who told me that he remembered “the genitalia areas”, rattled off a list of terms similar to those that Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion had produced. Though he was not entirely accurate, he touched on most of the information from the anatomy lesson. Like Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion, Spider Monkey developed his answer based on explaining the male and female body



separately. He also displayed his status as a good student by remembering how the educators had pointed out the common conflation of vulva and vagina and demonstrated his scientific grasp of the female body by specifically noting their difference to me: “There was the vulva, which was, wasn’t like everybody called like, like, like the vagina and all that stuff but it was actually the vulva” (Personal interview, November 23, 2012).

Milton and Black Jack took a different approach to my question about body parts. Instead of situating their response within a reproduction frame, they mostly talked about the all bodies puberty changes that Shauna and Jane had included in that activity.

*LS:* Can you remember any of the other body parts they talked about?

*Milton:* Um (pause) They...

*Black Jack:* Os?

*Milton:* They talked about the //pituitary gland

*Black Jack:* //Pituitary gland

*Milton:* That both, both males and females have them. They talked about the, uh, like breast area.

*Black Jack:* The sweat glands. The

*Milton:* That open.

*Black Jack:* The oil glands.

*Milton:* Um. They said that, uh, women have usually larger, like, fat around the breast area because they have mammary glands, um. And I think that’s, that’s all I can think of actually.  
(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

They constructed a response that pulled directly from the puberty game. Unlike the other boys, they primarily focused on puberty changes that everyone experiences instead of specifically distinguishing between males and females. However, they did join the other boys by steeping their conversation in scientific language.

## Erections

When the educators explicated anatomy, they clearly broke the lesson down into female bodies, male bodies, and all bodies. As I demonstrated above, the boys easily constructed a boy/girl binary based on body parts, labeling the different gendered body parts as well as parts that were for everyone. However, the educators were less transparent in the way they talked about erections. Given the ambiguous way Shauna and Jane explained them in the second workshop, I was particularly interested in how the boys would define erections. In the preceding chapter, I discussed how erections were handled during the puberty game after a student assigned that card to the all bodies category. When breaking down the activity, Jane corrected what she initially identified as a misplaced card. At this point Shauna interjected, clarifying that women could have erections, but in class they were only going to discuss male erections. Shauna's interruption hinted at the possibility of female erections but stopped short of explicating them. Thus, she established a boundary in their story of sexual health by bringing male erections into the discursive space and leaving female erections out of that space. This boundary became even more evident when I talked to the boys about erections.

The boys typically began explaining erections with confidence, describing them using the scientific words they had been taught in the workshop. However, our

conversations were occurring near the edge of the educators' story and as we approached that edge, the boys' conviction was tested. They contradicted each other, admitted uncertainty, and sometimes just gave up, undecided. When they had exhausted all of the information made available by Shauna and Jane's story, they often struggled to build their own cohesive story. The following excerpt demonstrates Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion trying to define an erection.

*Leon the Lion:* It's like...Well, like // they didn't really explain

*Doodle Dude:* // The skin around the

*Leon the Lion:* / the tissue fills up with blood or something and your and the trap door closes or something

*Doodle Dude:* from the bladder

*Leon the Lion:* and the vans deferens opens or something

*Doodle Dude:* The erection is the skin.

*Leon the Lion:* / But they didn't really explain why, like, they said it could happen at random moments, but I think it's, like, if you're excited or something,

*Doodle Dude:* No, your blood pressure.

*Leon the Lion:* That's what happens when you're excited.  
(Personal interview, November 22, 2012)

In this exchange, Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion drew upon a lot of the language the educators had featured in the workshop. Shauna and Jane had talked about the tissue filling up with blood and the vas deferens; they also used the metaphor of a trap door to make it more accessible. While the boys incorporated the educators' words in their definition, they had trouble re-creating it. Twice Leon the Lion remarked that Shauna and Jane had not explained erections, even though they had

described the biological process the male body goes through when becoming erect. Despite their confusion, they were able to recall the story of the workshop and repeat that language to me. However, this regurgitation did not rely on nor indicate comprehension. When I asked them about erections again during our second interview, they were likewise confused.

*LS:* Um, so what about erections. Who gets erections?

*Leon the Lion:* Males.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah, males.

*Leon the Lion:* They didn't really explain what, why they get it though. But, like, it, it's caused, like, there's, like, a bunch of blood that goes and then the vans deferens closes or something and the bladder closes or something and yeah.

*Doodle Dude:* (Laughing) What he said.  
(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

Two months after the workshop, Leon the Lion could still recall some of the terminology Shauna and Jane used when constructing their story of sexual health. At the same time, he admitted uncertainty. In fact, the only knowledge that the two boys were confident in was that erections happen only in males.

Milton and Black Jack had no problem recreating a definition of erections in our first interview. In fact, erections were one of the topics they got most excited about; it was a point in their interview when they built off of each other most consistently. They were embarrassed to talk about it at first, but they quickly eased into the conversation, relying heavily on Shauna and Jane's language.

*Black Jack:* // It's like

*Milton:* // It's when, uh, if (giggles)

*Black Jack:* Um (giggles)

*Milton:* Ok, if the body, if the body thinks that you should have that, you are, um (pause) aroused or

*Black Jack:* (giggles)

*Milton:* aroused it sends // blood

*Black Jack:* // blood

*Milton:* into the penis // and

*Black Jack:* // and

*Milton:* then // the

*Black Jack:* // the

*Milton:* and the, then it traps the blood in the penis // so it can't get

*Black Jack:* // and then it

*Milton:* // So the penis gets stiff

*Black Jack:* // and then the penis

*Milton:* and then, uh

*Black Jack:* // and you can't really move, it points up

*Milton:* And then, um, that's when I, you're able to able to ejaculate and

*Black Jack:* Yeah

*Milton:* And, it's, but your bod-body can also practice being erect even though you aren't, like, doing anything in particular that would make you

*Black Jack:* // attracted

*Milton:* // have an erection  
(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

After they defined erections, I asked them who gets erections. This question pushed them to the limit of the educators' story. They became animated, bouncing

off each other when constructing a definition, an event that fell just within the boundary of Shauna and Jane's story. However, when I asked them to go farther, they were less confident. Instead of building off one another toward a shared vision of the 'truth', they challenged each other, uncertain of where they would end up.

*LS:* So, who gets erections?

*Black Jack:* Boys.

*Milton:* Uh, males.

*Black Jack:* Just boys.

*Milton:* No, no, no. Women have erections too, right?

*Black Jack:* I don't think so.

*Milton:* If you touch, like, the clitoris? It has the same, like, muscles as the penis, and it can get aroused but it doesn't do anything when it is aroused.

*Black Jack:* We're not really sure, we think mostly males.

*Milton:* But they said the female can get aroused too.

*Black Jack:* But rarely.

*Milton:* I don't know.

*LS:* Rarely?

*Black Jack:* Well, not rarely, more like it doesn't do anything.  
(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

During this conversation, they were not able to depend on common knowledge. Therefore, the boys could not resolve the question of who gets erections by performing as good students. Milton disagreed with Black Jack when he remembered that the educators had mentioned something about women and erections. He then attempted to incorporate that 'truth' into the story they were

creating. Black Jack, who tended to agreeably join in after Milton, seemed uncomfortable with the conflict and tried to assert a shared version of the story; however, they were creating a story as they went without the benefit of Shauna and Jane's version. Ultimately, the boys determined that women could have erections, but, unlike male erections, female erections didn't "do" anything. In this respect, the boys connected erections exclusively with male sexual pleasure. The boys viewed erections as having a purpose for men: sexual arousal. Conversely, they removed the potential link between erections and female sexual pleasure by devaluing female erections as meaningless.

The boys tended to be confident when discussing erections within the limits of the story Shauna and Jane had provided. Once we edged into the boundaries of that story, however, the boys were left to imagine their own versions. For Milton, this resulted in the interpretation that women could have erections but they were devoid of the meaning associated with men's. When Spider Monkey and Emuman attempted to decipher the ambiguity of this boundary, they assigned all the power to Shauna and Jane, deciding that women didn't really get erections but the educators had created the uncertainty to be kind.

*LS:* Who gets erections?

*Emuman:* (excitedly) Us!

*Spider Monkey:* Um, males and kinda females. Cause they said that, cause they said that someone put, someone put under like, they had, like, these words things, but someone put it under all, like, they [had] a piece of paper, and it has erections written on it, and someone put it under all bodies, and they said 'that's kind of true' cause like {inaudible}. Like, more for males, but it's also true for females.

*Emuman:* Kind of.

*LS:* So what is kind of, like how do women kind of have erections?

(Pause)

*Spider Monkey:* I don't know.

*LS:* How do men have erections?

*Spider Monkey:* Um, well, their penis kind of goes like stiff (gesticulates an erection).

*Emuman:* It fills up with blood.

*Spider Monkey:* Yeah, blood goes into the penis causing it to (gesticulates an erection again)...grow (laughs).

*LS:* So, how do you think women get erections?

*Emuman:* I don't know. I think it was more just something that they didn't really want anyone to be wrong about that, I think. It made sense, but I think it's more men that the men.

*Spider Monkey:* Who get excited.  
(Personal interview, January 30, 2013)

These versions of the story constructed an important imbalance between male and female erections, where males are capable of pleasure but not females. Shauna and Jane's lack of discursive space for female erections also made female pleasure less imaginable for the boys. They had difficulty creating a story that included female erections, and they had even more trouble associating female erections with sexual pleasure.

The disjunctures I discussed in this chapter appeared when the boys attempted to elaborate their explanations of an element of sexual health that Shauna and Jane had left out of the discursive space of their story. The boys' confusion about who has erections, for instance, represents their investment in speaking within the



educators' discourse. Moreover, it demonstrates that when they reached the limit of available information, they frequently deviated from the established story. In this way, disjunctures uncover the boundaries of the educators' story of sexual health. Within the boundaries of the story, the boys were comfortable reiterating the educators' version. When we passed the boundaries, the boys were no longer able to recall and repeat in order to formulate a response.

In the next chapter, I focus on the ways the boys simultaneously constructed homosexuality through the 'gay is okay' discourse and heterosexuality through a scientific discourse, positioning homosexuality as a social identity in need of acceptance and heterosexuality as a scientific fact that just is.

## **Chapter Four: The Boys' Story of the Heterosexual/Homosexual Binary**

*Leon the Lion:* And like, I learned that, like, being gay, in my opinion, doesn't really make you different.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah, like, you're still a person.

First interview, November 22, 2012

### **Introduction**

The first time I interviewed the boys, I did not anticipate focusing on the multiple ways they constructed a heterosexual/homosexual binary. I returned to conduct a second round of interviews two months after the workshops primarily in order to delve more deeply into the ways they had so intentionally and inconsistently crafted their responses to homosexual issues yet simultaneously never explicitly talked about heterosexuality in the first round. In our follow-up interviews, we talked about topics explicitly related to heterosexuality and homosexuality. There were numerous limits to the story Shauna and Jane had told about heterosexuality and homosexuality in the workshops; these limits were primarily the result of how the workshops were structured. Specifically, the educators contained almost all topics that depicted or intimated homosexuality within the first workshop, which addressed values and decision-making, and they referenced heterosexuality when they explained (hetero)sexual reproduction in the second workshop. Since they relied on an unspoken assumption of heterosexuality as the basis for teaching reproduction, they constructed an image of heterosexuality as a scientific and natural fact of human life. Conversely, by locating all of their references to homosexuality within a framework of values, they ultimately re/produced an image of homosexuality as socially different and in need of

acceptance. Their framing of heterosexuality and homosexuality as a scientific fact versus a value, respectively, constituted a limit of their story. Since the educators created a discursive space that left out discussions of sexuality, queer sex, or even the words 'gay' or 'straight', most of the conversations I had with the boys on these topics took place outside the boundaries of Shauna and Jane's story.

In this chapter, I explore the ways the boys re/produced and challenged a heterosexual/homosexual binary through their engagement with and deviations from the 'gay is okay' and scientific discourses. I begin by demonstrating the presence of heterosexual assumption in the workshops. I then revisit Milton and Black Jack's discussions about the possibility of their friend wearing a dress. I end by examining the ways the boys defined sex and differentiated between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

### **The Assumption of Heterosexuality**

In the beginning of the second workshop, Shauna and Jane explained the importance of boys and girls taking part in the same sexual health classes. In order to present co-ed sexual health as necessary, Shauna and Jane implicated the students' burgeoning heterosexuality. They suggested that it would be helpful as the kids grew up for the boys to understand girls' bodies and for the girls to understand boys' bodies. When I talked to the boys about their feelings about participating in a co-ed sexual health class, they were conflicted. They remembered how the educators justified it to them; however, they confessed to sometimes feeling a bit awkward about the set-up. Still, performing as good students, they worked to display their understanding of the educators' reasons and rationalized the structure

of the class, often implicitly referencing heterosexuality when I asked why it was important to know about each other's bodies.

*Emuman:* I think it's good that they both, as they, they kind of stated, but it's nice to know that we both know about each other.

*Spider Monkey:* Because, it's, later on you're going to have to know because you're going to get older and you're going to have different feelings for men and women and then you gotta know how it kinda works.

*LS:* What kind of feelings?

*Emuman:* (giggles) Love.  
(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

Spider Monkey and Emuman directly stated that it was necessary for boys and girls to attend the same class because when they grew up, they would have "love" feelings for each other. They relied on heterosexuality to explain why they agreed with the educators, even if they maybe felt uncomfortable about it.

When explaining to me why boys and girls should be in the same sexual health class, the boys subsumed their feelings of discomfort into Shauna and Jane's reasoning. They knew that it made sense for the class to be coed because they had been told why it was right in the beginning of the lesson, and they were good students who followed direction. Therefore, they were unwilling to voice their discomfort until I specifically asked them. In the second interview, Doodle Dude admitted that despite how important it was for boys and girls to be in the same class, he had felt "Kind of awkward" (Personal interview, November 22, 2012).

*Doodle Dude:* Because you were, like, talking about bodies and...

*Leon the Lion:* Sort of. It didn't feel that awkward to me.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah, but it was still a bit awkward.  
(Personal interview, November 22, 2012)

There was a disjuncture between the way they felt about the set-up of the class and the way they knew they were supposed to feel. Milton summarized this disjuncture:

*Milton:* Oh. Well, I think they should [be in the same class] since they gave, like, a good reason that if we know about each other's bodies we'll, like, know about each other more...but it's still kind of awkward.  
(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

The educators introduced the workshop by communicating the importance of co-ed sexual health classes, which they rationalized through an assumption of heterosexuality. This heteronormative reasoning established the frame for the rest of the lesson.

### **Milton, Black Jack, and the Dress**

Milton and Black Jack were two of the boys who participated in the group that discussed how they would feel if their best friend started wearing only dresses. As I discussed in the third chapter, a boy wearing a dress represents an act of gender non-conformity and is often associated with the possibility of homosexuality. In their conversations during the class activity and in our interview, the boys worked to maintain their legitimacy as boys and students. There was a multiplicity of discourses available for them to draw on and profound contradictions between the types of discourses they articulated. On the one hand, the boys had to assert their heteromascularity, in front of each other and for themselves. On the other hand, as students at Eastside Elementary, where homophobia is not tolerated, they had to show their fluency with the 'gay is okay' discourse. In order to balance the tensions of these discourses, they participated in Othering boys who would wear

dresses to distance themselves from effeminate masculinity while simultaneously affirming their acceptance of everyone's right to express themselves.

When the kids split into their groups for this activity in the first workshop, the boys took the lead in the conversation. They re-worked the question and, in the process, reasserted their heteromascularity. To start, Black Jack asked: "can it be a James Bond type dress?" (Author's fieldnotes, November 2012). Then the boys digressed, swapping Bond knowledge while the girl in the group, who I will refer to as Lily, attempted to redirect them. Her girlhood was not threatened by the question, so she was not under the same pressure to affirm her image. She inserted herself into their conversation, mentioning that she's pretty sure that's not what they're meant to be talking about. Milton and Black Jack responded by turning the focus of the conversation to a mutual friend. They brought up a boy they knew and asked in a teasing voice "Can you imagine Justin<sup>11</sup> in a dress?" (Author's fieldnotes, November 2012). They poked fun at Justin by imagining him in what they were constructing as an absurd situation. They built off each other, using Justin as their foil for positioning themselves as boys who do not wear dresses. For instance, they asked, "Does he wear tighy-whities" under his dress? (Author's fieldnotes, November 2012) By asking this, the boys were concurrently establishing their heteromascularity and questioning Justin's. By distancing themselves from the immediacy of the example and placing it on Justin, they constituted themselves as arbiters of heteromascularity and were thus able to ask if Justin could maintain what they viewed as markers of boyhood (tighy-whities) while wearing a dress.

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<sup>11</sup> This is a pseudonym.

Lily again attempted to redirect the discussion. She scolded the boys, reminding them “You’re not supposed to judge someone that much” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). As Lily finished reprimanding the boys, Ramona walked over to check on the group. Her presence created a tension for the boys. They were aware of the discourse that their school officially condoned respect for any type of difference. Though they adamantly did not want to embody that difference, they positioned themselves as good students and presented their knowledge of that discourse to Ramona. While she was there, the boys shifted the direction of their conversation. Instead of displaying their heteromascularity by trading emasculating jabs at Justin, they demonstrated their respectful attitudes by focusing on how okay they would be with their friend wearing dresses. They told her, “I wouldn’t actually judge them that much...It’s their personality” and “I wouldn’t care...I would still be his friend” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). Black Jack delivered the closing line, summing up their position by stating, “We reached a consensus that we wouldn’t mind if our best friends wore a dress” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). This consensus was one of the conclusions they drew, but it was not the only one they had discussed. However, they did not let Ramona in on their jokes about Justin or their ideas for manufacturing a Bond dress, complete with guns.

When the boys reported back to class (Lily did not add to it), they integrated both discourses into the way they formulated their comments. They mentioned that playing soccer would be hard in a dress but emphasized, “It’s a free country”. They distanced themselves from the possibility that they could be these boys by adding

that they would be “curious as to why [he was wearing a dress] but not all up in his face” (Author’s fieldnotes, November 2012). Through their comments, the boys participated in constructing a ‘gay is okay’ discourse that accepted difference; likewise, they positioned themselves as heteromasculine boys by underscoring the ways that a boy who chose to wear a dress would be ‘different’, in general and from them in particular. In this context, difference became a way of talking about boys who are not ‘typical’. It implied a deviation from the norm. The disjunctures between the way the boys talked about this issue with each other, the way they presented it to their teacher, and the way they reported back to their class demonstrate the multiplicity of discourses they accessed when talking about a friend wearing a dress.

I brought up this conversation with Black Jack and Milton during our interview. In these conversations, as in class, the boys worked to maintain their legitimacy as boys and as students. Both boys walked me through their thinking by telling me about a friend. Milton chose a friend he plays video games with online but doesn’t interact with much in person. He explained that he “wouldn’t really mind if [his friend] started wearing dresses cause...he does what he wants to and it doesn’t really, like, detract from the playing games” (Personal interview, November 23, 2012). He identified wearing a dress as ‘different’ but, as long as that difference didn’t affect his life, he thought it didn’t really matter. I revisit the conditional acceptance stance later in this chapter when I examine some of the qualifications the boys added to their acceptance of homosexuality.



Milton and Black Jack's acceptance of a friend wearing a dress hinged on the idea that wearing a dress is different, and they were kids who respected difference. Moreover, they signaled that this type of difference meant being not like 'normal' boys and, importantly, not like them. They consistently asserted their heteromascularity and maintained their distance from boys who might wear dresses.

In addition to their stance of hypothetical acceptance, both Milton and Black Jack explained to me why their friend wouldn't wear a dress in reality. They positioned their friend as a boy who would never choose to wear a dress, thus making their acceptance even more hypothetical. By articulating how their friend is not the type of boy to wear a dress, they further constructed a binary of difference: some boys wear dresses, some boys don't, and Milton and Black Jack, as arbiters of heteromascularity, can tell which is which.

*LS:* Do you think [your friend] would start wearing only dresses?

*Milton:* (Immediately) No.

*LS:* Why not?

*Milton:* Well, (pause) I don't, I just don't think he is the kind of person who would start wearing dresses because, um, like, in my opinion, I don't think...he, like, gets, like, like upset like, he like, cries really easily so, I think that people would like maybe like bully him about it. I don't think he would wear it.

*Black Jack:* My friend is also in grade 7...I don't think he would wear dresses cause he doesn't really like 'em...He thinks like too many like 'fancy' people wear [dresses].

(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

Difference is not benign, as Milton identified by citing bullying as a potential danger for a boy wearing a dress. Unlike Black Jack, who normalized the 'boyiness' of

his friend by contrasting him against 'fancy' people, Milton did not comment on whether or not his friend would prefer to wear dresses. Instead, he focused on whether or not his friend was confident enough to stand up to the inevitable bullying he would face. By doing so, Milton recognized that wearing a dress was an act that could trigger bullying. Wearing a dress is not viewed as a normal activity for boys, and a boy who chose to wear one would be seen as different. Though Milton and Black Jack firmly acknowledged that a boy in a dress was a different type of boy, they also integrated that recognition within their access to discourses on respecting difference. While not everyone would accept these boys, Milton and Black Jack worked hard to present themselves to me as tolerant and demonstrate that they were respectful of that type of difference. This conversation cannot be separated from the space of our interview, which was a specific social context in which they most likely recognized the pressure to perform tolerance for me just as they had for Shauna and Jane. Therefore, similar to their class presentation, the boys refrained from trading jokes and responded within Eastside Elementary's official discourse on respecting difference.

The boys did not explicitly respond to this scenario by invoking homosexuality. They never mentioned the possible link between a boy wearing a dress and a boy being gay. Though Black Jack's use of the word 'fancy' could be a proxy for gay, the boys constructed their acceptance based on the importance of respecting difference and the idea that we are all free to be who we want. This value is akin to what the educators stressed during the workshop. They encouraged the kids to agree with same-gender handholding and marriage because believing that

‘gay is okay’ and accepting that gay people are just like everyone else is the right value to hold as respectful kids (at least in their interactions with adults), especially for kids who attend ‘progressive’ Eastside Elementary.

### **Making Sense of Sex**

In Shauna and Jane’s attempt to create a curriculum that both upheld the PLOs of the Ministry of Education and was conducive to their SHEC training, they taught (hetero)sex only as a means to describe reproduction. They established boundaries around this depiction through the ways they redirected the conversation when a kid asked how to have sex and, importantly, through their silences. They avoided directly responding to that question by implying that it was not necessary for the kids to have in depth sexual knowledge yet. Moreover, they were noticeably silent on the various meanings people found in sex – a silence that resulted in the boys struggling to understand sex as an activity that anyone but heterosexual men and women with the intention of procreating would engage in.

In both rounds of interviews, I discovered that when tasked only with definitions, the boys stayed within the limits that Shauna and Jane provided. The boys again performed as good students, and their definitions primarily revolved around the story of heterosexual reproduction that the educators privileged in class. Throughout our interviews, the boys were consistent in framing sex as a heterosexual activity that was (almost always) intended to produce a baby. Even when they mentioned the possibility of other types of sex, they frequently reasserted the normalcy of heterosexuality.

When I first asked Spider Monkey and Emuman about sex, Spider Monkey, who had seemed nervous and embarrassed from the start of the interview, took over the conversation. He interrupted Emuman and spoke quickly and excitedly.

*Emuman:* When two people

*Spider Monkey:* / When, when a man puts his penis in a woman's vagina and then the man produces sperm in the vagina and it goes through the center area and it goes into the fallopian tube and that's where the egg and the sperm meet and then, um, (coughs) and then there's, like, and then the egg decides which sperm is going to come in. And I think there's X eggs and there's X or Y sperm. And I think X and X makes a girl and X and Y makes a boy...And yeah. It's how to make a baby.  
(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

His definition of sex reiterated Shauna and Jane's, and he spoke within the context of their representation. Two months later, I asked them about sex again. By this point, Spider Monkey and Emuman were a bit nebulous on the details. This time, Spider Monkey wasn't able to rattle off an answer with animated ease, so Emuman took the lead. Unlike during our first interview, they remembered that the educators said there were different types of sex. However, even though the boys could recall that the story of sex included different types, they were unable to expand.

*Emuman:* I remember the normal types (laughs).

*LS:* What's the normal type?

*Emuman:* Penis-vagina sex.

*LS:* Mmhmm. (pause) How do you know that it's the normal type?

*Emuman:* Well, it's the most common, I guess you would say.

*Spider Monkey:* It's the easiest way. You don't have to go to a lab and all that stuff, I don't think.

*LS:* To have a baby?

*Spider Monkey*: Yeah, yeah.  
(Personal interview, January 30, 2013)

The boys took up Shauna and Jane's story and described what they understood to be "normal" sex. In part, Spider Monkey understood heterosexual sex as normal sex because it was the easiest way to reproduce. Moreover, he defined sex as (heterosexual) reproduction. Sex was not an activity that could lead to procreation; it *was* procreation. His reasoning was not random; it replicated Shauna and Jane's approach to the topic. Shauna and Jane's story stopped short of defining heterosexual sex as normal sex, but they explained that type of sex because it was not otherwise possible for them to describe the sexual reproduction. Spider Monkey then deduced that based on its relevance to reproduction, it must be the most common, normal kind. In addition to not being random, his reasoning was also not objective or value-neutral. If heterosexual sex is normal, then, by contrast, non-heterosexual must be abnormal, if it even exists.

I noticed a similar pattern in my interviews with Milton and Black Jack. In our first interview, they replicated the scientific definition of sex that Shauna and Jane used in the class. Then in the second interview, they broached the idea that there are different types of sex, but, like Spider Monkey, implied that heterosexual sex was the most common. Just as during our conversation about erections, when Milton and Black Jack talked about sex they became animated and began interrupting and talking over each other.

[From the first interview]

*Black Jack*: Um, well, it's when the penis // is in

*Milton*: / It's when a man puts the penis into the woman's // vagina

*Black Jack:* // vagina and then

*Milton:* // ejaculates

*Black Jack:* And then the sperms comes into the vagina

*Milton:* And then

*Black Jack:* / And then hopefully. Or not hopefully but

*Milton:* But, like, normally if, um

*Black Jack:* if it's there but, like, if it's

*Milton:* if an ovum is

*Black Jack:* there, the sperm will, like, it will pick a sperm and it will

*Milton:* / the sperm reaches the egg and then all the sperm tries to get into the egg // but the egg only accepts one sperm so

*Black Jack:* // the egg only takes one sperms so once it takes sperm it becomes like

*Milton:* But it only happens if they

*Black Jack:* / If they agree. (Louder) If they agree

*Milton:* It only happens if a ova is, uh, in, like, the fallopian tube or in the uterus.

*Black Jack:* Yeah. Yeah and, like, the genes of the sperm, that chooses if it's a girl or a boy.

(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

In this first version of their story, sex begins with a penis entering a vagina and ends when an egg chooses a sperm. In explaining sex, they readily incorporated information on procreation and genetics. Similar to Spider Monkey and Emuman, Milton and Black Jack located their story within the limits of the story Shauna and

Jane constructed during the workshop. They used the same, scientific words, and they too advanced an account of sex that was inseparable from reproduction.

Their story shifted in the second version.

*Milton:* But, sex is kind of like, uh. It's {inaudible} thing you can do between two people, I think that's it.

*Black Jack:* When people mostly hear about sex, they start thinking about a female and a male having intercourse.

*Milton:* Like, like sexual intercourse, but there's other kinds of sex, so yeah.

*LS:* What's other types of sex?

*Milton:* Phone sex, um, anal sex, oral sex.

(pause)

*Black Jack:* I think that's it.  
(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

They remembered that there were other types of sex; they also indicated that the most common type was a male and female having intercourse. Again, Shauna and Jane did not state that heterosexual sex was the most common type of sex. However, when the boys were making sense of why it was the only type discussed, they concluded that it must be the most common.

Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion also had similar exchanges in our interviews. Doodle Dude was quick to define sex as heterosexual and necessarily reproductive, though Leon the Lion interrupted with hints at a more expansive conceptualization.

[From the first interview]

*Doodle Dude:* /It's when a man and woman

*Leon the Lion:* // Well it's usually when a man and a woman like

*Doodle Dude:* / have a baby

*Leon the Lion:* Or just don't have a baby

*Doodle Dude:* / Have a baby and they feel (giggles)

*Leon the Lion:* It's like "making love" or something.  
(Personal interview, November 22, 2012)

Frequently Doodle Dude yielded to Leon the Lion's opinions; however, despite his friend's input, Doodle Dude maintained in both of our interviews that sex was heterosexual *and* reproductive. When pushed, Doodle Dude conceded by adding the word "usually". Even though Leon the Lion offered a few comments that deviated from a heterosexual, reproductive definition of sex, he agreed with Doodle Dude's assertion of how sex "'usually" looks.

[From the second interview]

*Doodle Dude:* It's like when two people, a male and a female...

*Leon the Lion:* Well, not necessarily.

*Doodle Dude:* Well, yeah.

*Leon the Lion:* Usually though.

*Doodle Dude:* Usually a male and a female kind of have a baby

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*LS:* So who else has sex?

*Leon the Lion:* Um, if there's a gay couple, they could have sex. I guess. Yeah.

*Doodle Dude:* Animals.  
(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

Likewise, they both had trouble conceiving of non-heterosexuals having sex. In this way, they joined with the other two pairs of boys in depicting heterosexual sex as



the most common or normal type when telling their version of the story of sexual health.

Interestingly, Leon the Lion introduced love into our conversation. Since the educators were discussing sex as a means for explaining reproduction, they did not talk about love when talking about sex. Therefore, when Leon the Lion and Doodle Dude framed sex as part of love relationships, they were also departing from the story they had been told.

### **Gay and Straight People**

In our interviews, the boys often re/constructed the discursive limits established by Shauna and Jane when they distinguished between heterosexuals/heterosexuality and homosexuals/homosexuality. When I returned for the second round of interviews, I proposed questions that encouraged the boys to explicitly discuss topics related to heterosexuality and homosexuality. They identified heterosexuality and homosexuality as distinct, often casting them as opposites. They constructed homosexuality as socially different by relying upon the 'gay is okay' discourse Shauna and Jane encouraged in the values thermometer activity. They were often intent upon drawing upon this discourse, performing tolerance for me even when articulating opinions that would seem to contradict the perspective that 'gay is okay'. Alternatively, they predominantly discussed heterosexuality through scientific terminology, reifying it as naturalized and normalized. Finally, they expressed multiple ideas around what it means to be a man and a woman by describing their views on who is/could be gay or straight.

As I discussed in the last chapter, even though Shauna and Jane avoided directly saying the word homosexuality, they still actively cultivated a stance on it. They encouraged the students to accept the value that 'gay is okay', which they intended to represent the idea that gay people are just like everyone else. The first time I talked to the boys about homosexuality, I asked them what it meant to be gay. Similar to the ways that Milton and Black Jack integrated a multiplicity of discourses into their conversations about boys and dresses, the boys' explanations of homosexuality included the tensions between a discourse that proclaims 'gay is okay' and their awareness of gay people as different and (at times) marginalized. Unprompted, two of the pairs incorporated an acknowledgement of homophobia into their definitions. Within that same comment, however, they also demonstrated their acceptance.

[From the first interviews]

*Spider Monkey:* It means to be, like, a lot of people say it's to be, like, married to, like, you like the same gender and all that stuff. That's called for different genders, like gay is, like, for boys, and I heard that lesbian is kind of like for girls. It pretty much means that you're married to the same sex. And then everybody makes fun of you for the, like, the same, the same, you like the same person, and I don't really get that. But yeah.

*Emuman:* That's pretty much what it means. That you like somebody with the same gender as you.

(Personal interview, November 23, 2012)

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Doodle Dude: It means to be kind of (pause) liking another person without like. It's kind of (pause). It's like one person likes the other and, but they're the same thing, and some people would object to that.

Leon the Lion: / I don't, I know, I don't object to it at all. I think it's fine.

Doodle Dude: Yeah. // Well, I don't really understand. It's completely okay.

Leon the Lion: // I don't understand why people don't, like, like, um (pause).
It just seems really weird to me.
(Personal interview, November 22, 2012)

Despite professing to not understand anti-gay attitudes, these boys firmly established homosexuality as a controversial topic and positioned themselves on the side of acceptance. Like Milton and Black, these boys were invested in legitimating their status as students who had access to the official discourses on homosexuality available in their school and articulated in the workshops. These were the first statements they made regarding homosexuality. Therefore, their initial responses included both the acknowledgment of anti-gay sentiment and an ardent assertion of acceptance. Similar to the educators, the boys were constructing a story of homosexuality based on values. However, while they aimed to present a 'gay is okay' perspective, they also highlighted difference by recognizing that gay people are not just like everyone else – they face ridicule. Unlike heterosexuality, which was constructed as an established scientific fact, homosexuality was open to disagreement.

This type of response remained consistent throughout the interviews, especially for Doodle Dude, Leon the Lion, Spider Monkey, and Emuman. When the boys discussed homosexuality, they tended to talk within the 'gay is okay' discourse Shauna and Jane had established. Through this discourse, they continuously legitimated their positions as students who respected difference. Moreover, they frequently integrated their opinions that 'gay is okay' within a larger awareness of gayness as controversial. For instance, when Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion

explained to me why they thought it was okay to be gay, they incorporated comments about past intolerance.

Leon the Lion: Cause it doesn't matter who [you are], I mean, like, so, like {inaudible} people just originally didn't think that was right because it's not normal and, like, and well if something's, if there's a change, people are always afraid of change, well a lot of people are, so that's like a change or something, like that's different, so they're afraid cause it's different.

Doodle Dude: Yeah. Some people get kind of nervous about it cause they're like, that's not really right, it's like.
(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

This conversation reflected the structure of Shauna and Jane's value thermometer activity. Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion supported homosexuality; they also recognized that people of their grandparents' age might have held different values. In discussing this past intolerance, they indicated that people used to object to homosexuality because it was different and they were "afraid" and "nervous". Their use of these words was a way the boys constructed homosexuality as controversial. Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion bolstered their position as students that respected difference by recognizing that not everyone shared their value of tolerance. In accepting gay people, the boys thus distinguished themselves. In a very poignant moment, Leon the Lion explained what he thought people wanted to teach them about gayness, and, in doing so, underscored the discourse of accepting difference that Shauna and Jane had pursued through their values approach to homosexuality.

Leon the Lion: [Shauna and Jane] probably don't want us to follow in their footsteps and be taught that gay is bad.

Doodle Dude: Yeah.

Leon the Lion: They probably want us to be like, well, they want to change the world for the better, right? And, like, gay is slowly sort of becoming, like, people are accepting it in a lot of the world, parts of the world.

Doodle Dude: Yeah.

Leon the Lion: So that's good and, like, people, like, if everyone's taught that gay is good and okay, then, then it will change. People's opinions will change. And then that's change and stuff.
(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

As Leon the Lion noted, the kids were actively taught about homosexuality, even though he, like the other boys, did not remember the educators using that word. Again, his comments reflected the messages of the values thermometer activity. Through that lesson, Shauna and Jane encouraged the kids to reflect on the values they held toward homosexuality by framing the discussion through a discourse that promoted an acceptance of difference. Furthermore, they attempted to make visible the trajectory of society's stance on this topic. Leon the Lion deduced that the educators intended to make the world better by facilitating a 'gay is okay' attitude among them, demonstrating that values were shifting toward acceptance.

When the other two pairs of boys described why gay is okay, they likewise relied upon discourses of acceptance and respect, referencing such North American values as freedom.

Spider Monkey: Well, because, you know, it's just like you can do what you want, you can be whoever you want, as long as it like doesn't somehow, like, violate any society stuff, laws or anything. You can, well. Just, it's hard to explain for cause it's like you know it's okay to be, I'm totally fine with, but I don't have any good reasons.
(Personal interview, January 30, 2013)

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*Black Jack:* Well, you, you are, you're a human, just like everyone else.

*Milton:* And, then, so you can do anything you want to do, and it's okay to be gay because they give you the freedom to be gay, so if you want to be gay, you can be gay, so.

(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

Believing that gay is okay was a *value* that they all held. Not everyone would agree with them, but these boys held the value that people were free to be who they wanted. These comments suggest that the boys depicted homosexuality as a choice; however, the boys were undecided on this issue. Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion even debated it.

*Doodle Dude:* Yeah, you just chose a different choice.

*Leon the Lion:* I don't think you can really choose it. Really. Well, maybe, like, it depends on what, like, what you're, like, taught when you're younger. But I don't think it's really your choice whether you're gay or not.

*LS:* What are you taught when you're younger about it?

*Leon the Lion:* I don't know, like if you like (pause). I don't know if it's true but if, like, if a boy is, like, sort of, like, um, plays a bunch with Barbie dolls or something. I don't really think this is true but maybe he, like, will become a bit more, like, girly.

(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

In these comments, Leon the Lion also conflated gender and sexuality, a conflation that had been suggested during the first workshop. Leon the Lion indicated that gender transgressive acts, such as boys playing with dolls, might actually turn someone gay.

Regardless of whether or not people chose to be gay, the boys believed that it was fine, albeit at times they included some caveats. Just as Milton and Black Jack invoked conditional acceptance when elaborating on boys wearing dresses in order to further distance themselves from boys who might do that, Spider Monkey and Emuman qualified their acceptance of homosexuality while fervently Othering gay people. For instance, Emuman commented, "It doesn't really matter as long as they

don't bring it into your life and bring it up to you" (Personal interview, November 23, 2012). Spider Monkey concurred, adding that if that happened, "The friend[ship] would kind of ruin sometimes" (Personal interview, November 23, 2012). The boys spoke openly about gay people and tended to reassert their opinion that 'gay is okay'; however, their acceptance was at times conditional. They were invested in maintaining their heteromascularity and did not want to conflate their acceptance of homosexuality with the possibility that they could be gay.

Interestingly, Milton was the only boy who noted the presence of heterosexuality in the workshops, stating, "They told you how to make a baby through intercourse, I guess that's kind of straight" (Personal interview, February 7, 2013). The other five boys were all quick to respond that the educators had never mentioned it. In fact, when I first used the word 'straight' with Spider Monkey and Emuman, the latter asked, "What's straight exactly?" (Personal interview, January 30, 2013). He had never heard the terms 'straight' or 'heterosexual' before. Despite their insistence on heterosexuality's absence from the workshops, the boys were all able to construct a strikingly similar story about heterosexuality. In our interviews, the boys expounded when justifying the reasons why it was okay to be gay. When I flipped the question to be about straight people instead, they constructed a succinct story that constituted heterosexuality as natural, normal, and the easiest way to reproduce. For example, unlike when he was describing homosexuality, Spider Monkey explained that, "straight is kind of, like, pictured as the normal person" (Personal interview, January 30, 2013).

The other two pairs of boys joined with this version of heterosexuality, further locating it within a naturalized discourse. This was partly done by their continued conflation of heterosexuality with procreation, a framework that directly followed the way Shauna and Jane had presented that material.

*Milton:* ...it's natural, because it's the only way of, like, naturally reproducing.

*Black Jack:* Yeah.

(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

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Leon the Lion: Cause, um, that's how people are made. They're made that way.

Doodle Dude: It's just how it is.

(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

The boys were much more direct when explaining why it was okay to be straight as opposed to gay. Moreover, none of the boys relied on their values or referenced their opinions to justify their acceptance of heterosexuality. Instead, they advanced a 'scientific' reasoning. Heterosexuality, they indicated, was okay because it was natural. As Leon the Lion and Doodle Dude commented, people were made heterosexual – "It's just how it is". Often they positioned heterosexuality as scientific through their conflation of (heterosexual) sex and reproduction. Since heterosexual sex was necessary for procreation, they understood it as both a natural part of life and a scientific process. Therefore, even though heterosexuality was never directly explained in the workshops, the boys joined together in their construction of it as naturalized and normalized.

The boys elaborated their construction of the heterosexual/homosexual binary when they described how they could tell if someone was gay or straight.

During this part of the interview, most of the boys detailed the visible differences between gay and straight people, which further undermined the educators' aim to present an image of gay people as just like everyone else. Even when activating stereotypes to distinguish between gay and straight, they made explicit references to the 'gay is okay' discourse.

LS: So, how can you tell someone is straight?

Spider Monkey: Their behaviour. Probably. Maybe, like, the way. It can even be, like, the way you stand, the way you talk to someone, like, like, I kind of see that. Like, yeah. Mostly I think some people are kind of stereotypical, they think that their voice, their voice is kind of, like, that it makes them, well, it makes them, like, like, straight, and then there's a separation (motions a divide), like yeah. It's the exact opposite {inaudible}.

LS: So what type of standing?

SpiderMonkey: Yeah.

LS: Can you give me an example?

Spider Monkey: (moves like he wants to get up)

LS: You can show me if you like, you seem ready.

Spider Monkey: (gets up and strikes a pose; he is just standing perfectly straight) Like maybe this would be, like, straight but not like *standing straight*, that's not what I mean (giggling).

LS: (laughs) I know what you mean.

Spider Monkey: (strikes another pose; he leans with all of his weight to one side and a hand on one hip) And then, ah, I can't believe that I'm doing this. But, like, maybe that and having your hand on your hip is like the exact opposite maybe. A homosexual would be like that.
(Personal interview, January 30, 2013)

Spider Monkey understood that acknowledging these stereotypes contradicted the idea that gay people are just like everyone else, which was a value that his school in general and the educators in particular promoted. Spider Monkey

was embarrassed that he knew and was acting out the stereotypes associated with gay and straight people. His embarrassment demonstrated how important performing tolerance was to him. Spider Monkey's awareness of stereotypes that depicted gay and straight people as obviously different conflicted with the way he was participating in the 'gay is okay' discourse. That conflict made him feel uncomfortable to the extent that he hesitated and nervously giggled. Throughout the interviews, he performed tolerance and heteromascularity, navigating among the complexities of these multiple discourses. By displaying his access to discourses that differentiated between gay and straight people based on stereotypes, he ran the risk of undermining that performance. Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion had a similar conversation. They both suggested that it wasn't possible to tell before they developed an image of gay and straight people based on common stereotypes.

LS: Um, so, how can you tell if someone is gay?

Leon the Lion: Um, I, you can't necessarily tell, but maybe by their behav-, well. Sometimes, like, sometimes they act more, like, if they're, like, a girl they might [be] a bit more tough sort of sometimes that's the case, sometimes it's like a gay couple and one's sort of like a man and one's sort of like a woman. Maybe.

LS: Yeah.

Doodle Dude: You can't really tell unless they, like, either say or you kind of, like, see // them acting, like, gay with the other person.

Leon the Lion: // Sometimes, like, it's the other person, sometimes, like, gay people, like gay people, like sometimes like a boy might wear, um, a dress or something (laughs) and, um, yeah. Sometimes their behaviours, just the way they sit sometimes maybe.

LS: So, like, how would a gay person sit?

Leon the Lion: I don't know, just some sort of, like, if you're, um, like I've seen some people, like, like some men, and it's sort of, I thought maybe they might

be gay, cause they were sort of acting like a little, acting sort like (flicks his wrist) sort of feminine...

LS: Um, so what about a straight person – how can you tell if someone is straight?

Leon the Lion: You can't necessarily, but same thing, sort of just

Doodle Dude: Yeah, same thing.

Leon the Lion: Act. Well, they sort of act like how you would expect a man to act if you were a man.

(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

In this exchange, Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion referenced one of the statements related to gender non-conformity that Shauna and Jane had used in an activity during the first workshop – the idea of a boy wearing a dress. However, they explicitly linked the gender transgressive act with homosexuality. This conversation was another instance of the boys conflating gender and sexuality. Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion viewed gender non-conformity as a sign of homosexuality, and, likewise, gender conformity as a sign of heterosexuality. Together they constructed an image of gay people as not 'real' men or women and straight people as the epitome of 'successful' men.

Milton and Black Jack, on the other hand, responded quite differently to these questions. Whereas the other two pairs of boys answered immediately, making visible the heterosexual/homosexual binary, Milton and Black Jack paused and uncomfortably exchanged looks. When they finally responded, Milton took the lead.

Milton: They tell you.

LS: Okay.

Milton: That's how, that's how *I* know someone's gay cause there's this, this guy, like, I'm not, I don't really judge people and try to figure out they're gay

cause you can, you can, cause I don't really believe in the stereotypes that gay people follow because I think, like apparently gay people like, I don't know, like a lot of stereotypes say only gay people do that, they do that, I think anybody could do that, like for them doing something, I don't think they're gay, so I only really know they're gay if they tell me, cause I don't really assume.

Black Jack: Yeah.

(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

Milton was the only boy who suggested that he would know when someone told him. His comments were complicated. In his response, he acknowledged the existence of stereotypes about gay people though never explicated them. He also advanced the idea that gay people are just like everyone else by exclaiming that "anybody could do that". Instead of highlighting stereotypical behaviour traits or speech patterns, Milton acknowledged that those stereotypes exist but that really, anybody could be like that. He responded very similarly when I asked him about straight people but also recognized the existence of a heterosexual assumption, which he demonstrated by stating that he assumed people to be straight unless they specifically identified otherwise.

Milton: It's if they tell you, well. Probably for me, like, I assume that when I first [meet] people that they're straight cause that's what a majority of people are, but if they, but so I don't even, they don't even have to tell me, so like, if I met someone new, I think they're straight unless they tell me they're gay, so.
(Personal interview, February 7, 2013)

The boys predominantly re/produced the educators' reliance on the 'gay is okay' and scientific discourses when constructing a heterosexual/homosexual binary. They worked to establish themselves as good students who accepted gay people while also distancing themselves from the possibility of homosexuality by claiming heteromascularity. Though they fervently asserted their belief that it was

okay to be gay, they also understood homosexuality as a controversial social identity that was not always accepted. Likewise, the boys naturalized heterosexuality and identified heterosexual sex as necessarily reproductive based on what they extrapolated from the second workshop. Whereas homosexuality actively required acceptance, heterosexuality was always already accepted.

The boys furthered the conflation that the educators had intimated between gender non-conformity and homosexuality, explicitly drawing out the connection. Shauna and Jane had indicated this connection when, for example, they asked the students to reflect on their feelings toward a best friend who started wearing only dresses, took dance classes, or cut off all their hair. At times during our interviews, the boys put forth gender non-conformity as a possible cause of homosexuality; however, more frequently, the boys understood gender transgressive behaviour as a sign of homosexuality. This link, though never explicated by Shauna and Jane, was consistently implied through examples they highlighted in the first workshop.

Conclusion

Shauna and Jane developed their sexual health workshops for Ramona's grade 5/6/7 class by integrating the Ministry of Education's PLOs with their SHEC training material from Options for Sexual Health BC. Their story of sexual health discursively normalized certain bodies, experiences, sexualities, and types of sex while simultaneously marginalizing others. In order to construct this story, Shauna and Jane predominantly relied on 'gay is okay' and scientific discourses – two discourses that never quite overlapped. They did not, for instance, employ a scientific discourse to justify homosexuality as natural; instead, they contained all references to homosexuality within a values framework that constituted homosexuality primarily as a social identity. During their processes of meaning making, the boys both re/produced and challenged the discourses Shauna and Jane articulated to tell their story of sexual health. Disjunctures most often occurred between the two stories when I asked the boys about parts of Shauna and Jane's story that were ambiguous or when my questions pushed them to consider material outside the discursive space the educators had established. These disjunctures illuminate the silences in Shauna and Jane's story, and the boundaries they erected.

The educators constituted homosexuality as a social identity by locating their discussion of it within values-focused activities. One of the greatest weaknesses of this type of framework is that values, as illustrated by Shauna and Jane themselves during the first activity, are vulnerable to change. While there are positive implications to the idea that values shift over time, this idea also suggests precarity. If attitudes can turn in favour of homosexuality, they can also turn against. The

changeability of homosexuality means that currently 'gay is okay' only because we have decided that it is. This construction was in contrast to the way the educators established heterosexuality as constant and stable.

In our interviews the boys re/produced the framing of homosexuality as a social identity. When discussing it, they performed both tolerance and their version of a respectable student by positioning themselves as heteromasculine boys who accept difference. In our interviews, the boys produced some of the tensions that existed between these two roles. In order to maintain their legitimacy as boys, they worked to Other homosexuality and ensure that they were not read as gay. On the other hand, they constructed their status as good students by demonstrating their fluency with the 'gay is okay' discourse. The boys displayed acceptance – not because they believed homosexuality to be natural or normal, but because accepting difference is the right value to espouse.

The boys additionally demonstrated their status as good students by recalling information from the workshops and reciting it to me within the discursive framework provided by the educators. As if the first round of interviews were akin to a test of their comprehension, the boys displayed their ability to both retain and call forth material. Initially they answered with the assumption of specific 'right' and 'wrong' responses to my questions regarding body parts, for instance. During our conversations, I encouraged them to trust that this was not the case, that my questions were separate from school, and that nothing they said would offend me. Since our conversations in the second round revolved around issues that were less explicitly discussed in the workshops, the boys rarely evoked this particular type of

good student performance. Rather, when they performed as good students, they were accessing discourses of tolerance, displaying their awareness of the necessity and importance of accepting difference.

While Shauna and Jane established homosexuality as a mutable social identity, they framed heterosexuality as an always already accepted scientific fact by subsuming any discussion of it within their lesson on (hetero)sexual reproduction. They did not intentionally cultivate a stance on heterosexuality, demonstrating that there was no need to do so. Since heterosexuality is a naturalized fact of life, it was not necessary for Shauna and Jane to spend time making the case for acceptance as they did with homosexuality. The boys understood this difference, noting that heterosexuality was the natural, normal way that people were made. This understanding was connected to their explanations of sex, which were always both heterosexual and reproductive. Moreover, when discussing sex, the boys tended to desexualize their definitions by emphasizing the process of reproduction as a scientific one. Importantly, pleasure did not feature in their versions. Instead, like Shauna and Jane, they explained sex by underscoring the roles of body parts and their stories always ended in an egg choosing a sperm. Not only does this definition of sex exclude all queer and non-heterosexual experiences of sex, but it also negates the existence of non-procreative sex. According to this story, sex begins with a penis entering a vagina and ends with conception. Thus, the discursive space Shauna and Jane established with their story of sex denied the intelligibility of many people's experiences of sex.

For the boys, heterosexuality was natural and normal because of its necessity for reproduction. Though their understanding of heterosexuality was linked to procreative sex, they neglected to connect homosexuality to sex. Instead, the boys discussed homosexuality through the values framework Shauna and Jane established by emphasizing the 'gay is okay' discourse. Therefore, homosexuality remained a desexualized social identity, best understood by its most frequent proxies: homosocial behaviour, homosexual behaviour, and gender non-conformity.

The boys, especially Doodle Dude and Leon the Lion, re/produced the educators' conflation of gender non-conformity and homosexuality. Shauna and Jane consistently merged these concepts. In the first workshop, they referenced several gender transgressive behaviours, such as wearing only dresses or dancing, in order to imply homosexual behaviour and challenge the kids to reflect on those values. Gender non-conformity was one of the principal ways Shauna and Jane accessed the idea of homosexuality. However, kids (and adults) who are gender non-conforming are not necessarily queer, neither are kids (and adults) who are queer necessarily gender non-conforming. Through this conflation, the educators and the boys participated in collapsing the possibility of gender identity as a distinct experience. Instead, gender non-conformity became understood as a sign of homosexuality. This undermined the intelligibility of gender non-conforming kids, re-working their experiences into discourses on homosexuality. Moreover, this conflation is problematic for cisgendered kids who may be questioning their sexuality. When non-heterosexuality and gender non-conformity are inextricably linked, questioning cisgendered kids may not understand queerness as a possibility.

In the second workshop, Shauna and Jane indicated that science was an essential part of what constitutes the legitimate knowledge of sexual health. Furthermore, they implied that certain topics, such as puberty and (hetero)sexual reproduction, were scientific while other issues were not. Explaining issues from this 'objective' scientific perspective also ended up presenting them as such. Ultimately, the discourses the educator drew on to explain various aspects of sexual health re/inscribed normative understandings of those issues. For instance, the educators relied on a scientific discourse in order to teach sexual health 'objectively'. However, the boys viewed (hetero)sexual reproduction as naturalized in part because the educators explained it 'scientifically'. Therefore, the educators, in accessing scientific discourses to teach (hetero)sexual reproduction, participated in naturalizing it. Through this emphasis, they constituted science as the legitimate story of sexual health and encouraged the kids to also understand it as the official story.

In meaningful ways, the scientific and 'gay is okay' discourses contradicted each other. The educators relied on the two discourses for opposing reasons. Due to its presumed objectivity and value-neutrality, Shauna and Jane drew upon the scientific discourse to explain topics typically viewed as universal and/or uncontroversial. On the other hand, they used the 'gay is okay' discourse to specifically encourage acceptance of a contentious issue. Moreover, while the scientific discourse worked to naturalize certain bodies and experiences, the 'gay is okay' discourse represented the necessity of promoting tolerance for more precarious bodies and experiences. The educators naturalized heterosexuality

without ever explicitly discussing it by privileging a scientific discourse, for the scientific discourse assumes the naturalness of its subjects. Conversely, the 'gay is okay' discourse works from the opposite premise. The educators relied on this discourse for the explicit reason that the naturalness of homosexuality could not be assumed. Rather, they used it to intentionally present homosexuality as an acceptable alternative to the obviously viable norm of heterosexuality.

The Ministry of Education participated in creating the context for these contradictions through the prescribed learning outcomes they highlighted in the Guidelines for Health and Career Education. These guidelines mandated that educators explain conception and the human reproductive system. Rather than referring to these body parts as our sexual anatomy, The Ministry of Education clearly framed them as reproductive anatomy, which indicated an investment in a scientific discourse. By labeling anatomy as reproductive rather than sexual, The Ministry of Education also participated in naturalizing (hetero)sexual reproduction. Furthermore, their guidelines insisted on instruction of conception even though they refrained from including information on non-reproductive sex. This imbalance privileged heterosexual sex over queer sex. The Ministry of Education also placed an emphasis on topics related to peer pressure, such as stereotyping, discrimination, and bullying. In this respect, it provided an ambiguous space for educators to discuss, in a non-sexualized manner, issues that may affect the non-dominant student population.

Shauna and Jane developed their lessons based upon these guidelines as well as their training manuals from SHEC. They were constrained by the Ministry's

mandates in what they could incorporate into their lessons in several ways. For instance, they were officially permitted to discuss conception but not formally allowed to incorporate information on sex from a more expansive, less (hetero)sexually reproductive framework. Shauna and Jane are progressively minded and interested in challenging elements of the normative version of sexual health. Their workshops both subverted and reified the standardized curricula. They expanded the discursive space of their story of sexual health to include masturbation as a viable activity for all kids (which is a complicated contradiction for the non-sexual child), they explained conception as an egg choosing a sperm, they focused on puberty as a *kid* experience, and they promoted acceptance of homosexuality. While they actively constructed a story that in many ways departed from a standardized curriculum, Shauna and Jane also participated in re/inscribing aspects of the dominant discourses in sexual health. Their workshops took place within the heteronormative space of a public school classroom. Importantly, this heteronormativity is not individually enacted but rather is an institutionalized system of power. In this respect, in order to expand the discursive space to incorporate the intelligibility of other bodies and experiences, it is necessary for educators to actively engage with that heteronormativity. The institutionalized nature of heteronormativity means that it often operates in invisible, subtle, or unmarked ways. Therefore, to disrupt the naturalness of its presence, educators need to make visible some of the ways in which heteronormativity functions. By doing so, we unsettle the heterosexual assumption and create space for other

experiences of sexuality. When we do not challenge the role heteronormativity plays in the classroom, we continue to privilege heterosexuality as the naturalized norm.

Shauna and Jane worked to incorporate acceptance of homosexuality into the heteronormative space without addressing the power of that system, so they ended up leaving heteronormativity intact. They appealed to the students' values, encouraging the kids within the 'safety' of their heteronormative classroom to embrace tolerance. Through so actively aiming to encourage tolerance of homosexuality among the kids, Shauna and Jane concurrently communicated the vulnerability of homosexuality and its need for acceptance. When bodies and experiences are taught differently, difference itself is part of what is communicated. Therefore, by teaching homosexuality so differently than they taught heterosexuality, they ended up teaching homosexuality *as* difference. In the process, they also privileged heterosexuality as natural and normal. They constructed heterosexual sex as natural primarily given its relationship to (hetero)sexual reproduction. Additionally, they collapsed the possibility and intelligibility of female sexual pleasure by excluding female erections from the discursive space of the workshops.

Many of the ways Shauna and Jane ended up re/producing normative discourses in sexual health represent their work mediating between their SHEC training and the Ministry's guidelines. The discourses they relied upon to frame the material they included in their lessons naturalized certain experiences of sexual health while rendering others precarious. Their decisions regarding the structure of the workshops, for example, conveyed important information to the boys. By

containing discussions of homosexuality to the workshops on values and all references to heterosexuality to the body science lesson, the educators indicated that these were separate issues. One was social and subject to change; one was scientific and natural.

A poststructuralist discourse analysis was able to make visible the ways the boys interacted with the discursive spaces Shauna and Jane constructed during the workshops. Rather than concentrate on a formal assessment of their 'learning', for instance by evaluating their recall of specific information, a poststructuralist analysis emphasizes the discourses that the boys accessed to make meanings of their experiences of learning during the workshops. The difference between assessing retained material and examining the discursive construction of learning is also a difference in understandings of knowledge. The former highlights a view that knowledge is fixed and stable. This view posits that, as sexual health educators, we are capable of determining the best, most appropriate knowledge to disseminate in a classroom and that we can then evaluate the students' comprehension of that information. On the other hand, the latter view focuses on how knowledge, specifically about bodies, sex, sexualities, is re/produced in a sexual health classroom. Poststructuralism contends that knowledge is partial and truth is contextualized, so the more compelling question becomes 'how is knowledge of sexual health constituted?'

My study had several limitations, and I do not intend to generalize from my findings. In many ways, Eastside Elementary is a unique school. It actively presents a progressive image and strives to construct an intentional, collaborative learning

environment for its students. Classes are organized in family groupings, a setup which allows older students to act as leaders and learners and younger students to learn from their peers as well as teachers. Eastside students call their teachers by their first name. These factors are some of aspects that inform how Eastside Elementary presents itself as progressive. Moreover, these elements that depart from more standardized public schools make Eastside a unique social context.

Even within Eastside Elementary, Ramona's class is likewise atypical. Ramona organized the sexual health workshops on her own. She contacted Shauna and Jane and negotiated to bring them in. They did not present to every class at Eastside. Instead, Ramona had an investment in ensuring her students received sexual health education, so she coordinated the workshops. Furthermore, the six boys I interviewed are not meant to represent their entire class. They can provide a situationally specific view of their own experiences of the workshops, which they performed for me in the context of our interviews.

In other ways, however, the workshops at Eastside Elementary are fairly typical. The Ministry of BC's guidelines are standard for the province. Shauna and Jane remained within their parameters and supplemented from their SHEC training materials to create lesson plans. They have used and will use many of these same activities in other classes around the Lower Mainland when teaching sexual health. In this respect, these workshops contained curricular elements that will be present at other schools. Additionally, SHEC is currently the only certification program in BC. While my project was not an assessment of that program, I did examine lessons plans two of their educators created based on their training. Future research could

interrogate the SHEC dimension and analyze the discursive production of sexual health knowledge through the training of new sexual health educators.

Shauna and Jane are invested in the continuing practice of sexual health education. As they have just finished their practicum, they are newly certified sexual health educators and both committed to growing and adapting their work. Creating lesson plans that do not re/inscribe dominant discourses is a challenging endeavour. I believe that one of the main, practical suggestions to come from this research would be to pay greater attention to the ways we discuss sex, sexuality, bodies, and experiences. It is not enough to incorporate a discussion of homosexuality or encourage acceptance of homosexuality in a sexual health workshop. The language we use when talking about bodies, sex, sexualities, and relationships communicates as much as the information we share. Part of this process is a critical awareness of the normative discourses we access and privilege when telling certain stories. In order to teach queer sex and sexuality without stigma, we need to first believe that there is nothing inherently more dangerous about incorporating queer rather than heterosexual sex and sexuality into the curriculum. The next step is to tell a story that reflects that idea.

It is not possible to include all bodies, experiences, types of sex, or sexualities in the discursive space of a single workshop, for they are boundless. However, in order for any non-dominant person or activity to become intelligible, we first need to address the heteronormativity of the spaces we inhabit. By directly confronting some of the ways heteronormativity operates, we can open up space for other experiences to seem viable. To challenge heteronormativity, we need to explicitly talk

about it. Instead of understanding homophobia as a system of power that marginalizes queer people, we, as educators, can emphasize the ways in which homophobia regulates all sexualities. Beginning with this type of foundation indicates an investment in disrupting the normalcy of heteronormativity. We can continue from that baseline by indicating that there are multiple ways of having bodies, engaging in sex, and experiencing sexualities without privileging dominant views. For instance, we can present different types of sex as viable options rather than emphasizing heterosexual sex because of its connection to reproduction. By offering explanations for multiple kinds of sex and discussing sex in relation to experiencing pleasure, we can step away from the scientific model. In doing so, we can incorporate non-heterosexual, non-reproductive sex into the discursive space of the sexual health classroom.

Further research in this area could focus on the presence of a 'gay is okay' discourse outside of sexual health. For instance, as many schools seek to establish themselves as anti-homophobia safe spaces through highly publicized events like Pink Shirt Day, it is important to examine what types of messages are communicated by discourses that underscore the differences and precarity of specific populations. How are these events contributing to the dismantling of heteronormative spaces and how are they reinforcing the idea that queer kids are vulnerable? Moreover, future studies could investigate how non-sexual health educators working with primary school-age kids bring topics related to homosexuality into their classrooms. In my project, the educators refrained from using the term homosexuality and instead implicated through proxies, most frequently relying upon gender non-conformity.

Explicitly discussing homosexuality with kids would be in tension with discourses on the non-sexual child as it directly connects them with sexual knowledge. Given the prevalence and persistence of these discourses, educators may rely on referencing gender non-conformity in order to suggest homosexuality. The conflation of these definitely related but also complexly separate concepts threatens the standalone intelligibility of gender non-conformity as well as the visibility of cisgendered queer people. Further research could explore the ways educators discuss homosexuality with their students, examining evidence of the presence of this conflation. Additionally, what are the effects of this conflation for a school-age population, specifically for queer cisgendered and heterosexual gender non-conforming kids? Lastly, since my research only describes the processes for the sexual health workshops in Ramona's grade 5/6/7 class and the ways the six boys I worked with constructed meanings, future studies could take up related questions for different types of schools, different age groups, and, importantly, for kids of other genders.

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¹² This is the school's pseudonym.

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Sociology

[address redacted]

Tel : [redacted]

Fax: [redacted]

An Assessment of Sexual Health Education: How Do Students Learn Key Concepts?

Larissa Slovin
Department of Sociology, MA
University of British Columbia

Dear Parent/Guardian and Student,

I am a graduate student from the University of British Columbia, and I am conducting a study of [name redacted]'s Grade 5/6/7 sexual health class. I would like to invite your child to participate in this research project examining how young people learn the key concepts presented during a sexual health class. I am conducting this study in partial completion of my Master's Thesis for the Sociology Department at the University of British Columbia. Your child has been asked to participate because he/she is a student in [name redacted]'s class.

The purpose of the study is to assess how students understand the topics presented to them during a sexual health education course. Therefore, I am interested in conducting interviews with students after they have taken the course to see what they learned and how they learned it. I will not be providing any sexual health information.

All students will have the opportunity to participate with a peer, if they feel comfortable having another student interviewing alongside them. Each interview will last for about one to one and a half hours and will take place in school. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate at all. It is also important to remember that it is possible for students to withdraw from the study at any point with

absolutely no penalty or for them to skip any questions they are not comfortable answering. I will digitally voice record the interviews in order to ensure accurate data collection. However, each student who participates will be assigned a pseudonym to protect his/her confidentiality. I will provide my email address to all participants and parents/guardians, and people are welcome to contact me through that medium at any point during the study. I will store all data pertaining to the study, including the data from student emails, in a locked drawer and destroy the data after five years. I will protect the confidentiality of all participants.

The risks in this study are similar to the risks involved in an ordinary parent/guardian – child conversation about the experiences of a sexual health class. Though I do not anticipate that these interviews will provoke any emotional responses, I will be able to direct students to school counselors just in case. Moreover, both you and your child will have the ability to reach me through email.

The greatest benefit of the study is the potential to better understand how students learn information that is presented to them during a class. Youth also tend to enjoy the opportunity to talk about their day.

Below, if interested, you will have the chance to consent to your child's participation in this study. There will also be a space for you to consent to your child participating in the interview with a peer, if your child chooses. Lastly, there is a place provided for your child to assent to his/her participation. If both you and your child consent to the study, please return this signed form with your child to their teacher.

If you have any concerns about your child's rights as a research participant and/or their experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at [phone number redacted] or if long distance e-mail [email address redacted] or call toll free [phone number redacted].

Sincerely,

Larissa Slovin

[email address redacted]

*Please turn to the final page to sign

I consent to my child's participation in the study and to have the interview digitally voice recorded:

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

I consent to my child participating with another student if he/she chooses:

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

I assent (agree) to participate in this study and to have the interview digitally voice recorded. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty and that my confidentiality will be protected throughout.

Signature of Student

Date

APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide One

How are youths' understandings of sex, sexuality, their bodies, and relationships impacted by a program that intentionally strives to be inclusive of non-heterosexuals?

Introduction: We're here today to talk about your experience of these two workshops that just happened in your class. Everything you say to me is going to be totally confidential because you're going to get to pick pseudonyms (kind of like code names) to go by. There are no right or no wrong answers. I'm really just interested in what you think. Any questions before we begin?

Have them state their names so I can identify their voices.

- 1) Rapport building/Background questions:
 - a. How long have you been friends?
 - b. Describe your friendship.
 - i. When did you meet?
 - ii. Where do you mostly hang out?
 - iii. What do you like to do together?
- 2) What was your favourite part of the workshops? Why?
- 3) What was your least favourite part of the workshops? Why?
- 4) What do you think was the point of the workshops?
- 5) If you were teaching this workshop, what would you do differently? The same?
- 6) What would you like to know more about?
- 7) Do you think boys and girls should be in the same workshop? Why or why not?
- 8) During the workshop, it seemed like the boys talked more than the girls – is that usually the case on other days in your class? Can you give me an example? Any thoughts on why?
- 9) Last week, the educators spoke about values a lot – where do you get your values from? Have you noticed any of your values change? [can prompt with the prompts they used]
- 10) What makes a friendship healthy?
- 11) What makes a friendship unhealthy?
- 12) How do you distinguish between healthy and unhealthy friendships in your life?
- 13) *Insert questions about wearing dresses for relevant group
- 14) In what ways is bullying an issue in your school or in your class? With your friends? Who tends to get bullied? What about?
- 15) Have you ever been bullied? Have you ever been mean to someone in your school, even on accident? What happened?
- 16) What does it mean to be gay? Lesbian? Straight? Queer? [probe for slang]

- 17) How would you feel if your best friend told you they were gay?
- 18) What makes bodies different?
- 19) What is puberty? What happens during puberty? [probe – what are erections? menstruation?]
- 20) How does science fit into all of this?
- 21) What is sex? When is it okay to have sex?
- 22) When did you first learn about sex? What did you learn first?
- 23) Who do you talk to about sex? What do you talk about?
- 24) What are the ways that people can have babies?
- 25) [get at the waterbed/uterus chat]
- 26) What is a family?
- 27) Is there anything you would like to add?
- 28) In order for me to protect your confidentiality, I'm going to use a pseudonym (make sure they know what a pseudonym is) for you when I write about these interviews – would you like to pick out a name? Also, I want to make sure I represent you as you would, so how would you identify yourself?

Questions for the boys who were speaking about the dresses:

- 1) You were in the group discussing 'what if your friend started only wearing dresses', right?
- 2) Describe the friend you were thinking of? Do you think they would start wearing only dresses? Why or why not?
- 3) Would you still be their friend?

Interview Guide Round Two, Friendship Pair One (Leon the Lion and Doodle Dude)

- 1) Can you tell me about your school? What is your favourite part? Why did you start coming to this school?
- 2) What's the difference between kids and children? What makes them different from teenagers?
- 3) Are you kids or children? How do you know? How does it feel when someone calls you a child?
- 4) You're always in class with girls, was it any different to be in class with girls during the sexual health workshop? Probe for examples.
- 5) How can you tell if someone is gay?
- 6) How can you tell if someone is straight?
- 7) How did the educators talk about anything related to gay things in the workshops? What types of things did they talk about?
- 8) How did heterosexuality get talked about in the workshops?
- 9) Why is it okay to be gay? How do you know?
- 10) Why isn't it okay to be gay? How do you know?
- 11) Why is it okay to be straight? How do you know?
- 12) Why isn't it okay to be straight? How do you know?
- 13) If you could guess, what do you think the educators wanted to teach you about gay people? Why do you think that? Probe for examples.
- 14) If you could guess, what do you think the educators wanted to teach you about straight people? Why do you think that? Probe for examples.
- 15) Last time you said that older people were taught that gay people were bad, what are you taught? Who teaches you?
- 16) In the first workshop, there was a lot of focus on values. What is a value? What is an opinion? What is a fact? What is science? What do you think the connection is between a value and an opinion? Or a value and a fact?
- 17) Last time we also talked a lot of science, body science. What other types of science do you study? What is science?
- 18) I'd like to talk a bit about bodies again. Do you remember the diagrams they drew on the boards? What body parts do you remember best?
- 19) What's the point of the clitoris?
- 20) What are erections? Who gets erections?
- 21) What is pleasure?
- 22) What's the difference between the uterus and the womb?
- 23) What is sex? Who has sex? When do they have sex? Who else has sex? When do they have sex?
- 24) Last time we talked about reproduction a bit, what does it mean for the sperm and egg to agree?
- 25) Do you remember the other program that came in to do sexual health? Can you tell me how it was different from Shauna and Jane's workshops?
- 26) Anything else?

Interview Guide Round Two, Friendship Pair Two (Spider Monkey and Emuman)

- 1) What's the difference between kids and children? What makes them different from teenagers?
- 2) Are you kids or children? How do you know? How does it feel when someone calls you a child?
- 3) You're always in class with girls, was it any different to be in class with girls during the sexual health workshop? Probe for examples.
- 4) Last time, Spider Monkey, you mentioned how you liked getting to talk about things that you didn't usually discuss in schools. What types of things did the educators talk about in the workshops that you don't usually talk about in school? Why do you think you don't usually talk about that stuff in school?
- 5) We talked a bit about an incident with sissy fighting last time. When you're explaining sissy fighting to your teachers, what do you tell them?
- 6) How can you tell if someone is gay?
- 7) How can you tell if someone is straight?
- 8) Did the educators talk about anything related to gay things in the workshops? How did gay stuff come up in the workshops?
- 9) How did heterosexuality get talked about in the workshops?
- 10) Why is it okay to be gay? How do you know?
- 11) Why isn't it okay to be gay? How do you know?
- 12) Why is it okay to be straight? How do you know?
- 13) Why isn't it okay to be straight? How do you know?
- 14) If you could guess, what do you think the educators wanted to teach you about gay people? Why do you think that? Probe for examples.
- 15) If you could guess, what do you think the educators wanted to teach you about straight people? Why do you think that? Probe for examples.
- 16) In the first workshop, there was a lot of focus on values. What is a value? What is an opinion? What is a fact? What is science? What do you think the connection is between a value and an opinion? Or a value and a fact?
- 17) Last time we also talked a lot of science, body science. What other types of science do you study? What is science?
- 18) I'd like to talk a bit about bodies again. Do you remember the diagrams they drew on the boards? What body parts do you remember best?
- 19) What's the difference between the uterus and the womb?
- 20) What is sex? Who has sex? When do they have sex? Who else has sex? When do they have sex?
- 21) What's the point of the clitoris?
- 22) What are erections? Who gets erections?
- 23) What is pleasure?
- 24) Last time we talked about reproduction a bit, what does it mean for the sperm and egg to agree?
- 25) We talked about the other program that came in to teach sexual health. You said that used some improper words. What's the difference between proper and improper words? How do you know? Probe for examples.
- 26) Anything else?

Interview Guide Round Two, Friendship Pair Three (Milton and Black Jack)

- 1) What's the difference between kids and children? What makes them different from teenagers?
- 2) Are you kids or children? How do you know? How does it feel when someone calls you a child?
- 3) You're always in class with girls, was it any different to be in class with girls during the sexual health workshop? Probe for examples.
- 4) Last time we talked a little bit about boys wearing dresses and fancy people. Can you give me an example of a fancy person?
- 5) How can you tell if someone is gay?
- 6) How can you tell if someone is straight?
- 7) Did the educators talk about anything related to gay things in the workshops? How did gay stuff come up in the workshops?
- 8) How did heterosexuality get talked about in the workshops?
- 9) Why is it okay to be gay? How do you know?
- 10) Why isn't it okay to be gay? How do you know?
- 11) Why is it okay to be straight? How do you know?
- 12) Why isn't it okay to be straight? How do you know?
- 13) If you could guess, what do you think the educators wanted to teach you about gay people? Why do you think that? Probe for examples.
- 14) If you could guess, what do you think the educators wanted to teach you about straight people? Why do you think that? Probe for examples.
- 15) In the first workshop, there was a lot of focus on values. What is a value? What is an opinion? What is a fact? What is science? What do you think the connection is between a value and an opinion? Or a value and a fact?
- 16) Last time we also talked a lot of science, body science. What other types of science do you study? What is science?
- 17) I'd like to talk a bit about bodies again. Do you remember the diagrams they drew on the boards? What body parts do you remember best?
- 18) What's the difference between the uterus and the womb?
- 19) What is sex? Who has sex? When do they have sex? Who else has sex? When do they have sex?
- 20) What's the point of the clitoris?
- 21) What are erections? Who gets erections?
- 22) What is pleasure?
- 23) Last time we talked about reproduction a bit, what does it mean for the sperm and egg to agree?
- 24) Do you remember the other program that came in to do sexual health? Can you tell me how it was different from Shauna and Jane's workshops?
- 25) Anything else?