

TEACHING BODIES, LEARNING DESIRES:  
FEMINIST-POSTSTRUCTURAL LIFE HISTORIES  
OF  
HETEROSEXUAL AND LESBIAN  
PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN WESTERN CANADA

by

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### **Abstract**

Physical education is a profession where heterosexuality has historically been regarded as normal, if not compulsory. The location of female physical education (PE) teachers at the nexus of discourses about masculinist sport, women's physical education and pedagogies of the body has exerted unique historical pressures on their sexualities. In North America and Western Europe, female PE teachers have frequently been suspected of being lesbian. This suspicion has enveloped lesbian teachers in a shroud of oppressive silence, tolerated only as an 'open secret' (Cahn, 1994).

This study examined the life histories of six women from three generations who had taught physical education in western Canada. Previous life history research has focused exclusively on lesbian PE teachers (Clarke, 1996; Sparkes, 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Squires & Sparkes, 1996; Sparkes & Templin, 1992) which risks reinforcing a hierarchical relationship between 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual'. Accordingly, three women who identified as 'lesbian' and three as 'married' or 'heterosexual' were involved in this study which incorporated poststructural, psychoanalytic and queer theories about sexual subjectivity into a feminist approach to life history. The notions of 'understanding' and 'overstanding' were used to analyze data which meant interpreting not only had been said during the interviews but also what was left unsaid.

The women's life histories revealed how lesbian sexualities have been marginalized and silenced, especially within the physical education profession. All the women grew up in families where heterosexuality was normalized, and all except one experienced pressure to date boys during their high school education in Canada. As teachers, identifying as a 'feminist' had a greater affect on their personal politics and approaches to teaching than their sexual identities. The life histories

also provided limited support to the notion that PE teacher's participation in various women's sports accentuated the suspicion of lesbianism. For two of the 'lesbian' women, team sports continued to provide valuable lesbian communities from the 1950s to the present day. In contrast, one 'lesbian' woman established her lesbian social network through individual sports and urban feminist groups. The 'heterosexual' women had all participated in gender-neutral sports. Overall the sporting backgrounds of these teachers did little to dispel the long-standing association between women's sports and lesbianism which, in turn, has affected female PE teachers.

Drawing on queer theory and the notion of 'overstanding' data, deconstructive interpretations suggested how heterosexuality had been normalized in several institutional discourses within women's physical education. These interpretations undermined the boundaries of 'the closet', sought out an absent lesbian gaze and suggested that homophobia has been, in part, rooted in the social unconscious of the physical education profession.



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## Chapter 1

### Moving Bodies, Silent Desires

*The cranial cavity contains the brain. its boundaries are formed by the bones of the skull.*

*Let me penetrate you. I am the archeologist of tombs. I would devote my life to marking your passageways, the entrances and exits of that impressive mausoleum, your body.*

From Jeanette Winterson's (1993) Written on the Body

Only in my dreams do I manage to emulate the somatic imagery of Jeanette Winterson; all the same, this thesis is concerned with bodies, boundaries, tombs and writing. It is a thesis written on the body, not just any Body, but written onto the body of the Female Physical Educator. My concern is with female bodies in physical education -- how genders and sexualities have been written on to these bodies. Like Winterson, I am concerned with boundaries -- not the impenetrable boundaries formed by the bones of the skull, but the boundaries between lesbian/heterosexual, silence/speech, and marginal/normal. As for tombs and mausoleums, the professional body of physical education has long been haunted by the 'specter' of the lesbian.

#### A 'lesbian specter' In Physical Education?

This study emerged from two truisms which have circulated within women's physical education, within some lesbian communities and more recently within feminist sport sociology. Firstly, women who teach physical education have frequently been suspected of being lesbian. Secondly, many of them were! I wanted to explore what is at stake in these popular myths, why have they been such an

enduring part of the 'common knowledge' about physical education in North America and Europe, and how have they affected teachers' lives in empowering and homophobic ways. What are the particular social and historical forces which gave rise to a unique 'lesbian specter' which has haunted physical education? For much of this century, suspicions about lesbianism have enveloped lesbian physical educators in a shroud of oppressive silence -- tolerated only as an open secret, an absent presence. The suspicion of lesbianism, explained Susan Cahn (1994a), has functioned both as a homophobic repellent and as a magnetic sexual field of force in physical education and women's sport. I suggest this is due to the peculiar (some might say queer) location of women's physical education at the nexus of masculinist sport, gendered education, and pedagogies of the body.

Thus the sexualities of female physical education (PE) teachers have been subject to unique pressures, more intense perhaps than women in other areas of teaching and yet slightly different from those facing women in sport. The sexualities of teachers have always been placed under intense normalizing pressures due to teacher's pedagogical relationship with children. Equally, PE teachers have experienced more homophobic scrutiny than women in other areas of teaching because of the associations between physical education, sport and masculinity. While the dynamics of heterosexism experienced by female PE teachers and female athletes are not synonymous, the dynamics of recruitment into PE teaching has meant that large numbers of teachers have also been actively involved in sport. Moreover, women's physical education has provided, until recently, a unique female-only context within education due to the historical separation of men's and women's physical education. It is this unique position, at the nexus of sport and education, which has driven the particularly intense surveillance of lesbian desire in women's physical education.

Physical education is a profession where heterosexuality has been regarded as normal, if not compulsory. This 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980) has affected female and male PE teachers quite differently. Throughout North American and Europe prior to W.W.II, the women's and men's professions developed somewhat independently and, although co-education has since become predominant in most of western Canada, this gendered history continues to have a different impact on women's sexualities than men's. This is largely due to the unequal gender relations which structure sport<sup>1</sup>. Westernized sport is an important social institution which has valorized certain aspects of masculinity such as competitiveness, strength, speed and aggression. Consequently, women's entry into sports during this century has always upset the normative 'gender order' (Messner & Sabo, 1990) that assumed that sport was 'masculine' and women were 'feminine'. This gender order relies upon a logic of sexuality which can be traced back to turn-of-the-century legal and scientific discourses.

The notion of lesbians as 'congenital invert', proposed by sexologists in the late 1880s, posited that lesbians had "a male soul trapped in a female body". Moreover, the supposedly 'masculine trait' of athleticism was frequently used as evidence of sexual inversion. The beginning of this long-standing association between sport and lesbianism (then conceptualized as uranism) can be traced back to sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's 1889 *Psychopathia Sexualis*:

*Uranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances...The masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom, finds pleasure in the*

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to imply that physical education and sport are synonymous. Nonetheless, the physical education profession has been significantly influenced by the institution of westernized sport in ways that other areas of schooling obviously have not.

*pursuit of manly sports, and in manifestations of courage and bravado. (Krafft-Ebing cited in Smith-Rosenberg, 1989a: 269)*

These associations reappeared in Havelock Ellis' work on sexuality in 1915. Depicting the female sexual invert, Ellis claimed:

*The brusque, energetic movements, the attitudes of the arms...There is also a dislike and sometimes incapacity for needlework and other domestic occupations, while there is often some capacity for athletics (Ellis cited in Chauncey, 1989: 91)*

This idea gave rise to the suspicion that women in sport might be lesbian, popularized in the late 1920s (Cahn, 1994a), which lingers on in similar suspicions about women in physical education. The logic worked in two ways. On one hand, something 'masculine' made certain women want to play sports or, on the other, playing sports risked developing 'masculinity' in women. Either way, women who played sport were not properly 'feminine' and therefore were suspected of being lesbians -- women's sports somehow required a 'male soul' in a 'female body'. Of course the more masculine the sport, the stronger the suspicion. Hence, women who played sports requiring speed, strength, aggression or body contact (e.g. rugby, soccer, shot put) have been subjected to greater suspicion than those in sports valorizing grace, choreography or aesthetic expression (e.g. ice skating, synchronized swimming). While the notion of 'congenital invert' also shaped assumptions about male homosexuality, this logic did not affect men in sport or physical education in the same way. By the very nature of sport, men's participation has been used to reinforce their masculinity and thereby dispel any suspicion of homosexuality.<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup>Ironically these assumptions about male heterosexuality in sport and physical education prevail despite the intense homosociality of sport. While this might seem surprising, the active use of

also explains why men's physical education has had much less contested relationship with sport than the women's profession. As a result, male PE teachers have typically been assumed to personify normative masculinity and heterosexuality, pushing the 'specter' of male homosexuality far beyond the concerns of the profession.

#### Purpose of the Study

Broadly speaking, this study examined the social construction of sexual identities across three generations of women who taught physical education in western Canada. The study centered around the life histories of six physical education teachers -- three who self-identified as 'lesbian' and three as 'heterosexual'. The study was motivated by long-standing suspicions about lesbianism in women's physical education, alongside a series of contemporary developments in sport and education. Institutionalized spaces within women's sport where lesbian desire could be openly expressed began to emerge in the 1980s. Since then, lesbian and gay sports have become increasingly visible and organized in urban Canada, evidenced by events such as the 1990 Gay Games in Vancouver. In the academy, feminist scholarship was producing increasingly sophisticated research about lesbianism while poststructural and queer theories were expanding how sexualities might be conceptualized. By the late 1990s, the public school system in British Columbia was beginning to acknowledge the harmful effects of homophobia on students, and to seek ways to eliminate heterosexism from K-12 curricula.

It was within this context that I searched for a way to research what Cahn (1994a) so aptly described as the 'homophobic repellent and magnetic sexual field of force' in women's physical education. Naturally, I had to make a decision about the most appropriate methodology -- what type of research could penetrate the

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sport to prove men's heterosexuality, virility and masculinity only testifies to the need to disavow the presence of homoeroticism in men's sport.



passageways and tombs of a profession which had historically required lesbians to remain hidden and silent? One way was to ask lesbian teachers to talk about their experiences. So much of the compelling research about lesbians I had read used oral histories; indeed, reading stories about lesbian lives such as The Well of Loneliness, Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit and Zami<sup>3</sup> had a profound impact on my understanding of what it could mean to be lesbian in my time and place. Added to this, at the time I was formulating this study, existing research about lesbians in physical education had either focused on teacher's life histories or the identity management techniques used by lesbian teachers (Clarke, 1996; Griffin, 1991, 1992b; Sparkes, 1994b; Squires & Sparkes; 1996; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). Within this context, I settled on the methodology of teacher's life history.<sup>4</sup>

The life histories within this study illustrate the specific ways six PE teachers accepted and resisted identities such as 'feminist', 'lesbian' and 'married' throughout their lives. The histories also suggest what social norms and material practices influenced how these identities were accepted and resisted at various points in the women's lives. This was primarily, but not exclusively, a study about heteronormativity -- the central question being how heterosexual identities have been privileged over lesbian identities. It is also true to say that the political intent of this research has been to disturb the taken-for-granted workings of this heteronormativity. Also, this inquiry has been confronted with an intriguing methodological paradox -- the use of 'spoken' accounts to investigate issues of 'silence'.

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<sup>3</sup> These books have been so influential for me on a deeply personal level that I have chosen to cite them informally rather than formally in the main text. For readers who would like to locate these books, the respective authors are Radclyffe Hall (1928), Jeanette Winterson (1985) and Audre Lourde (1982).

<sup>4</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3 for more detailed accounts of factors influencing my choice of methodology.

## Theoretical Framework for a Poststructuralist Approach to Life History

Existing life history studies about lesbian PE teachers have been informed by humanist and feminist assumptions which, I think, has limited the analysis of why lesbian sexuality has been effectively silenced for so long in physical education. Firstly, the theorization of 'the subject' is problematic due to the prevailing assumption that sexuality identity is coherent, unitary and, in some way, transparent to the attentive life historian. Secondly, the research focus on the lives of lesbians has theoretical and political limitations.<sup>5</sup> Recent advances in poststructural-feminism and queer theory have challenged these approaches. Accordingly, I have incorporated poststructuralist and queer notions about subjectivity and sexuality into a feminist approach to life history. Not surprisingly, this hybrid framework created a new set of thorny theoretical issues.

Research about women who have lived with the 'open secret' and silences<sup>6</sup> of lesbianism on a day to day basis requires a methodology which can approach these

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<sup>5</sup> I agree that a pragmatic politics of identity can be beneficial in the short-term but have argued that it should not be the only focus of research into sexualities (Sykes, 1996). A re-mediating focus on lesbian experiences articulated through the specificity of race, class, dis/ability and age can be strategically effective within physical education. Undoubtedly, existing life history research based on feminist standpoint theory has made important political and theoretical advances within sports sociology and physical education.

<sup>6</sup> 'Secrets' and 'silence' emerged as increasingly salient concepts as this study unfolded.

Initially I used the concept of 'secret' as Susan Cahn (1994) had, referring to the 'open secret' that lesbianism existed in PE and sport but was not explicitly discussed (see Cahn, 1994). Indeed, the importance of analyzing this 'open secret' in understanding heterosexism and lesbian desire can be discerned in Foucault's (1978) History of Sexuality:

*...secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its [power] operation. Not only because power imposes secrecy on those whom it dominates, but because it is perhaps just as indispensable to the latter: would they accept it if they did not see it as a mere limit placed on their desire, leaving a measure of freedom -- however slight -- intact? (p. 86)*

Later on, in the discussion of transgenerational secrets (see Chapter 3 'Lesbian Encounters'), I began to explore Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's (1994) psychoanalytic concept of 'secret'. As Nicholas Rand (1994) pointed out, Abraham and Torok's conception of a secret does not coincide with customary definitions of the term:

issues seriously. It is not beyond the scope of interview-based research such as life history to do so; yet, I think it is fair to say that traditional humanist and some feminist approaches to life history have yet to recognize the importance of what is known but kept secret and what is left unsaid. This potential to explore 'silence' and the 'Other' in life history has been, for me, the strongest argument for using a poststructural approach -- a version I hoped would be especially appropriate for inquiring into the lives of women who have been surrounded by lesbophobic silences on personal, professional and inter-generational levels.

The liberal humanist notion of a coherent, stable 'subject' has been persuasively critiqued by scholars from several intellectual traditions, including some feminist materialists and post-colonial theorists. This study has taken up questions about subjectivity raised mainly by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theorists. The idea of a sovereign subject has been troubled, on the one hand, by psychoanalytic theories about the 'unsaid'. On the other, poststructural theories about discourses which limit the subject positions available to an individual have

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*a secret is not primarily a hushed-up fact, a covert plot, a private feeling, or a confidential knowledge hidden from others...the secret is a trauma whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences are entombed and thereby consigned to internal silence, albeit unwittingly. (p. 99)*

While I think this latter conception of a 'secret' has potential for suggesting the complex formation of sexual subjectivities, considerable caution is required when translating psychoanalytic concepts from clinic settings to other interpretative contexts. My use of Abraham and Torok's concept of 'secret' is no more than a tentative speculation which does not pretend to capture many details of their work on encrypted secrets. Similarly, I think their characterization of 'silence' has much to offer future work about marginalized sexualities, and homophobia in particular, but the analysis of silence in this study does little more than gesture towards their detailed psychic theorization. For Abraham and Torok, silence:

*whether it characterizes individuals, families, social groups or entire nations -- the untold or unsayable secret, the feeling unfelt, the pain denied, the unspeakable concealed in the shame of families, the cover-up of political crimes, the collective disregard of painful historical realities -- may disrupt lives. (Rand, 1994: 21)*

For more detail about the term 'silence' refer to the theme "The Lesbian Closet" in Chapter 6.

led to deep questions about agency and sovereignty of the subject. These fundamental challenges give rise to the notion of a split or fragmented subject. The cautious use of a poststructural approach to subjectivity takes seriously the Other within the subject(s) of life history -- allows life history to focus not only what is said but on what is not said. Increasingly these intangible aspects of gendered sexualities are attracting scholarly attention (Britzman, 1998; Butler, 1997b; Todd, 1997). It was Judith Butler (1997b) who recently observed that "clearly, there are workings of gender that do not 'show' in what is performed as gender, and to reduce the psychic workings of gender to the literal performance of gender would be a mistake" (p. 144). While this life history study did not intend to focus on psychoanalytic aspects of subjectivity at the outset, vexing questions about the constitutive role of the unconscious gradually crept into the analysis.

It seems to me that challenging the 'open secret' of lesbians in physical education may mean shifting from giving lesbians 'voice' to asking how heterocentrism has silenced those voices. A continuing research focus upon lesbian identity risks sustaining the hierarchical relation between lesbianism and heterosexism (Namaste, 1994; Seidman, 1993), and at best leads to the subject positions of 'tolerant normal' and 'tolerated subaltern' (Britzman, 1995). Seidman (1993) suggests that poststructuralists aim to destabilize identity as a grounds for politics in order to open up alternative political possibilities, and that this may involve a shift from the resisting gay subject to an analysis of the homo/hetero codes that structure Western thought:

*Repudiating views of identity as essence or its effect, poststructuralists propose that the identity of an object or person is always implicated in its opposite.*

*'Heterosexuality' has meaning only in relation to 'homosexuality'; the coherence of the former is built on the exclusion, repression, and repudiation of the latter....If*

*homosexuality and heterosexuality are a coupling in which each presupposes the other, each being present in the invocation of the other, and in which this coupling assumes hierarchical forms, then the epistemic and political project of identifying a gay subject reinforces and reproduces this hierarchical figure. (p. 130)*

Heterocentrism is let off the theoretical hook, as it were. Hence, the task facing queer theory is:

*not to stop studying identity formation, or even abandon all forms of identity politics, but rather to maintain identity and difference in productive tension, and to rely upon notions of identity and identity politics for their strategic utility while remaining vigilant against reification. (Epstein, 1994: 197)*

This means asking how the categories 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' have come to acquire their status as coherent and core elements of subjectivity and as political realities through modern discourses such as sexuality, sport and physical education. It can also mean examining, if we draw on Judith Butler's (1990) earlier work, how heterosexual identities have been performed in ways that marginalize lesbian sexualities in order to maintain their privileged position. In this study, "remaining vigilant against reification" has meant thinking about normative ideas contained within the life histories in different ways. To some extent the study has attempted to deconstruct, or negotiate the limits (Namaste, 1994) of the hetero/homosexual binary category. Part of the analysis expanded more obvious understandings to produce alternative interpretations about the normalization of heterosexualities and the marginalization of lesbian sexualities.

A thorough understanding of sexual subjectivity necessitates an analysis that takes into account the historical and social contexts, or what I refer to as

'institutional discourses'. Pragmatic poststructural and feminist theorists (Davies, 1991; Phelan, 1993) suggested that research should focus upon the way in which institutional discourses intersect with personal discourses to construct sexualities, rather than the construction of sexual identities per se. Davies (1991) argues that a poststructural perspective understands the individual and collective as both discursively constructed in interlocking ways. Accordingly, discourses in physical education, women's sport, feminism, families, and schooling provided the larger context in which the life histories were interpreted.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Lesbian Studies in Educational Research

Lesbian sexuality has only emerged as a topic of research in physical education during the past decade. This line of inquiry has arisen in large part because an increasing amount of research has been conducted into feminist, lesbian and queer issues in education. An overview of the literature shows the increasingly diverse and sophisticated scope of Gay and Lesbian Studies in education (for example, Britzman, 1998; de Castell & Bryson, 1997; Epstein, 1994; Harbeck, 1992; Unks, 1995; Woog, 1995). There have been several personal accounts of silence and homophobia experienced by lesbian teachers specifically (for example, Anonymous, 1989; Doe, 1991; Jeffs, 1995; Powell, 1993). Equally, a number of books have focused exclusively on the experiences of lesbian and gay teachers (Harbeck, 1992; Jennings, 1994; Khayatt, 1992; Kissan, 1996).

Much of this research in the UK and North America has been influenced by liberal feminist notions of lesbianism. For example, Squirrell (1989) linked the role of homosexuals in education with an area of equal opportunities. She alluded to heterosexism as the underlying cause of oppression against lesbian teachers, but concentrated more on silence, fear and job security at the individual level. In contrast, Oram (1989) presented a socialist-feminist analysis of 'spinster' teachers in inter-war Britain, a climate profoundly influenced by the marriage ban for women teachers.

Didi Khayatt's (1992, 1994) research into lesbian teachers broke new ground in Canadian educational research by challenging the heterocentric conception of female sexuality as reproductive labor, particularly in Dorothy Smith's analysis of everyday realities of women's experience, which was dominant at the time. Her

analysis of heterosexism within capitalist patriarchy, and the position of lesbian teachers therein, greatly extended existing feminist and Marxist analyses of gender in schooling. She analyzed how ideological practices controlled who is allowed to teach and administer state schooling, and consequently who implements male privilege and compels heterosexuality. In turn, she outlined how this ideology constructed lesbian teachers as "inadmissible, incomprehensible, a contradiction in terms" (p. 71). Using this theoretical framework, she developed detailed accounts of how lesbian teachers managed their sexual identities within the context of the school, the classroom and the community. Khayatt identified the degree of involvement in feminist politics and the size of school board as the two most influential factors affecting how lesbians approached their teaching. She identified the dilemma facing lesbian teachers as follows:

*a teacher who is a lesbian lives a life filled with dilemma...it is not simply a question of the more obvious inconsistencies with which one has to deal on a day-to-day basis...No. The issue is more the small ways in which a lesbian teacher is silent. It is the invisibility of her life. It is the denials she articulates, the deflections she manages, the defenses she feels compelled to put up. (p. 239)*

This astute interpretation of the dilemma facing lesbian teachers is one that proved to be central to this study, although this resonance became apparent only with the benefit of hindsight.

No research about the lives of lesbian teachers in British Columbia has been published to date, although issues of sexual orientation affecting teachers and students began to appear in the early 1990s. As early as 1992, the Vancouver School Board (1992) supported the equal treatment of all individuals regardless of "race, culture, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, *sexual orientation*, or physical or



mental ability". An advocacy group of lesbian and gay teachers (GALE BC) has become increasingly organized during the 1990s.

In 1990, Reis put forward several reasons why sexual orientation should be taught in public schools throughout British Columbia. Wicks (1991) and McCue (1991) also discussed the difficulties facing lesbian and gay youth in British Columbia schools.

In 1995, GALE BC published and distributed a manual called Counseling Gay and Lesbian Youth (GALE BC, 1995) providing information to school counselors throughout the province. Since the mid-1990s, the provincial government and teacher's federation in British Columbia have actively supported measures to combat homophobia in public schools and heterosexism in curriculum materials. Extending from a Canadian Teacher's Federation (undated) policy which stated that "sexuality education should include information and discussion about sexual orientation, homophobia and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation", the British Columbia Teacher's Federation adopted a resolution to create a program, funded from members' dues, to eliminate homophobia and heterosexism from the public schools system. In 1997-1998, a seven-member ad hoc committee was given the task of making recommendations about teacher education, curriculum and resource materials to begin this process (British Columbia Teacher's Federation, 1998).

These measures have provoked considerable opposition from various right-wing and fundamentalist groups in the province. The most publicized responses have involved the trustees of the Surrey School Board of whom several represent conservative, religious views. The connections between members of the Board of Trustees and right-wing religious organizations such as the Citizen's Research Institute are less publicly known, but appear to have influenced positions adopted by this particular school board. For instance, in April 1996 the trustees forced the

deletion of a number of protections from a draft policy on sexual harassment, including the sentence "Any form of expression of bias on the basis of sex or sexual orientation including derogatory comments" which made the policy inconsistent with the BCTF collective agreement (Bigots Ban Books, 1998). The following year, the same school board banned three children's books which referred to same-sex families from use in primary classrooms. They also voted to ban the use of "any resources from gay and lesbian groups such as GALE BC" thereby effectively preventing counselors from using the Counseling Gay and Lesbian Youth handbook. These events led two teachers, a student, a parent and an author to challenge the banning of these materials in the BC Supreme Court. The case was heard in 1998 and, at the time of writing, the decision is still pending.

#### Studies in Physical Education

Due to the impact of feminist scholarship, researchers in physical education have gradually turned their attention toward issues of lesbian sexuality and homophobia. Much of this research examined gendered relations in teacher preparation programs. For instance, Alison Dewar (1990) analyzed ways in which physical education students constructed athletic and gender identities in a Canadian program. Her study referred to compulsory heterosexuality and lesbophobia, although the primary theme was how students assimilated scientific, biodeterminist rather than social constructivist notions of sex from the PE undergraduate curriculum. Ann Flintoff (1994) also studied the ways in which British teacher education constructed gendered identities, but did not consider sexual identities. An autobiographical account by Skelton (1993) suggested how the informal student culture of physical education students reproduced a hegemonic masculinity -- including compulsory heterosexuality -- that undermined the humanist, formal curriculum of the teacher education program. In the U.S.A., Williamson and Williams (1990) documented how a mandatory 'Equity Awareness'

course at the University of Massachusetts helped physical education students reflect upon racism, sexism, homophobia and motor elitism in the profession.

### Studies of Lesbian PE Teachers

The first studies about lesbian PE teachers appeared in the early 1990s using life history research (Clarke, 1996; Sparkes, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Squires & Sparkes, 1996; Sparkes & Templin, 1992), historical research (Cahn, 1994a), participatory action research (Griffin, 1992b) and what I shall refer to as identity management research (Griffin, 1991, 1992b, 1992c; Woods, 1992; Woods & Harbeck, 1992).

Andrew Sparkes has published several articles about life histories of lesbians in physical education. His work draws primarily upon Griffin's (1991, 1992a, 1992c) liberal feminist and Lenskyj's (1986, 1990, 1991) more radical feminist analyses of homophobia and lesbianism in sport. His theoretical framework acknowledged that schools, as patriarchal institutions, are ideologically and culturally heterosexual. He has counterpoised the public realm of the school against the private life of the lesbian teacher, inquiring how the school 'controls' the teacher's private life. Thus, the hegemony of heterosexuality is acknowledged as being institutional and Sparkes examined how lesbian teachers resisted this hegemony. This framework does not, however, focus on how the marginalization of the lesbian teacher is actually fundamental to institutional heterocentrism. This is one area where this thesis, incorporating queer theory, builds on the theoretical framework used by Sparkes.

Other than these life history studies, most research about lesbian PE teachers has examined how teachers have 'managed' their sexual identities in the homophobic milieu of schooling. Woods and Harbeck's (1992) phenomenological study asked "how lesbian physical educators cope with some unique occupational stresses relating to society's perspectives on homosexuality and women in sports" (p. 142). Pat Griffin (1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c) has been one of the most prolific authors about homophobia in sport. Much of her work is based on liberal feminist

principles, focusing on identity management strategies used by lesbian physical educators. In an action research study (Griffin, 1992b), she identified a continuum of management strategies lesbians used to separate or integrate their personal and professional identities. These ranged from 'passing' as heterosexual, 'covering' which involved censoring rather than deceiving, 'being implicitly out' to 'being explicitly out'.

Cahn's (1994a) historical research into the construction of gender and sexuality in women's sport in the US is the most comprehensive study to date. She traced the changing material conditions that constructed notions about lesbianism in American physical education from the late 1920s. As such, her work contributes to a historical materialist theory of lesbianism. In this inquiry, physical educators were juxtaposed with women athletes and sport promoters while medical, sexological, and education discourses were analyzed alongside those in the popular media.

It is worth detailing Cahn's findings as they are directly related to the issues of silence and invisibility at the heart of this thesis. Between 1870 and 1920 lesbians were constructed as 'sexual inverts' by the medical profession and sexologists, two of whom, P. M. Wise and Havelock Ellis, connected lesbianism to female athletes. She described how fears about female heterosexuality becoming out of control were increasingly popular from 1900 to 1930. During the 1930s, this fear of 'uncontrollable' heterosexuality coexisted with a developing awareness and fear of lesbianism, until the stereotype of the mannish lesbian gained primacy in the mid-1930s. The post-war gender conservatism of the 1940-50s forced many female athletes to 'prove' their heterosexuality through reference to family and motherhood. Cahn insightfully noted that this tactic of proving the heterosexuality of female athletes failed to dispel the stigma of lesbianism in athletics; paradoxically, it added to the fear of homosexuality, thereby strengthening the stigma. The 1960s

became the era of the 'open secret' in which the presence of lesbians in sport, especially softball, was known but not discussed. This 'open secret' of lesbian athletes operated within heterosexual norms, rather than challenging them. At the same time, Cahn suggested, sport provided friendship networks and sufficient social freedom to reconstruct traditional femininity.

This study provided much needed documentation of the historical account of lesbian sexuality in North American sport. Cahn's conceptualization of sexual identity acknowledged, but did not seriously engage, debates about identity and subjectivity which were emerging at the time. While she acknowledged the potential of poststructural theories about fragmented, non-unified identities, she noted that the oral histories of women she interviewed strongly suggested that "a sense of authentic self is both real and necessary to people living within a given context" (Cahn, 1994: 332). This tension between this 'sense of authentic self' and theories of fragmented identities has also been a central issue within this thesis. More broadly, this thesis continues this nascent line of inquiry into lesbian PE teachers, building on the life history studies of Andrew Sparkes in particular.

### **Life History Research**

This section outlines the most relevant life history literature. Research methodologies and epistemologies that draw upon personal experience have a long, varied and interdisciplinary tradition. Goodson and Walker (1988) claimed that life histories in anthropology and sociology were numerous in the 1920s and 1930s, with a resurgence in the 1970s. They also noted that use of oral history by social historians has been increasingly recognized as a legitimate source of data. The use of personal accounts, specifically autobiographies and life stories, by historians and sociologists in the early 1900s is noted by Purvis (1987), who also commented on a resurgence in the 1980s. Life history research may diverge "on the one hand towards historical biography in the humanistic tradition, and on the other towards studies of

collectivities in the social science tradition," according to Milburn (1989, p. 161). There are considerable similarities between sociological and educational research uses of life history research; most differences arise from the varied interpretive, critical, feminist and poststructural challenges to positivist social science. Life history then, according to Sparkes (1993), "is an umbrella term that includes as sources of data, autobiographies, personal documents, human documents, life records, case histories, interviews, life stories etc." (p. 110). Collaborative autobiography has been used in teacher education and educational research (Butt, 1988; Butt & Raymond, 1987; Butt, McCue, Townsend & Raymond, 1989; Goodson, 1989; Knowles, 1991). In the late 1980s, feminist theories began to inform the use of autobiography and personal narrative in educational research.

Life history research relating to teachers has dealt with issues facing student teachers (Sikes & Tronya, 1991) and teachers' careers (Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985). Two important studies used life history to explore the lives of feminist teachers in New Zealand (Middleton, 1993) and women teachers who were social activists in the United States (Casey, 1993). These studies are more relevant to the research being proposed because of their feminist perspectives, which influenced both their content and methodologies. Life history research in physical education has delved into the profession's status as a marginal subject (Sparkes, Templin & Schempp, 1990; Sparkes & Templin, 1992), teachers' careers (Templin, 1988) and, more recently, the experiences of a lesbian teacher (Squires & Sparkes, 1996; Sparkes, 1994a, 1994b). Life histories have been an important source of knowledge as lesbian and gay studies have developed over the past decade (Gay Men's Oral History Group, 1989; Lesbian History Group, 1989; Lesbian Oral History Group, 1989; Sullivan, 1990).

Cross-generational life histories have the potential to reveal both continuities and dis-continuities. Changes of this sort have been demonstrated in terms of mid-life changes in sexual identities (Fleishman, 1993); malleability of life courses in

general (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995); and bisexual identities (Creed, 1995). Similarly, Smith-Rosenberg (1989b) deployed the trope of the 'New Woman' in early twentieth century America, to show how cross-generational feminisms and feminists have been fractured. As she put it, "how the language and victories of one generation of women can radically reposition the women who follow, making them speak different languages, avow different goals" (p. 120). Interestingly, she drew a parallel between the conflicts between successive generations of New Women and the challenges of poststructuralism facing feminists today. The importance of a relational analysis in oral histories was stressed by Kathleen Casey (1993) in her life histories of women teachers. She was referring to the relation between past and present; dominant memory and commonplace understandings; personal and large-scale changes. Furthermore she claimed that analysis of these relations may reveal discontinuities or 'factual disparities' (p. 12) which may provide valuable insight rather than problems of distortion.

### **Theories of Sexuality**

Poststructural theories of the subject critique the notion of identity as a coherent and stable sense of personhood, proposing instead that subjectivity consist of fragmented, split subject positions. These different assumptions can be traced through the debates about essentialism versus social constructionism. For instance, the tension between individual perceptions that lesbian identity is based upon an essential sexual orientation and social constructionist theories of sexual identity has been discussed by Rust (1993). Rust cites social psychological studies from the 1970s that claim that individuals experience their sexual identities as stable and essential, and that changes in their sexual identities are part of a process of discovering their 'essential' sexual orientation. These claims are clearly problematic given the poststructural/social constructivist assumptions of the thesis; however, I assert that they have been commonly held perceptions. Rust pointed out that even the goal of

discovering an essential sexual identity is, in fact, defined by available social constructs. Weeks (1991) tackled the paradox that while sexual identities seem to change and be in flux, there is a strong personal and political need to fix and stabilize sexual identity. He suggested that sexual identity "is provisional, precarious, dependent on, and incessantly challenged by, social contingencies and psychic demands -- but apparently necessary, the foundation stone of our sexual beliefs and behaviors" (p. 69). This paradox between the psychic, personal need for a degree of stability and coherence in one's identity and poststructural theories of instability and fragmentation remains a contested issue.

This issue was broached by Julia Creet (1995) when she discussed the anxieties of coming 'out' and coming 'undone'. She based her argument on the notion of identity as a repetitive discursive performance, with lesbian identity predicated specifically on the speech act of 'coming out'. Coming undone referred to the loss of identity, of slipping into a non-identity, illustrated through an account of a long standing lesbian falling in love with a man. She articulated the paradox -- if the repetitive performance of 'coming out' constitutes and maintains a lesbian identity, how does this retelling work within and against the notion that identities are unstable? Creet did not resolve the paradox for us. She leaves us with the thought that her lesbian identity "is psychically entrenched play, as Butler points out, but, one must insist, physically and historically entrenched play also" (p. 196).

The following literature is used to review how 'identity' has been conceptualized in life history research. Casey (1993) differentiated her approach to life history from others that focus upon a 'fictive composite individual'. Her study of female teachers was structured around common identities such as 'catholic', 'nun', 'black', 'political activist'. Casey was dismissive of poststructural theories of identity. For her, the subject is more than a creation of discourse:



*Unlike the alienated person of post-modern discourse, this self is not a jumble of fragments; she can articulate her own coherence. Acting within limitations constructed by the other, she nevertheless has some choice, and she has some power. (p. 25)*

In contrast, Smith (1993) recounted how personal narratives have recently started to challenge "the certitudes of bourgeois individualism -- for instance, the certitude of stable, unified selfhood" (p. 395). Her biographical study illustrated how an individual, Linda Nieman, was situated within multiple discourses of identity, critiquing the myth of unified selfhood. The traditional framing of biographical subject, she argued, can be countered by weaving institutional discourses into the text alongside the narrative. However, such historicized and contextualized representations of the subject may require alternative forms of life writing. For example she suggested organizing a narrative around topics -- such as the body, the voice, minds, gardens, education and so forth -- rather than a chronology of a person's life. The suggestion that narrative structure in autobiography precludes awareness of the complexities, fragments, silences and changes of the 'self' is rejected by Stanley (1993). She argues that autobiographical writing can "take a clear 'this then that' narrative form in which the life of the self, and thus the writing self also, is constructed by means of strong referential claims. But this can include an awareness of the 'inner' fragmentations of self " (p. 207).

#### Poststructural Theories of Sexuality

Poststructural theories of homosexual identity have proliferated largely as a result of debate about essentialism and social constructionism in lesbian and gay studies (DeCecco & Elia, 1993). It is fair to say that, certainly as we enter the late 1990s, much of the theorizing about identity, the subject and subjectivity has yet to have a significant impact on research in sport sociology and physical education.

Poststructural, queer theories of sexuality attempt -- among other things -- to

counter the problems arising from overly essentialist assumptions about sexual identities. Before exploring this more deeply, a word of caution about the term social constructionism is needed because the term has different meanings in various disciplines. In social psychology for instance, Burr (1995) suggested that social constructionism refers to any approach which takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; is historically and culturally specific, anti-essentialist or anti-realist. Within sociology, according to Epstein (1994), social constructionism provided continuity between sociological labeling and deviance theories about sexuality and more recent queer, gay and lesbian theories about sexuality. A helpful genealogy of social constructionism in sociological research into sexuality can be found in Nardi and Schneider's (1998) anthology. Broadly speaking, I use the term 'social construction' primarily to refer to theoretical approaches that challenge essentialist notions of identity.

Back to poststructural and queer theories about sexual identities. An important historical approach to the social construction of sexual identities is to be found in the work of Weeks (1991). In his words, identities "are not necessary attributes of particular sexual drives or desires, and [they] are not, in fact, essential -- that is naturally pre-given -- aspects of our personality" (p. 68). He also claimed that identities are selected from a range of possibilities; however, the range of possibilities is historically contingent and constrained rather than endless. Rather than interpreting the work of Marx and Freud reductively, Weeks noted how their work challenged the possibility of a coherent, unitary identity. Marx's view that an individual is an ensemble of social relations, Freud's notion that unconscious forces beyond rational control subvert the conscious individual, and subsequent feminist rethinking of the relations between the psyche and male power are used by Weeks to support the following conclusions:

*First, that subjectivity is always fractured, contradictory, ambiguous, and disrupted; second, that identity is not inborn, pre-given, or 'natural'. It is striven for, contested, negotiated, and achieved, often in struggles of the subordinated against the dominant. Moreover, it is not achieved just by an individual act of will, or discovered in the hidden recesses of the soul. It is put together in circumstances bequeathed by history, in collective experiences as much as by individual destiny. (p. 94)*

Social constructionist views about sexuality have rarely been articulated so clearly and with such detailed historical background as in the work of Weeks. He suggested two lines of inquiry for historical research into sexuality which proved to be important to this thesis. Firstly, the conditions that dis/allow the emergence of sexual categories and, secondly, the factors that affect individual acceptance or rejection of those sexual categories. He differentiated between emotional/sexual propensities -- desires that are shaped at the psychoanalytic level -- and sexual identities that are shaped during a lifelong series of social interactions, calling for historical research into both:

*...we must see [them] as aspects of the same process. Social processes construct subjectivities not just as 'categories' but at the level of desires. This perception, rather than the search for epistemological purity, should be the starting point for future social and historical studies of 'homosexuality' and indeed of 'sexuality' in general. (p. 45)*

These dual lines of inquiry are evident in this study, particularly in the focus on institutional discourses and the social unconscious in the data analysis.

Nonetheless, Champagne (1995) argued that Weeks' version of social construction theory yields choices about identity available to a humanist subject, rather than a range of subject-effects. I found his critique somewhat reductive:

*Weeks' casting of identity not as discursive but as 'historical' necessarily ushers in a subject who, while purged of an essentialist sexual identity, is nonetheless sovereign, capable of choosing his or her identity from the supermarket of history or rejecting such an identity -- while still, in some sense, being homosexual. (p. 65)*

He also suggested that attempts to historicize the construction of sexual identities eventually and unavoidably result in a "kind of essentialism" (p. 65). This paradox -- that a degree of essentialism exists within social constructionism -- remains unresolved in most social constructionist and poststructuralist theories. Grosz (1994) pointed out that constructionism "needs to make explicit what are the raw materials for its process of construction and these cannot themselves be constructed without the assumption of infinite regress. The building blocks or raw materials must in some sense be essentialist" (p. 213). Thus, it seems that social constructionist research into identity will necessarily entail a degree of essentialism, and this is, in my view, why the essentialism/social constructionism debate is so persistent. Poststructural theories of sexual identity have a legacy in the debate about essentialism and social constructionism and all but the most skeptical poststructuralist theories of identity contain elements of social constructionism. As part of a movement towards social postmodernism in social theory, Seidman offered a comprehensive account of the increasing complexity and ambivalence of social constructionism in sexual politics (Seidman, 1993; Nicholson & Seidman, 1995).<sup>7</sup> He argued that the ambivalence of social constructionism in identity politics

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<sup>7</sup>The social constructivist assumptions of gay liberation, Seidman (1993) contends, evolved into two separate movements based on what he calls an ethnic model of identity. He describes "...a movement away from a liberationist framework toward an ethnic/ethnic minority model, with an emphasis on cultural difference, community building, and identity-based interest-group politics" (p. 117). A gay men's movement focused upon winning civil rights developed at the same time but distinct from a lesbian separatist movement based upon female values and lifestyle choices. Both these

arises from on the one hand, its challenge to a unitary lesbian identity yet, on the other hand, its focus upon the historical construction of identities.

### Queer Theories of Sexuality

The next section reviews the impact of 'queer theory' on the re-conceptualization of sexual identity. 'Queer theory' necessarily resists any straightforward definition, yet it is possible to trace the emergence of central queer theories and theorists during the past decade. Queer theory arose in the context of sex debates between anti-pornography and sex-radical feminists, critiques of feminism, the rise of postmodern and poststructural theory, and the right wing backlash against homosexuality in the AIDS crisis (Seidman, 1994; Walters, 1996). While the theoretical and political genealogy of queer theory stretches back into the early poststructural/modern work of Foucault and Derrida of the 1970s (Namaste, 1994)<sup>8</sup> and has been heavily influenced by French poststructuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Seidman, 1994), the term 'queer theory' began to gain currency in 1991. The political movement 'Queer Nation' was born in 1990 at a small meeting of gay men interested in direct action around lesbian and gay issues according to queer historian Donna Penn (1995), while Teresa de Lauretis has been attributed with coining the term 'Queer Theory' in 1991 (Walters, 1996). Since then articles exploring queer theory have begun to appear in sociological, feminist and educational journals with special editions<sup>9</sup> and anthologies<sup>10</sup> devoted to the topic.

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political movements, although aiming towards different ends, assumed a unitary gay or lesbian identity, and it was this essentialism that solicited critique. Following Seidman's account, constructionist scholars critiqued the ethnic identity model as obscuring the diversity of same-sex desires.

<sup>8</sup> Ki Namaste (1994) insightfully assessed the contributions made to queer theory by Michel Foucault's analysis of the discursive production of the category homosexual and Jacques Derrida's concept of supplementarity.

<sup>9</sup> Queer Theory was the subject of special editions in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* (vol. 3 #2, Summer 1991), *Radical History Review* (62, Spring 1995), *Sociological Theory* (12 #3, July 1994), and most recently in the *Harvard Educational Review* (1996). See also Penn and Irving's

Any list of queer theorists will oversimplify, exclude and misrepresent the diverse theoretical backgrounds of individual scholars, but key players include Eve Sedgwick (1990), Diana Fuss (1995), Judith Butler (1990, 1993a), Teresa de Lauretis (1991, 1994) with Canadians such as Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell (1994) and Deborah Britzman (1995) publishing queer articles concerning education specifically. Work appearing under the rubric of queer theory generated a number of critiques from material feminists (Hennessy, 1995; Ingraham, 1994), lesbian feminists (Jeffreys, 1994; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1994; Martin, 1994; Walters, 1996), mainstream sociologists (Oakes, 1994; Norton, 1996) and even from within queer theory itself (Butler, 1994; Seidman, 1995). The following section outlines several central themes within queer theory alongside the critiques which have been generated as a result. Briefly, current queer theorizing is concerned with deconstructing normalcy, particularly heteronormativity; interrogating the intersections between racial and sexual identities; distinguishing between the study of gender (feminism) and sexuality (queer studies); and the role of discourse in (de)constructing sexualities.

It has been argued that queer theories assume: that identity politics mute internal differences along racial, class, gender and other lines; that identities are always multiple; and that any categorization is inherently suspicious (Epstein, 1994). These assumptions have influenced the direction of research into sexualities to varying degrees, claiming to offer the following routes for inquiry.

Queer theory, some would argue, no longer focuses only upon lesbian (and gay male) sexuality but brings into view the workings of heterosexuality by

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(1995) review of emergent literature in gay and lesbian studies.

<sup>10</sup> Notably, an introductory anthology of early queer theorizing in the Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader (Abelove, Baral & Halperin, 1993) and a Marxist critique of postmodern trends in queer theory called Material Queer (Norton, 1996)

interrogating the hierarchical relations between homo/hetero, inside/outside, self/Other and normal/transgression. It could be said that heterosexuality represents the inside, the center, the natural. Heterosexuality is surrounded by marginal sexualities which are less privileged -- homo, bi, trans, celibate sexualities exist as/at the margins of heterosexuality. Certainly this hierarchy permeates much physical education discourse. But in order to maintain this opposition, a boundary between inside and outside is required and it is the "production and management" (Namaste, 1994: 224) of this boundary that queer theory interrogates. And yet, while queer theory introduces heterosexuality as a central category of inquiry, Michael Warner (1993) notes that "'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than heterosexual" (p. xxvi). Thus, queer theory takes aim at the de/construction of heteronormativity rather than heterosexuality per se (Hennessy, 1995). One aspect of this interrogation has been the deconstruction of sexual identities beyond the limits of homo/hetero in favor of "the plurality and irreducibility (irreducible to gender, to the body, to social construction) of sexual desire and sexual play" (Walters, 1996: 836). The trope inside/outside, first explicated by Diana Fuss (1995), has been fertile ground for queer theorizing. The antagonistic yet mutually dependent relation between inside/outside -- sometimes but not exclusively read as homo/hetero -- leads to the realization that "we cannot assert ourselves to be completely outside heterosexuality, nor entirely inside, because each of these terms achieves its meaning in relation to the other. What we can do, queer theorists suggest, is "negotiate these limits" (Namaste, 1994: 224).

A number of feminists have voiced serious concerns about the content and institutional location of 'queer' theory. For example, queer theory raised problems for radical feminists Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1994), because they fear that "as the meanings of heterosexuality and homosexuality become blurred within a fantasy world of ambiguity, indeterminacy and charade, the material realities of

oppression and feminist politics are forgotten" (p. 456). Their critique centered upon the notion of queer heterosexuality whereby "people who, while doing what is conventionally defined as 'heterosexuality', nonetheless do so in ways which are transgressive of 'normality'" (p. 451). While their discomfort with this particular queer style may be justified, it glosses over more compelling reasons for inquiring into the workings of normative (rather than queer) heterosexuality given by Fuss (1995), Namaste (1994) and Warner (1993) among others. Tensions between feminist and queer theories are far from resolved. An excellent entry point into the debates can be found in the edited volume Feminism Meets Queer Theory (Weed, 1997).

In part, 'queer' emerged as a corrective to the exclusions of other marginal sexualities and of people of color by the lesbian and gay movements and theories which developed in the 1980s (Seidman, 1994). One of the foci of queer theory has been the "differential formation of homosexuality across racial boundaries, including the question of how racial and reproductive injunctions are articulated through one another" (Butler, 1993b: 21). The overlap between post-colonial studies and queer theory is producing some of the most astute accounts of the construction of racialized sexualities (Moraga, 1996; Nelson, 1993; Somerville, 1994). Despite the claim that queer politics and to a lesser extent queer theory emerged as a corrective to the exclusion of people of color, Walters (1996) cautions that there is little inherent within queer theory to prevent a similar cycle of deracination. She forewarned the risk that "queer can 'de-race' the homosexual of color in much the same way 'old-time' gay studies often has, effectively erasing the specificity of 'raced' gay existence under a queer rubric in which whiteness is not problematized" (p. 842). Thus the challenge facing queer studies in physical education is not to overlook the intersections between racial identities and sexual identities. Or to put it more proactively, the heterocentric and Eurocentric history of the physical education



profession makes queer studies into the construction of white, heterosexual identities a particularly urgent project.

It is important to note that the issues of white privilege and racism arising within this thesis emerged largely because of the feminist framework which foregrounded the everyday memories of the teachers. The analysis of these recollections was informed as much by critical race theory (Dei, 1996; Frankenburg, 1993) as queer theory. Queer theory's focus on the 'normal' did, however, direct analyses onto ways absence, othering and silence were central to 'normal' ways of talking about racial identity for white women.

Another related theme in queer theory has been a rupture in the taken-for-granted links between sex (male/female), gender (masculine/feminine) and sexuality (homo/hetero) -- a theme which permeates the work of Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler particularly (Walters, 1996). Differences between the centrality of lesbianism and relevance of feminism in the queer theorizing of Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have been suggested by Kathleen Martindale (1995). Greatly abbreviating, she suggested that Sedgwick focused more on sexuality than gender, describing her work as anti-homophobic and not always coextensive with feminism.<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler's earlier work emphasized the performative nature of gender and sexual identities, thereby providing a theoretical framework for anti-essentialist feminist and queer theorizing of both gender and sexuality. In comparison, Teresa de Lauretis, invoked the term "queer theory" to remedy masking of gay male privilege in the purportedly equitable phrase "lesbian and gay" -- a move indicative of her other work which retains a stronger feminist impulse than Butler or Sedgwick.

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<sup>11</sup> For Sedgwick's own discussion of the unpredictable relation between feminist and queer inquiry see Axiom 2 in Epistemology of the Closet (1990).

There is a perceived danger in some feminist circles that queer theory's claim to be concerned with sexuality as distinct from gender discounts and overshadows earlier feminist theories which reworked the links between gender, sex and sexuality. The most notable example of this is Gayle Rubin's (1984) groundbreaking article "Thinking sex" in which she argued forcefully for the analytical separation of gender and sexuality "in order to speak more freely about 'transgressive' variations of sexuality" (Flax, 1992: 287). A queer sounding project if ever there was one, but one made almost a decade before the arrival of queer theory.

The second problematic raised by some feminist theorists is that gender runs the risk of disappearing in queer theory. They have warned that vigilance is needed to prevent the privileging of gay men at the expense of lesbians, and slide into "implicit and explicit marginalization and demonization of feminism and lesbian-feminism" (Walters, 1996: 837).<sup>12</sup> By far the most stringent criticism that queer theory has the potential to exclude and disavow the contribution (even the material existence) of lesbians and lesbian feminism has been voiced by Sheila Jeffreys (1994). Writing from a lesbian feminist perspective in which "lesbians and gay men are in many respects different because lesbians are members of the political class of women" (p. 459), she is extremely concerned that queer theory's fascination with gay male cultural forms such as camp and drag, particularly by Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, will "subsume lesbians into a variety of gay men" (p. 471). This concern has been taken up in more nuanced ways by other lesbian feminists who, at the same time, are more curious about the possibilities of developing a feminist queer theory. Judith Butler (1994) herself is extremely wary of the separation between feminist and queer theory, if queer theory defines itself (as the study of sexuality)

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<sup>12</sup> Walters (1996) also makes the analogy between feminist critiques of queer theory's elision of lesbians and critiques of postmodernism's elision of the subject and the category 'Woman'.

against feminism (as the study of gender). She also forewarned of the anti-feminism accompanying the rise of conservative gay men within the queer movement.

The theoretical framework of this study has been heavily influenced by a long history of feminist research; however, queer theories have undoubtedly shifted the focus onto 'normality', specifically heterosexual, white norms. The theoretical framework is also indebted to Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler's work on gendered sexualities which, some would argue, warrants the term 'queer'.

### **Female Sexualities in Physical Education**

Physical education is a discourse of the body, unlike other areas of curriculum in formal schooling. Indeed, discourses of physical education are indelibly and especially written on the body, just as discourses of gender are etched into the body. In the words of Elizabeth Grosz (1990):

*Masculinity and femininity are not simply social categories as it were externally or arbitrarily imposed on the subject's sex. Masculine and feminine are necessarily related to the structure and the lived experience and meaning of bodies. As Gatens argues in her critique of the sex/gender distinction (1983), masculinity and femininity mean different things according to whether they are lived out on and experienced by male or female bodies. (p. 73-74)*

In women's physical education, athletic masculinity has been etched into the female body. This disrupts the normal links between female/femininity and male/masculinity, disturbing what Messner and Sabo (1990) referred to as the "gender order" in sport. Discourses of physical education, especially those derived from sport, more often than not valorize hegemonic masculinity while denigrating homo-masculinity and most femininities (Dewar, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Scraton, 1986; Whitson, 1994). Female physical education teachers are unavoidably

implicated in and associated with these discourses of masculinization. As a result, the heterosexuality of women who participate in sport and physical education has long been under suspicion due to these masculinizing effects of sport. This association between sport, masculinity and 'fragile' heterosexuality began in the 1920s and 1930s, as Susan Cahn (1994b) documented:

*Mannishness, once a sign of gender crossing, assumed a specifically lesbian-sexual connotation; and the strong cultural association between sport and masculinity made women's athletics ripe for emerging lesbian stereotypes. (p. 335)*

Additionally, gender separation saturates many other aspects of physical education from student grouping, activity selection, hiring practices, and administrative duties. This means that female teachers have often worked in all-female contexts, be they physical education classes, sporting teams, social or professional associations. Thus, the construction of sexuality in women's physical education is peculiar due to the negotiation of stereotypical notions of athletic masculinity in frequently all-female contexts. This peculiar (some would say, perverse) context warrants comparison with Teresa de Lauretis' (1994) analysis of lesbian desire which, she claims, is directed towards both masculinity and female-directed femininity.

Conceptualizing women's physical education as a sociocultural context where masculinity is negotiated in female-only spaces requires a theoretical openness to what Eve Sedgwick (1990)<sup>13</sup> called 'gender inversion' and 'gender separation'. Most

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<sup>13</sup> Eve Sedgwick (1990) pointed out that all discourses about homo/sexuality follow two main tropes of gender which shape our understanding of same-sex desire -- the trope of inversion (transitivity between genders) and the trope of sameness (separatism between genders). The trope of inversion works when homosexuality refers to masculine sexual desire in women and vice-versa -- the stereotypes of the mannish lesbian and congenital invert, for example. Conversely, the trope of sameness works when homosexuality is viewed as sexual desire between the same gender as in 'woman-

frequently, lesbian sexuality<sup>14</sup> in sport is conceptualized as 'gender inversion' whereby the 'unnatural' masculinity of women participating in sport is linked to lesbian sexuality. A heterosexual desire (male-female) continues to work, but the desire has transferred via masculinity into the female body. This trope of (hetero)sexual desire underpins such homophobic clichés as 'she looks like a man', 'he throws like a girl', 'the sissy boy' and 'the mannish lesbian'.

'Gender separatism' is less frequently invoked in sporting discourses, but nevertheless permeates the experiences of many women. The trope of separatism invokes suspicion about lesbian desire within women-only sports; indeed, this suspicion of lesbianism in women's sports functioned both as a homophobic repellent and as a magnetic sexual field of force (Cahn, 1994a).

The framework above denaturalizes the gendered links between male/masculinity and female/femininity and, as such, owes more to feminist theories about gender than to queer theory. The shift from feminist to queer occurs when the implication of heterosexuality is considered. Judith Butler's (1990) contention that all genders are imitations does just that. Butler stated that gender is not the rightful property of a particular sex, that masculine does not properly belong to male nor feminine to female. This insight (which circulated within feminism for at least two decades) is supported through the example of male drag, whereby Butler suggests that "drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation" (p. 185). Butler's theory of gender as imitation turns on the notion<sup>15</sup>

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identified woman' notions of lesbianism or gay men's desire for hypermasculinity. Both tropes of transitive and separatist lesbian desire can be discerned in de Lauretis' theory of lesbian desire -- the masculine fetish representing the transitivity of masculine desire onto women's bodies, and the femme fetish representing the separatist trope.

<sup>14</sup> The tropes of inversion and sameness work quite differently for gay men in sport because of the discourses of masculinity upon which many sporting practices are contingent.

that there is no primary gender which drag imitates. In other words, drag is not an imitation of 'real' femininity by males; rather, "all gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original" (p. 185). She goes on to suggest that the very idea of a real, proper gender is actually an 'effect' of the imitation -- what has been naturalized as correct gender for particular sexes is no more than a "phantasmic ideal of heterosexual identity" (p. 185). Applying this logic to women in physical education, it follows that butch women are not trying to emulate a form of masculinity which is 'naturally' male, nor are lesbians trying to imitate a masculine form of sexuality by copying 'natural' heterosexuality; rather, the genders performed by butch lesbians, butch straight women, femme lesbians and other gendered sexualities of women in physical education are all imitations. The important difference is that feminine heterosexuality presents itself as more than that -- presents itself as the real, the natural, the genuine article. Normative femininity is not a gender that is natural or originary even though it sets itself up as such or in Butler's own words, "compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of 'man' and 'woman' are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real" (p. 185). Butler goes on to argue that if compulsory heterosexuality is only an imitation but sets itself up as the original, it is bound to fail and "precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavors to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself" (p. 185).

This is a crucial, queer insight which requires a different analysis of lesbian desire than that required by (liberal, radical, lesbian) feminist theories -- the construction of normative heterosexuality forms a crucial part of understanding of lesbian desire, lesbian stereotypes, and the secrets of the lesbian closet. Research into

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<sup>15</sup> Drawn from Derrida's argument that the mime does not copy some prior original, but rather the phantasm of the original.

lesbian lives, the isolation of the closet, and the violence of homophobias<sup>16</sup> requires analyses of the relations, boundaries and overlaps between hetero- and lesbian sexualities. The feminist work of Pat Griffin (1991, 1992a) and Helen Lenskyj (1986, 1990, 1991, 1994) pre-empted this queer focus upon heterosexuality to an extent, describing the negative impact of the homophobic 'lesbian specter' on straight women in physical education. Prior to this study, however, normative heterosexualities have not been the focus of life history research within physical education research.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter has reviewed literature which directly supports the methodology and theoretical framework of this thesis; specifically, studies of lesbians in education and physical education; life history research; poststructural and queer theories of sexual identity. How this literature was interpreted throughout this study is discussed in the next chapter, 'Spoken Lives, Written Lines'.

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<sup>16</sup> From a psychoanalytic vantage point, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (1996) makes the case that there are obsessional, hysterical and narcissistic homophobias which variously intersect with specific racisms and sexism.

## Chapter 3

### Spoken Lives, Written Lines

#### Methodological Tensions within Feminist-Poststructural Life History

*While life writing used to appear the most transparent kind of writing, perhaps because of the seductions of factuality, it now seems almost too complicated for words.*  
(Smith, 1993: 393)

Surveying feminist responses to the crisis of representation, Liz Stanley (1996) mapped four major feminist positions ranging from the foundationalist belief in a one-to-one connection between reality and representation to the view that eschewing any representation of others is the only adequate feminist response. In between these responses, some feminists recognized and built upon the (often unacknowledged) power of the researcher to represent women's lives. Accordingly, Stanley argued that:

*representational claims must be surrendered in favour of analytically accountable feminist research accounts which display their argumentative processes in detailed ways which can be critically engaged with by readers. (p. 45)*

Textual appropriation of the Other is inevitable in qualitative research, argued Opie (1992), and can be countered but never eliminated by making the strategic location of the researcher explicit. Ironically the more qualitative researchers attempt to give up, give back, collaborate or undermine their own authority of their accounts, the more they must engage with their authority because



"to critique authority is always itself an authoritative gesture" (Biriotti, 1993: 15). Similarly the claim, frequently made by critical theorists, that identifying the goals of one's research may disrupt the researcher's authority is, according to Stanley Fish (1997), itself a claim to authority which signifies mastery and control even as they are disowned. Accepting that the interpretive process necessarily appropriates the experience, stories and texts of people being researched, and that the researcher's authority can never be fully undermined is a starting point. Michelle Fine (1994) stressed that the problem is not that researchers edit, interpret and tailor data but that so few researchers reveal how they do this.

This chapter begins by recounting issues about sampling, interviewing and transcribing which emerged in the early stages of the study. From the outset I had to confront epistemological implications of analyzing life history data from a feminist-poststructuralist framework. The synthesis of issues put forward by Steinar Kvale (1995) was invaluable to me at this time, and his book *InterViews* could usually be seen cluttering up my table at the local coffee shop. I reflect on the intricate maneuvers involved in developing interview relationships with each of the women -- how we cautiously revealed our sexual identities to one another, how we evaded the importance of our shared identities as educated white women, and what forms the insider-outsider relation took.

Next, I outlined the u-turns I made during the early stages of analyzing the interview data. Initially I explored coding and narrative approaches to data analysis, neither of which proved satisfactory. Subsequently, it was Kvale's work that introduced the possibility that poststructural analysis could not only 'understand' but also 'overstand' interview data -- this dual approach was what I had been searching for. It provided an oeuvre to accommodate speech and silence, to interpret not only what had been said but also what was left unsaid, and to begin thinking about how the 'specter' of lesbian haunted physical education discourses. A major

theme in the study, *Lesbian Encounters*, illustrates how different types of discourse analysis produced 'understandings' and 'overstandings'. The chapter concludes with a theoretical discussion of the methodological tensions arising from the use of speech act theory, deconstruction, psychoanalytic and positioning theories in discourse analysis.

### **A Case for Life History**

The terrain of life writing is diverse, spanning literature and more recently some areas of social science. Biography, as a literary genre, is perhaps the oldest form of life writing. Since the 1800s traditional, empiricist biographers have been concerned with writing about the triumph and failures of great people, giving rise to what Sidone Smith (1993) called the myth of bourgeois individualism. Life writing within the social sciences has a long-standing, if somewhat chequered, history in anthropology, sociology and, to a lesser extent, psychology. At the turn of the century sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey railed against positivist sociology of the time, calling for human studies which arose from lived experience by way of autobiography, biography and history. Campbell (1988) traced how language emerged as central to biographical knowledge through Husserl's phenomenology, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotics. Life history has undergone a renaissance within sociology since the early days of the Chicago school during the 1930s (Smith, 1994) alongside its emergence within qualitative educational research, feminist and lesbian circles. In the field of educational research, the term 'life history' encompasses personal narratives (Knowles, 1991), individual and collaborative autobiography (Sikes & Tronya, 1991; Butt & Raymond, 1987), ethnographic biography (Goodson, 1989) and personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Early life history research in education was informed by traditional empiricism. Increasingly life history research has relied on a 'weak' form of standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Smith, 1993).

The common justification for life history research, eruditely proposed by Ivor Goodson and Jean Clandinin, is to provide teachers with a voice as an empowering means of professional development. The value of educational biography and autobiography rests on the assumption that the understandings gained from writing about individual lives can be empowering to those individuals. A 'stronger', explicitly feminist, form of standpoint epistemology influenced the feminist life histories of Sue Middleton (1993) and Kathleen Casey's (1993). Rather than positioning all teachers as oppressed by virtue of top-down curriculum and professional development compounded by deskilling and depersonalized positivist educational research, Middleton and Casey chose to focus on particular groups of teachers who were marginalized by virtue of gendered, racialized and sexual power relations. Their life history research has more in common, politically and methodologically, with oral history projects published by grassroots lesbian groups, particularly in Britain during the 1980s. The 'strong' version of feminist life history influenced my initial decision to do life history research, although my approach sought to integrate poststructuralist rather than standpoint assumptions about experience and subjectivity.

Having said this, I chose life history research not only for methodological reasons but as a result of my own personal history in teacher education and action research. During the early 1990s, I had been drawn to the emancipatory promises of critical theory to use critical action research in my master's degree, but several intellectual critiques collided at the end of that research. One, I was concerned that the promise of 'emancipation through participatory research' was itself becoming a 'grand narrative' in critical theory. Secondly, I was increasingly troubled by the absence of feminist theory in the educational action research literature. Thirdly, as I moved to British Columbia for my doctoral program, I was aware of the dangers of 'imposing' participatory research in an unfamiliar context -- a reality of my doctoral

study which could not be ignored. These three factors combined to make me wary of the emancipatory promise of action research. Goodson and Walker (1988) suggested that life history research, compared to action research which increasingly held sway in Britain in the late 1980s, provided a less radical way of building teachers' concerns into educational research although it might overcome some of the problem of sustaining projects encountered in action research.

At the beginning of this study I hoped that life history could "give flesh and breath", to use Minnie Bruce Pratt's (1995) phrase, to abstract theories about sexuality. I still hold that view but in a rather more complex, ambivalent way than before. Many social scientists now argue that biography should move beyond narrating the particular into more abstract interpretations (Smith, 1994). On the one hand, an important strength in life history work is the distinctiveness and detail in which an individual's stories can be studied; yet on the other hand, this focus on the individual may unnecessarily downplay the importance of broader social structures. As Andrew Sparkes and Thomas Templin (1992) framed the dilemma, focusing too intently on the individual can divorce personal experience from the wider socioeconomic and political forces which shape them. Resolving the ever-present risk of methodological individualism requires a delicate balance which respects the narrator's personal truths while pursuing broader socio-historical analyses. This balance can become more tenuous if, as Ivor Goodson (1988) warned, the theoretical analyses "are not part of the consciousness of the individual" (p. 80). A partial response has been 'group biographies' which, at its best, gives insight into social structures beyond the limits of any one individual biography (Smith, 1994) by exploring commonalities across many life histories (Sparkes & Templin, 1992). The location of individual experience within wider social relations, within historical and political constraints, occurred to a limited extent in the early life history work by Faraday and Plummer (1979) and in more recent work on lesbian physical education

teachers by Andrew Sparkes (Sparkes, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Sparkes & Templin, 1992; Squires & Sparkes, 1996). While acknowledging the influence of this work, my approach to life history is more closely aligned with the 'socially theorized life history' used by Connell (1992) to study the construction of masculinity in gay men, an approach which extends beyond the unstructured narratives of individuals into a theoretical analysis of broader social structures.

My approach was also based upon poststructural assumptions about experience, subjectivity and discourse rather than empiricist or standpoint epistemologies which have informed much lesbian (Lapovsky Kennedy, 1995; Lesbian Oral History Group, 1989; Sparkes, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Squires & Sparkes, 1996; Sparkes & Templin, 1992) and educational (Middleton, 1993; Casey, 1993; Goodson & Walker, 1988; Knowles, 1991) life history research. Traditionally, life history research has relied upon an individualistic humanism which valorized the 'reality' of personal experience and the transparency of oral accounts, but some feminist and poststructuralist notions of language and subjectivity have begun to challenge such assumptions. Several poststructural theorists (Clough, 1993; Davies, 1990, 1991 1992; Scott, 1992; Weedon, 1987, 1997) have developed different accounts of subjectivity and identity which are, of course, fundamental to all forms of oral research including life history. For instance, Chris Weedon (1987) sketched the poststructural relation between experience and language in the following way:

*As we acquire language, we learn to give voice - meaning - to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which pre-date our entry into language. (p. 33)*

Thus the ways the women described their sexual identities was profoundly affected by the discourses about sexuality, such as 'dating' and 'the lesbian closet',

which were always already circulating within their families, schools and communities, and the poststructural task was to attend to how each woman took up or resisted these discourses. Similarly, Joan Scott (1992) detailed how poststructuralism has altered the way historical research conceptualizes 'experience' as evidence:

*from one bent on 'naturalizing' experience through a belief in the unmediated relationship between words and things to ... how have categories of representation and analysis -- such as class, race, gender, relations of production, biology, identity, subjectivity, agency, experience, even culture -- achieved their foundational status? (p. 796)*

Hence, one of the main purposes of this feminist postructuralist approach to life history is to represent the changing, hierarchical relations between 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' within and between the lives of these six teachers.

### **Interviewing**

Interviewing, as a method in qualitative and feminist research, has traditionally been rooted in a humanist notion of the individual -- a sovereign subject who possesses knowledge which, if skillfully solicited, can be uncovered by the interviewer. In these approaches to interview research, the literal translation of talk has been equated with lived experience and its representation (Denzin, 1994). Methodological issues have focused on how to accurately represent the lived experience or 'reality'; how best to uncover the intended meanings of researched. Poststructuralism, firstly within literary theory, has started to challenge the humanist logic that separated author, text and reader. In literary theory, Roland Barthes' pronouncement that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (cited in Biriotti, 1993: 3) marked a shift away from the

intentions of the author towards the response of the reader. Many have been skeptical of the poststructuralist hope that "the death of the author, an attack on the humanist subject, with his implications in racism, sexism and imperialism, can therefore be seen as part of a strategy of political liberation" (Biriotti, 1993: 4). Feminists such as Somir Brodribb (1992), Teresa Ebert (1996) and Linda Hutcheon (1989) raised concerns that the poststructuralist death of the author has been championed at a time when the voices of marginalized groups were just beginning to gain authority. The political fall-out they claim, has not been liberation of subjects experiencing racism, sexism and imperialism but, paradoxically, a well-disguised mechanism to re-silence and de-legitimize their claims to voice and authority. Feminist researchers have been concerned that turning away from the interviewee as sovereign subject and women's testimonies of experience has the potential to disempower women, and jeopardizes the political bite of the research.

Biriotti (1993) pointed out that increasingly poststructuralism has directed attention neither at the intentions of the authors or readers, nor interviewees or interviewers but to the workings of texts themselves. Crudely translated into interviewing methodology, this indicated a shift from interpreting what interviewees meant to communicate, as authors of their own life histories, to representing the multiple interpretations available to the researcher and other readers. This has, in turn, required the reconsideration of the humanist relations between individuals, experience and empowerment in terms of subjectivity, texts and agency. Thus Chris Weedon asked, what if subjectivity is regarded in terms of agency rather than sovereignty (cited in Lather, 1992)? In the same discussion, Patti Lather framed the dilemma in the following way:

*While we are not the authors of the ways we understand things, while we are subjected to realms of meaning, we are involved in discursive self-production where we attempt to produce some coherence and continuity. (p. 102)*

Janet Ransom (1993) responds in a similar vein by suggesting that:

*social and historical constitution of the subject is not a limit on women's agency but the precondition of women taking action. It is because, not in spite of, our embeddedness in discursive practices that political action is possible. (p. 135)*

What does this mean in terms of life history methodology? For me the issue turns away from the discovery and representation of the women's experience to the ways in which their experiences, and my inquiry into their lives, have been constituted within social discourses. This, of course, includes our interviews and my interpretations.

The challenge moves from accurately re-presenting the 'real' experiences of sexuality in the lives of the women, towards cautious discursive analyses of how their stories, my questions, transcripts, quotations, interpretations provide compelling 'understandings' and 'overstandings'<sup>17</sup> about female sexualities. The unfinished and partial nature of such poststructural inquiry was captured well by Norman Denzin (1994):

*language and speech do not mirror experience; they create experience, and in the process of creation, constantly transform and defer that which is being described. (p. 296).*

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<sup>17</sup> See detailed explanation in Chapter 3 'Understanding and Overstanding'.



I think this interminable process is crucial to poststructural methodology -- requiring a tolerance for open-endedness, suspended judgement and ambiguity on the part of both researchers and readers.

### **Sampling**

My Initial Letter of Contact (see Appendix 1) stated that I wished to interview female physical education teachers who had taught in the public school system in western Canada in order to explore how changes in ideas about gender and sexuality had affected the lives of women from different generations. I also stated that I wanted to talk to women who identified "as heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, unmarried and married women, and women who would not use any of these labels to describe themselves" (see Appendix 1). No explicit mention of women's racial or ethnic identities was made during this process which, in hindsight, may have contributed to all participants being white, Euro-Canadian women. This limitation is discussed later in the thesis.

Six people recommended women who fit the criteria for participation and twenty one teachers were invited to participate. An advertisement calling for women PE teachers was placed in the GALE BC (Gay and Lesbian Educators BC) newsletter for two months. I sent Letters of Initial Contact at different times to forestall the problem of too many women deciding to participate. This also allowed me to select participants with different ages.

Women were invited to take part in 2 - 3 interviews of approximately one hour duration. As it turned out, interviews lasted between 1 to 3 hours. This did not include informal discussions before and after the taped interview. These informal conversations were extremely valuable in establishing rapport at first meetings, recapping what had been covered in previous interviews. On two occasions women talked about concerns over confidentiality when the tape was not running. Four women were interviewed twice, two were interviewed three times. Not all the data

from these interviews has been thoroughly exhausted in the analysis. There are still areas which were covered that could be expanded. Nonetheless, the study would have undoubtedly benefited from third or fourth interviews after the majority of the data had been analyzed. The decision not to do so was partly because the analysis took over a year and re-establishing contact with all the women after this time may have been difficult; partly, it was a purely practical decision based on research timelines.

The purpose of working with six women was to allow for comparison across generations of teachers with differing sexual identities and, I think, qualifies marginally as a "group life history". A sample size of six was not intended to be exhaustive and much stronger claims about social trends and commonalties could be drawn if, as in Connell's (1992) life history work with gay men, groups of ten women in each age group and each sexual identification had been involved. The decision to work with six women only was partly pragmatic in terms of balancing the quantity and quality of data to be analyzed. Nonetheless, commonalties in themes 'Straight Families' and 'Dating Lessons' appeared in all the women's life histories regardless of age or sexuality. These commonalties would not have been apparent or significant if the only women of the same age or lesbian women had been involved.

A significant limitation was the lack of linguistic, ethnic, racial and sexual diversity among myself and the women involved in the study. This was partly due to the use of the snowball method to contact participants, but I think also reflected the homogeneity of teachers working in Canadian physical education.

Selection on the basis of sexual identity involved a degree of serendipity. I had some a priori expectations about how each woman identified her sexuality based on recommendations of other people and my previous knowledge about them. I was introduced to Marion through her grand-daughter who, in turn, I met

via one of the participants. No mention of her sexuality was made except obliquely as 'a grandmother' which may or may not have been intended to describe her as heterosexual. I had been told by mutual friends that Connie identified as heterosexual, although this was sometimes followed by comments that she was lesbian-positive which cast her heterosexuality into some doubt. A lesbian contact told me assuredly that Bethany was "straight but liberal-minded". Denise had been identified as an older lesbian teacher by two other people within her school system. I knew Jenny at graduate school prior to the research, and we were both out as lesbians to one another. Lisa volunteered to participate in response to the Initial Letter of Contact sent to teachers within the Vancouver School Board so I had no advance ideas about her sexuality prior to our first interview.

I did not identify myself as a 'lesbian researcher' when contacting participants and my decision not to do so was based on an intuition that some women, especially those who might be unfamiliar with or homophobic towards lesbian women, would be less likely to volunteer. This is less an issue of deception than a political decision based on conducting research about a heterocentric teaching profession. Equally, I was not out as a lesbian to all the women at the beginning of the research. Jayati Lal (1996) spoke directly to the significance of this:

*Identity is not a useful site for the exploration of one's positioning in the research situation because one is constantly being situated into it by the micropolitics of the research interactions and the macropolitics of social inequality. To expect a researcher to become an insider is to demand that she transcend these politics. (p. 197)*

While I did not simply establish insiderism with the lesbian women, all my interview relationships were influenced by the nuances of coming out (or staying in) the closet. Some interviews began with one of us inside the 'closet', as it were,

and our processes of coming out were very different. Uncertainty, hesitancy, trust and mis-trust colored different moments in the interviews, and the women's hopes and doubts about my ability to accurately hear and understand what they were saying undoubtedly fluctuated.

One of the most surprising and instructive moments for me as researcher occurred early in my first interview with Lisa. I arrived on time, obsessively punctual as always, at Lisa's house for our first interview one weekday evening after she had returned home from teaching. After greeting me at the front door she led me into the sitting room, where a woman who looked the same age was intently watching 'Hockey Night in Canada'. We briefly exchanged first names and some scathing remarks about the Vancouver Canucks' losing performance, then I followed Lisa into the kitchen to set up for our interview wondering to myself what the relationship between these two women was -- I found out sooner than expected. We started the interview talking about demographics; why Lisa had chosen physical education; some of her early memories about physical education as a student, and had begun to discuss the gendered relations in the PE department where she currently taught. I used the words 'sexuality' and 'homophobia' for the first time in a question which I hoped would *gradually* move our general discussion of sexism towards her opinions about homophobia and heterosexism. As you can see from the transcript below, Lisa interrupted her descriptions of her school, colleagues and students to state "for the record" that she was lesbian.

*Heather: Mhm yeah. Um.....how do you see issues of sexuality and homophobia coming through?*

*Lisa: Mmmm.....God.....from the students' perspective or.....?*

*Heather: Any....any.*

*Lisa: Well, for one thing I like the school that I'm at. I mean....there's um.....it's very open.....um.....when I went there last year. Well I might as well tell you for the record anyway that I am a lesbian....but er.....there are.....there's a group of teachers that are, and they're very open. And they're open to the other staff members. I'm not saying they're open to any of the students.*

I vividly remember how my cheeks flushed magenta as embarrassment poured over me when Lisa made this coming out statement for the record. At the time I was at a loss to explain my reaction -- I could barely remember the last time I had blushed at the typically pleasurable process of a woman coming out to me. My reaction seemed inexplicable at the time and I rehearse it now, not purely as a methodological confession, but to draw attention to the sometimes irrational, unpredictable side of interviewing and the difficulty of negotiating the 'closet'. In retrospect, my embarrassment was caused by the way Lisa took the initiative to tell me, instead of being asked, about her sexuality. This clashed with my intentions to gently provide openings, to hint at, set the scene for each of us to come out. This was made 'worse' by my sense of having read the situation poorly and, maybe, of being perceived as homophobic in taking so long to ask her directly. This incident taught me early on that the assumption that being a lesbian researcher would lead to 'insiderism' with other lesbians in the study were misguided at best. As Diane Wolf (1996) already knew:

*assumptions about understandings that arise from...having some kind of mutual self-identification as members of an oppressed group overlook or perhaps skirt the issue of the ethnographer's personality, openness, willingness to listen, and ability to empathize. (p. 17)*

Jenny frequently spoke to me as a lesbian insider -- as one who knows. Indeed, there were times when I felt I 'intuitively' understood, even could anticipate, what she was telling me. For instance, as Jenny was explaining her initiation by 'The Goddess Kelly' I remembered a week I spent with a lover in a similar summer camp in Vermont. But in the second interview, as we talked about this incident again Jenny's account began to digress from the story I anticipated. Jenny talked about unrequited desire where I had assumed it had been fulfilled, about an unanticipated 'menage a trois' which surprised me. Thus, I oscillated between insiderism and surprise with Jenny.

With the other women, there were far fewer moments of what might be called 'insiderism'. To this day, I'm not sure whether Marion thought, suspected or 'knew' that I was lesbian and we never openly discussed this. So much of our communication remained well inside the boundaries of normal conversation -- polite, scripted, conversational. There were occasional moments of tension, but we both quickly brought the talk 'back into line'. It felt to me as if progress towards using terms like 'lesbian', 'gay' 'homosexual' and 'homophobia' in my interviews with Marion would be made if I followed her script -- a script which was frustrating and demanded patience. Throughout our interviews I tried not to offend, shock, press too hard; to listen, follow, be led; to empathize, relate to and understand; to use the words Marion used.

I was painfully aware of how we negotiated sexual identity during the interviews, but only in retrospect have I become aware of a different type of identity negotiation. There were few moments in the interviews when we talked about racism, and even fewer when we talked about becoming and being 'white' women -- arguably, as much was communicated through our silences about racialization as was communicated through the discussions themselves. The limited extent to

which we talked about race, racism and anti-racism was partly due to my interview focus on sexuality, although a more insidious reason was our unwitting duplicity as White women not to talk about issues of race. Indeed, as Frankenburg so clearly stated, "white women's lives are affected by racism, but frequently in ways that simultaneously conceal or normalize race privilege from the standpoint of its beneficiaries" (Frankenburg, 1993: 161), and the absence of talk about race or racism in the interviews concealed the privileged subject positions we occupied as white women who could narrate and listen to life histories filled with references to sexism, directed towards issues of heterosexism but only very occasionally making reference to racism and Eurocentrism.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, almost all of the talk about race focused on 'immigrants', 'Asian', 'Black', 'Native' and 'racists'. For example, Lisa mentioned that there was "no other racial group" in her hometown during the 1970s without specifying what the racial group of the town was, leaving the normative assumption that the population was ostensibly 'white'. Indeed, this talk about the Other was also observed by Ruth Frankenburg (1993) in her life history work with white women in the US. She adroitly pointed out how "Whiteness and Americanness seemed comprehensible to many only by reference to the Others excluded from these categories" (p. 17). There were only two occasions in this study when 'whiteness' was mentioned, illustrating powerfully how white racial identity (and its normative, privileged position) was constructed through *différance*, as the absent presence in most talk about race and racism.

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<sup>18</sup> My use of the term 'white' is intended to, in part, counteract the normative process at work when only the racial identities of women of colour are noted. One of the central features of white privilege is not to 'see', discuss or research its own operation. Therefore, another purpose in repeatedly naming the narrators and myself as white women is to mark the text as a 'white' text, to deliberately invite anti-racist criticism as part of the process of becoming accountable for the operation of my white privilege in the construction of the text and conduct of the research.

## Transcription

I anticipated transcribing to be a mechanical, laborious task; yet sitting down to transcribe my first interview I was faced with a series of decisions. How would I cope with overlapping voices, emotions and intonations; would I include laughs, sighs and sneezes; how would I arrange the voices into speaking turns, intonation units, events and so on? I developed a protocol based on linguistics and ethnographic literature concerning transcription (Edwards, 1993; Mishler, 1991; Moerman, 1988). I decided to use only the most basic unit of sequencing, the speaking turn (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993), whereby paragraphs are used only at the end of a period of speech by one person. Drawing on Edwards (1993), overlapping speech was accommodated into the vertical spatial arrangement of speaker's turns; words were separated using a single space, to preserve the readability of the transcript and pauses were represented by a series of periods that approximated the length of pause; accentuated words were capitalized; and laughs and sighs were noted in italicized parentheses in the running text. More specific intonation units and prosodic features were excluded as these have more relevance for linguistic analysis, and I thought they would detract from the readability of my transcripts.

*Heather: Um.....maybe you could retrace your steps not as a teacher, but...er.....if you call yourself a feminist, as a feminist.....How did it....Do you call yourself a feminist?.....er....When did that first start?..YES*

*Connie: YES....yes...yes.....(laugh).....YES (both laugh).*

*Er.....Well.....the point where I could articulate.....(laugh).....sounds like.....sort of your first orgasm that you really [ ? ] (both laugh)....probably taking Women's Studies courses at Queens.. because for me the first couple of courses I took it was truly like someone had taken*



*this cloudy glass that I seen my whole life in and they simply sprayed  
Windex and wiped it clean and I went "Holy fuck! You gotta be kidding".  
That's what it was like. And then I just wanted to open that window wider  
and wider and wider.....*

The protocol I decided upon omitted many microscopic features. I decided that marking intonations or clocking the length of pauses would make the types of discourse analysis I intended to use more rigorous. As Mishler (1991) noted, transcription is not a straightforward task of capturing the transparent 'reality' of speech but it is a critical step in the transformation of speech into a representation -- transformation that could lead to many different representations. Only in the last draft of the manuscript, after the interpretations had been all but finalized, were many pauses (.....) and extraneous words (Yes....yes.....yes.....Er.....Well....) removed to make the quotes more readable.

Being re-immersed in the interview during the transcription altered my perceptions quite dramatically at times. I recall leaving one of the very first interviews feeling unsettled, almost upset for two days afterwards. Although I have never really identified specific reasons for this unsettled feeling, it partly arose from my anticipating or desiring responses and opinions that the interviewee didn't provide accompanied by a sense of disagreement that I hadn't anticipated. The traumas of a neophyte interviewer! When I transcribed this particular interview, however, my feelings of disappointment evaporated to reveal some wonderful statements of courage that I had been unable to hear during the interview. Two things occurred to me as a result of this. Firstly, that the person interviewed did not go through a similar process of 're-living' the interview. Secondly, I was painfully aware of questions that could have been asked if I had been able to hear in the interview what I later heard during the transcription.

As for the technical aspects of analyzing the transcripts, once I had selected episodes from the transcripts which, in a very general sense, related to a theme I cut and pasted them from the 'transcript' file into a new 'thematic' file. This was done on Microsoft Word 5.1 because I was familiar with the program and felt that a qualitative software program such as Hypercard or NU.DIST would be too time consuming and provide insufficient flexibility.

Interviews were initially transcribed using original names for people and places. Pseudonyms were then inserted into a second copy of the transcript which was then returned to the narrator. All place and personal names were changed, including names of universities and of course schools. Place names were generally altered to fictitious names (e.g. Bretonnaire) and city names interchanged with nearby city names, (e.g. Edmonton was altered to Calgary or Saskatoon). In most cases, the city name 'Vancouver' was not changed because anonymity of the women was not risked, due to the number of schools in the city, and relevant geographical details would have been omitted. A list of original names and pseudonyms was kept secure with the original transcripts. No original names or transcripts were kept on floppy or hard disc files.

Narrators were asked to read the transcripts, change the pseudonyms and mark anything they wanted altered or deleted. The six women responded to their transcripts with varying degrees of detail which was, in turn, connected to their differing opinions about anonymity. Two women said at the interview that they didn't particularly care if pseudonyms were used and made minimal or no alterations to their transcripts. Three were concerned that their names and schools not be identified, but accepted the pseudonyms I suggested. With one narrator, I went through a lengthy process of editing the transcript and altering the pseudonyms several times. This process began when the narrator returned the transcript of her first interview to me with lengthy sections deleted and many

grammatical corrections. At our second interview we agreed to retain the conversational speech of our interviews rather than strive for written grammatical correctness; however, the narrator insisted that strong language and swear words should still be toned down. For example, 'it was a hell of a trip' was changed to 'it was a very challenging trip' and 'Holy Fuck!' changed to 'Wow!'. On one hand, these were difficult changes for me to make because they fundamentally altered the language and meaning of the interview. On the other hand, the changes stemmed from the narrators' deep concern about how anonymous her interview could be made merely by using pseudonyms, and so she wanted to remove anything potentially incriminating or contentious in case the transcript was traced back to her. Given the political struggles and school climate this teacher worked in, these concerns were quite understandable. Eventually, we edited each transcript twice instead of once and spoke at length about the compromises and alterations.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Lift!

Dig in, dig deeper.

Bin, sort, chunk,

Shape, winnow, layer, weave,

Lift!

Dig in, dig deeper.

Push into it, pull it apart,

Probe, and

Lift!

Poem by Joan Zaleski

(cited in Ely, Vinz, Anzul & Downing, 1997: 162)

Steinar Kvale (1995) outlined five approaches to analyzing interviews. In the beginning I used 'condensation' analysis to identify themes. Dissatisfaction with these early interpretations led me to try 'narrative' analysis, with equally unsatisfying results. Eventually I combined several types of discourse analysis which are discussed in detail at the end of this chapter. Using Kvale's terms, I used both 'condensation' and 'interpretation' approaches in my analysis; however, during the course of the analysis I came to conceptualize these as 'understanding' and 'overstanding' the interview texts. Within this dual approach, I analyzed the transcripts at a micro-level using speech act theory and deconstruction and at a social level using positioning theory and institutional discourses. In addition, I attempted to incorporate a psychoanalytic and poststructuralist, rather than humanist, theory of subjectivity.

Selecting the method of analysis was by no means straightforward, as the following account will show. After transcribing the interviews, I danced with a couple of analytic partners before taking a flying intuitive leap into interpretation analysis. (See table below.)

Approaches to Analysis of Meaning	Interview Text	Outcome of Analysis
Condensation:	----- ----- ----- ----- -----	----- -----
Categorization:	----- ----- ----- ----- -----	+/- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
Narrative:	----- ----- ----- ----- -----	Start -> Goal Enemies > Hero < Helpers
Interpretation:	----- ----- ----- ----- -----	----- ----- ----- ----- -----
Ad hoc:	----- ----- ----- ----- -----	+/- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 ----- -----

(Kvale, 1995: 191)

### Condensation analysis

When I first started my analysis I attempted to condense the interview data into a number of key themes which I then intended to base my analysis upon. Here's my first set of themes, sketched on a scrap of paper in my local coffee shop during the early days of working with the transcripts:

### INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES

Essentialism	Racism & Heterosexism	Religion	Law	Feminisms	Lesbian
natural reproduction & mothering	changes in racism of parents generation	living-in-sin divorce	individual privacy	liberal feminist access & equality in sport pedagogies epiphanies	silence & closet bookstores & media coming out teams sport Gay Games
either lesbian or heterosexual	urban resurgence of anti-Asian racism over homophobia	lesbian monogamy	protection from employment discrimination		

I managed to get through a grand total of three transcripts, thoughtfully coding sections as 'essentialism', 'religion', 'feminisms' and so on but I realized that merely naming the themes, applying a coding label was far too pre-emptive for me. Although an episode in the interview may seem to relate to 'feminism', I knew I might also return to it in 'lesbian' or 'essentialism'. It seemed as though the themes and codes were pre-empting the directions in which my interpretations might follow -- coding felt like foreclosure. Condensation analysis or coding could be described as a method which aims to "understand" (Culler cited in Eco, 1992) interviews. Codes are marked, albeit tentatively, in response to themes, stories, episodes in the transcript which are obvious, significant, raise key issues. For instance, I marked this quote from Jenny's interview as 'LESBIAN' with a sub-theme 'COMING OUT'. As you read the transcript these seem to be quite obvious themes. (See excerpt from transcript below.)

H:	Yeah.....um.....when you were kind of in your later grades.....and thinking about being a phys ed teacher.....were there any particular phys ed teachers who encouraged you?	
J:	Mmmhhh....Yeah I.....it's....when I think back on the PE department at my high school, there were I guess probably five, maybe six, full-time PE teachers and er....all but one of them, who I had very little to do with I never had him, were I think all really influential because of the coaching they did. And I had a lot of involvement with the PE department, I was the Athletic.....what did they call me?....what did they call me? Head of the Athletic Council or something? And I..I was representative for a Leadership Camp in the summer that the Ontario government ran for high school students, so..I had....I had really good relations with all of them, but there was one teacher in particular in who I really.....just thought was great. <b>And her name was Miss Morris, and she did gymnastics. And she was SO NEAT because I never did..my image of my body was not that of a gymnast. And she saw that I was very strong, and I didn't have a lot of fear so she got me up for gymnastics....And I just loved it. I kept jumping and doing flips, and she had me doing stuff I never thought I could do. And she was just...she was young, you know, and very vibrant and I still remember her, she was just...everyone loved her, well not everyone but she was just er.....people who liked sports anyway. Yeah, so she was probably the most. And Mr Richards, the PE department head, in his own grumpy way, you know...we knew that he loved us, deep down, and they just.....You know, they really encouraged us. And there was lots of money then for sports...</b>	Theme:  COMING OUT  Sub-Theme:  SAME-SEX DESIRE IN ADOLESCENCE [lines 66-73]
H:	So there was Mr Richards, Miss Morris and who were the others?	

Coding this section as 'COMING OUT' foreclosed other potential ways this Passage could be interpreted, risked fixing the content of the story, but at the same time was quite coherent with Jenny's apparent meaning. The story appeared to invite analysis in terms of 'coming out'. What was not apparent, or in Derridean terms, present in the transcript were the questions which queer theory might ask. But beyond codes such as 'HETERONORMATIVE' and 'LESBIAN RESISTANCE' I couldn't frame themes of absence, silence and secrets at this stage. I was unable to start "overstanding" the transcript using a process of coding or condensation analysis.

### Narrative analysis

At this time, I was motivated by Laurel Richardson's (1992) ethnographic poem "Louisa May's Story of Her Life" to look for primary themes or motifs running through each woman's life histories. Maybe the primary motif within each individual life history could illustrate the institutional discourses? Returning to my coffee shop, I sketched another possible framework...

INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES						
SPORT	LAW	FEMINISM	LESBIAN	ESSENTIALISM	RELIGION	RACISM
LIFE HISTORY MOTIFS						
DENISE: Teams of Silence		CONNIE: Activist Teacher	LISA: Coming Out		MARION: Marriage	
		BETHANY: Becoming Single	JENNY: Travels to/from Home			

...and then wrote three short life histories which were structured around a motif which was frequently 'present' in the woman's stories. (See Appendix 2 for Jenny's 'Travels To/From' narrative). These life history motifs presented two problems. Firstly there was no straightforward correspondence -- no 'good fit' -- between the individual motifs and the broader social discourses, as the empty columns in the previous diagram show. None of the narratives illustrated the institutional discourses of law, essentialism and racism I had coded earlier.

Secondly, the narratives re-presented events in chronological order even though the stories had been told in different sequence as the women traveled forward and back in time during the interviews. My coming out narratives of the three lesbian women followed what Ken Plummer (1995) described as the modernist plot of a voyage of discovery to a true inner self. Elliot Mishler (1995) distinguished



this type of narrative analysis as "reconstructing the told in the telling" and I was sensitive to his warning that such narratives suppress the problematic relation between the order in which events took place and the order of their telling in the interview. He noted that "adopting this realist perspective, researchers tend to privilege the 'real' sequence of events, giving it an objectivity independent of language" (p. 92). These chronological narratives ignored a poststructural focus on how the telling of stories was intimately connected to the re-construction of our notions of sexuality. By reordering the women's stories as narratives of coming out I was rehearsing a familiar plot which has been empowering for individuals and persuasive within identity politics, but which was nonetheless a rehearsal, a reiteration and a repetition. To resist this modernist plot and write more fluid poststructural narratives it seemed that I would have to move away from organizing narratives chronologically according to 'real' time.

Writing separate narratives for each woman was problematic in two ways. On one hand, individual narratives produced a significant opposition between the women's identities as 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual'. On the other hand, writing separate narratives for each woman inscribed discrete textual boundaries around each of the women. This introduced a fundamental structure in which each woman was textually represented as a unitary whole, discrete and separable from the texts of other women and my analysis. Again this suppressed the poststructural notion of individuals being embedded within and constituted through discourse, which ultimately led to my decision to structure my analysis around themes in which the women would be 'embedded'. This seemed to be a more open acknowledgment of the power (maybe tyranny) of the ways texts constitute subjectivities, rather than romanticizing my textual representations of the women as somehow more 'real' and less 'textual'.

The problems of a chronological sequence, fixing the lesbian/heterosexual binary and emphasizing individuals as unitary which emerged in these modernist narratives didn't bring me closer to developing a poststructural, fluid, open-ended analysis. After three weeks of trying to dance with what appeared to be an ethnographic avant-garde, I was deeply unsatisfied and so I moved on yet again.

### **Understanding and Overstanding**

My decision to use both condensation and interpretive analysis (Kvale, 1995) was borne from conflicts between the methodological literature about feminist/lesbian life history and theoretical literature of poststructuralist/queer theories. I was painfully aware that not foregrounding the women's stories 'as they were told' risked subjecting the women to textual erasure and silencing, and yet my previous attempts to do this were problematic on poststructural and queer grounds. Equally, I have struggled to avoid the anti-feminism of some queer theories and political nihilism of the most skeptical versions of poststructuralism. As a result I adopted a pragmatic 'feminist-queer' approach which had more than one purpose driving the analysis. I wanted to 'understand' and 'overstand', to listen to stories *and* silences. Umberto Eco argued that "we can, and do, recognize overinterpretation of a text without necessarily being able to prove the right one, or even clinging to the belief that there must be *one* right reading" (Collini cited in Eco, 1992: 9).<sup>19</sup> For me, this meant considering the women's accounts in ways which they might have intended but, at other times, using queer theory to deconstruct the 'surface calm of meaning' (Sanger, 1995: 91). So at times, I represented the 'active voices' of the women by using verbatim quotations to allow you, the reader, to create a 'realist'

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<sup>19</sup> Various positions on the limits of interpretation were laid out in Interpretation and Overinterpretation (Eco, 1992), a fascinating debate between semiotician Umberto Eco, pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, and postmodern literary critics Jonathon Culler and Christine Brooke-Rose.

reading if desired. I also wrote queer deconstructive interpretations with the explicit intention of disrupting these 'realist' meanings.

This led me to a paradox in poststructural interviewing captured well by Steinar Kvale (1995) who asked whether the purpose of interpretation is to get at the *author's intended meaning* or does it concern the *meaning the text has for us today*? Rather than seeking resolution, this thesis is precariously balanced in the dubious space between the horns of this dilemma, resulting in two different forms of analysis.

In chapters 3, 4 and 5 data have been represented as a series of themes, as suggested by Smith (1993), rather than chronological life histories. The themes emerged from how each woman talked about issues and memories, and how these narratives relate to institutional discourses such as families, feminism, racism and so forth. My use of the term 'Location' refers to the positioning of each woman within these discourses. Broadly speaking, I analysed the interview transcripts to suggest ways in which each woman positioned herself in relation to the categories of 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual'. Extending the analysis beyond the actual transcripts, I then suggested how these subject positions might have acquired their status as coherent and core elements of individual subjectivity; as political realities through the institutional discourses of women's sport, lesbian and feminist urban communities, feminisms, physical education to name a few; and how the silences and unsaid suggested meaning using psychoanalytic and deconstructive theories.

#### INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES

Straight Families	Dating Lessons	Lesbian Encounters	Re-living Sexisms	Silences of Straightness	Shadows of Whiteness	Feminist Generations
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Kvale (1995) described how interpretation analysis allows "the interpreter goes beyond what is directly said to work out the structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in the text" (p. 201). This approach has been problematic for many life historians, methodologists and literary critics, not the least of whom was semiotician Umberto Eco (1992) who argued that overinterpretation occurs when the textual coherence of a text is not maintained in its interpretation. But, if we adopt this criteria of textual coherence, we need to ask what happens to interpretations that seek out the moments and memories which do not seem to fit?

An alternative approach is Jonathan Culler's (1992) distinction<sup>20</sup> between *understanding* which asks questions the text insists upon and *overstanding* which asks questions the text does not pose. As Culler explains, overstanding "asks not what the work has in mind but what it forgets, not what it says but what it takes for granted" (cited in Eco, 1992: 115). Accordingly I directed analysis in Chapter 5 towards themes not immediately apparent in the interviews or in my earlier interpretation of them. For example, exploring what the preceding analysis did not include led to queer speculations about heterosexualities in relation to the lesbian closet, the lesbian gaze in single-sex teaching contexts, and the lesbian eroticism in pedagogy.

'Condensation analysis' and 'interpretation analysis' expressed the different interpretative pulls within my analyses and, to this extent, these heuristics helped me re-focus when I was mired in the rich muddiness of the data. Since then, with much needed personal distance, I have been able to reflect on more detailed tensions embedded within my feminist-queer poststructuralist approach to life history.

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<sup>20</sup> Culler's (1992) use of understanding and overstanding draws directly on the distinction first made by Booth in 1979.

The analysis produced in this study has justified a feminist poststructuralist approach to life history. Poststructural feminists like Scott (1992), Davis (1991, 1990) and Weedon (1997) regard the hybridity between feminisms and poststructuralism as central to theorizing the 'subject' and 'experience' in life history. Indeed, as Ruth Roach-Pierson (1991) reminded feminist historians, "it has, after all, never been the job of the historian only to reclaim voices. That would result in naive empiricism. No, the task has been equally, and just as importantly, to contextualize the individual voices, to reconstitute the 'discursive' world which the 'subjects' inhabited and were shaped by" (p. 94). This life history research started with similar hopes although I attempted to incorporate poststructural assumptions about identity and queer theory of sexuality alongside feminist life history methodology.

A major tension arose because the research aimed to incorporate a poststructural theory of subjectivity into feminist life history, yet poststructuralist notions of the subject have been challenged on several fronts by feminist and materialist critics. The same can be said for the queer theory informing this study. So, what are the implications of attempting life history from a feminist-queer poststructuralist framework? Which aspects of poststructuralism can be justified; how has poststructuralism intersected with other theories; and when was poststructuralism unable to provide the most compelling analysis? To respond to these issues it has been necessary to reflect on how my analysis occupied a theoretical space between several poststructural, feminist, and queer theories.

The women talked about their lives and sexualities at different levels, sometimes recounting momentary incidents, sometimes reflecting in more general terms. As a result I sometimes focused on very specific moments, both in the interviews and in the lives of the women -- I came to regard these as 'flashpoints' of meaning. Equally, I wanted a broader social analysis of sexualities in these women's lives, an analysis which stretched across the different generations of women.

Kamler, Comber and Cook (1997) observed that in many types of discourse analysis there is currently a good deal of interest in the way researchers move between broad social formations and micro-textual analytic work. The next section details the types of analysis I used, and the theoretical tensions surrounding their use. I focused both on what was said in the interviews, what was permissible to talk about in the normative discourses of the time *and* on the silences about sexuality which often carried a great deal of significance. The following diagram is no more than a tidy schematic -- the analysis itself entailed messy overlaps and connections. (See diagram below.)

SPEECH		SILENCE	
<p>UNDERSTANDING</p> <p>asks questions the data insists upon</p>		<p>OVERSTANDING</p> <p>asks questions the data does not pose</p>	
<p>SOCIAL-LEVEL</p> <p>positioning</p> <p>theory</p>	<p>TEXTUAL-LEVEL</p> <p>speech act</p> <p>theory</p>	<p>SOCIAL-LEVEL</p> <p>social</p> <p>unconscious</p>	<p>TEXTUAL-LEVEL</p> <p>deconstruction</p>

Discourse analysis occurred at the micro-level of words using speech act theory and deconstruction; at the social level using positioning theory. Analysis aimed to understand common, historical themes across the women's lives and to overstand how silences shaped the unsaid otherness of their stories. Analysis revealed how the historical context normalized the type of lesbian and straight identities these teachers could take up while also unsettling this process of normalization. I must admit, however, that tensions between these approaches became almost palpable at times during the interpretive process. The example below illustrates why women's narratives warranted the use of different types of discourse analysis.

### **Lesbian Encounters**

This section outlines how the women encountered 'lesbian'. Briefly, the three lesbian-identified women talked at length about coming out, meeting lesbians and searching for lesbian community. In contrast, the three heterosexual women talked in much less detail about their encounters with lesbians and lesbian stereotypes.

The following demographics are included to assist the reader to identify the six teachers in the themes which follow:

Pseudonym	Identified as	Age	Entered PE profession
Marion	'married'	70	1962
Denise	'lesbian'	59	1956
Bethany	'heterosexual'	49	1968
Connie	'heterosexual'	40	1976
Jenny	'lesbian'	37	1977
Lisa	'lesbian'	29	1990

Thank God somebody told me!

Jenny reminisced about the summer of 1986 when, in her early twenties, she had just completed her undergraduate degree at a university in Ontario. Immediately after graduating she went to teach outdoor education at a private summer camp in New Hampshire -- a journey which was going to change the course of her life.

*There's a lot of arts at this camp and a lot of free-spirits. I got to be good friends with this one woman Sonya. So off she goes on her out-trip and keeps sending all these postcards. So about the end of July we're doing a switch over, some kids are going and some are coming, and we have this big celebration. I was chatting with Kelly [The Camp Director] and said that I got all these postcards from Sonya, and it's just great, and wonder where she is now and I can't believe she has that much time to write. Kelly kind of put her arm around me and she said, "Do you know why she's sending you all those postcards? Cos she's really interested in you."*



*And I'm like, "What do you mean?"*

*She said, "Well, Sonya's a lesbian and I probably think you are too. And Sonya is very interested in you."*

*And I remember thinking "Ooohhhhhh...."*

The narrative crystallized around one phrase which carried exceptional illocutionary force -- when Kelly declared that 'Well, Sonya's a lesbian and I probably think you are too'. This phrase served as a powerful speech act. It served to 'speak into existence' Jenny as a lesbian, to be hailed by Kelly, to interpellate her into the possibility of becoming lesbian.<sup>21</sup> The implications for this did not fall into place immediately, but later she described the profound importance of this conversation.

*Like, how did I not figure this out? I can't believe that somebody else had to tell me, but when I think back on it was just so out of my realm of experience. It wasn't even that I had heard about gay people negatively, I just hadn't! I'm probably the only person in the world who didn't have a sexual experience until they were in their late twenties!*

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<sup>21</sup> There are two reasons why "I think" may not appear to be a clear example of Austin's performatives such as "I do", "I bet", "I solemnly swear" which complicates this analysis initially. Firstly, Kelly's statement did not occur within an immediately recognizable social convention, such as a wedding or courtroom. Clearly, the convention in which Jenny and Kelly spoke was not strictly governed in the same way as a marriage ceremony or trial but their conversation took place within a collegial female friendship. The conventions governing this conversation become more obvious when contrasted to the conversations that could happen between, say, teacher and student, husband and wife, lawyer and client -- obviously the illocutionary force of the phrase "I probably think you are a lesbian" would be quite different in each of these contexts. Nonetheless the speaker, Kelly, had authority which lent force to the statement because she was out as lesbian to Jenny, and in the broader context of the camp.

Secondly, "I think" does not immediately give rise to a clear action, whereas to say "I bet" gives rise to the bet at the moment of speaking. This distinction between descriptive/constative and performative acts is central to, yet subject to slippage in, speech act theory. Again Sandy Petrey (1990) tackled this dilemma with great insight, explaining that the constative/performative distinction cannot last, and one consequence is that "the illocutionary force borne by words is always also a relationship lived by people" (p. 26).

The fact that Jenny referred to this incident several times during her life history reinforced<sup>22</sup> how powerful it was for her. Bronwyn Davies (1992) outlined with great simplicity how stories are central to the constitution of subjectivity, writing that "who I am potentially shifts with each speaking, each moment of being positioned within this or that discourse in this or that way" (p. 57). Certainly in Jenny's case, who she was shifted dramatically when the camp director said "Sonya's a lesbian and I think you are too". All of a sudden, Jenny encountered the possibility that women could be more than merely 'free spirits', they could be 'lesbian'. No wonder she later described the camp director as "The Goddess Kelly"!

In 1986, after finishing her BEd, Jenny taught in Aotearoa/New Zealand for a year in what she described as "the most conservative town in the world".

*New Zealand is a pretty repressed country although there was a pretty strong women's community although my impression of it is mostly centered in Auckland in the North Island. I was way down at the south end of the south island...*

*...One of the reasons I left, and it certainly wasn't the only one, was that I just couldn't be there in that town knowing that I had ZERO chance of meeting anybody that I'd probably want to have a relationship with. And if I did how could you possibly conduct one there?*

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<sup>22</sup> The repetition of speech acts within life histories has implications for poststructural theories of reiterability which are beyond the scope of this study. I shall merely intimate where this line of thinking could lead. Building on her earlier notion of gender as an imitative performance which is forced into endless repetitions, in Bodies That Matter Butler (1993a) clarified that performativity depends not on the "act by which a subject brings in to being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (p. 2). It is this notion of reiterability which is central to a poststructural usage of speech act theory. The Derridean notion of iterability, formulated in response to the theorization of speech acts by John Searle and J. L. Austin, also implies that every act is itself a recitation, the citing of a prior chain of acts which are implied in a present act and which perpetually drain any 'present' act of its presentness (Butler, 1993a: 244).

On her return, Jenny spent time in Ottawa and then Vancouver trying to find lesbian communities by visiting women's bookstores, reading lesbian/gay newspapers like *Angles* or *Xtra-West*, attending Women's events such as the Take Back The Night March, and volunteering for the Gay Games but repeatedly found that "there wasn't much to break in to".

*I sort of looked for ways to find the lesbian community and it.....it's there. And there's this funny little cafe, I don't remember even what it was called , so I kind of would wander in there and sort of figure out how to meet people. I'm not a club person, you know, I'm not a...I can't just go and hang out in a bar.....*

*I went to the Take Back The Night march and this and that, and a....a woman who at that sort of time who I really became friends with...actually, she works here at the bookstore. But you know, that led to other things. And then I was working part time at Coast Mountain Sports so.....you have this time, you're meeting all these people, you do stuff..and then...you have this time when you're not sure if it's going to last. And then I went through a...period where I just wasn't seeing anybody. And then I really started to connect with people.*

*I'd go to the Lotus once or twice. Yeah and everytime I went, I thought why am I doing this? Even if I met anyone here, I wouldn't have anything in common with them. I don't like these places, you know. And I went to Flygirl with a couple of my friends, and I thought forget it, I just have to do the things I like to do and I'll meet somebody. Which is EXACTLY what happened*

You don't have to put a label on it

Denise remembered very little open discussion about who was or wasn't gay during thirty five years playing and coaching basketball and softball. She recalled that "her first indication that there was anyone else in the world with the same feelings as she had" came in 1957 playing softball. In those days, well before homosexuality was decriminalized in Canada,<sup>23</sup> she learned about sexual relations between women primarily by observing how and where women socialized after practices, games and competitions.

*We went to the Championships down in the States. All the teams were in one hotel and there was a room set aside for socializing. One night we decided to go up there. So we went up to the eighth floor and some women were dancing and I kind of went in and did a double take. And it was interesting because, like I said, now um ....I see lots of the people I played ball with then and I'd say sixty percent at least were gay and yet none of our team stayed around. (Laughing) We just went up there, had a look around and left and went back! Went back to our rooms, we didn't ...you know.*

For much of her adult life homosexuality had not been openly discussed at home, work or sports. She explained how 'the times' affected what could and could not be talked about:

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<sup>23</sup> In 1955 the American judiciary recommended the legalization of all consensual sex between adults (Harbeck, 1992). In the U.K. the decriminalization of homosexual acts was pioneered by the Woolfenden report in 1957. It was not until 1969 that homosexual acts were decriminalized in Canada (Sanders, 1994), and then this only referred to consensual acts conducted in 'private'. As the Gay Day Committee pointed out, this legal reform "was widely misunderstood as 'legalizing' homosexuality and thus putting homosexuals on an equal basis with other Canadians. In fact, this amendment was merely a recognition of the non-enforceable nature of the Criminal Code as it existed" (cited in Kinsman, 1987: 172).

Denise: I didn't know if she was gay. She was in a very long term relationship in the States er ....sometime after , like a 25 year relationship, and we had never talked about it until just a couple of years ago. We were chatting and she had just broken up.

Heather: Doesn't it seem incredible?

Denise: Yeah. But it's the time. It wouldn't happen now. It wouldn't happen because everything's more open.

She explained how women managed to express same-sex desire within this reverberating silence:

Heather: People still fall in love and have relationships, how did that work if nothing really could be said?

Denise: I think it was just something that happened but was kept secretive.

Heather: Or ...more kind of, how do you....er fall in love, start seeing somebody or just see somebody if there's no language? .....Or what language was used?

Denise: Well, I .....I .....don't know. I mean what language do you use today? You can certainly fall in love and start seeing somebody without having to use the terms 'gay' or 'lesbian'. I mean, you're who you are and you don't have to put a label on it. So you can just start going out and seeing somebody socially. And you don't have to label something. ....to have feelings obvious. So ...I don't honestly know

Heather: I mean these are questions I can relate to -- I mean in my first relationship I had no language and went through six months of believing we were the only two people in the whole world, you know

It has been relatively recently, in the 1990s, that Denise has gone to lesbian bars and bookstores:

Denise: *I'd never gone to a gay bar, a gay party outside the odd softball connection and that was more drinking than anything.*

Denise: *I was surprised the first time I saw lesbian magazine or a newspaper.*

Heather: *Can you remember when it was?*

Denise: *Oh it wasn't that long ago. Probably a couple of years ago going down to line dancing or something like that at the Lotus Club and people I was with picking up these papers and I look (laughing) tuck it in my jacket, thing. Couldn't believe it. I said "Did you see this?" "Oh yeah." People were very nonchalant. I was like "Ohhh."*

### There's lesbians anywhere you play sports

Lisa stated that she had 'known' she was gay from an early age:

*Well I grew up thinking I was gay. I had crushes on my teachers and friends. And in elementary school I know whenever we played with our friends, we played like a house game in elementary school and I was always 'Uncle'... 'Uncle Lisa!' (Laughs)*

Lisa remembered encountering homophobia directed at female PE teachers at her high school in small town in central British Columbia during the early 1980s. She told me they had been the target insults such as 'She's a dyke', and in one case, 'being run out of town' because parents found out she was lesbian.

One of her first memories of lesbian desire arose through softball:

*Lisa: Summer of grade 8 or 9, I had been picked up on this ball team in Karimore to play in provincials, but I needed to stay in Karimore to practice with the team. And I stayed with this one family. Marianna, she was the only one who played ball and I thought she was very good looking. And anyways we had to sleep together (laughs)*

*Heather: Damn!*

*Lisa: Damn! Yeah, that's what I thought! And she got up in the night to, I don't know, must have gone to the washroom or something like that, so I laid my arm out across the bed (laughs) and she just got back into bed. And that's probably about the only thing that I can recall.*

Women's team sports were central in Lisa's coming out in during her late teens and early twenties:

*Heather: What sort of things helped you come out?*

*Lisa: Sports and friends. (laughs) Definitely. Growing up in a small community it would probably never even be heard of. Having old fashioned parents probably wouldn't have helped much. So I sort of just stayed in, no-one to talk to in high school. Even my best friend -- I wouldn't have talked to my best friend even though it turns out four years later that she's gay too! (laughs) Probably could never have told each other as we were growing up.*

*Heather: That's crazy isn't it?*

*Lisa: Yeah. Moving into a bigger town right after I graduated and getting involved in sports that I did, and I...I don't care where you go any sports that you join, you're going to run into homosexuals.....There's going to be lesbians anywhere that you play sports.*

*Heather: What sports were you playing?*

Lisa: *Fastball and broomball. My first year at college, well I was...I hadn't really told anybody I was still in the closet...but searching. Then once I played fastball that summer my first year at college some women said "Why don't you come out and play broomball?" and that's where I basically came out -- to some close friends of mine.*

Lisa entered teacher education in 1993:

*I was associated with being lesbian on campus here and associated with different people. I was choosy though in who I told only because I was going into the teaching profession.*

### Live and let live

Marion taught Ukrainian folk dance with her husband for many years which is where she met most of the gay people she knew:

*My husband and I, we've worked with so many people especially in the dance business who were gay. Some were openly gay and some were not. And we were both very....you know accepted of them and everything. And...and got along fine with them.*

Marion made an oblique reference to lesbian sexuality when she told me about her experience with this policy at her graduate school in the US:

Heather: *When you went through your teacher training or.....in the three years of the degree.....what sort of messages were there about how you should behave as a lady or as a woman in sports?*



Marion: Well..there was some talk about what we should and shouldn't wear I remember but there was more emphasis the second time I went back because the fellow who was kind of in charge of the PE program said "Let's get rid of this stereotype..We don't have to wear the baggy sweat pants and all that."

Heather: And that was what people were wearing....?

Mation: But the first time, not very much was said. But the second time I went back to school there seemed to be a little bit more emphasis on the fact that you could be a PE teacher and be feminine. And I don't remember anybody saying very much the first time around.

Heather: Because people weren't worried about it or.....?

Marion: I think people just accepted it and said "This is the way it is".

Heather: So I wonder why it changed and people became a little bit more worried about what they were looking like.

Marion: Well, I think it was when this equality thing came along. Women can be in business and be feminine. They can do a lot of things and still be feminine. I think that whole idea was starting to break down a little bit.....

In this particular story, she hinted at the association between lesbian stereotype and unfeminine appearance, and linked this to "the whole equality thing". If we consider the discursive repertoires available to Marion at this time, this story illustrates how liberal feminist discourse was taken up within the physical education profession. The idea that feminine women could succeed in previously masculine professions, such as business and physical education, was central to how Marion's remembered women's equality in the 1960s. This association between femininity and women's equality indicates how liberal feminist discourses was used within physical education to normalize heterosexuality and sustain homophobic

attitudes at that time. Many physical education departments in the United States used dress codes to combat an image of female physical educators as unfeminine. Such homophobic policies were relatively widespread in women's physical education programs throughout the United States at this time (Franzen, 1996)<sup>24</sup>.

I didn't know they were anything BUT heterosexual

Connie didn't recall homosexuality being talked about at her high school:

Connie: *In terms of gay and lesbian relationships in high school then I probably didn't even have the words for it. It was never even ...so that I feel kind of angry about but I think it's the same with all sorts of exclusion. I went through a pretty narrow education system, and life long learning, and fit into this box... I didn't even know there was life beyond that box, alternative positions.*

Heather: *The issue of language is really important. ....Can you remember the first time you heard words like 'gay' and 'lesbian'? Can you remember the first time?*

Connie: *No.*

Heather: *Can you remember them being used as insults in school?*

Connie: *I don't really. I certainly hear them a lot now but er .....if I did I didn't even think about it. And I don't think that any of the people I knew, I mean calling somebody a fag for example wasn't, I don't remember...I don't remember..*

Heather: *What were the insults that you used? You've got to have something to ...*

Connie: *Er ...'slut', 'nerdish'..nerdy or geek.*

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<sup>24</sup> For a full account refer to Trisha Franzen's (1996) oral histories of US lesbians born during the 1940s.

Connie remembered finding several friends were lesbian or gay during her thirties:

*Heather: So you can't remember quite specifically when you started to get language about 'lesbian' and 'gay'. Can you trace up from high school to now, when you first met someone who you thought was gay or lesbian, when you first read about it, when you first heard about it?*

*Connie: Probably not till university and probably not till ....I don't know, until the last 8 to 10 years. So not that long ago. But that's sort of you, I mean ..I have many close friends now, and had then but didn't know, and who told me after that. So I've had that sort of experience a couple of times.*

*Connie: I had some close friends I guess that I didn't know.....er.....were anything BUT heterosexual i.e. I didn't think of them as being bisexual, homosexual or gay and...and..when I found out...er...I guess I was a bit hurt. And the whole thing about "Well....you know.....of course I wouldn't treat you any differently and [ ] blah, blah, blah". And went through all of that.*

### People labeled us

Bethany recollected rumors about her friendship with another woman at college in the 1960s:

*I know during university my roommate and I were very close and she's very attractive and very much into dating men, but still people labeled us with "we were too close, we spent too much time together, we read each others thoughts a little too closely". So I've had some friendships with women that have been questioned.....and I always think it's*

*interesting when I hear that because what do people base it on...what do people think....I don't know.....but I have never ever cared....it doesn't upset me.....*

In the 1990s, she is supportive of lesbian, gay and bisexual students at the community college where she worked as the Athletic Director:

*There is a very strong movement on campus called the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance. And they're very vocal, they're very demanding. They know what they want, and they're present. I enjoy them on campus and the college gives them lots of space, lots of recognition and....er.....lots of tolerance.*

### **Feminist-Poststructural Approach to Discourse Analysis**

The theme 'Lesbian Encounters' illustrated how the women accepted and avoided the possibility of 'lesbian' in quite different ways within the material practices of families, schooling and women's sport they experienced. On one hand, the idea of 'lesbian' was mentioned infrequently by the women who identified as heterosexual, namely Marion, Bethany and Connie. Marion encountered, but was not the target of, lesbian stereotypes at graduate school and had several gay male acquaintances in the dance business. Bethany remembered being stereotyped as a lesbian during her undergraduate physical education degree. Connie's contact with lesbian women was mainly through friends during her thirties, while she became sensitized to homophobia as a result of Women's Studies courses she took at graduate school. The invisibility of the category 'lesbian' is evident in the small number of recollections about lesbianism in sport or physical education, the sparse detail of these memories, and the recollection of isolated incidents of lesbian

encounters<sup>25</sup>. This can be thought of as an instance of what Deborah Britzman (1998) referred to as 'exorbitant normality' which occurs when 'the other' is rendered intelligible only as a special event, never the everyday.

On the other hand, Denise's, Jenny's and Lisa's narratives suggest how they responded to the possibility of 'lesbian' quite differently. The three lesbian-identified women spoke at length about searching for other lesbians, coming out, and establishing lesbian social networks. They recalled first glimpses and touches, searching for lesbian contexts and coming out in straight contexts. Jenny's search led her to various feminist and lesbian urban contexts, such as lesbian cafés, feminist bookstores and a 'Take Back The Night' march. She found lesbian bars and women's team sports quite disappointing. In contrast, women's team sports had formed the sole basis of lesbian community for Denise since the 1960s and, more recently, for Lisa as well.

The differences in these accounts may seem obvious -- lesbian women are going to talk about the category 'lesbian' more frequently than straight women. Despite this important difference, all six women talked about their *adult* sexual identities as relatively stable elements of their sense of self. Interestingly, Susan Cahn (1994a) was struck by a similar imperative, concluding that "a sense of authentic self is both real and necessary to people living within a given context" (p. 332).

This interpretation of identity is, at first glance, contrary to the conceptualization of identities as always in formation, incomplete and even contradictory. The apparent tension between the notion of coherent identities -- either 'lesbian' or 'heterosexual' -- with poststructuralist claims about incomplete,

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<sup>25</sup> Reference to homophobia and lesbian stereotyping as 'isolated incidents' has parallels with Ruth Frankenburg's (1993) observations about how racism was talked about by white women.

fragmented identities leads me back to the notion of positionality and subjectivity. If we are prepared to conceptualize identity along the lines of Linda Alcoff's (1995) notion of positionality, a coherent identity can be considered "relative to a consistently shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on" (p. 451). Thus, the narration of apparently stable 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' identities can be understood, in part, as an effect of normalization within the discourses themselves,<sup>26</sup> as evidence of how these binary oppositions were, to all intents and purposes, the *only* sexual subject positions available to the women in these generations. I think the absence of the 'bisexual' or 'queer' from the life histories demonstrates the pervasiveness of the lesbian/straight binary for these women.

There were other differences, in addition to the contrast between 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' identities -- most notably how the women talked about their identification with feminism. There were also important differences within each woman's stories about themselves and, of course, differences at the level of the 'social'. Existing life history research has rarely accounted for such differences 'within', 'at' and 'beyond' the individual because it has relied heavily on a

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<sup>26</sup> This narration of 'fixed', 'authentic' sexual subject positions can be thought about on several levels:

- i. as a humanist interpretation of a bourgeois, sovereign self which underpins modernist conceptions of identity, derived variously from sexological, psychological, liberal and radical feminist constructions of 'lesbian identity';
- ii. as a pragmatic, political defense/offense against the normalizing pull of heterosexual identities within heterocentric contexts;
- iii. as a narrative 'effect' which can never be fully achieved due to the slippages along an endless chain of signifiers, or due to the unconscious alterity which inhabits the 'self'.

The latter two are, in my opinion, compatible with a pragmatic poststructural theory of subjectivity. Lesbian identities can be regarded 'as if' they were authentic in order to engage in strategic political struggles such as establishing separate lesbian sports or anti-homophobic policies. Equally, the impossibility of being completely and permanently 'lesbian' must be continually borne in mind at the ontological level of long-term, historical theorization.

humanist, individualist assumption of a 'coherent' identity. I suggest that, because poststructuralism rejects this self-contained presentism of humanist identity in favor of a fragmented theory of subjectivity, it not only accommodates but directs attention onto difference at several levels. This fragmentation of subjectivity -- the notion of the split subject -- focuses attention onto construction of self/Other; normative/marginal sexual identities; speech/silence; and conscious/unconscious.

I would also argue that the intersection of gendered, sexual and racial subjectivities is not incompatible with a poststructuralist theory of the subject driving this research. While much feminist and queer theory purports to account for intersections between race, class, and gender, empirical research frequently struggles to respond to these complex intersections. The potential of methodologies such as life history to *insist* that researchers listen to specific, intersecting subject positions of women's lives has long been recognized in feminist research. On several occasions the narratives insisted that race and racism be foregrounded in my analysis, although I was sometimes surprised at the moments when this happened. The way we talked about racism and racial difference in the interviews revolved around linguistic, racial Others which led to analysis of the normative silences which sustain our positions as 'White' women. On reflection this unexpected direction in data analysis is a persuasive argument for a life history methodology -- for continuing to research empirical life stories in spite of the tensions set into play by poststructural skepticism about transparency of experience in verbal accounts.

#### Speech Act Theory

There were occasions when unexpected things were said in the interviews, when the conversation took a sudden turn, when a particular word made something 'happen'. Not only were the interviews disrupted by these 'dramatic' moments, but women remembered their lives being affected by a conversation, a remark, an act of speech. Jenny's revelation at summer camp by 'the Goddess Kelly'

that she might be a lesbian was a striking example. Although they were rare during interviews, these moments lent themselves to a focus on the performativity of language using micro-level discourse analysis.

Speech act theory<sup>27</sup> has the potential to illustrate, in a very immediate way, how discourses function performatively. My use of this type of close discourse analysis illustrated how particular words enabled or restricted the endless discursive construction of sexual subjectivities. Neither speech acts or the silences they evoke have any permanence; indeed, a never-ending task faces heteronormative discourse to continually repeat or perform its silencing functions. Lesbian subject positions can, of course, be claimed within physical education but doing so has impact -- "my girlfriend and I...", "yes, I prefer women...", "from my lesbian perspective...". Such speech acts are extra-ordinary, remarkable, and usually remembered. These were the occasions which 'stood out' during interviews and which were most appropriate for micro-level analysis. In contrast, heteronormative speech acts thrive in being unremarkable, mundane and so very ordinary. Maintaining a heterosexual storyline relies on continual repetition to the extent that it may appear that a person simply 'talks like that'. As Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990) explained, "participants may not be aware of their assumptions nor the power of the images to invoke particular ways of being and may simply regard their words as 'the way one talks' on this sort of occasion" (p. 49). Mundane ways of talking play an important role in normalizing heterosexuality. Heterosexual subject positions can be claimed

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<sup>27</sup> Austin's speech act theory of the 1960s emphasized how speech is not only descriptive but also performative, through the idea of 'illocutionary' acts. Words are performative if they do things, if they perform an action -- conversely, if they aren't spoken the action doesn't happen (Petry, 1990). Put another way, illocution is to locution what speech acts are to speech. Moreover, 'illocutionary force' is the combination of language and social practice and, at certain moments in the life histories, speech acts about lesbian sexuality often carried exceptional degrees of illocutionary force. The performative aspects of language and discourse have developed into an important topic in queer, especially literary, studies (Butler, 1993a, 1997a; Parker & Sedgwick, 1995).



and repeated on numerous opportunities in everyday and professional conversation. These repetitive performances, if unchallenged and uncomplicated as they frequently are, grant security and certainty to heterosexual storylines. This in turn allows a heterosexual subjectivity to be firmly and deeply anchored, so that a heterosexual sense of the self can be readily experienced as coherent, life-long and 'natural'.

Speech act theory was able to reveal the impact of a particular speech act on Jenny's lesbian identity, highlighting the link between the performativity of language and sexual subjectivity -- when silence was 'broken' rather than 'golden'. What happens when analysis turns to the spaces between silence/speech, inside/outside, lesbian/heterosexual? Time and time again I needed to listen to the rowdy silences about lesbianism which littered the narratives.

#### Deconstruction

I found myself turning to Derrida's notion of *différance*, where meaning resides but is never fully present (Collins & Mayblin, 1996; Derrida, 1982; Sampson, 1989). For example, I wanted to delve beneath the surface calm of an anecdote Marion told me because it contained much about language, Other and sexual normativity. She recounted a conversation from graduate school in the early 1970s:

*One of the graduate students said to me one time, because she knew I was married and everything, and she said, "I want to be married and have a family. I don't want to live the way some of these others live."*

*And she meant the single...But it was just her feelings about the whole thing. If you want to get married and have a family, that's good too.*

'Marriage' and 'having a family' referred directly to heterosexuality, while 'the whole thing', 'single' and 'others' referred euphemistically to a way of life that was

different, that was not heterosexual. Although 'single', 'these others' or 'this whole thing' were vague, the meaning of each term relied upon being different from 'married'. This type of analysis illustrated the more general queer theoretical claim that 'female heterosexuality' requires the 'lesbian Other' because it only acquires significance in the play of *différance* between the two.

While there are significant differences between speech act theory and deconstruction<sup>28</sup>, Sandy Petrey (1990) cogently argued that both warrant great interest because "their disagreements over *how* language performs take off from the same constant awareness *that* it performs" (p. 133). My approach to deconstruction drew on Jack Sanger's (1995) metaphor:

*deconstruction (the act of using text to undermine its own rhetoric) allows the analyst to explore the text as a kind of water tank wherein conflicting ideologies are submerged under the surface calm of an attempted unitary resolution. (p. 91)*

Thus, speech act theory and deconstruction shaped how I analyzed specific words in the transcripts. This type of close discursive analysis suggested how particular words functioned at different historical moments for these women; that

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<sup>28</sup> 'Deconstruction' is a highly contested term which by its very nature defies definition, but some explanation of my use of the terms 'deconstructive' and 'deconstruction' is warranted. Petrey (1990) contended that "Derrida concentrates on language as language, Austin on language as collective enactment of reality; one emphasizes locution, the other illocution" (p. 147), yet despite these differences, "speech act theory understands society as a dynamic process tangible in the words through which human beings interact, and deconstructive commentaries on the words enhance the fascination of the tangibility" (p. 144). Derrida himself refused any fixed definition of deconstruction as method, analysis or critique and was quoted as saying that "all sentences of the type 'deconstruction is x' or deconstruction is not x' *a priori* miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false" (Collins & Mayblin, 1996: 93). Deconstruction has been used as a means (Scott, 1992) for analyzing discourses which opens up a term, or rather binary oppositions, to question and reconstruction, rather than negating the terms completely (Butler, 1992). While cautioning that deconstruction is not simply a set of techniques, Parker (1988) distinguished three stages to a deconstruction. Firstly, identify conceptual oppositions; then demonstrate that the privileged pole of the opposition is dependent upon and could not operate without the other; and, finally, point towards new concepts by reinterpreting the opposition.

is, it helped to 'understand' what the narratives contained. At other times, this detailed level of analysis gestured toward the unsaid; tried to 'overstand' what lay beneath or outside particular words.

### Individualism and Social Postmodernism

Close discourse analysis of the type produced by speech act theory and deconstruction, as well as other approaches commonly used in life history, run the risk of individualism; that is, placing too much emphasis on an individual transcript, interview, or account of experience. Life history as a methodology has always had to confront this criticism. My use of six women countered this tendency for unwarranted individualism to a degree (see Sampling). Individualism was also tempered by analysis at the level of the 'social', what I refer to as 'institutional discourses'.

Returning to the example 'Lesbian Encounters' again, several discourses about lesbian sexuality in women's sports were evident. Denise and Lisa encountered other lesbians, developed same-sex relationships and a lesbian social network by playing team sports. Denise remained quite closeted while playing and coaching basketball and softball from the late 1950s until the late 1980s, whereas Lisa came out early in her fastball and broomball playing days. From the way Denise and Lisa talked, lesbian relationships between players were common in these sports and, since the late 1980s at least, increasingly overt. These long-standing and widespread lesbian communities were based on liberalist assumptions about privacy and individual rights. Varying degrees of secrecy and privacy placed restrictions on how lesbianism could be expressed -- players were expected or could 'choose' not to be out as lesbian within these sports. Open discrimination against lesbians in these sports seemed to be rare, providing a relatively high degree of safety for the exploration and expression of lesbian desire. Lesbian identity was constructed as a

matter of individual choice deserving of privacy and, since the late 1980s, limited visibility as well.

In the last decade a number of 'lesbian' teams and leagues have been established in Vancouver, in addition to the 1990 Gay Games. This represents a significant shift in assumptions about lesbian sexuality within sport, and is indirectly linked to the women's access to feminism (see *Feminist Generations*) and identity-based politics of urban lesbian and gay movements. All the lesbian women had deep reservations about segregated lesbian or gay sport, but for quite different reasons. Jenny volunteered at the Gay Games only to be shocked at the sexism of gay men she worked with. Equally, she was disappointed to have little in common with women in a lesbian volleyball league she joined. Denise strongly disagreed with the Gay Games on the grounds that it unnecessarily highlighted sexuality and that she had never experienced exclusion from sports because she was lesbian. Their lack of involvement in organized 'lesbian' sports indicates how central individualist and liberal views about sexuality were for these women compared to views which emphasized lesbian visibility and segregation as a form of identity politics.

Lesbianism in women's team sports was conspicuous only by its absence in the narratives of the women who identified as heterosexual. Connie encountered the possibility of 'lesbian' through friends and feminist courses at graduate school but didn't mention open or secret lesbianism in outdoor recreation, her main physical activity. Bethany did refer to lesbianism but only in terms of negative stereotypes and homophobia, firstly as a PE undergraduate in the 1960s and then recently in sports administration at the college level. Marion referred indirectly to lesbianism in physical education when she remembered the 'single' women professors and feminine dress codes at her graduate school in the US during the 1960s. On the basis of these isolated memories it is difficult to make substantial claims about changes in lesbian stereotypes or homophobia. Rather, the significance

lies in the persistent silence about lesbianism from 1950s through to the present time. Discourses about lesbian sexuality circulating in women's sport and the physical education profession were significant -- not for the lesbian possibilities they offered but those they disavowed. Their narratives about lesbianism in sport remained relatively untouched by the increased visibility of lesbians in women's team sports or the emergence of organized 'lesbian' sports (although this was not the case with their views about feminism in sport, see 'Feminist Generations').

The example above demonstrates how I attempted to 'understand' the specific historical attitudes about lesbian sexuality circulating in women's sports, feminism and physical education. Here my focus on these institutional discourses was a move towards social postmodernism. The under-theorization of the 'social' has been a criticism of performativity and speech act theory in queer, literary and sociological studies (Eagleton, 1983; Patton, 1995; Nicholson & Seidman, 1995).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cindy Patton and Stephen Seidman both expressed concerns about the trend away from social theory in queer work:

*New work in queer and gender theories on performance and performativity emerged importantly in response to a critique of essentialized identity and debates about the end of identity politics. Given this particular entrance of performance theory, into a highly political domain, there has been, I believe, an overemphasis on the actant-subject and a relative lack of consideration of the stage or context or field of the performance or performative act. There have been highly developed poststructural and postmodern accounts of these bodies-in-performance or their performative acts, but little in the way of poststructural and postmodern efforts to reintroduce concepts for what was once called the "social". (Patton, 1995: 181)*

*Queer theory has largely abandoned institutional analysis. In Sedgwick, the homo/hetero definition functions as a largely autonomous cultural logic...these cultural meanings are never linked to social structural arrangements or processes such as nationalism, colonialism, globalization, or dynamics of class or family formation or popular social movements. (Seidman, 1995: 134)*

Equally, Terry Eagleton (1985) exposed the consequences of skeptical postmodernism in literary theory, which I think applies to some poststructural textualism in social research:

*it is mischievously radical in respect to everyone else's opinions, able to unmask the solemn declarations as mere dishevelled plays of signs, while utterly conservative in every other way. (p. 145)*

Similar arguments have recently appeared in debates about discourse analysis in educational research:

*Neither Austin nor Searle are interested in using speech act analysis as a way of deconstructing and critiquing 'games' of social relations, difference and material wealth...To do so would require we broaden out speech act analysis to a political economy of speech acts, a sociological analysis of the fields of social relations, the institutional sites where speech acts are used, and a documentation of the dynamic constitution and reconstitution of the 'rules' of language games of everyday life...It is precisely this type of analysis which is at the heart of critical discourse analysis.*

*(Luke, 1997: 350)*

If a critical focus on the 'social' can be achieved, it creates the possibility for poststructuralist life history to contribute to social critique and ultimately political action.<sup>30</sup>

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Poststructurally informed work which allows for political and material realities is currently difficult to find. One exception is Sagri Dhairyam's (1994) poststructuralist theorization of racial identity through lesbian sexuality in which she explores how performative speech acts involve both the language and the body:

*Locating the performative as the body that speaks is also to write speech as of the body; in so doing we resist the slide from body to language to literacy to literature, and so, indeed, to theory, which relentlessly returns the critical intellect to pride of place...To reflect on racial identity through sexuality...is not to subsume one into the other; rather, it is to highlight the color of the body as both all-too-material difference and as fantasy...Only when whiteness, masculinity and education still enjoy the discursive privilege of 'passing' as invisible can the intellect be sanctioned without any need to reflect on the colonizing fantasies of its physically threatening body. (pp. 42-43)*

<sup>30</sup> This is the case only if pragmatic rather than ludic poststructuralist positions are adopted. For further detail refer to Donald Norton's (1996) *Material Queer* trenchant critique of ludic postmodernism in queer theory.

Having been sensitive to the need for social analysis throughout this study, from a reflective position I now contend that social analysis is not necessarily incompatible with a poststructuralist theory of subjectivity<sup>31</sup>. Both can be accommodated within poststructuralist life history, but not without tension. Undoubtedly assumptions about fragmented identities, Others within the Self, and constitutive force of silence place considerable torque on straightforward social explanations and political strategies. In this study, the tension gave rise to my divergent impulses to 'understand' and 'overstand' the women's narratives. Such tension can be relieved, to a limited degree, by pragmatic feminist-poststructuralist strategies such as simultaneously striving towards deconstructive overstanding in the theoretical long-term, while opting for short-term politics based on assumptions 'as if' identity mattered, selves could be known, and life histories told to one another (Riley, 1988; Sykes, 1996). This may involve a move towards 'social postmodernism' within life history; which requires:

*rethinking the very nature of the basic categories through which the social whole is viewed and constituted. Such a postmodern approach rejects an understanding of such categories as the family, the state, the individual, and the homosexual as 'natural'. This move de-essentializes such categories by placing them within specific historical and political contexts. It thus avoids the essentialist disposition of some modern modes of understanding; it also avoids those poststructuralist arguments which often ignore the institutional context of discursive practices. (Nicholson & Seidman, 1995: 24-25)*

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<sup>31</sup> Refer to Chris Weedon (1997) for a comprehensive explanation of poststructural conception of 'subjectivity', and also Catherine Belsey's (1997) precis of Althusser's notion of the subject in relation to Lacanian subjectivity.

The 'social' has been analyzed in this study by focusing on the institutional discourses<sup>32</sup> which framed the women's narratives. Throughout the analysis, decisions had to be made where to strike a balance between textual and social analyses. As it turned out, a large majority of the analyses focused on institutional discourses.

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<sup>32</sup> I have used the term 'institutional discourse' in the same way as medical anthropologist Jamie Saris (1995). In his life history work on illness narratives he drew on Lyotard's definition which:

*always requires constraints for statements to be admissible within its bounds. The constraints function to filter discursive potentials...They also privilege certain classes of statements (sometimes only one) whose predominance characterizes the discourse of the particular institution: there are things that should be said, and there are ways of saying them. (Lyotard, 1984 cited in Saris, 1995: 42)*

Saris (1995) went on to lyrically define 'institution' as:

*A structure (physical, conceptual or both) that 'sets up' discourse and practice...as bundles of technologies, narrative styles, modes of discourse, and, as importantly, erasures and silences. Culturally and historically situated subjects produce and reproduce these knowledges, practices, and silences as a condition of being within the orbit of the institution. (p. 42)*

This complements Bronwyn Davies' (Davies & Harré, 1990) conception of discourse as the institutionalized use of language at disciplinary, political, cultural and small group levels, and around specific topics such as 'gender', 'class' and I would add 'sexualities'. Davies explained in more detail how:

*the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. (Davies & Harré, 1990: 46)*

Whilst Davies employed the term 'conceptual repertoire', Wetherell and Potter (1988) used 'interpretive repertoire' defined as a relatively internally consistent language unit within a particular discourse. This view is helpful because it allows for inconsistent and variable interpretive repertoires within the same discourse. Ultimately, I prefer the term 'discursive repertoire' as used by Ruth Frankenburg's (1993) which avoids the ties of 'conceptual' with psychologically-based humanism.



### Psychoanalytic Theory of Subjectivity

Poststructural and psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity have a long, intertwined intellectual history.<sup>33</sup> This research has been troubled throughout by the extent to which psychoanalytic approach to subjectivity could add to the interpretations of the women's life histories. Psychoanalysis has been important to feminism, as Chris Weedon (1987) explained, by presenting a challenge to the "unified, self-present subject of rationality, and to theories of innate biologically determined sexual identity" (p. 71). Indeed, I think that cautious use of psychoanalytic concepts or metaphors can be justified. Nonetheless, many feminists continue to have reservations about the political efficacy of psychoanalytic theorizing.<sup>34</sup> These tensions between psychoanalytic, poststructural and feminist accounts of subjectivity must, sooner or later, be confronted by researchers employing any form of poststructuralism.

I turned to psychoanalytic concepts when contradictions, evasions, and curious repetitions occurred in our interviews -- moments when the illusion of coherence began to fall apart, began to fragment. It was these moments which drew

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<sup>33</sup> The most influential, of course, being Lacan's re-reading of Freud as the cornerstone of his critique of Saussurian linguistic structuralism.

<sup>34</sup> For excellent feminist appraisals of feminist responses to and critiques of psychoanalytic theories refer to Weedon (1987), Landry and MacLean (1993), and Barrett (1992). Michèle Barrett (1992) explained how deep critique of social causality and the search for epistemological origins evolved in both poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. Most relevant tensions for my analysis are the misogynist theoretical origins and clinical institutionalization of psychoanalysis and the heterosexism of many feminist reworkings of psychoanalytic Oedipal and object-relations theory.

I found Landry and MacLean's (1993) articulation of these tensions persuasive from their materialist perspective. They explained that although poststructural theory of subjectivity must take into account difference -- the subject as formed in relation to the Other -- there are dangers in universalizing this notion of difference. As they pointed out in Michele Barrett's work, "Freud's writings are deeply embedded in the gender ideology so crucial to women's oppression" (p. 172) and Spivak's critique of the colonialism in an exaggerated universalism of psychoanalytic theory. They also note that "the existing feminist debate on sexuality has been a relentless focus on psychoanalysis as 'the' language of sexuality and the family as 'the' ground of sexuality. Such focus not only familializes sexuality but also heterosexualizes it" (p. 160).

me to think about how the absent Other haunted the confused spaces at these edges of meaning, floated in the intangible unsaid<sup>35</sup>. The problem psychoanalytic theories attempt to confront is, deferring to Nicolas Abraham's (1994) erudite summary,

*how to include in a discourse...the very thing which, being the precondition of discourse, fundamentally escapes it. (p. 84)*

My route into this problematic was the notion of 'identification' through the Other. As Madan Sarup (1996) pointed out, identification is used in many senses within psychoanalysis but is most typically used in the sense of "identification of oneself with the other" (p. 30). The notion of identification allowed me to listen to how women talked about themselves through various Others which, in turn, led to more specific psychoanalytic concepts such as transference, introjection and incorporation, transgenerational phantom, fetishism and social unconscious (Abraham & Torok, 1994; de Lauretis, 1994; Felman, 1987; Frosh, 1997; LaPlanche & Pontalis, 1973; Mackwood, 1997; Presnell & Deetz, 1996). For instance<sup>36</sup>, several teachers were reticent to talk about student crushes but talked freely about their own crushes as students. This contradiction struck me as important but there seemed to be no easy explanation. Moving from the general notion that crushes are part of the way students 'identify' with their teachers, the concepts of transference and counter-transference allowed more complex interpretations to emerge. I came to think about the women's hesitancy to talk about their students' affections as 'homophobic

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<sup>35</sup> This notion of the 'unsaid' has begun to appear in educational theorizing influenced by psychoanalytic theories, notably Sharon Todd's (1997) edited volume Learning Desire in which Kaarina Kailo explored ways that "the unsaid evokes psychoanalytic concepts referring to traces of unconscious desire, for Lacan 'the desire of the other'" (p. 189).

<sup>36</sup> See Teaching Desire in Ch 7 for a more detailed analysis of desire, transference and counter-transference in women's physical education.

counter-transference', which in turn raised the dark possibility that homophobia might be deeply rooted in the collective psychic defenses of the teaching profession. In this case, then, psychoanalytic theory allowed for speculations about homophobia within the teaching profession beyond the level of rational educational discourse.

Similar issues about homophobia within the profession arose from stories where Bethany and Denise talked about similarities and differences with their mothers. On one hand, Bethany consistently distanced herself from her mother's homophobic and racist attitudes while, on the other hand, Denise identified strongly with social pressures faced by her grandmother. The following excerpt illustrates the type of interpretation psychoanalytic theory allows, and also the tentative nature of such claims within this thesis.

This particular theme speaks to unconscious investments which sustain homophobia. Denise recalled the lengths to which her father's family went to uphold public respectability in the 1920s and 1930s:

*My father's background was unknown to me until after he died actually. His mother was unwed and raised him as if he were her little brother. Again it was depression, she lived with her mother. I mean in these days to be an unwed mother was just a sin. She never acknowledged him, even to the rest of her family, to her younger children. They didn't know until she was almost on her death-bed. I grew up thinking she was my aunt.*

This story emphasized the secrecy surrounding the birth of Denise's father, revealing something about the normative values about marriage and parenting of the 1930s -- as Denise said, "to be an unwed mother was just a sin". But there was more to the story than this. The timing and telling of this story in the interview was important. I felt as if this disclosure occurred to Denise quite unexpectedly and she had to make a snap decision whether to share it with me. It was one of those

moments when the level of trust between us increased dramatically. Each time I returned to Denise's transcript, the impact of this particular story within her overall life history became more compelling. Denise told stories about her father quite frequently in the interviews, sometimes when they seemed to be only indirectly related to my questions. For example, in response to this question....

*Heather: So, I want to get an understanding of the things that you wouldn't tolerate in a relationship, the things that are unacceptable.*

...Denise talked about her father's attitudes about money, the family's finances and how this gave her a sense of responsibility. This was not the type of response I had anticipated. I needed a way of thinking about why our interviews felt to me as if they veered off in unexpected directions back to her father. She gave me a clue with this remark:

*Denise: being tolerant of or looking at somebody else's situation. I look at my Dad and think 'How could he accept the fact that his mother wouldn't acknowledge him? But he played the game.*

This seemed very similar to why she hadn't told her mother she was gay:

*Denise: ...going through that whole realm of being gay, I don't know where my life would have gone, what her attitude would have been. On one level I know she knows. She's not a stupid woman so she has to know but it's not anything that's been discussed. She can keep up the pretense.*

While these secrets were quite different, they seemed to be connected somehow across different generations. I began to wonder if, at some level, knowing about her father's secret helped Denise to cope with being in the closet. The notion of 'incorporation' provided a starting point to think about the connections. As Gae Mackwood (1997) explained, incorporation copes with loss of an object by burying it in a psychic crypt and keeping it secret to preserve the fantasy that the loss did not occur:<sup>37</sup>

*Because the basic structure of introjection requires the mediation of desires from the lost object and onto language 'about' the object, any traumatic event that is silenced or prohibited and thus left 'unsaid' could subject the individual to an 'illness of mourning' or incorporation. (p. 182)*

Of course, on the basis of life history interviews it is not possible or productive to ask what actual psychic loss Denise or her grandmother may have incorporated -- whether secrets about being an 'unwed mother' or a 'lesbian' represent similar lost objects. Yet I think it is possible to consider how subjectivity can be shaped by unconscious patterns, not only throughout an individual's life history but also across generations.<sup>38</sup> Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's (1994) concept of the 'transgenerational phantom' refers to the consequences of silence from one generation to the next, through the unwitting reception of someone else's

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<sup>37</sup> I first came across the notion of buried psychic secrets in Abraham and Torok's (1994) detailed work in The Shell and the Kernel, and later found Mackwood's (1997) application of this work to pedagogy very compelling. Yet, this is a detailed theoretical issue -- particularly, the distinctions between incorporation and introjection -- which I have only begun to work through in this analysis. It is important to acknowledge that my use of 'incorporation' and 'transgenerational phantom' are suggestive rather than adamant.

<sup>38</sup> In order to pursue this interpretation any further, however, the analysis should become more metaphorical than literal, more social than individualistic.

secret. It has been argued that this has "the potential to illuminate the genesis of social institutions and psychical roots of cultural patterns and political ideology" (Nicholas Rand cited in Abraham & Torok, 1994: 169). If we are prepared to accept this position<sup>39</sup>, using psychoanalytic theory to speculate about secrets in life histories might contribute to existing ways of thinking about oppressive, social relations such as homophobia or heterosexism. Maybe the persistence of homophobic ideas within physical education is linked, in some unreadable way, to the repetition of deeply hidden psychic secrets across generations of the profession?

I have left these thoughts about secrecy hanging in the air, incomplete and fragile, as a provocation for future research into the homophobic social unconscious. Increasingly, I find interpretations of silences and secrets urging a return to queer literary criticism. Current queer theorizing is populated by many scholars grounded in literary criticism which, among other functions and problems, serves to open routes of analysis. For instance, I am tempted to suggest that my suspended argument could be moved forward by considering D.A. Miller's writings about the open secret<sup>40</sup>. Consider for a moment the possibilities for theorizing opened up by these passages:

*...the social function of secrecy -- isomorphic with its novelistic function -- is not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal, the knowledge of knowledge. (Miller cited in Weed, 1997: 279)*

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<sup>39</sup> It is arguable whether the idea of a crypt of the self or of the phantom is the most relevant metaphor for interpreting how secrets cross generations.

<sup>40</sup> I encountered Miller's work on the open secret in Elizabeth Weed's (1997) contribution to the debate in 'Feminism Meets Queer Theory'.

*In a mechanism of Freudian disavowal, we know perfectly well that the secret is known, but nonetheless we must persist, however ineptly, in guarding it. The paradox of the open secret registers the subject's accommodation to a totalizing system that has obliterated the difference he would make -- the difference he [sic] does make, in the imaginary denial of this system 'even so'. (Miller cited in Weed, 1997: 280)*

Is it possible to refuse Miller's literary thoughts about the 'open secret' when this trope has been so enduring within physical education? This bridging between empirical life history narratives and textual criticism is potentially rich, yet life historians must continuously make it explicit when their interpretations draw upon such work.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the literary roots of much poststructuralism and psychoanalysis invites this interdisciplinarity. The issue of limits remains; forcing the question, how directly can such literary ideas be incorporated into the analysis of life history data? I think it is difficult to draw associations directly from individual life histories; rather, literary sources might support analysis beyond the individualistic level.<sup>42</sup> I have attempted this by discussing the notion of the transgenerational phantom within the social unconscious.

Theoretical tensions linger. I remain uneasy about theorizing about the social from individual narratives. Madan Sarup strikes to the heart of my uneasiness:

*Some people assume that if identification works in a particular way with individuals, then it must work in the same way with, say nations. This would be using psychoanalysis analogically. But to draw psychoanalytic insights from one sphere and*

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<sup>41</sup> See section on 'The Lesbian Closet' in Ch 7 Dis/Locations where I cite the influence of Eve Sedgwick's analysis in Epistemology of the Closet.

<sup>42</sup> In addition to exploring psychoanalytic ideas within the social unconscious, other routes into the social from the individualism of humanistic life history are provided by postmodern social theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Seidman & Nicholson, 1995).

*to transfer them to another sphere is reductionist. There are many types of identification, and one cannot just transfer what happens in one scenario to another, larger, scenario. There are many differences between one scenario and another, and, to avoid the charge of reductionism, much more theoretical work will have to be done. Perhaps there will always be a tension between the psychic and the social and we may have to learn to live with that tension. (Sarup, 1996: 183)*

Nonetheless I think possibilities opened up by psychoanalytic theories warrant their cautious use, if only to gesture future directions for life history research.

### Summary

I was, perhaps, struggling with irreconcilable issues. On the one hand, a poststructuralist approach to life history raised issues about the short-term, ethical effects of the power relation between researcher-as-critic and researched-as-author. Other issues were raised by the long-term poststructuralist project of (de)constructing normal/queer subjectivities using life history -- previously a humanist, and thoroughly modernist, research method. Rather than being irreconcilable, maybe these questions were of a different order. Concerns about the ethics and power enacted between the researcher and researched are not, if one accepts Richer's (1992) view, "produced in or by the subjects who produced knowledge. The relations are produced elsewhere, so that questions about the researcher's intentions are the perfect decoy, deflecting attention from the social field to the individual one, turning a social question into an introspective one" (p. 112). Richer based this on Foucault's declaration that power should not be analyzed at the individual level of conscious intention, as a subject of knowledge but rather as an effect of power relations.



Such an approach shifted the methodological questions onto the field of power relations surrounding the interview context. By doing this, the research interview could be conceptualized as a form of academic surveillance deployed through accreditation, labor market, legitimization, contemporary identity politics; that is, a mode of knowledge production (dis)guised as critical (queer) social science. The interviews could be thought of as relations of power, disguised as neutral, ethical, humanistic research relying on the duplicity and complicity of all those involved. The tensions between queer and straightforward interpretations of the women's stories -- indeed, a queer interrogation of straight lives -- risks re-inscribing the relation of power between researcher and the narrators. In light of this, it is productive to regard the interview in terms of the researcher/researched power relations and theoretical tensions between straight/lesbian/queer standpoints which are worked out within a field of institutionalized power.

## Chapter 4

### Social Locations, Narrated Selves

This chapter outlines how a hierarchical relation between 'heterosexual' and 'lesbian' was taken for granted in the early years of the women's lives but then, as adults, they developed divergent views about female sexualities. The themes 'Straight Families' and 'Dating Lessons' bring into view how 'heterosexuality' was normalized across three generations of women, while the theme 'Feminist Generations' highlights how feminism influenced their views about gender relations.

#### Straight Families

*Insertion into language begins at an early age and always happens in the context of specific discourses governing family life and childhood more generally. Moreover it is a consistent feature of most forms of discourse that they deny their own partiality.*

*(Weedon, 1987: 97-98)*

Given the richness of individual lives, none of the women's families could be adequately described in such sterile terms as 'heterosexual nuclear family'; however, the primary parents in each woman's life history were a mother and father, and there was little mention of parenting within extended families. Bethany talked about her 'absentee dad'; Denise spoke about her father's upbringing by his grandmother, and Lisa spoke of negotiating her relationship with her adoptive and biological parents. Discourses about sexism, occasionally racism, colored some of these childhood memories. What was not questioned, except possibly in retrospect, was the assumption of heterosexuality which structured all immediate family

relations. The following childhood recollections provide some indication of what gendered and sexual subject positions were available to the women in the early days of life.

Just the way it was

Marion's parents immigrated to Saskatchewan from the Ukraine in the early 1900s just before the outbreak of the 'First' World War. As a first generation Canadian, Marion was caught between Ukrainian and North American views about early marriage. She recalled how her family's Ukrainian tradition of early marriage was a 'cultural thing' which her mother in particular wanted to move away from:

*Both my Mother and Dad said they had moved to the United States [from Saskatchewan] for a reason. We are related to half the people in Saskatchewan from Regina through to Saskatoon and I think they purposely wanted to get away because they wanted to live differently. I think it was just the influence of the families. You know, the traditions -- the girls getting married young.*

*We went [to Saskatchewan] one time and one of my aunts said something about meeting some nice Ukrainian boys -- two days later we were on our way home! She decided she better get her teenage daughters out of there.*

*They just felt that as long as they lived in Canada they would have that cultural thing that had come over with them.*

Marion commented on the unequal division of labor within her family, referring to a form of sexism which was to appear in all the other women's memories of their early families.

*My sister and I still laugh about how my Dad was waited on forever. We try to explain it to other people but that's just the way it was. There was nothing cruel or bad about it, it was just the way it was.*

Like Marion, Denise also used the phrase 'just the way it was' frequently in her stories. Denise contrasted her own situation as an unmarried, professional woman with her parents' generation being one wherein the women "went to work in Woolworth's, got married, had families" with the expectation that after marriage "the male provided and the female stayed at home". Like Marion, Denise concluded her narrative by reminding me that this was "just the way things were at that time".

As Denise told me a series of stories about her parents, she stressed the impact of the economic depression of the 1930s in Edmonton, Alberta where she grew up. As she said, "I grew up with my parents having gone through the depression years. Neither had a lengthy education and probably neither completed high school". Her stories resonated with economic hardships:

*Well we could only afford one [child]. And that was in the age of fairly large families and they didn't have enough money. They figured they could only afford one kid. So that was it.*

and women's lack of choices about the type and timing of paid work:

*My Mum was at home. My Dad was of the generation where the male provided and the female stayed at home and looked after the kids. So he didn't want her working and she didn't work. She would have loved to have worked, I think.*

*She was the youngest of six girls. Each of the girls in her family had similar backgrounds. Some went out and left home very early and had to work for other people*

*to make ends meet. um .....they all had similar backgrounds in terms of went to school, went to work in Woolworth's, got married, had families. Her five older sisters all had similar backgrounds to what she did. And it was.....just the way things were at that time.*

Again, limited access to higher education and financial necessity restricted the options available to her mother's generation -- Denise remembered early marriage being almost inevitable for them.

My father had it really good

Bethany's family lived in rural Nova Scotia during the 1950s. Her memories focused on the family's poverty, how this affected her father and mother differently, and the contradictions between her mother's Catholicism and racism. In this description, Bethany emphasized how economic and emotional dependence in her parents' marriage kept her mother at home while her father "had it really good".

*Bethany: My parents have a marriage partnership that has never changed in all the years that I have known them. My mother alternately loves and hates my father. He just goes through life being himself and she still expects him to be the source of her happiness.*

*Heather: So the relationship that your mother has isn't something ... that you would like to have?*

*Bethany: Well, he did his own thing, went off. He was an absentee Dad. He was very good looking. And my mother has never forgiven him for that but she's never left him either, mostly because she can't. She's never worked, she's always been a housewife. Plus she's always loved him.*

Poverty permeated Bethany's memories of the marriage:

*Nobody could afford church. I can remember my mother crying about it for years, and blaming my father -- not that he was there very often to be blamed. It was twenty miles away and we didn't have a car. I can remember as a kid she'd try to read us prayers but gave up after a while because there were too many other important things to do. We didn't have running water, we had to carry buckets of water. I don't think she ever forgave my father for that.*

Through these stories Bethany implied that she disapproved of her mother's situation, yet recognized how her mother's choices to redefine the marriage were limited due to social and economic realities. She linked the family's poverty with her mother's dependence upon her husband for financial support and spoke directly about 'sexism' within her parents' marriage.

#### Patriarchal system

Both Connie's parents were third generation Euro-Canadians, her father's family had emigrated from Germany and her mother's from Scotland and Ireland. From her current feminist perspective, Connie looked back on how a "definite, total patriarchal system" affected her family:

*Connie: I can remember sitting around the table and my father had the armchair. He sat down and he didn't get up from the table and neither would my brother, you know. The whole cooking and...*

*Heather: Okay, so when you say roles you're meaning really traditional...*

*Connie: ...yeah, yeah. In terms of domesticity for sure. And then educationally I think I was very much stifled because of my gender and I saw that right up until university, you know. You feed into it too. I mean it works both ways*

*because you learn as a infant that your gender is first and then the human being is second.*

She recalled some family tales of financial hardship during the depression but, unlike Marion, Denise and Bethany, her parents' generation had progressed through post-secondary education, entering into a white, professional middle-class.

*Connie: Well I would say for my Mother growing up they were quite poor, although probably not relative to others especially during the depression. But I heard stories of putting newspaper in the toe of their shoe so it would last the winter. And stitching up the stockings and lots of stories like that.*

*Heather: Right.*

*Connie: My Dad, maybe not as much. He went to university. University of Manitoba and I would assume that was not the norm.*

*Heather: What about ...he had a brother, who died, and two sisters?*

*Connie: And three sisters.*

*Heather: Three sisters. Do you know what sort of education they had?*

*Connie: That's a good question. One of them was a music teacher. And I know my Mum was a teacher for a while but just went as far as middle school which was like six months. Another one might have a university degree and another one doesn't.*

Jenny talked about her parents in terms of their connection to the United Church and her father's interest in the family genealogy:

*Jenny: That family thing, you know. And we're not just talking about immediate family either. All our lives we've heard about his aunts, uncles and*

*grandmas and grandpas and the family tree. And just that whole package is huge for him. That's the unit.*

*Heather: Yeah. How many generations Canadian and kind of where do you trace your family?*

*Jenny: Oh my Mum, she moved from Holland. So her family is Dutch-German. And my Dad is..it would've been...oh this is awful but I don't know...it would have been his grandfather, maybe his grandfather came from England. So since the eighteen something's...50s, 60s. They emigrated from Yorkshire or somewhere. So fairly long on my Dad's side. My Mum is fairly European.*

Sexism was a prominent theme in the women's descriptions of family life from the 1930s to the 1950s. In contrast, heterosexuality was taken for granted in these narratives of childhood. Unlike sexism, heterosexism in the immediate family went unremarked and unquestioned between parents, brothers and sisters. Later narratives show how the heterosexuality of aunts, uncles, and teachers was occasionally questioned.

### **Dating Lessons**

*If anything marks postwar ideologies about gender and sexuality and the relationship between the two categories, it's dating. (Adams, 1997: 98)*

A curious split appeared when we talked about sexuality during adolescence. Several women remembered scenes from high school, nostalgically recalling old friends, boyfriends and the kudos gained from 'dating'. These memories were punctuated by fears about contraception, pregnancy and unwelcome male heterosexuality. Nonetheless, these narratives about heterosexual dating were



neatly split from the women's talk about lesbian sexuality, 'girlfriends' or same-sex desires which only appeared in women's memories of sport and physical activity outside high school. Thus, the co-educational high schools were remembered as key sites for the normalization of adolescent heterosexuality. These dating narratives also reveal the economic possibilities available to these women<sup>43</sup>, which were quite different from the economic pressures facing their mother's generations.

I don't understand this dating

Marion talked about her memories of 'dating' as a young woman growing up in Washington state in the United States in the early 1940s.

*I didn't start dating till I was practically out of high school the last year, and I remember one time I had a date with a boy one Friday to go to a movie, and I went with another boy to a dance on Saturday.*

*And my Mother said to me, "I don't understand this dating".*

*And I said, "Well Mother, I'm not sure I do either. It's the way that they do things in the United States".*

*And you see, what bothered her was she was used to making a commitment. Like, by the time she was seventeen she knew she was going to marry my Dad. Sixteen, seventeen.*

*That's the only time she said, "I'm not sure if I understand this".*

*My mother never encouraged me to get married young, although she had married early.*

*I still met somebody and got married young anyway! But it was not something that was*

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<sup>43</sup> Marie Louise Adams (1997) outlined how changing economic conditions, proliferation of cars and availability of commercial amusements after the First World War made dates outside the home possible, and how constantly changing partners evolved into 'going steady' for working and middle-class white youth in North America after the Second World War.

*mandatory. No it wasn't like this is something that we've done and we expect you to do it.*

Marion mentioned several times her own and her mother's 'lack of understanding' about dating, a lack of understanding that temporarily bridged Ukrainian and North American cultural difference. She contrasted this version of 'dating', encountered late in her high school days in Washington state during the 1940s, with her mother's traditional Ukrainian experience of courtship. This North American version of 'dating' referred to going out for an evening to social events such as movies or dances with a boy. The 'date' lasted for one evening and provided semi-public means of heterosexual socializing during adolescence; again, this contrasted with her mother's Ukrainian experience where the norm had been to establish an exclusive, long-term relationship with a potential husband. Marion was aware of having to adopt the normative practice of dating, aware that it differed from her mother's normative expectations of early commitment and marriage. The adjustment was just one of many required of Ukrainian immigrants such as Marion's family who was deliberately assimilating into white North American cultural practices.

#### No longer a Grimm's Fairy Tale romance

Looking back on her teenage years in rural Nova Scotia during the early 1960s, Bethany remembered how heterosexuality was the only version of sexuality publicly available to her at that time:

*Heather: Can you give me a brief outline of um...when you started dating boys and what sort of relationships you had.*

*Bethany: Fourteen!*

*Heather: And you can remember him clearly!*

*Bethany: I certainly can. Yes I can. He was one of the hired help on one of the farms.*

*And he was a Fonzie character with the fast cars, the slicked back hair,  
the leather jacket. And I just thought he was the best thing in the world.*

*We used to go out stealing things. Hub caps...and mirrors off cars...and  
things. For fun. And drive fast for fun. I was totally enchanted.*

*Heather: So he had his own car or he would borrow?*

*Bethany: Oh he was like twentyish. He was old. So yep I do remember exactly. Yeah  
I can still remember him. Of course it took him about two months to figure  
out that he couldn't have sex with me and then...pphhtt...that was the end  
of it unfortunately. (laughs) I was in such mortal terror!*

On the one hand, Bethany's portrayed dating as a rebellious rite of passage, of being 'totally enchanted' with breaking the rules such as driving fast and stealing hubcaps; yet on the other, she concludes the narrative by invoking a dark feeling of 'mortal terror'. Again, the contradictory burdens of sexual responsibility and availability run beneath Bethany's memories of how she positioned herself with the normative practice of heterosexual dating.

Looking back on her marriage of seventeen years, she told me how her life had turned out quite differently from her early expectations and hopes.

*My life is quite different from what I set out to do. I set out to get married, have a job,  
have a horse-farm and er.....that would be my life. And I didn't get any of those things.*

*I have a career now. (laughs) And I live in the city....oh my God. I'm the least city  
person you'll ever come across.*

As a single woman in her fifties looking back, Bethany remarked to me that "marriage no longer holds that Grimm's Fairy Tales romance for me".

### Wanting To Beat Them Up!

Connie recollected her experiences of dating in a rural Ontario high school in the mid-70s which included one-night events such as dances, movies or skating and later having a series of boyfriends. The importance of peers was reflected in being visible, having the last skate or being shown attention by boys.

Connie: *What I remember personally is probably my first interest in boys is wanting to beat them up. I remember trying to get the reputation that I could beat up guys and I could put them on the ground or I could arm wrestle and I still .....But I guess it was about grade 7 when boyfriends happened. I switched to a new school so I was making new friends but I remember sort of having boyfriends. The last skate, I would roller-skate every Friday. The last dance, to have a guy to skate with that was pretty cool.*

Heather: *The phrase going on a date keeps coming up. From your experience, what did going on a date mean?*

Connie: *It usually meant getting picked up in a car, going to the movie and then going to the A & W for hamburgers and root beer. And feeling sick to my stomach and not being able to eat, from feeling nervous. I just remember that over and over again.*

Heather: *With the new A & W coming here, Jan was going on about the drive-in A & Dubs, and I didn't get it cos I've never seen it. Like, you eat in your car? Non comprenez! (Both laughing)*

Connie: *I remember doing that. And then going to get kissed, and then what are they going to try and do. Oh yes I used to get so nervous about that.*

Heather: *Did you have boyfriends for a week or a month, or how did it progress?*

Connie: *I had a lot more guys that I was friends with. I had a boyfriend either in grade 9 or 10, the first year that I had a boyfriend that was in grade 12 or*

13. And then after that I don't really remember, that was only for a year or so. And then for the rest of high school, like different guys but I don't really remember having a steady boyfriend.

*Heather:* What sort of pressure or peer reward was there if you had a boyfriend, or if you didn't have a boyfriend, how did your girlfriends react?

*Connie:* Having boyfriends was pretty neat but not extreme. Like I don't think I would not have friends if I didn't but it was like getting the newest coat, it was like "Wow! She's got one and she's lucky." Not there's some demi-god and your a peon, because we were sort of hanging out together.

### It just scared me to death

Similarly, Jenny went to high school in rural Ontario in the 1970s. She remembered reluctantly going on a few dates with guys in her peer group at high school.

*Heather:* Did you go on any dates with boys when you were at school?

*Jenny:* Oh very few. I didn't want to. It just scared me to death. There was this one guy who called me a couple of times to do stuff. And I never did. We sort of ended up at parties together. He was a nice guy, but I just didn't find him very attractive in that kind of sense.

Jenny began her narrative by recalling the expectations and fears associated with dating, declaring "I didn't want to. It just scared me to death". She mentioned several times not being sexually attracted to the boys, preferring instead to have non-sexual relationships with them.

*And then this friend Jordon is at this party and he wanted to get..first it was start necking and I'm like "I don't know" because I didn't find him very attractive and then I knew he wanted to. I mean he probably would've gone all the way. I mean he was just hot to trot. And I finally just said, "Yaugh!"*

On another occasion she mentioned ending the date when the boy attempted to initiate sexual activity, although what constituted such sexual activity was left unsaid.

*I did stuff with all my friends. There was Penny and Kate and Julie and Nan..and there was a bunch of guys, and most of whom were actually were in higher grades. And I actually didn't feel comfortable around them. I didn't care for most of them actually. They were kind of not that nice. But yeah, I had one friend Derek who was my age, and actually yeah we went on a date and then HE decided -- this was in grade 12 -- he thought it might be a good idea if we decided we would become more than friends and I quickly vetoed that because he's a great guy but I had NO desire to go out with him. He was just a big goof. A really sweet guy. So I was really happy with those kind of relationships with guys. It was sort of just fun. And of course I loved being around my female friends and now we know why!!!*

These narratives portray the difficulties Jenny encountered in resisting the normative discourse of dating during her high school days -- when she finally just said "Yaugh!" and "quickly vetoed that". Her stories also gave a sense of the fear and ambivalence she remembered.

Even though I knew I was gay

Remembering her time at a small town high school in British Columbia in the 1980s, Lisa talked openly about having sexual intercourse and using

contraception. It may be tempting to claim that her narrative reflects a liberalization of teenage sexual activity in the 1980s compared to other women's memories from the 1940s to 1970s. More significant I think were themes which reappeared in Lisa's story. For example, she also recalled her fears about pregnancy the first time she had sex with a guy:

*Lisa: I lost my virginity in grade 8, which was a big mistake.*

*It was the one guy that, probably the only guy, that I ever had a real crush on. And he was a new guy, and he came from Quebec and ...he was very good looking. And when I got into grade 8, I just thought "Hey." We had been drinking, and that was probably a cause, a big factor.*

*Heather: So when you go "it was a mistake", when did you come to think of it as a mistake? The morning after or years after?*

*Lisa: No years after...well no, probably the same year. And then I didn't have sex with any other guys through high school.*

*Heather: So what made you think it was a mistake? At the time, in the morning after, was it okay?*

*Lisa: No, actually I guess I thought it was a mistake because the condom had broke -- we were responsible, we used a condom -- but it did break. And I guess I thought I was pregnant so...and then it went through the whole school and the counselor got a hold of it and called me in. And that's probably when I decided it was a mistake.*

There seems to be several elements which contributed to this incident being remembered as a 'mistake'. Lisa initially hinted that the actual loss of her 'virginity' was a mistake, but a fear of getting pregnant, perceived responsibility for contraception and the reaction of peers and school staff came through later in the

narrative as more important underlying reasons. Similar themes appeared in the narratives of Bethany and Jenny, revealing how they had to negotiate their sexual activities within acceptable limits of availability/promiscuity, risk/responsibility, abandon/control.

Lisa explained to me that she had a boyfriend in high school "because everyone else did" and also during the first year of college "even though she knew she was gay". On the surface then, having a boyfriend appeared to be, for Lisa, closely linked to the heteronormative expectations of high school and college friends.

*In high school I only had one boyfriend, I think I was in grade 11. But it wasn't...it was basically we got along together and did things together. Never met my parents though. (Laughs) That was just a school thing because everybody else had a boyfriend. When I did go to college my first year -- when I first started to come out I still didn't know anybody -- and I had one boyfriend in Karimore during my first year of college, even though I knew that I was gay.*

'Dating' has probably been one of the most important and long-standing practices through which (hetero)sexuality has been institutionalized during adolescence. Certainly 'dating' appeared as a common discourse across the generations of women in the study and an important vehicle for normalizing heterosexuality. All the women, with the exception of Denise, recalled various rituals of dating. Having a boyfriend and being seen to date were recalled as vital parts of correctly performing female heterosexuality as a teenager, especially within the context of 'the high school'. Several women talked about negotiating expectations of parents and peers, controlling the sexual activities of their (male) dates, taking responsibility for contraception and fearing the risk of pregnancy. But, of course, there were differences within this common discourse between each



woman and each generation of women. The women's memories of dating also revealed their deep ambivalence about this normalizing practice. With a particular reading, their narratives may also start to loosen the grip of heteronormativity.

Changes in the discursive repertoires about 'dating' can be observed across the generations from Marion's accounts from the 1930s to Lisa's memories from the 1980s. These changes might loosely be attributed to widespread liberalization of female (hetero)sexuality in North American society. Yet part of this liberalization, at least the reduced pressure to get married early, was due to the economic independence the teaching profession afforded these women. In Marion's case, adopting the unfamiliar North American practice of dating was a move away from Ukrainian-Canadian tradition of early marriage, and intimately linked to her family's deliberate assimilation into white, middle class North American culture. The irony in Marion's story is that even though assimilation and educational access were emphasized by her parents, "she got married early anyway". For Bethany, who often mentioned how poverty affected her family in rural Nova Scotia during the 1960s, dating was remembered as a time of rebellion. Rebellion against the confines of her family's poverty (no disposable income, no car, no travel to church); against her mother's discriminatory attitudes; and the beginnings of her journey away from 'home'. She recalled the pervasive expectation that women would marry early, and this is clearly connected to the lack of economic choices facing working class women in her rural community at that time. Denise made no mention of dating or boyfriends, talking instead about the silence surrounding homosexuality which she experienced throughout adolescence and adulthood. For Connie, dating was largely unquestioned and vaguely recollected as a regular part of high school life.

Each story contained a deep ambivalence towards dating which, I think, revealed the contradictory subject positions they had to negotiate as young women. How did the women talk about the apparent contradiction between heterosexual

dating and being lesbian? Jenny and Lisa's remarks revealed much about the incompleteness of heteronormativity. Jenny ended her stories about dating by saying cryptically "and now we know why!". The phrase offered a partial explanation as to why she preferred to spend time with her girlfriends, and have boys as friends rather than 'dates'. Lisa concluded her stories with the remark "even though I knew I was gay". This phrase undermined the possibility that she was, in any authentic sense, straight even though she was sexually active with boys. These remarks help to *reconcile the apparent contradiction* between their adult lesbian identities with their memories of teenage heterosexual activity.

At the same time, these ironic remarks undermined the impression that teenage dating was linked to 'authentic' heterosexuality. This is, of course, the main idea behind dating -- to explore and prove normal sexual activity during high school. So, Jenny and Lisa's stories dislodged compulsory heterosexuality from its normative moorings. Arguably then, the very linguistic process which tried to 'fix' lesbian identity actually demonstrated the 'fragility' of sexual identities. These stories indicate how the lesbian Other can inhabit heterosexuality or, as poststructural theorists might say, how the absent trace haunts any presence in subjectivity (Sarup, 1996: 57).

Movies, dances and skating were the scene for many high school stories. They also revealed how relentless the pressure to 'be' straight was at high school. Teachers, and in particular physical education teachers, did not figure in the discourse surrounding dating, unlike parents, counselors and peers. Also, none of the women mentioned sport or physical activity in their narratives about dating. There were other settings outside high school where women talked about lesbian sexualities (see 'Lesbian Encounters').

## Feminist Generations

This section explores the women's perspectives about feminism. The life histories revealed that only some women identified as feminists whilst all of them talked at length about sexism. Linda Alcoff's (1995) explained what difference she thinks a 'feminist' identity makes<sup>44</sup>:

*When women become feminists the crucial thing that has occurred is not that they have learned any new facts about the world but that they come to view those facts from a different position, from their own position as subjects. When colonial subjects begin to be critical of the formerly imitative attitudes they had toward the colonialists, what is happening is that they begin to identify with the colonized rather than the colonizers....it does necessitate a political change in perspective since the point of departure , the point from which all things are measured, has changed. (p. 452)*

## Pre- to Post-Feminist Generations<sup>45</sup>

At first glance the women's personal politics seem to correspond with the rise and fall of second wave feminisms and, undoubtedly, the availability of feminist and lesbian discourses influenced each woman's ideas about sexuality. Marion and Denise, the two older women in the study, talked at length about sexism they had experienced during their teaching careers and the lack of equal opportunities for

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<sup>44</sup> Linda Alcoff's (1995) concept of 'positionality' has similarities to but should not be confused with 'positioning theory' which is evident in the feminist poststructuralism of Bronwyn Davis (Davis & Harré, 1990) . Harré's psychological explanation which focuses on conversation analysis, explains positioning as the process by which people are 'located' within conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. This differs from Alcoff's broader social conceptualization of positionality in terms of psychoanalytic subjectivity combined with identity politics. The two are by no means exclusionary or even contradictory; rather they demonstrate quite similar post-structuralist theories of identity from different disciplinary perspectives.

<sup>45</sup> Refer to Nancy Whittier (1995) for an analysis of the post-feminist generation in the United States.

women and girls in sports. They attributed improvements in society's attitudes towards women and homosexuals more to the passing of time rather than specific political struggles. Also, while both women were committed to principles stemming from first wave feminism, such as equal access to education, employment and sport for women, neither used the term 'feminism' directly or identified themselves as feminists. On the other hand, the three women who identified themselves as feminists encountered second-wave feminism during the 1970s and 1980s, but have come to express their feminism in very different ways. Bethany's liberal feminism was rooted in her childhood memories of poverty and racism, which have combined with her more recent political struggles at work to improve sporting opportunities for females. In contrast, Connie's environmental concerns as an undergraduate have developed into a committed social activism on environmental, multicultural and feminist issues both inside and outside her teaching. Jenny's feminism, in contrast, stemmed from her involvement in various feminist communities while coming out as a lesbian. She spoke about her difficulty in separating "the lesbian part from the feminist part". All three 'feminists' encountered feminism through the media, particularly books, and yet had diverse experiences with white feminist communities and the educational system. The youngest woman, Lisa, explicitly identified herself as not being a feminist and distanced herself from social activism. Nonetheless, several discourses of identity politics and lesbian rights were evident in how Lisa distinguished between the homophobia she recalled in rural communities and the racism she was now observing as a young teacher in an urban school.

#### Just the way it was

Marion and Denise, born during the depression years of the 1930s, developed their early political views well before second-wave feminism in North America. They spoke at length about sexism without any reference to feminism. Marion's

declaration that "it was just the way it was" appeared often in both my interviews with these older White women as they positioned me as a younger woman who had not experienced growing up in the 1930-40s. The phrase served to stress how ordinary these family arrangements were at the time. It was important to both Marion and Denise that I come to understand that they were telling me about something quite normal for the time, at the same time this illustrated how they spoke about unequal gender relations without explicitly using feminist terms or concepts.

Marion never spoke in terms of 'feminism' as she described two decades of dealing with sexism in physical education; nonetheless her narratives were filled with how she coped with sexist behavior in physical education. As she put it, "There were times when I felt when I wasn't given the better deal. And then I found myself, I wouldn't even fight most of the time. I'd just take that".

Marion's childhood memories about the changing roles of women were interwoven with her family's assimilation in North American culture as pre-WW I immigrants from the Ukraine. She also recognized her parents' deliberate break with other aspects of Ukrainian tradition:

*Both my Mother and Dad said they moved to the United States for a reason. We are related to half the people in Saskatchewan, from Regina through Saskatoon. And I think they purposely wanted to get away because they wanted to live differently. Mother would say, "We're in the United States. We're American now. We're going to be that way. We're going to accept their culture". And she would speak her own language when there was no-one else around, but as soon as one of my friends came around it was English.*

Within this context of assimilation to white North American culture, Marion's family stressed the importance of equal access to education for women.

*I remember my Dad saying, "Times are changing. Girls have to have an education". So I think that's one of the reasons they liked me to be in sports. Anything to keep me in school. My brother was an average student. Sports kept him in school.*

These stories told how Marion became aware that her parents departed from Ukrainian tradition by valuing access to education and sports for girls. Girls' access to education and sport reappeared as a primary concerns in Marion's teaching career. Responding to my questions about how she had experienced sexist discrimination later in life as a physical education teacher, her stories told of battling against sexist language, stereotypes of women as physically inferior, students' resistance to co-ed classes, and struggling to improve girls' sporting facilities, maintain collegial relations with male staff and demonstrate that femininity could be combined with women's equality .

The absence of the terms such as 'feminist' in Marion's narratives about sexism might be attributed to the fact that Marion grew up before 'feminist' discourses were widely available; however, this overlooks the use of the term 'feminism' as early as the 1890s when it applied to a group of political and social movements now collectively referred to as 'first wave feminisms' (Humm, 1992: 1). Indeed, the importance of women's equal access to education was first identified by Mary Wollstonecraft and J.S. Mill in the 18th and 19th centuries respectively (Jaggar, 1988) and was later taken up by predominantly white, first wave 'feminist' or 'suffrage' movements. In light of this, it is more accurate to consider how Marion's language illustrated the way in which her deeply held beliefs about women's rights

and equality were disassociated from the early feminist discourses in which they originated.

Neither Marion or Denise referred to themselves as feminists nor were their personal politics directly concerned with social activism inside or outside the school. Both women had long been concerned about improving girls' access to education and sport, and both attributed changes in social attitudes about homosexuality to the passage of time which in turn gradually increased society's level of tolerance.

Denise viewed social change as an external process which slowly affected individuals' attitudes. She talked about changes in values about gender roles, homosexuality and racism from one generation to the next, often explaining that "just general acceptance of language" altered social attitudes -- quite a different notion than feminist perspectives which assume that social change results from, as much as acts upon, the agency of individuals.

Denise regarded education to be an important site for more progressive social values, with educators being a "more informed" and "more accepting group of people".

*Well...you know I think that, and maybe I'm naive, but in a school setting you have a more informed public that you do general public. And I think we have probably the advantage of having all the literature given to us constantly because they want us to be aware, they want us to be informed on certain issues, and so.....when I look at my parents' attitudes it hasn't changed as much as someone who has been in an educational setting. They only know what they read in the paper and what they see on TV and so.....I think that in education you have a more informed group of people and a more accepting group of people because of the nature of the job. You learn to accept people, you learn that..you're not to discriminate on sex or race or and so...that has to have some bearing.*

Again social change was, in Denise's view, deliberately imposed upon teachers by unspecified educational authorities because "they want us to be aware, they want us to be informed". Equally she observed how attitudes gradually changed with time as she outlined how her expectations as a lesbian teacher differed from "more modern teachers".

*But then you have to remember that because I have been teaching longer I am probably much more naive. And....you see, when you look at my background um.....I've had a perception of what the expectations of a teacher was when I went into teaching and so, my experiences were probably not [inaudible]. So.....I never went to a gay bar until three years ago. Now I wouldn't say that's the experience of a teacher....a more modern teacher. But they...they wouldn't have the same concerns.*

*And I look at my age too, and how I think and what it was like for me is totally different than ..you know, a fifteen year difference. I look at a lot of my friends that are, say fifteen years younger, and their experiences are totally different than mine.*

Both these women were keenly aware of sexism and discrimination, and talked about changes in society's attitudes about women during their lifetimes. Neither woman identified with feminism directly which may, in part, be due to the absence of feminist discourses in their professional training and school settings. Denise often mentioned the complete lack of discussion about homosexuality on TV and in the media during her childhood, and the fact that it was only in 1992 that she first visited Little Sisters, a lesbian and gay bookstore in Vancouver, or went to any lesbian bars in the city. Denise had little contact with lesbian or feminist



movements outside the mainly closeted, white lesbian sporting communities for almost thirty years.

Games my Mother never taught me

Bethany, Connie and Jenny came of age in the era of struggles over civil rights and women's rights. Their paths to feminism were quite different, as were their substantive feminist views. While they all encountered feminism in the late 1970s and 1980s, they followed different routes via world travel, Women's Studies, entering white lesbian communities and reading feminist books.

Early on in our interviews Bethany described her feminism to me as "the belief that I defended women's rights -- period. And that was my only definition for being a feminist". Through her stories I noticed that challenging stereotypical views about women and unequal opportunities for women in sport and work have been central to her liberal feminist views. Since the early 1980s, it has been important to Bethany to state her feminism explicitly in work contexts:

*As far back as 1983 or 1984 I was calling myself a feminist. Back here when I first started to attend national meetings did I first start to say "Yes, this is what we are and this is what we should be".*

Bethany discussed how her personal feminism at work had become less "arrogant" and more consultational.

*So many years ago when I was on the Canadian Colleges Women's Sport Committee, I would call myself a feminist and many around the table would refuse to, and when I sat as Chair of that committee, I insisted that people think of things in a feminist way which upset everybody of course, and I would no longer go in with that approach.*

Bethany told how she was pleased by a provincial policy on gender equity in sport, a policy based on liberal feminist notion of equal opportunity<sup>46</sup>.

*The government took a stand with sports several years back and they virtually said "Unless you bring your female numbers up to match your male numbers you're not going to get federal funding".....and I was very pleased that somebody did that....although I was never very sure who did that.....but it worked its way down to the groups that I deal with.*

For Bethany, the feminist movement of the 1970s resulted in increased opportunities for women in traditionally male sports -- a history which, she pointed out, is too readily forgotten by many of her female students in the 1990s.

*They don't realize that a few years back they wouldn't have been playing ,wouldn't be on the wrestling, wouldn't be a women's golf program for them.....I have to remind them now and again that there were people who fought for those kinds of programs.....they didn't get there by saying "I'm not a feminist!"*

More broadly, she expressed concern about a decrease in many women's acceptance of the 'feminist' label:

*They're less accepting of it because they think it means gay, that it means you hate men, that it means that you're not going to be reasonable.....it means a whole lot of things to people...and women don't even like to use it because they don't like to be seen as all those things.....I think it's really unfortunate...so I tell everyone I can that if we*

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<sup>46</sup> See Alison Jaggar (1988) for an analysis of contradictions inherent in this notion of equality.

*don't take back that label, if we don't call ourselves feminists will be the unreasonable people that no-one wants to deal.....Some are fine with it. Others are not fine with it... Now I don't care.*

So, in response to direct questions, she gave me the impression that being known as a feminist working in college athletics had not become easier for her during the past ten years, rather she was aware of increasing fear and resistance to the feminist label by other women, especially younger women.

Her primarily liberal feminist views continued to motivate Bethany to keep "gently prodding" for colleagues to deal with sexual harassment in sport, to model and discuss women's rights with her students and confront sexism in coaching and sport participation within her institution. Her liberal feminism seemed to stem from her childhood memories of being poor alongside her resistance to traditional expectations about marriage. Her feminist views have evolved through her struggles against sexist discrimination at work. She spoke about feminism less directly when talking about her personal relationships, poverty and racial discrimination.

#### Until I have freedom

I think Connie would approve of me describing her as a social activist concerned particularly with environmental and women's issues. I got the sense throughout our interviews that she wanted to convey to me the urgent need for committed social action, both inside and beyond the classroom. Before our second interview began, we had been chatting in her sitting room about types of music we liked, and Connie told me about her theme song "I Will Not Rest Until I Have Freedom":

*And to me, I don't understand why all 5.4 billion people aren't standing up and shouting at the top of their lungs 'Until I have Freedom and Justice'. It makes no sense that we're not all trying to immediately save our environment, immediately fight for human rights.*

A deep-seated concern for environmental issues underpinned Connie's political views, a concern which she started to pursue as she "sort of fell slowly but naturally into Environmental Studies" as an undergraduate in the late 1970s. Connie speculated that her three sisters presently considered her to be the most "left-wing, more activist and more concerned about global issues" family member, and attributed this partly to her experiences traveling...

*Connie: Traveling to southern countries, sort of quote unquote 'developing' countries was a life-long learning experience for me. And still will be one to continue.*

*Heather: So when did you start traveling?*

*Connie: Oh I did the Europe scene when I was 18. But actually 1990 so not that long ago. Took a year off and traveled and since then I've taught in Nepal and been to China and just gathering more information and getting involved in global issues locally here. Going to workshops -- they're always "Aha", and pushing me to look at another perspective and then Women's Studies courses. Once you open up it just sort of falls at you and the more you're open, the more it falls.*

...and partly to her experiences taking Women's Studies courses. On returning to graduate school almost a decade later, she recalled her dramatic introduction to feminist perspectives.

*So many things have made me realize that the way I see thing is SO narrow. It's like thirty years I've been brainwashed and conditioned to think certain things.*

On occasion Connie described her feminism in terms of a single category 'women', but she frequently talked about other oppressed groups. She was the only woman who talked about Women's Studies, referring to courses she took as a graduate student. Isolated Women's Studies courses first appeared in Canadian higher education during the early 1970s (Roach-Pearson, 1995) and, by the time Connie went to graduate school in 1987, well over forty universities had Women's Studies programs (Eichler cited in Roach-Pearson, 1995). She mentioned to me on several occasions how Women's Studies opened up a new way of looking at the world and at herself:

*Heather: Do you call yourself a feminist and when did that first start?*

*Connie: Yes. Probably taking Women's Studies because for me the first couple of courses I took it was truly like someone had taken this cloudy glass that I seen my whole life in and they simply sprayed Windex and wiped it clean and I went "Wow! You gotta be kidding". And then I just wanted to open that window wider and wider and wider. I was PISSED OFF that it took me to a Master's level to learn this. I should be learning this in high school. And at the very most, they did me a disservice in my Bachelor's not including Women's Studies. It's FUNDAMENTAL to everything.*

Being introduced to feminist viewpoints was not always easy for Connie, as she went to considerable lengths to tell me what emotions were unleashed as she began to think through a feminist lens -- how she dealt with feeling angry, guilty and privileged.

*I was SEEING the patriarchy and all of its manifestations, every minute molecule of patriarchy historically and omnipotent. Just looking around globally. What about the rest of the world, what about the rest of the women? Seeing my privilege and struggling a lot with I'm white, I'm educated, I'm middle class, I'm heterosexual.....I'm healthy....you know, I...I'm able-bodied.*

The implications of social privilege occurred repeatedly throughout Connie's thirties, as she worked to incorporate feminism into her teaching.

The physical education profession in Canada, Britain and the US responded even more slowly than the field of education generally to the development of Women's Studies, with articles directly informed by feminist theory appearing more frequently in the late 1980s in journals such as CAPHER. Spurred on by literature of feminist pedagogy within education, accounts appeared documenting how individual teacher educators began to incorporate issues of sexism, homophobia, motor elitism and racism in preservice physical education courses.

Unlike Denise and Lisa, being lesbian was inextricably connected to Jenny's personal feminist politics. She told me about the fluidity between her feminist and lesbian identities, saying "it's hard to find the.... the crossover between the feminist part.... and the lesbian part" and "there's a DIFFERENCE and..I don't know.....I don't know what it is". For Jenny, becoming and being 'lesbian' and 'feminist' were not synonymous, nor were they easily separable. Sexism was more evident in some of Jenny's stories and homophobia in others, despite this her stories showed how difficult it was for her to maintain a clear distinction between sexism and homophobia.

Jenny described how her teaching was deeply affected by her feminism, which in turn could not be separated from her lesbianism.

*Heather: Can you think of any ways that being a lesbian affects your life as a teacher?*

*Jenny: I don't if it's more being a feminist but I'm certainly sensitive to gender issues. You know, kids....if I hear them talk about fags and homos, and I don't hear that very much from our kids, which probably means that I just don't hear it.....So there's that really overt stuff about gender and sexual -  
- homophobic behavior.*

*It's going to change the way I interact with MEN for sure. That doesn't mean that there aren't straight women who have different ways of interacting with men, but I certainly think that there's a difference for me. Kids and physical activity. Again, it's hard to find the crossover between the feminist part and the lesbian part. I pay a lot of attention to what the girls are doing, how the system treats them, and what we expect of them. In a predominantly straight system, I don't know how that has affected me as a teacher.*

Jenny acknowledged both individual homophobia and the institutionalized heterosexuality of her school.

*Heather: How do you think you would teach differently if you were a straight feminist?*

*Jenny: .....Wow.....I can't imagine being straight (both laugh)...I really can't.*

*I think a lot of it is I'm really looking for..different ways to present options to them, and to present myself, and I think to a few that I certainly convey a real independence, a strength of character, a really STRONG woman. I'm*

*teaching with straight women who do as well but I think there's a  
DIFFERENCE...I don't know what it is.*

Jenny noted the difficulty in explaining precisely what the difference was between her sense of femininity and that of heterosexual women. She was the only woman to mention heterosexuality as a political rather than personal concern when she talked about working in "a predominantly straight system".

Sometimes they go overboard

Lisa, the youngest teacher in the study, distanced herself from feminism and social activism. Growing up in the 1970s meant that feminist projects such as increasing women's access to sports and securing lesbian rights had frequently been achieved by the time Lisa came out and started to teach. Social activism was increasingly associated with a unproductive idealism by many of Lisa's 'post-feminist' generation. And while Lisa's declaration that she was "not a feminist" might be attributed to 1990s apoliticism, the similarities between her cynicism towards gay activism in sport and that of Denise actually traverses their generational divide.

Lisa outlined her political stance in the following way:

*Lisa; I mean I'm not a feminist and I think sometimes ...feminists get too involved in the politics of it and what not. I mean I think if there was few demonstrations ...fewer demonstrations and activists out there for gay rights and what not, I think things might get better. But then I think, well may be they've helped a bit too.*

*Heather: Mmmhhmm.*

*Lisa: ....but sometimes they go overboard. I don't know. I don't get involved in any of that stuff. I just sort of live my life. May be I should, I don't know. Right*



at this point I don't. I [mean I would] walk down the street on gay ... gay pride day I mean that's fine, that's my right, but I don't get involved in the politics of it.

Heather: Because it can kind of annoy other people or.....?

Lisa: Yeah it does annoy other people. Because there's more so than just homophobia. Like there is the racism part and the other things that people should be fighting for. There's just too much of everything. Fighting for things, fighting for that. I'm not very political person. I just like to live my life.

Heather: Yeah, yeah. Well we only have a certain amount of energy.

Lisa: So I'd hope things will change but I don't think people have to do as much of the activist stuff as they do to change it because I think that it's slowly becoming more acceptable.

Following her BPE degree, Lisa qualified as a teacher in a one year BED program in 1994 at which time issues of discrimination, abbreviated to "The Isms", were taught in the physical education methods course. Lisa felt these issues were somewhat relevant to her current teaching context but the instructor had placed too much emphasis on them during the course.

Heather: Was there any time in your teacher ed where they even touched on issues like this?

Lisa: Well , in one of my phys ed classes. One of the teachers touched upon quite a bit of the issues that would take place in phys ed.

Heather: In terms of sexual harassment or ethnic issues?

Lisa: Mainly on sexual harassment, sexuality er.....oh God, the "isms"

Heather: The "isms" in the gym?

*Lisa: Basically I think that's what the whole course was on.*

*Heather: Mmmm....too much so?*

*Lisa: Well (laughs) Yeah it was too much so I thought and a lot of the males in the class thought it was too much so....*

*Heather: And how much kind of relevance does it have now?*

*Lisa: Oh I think it is very important and ....I mean..yeah, it's got quite a bit of relevance. Just seeing it within the classrooms and within the school.*

The three lesbian women were ambivalent about connection between lesbian activism and lesbian team sports which emerged during the late 1980s as lesbian leagues and the Gay Games evolved alongside the struggles for sexual diversity within Vancouver's lesbian communities. Jenny's search for lesbians in the feminist communities rather than team sports accounts, in large part, for the difference between her views and those of Denise and Lisa. It might also account for the surprising similarity between Lisa and Denise's concern that some recent developments within lesbian communities were unnecessary if not potentially damaging. For instance, Denise questioned the need for the Gay Games on the basis that "as soon as you label it sexually, then you automatically exclude certain people" and that she had not been excluded from existing sporting competitions because of her sexuality.

*Denise: My partner's very involved, or has been very involved, in the Gay Games okay. Thousands of people participate. Well they have more people participate than the Olympics. But I said "You know, I've participated in international competition and I was never excluded because I was gay. Like they didn't call them the 'Heterosexual Games'. I said "It was open to everybody." And her argument is "The Gay Games are open to everybody.*

*You can go in whether you're gay or not." But it seems to me, as soon as you label it ...sexually .....then you automatically exclude certain people just because they don't want to, you know... They don't call these others, they don't say 'heterosexual'. They're just games. So I don't.*

*They wanted me to go in the Gay Games. And I said "It's not because I would be concerned of going in because you're not going to be seen if you're over in Europe somewhere." I don't believe in the philosophy of it.*

Denise's views raised a dilemma in liberal feminism whereby, as Alison Jaggar (1988) explained, institutions such as sporting competitions provide equal opportunities to everyone while allowing each individual maximum opportunities for fulfillment. The Gay Games may fulfill many athletes' need for competition in lesbian-positive atmosphere and institution, but also raised issues of exclusion and unnecessary labeling for Denise. A concern which Denise also voiced about Vancouver's Gay Pride March:

*One thing I don't like is when I see these gay parades and I see everybody dressed up. I always think they look like a bunch of clowns. ....and probably more male than anything. you know, guys dress up with .....all their regalia, even the dykes on bikes or whatever. You know, is that what it means if you're going to be gay do you have to get all dressed up in your leathers?*

### Summary

All the women were deeply concerned about women's inequality in sport and physical education, yet they had quite divergent opinions about feminism. Denise and Marion began teaching physical education in the 1960s, before second-wave feminism entered the physical education profession. In contrast, Bethany, Connie

and Jenny who entered teaching in the late 1970s and early 1980s, identified as feminists and expressed views from liberal, multicultural and lesbian-feminisms respectively. Having trained as a teacher in the early 1990s, Lisa did not regard herself as a feminist. It is, perhaps, significant that the women's identities as feminists were not connected to their sexual identities; to put it bluntly, being lesbian did not mean becoming a feminist. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1992) challenged this idea about 'feminist osmosis':

*The politics of being 'woman' or 'lesbian' [is] deduced from the experience of being woman or lesbian. Being female is thus seen as naturally related to being feminist, where the experience of being female transforms us into feminists by osmosis. (p. 77)*

Instead, the generation to which the women belonged was, arguably, the most significant influence on the women's views about feminism. If the women are characterized in terms of generations, Marion and Denise could be regarded as belonging to a generation prior to second-wave feminism; Bethany, Connie and Jenny as belonging to generation of white, second-wave feminists; and Lisa as belonging to a 'post-feminist' generation.

## Chapter 5

### Social Locations

#### Narrated through Other(s)

This chapter considers how the women talked about various types of unequal social relations; that is, the extent they talked explicitly about discrimination or inequities in their own lives. It begins with stories about sexism, highlighting the types of discrimination endemic in the physical education profession. The women also spoke about unequal female-male relations in their families and in women's sport. They spoke at length about sexism and more briefly about racism. Frequently their narratives avoided direct references to their own racial identities or experiences of homophobia within physical education. Stories about racism and homophobia focused more frequently on 'Others' and less about the women's own experiences. Increasingly, shadows of whiteness and silences of straightness appeared in the life histories.

These shadows and silences about racisms, sexism and homophobia reveal much about how privilege, as white physical educators, is constructed over lifetimes and even sustained by life history research such as this. Nonetheless, these stories about discrimination provide historical substance to the political categories 'race', 'class', and 'gender'. The difficulty of moving beyond the often empty incantation 'race-class-gender' has been quite eruditely stated by Himani Bannerji (1995):

*How to think of gender, 'race' and class in terms of what is called their*

*'intersectionality'... is a project that is still in the process of being worked out.*

*Somehow, we know almost instinctively that these oppressions, separately named as*

*sexism, racism and class exploitation, are intimately connected. But when it comes to showing how, it is always difficult, and strains the capacity of our conventional ways of speaking on such matters. And, if abstract theorization is partially possible, the concrete understanding of how they actually work together continues to have an elusive quality about it. (p. 122)*

The following stories about sexism, racism and homophobia illustrates changes experienced by the women during their teaching careers.

### **Re-Living Sexisms**

When asked about sexist discrimination they had experienced at work, women spoke about verbal sexism of male colleagues and systemic differences between female and male promotion. Each woman placed a different emphasis on these narratives of sexism between female and male physical education teachers within their overall discussion of discrimination and personal politics. Marion talked almost exclusively in terms of sexism throughout her life history whereas Denise noted how sexism of the 1970s and 1980s had been overtaken by concerns about racial and linguistic difference in the 1990s. Although Jenny talked about changes from blatant to subtle sexism, her narratives of sexism were frequently interwoven with issues of heterosexism.

#### The road to administration

Marion talked about coping with the effects of male sexism by avoiding it, to the extent that she declined a promotion over fears about potential sexism of the male PE staff:

*Marion: We didn't have all that equipment but they had it at the senior secondary -- the balls and ribbons and stuff. So we would borrow that stuff, so one time I was returning some stuff there and I have never heard...I tell you, I would*

*just quit...they were screaming and yelling at each other. I thought they were going to get in a fist-fight. These.....*

*Heather: Who? The students?*

*Marion: No. The teachers. The PE teachers at Middletown Senior Secondary. Just awful.*

*Heather: Two men?*

*Marion: Yeah..oh there were three or four of them, really angry voices. And I mentioned it to one of our men teachers and he said "Oh yeah, there's just a lot of bad feeling there". And they really got into some hot and heavy arguments. And then there was an opening for a woman PE teacher and somebody said I .... by this time I had a lot of seniority, so if I had wanted to I probably would have been first in line. I thought "Forget it. I'm comfortable here", and I couldn't see where it was going to help me any to go to a senior secondary and I knew that there were only three or four more years and I would be through teaching anyway.*

While Marion's decision *not* to move schools for a promotion partly because of the loud, argumentative behavior of the male physical education staff illustrated the personal cost of harassing verbal sexism, Denise recounted the more systemic sexism which resulted in male physical education teachers all too frequently moving up the administrative ladder. She spoke about the difficulty female PE teachers experienced being promoted prior to the mid 1980s, recalling a common joke that "the road to administration in Vancouver is phys. ed., counseling then administration", for male PE teachers anyway.

*Heather: Is that still the situation?*

Denise:     *Oh well I shouldn't say it's not. As more women are in administrative positions and proving themselves very well it's just...you get some men who couldn't imagine working for a woman, Now that kind of barrier is broken, It's the same thing as doctors. They used to say that a doctor was automatically a male and now you actually ask "Do you have a male doctor or a female doctor?"*

Although Denise compared the improvement in women's promotion within the educational system to a "barrier that was broken", she noted that as more women "came on board it [was] just accepted as a fact" inferring that women gained equality as society's attitudes evolved over time.

Bethany left teaching after a few years, because she "liked the coaching but didn't like teaching", to work in a sporting goods store for a year followed by a job in sports administration in the Maritimes. After moving to British Columbia in 1980 it took her three years to find work in sports administration, initially taking a part-time position as one of the first female administrators in college athletics in the province. She was willing to accept a part-time administrative position which was considered suitable for a woman rather than a "more accomplished" man, but emphasized her agency in making the position full-time.

*But I got the job because it was a part-time job and I was prepared to accept it on that basis and try to make into a full-time job which I have. And I feel I can do this job as well as anyone out there...I truly feel that way. But I'm not certain that people see that way. They see men as being more accomplished. But I have a great deal of respect for anyone who can take a job and try to make into their job.*



She determined to challenge the prevailing assumption that women were less accomplished in managing athletic programs by gradually altering the nature and extent of her work.

Go ahead and have your little fun

Marion and Jenny both talked about the verbal sexism of their male colleagues but in quite different ways, with Marion fending off deliberately provocative sexist humor of colleagues in her department in the 1970s and 1980s while Jenny noticed differences between her male and female colleagues in the early 1990s.

Marion's resignation to "the way things were" existed alongside a quiet confidence to intervene when she wanted to, something which I became aware of in many of Marion's stories, like these about the equipment storeroom and sexist jokes:

*So one day I'd cleaned this thing up and I walked into the office and I said to all three men teachers "Listen, I've got a whole house to clean, if I want to do any cleaning I've got all kinds of opportunities at home. I don't want to do this night after night". Boy, they all leaped up and went in and straightened it out. So I told the Principal, I don't feel intimidated.....At that time I never ever did. And you know, they used to tease me and say sexist things.*

*We were trying a new grading system. This one day, it was right after school, I walked into my office and one of the men teachers said in a loud voice, "Well we've got this grading system figured out".*

*And I said, "Good because we'd been working on this".*

*"We've decided any girl with a 40 inch bust line is an absolute A".*

*And I said "Oh that sounds great". I'm not going to react to this. Go ahead and have your little fun".*

Jenny made a distinction between 'blatant' and 'subtle' sexism in her workplace explaining that, while she couldn't remember the last time she was blatantly discriminated against, she had noticed "differences in discourse" and promotions between female and male teachers.

*In terms of promotions I think just being a woman you're at a disadvantage because it is very male-dominated. Economically, benefits, all that stuff is no problem -- I can put my partner on as soon as she can prove she's been living with me for two years.*

*We have always had male Principals, although we did have a wonderful female V-P until this year. She's gone to another school. There are two men and two women in our program, I see the two guys taking over a lot. Not taking over, but they just automatically go and do the power stuff and leave Louise and I behind. [They] have taken all of those different roles that involve that kind of liaising and they've appropriated them.*

*I notice differences in discourse -- when either of the men talks to the students they will talk about "I am doing this. I am doing that" whereas I will refer to the "we". I can't just speak for me because I want to be clear that this is a decision we've made or the kids need to know that it's something program-wide and that doesn't happen as much when either Brian or Desmond are speaking in the class. It's "I" or "me" not "we" or "us".*

*I can't remember that last time I felt overtly, like really blatantly discriminated against. I think that because of what I do, and I do a lot of masculine sports, as does*

*Louise, you know we run and we climb and we ski. And we're pretty good at it so um.....within the milieu of our school, even there's some really really sexist men on our staff, they leave us alone. I mean we don't spend much time down there anyways, but they kind of know we're.... we're...pretty independent and pretty strong, so.....*

The women's narratives about sexism were, perhaps, the most detailed of all unequal social relations discussed in the interviews. They had all taken up subject positions as 'female' within sexist social relations of their families, communities and specifically the physical education profession. Perhaps this is not surprising, nevertheless it raises several issues. Firstly, their detailed accounts of sexism contrasted with the way they rarely talked about racism; occasionally about homophobia; and only two women talked about class privilege and poverty. This emphasis on different social relations revealed much about the subject positions available to these women as physical educators, and also how silence can be a powerful way of maintaining social privilege.

Secondly, there were important differences in how the women conceptualized their agency within the sexist relations that structured physical education. On one hand, Marion and Denise regarded verbal and systemic sexism as 'social facts'. This is not to suggest that they regarded sexist practices in any reductive way as biologically-determined or ahistorical; rather, sexism was referred to as 'just the way it was at that time' or as the result of 'society's attitudes'. Both women discussed how sexism had changed during their lifetimes, but the crucial difference was how they regarded themselves in relation to these changes. As Chris Weedon (1987) observed, such a view of unequal gender norms "tends to render invisible the social power relations which have produced them together with their inherent instability" (p. 94). Recognition of one's position within sexist contexts, such as physical education, families, schooling and sport, does not necessarily entail

recognition of one's individual agency or engender a political intention to alter these sexist practices. The articulation of 'feminist' with 'female' subject positions differed between Marion, Denise and Lisa who did not identify as feminists and Jenny, Connie, and Bethany who did (see 'Feminist Generations').

### **Silences of Straightness**

Marion's way of talking about homosexuality indicated a basic liberalism, similar to Denise and Lisa, which assumed that sexual orientation is a non-political aspect of an individual's private life. This notion of privacy accounted in large part for the delicacy and hesitancy with which Marion worded her opinions, which in turn led me to ask indirect questions about 'single' women and homosexuality. For much of her adult life Denise's experience of being gay reflected a political liberalism in which sexual orientation was a private and personal concern, rather than a political issue to be discussed or struggled over in public. She talked about being gay as a personal matter although several of her stories refer to changes in 'society's attitudes' as homosexuality has become more openly discussed. This view of social change reinforced her conviction that sexist, homophobic and racist attitudes mellow over time without, even in spite of, political activism by special groups such as feminists or lesbian activists. However, as later narratives will illustrate, Denise's views on being gay were not influenced by liberal discourses of lesbian rights unlike her views on sexism, which took up liberal feminist issues such as systemic, sexist discrimination in promotion. Despite their thirty-year age difference Lisa and Denise shared remarkably similar views about being gay, particularly a non-political approach to lesbian sexuality. The most significant difference was how Lisa had taken up the discourse of lesbian teachers' rights which emerged from gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements in the 1970s.

We don't talk about THAT in sport.

Working now in college sports administration, Bethany expressed a mix of frustration and resignation that raising homophobia as a concern with fellow administrators remained a taboo. Bethany has recently tried to "gently prod" her colleagues into developing a sexual harassment policy but has been met with denial which in turn has left her professionally isolated.

*I've organized a couple of harassment seminars.....and those kind of things...and they just turn around and say "Ahh, we don't need this. There's no harassment going on" And I have to say "Excuse me, but we had this situation just this last month, how did you deal with it?" "Ahh yes, but that was just an aberration". "Alright fine"...but it's still very difficult. Some of the women do not speak up...one of the women was an Athletic Director...it was an ugly situation..really ugly.....and we're still dealing with those sort of things.*

Silence was a major obstacle to Bethany's ability to raise the issue of homophobia, speculating that other Athletic Directors would "look at her as if she had rocks in her head" if she were to suggest a policy to deal with it.

*Heather: Is there any mention of homophobia or same-sex harassment?*

*Bethany: No, never talked about (sarcasm). "We don't talk about that in sport!".*

*There isn't any of that in sport, don't you know that?....unless it's all those women trying to come out and cut out all the heterosexual women (end of sarcasm) No....(laughs)*

*Heather: So that is still silent?*

*Bethany: Very, very silent. They'd all look at me as if I had rocks in my head if I tried to introduce that. I haven't gone any further than harassment. Homophobia, no. I haven't approached it,*

When she looked back on earlier parts of her life, Jenny observed that she had been oblivious to incidents of sexism and "the homosexuality issue", but now this was quite obvious from her adult perspective as a feminist and lesbian. For example, thinking back to her high school physical education she said, "I don't remember noticing a lot of sexism about then, but although as I reflect back it was HIDEOUS". The story below demonstrated how Jenny reinterpreted an incident of sexist discrimination at university as a homophobic incident.

*Heather: Did you have the language? When you went to university did you know the word 'lesbian'?*

*Jenny: No. I don't remember ever using it. It just didn't come up. One of my favorite profs -- I wasn't attracted to her, maybe on some level I knew -- I loved to talk with her. I loved her course and got really high marks in it. Used to hang with her as much as a student and a prof can. Then there was this weird stuff going on about she was the coach of the women's basketball team, a very successful team, and they brought in this guy to coach the men's team and there was all this shuffling about who's going to be Athletic Director. They were basically trying to shuffle her out, and I think a lot of women were quite upset by this, and we were trying to have some input into what was going on. A couple of months later, a friend of a friend said, "Didn't the homosexuality issue ever come up?" And I'm like "What?"*

*You see, I didn't have a clue that was what it was all about. All those women, they were probably all dykes -- in fact, I know they are now -- I just missed it!*

Looking back, Jenny described how she disagreed with what she thought was sexism in the PE department. The mention of 'the homosexuality issue' by a friend a couple of months later introduced Jenny to a new form of discrimination -- heterosexism.

Denise didn't mention any personal experiences of homophobia during her long career as a teacher or an athlete, but did agree that female physical education teachers have frequently been stereotyped as lesbians. Regarding the relation between education and sexualities, Denise spoke in terms of her school's responsibility to meet the counseling needs of gay and lesbian youth explaining that currently "the counseling department deals with kids' sexuality, the phys ed department doesn't deal with it directly".

Lisa didn't say if she personally experienced homophobia during adolescence and gave me the impression of being satisfied with the lack of homophobia and opportunities she had experienced playing team sports and teaching physical education in Vancouver during the 1990s, although she often distinguished between the tolerance of urban settings with the ongoing homophobia of rural environments. The regional location of a school was an important factor in the forms of sexism and racism she noticed, distinguishing between a "big city and small town", between inner city East Vancouver and more affluent West Vancouver. Talking about a gay male teacher who was "run out just a couple of years ago" from a school in a small city in southern British Columbia she felt that acceptance of homosexuality "changes from being in a big city where it's quite open to being in a

small, smaller area".<sup>47</sup> Regarding her present colleagues, she told me that a group of openly gay teachers in her school had "got a very good response from the rest of the staff" although "they were not open to any of the students". More generally, she went on to say that:

*because I have a lot of straight friends, and like girls and guys like er.....they seem to accept women a lot more so than they do men. So I don't find myself affected by, say, the general population...*

but, on the other hand:

*...I feel limited in my job only because so many parents look down upon it still. Not so much in the east side, I think it's more acceptable than maybe the outskirts of Vancouver.*

Lisa felt directly affected by the discourse that lesbian and gay teachers were morally suspicious which emerged after homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969 and was re-ignited in the mid-1990s by vocal right-wing, family values groups in British Columbia. The one occasion Lisa expressed dissatisfaction with the educational system, she criticized the exclusion of gay and lesbian issues from the curriculum, giving the following example:

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<sup>47</sup> Recent work in the geography of sexuality has developed analyses of this rural/urban trope. See for instance Tamar Rothenburg's (1995) work on the emergence of urban lesbian spaces. Also Lawrence Knopp (1995) highlighted the important connections between particular race, class, gender and sexual relations in the urbanization of Western cities. This work supports Lisa's comparison between urban and rural homophobia, and current race relations in her urban school. Another element in the geography of sexualities was the evident re-location of lesbian desire and homophobia from the everyday practices and content of physical education into the exclusive domain of counselling. (See Denise's comments on homophobia in Chapter 5 'Shadows of Whiteness'.)



*if you're doing family life or you're doing family trees. some kids have a family tree of a mother and a mother but it's always a mother and a father up on the family tree. And if it was open like that, then kids er ...because of the high er .....suicide rate of kids that happen to be gays and lesbians, and they have no-one to turn to, or at least they feel like they have no-one to turn to, if you could just open it into the schools like that, things could change that way. And I think that's the only way, the only place that you can open, I don't know, make things make sense is through the education system. And I don't know ..I don't know why it's not open like that. I mean we've got all the rights we can have in our Union. Our Union's great and, if we've got such a great Union that way why can't we bring it into the school system that way?*

Lisa regarded the teacher's union as primarily responsible for activism on gay and lesbian issues, acknowledging their achievements in protecting gay and lesbian teachers while failing to meet the needs of gay and lesbian students. To this extent, contesting the rights of gay and lesbian teachers and students was a public rather than personal issue for Lisa. A liberal discourse of rights and equal opportunities underpinned Lisa's views about both sexism and homophobia. Discourses of lesbian and gay civil rights had circulated since the 1970s and were beginning to be institutionalized within teacher education curriculum and public school policies by the time Lisa entered teaching in 1990. It was within such a context that Lisa developed her political views about sexual orientation which reflected a strong personal sense of entitlement and equality as a lesbian.

### **Shadows of Whiteness**

The preceding narratives highlighted how the women rarely described themselves as targets of homophobia, referring instead to its effects on other people,

teachers 'run out of town', generic 'women in sport'. Homophobia was not talked about as a problem within physical education in the classroom, although the negative stereotyping of lesbians in sport was hinted at. Silence and disavowal ran deep, and continued in our discussions about racism. My questions about homophobia in physical education teaching during the 1990s in Vancouver led both Denise and Lisa to talk about racism between students. All the same, instead of distancing ourselves from the effects of homophobia as women in physical education, more often our narratives disavowed our implication in racism through our talk about racism's effect on others. This displacement of racism onto Others casts a shadow of whiteness over these narratives which (partially) concealed how we, as white women, talked about and have been privileged within discourses of race and racism.

I don't find her any more racial than the general public

One of the main ways Denise and Bethany spoke about racism was by comparing their views with those of their mothers. Denise's opinions about racism were contradictory. At first she positioned herself as racially tolerant, in contrast to her mother...

*Denise: But I don't find [my mother] any more racial than..... her friends or my friends.*

*She's in Calgary. In Calgary they don't have the diversity that we have here [in Vancouver] so they use slang terms like pakki or East Indian. They see something on the TV and they see a gang related shooting or a drug-related shooting and they look at the color of the skin and they think that they are people that have come to ...for all they know they might have been born in this country, but they don't know that. But I don't find her any more racial than the general public...*

*Heather: But you're not only another generation down but you're also teaching and in a school .*

*Denise: Yeah and I'll be talking about the kids at school -- the transitional class -- and I'll tell her some of the cute things that they do. I think she can appreciate that kids are kids. But when you look at what the media reports then you can see how people will react to immigration in a negative way because the numbers of crimes.*

Her description of her non-English speaking students as 'cute' and that 'kids are kids' was based upon a 'color-blind' multiculturalist discourse. This color-blind trope reflects a liberal humanism which purports to see beyond skin color to regard all individuals as fundamentally equal. The color-blind metaphor is part of what Ruth Frankenburg (1993) referred to as 'color-evasive' discursive repertoire employed by white women which 'dodges difference' while leaving the racial hierarchy firmly intact. As other anti-racist critics such as George J. Sefa Dei (1996) and Christine Sleeter (1993) have pointed out, this discourse of color-blind multiculturalism not only denies the salience of 'race' on an individualistic level, but obscures broader workings of racism at structural and institutional levels.

*It's a language thing...I don't see sexuality*

Lisa shared Denise's opinion that racism between students currently overshadowed sexism and homophobia in her Vancouver high school:

*I think it's more racial tensions in our school than sexism. I think in the inner city kids have grown up, especially I think in the east side because there's a lot of broken homes, a lot of single families, I think kids, they probably accept it more so than if you were growing up on the west side where there's less, fewer broken homes and there's no poverty er...you know, the kids are brought up the 'right way'.*

Denise's narrative didn't refer to how structural racism throughout the school system severely limited students who didn't speak English as their first language. Instead, she suggested that she would "struggle with Japanese" if she were in Japan. This covers over how white, Anglophone privilege permeates schooling, from institutional to individual levels.

For Denise racial differences, mainly in the form of language differences, had become the most important form of social difference and discrimination in her Vancouver school in the 1990s. As she put it, "everything's changed so much. I mean now kids are very outspoken but the language is a really interesting area because you don't know what they're saying. I walk down the hall, I can't understand half the kids. In my class I can't understand them".

*Heather: What sort of discrimination between students, or insults? What sort of thing....do you.....?*

*Denise: You see, half the kids in the school can't understand...they speak their native language.....I'm always telling them "Speak English so I understand!" And they just laugh.....Yeah.....I mean, if you and I went to Japan or something we would struggle with Japanese. Speak English! So we could be throwing insults galore at someone who didn't speak English with a smile on your face and who would know? I mean.....they could be calling me an old bitch and standing there and smiling at me and I'd be thinking that they think I'm just wonderful (laughs) I have no idea...Basically I find the kids quite nice to one another. I find them reasonably considerate of the staff. I don't find them insulting. I think that they're in a school*

*that is.....is.....I think it's a fairly nice school. I don't think it's a rough school in terms of gangs.*

Denise identified the 'racial' issues as not understanding students who could/did not speak English and the way students formed groups. Denise's narrative contained shades of an assimilationist, multiculturalist discourse which seeks to erase differences from a white, Anglophone norm. Also, the focus upon students' interactions evaded how institutional racism structured the school system; that is, the discourse ignored problems facing non-English speaking students within a structurally racist institution by referring to students as the cause of problems within the system.

Over the past ten years, issues of sexuality in her physical education classes have been pretty much obscured because "it's a language thing...so I don't see sexuality as even entering into this".

*The attitudes towards each other are more racial than anything. That's more of a concern and I don't know if we're going to find a way to address it. You see the kids will come into my class and ask me...um.....okay, get into two groups. It doesn't matter about skill, it doesn't matter about.....two groups -- Caucasian here, oriental here.*

*I'll say, "Don't you like one another?"*

*And they'll say, "Yeah, that's fine".*

*But they go in their comfort zone. The oriental kids, a lot of them can speak to one another.*

*So I say, "Get into groups: Mandarin here, Cantonese here".*

*It's a language thing so I don't see sexuality as even entering into this.*

Lisa framed racism between her students somewhat differently than Denise, talking in terms of home background and cultural values rather than language differences. This may have been partly because, at the time of our interviews, Lisa was teaching mainly English as a second language to students referred to as the 'Literacy Group' and some physical education in an inner city school in East Vancouver. Possibly because language differences formed a central part of her teaching, she explained racial difference in terms of students' socio-cultural family contexts rather than language differences. Lisa described how the 'racial tension' she observed was gendered in a particular way because "it seems to be just boys, it's not the girls using racial comments" towards female students and the authority of some female teachers in particular. She focused on the racism-sexism of male students from Vietnam and El Salvador in her Literacy Group. Her understated description of these students as "refugee kids that have come from countries where civil war has taken place" most of whom had "been split from their families...for four or five years" let me know that she was aware of trauma in their lives outside school; all the same, their linguistic and cultural difference from herself were the most significant element of the boys' sexist attitudes and actions.

Lisa responded to my question about her experiences of sexism at work with the following narrative in which she attributed the sexism of her male students to family contexts "because many of them come from broken homes" and different cultural values of "refugee kids" recently moved to Vancouver.

*I guess because there are so many ethnic backgrounds at the school, you see a lot of gender issues. A lot of the kids that have come from the different cultures, come from cultures where the male is the dominant one.....You see a lot of....a lot of males*

*that have a lack of respect for females, whether it be teachers or other girls in the school er.....like their classmates. I see it a lot in my ESL classrooms er.....particularly last year when I was on my temporary contract. We went though a lot of....in my ESL kids there were some Vietnamese boys who were, well particularly one, who was sexually harassing the girls. And the girls were Vietnamese as well and they were terrified to come and tell anyone, whether it was myself or we have an ESL counselor.*

*This year I have a couple of boys from El Salvador and they show their lack of respect for female authority. The boys say, "You're not my mother so you can't tell me what to do"*

*We have tables like about this high and I have them in a U-shape in the classroom. I'm standing at the front and apparently this one boy whipped his penis out and was going like this -- you know, like jacking off to the girls who were across -- and I didn't see it. The girls never said anything. I found this out later.*

Lisa suggested that "because there are so many ethnic backgrounds at the school, you see a lot of gender issues" implying that the sexism of her male students was noticeable because it was linguistically and culturally unfamiliar to her. There was also sense that their sexism was due to 'different', non-mainstream Canadian forms of patriarchy when she explained that many students in the Literacy Group were "from cultures where the male is the dominant one...a lot of males that have a lack of respect for females, whether it be teachers or other girls". She pointed out how language differences between the students and herself prevented her from recognizing boys' verbal sexism and also prevented girls telling her about

harassment they experienced, both of which made it more difficult to intervene in sexist dynamics as she said "it was probably happening as I was standing in front of the classroom".

Lisa explained sexism of male refugee and ESL students in terms of cultural differences, often compounded by poverty or economic hardship -- although her descriptions focused on the actions of individual male students, her explanations implied that structural racism, in the form of economic hardship, and global politics, as "refugees from countries where civil war has taken place" also played a part.

#### Homophobia...One of the most tabooish

Connie made little reference to homosexuality or homophobia in sport, but was extremely concerned about homophobia within the general high school population. The next story demonstrated how, for Connie, feminist teaching meant countering not only sexism but also homophobia.

*Heather: How aware were you of your legal position to bring in a speaker to speak about homophobia?*

*Connie: Well, that's an interesting (laugh) question because... in terms of....legality, or my right as a public educator, I'm a civil servant, I work for the local school board which is part of the BC Ministry of Education. Well. our Federal Government is a member of the United Nations. We've signed all these documents including you know the discrimination of...you know the document....the long document about women, you know...*

*Heather: Uh huh.*

*Connie: And to me all those U.N. documents..the Rights of the Child, you know the one that was signed in Nairobi, the one that was signed in Copenhagen. ALL of them say...that a public education system funded by the public*



*system, ALL.... you can't discriminate. Right? And there's more and more push for that, that homophobia...gays and homosexuals are on a CLASS of their own....totally. And it's you know...I think the Christian fundamentalists who are spearheading that. And it's so bizarre to me. You know, I mean in other countries it's it's....*

Connie talked to me at considerable length about how she thought formal education, both physical education and the Career and Personal Planning course she was teaching at the time, was related to learning and unlearning gendered roles. Connie expressed both liberal and multicultural feminist views in addition to an awareness of homophobia. The class she described below involved debunking negative myths about homosexuality in order to increase students' tolerance towards lesbians and gays.

*Connie: It struck me that of all the 'isms' -- ageism, sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, Eurocentrism and so on -- the most tabooish in this right-wing, fundamentalist place (both laugh) that we now live was homophobia. That's a good place to start. I also saw it as so blatant in the schools. It really ticked me off.*

*Heather: Yeah.*

*Connie: And it was amazing whenever you brought it up how controversial it was. I was very naïve when I went into it. Like a year ago I invited a woman I know from this community (laugh) into speak to my class. The topic was homophobia. We'd been talking about racism and discrimination and I didn't at all tell them anything. So she came in, then I asked for reactions. And I was quite APPALLED and a bit afraid at some of the responses I got.*

*Like guys telling me like, you know, they'd beat the shit out of a gay if  
they saw one....*

For Connie, homosexuality was an unjust basis for social discrimination comparable to other oppressed groups such as First Nations, female, non Euro-Canadians and so forth. Her views have been influenced by three concurrent sets of discourses about difference -- feminist identity politics, First Nations land claims, and global environmental issues. Debates within feminism around identity politics and difference, generated initially from black feminist critiques of liberal and radical feminism during the 1980s, would have been ongoing when Connie was introduced to Women's Studies. This, I think, largely explains why Connie's view about equality exceeded a typically liberal notion of freedom -- briefly, an individual's right to freedom from discrimination without according special rights to any historically oppressed social group. Very public debates about aboriginal sovereignty and European colonialism accompanied First Nations land claims which were well underway when Connie moved from Ontario to teach in Northern British Columbia. Also, Connie had been concerned about economic and environmental issues on a global scale since her undergraduate studies in Environmental Studies in the late 1970s. These various discourses coalesced in Connie's concern about discrimination, especially the homophobia of her students, giving rise to a view which was by no means exclusively feminist.

Her view that social problems were basically individualistic and psychological caused Connie to get students to learn about themselves, unlearn prejudice and roadblocks. It is worth introducing Ambalvaner Sivanandan's (cited in Bonnett, 1993) warning that reducing social problems to individualistic solutions may only serve to confuse personal satisfaction with political intervention<sup>48</sup>.

Connie and Bethany occasionally spoke about racism in what Frankenburg (1993) termed a "race cognizant"<sup>49</sup> discursive repertoire used by some white feminists which:

*pays careful attention to the ways racism shaped white women's experiences, attitudes, and worldview, as well as to what one might call the 'micropolitics' of daily life. Others were more concerned with structural or institutional racial inequality and were less convinced of the value of examining the ways race and racism shaped white selves. (p. 159)*

Some women linked racism in various ways to other forms of oppression based on social identity, a way of talking about race which had been clearly shaped by identity politics since the late 1980s. Connie and Bethany cited a series of marginalized social identities or minority groups when referring to unequal social relations. On one occasion Bethany compared being gay, black or female:

*Bethany: Leave it open. Certainly it doesn't hurt anyone. I only have a problem when I think there's hurt involved. And let's face it, to be gay, or to be black, or to be a woman sometimes.....is hurtful.*

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<sup>48</sup> Refer to Ambalvaner Sivanandan's (cited in Alister Bonnett, 1993) critique of Racism Awareness Training (RAT) in which he warned that the catharsis of guilt stricken whites does not contribute to the political black struggle against racism.

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Frankenburg (1993) traced race cognizant discursive repertoire to the following particular historical moments:

*movement for decolonization in the Third World; post-World War II civil rights activism; the Black, Chicano, Asian, and Native American antiracist, nationalist, and cultural renewal movements of the 1960s and 1970s; and, finally the articulation of distinctively feminist versions of antiracism initiated by women of color throughout the 1980s. (p. 158)*

Connie often specified a chain of oppressed groups in addition to 'women' such as 'homosexual', 'gays', 'people of color', 'women of color', 'buddhists', 'male nurse', 'homosexual teacher', 'E.S.L. student'.

*And I got a thing written on my doorstep. I really felt harassment. I got "Miss Feltsham sucks Satan's cock" written on my doorstep. That REALLY hurt. But you know what? I celebrated that hurt because I thought "That's what it must feel like to BE....homosexual, to BE....a person of color, to BE.....a minority. You know to BE an [E.S.L.] student at our school". I had a moment of reality there. Then I took it to the shop and they planed it off.*

Connie described this harassment as a specific incident in which she "had a moment of reality". It was an incident that Connie recalled to illustrate the type of everyday events which she experienced as a teacher which led her to keep analyzing how sexism, racism and homophobia affected her and others.

## Chapter 6

### Queer Dis/Locations

*Queer theory offers education techniques to make sense of and remark upon what it dismisses or cannot bear to know. (Britzman, 1995: 154).*

*But women's desires are the result of bodily inscriptions and of metaphors and story lines that catch them up in ways of being/desiring from which they have no escape unless they can re-inscribe, discover new story lines, invent, invert, and break the bounds of the old structure and old discourses. (Davies, 1992: 58)*

This chapter presents a series of analyses derived from, yet exceeding, the life history data. The previous chapters revealed how these women encountered possibilities such as being a 'feminist' or a 'lesbian' and how these identities affected their teaching practices. Within the institutional discourses which gave rise to these possibilities, specifically within physical education and dating, 'lesbian' subject positions were often absent. The themes in this chapter -- called 'dis/locations' -- begin to deconstruct<sup>50</sup> these silences. Each theme focuses on the visibility of

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<sup>50</sup>'Deconstruction' is a highly contested term which, by its very nature, defies definition. Derrida refused any fixed definition of deconstruction as method, analysis or critique and was quoted as saying that "all sentences of the type 'deconstruction is x' or deconstruction is not x' *a priori* miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false" (Collins & Mayblin, 1996:93). Nevertheless, some explanation of my use of the terms 'deconstructive' and 'deconstruction' is warranted. Jack Sanger's (1995) metaphor broadly describes the way I approached deconstruction:

*deconstruction (the act of using text to undermine its own rhetoric) allows the analyst to explore the text as a kind of water tank wherein conflicting ideologies are submerged under the surface calm of an attempted unitary resolution. (p. 91)*

I attempted to undermine some of the most obvious meanings of the ways the women and I talked about the lesbian 'closet', 'gaze' and 'crush' in life history interviews to suggest how

normative forms of female heterosexualities with the purpose of dis/locating these normative discourses. Questions have been asked which the life history data and my previous interpretations did not ask -- 'lesbian' has been deliberately, maybe provocatively, located into spaces where it previously seemed absent. It is important to stress that these analyses have been re-worked to relate directly to my analysis of institutional discourses in the previous chapter, rather than from the women's individual narratives.

This chapter dis/locates three apparently heteronormative discourses -- the lesbian closet, gaze and crush. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argued that, because discourses are always open, the subject can never be fully determined. Thus the challenge taken up in this final chapter was to examine 'who and what went missing' in the narratives. What follows, then, is an analysis of rhetorical moves, silence and omissions, disavowals and contradictions which is intended to dis/locate some of the familiar, normative boundaries between hetero and lesbian subject positions.

### **The Lesbian Closet<sup>51</sup>**

Keeping lesbian sexuality safely contained within 'the closet' has been vitally important to normative heterosexuality. One of the main purposes of the closet is to discursively uphold the boundary between either/or, homo/hetero, self/Other; indeed, this boundary has been and continues to be very effective.

Silence has been the most obvious and enduring feature of the closet, often a permanent feature in a discursive world where there simply weren't words to name

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heterosexuality relies upon silence and speech to maintain its privileged position. Finally, these interpretations are put forward as one of several possible interpretations, each of which could itself be undermined by successive deconstructive readings -- which is where you, as the active reader, enter or refuse the fray.

<sup>51</sup> The analysis in 'Dis/location 1: The Lesbian Closet' has been published in the *Journal of Sociology of Sport* (Sykes, 1998).

the closet and its secrets. For instance, Denise reminisced about the silence surrounding lesbian sexuality in her youth, recalling that "gay wasn't even a term" in the 1950s:

*There was no discussion at school on sexuality. There was no TV to give you any indication that there was anybody else in the world that was gay. I mean there wasn't ... gay wasn't even a term.*

The silent closet has haunted women in physical education since the post-WWII social repressions of the 1950s, through the sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s and well into the 1980s era of lesbian and gay rights. But silence is never just silence. Silences communicate meaning -- consider metaphors such as "a pregnant silence hung in the air" or "an awkward silence filled the room". Silences can almost be regarded as speech acts which become remarkable only in relation to what else has been said:

*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. (Foucault, 1978: 27)*

As Sedgwick (1990) artfully stated, the silences of the closet only have meaning when the discursive situation in which they are produced is considered :

*'Closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence -- not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it. (p. 3)*

Broadly speaking then, the lack of explicit discussion about lesbian sexuality only becomes remarkable because of the constant, explicit discussion and representation of heterosexuality. As Sampson (1989) explained, the category 'lesbian' always already exists within the category 'heterosexual' as the absent trace, the absent presence which is required and yet not visible. It is what Fuss (1995) called the interiority of the exterior which the closet hides from view. Fuss went on to argue that "the greater the lack on the inside, the greater the need for an outside to contain and to defuse it, for without that outside, the lack on the inside would become all too visible" (p. 235). In the case of the lesbian closet, this lack can be read as a lack of certainty underlying the naturalized status of heterosexuality. If we return to Butler's (1990) theory that normative heterosexuality sets itself apart by claiming the certainty of its 'natural origin', the closet persistently threatens to reveal this *lack* of certainty. Thus, normative heterosexuality is compelled to defend against the recognition that its ontological status, its claim to naturalness, is less than certain.

If one accepts Derrida's (1982) notion of *différance*<sup>52</sup>, one begins to see that *doubt* of the closet and *certainty* of normative heterosexuality can never be fully contained either side of an watertight boundary. So often doubt and suspicion leak outside the closet and so, rather than being a hermetically-sealed confine for lesbian sexualities, the closet is in fact highly contagious, capable of transmitting doubt, suspicion and secrecy (Sedgwick, 1990).

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<sup>52</sup> Refer to Chapter 3 for discussion about my use of deconstruction and the notion of *différance* alongside speech act theory.



### Closets of (an)other

One of the outcomes of this permeable boundary is that 'heterosexuals' may find themselves inside the closet of someone else, coping with the secrets of someone else's clandestine sexuality. Paradoxically, secrets are thrilling burdens -- so often the thrill of being entrusted with a secret is quickly tempered by the burden of keeping that secret. Again Sedgwick (1990) articulated this feature of the closet so eloquently. She observed that coming out to someone charges them with secret knowledge which, in turn, draws them into the closet that has just been vacated. For instance, Denise explained how her mother preferred to 'keep up the pretense' of not knowing Denise is gay because it meant she doesn't have to explain why her daughter was still not married. If Denise came out of the closet to her mother, she would have been burdened by 'having to explain' to relatives and friends, explanations riddled with decisions about what to say, what not say, which secrets to maintain and which to expose. Similarly, Denise was not out to a straight colleague at work with whom she discussed the trials and tribulations of their emotional lives because coming out to this straight colleague would have placed the burden of secrecy, decision and discretion onto her friend. So, the closet is not the exclusive property of lesbians, its burdens of secrecy can be displaced onto others. This means that heterosexuals may find themselves in the closet of another and the inside/outside boundary becomes less watertight than one might have imagined.

### Closets of association

The closet generates doubt and suspicion about all sexual identities, irrespective of their normative or marginal status. Again, this works through the radical instability of 'différance'. To be silent about heterosexuality breeds suspicion. For instance, not to stress one's femininity, discuss one's boyfriend/husband, to articulate a heterosexual script is to create silence about heterosexuality. This in turn can position an individual perilously close to the suspicion of being closeted. Thus

heterosexuality is compelled to repeat itself on two counts: in order to construct the silence of the closet, and to allay suspicion that it inhabits the closet. This means that unconvincing performances of heterosexuality can breed suspicion that the 'lesbian specter' is at large, as Bethany recalled quite clearly:

*I know during university my roommate and I were very close and she's very attractive and very much into dating men, but still people labeled us with 'we were too close, we spent too much time together, we read each others thoughts a little too closely'. So I've had some friendships with women that have been questioned and I always think it's interesting when I hear that because what do people base it on? What do people think? I don't know but I have never ever cared. It doesn't upset me.*

Part of the suspicion directed towards Bethany stemmed from the trope of homosexuality as gender sameness. Single sex contexts, such as female roommates, ostensibly designed to regulate (hetero)sexuality can work through a reverse discourse to intensify (homo)sexuality. Likewise, segregated changing areas, saunas, steam baths are designed as de-sexualized spaces within heteronormative logic; yet these very same spaces may be saturated with lesbian desire. Thus, a heterocentric view of sexuality is perhaps nowhere more powerful than in the "internal discourse" (Foucault, 1978: 28) of physical education and sport where separation of the sexes is blindly assumed to dissipate, if not entirely remove, any eroticism. At the same time, the haunting 'specter' of lesbian sexuality, which is the absent trace in these heterocentric assumptions, continually poses a threat to the certain and natural status of normative heterosexuality. Thus, any woman in physical education may be suspected of being lesbian if her performance of heterosexuality is not sufficiently convincing.

### Paranoid closets

Often the 'suspicion' that someone is lesbian is confirmed by the 'fact' that they are a physical education teacher. Arguably, the lesbian PE teacher has become an icon within some North American lesbian communities, as those familiar with Meg Christian's (1982) lesbian anthem "Ode to a Gym Teacher" will testify. In the excerpt below, Lisa and myself ironically recognized this lesbian script:

*Lisa: Well a lot of the women that I play sports with, there's a lot of Phys Ed teachers. So no I haven't really..."Oh you're a Phys Ed teacher, you're one of THEM are you? A Phys Ed teacher, I should have guessed".*

*Heather: And a wry smile or a knowing look!*

*Lisa: Yeah that's right! When I say that I'm a teacher, they say "Phys Ed teacher?" And I say "Yeah! That's right". (both laugh).*

This excerpt illustrated a common assumption that lesbians can detect other lesbians more accurately than anyone else, and Sedgwick (1990) pointed out how this assumption involves a degree of paranoid homosexual<sup>53</sup> knowledge which pulls heterosexuality ever closer to the closet. She outlined how a form of "homosexual-homophobic knowing" (p. 97) underlies the cliché 'it takes one to know one' so that doubt about someone else's sexuality may elicit doubt about one's own (hetero)sexuality. This paranoid doubt may be intensified after having one's suspicions confirmed; that is, when someone comes out. So it is when female athletes, coaches and PE teachers come out, the heterosexuality of other women is cast into doubt. Indeed, this is one of the epistemological features of the closet

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<sup>53</sup> Sedgwick's (1990) depiction of homosexual (gothic) paranoia was specifically concerned with male homosexual identity in turn of the century literature.

artfully described by Sedgwick (1990) whereby "the double-edged potential for injury in the scene of gay coming out...results partly from the fact that the erotic identity of the person who receives the disclosure is apt to be implicated in, hence perturbed by it" (p. 81). Moreover, there may be a mourning for the loss of the previous relationship, the loss of innocence, and the loss of certainty, as Lisa recalled:

*I did have a nucleus of girlfriends who I went to school with who were very supportive. A couple of them backed off after a while but then they came back after they realized that I'm still the same person.*

The realization that Lisa was 'still the same person' may not have been the only realization at work in this process of recovery. The loss of certainty about the Other (Lisa's sexuality) was accompanied by a paranoid uncertainty about the Self (their own heterosexuality), as the haunting refrain 'it takes one to know one' lingered in the background.<sup>54</sup> Lisa's coming out no doubt unsettled her friends' sense of their own heterosexuality and it is quite feasible that their return was dependent upon the realization that 'they are still the same' as much as 'she is still the same'. Thus, the paranoid doubt that accompanies the suspicion of others is yet another threat against which normative heterosexuality is compelled to defend itself, another element in the orchestra of challenges posed by homosexuality to the stability and certainty of heterosexuality.

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<sup>54</sup> Maybe this reaction -- ostensibly the loss of a 'heterosexual' friend when she came out as lesbian -- served as an uninvited reminder of the melancholic loss of the person's own lesbian desire. As Judith Butler (1997) theorized, a melancholic heterosexual subjectivity is founded upon a double negation:

*The formula 'I have never loved' some of similar gender and 'I have never lost' any such person predicates the 'I' on the 'never-never' of that love and loss. (p. 23)*

The excerpts above outline three ways in which the boundary between certainty/doubt and hetero/homo are less than watertight. Heterosexuals might find themselves in the closet of someone else, may be suspected of being closeted, and may even suspect their own heterosexuality. Constructing the silent closet, foreclosing the very possibility of lesbian subjectivity within discourse, attempts to stabilize the boundary between self-assured heteronormativity and marginalized lesbian sexuality. Heteronormative discourses repeatedly deploy the logics of misplaced masculinity and misdirected femininity to describe and defend against lesbian desire. These tropes construct homosexuality through mundane and everyday ways of talking, of remembering, of silencing, of telling stories. Queer theories allow us to read these mundane, everyday ways of talking as heteronormative scripts enlisted to uphold normalcy. Accordingly, I have employed a deconstructive queer analysis to turn 'the lesbian closet' inside/out, or at least begin to undermine the certainty of the boundaries between inside/outside, doubt/certainty, and homo/hetero. My purpose has been to dis/locate normal discursive functions of 'the closet', to question the certainty of heteronormativity and draw attention to why it has been compelled to prove its certainty and normalcy.

### **Gazing at a Lesbian Icon**

The life histories often focused on the dress and appearance of female PE teachers, which seemed to be the most powerful visual means of communicating gender and sexuality. This section outlines how dress and appearance worked to normalize sexuality, via the taken for granted assumptions of a heteronormative gaze, and then shifts locations to consider a lesbian gaze. To this extent, my interpretations seek the absent gaze, the looks which are not acknowledged, to hint at how normal ways of looking and being looked at, as a female physical education teacher, are twisted to fit with familiar, heteronormative narratives.

Dress, appearance and style communicate genders and sexualities in conjunction with, but also in excess of, verbal discourse. That is to say, images of another person do not necessarily function through linguistic signs and symbols but may also operate as visual icons (Presnell & Deetz, 1996). Icons, explain Presnell and Deetz (1996), function as "visual fragments that set into play a conceptual constellation. The image is a mere desiccated trace of life that, when water is added, can become an instant full-blown *Weltanschauung*" (p. 300).

Consider Jenny's explanation of the impact of her appearance:

*I can't imagine that some middle-aged Mum walks in and sees me and doesn't kind of wonder, but who knows? (Jenny)*

Jenny's statement calls up several assumptions about her femininity, and therefore her sexuality, which she didn't state explicitly as she is aware how her own appearance functions as a visual icon for a 'middle-aged Mum'. She also acknowledged how the gaze of her students allowed them to assess her sexuality, based on the 'conceptual constellation' set into play by, among other things, her haircut and clothes:

*I would almost guarantee that every single kid, if they don't know they must suspect that I'm a dyke because I see them look. Carmen drops me off when I have a trip -- here we are, we're loading the bus, and I drive in with this other woman with short hair, wearing pants (Jenny).*

So we could think of dress and appearance as a discourse of visual signs which play a part in constructing gender and sexuality and, as Patrick Fuery (1995) writes, "the gaze is not simply the act of perception...It is the powerful discursive

order that has direct connections, via epistemic operations, to power and knowledge" (p. 119); furthermore, it is this discursive quality that "transforms the act of looking and being looked at into processes of the gaze." (p. 118). In addition, appearance and body image are deeply embedded in the psyche, as constitutive parts of 'identity', through processes of internalization and identification. My use of the term 'gaze' does not literally refer to the looks that pass between students and teachers in PE classes; rather, it refers to a process which mediates how appearance is understood, what appearance is trying to communicate in the display (or performance) and the gaze (the consumption).

Under a homophobic gaze, the icon of the female PE teacher may unleash a constellation of fears -- transgression of gender roles, unfeminine appearance, masculinization through sport, homosexual recruitment -- all of which challenge normative female heterosexuality. On the other hand, a homoerotic gaze can interpret the same icon quite differently -- positive role-model, homoerotic athleticism, masculine fetish-object.

According to Patrick Fuery's (1995) interpretation of Lacan, the gaze is more than looking or being looked at, nor is there any single, binary or even three-way construction of the gaze; rather, there is a 'heterology of the gaze' involving eye-twisters and the empty eye, in addition to the lure, trap, shame of the gaze. The workings of Lacan's eye-twisters (*Augenverdreher*) demonstrate the complexity of the workings of the gaze:

*When we see something totally new we rub our eyes, we blink rapidly, we twist our head to one side to try to assimilate the unfamiliar, the uncanny, the defamiliarised. But what we really try to do is draw the new twist into the old twist, the established discourse, the familiar pattern... Narrative doesn't seem to twist the gaze, and yet this is precisely what it does in a constant and highly formulated*

*fashion, so much so that events, histories, acts of interpretation become twisted into narratives so that they fit more easily into the act of gazing. (p. 119)*

Physical education discourses attempt to normalize heterosexuality for girls and women through visual and verbal discourses that rely on the logic of heterosexuality which glues gender and sex together. Whenever gender and sex appear to challenge this logic, sexuality is called into question and the lesbian as Other is glimpsed. If the lesbian Other begins to gaze too openly or come into view too clearly, normative femininity must be reasserted in order to maintain a clear distinction between the self and Other -- this clear distinction is always a delusion. Thus while normative heterosexuality requires the lesbian Other for its own sense of self, the boundary between hetero/homo is unstable and so it must constantly work to keep the Other on the outside and reassert normative femininity. But relations of power always operate in multiple directions, so even as normative feminine heterosexuality reasserts itself, a lesbian gaze operates outside, across and inside the hetero/homo divide.

This section explores how the appearance of female PE teachers has been regulated by the gaze of a heterosexual imaginary via the continual surveillance of ubiquitous sweat pants, sweat shirts, whistles or earrings within the profession. The women's life histories illustrated how the institutional discourse about 'feminine appearance' in physical education has altered over the course of the women's lives: from pant suits in the 1950s, dress codes lasting into the 1970s; to styles of feminine dress currently available to white female teachers. Marion provided the earliest recollection about the importance of female appearance:

*In the early 50s they were debating whether women -- this was not just PE teachers it was everyone -- should wear pant suits. I can remember going to a staff meeting one time*



*and they were trying to decide because at that time the other teachers were all in skirts and, you know, blouses and sweaters and dresses. I remember that and they were trying to decide whether that was appropriate wear. And eventually all the teachers wore pant suits a lot.*

Later, in the early 1970s, she recalled how concerns about female physical educators' appearance of heterosexual femininity were formalized via dress codes:

*Marion: Well...there was some talk about what we should and shouldn't wear I remember but there was more emphasis the second time I went back because the fellow who was kind of in charge of the PE program said "Let's get rid of this stereotype..We don't have to wear the baggy sweat pants and all that."*

*Heather: And that was what people were wearing....?*

*Marion: But the first time, not very much was said. But the second time I went back to school there seemed to be a little bit more emphasis on the fact that you could be a PE teacher and be feminine. And I don't remember anybody saying very much the first time around.*

*Heather: Because people weren't worried about it or.....?*

*Marion: I think people just accepted it and said "This is the way it is".*

Both Marion and Bethany reflected on how they presented their heterosexuality through their style of dress. Bethany acknowledged the pressure, and possibly hinted at the benefits, of conforming to heteronormative expectations:

*I wear make up; I wear earrings. [It means] fitting in with the way society sees you. I don't know any other way and I'm not really brave enough to do anything else. I've thought about it a few times but I am traditional.*

Marion also spoke to the particular pressures facing female physical educators whose work clothes (baggy sweat pants, Nikes) were easily perceived as 'unfeminine':

*When I was planning my year I always bought my little track outfits, I always had to have new Nikes. But I would think about what to wear for the parent-teacher meetings because I wanted to look nice and not look so...you know. I didn't wear my track outfits to the Parent-Teacher thing. So I would think about wearing something that kind of tailored yet feminine and everything.*

Particular versions of normative feminine appearance have been institutionalized within physical education. The instances above illustrated some of the ways that an imaginary heterosexual gaze has defined and regulated styles, clothes and women's bodies. The question must surely be asked why has this concern about 'feminine' appearance persisted within physical education discourse from Marion's early years of teaching in the 1950s well into the 1990s? On the surface, concerns over feminine appearance represent attempts to dispel the 'masculine', read 'lesbian', stereotype which have haunted the profession. This has been achieved by keeping a feminine/masculine boundary firmly intact, allowing normative femininity to continually reassert itself as natural and homogenous without the gender trouble of "interfering heterogeneity"<sup>55</sup> (Felman, 1987: 61). This

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<sup>55</sup> Shoshana Felman (1987) used Lacan's notion of reflexivity to clarify the difference between

normalizing process becomes clearer when the inseparability of sexuality and gender is examined. Heteronormativity requires gender and sexuality to be linked -- for women to appear feminine and men to appear masculine. This internal logic of heterosexuality is troubled by other forms of sexuality where female/feminine, male/masculine are not so clearly linked. Thus women who disrupt this logic by appearing too masculine run the risk of being positioned outside the heterosexual self as Other and, within physical education, this has historically meant as 'lesbian'.

Nonetheless, a lesbian gaze has operated within physical education despite the professions' attempts to ignore it. As Michel Foucault (1978) observed, "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance" (p. 101). Thus, because the boundaries between feminine/masculine, inside/outside, homo/hetero can never be fully secured, women's physical education has provided an occult site for unimaginable lesbian gazes. It becomes more apparent how a lesbian gaze can circulate inside single-sex classes, changing rooms, friendships, parent-teacher evenings, faculty meetings and so on, even as heteronormative PE discourses refuses its presence.

Moreover, what if the normalization of feminine heterosexuality in physical education -- that is, the preceding normalizing institutional discourses and those constituted as subjects within it -- has seen, recognized, known, felt and desired the lesbian Other? What if, as Deborah Britzman (1997) dared to ask, within the discourses of normalization there have been moments of (mis)recognition that "the other to the homophobe is heterosexuality" (p. 34). What then? Maybe the driving

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humanistic and psychoanalytic modes of reflectivity or self-reflection which elucidated the poststructural discourses about fragmented and unified identities. Her phrase 'interfering heterogeneity' referred to psychoanalytic self-reflection in which symmetry in the recognition of the self is illusionary, "a symmetry that subsumes all difference within a delusion of a unified and homogenous individual identity" (p. 61).

force behind heteronormativity has not been to completely dispel the negative stereotype but merely to devalue it; to maintain the negative associations of 'lesbian'; to retain the hierarchical relation between hetero/homo. Maybe, the very normalcy of the physical education profession has relied on keeping the stereotype of the unfeminine lesbian at a safe distance as the Other, the 'specter', the dangerous icon and, most importantly, the not-me.

One last point -- remembering how visible bodies of physical education teachers are, due to the content and pedagogy of physical education itself, it becomes easier to understand how, under a homoerotic gaze, the PE teacher may become a lesbian icon. Presnell and Deetz (1996) foreground the connection between a visual icon as a spectacle and as a fetish object. If we accept that the gendered appearance of the female PE teacher may be remembered by some as visual icon of female masculinity, it reinforces the notion that she may also be constructed as a 'lesbian fetish-object' (de Lauretis, 1994). This raises questions about how students, in particular, gaze upon their teachers as lesbian icons.

### **Teaching Desire**

Denise and I started to discuss this in later interviews:

*Heather: Do you think that girls who may be gay are more likely to have crushes on their phys ed teacher [than other teachers]?*

*Denise: Well I think it was maybe more the case in past years than it is now because I think at one time the PE teacher dressed in a certain way, they were more casual in their dress, there was less formality in the phys ed situation than in a regular classroom. And now you can go into any of the classrooms and there's not a great deal of difference between how the PE teacher dresses and a regular teacher.*

What Denise hinted at can be explored in more detail, through the discourse of the 'schoolgirl crush'. Lesbian historian Martha Vicinus (1989) examined this phenomenon which was prevalent in English boarding schools from the 1870s onwards -- a phenomenon which was so common that it was also known as a 'rave', 'spoon', 'smash', 'pash' for passion and a 'flame'. She noted that for most young girls these flames focused on publicly admired figures who were at the same time remote yet familiar, either the head girl, a favorite young teacher, or a games captain. Well into the twentieth century, raves were openly discussed in the discourse of women's education, safely contained as controllable adolescent phase and apprenticeship for marriage. Vicinus noted that the entry of the New Woman into the public sphere, however, provided too much of a threat to normative views about femininity so that single-sex institutions were attacked, teachers' friendships stigmatized and raves disparaged as permanently distorting. Scientization also played its part. The medical discourse of sexology emerging in the 1880s started to conceptualize the rave in psycho-biological terms, as Havelock Ellis decreed:

*while there is an unquestionable sexual element in the 'flame' relationship, this cannot be regarded as an absolute expression of real congenital perversion of the sex-instinct.*

*(cited in Vicinus, 1989: 227)*

Although, as Vicinus astutely observed, the influence of sexological discourse in labeling rave as deviant was by no means straightforward. The pathologization of homosexuality, initiated at the turn of the century in sexological discourses, began to have noticable effects on women's physical education in the United States from the 1920s onwards. Sports historian Susan Cahn (1994b) observed that open acknowledgment of same-sex crushes between female physical education students and instructors coexisted for a while alongside emerging concerns about

homosexual deviance, but after the second world war McCarthy-driven fears about the 'homosexual menace' led to dress codes mandating feminine athletic uniforms, a shift from single-sex to coed athletic programs, and even to coed courses designed to foster "a broader, keener, more sympathetic understanding of the opposite sex" (p. 182).

This section explores how the status of a female teacher combined with physical education's focus on the body form a unique object for queer desire. Teachers, in the broadest sense, can become the object of a student's transference desire due to the knowledge which they are presumed to possess (Felman, 1987); however, in physical education this knowledge is more directly concerned with the body than any other subject in formal schooling. This is compounded by the fact that the athleticism of women in physical education has often challenged traditional notions of femininity, given the long-standing associations between masculinity and athleticism.

Before moving on, a note about desire in pedagogy is required. For many, teachers are amongst the most significant adult 'Others' encountered outside the familial home. They are uniquely positioned in the parade of Others which pass through an individual's psychic development, on the cusp between parents and lovers, on the trajectory between infancy and adulthood. As Freud himself reminisced, "we courted them and turned our backs on them, we imagined sympathies and antipathies which probably had no existence" (Freud in Felman, 1987, p. 84). It should come as no surprise then if teachers are often remembered (or repressed) as significant Others, as a good influence, as positive role models. But what does it mean when we cite a pedagogical relationship as 'significant', when we regard a teacher as a positive role model, even to the extent that we follow in her footsteps? Transference and identification are key concepts in understanding the unique type of relationship which can form between a student and their teacher(s).

Transference, in the psychoanalytic sense, is necessary for learning to take place, or as Shoshana Felman (1987) puts it, transference is "both the energetic spring and interpretive key" to the functioning of authority which leads to the realization that "teaching is not a purely cognitive, informative experience, it is also an emotional, erotic experience" (p. 86). In Lacanian terms, the teacher becomes seen by the student as the "subject presumed to know" (Felman, 1987: 84) and transference occurs when a student desires the 'knowledge' which the teacher (supposedly) possesses. Patrick Fuery (1995) raises the subtle yet important point that what is desired is "not simply the knowledge of something, but the knowledge of knowledge, and the desirable status of this knowledge" (p. 51). Transference entails a desire for the teacher's knowledge which, in the special context of physical education, also happens to be knowledge of the body, a particularly embodied form of knowledge. We might ask where and how does a boundary get constructed between, for example, a student's desire for gymnastic knowledge, intellectual knowledge and erotic knowledge? Maybe it is the proximity of such desires, inscribed onto the body of the PE teacher, which is at the heart of female sexualities in women's physical education.

To gain insight into desires for the teacher, it might be more revealing to look at the finer distinctions between erotic and platonic desire. A mundane description of the 'erotic' is provided by Webster's:

*a close relationship between usu. opposite-sexed persons in which an element of sexual attraction or libidinal desire has been either so suppressed or so sublimated that it is generally believed to be absent. (Webster's Dictionary, 1986: 1735)*

Immediately we can see how 'erotic' and 'platonic' gain meaning only in terms of their 'différance', with platonic having meaning only as the absence of erotic. In education and physical education especially, a great deal of discursive work

is expended to maintain the distinction between erotic and platonic relations between students and teachers. Evidence of this can be found in the prohibition of childhood sexuality (Foucault, 1978), the close regulation of adolescent heterosexuality in sex education and professional silences about the erotic (Guttman, 1996). While it may be difficult and somewhat arbitrary to locate the boundary between the erotic and platonic, the tolerable and taboo, it is reasonable to suggest that there appears to be considerable slippage across the erotic/platonic boundary in spite of the policing attempts of normative educational discourse.

Like all oppositions, the boundary between platonic and erotic is tenuous at best. There are always moments and instances when the boundaries are traversed and transgressed, revealing their inherent instability. Referring to Derrida's logic of the supplement, "what something is is thoroughly inhabited by what it is not" and this in turn requires the recognition of the other-in-self and self-in-other (Sampson, 1989: 16). The following interpretations suggest the presence of eros where it seems to be absent -- the erotic trace -- and thus present the way student-teacher relations are constructed as a potent, yet frequently sublimated, discourse in the development of homo/heterosexual identities and storylines. This leads into Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence, where he asserted there can be no primary presence; that is, meaning is produced through the constant deferral of presence, through the absence of the Other. Thus any absolute or fixed difference in meaning is impossible, thereby opening up each term to slightly different meanings (that is, creating the possibility of deconstruction). It is this Derridean notion of *différance* which underpins the following interpretations of how the women in the study talked about their own physical education teachers.

Lisa's remembered her PE teacher as an inspiration:



*[She] was my inspiration to become a phys ed teacher actually. She just reminded me of myself. I didn't know I wanted to be a teacher at that time, but she inspired me just because of the way she was with the kids. She was an authority but she was also quite laid back outside the classroom because she coached quite a few sports as well.*

Lisa stated that her teacher's informality and accessibility in coaching situations distinguished her from other teachers, possibly hinting at a less formal relationship and one where identification and transference were more possible. She recalled that her teacher's way of being with the kids influenced her later decision to become a teacher, expressing desire for a specific way of pedagogical knowing, of accessibility, informality and firmness which she regarded as more likely in a physical education (specifically, coaching) context. Lisa's description of her teacher in these terms follows a common script in physical education -- of the teacher being informal, casual. Indeed many physical education teachers claim the informality of the coaching situation to be one of the most rewarding aspects of their work, a situation in which less authoritative relationships can be formed with students.

Possibly more interesting was Lisa's observation that "she reminded me of myself". If we return once more to a psychoanalytic interpretation, the remark leads us to consider the prominent role played by this teacher in Lisa's chain of identifications.<sup>1</sup> This commonplace explanation serves an important normalizing function in which erotic desire can be sublimated in informal, casual student teacher relationships. Such sublimation is an important way of dealing with counter-transference on the teacher's part, but it can also obfuscate homoerotic desires of students. The boundary between admiring the informality and closeness of being around the physical education teacher and sublimated erotic transference onto the teacher is by no means fixed or impermeable. Precisely where this boundary is constructed is critically important given the relations of power inherent

in a pedagogical relationship; but what is also important is how homoerotic and heteroerotic student desires are constructed differently. This leads to questions about the implications of disavowing same-sex teenage crushes in heteronormative, if not homophobic, educational contexts where scripts for the development of lesbian identities are either absent, pathologized or devalued.

### Desiring the gymnastic body

Trust and physicality were the cornerstones of Jenny's memories of her PE teacher -- the bodily experience of being taken to new heights under her mentorship. Jenny remembered her PE teacher's influence on her sense of self and her gymnastic body-image:

*She did gymnastics. And she was SO NEAT because my image of my body was not that of a gymnast. She saw that I was very strong, and I didn't have a lot of fear so she got me up for gymnastics. And I just loved it! I kept jumping and doing flips, and she had me doing stuff I never thought I could do.*

*She was young, you know, and very vibrant and I still remember her.*

Jenny discovered a form of knowledge she desired, the very physicality of jumps and flips. This desire could be interpreted as the ludic exploration of her body's movements or as nothing more than the instrumental outcome of 'effective teaching'. To an extent Jenny desired the immediate knowledge of how to do gymnastics, what Patrick Fuery (1995) referred to as the knowledge of something; however, her story also hinted at more deep-seated identifications.

It is not only gymnastic skill, but body image, a lack of fear and a love for the process which color Jenny's account. In remembering her teacher as a person who 'did' gymnastics, who recognized her strength and courage, who took her (literally) to new heights we get a glimpse into why Jenny 'still remembers her'. She

remembered entrusting not only her body but her body image to her teacher, and identifying with her teacher as youthful, vibrant, and gymnastic. Returning to the notions of transference and desire, we cannot separate Jenny's desire for gymnastic skills from how these very skills were inscribed onto a 'vibrant, young and gymnastic' body. We could surmise that for Jenny the 'desired status of the knowledge' is embedded within her teacher's physicality, a desire for her gymnastic body.

### Desiring the feminist body

Bethany admired the independence of her PE teacher as a divorced, single-parent breaking from the constraints of normal femininity of the time:

*Then I simply realized that she was divorced, and she was raising a child. She didn't seem to be the way that I recognized most women being coy and subservient to men. She didn't seem to have all those characteristics that other women seemed to have. She did what she wanted to do... She did make it very easy for me to select this job.*

Bethany identified with her PE teacher because she "didn't seem to have all those characteristics that other women seemed to have" and admired the sexual independence of her teacher, that she could be divorced, a single parent, assertive with men. This is quite different from Bethany's expectations as an adolescent:

*When you grow up in the country that's what you do. You get married. You just have to find somebody to marry.*

Her teacher presented a version of womanhood which was both attractive and unattainable. She desired the fantasy of redefining marriage, of pursuing a career, or re-writing the traditional script of female heterosexuality. It has taken

Bethany a long time to reach a similar place in her life, although her image of her teacher and the present image of herself bear a striking resemblance<sup>56</sup>. A normal way of being female was partially resisted by Bethany who identified strongly with her PE teacher. Her memories of being inspired by this emancipated woman were powerful yet platonic; there was little room for (homo)sexuality in Bethany's tale. This absence of homoeroticism was consistent with Bethany's adult heterosexual identity, and resonated strongly with her sense of being sexually and financially independent. Bethany remembered how her teacher embodied sexual relations which were relatively independent, desire for a different version of hetero-femininity lived out by her teacher -- what could be termed desire for a feminist body.

#### Desiring the lesbian body

In a telling moment of lesbian insiderism, Denise and I both recollected having crushes on our own teachers:

*Heather: I know as a student I was MADLY in love with my phys ed teachers.*

*Denise: Right, I was too ... until she got married!*

Jenny recounted her increasing awareness of erotic desires for female teachers and mentors, moving from her high school PE teacher to an undergraduate

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<sup>56</sup>This raises the issue of how the recollection itself reinforced Bethany's current sense of identity. As Madan Sarup (1996) succinctly observed:

*we know that the past always marks the present, but often the past consists of a selectively appropriated set of memories and discourses. This may be because the stories people tell of their pasts have much to do with their shoring up of their self-understanding.(p. 40)*

professor and climaxing with a sexual relation with a Camp Director when she was a Camp Counselor.

*Miss Morris but I don't know if it was a crush as much as... I know I really liked her a lot but I don't remember having fantasies about sleeping with her or anything but she was a woman, and she was a PE teacher. It was okay to do fun PE stuff with her. So there was probably some of that.*

Retrospectively, Jenny admitted the possibility of eroticism in her relation with a university professor, conceding that "maybe on some level I knew":

*And one of my favorite profs, I wasn't attracted to her... maybe on some level I kind of knew... but I loved to talk with her and I loved her course and got really high marks in it and I used to hang out with her as much as a student and a prof can.*

Lisa, like Jenny, described an erotic crush on her undergraduate professor.

*Oh I had a powerful crush on one of my university teachers. Yeah, actually one night I went out to a party and I ended up phoning her -- I don't know if I got through. She did talk to me the next day so maybe I never did get the right number, I don't know!*  
*(laughs).*

Through their recollections about more explicitly erotic desires for some teachers, Denise, Lisa and Jenny attested to lesbian desires directed towards the teacher's body. The substance of the women's desires are quite diverse, ranging from platonic to erotic -- admiration, inspiration, physical tutelage, images of the self, sexual independence, and sexual desire -- all swirling within discourses of

pedagogical desire for the 'subject who is presumed to know'<sup>57</sup>, illustrating the immanence of an erotic female body in physical education.

Being the object of desire

Whereas the women fondly reminisced about a teacher whom had been influential for them as students, they were more circumspect about being the focus of their students' desires<sup>58</sup>. This final section explored how teachers respond to students' transference desires; that is, the notion of counter-transference. "In human relationships, sympathies and antipathies usually provoke a similar emotional response in the person they are addressed to" explains Shoshana Felman (1987), and so "the pedagogical situation may thus degenerate into an imaginary mirror game of love and

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<sup>57</sup>It is beyond the purview of the data to attempt a specific psychoanalytic reading of Lisa's identification with her teacher. I think it is possible to use a psychoanalytic concept of identification metaphorically, in order to introduce the unknowable and unconscious aspects into my interpretation of students' desire for the teacher. Here I am using the term 'identification' in a psychoanalytic sense, drawing primarily on an explanation provided by William Meissner (1981) who differentiates between the psychic process of incorporation, introjection and identification as follows:

*Identification is a process of internal organization and synthesis within the ego which is carried on essentially as a modeling and self-organization process in which the object representation is left intact and no translation of object elements into the self-organization takes place. Thus, while incorporation and introjection can be understood as defensive measures and ways of dealing with the intolerable threat of separation from or loss of the object, in identification the object is left totally intact and distinct and its inherent separateness is not only tolerated but preserved. (p. 53)*

Alternatively, one might start from the definition of identification given by Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) as:

*a psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partly, after the model the other provides. (p. 205)*

One might question how these desires are related to the sexing and gendering of bodies in physical education. Why is it that the physical education teacher features so prominently in these recollections? How are these recollections connected to the storylines in each of the women's lives? Or how are these memories of PE teachers deployed by women who have become PE teachers?

<sup>58</sup>More candid stories about same-sex 'teenage crushes' were told by PE teachers in Squires and Sparkes (1996) life history research, stories which would lend themselves to this type of psychoanalytic interpretation.

hate, where each of the participants would unconsciously enact past conflicts and emotions, unwarranted by the current situation and disruptive with respect to the real issues, unsettling the topical stakes of analysis or education" (p. 86). There is considerable disagreement, stress Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), whether counter-transference includes "everything in the analyst's [teacher's] personality liable to affect the treatment" or only "those unconscious processes which are brought about in the analyst [teacher] by the transference of the analysand [student]" (p. 93). Applying the more expansive notion to pedagogical contexts, the risks accompanying teachers' counter-transference have led to the assertion that teachers must somehow gain insight into their own "transferential mechanisms", which would assist them to understand their students' desires and their own desires (Felman, 1987). Moreover, Freud stated what may seem obvious but which is crucial to the present interpretation of desires for/of the physical educator that the teacher [analyst] "must also possess some kind of superiority so that in certain situations he can act as a model for his patient and in others as a teacher" (Freud cited in Felman, p. 87).

Is it possible to argue that social silences about homosexuality (that is, heteronormative discourse) are also constructed at the level of individual's psychic processes. If so, one might contend that for generations of teachers growing up within heteronormative contexts, one manifestation of counter-transference will be to repeat the silencing and erasure of homosexuality -- a return of the repressed, if you like. In other words, the psychic repression of homoerotic transference desires (compounded by silencing caused by the heterosexual imaginary in discourse) can return as an unconscious feature in some teachers' counter-transference, a feature that might be termed 'homophobic counter-transference'. Undoubtedly this form of counter-transference is one (of several) socio-psychic processes which, in Judith

Butler's (1990) terms, propels heterosexuality to repeatedly assert itself as originary and natural.

#### Silence as counter-transference

All the women in the study implied, more or less directly, that same-sex crushes had, in all probability, never been directed towards themselves and their narratives maintained the silence surrounding their own students' lesbian desires. This can be thought of as one way in which counter-transference can operate for teachers. Although referring to the analytic setting particularly, Lee Crespi (1995) drew attention to silence and neutrality about homosexuality as symptomatic of counter-transference on the analyst's part, an observation which I think goes part way to explaining the silences which echoed in the women's narratives.<sup>59</sup>

Questions about being the object of student same-sex desire elicited ambiguous responses from the teachers who identified as lesbian. On the one hand Lisa and Jenny downplayed any personal knowledge of being the object of their students' homoerotic desire, while on the other hand their lesbian friends were both curious and skeptical about their denials.

*Heather: Do you see that same thing ever occurring with you now that you're a teacher?*

*Lisa: How come everybody asks me that? Joanne asks me that all the time(laughs).*

*Heather: Well that's important in itself, why do we ask that question?*

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<sup>59</sup>Crespi (1995) also suggested several specific reasons for silent, homophobic counter-transference which cannot be extrapolated beyond the analytic relationship. It is also beyond the detail of the data to do more at this point than merely suggest that silence and erasure of homoerotic desire may, and I stress may, indicate some form of unconscious repetitions on behalf of the teacher.



*Heather: Do you think any of your students had crushes on you?*

*Jenny: MY FRIENDS ASK ME THAT (laughing) and I say "Oh, why would anyone have a crush on me?" (HS laughs) And they're like, "Ohhh, I bet lots of them do!"*

*I mean this is not a strong area for me, picking those things up. My partner just laughs 'cos SWOOSH (gestures straight over her head) .*

*So I really, REALLY honestly I would say probably not. I don't get a sense of that. They all have crushes on Brian. You know, long-haired, sensitive, kind of guy with a grizzled face. Yeah, they all love him.*

*I don't know. As I said, my friends don't believe me when I say it.*

Asking whether female students have crushes on their female PE teachers seems to be a FAQ -- a 'frequently asked question' -- within Lisa and Jenny's lesbian communities. Their friends' skeptical response to their denials seemed equally commonplace, supporting the idea that the female PE teacher has served as an icon within these lesbian communities.

Jenny, on the other hand, coped with the possibility that she might be the object of same-sex student desire by failing to 'pick up those sort of things', stressing the evidence of heterosexual crushes on a male colleague, and by distancing herself from the lesbian folklore and FAQ. Similarly, Lisa was surprised why other lesbians seemed to ask this question so frequently. Given Lisa and Jenny's memories of desires for their own teachers, their denial of similar desires in their students appears contradictory. It could be, however, that their denial is a way of coping with these desires -- that is, counter-transference through disavowal. How much of Jenny and Lisa's disavowal of lesbian student desire can be attributed to unconscious

counter-transference and how much to deliberate strategies of professional self-surveillance is difficult to discern.

Lisa cautiously speculated that one of her students might have had a crush on her, but provides no clues as to the attraction, the substance of her students' desire:

*One of my ESL kids, Mahala, a girl from Iraq. She's just such a sweetheart. She's a great kid and her sister's been in Canada four years and they were separated. And I thought her sister said some comment to me once about "Oh Miss Logan doesn't even like boys anyway!" with a smile on her face. And Mahala kind of smiled and looked at me [with the corner?] she's got these big eyes. But I wasn't sure if I had heard it right. So maybe, maybe not.*

Denise was less circumspect about student crushes. Homoeroticism in Denise's memories of student-teacher relations was both fondly remembered and strictly denied. At times she talked explicitly about same-sex desire and relationships between students and their teachers, including her own. Other times, she emphasized the strictly platonic nature of her relationships with students, her teaching context and curriculum. She stressed that all student issues about sexuality were directed towards the school counselor, having "no place inside the gymnasium". As a counter-transference mechanism, this distanced rather than silenced same-sex desires and so establishes a balance between acknowledging and deflecting students' potential desires for her.

If we accept these speculations about teachers' counter-transference, it indicates how homophobia and heterocentrism can be rooted within the unconsciousness of individual teachers, and arguably throughout the collective psyche of the teaching profession. This in turn points to how

homophobia operates within the teaching profession, beyond the level of rational educational discourse. One might wonder about the effectiveness of rational, behavioristic attitude-adjustment approaches to homophobia in light of these speculations, and question whether current anti-homophobic initiatives can function at the level of these unconscious desires and counter-transferences.<sup>60</sup>

Not being able to confront the way students desire the body of the female PE teacher reinforces the heteronormative stalemate which has prevailed for so long, but acknowledging eros in pedagogical relationship needs guidelines which I think can be extrapolated from the analytic relationship. Hans Loewald's (1978) eloquent consideration of how love and transference can be engaged in remaking the self describes the opportunity and task facing physical educators and the physical education profession:

*Transference does not mean that we are condemned to mindless re-enactment of early love relations. Nor does conscious understanding of automatic repetitions, of unconscious transference manifestations, lead to the elimination of transference. Consciousness of transference means that the living interpenetration of inner past and present can be resumed. (p. 49)*

Similarly, dis/locating intellectual attention onto lesbian gazes and desires within women's physical education necessitates pragmatic guidelines regarding concrete practices within the profession; but for now, my purpose has simply been to

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<sup>60</sup> I am indebted to Deborah Britzman for introducing me to the issues of transference in pedagogy, the in/effectiveness of purely rational anti-homophobic, anti-racist education in light of psychoanalytic reading of pedagogy.

open some discursive possibilities which have previously been silenced by the noise about normal female heterosexualities within women's physical education.

## **In/Conclusion**

### Contribution to Literature about Teachers' Life Histories

This study set out to examine the social construction of sexualities in the lives of female PE teachers from different generations, focusing particularly on the hierarchical relationship between 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' sexualities. The study's focus on lesbian and heterosexual women from different generations contributed a number of new insights to the life history literature about female PE teachers. Likewise, studying teachers from different generations revealed how ideas about women's sexuality have changed since the late 1950s. The most noticeable changes were the impact of feminism on the women's identities and views about social justice and increased availability of urban and sporting lesbian spaces. These changes greatly affected the women's lives outside teaching -- views on marriage, politics, social changes, women's equality and so on. This cross-generational perspective also revealed what had not changed, particularly the professional silence about lesbianism in the day to day discourse of physical education in public schools.

This research also stemmed from the political commitment to challenge homophobia and heterosexism within the physical education profession by drawing on elements of queer theory. The research process, narratives and many interpretations are still, however, 'located' quite firmly within the binary of 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual'. Additionally, framing issues in terms of lesbian 'suspicion' and 'specter' may risk allowing negative, suspicious readings of homophobic discrimination and heterosexism to continue, although I hope that the dis/locations and nuances of these life histories contribute, instead, insights which challenge this process within the profession.

One of the benefits of life history over other forms of oral or ethnographic research is the focus on different phases in teachers' lives, taking seriously not only their experiences as teachers but also as children, young adults, athletic women and, of course, sexual beings. The indelible impact of growing up in straight families and learning heterosexual dating lessons in high school should not, I think, be underestimated. The women's families, where heterosexuality was quietly yet continually normalized, provided an important context for comprehending how these women claimed adult sexual identities as 'lesbian', 'married' or 'heterosexual'. In the theme 'Straight Families', the women remarked on the sexist relations between their mothers and fathers yet the heterosexuality of their parents was taken for granted. When the sexuality of other family members was 'questionable' an aura of silence usually prevented any open discussion. Similarly the theme 'Dating Lessons' showed how all the women talked about the pressure to date boys in high school, memories punctuated with fears about contraception and unwanted pregnancy. The impact of these heteronormative years should be constantly 'remarked upon'. The life histories also documented important historical details about how, as PE teachers in western Canada, they have encountered the idea of 'lesbian'. All three lesbian-identified women talked at length about meeting other lesbians, coming out, and developing a lesbian social network. Not surprisingly, the women who identified as heterosexual talked less about lesbian issues, referring mainly to lesbian stereotypes they had encountered in physical education.

The study also confirmed findings of previous life history research about lesbian teachers (Khayatt, 1992, 1994; Sparkes, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Squires & Sparkes, 1996), notably the way silencing has been central to the experiences of lesbian teachers. Also, the importance of feminism on teachers' professional activities and personal politics reinforced Khayatt's (1992) research about lesbian teachers in Canada. The inclusion of 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' teachers in this study extended

this finding to suggest that, not only is a 'feminist' identity influential on teachers' ideas about social justice, it is more influential than a 'lesbian' identity. The life histories illustrated the profound impact of second-wave feminisms on teachers' access to politicized discourses about sexism, multiculturalism and, to a lesser extent, lesbian civil rights. Connie's life history testified to the importance of access to Women's Studies in shaping her approach to teaching, while Lisa was more ambivalent about the way issues of discrimination had been taught in her teacher education program. In hindsight, this study would have benefited from more detailed discussions about how the women's identities as 'feminist' and 'not feminist' actually permeated their everyday teaching practices. The importance of feminism has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged in the physical education and sport sociology literature; indeed, the impact of contemporary social movements -- feminism, anti-racism, lesbian and queer politics -- on teachers' approaches to physical education warrants more inquiry.

Although this was one of the first studies to focus on 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' teachers, the linguistic and racial backgrounds of the women were relatively homogenous. This may be, in part, a limitation of the snowball method of contacting participants although I think it also reflects the high numbers of Euro-Canadian teachers in western Canada, especially more experienced teachers. Nonetheless, a strong case could be made for further life history research about PE teachers with more diverse linguistic, racial and sexual identities. Contacting educational and lesbian organizations in the First Nations, Asian-Canadian and Afro-Canadian communities in Vancouver might be considered during the sampling process in future studies. Although every attempt has been made not to gloss over the quite different ways Marion, Connie and Bethany identified as heterosexual, this study can reasonably be described as focusing on 'heterosexual' and 'lesbian' teachers. It would be valuable for follow-up studies not to reify this

dual focus and, if possible, work with teachers who identify as 'bisexual', 'queer', 'transgendered' or 'transsexual'. Another productive line of inquiry would be the life histories of gay and bisexual men who have taught physical education. Again, such research would have to actively overcome the tendency for physical education not to recruit men with non-hegemonic sexual identities. These problems of recruitment, gatekeeping and homogeneity in physical education could be a valuable topic to consider. The stories of men and women who left the physical education profession because of heterosexism or racism could contribute to such an inquiry.

### Contribution to Feminist Sport Sociology

The study supports the basic elements of a feminist analysis of heterosexism in physical education which has circulated in sport sociology since the late 1980s.

During the lifetimes of these women, lesbian sports have become more organized, lesbian teachers have been granted legal protection from discrimination and homophobia has started to emerge as professional concern in PE teacher training and higher education. Nevertheless, the sexologist's specter of 'a male soul trapped in a female body' lingers in the heterosexist assumptions underpinning the day to day practices of physical education in the public schools. These life histories reveal how lesbian sexualities continue to be marginalized within the physical education profession, despite the increased visibility of lesbians in sport and urban spaces in western Canada.

There were occasions when the women's stories reflected Susan Cahn's (1994a) notion that the suspicion of lesbianism works as a magnet and a repellent. These dynamics appeared in Marion's recollections about the 'image problem' of female PE teachers in the late 1960s, and then reappeared in Jenny's story about assumptions made on the basis of her short hair. Likewise, the lesbian community Denise developed by playing team sports in the late 1950s was remarkably similar to

that sought out by Lisa thirty years later. These lesbian sporting spaces clearly provided a magnet for Denise and Lisa, alongside their careers in physical education.

The life histories of these six women provide limited support to the argument that PE teachers' involvement in sport accentuated suspicions of lesbianism in physical education. Denise and Lisa participated in relatively 'masculine' team sports, thereby associating them with lesbianism. To this extent, their life histories support the claim that homophobia and homoeroticism within women in sports carries over into their lives of PE teachers. Jenny's life history was more ambiguous. She participated in less 'masculine' sports, even though they formed part of her lesbian social network. The impact of this sporting involvement on her life as a lesbian PE teacher was difficult to estimate because of her simultaneous involvement in feminist communities outside sport. The 'heterosexual' women all participated in physical activities that offered little challenge to the compulsory heterosexuality normalized through sport. Marion's love of dance spurred her entry into PE, Connie's experiences in outdoor education were central to her feminist pedagogies, while Jenny's personal empowerment from rock climbing and running also shaped her approach to teaching. The women's involvement in these sports did not provide significant challenges to the gender order of sport, thereby raising few suspicions about their heterosexuality. The participation of the 'heterosexual' women in feminine or gender-neutral sports might have protected these women from the suspicion of lesbianism they might face as PE teachers. Overall, the involvement of these PE teachers in various sports does little to dispel the associations between masculinity and lesbianism. I think it is more accurate to suggest, as Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) rightly observed, that suspicions about lesbianism have simply been deflected:



*Although there has been a broadening of definitions of sporting femininity, and well-honed athletic female bodies are now openly embraced as sexually attractive according to heterosexual criteria, nevertheless, athletes who are heavily muscled, small-breasted...face insinuations about defeminization. (p. 170)*

So, it appears that suspicions about lesbianism facing women in physical education operate despite women's participation in an increasing number of sports. It is, arguably, only the forms of heterosexism that have changed. This diffusion of heterosexism in contemporary sports indicates a potential area for further research. It might be productive to examine the construction of sexualities in 'extreme' sports like Ultimate, blading, boarding and mountain biking, and the impact on the construction of sexualities in a younger generation of PE teachers.

#### Theorization of subjectivity in life history research

Due to nature of the 'lesbian specter', and the particular way lesbian sexuality has been marginalized within physical education, the notion of 'silence' was central to this study. This led me to think about how silence and secrecy actually functioned within the teachers' stories, in the social contexts surrounding them and, perhaps most intriguingly, in the formation of sexual subjectivities. Perhaps the most significant contribution this study makes is the way 'identity' was interpreted in life history data using a poststructural framework -- it was certainly the most challenging! The notion of *understanding* and *overstanding* data was central to this process, which led to a montage of discourse analysis approaches being used. The use of psychoanalytic theory and deconstruction alongside speech act and positioning theory in the analysis of life history data is unique, certainly in terms of physical education teachers. It points to the complex challenge of approaching empirical interpretative research in education from theoretical positions informed by poststructuralism, and also queer theory. I hope that the methodological tensions

discussed in Chapter 3 contribute to the sometimes difficult conversations between progressive feminist, materialist and poststructuralist intellectual traditions which, after all, are concerned with social justice in education and interpretive research as a form of political engagement.

The women talked about themselves directly when remembering their families, high school experiences and their relationship to feminism. I came to think about these themes as a process of *narrating a self*. Each woman featured prominently in stories about these uniquely personal aspects of their lives. In contrast, their narratives of sexism, homophobia and racism often focused on other people. I came to think of this as a process of *narrating the self through the Other*. For example, stories about race mainly focused on the racism experienced by students rather than the women's experiences of being white or anglophone in western Canada. Increasingly this way of interpreting the data challenged the humanist notion that identity has tidy individual boundaries, and that a life history can be re-told without reference to the Other. Also it should be noted that, through the process of narrating their stories, these women not only recalled selected life experiences but also analyzed many aspects of them. Consequently, the process of interpreting the experiences these women told me involved analysis by both the narrators and myself.

Not only did the theoretical framework assume that identities are constituted in the very acts of narrating the self and, often, through the other but also that identity can *never be fully constituted*. This led to interpretations in the final chapter which deliberately, some might say provocatively, inserted lesbian desire into the silences created by the data. The deconstructive analysis of the lesbian closet is intended to extend ways of thinking about how suspicions about lesbianism operate, contributing sights from queer theory to the existing analysis within feminist sport sociology. Similarly, the analysis of dress and physical appearance

searched out an absent lesbian gaze. Another way 'silence' was analyzed was by drawing on psychoanalytic theory, acknowledging the possibility that "the organization of our sexuality comes in an important way from outside" (Frosh, 1997: 35). The inclusion of psychoanalytic concepts in this study begins, in an extremely speculative way, to engage with other work on sexuality and the unconscious in education. The methodological dilemmas of interpreting empirical data such as life histories from a psychoanalytic perspective were far from resolved in this particular study. This is one of the most challenging areas facing life history methodology in the future -- whether to seek interpretations about unconscious desire on the basis of oral accounts.

Admittedly, the political implications of bringing poststructural concerns about silence, absence and othering to bear on life history work remain to be seen. The contribution of complicating understandings about the closet, of exposing lesbian eroticism within gymnasias, of suggesting that homophobia might involve more than rational humanist social processes is impossible to guarantee. In the long run, the political and intellectual efficacy of approaching life history and the study of sexualities from a feminist-poststructural framework will be assessed by the way such issues contribute to academic debate and, most importantly, the meanings individual readers assemble from engaging these histories.

At this stage it is important to once again acknowledge how my theoretical and personal biography shaped this research. As I reflect back on my search for the 'lesbian specter' in the passageways of physical education, I'm aware how my own interests directed this study in so many ways. The process of reading the self through the other certainly applies to me, just as it did to the women I worked with. Henrietta Moore (1993) expressed the outer limits of this self-reading:

*...this is much more than the comprehension of the self by 'detour' through the other', this is the imaginary comprehension of the self, the desire to make sense of the self by assigning value and meaning to experience, the desire to capture a complete self which becomes knowable. (p. 203)*

Yet, the impossibility of such complete knowledge lingers as I mull over my decision to take up Jeanette Winterson's (1993) seductive invitation which began this whole affair:

*'Explore me,' you said, and I collected my ropes, flasks and maps, expecting to be home soon. I dropped into the mass of you and cannot find my way out. Sometimes I think I'm free, coughed up like Jonah from the whale, but then I turn a corner and recognise myself again. (p. 120)*

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## Appendix 1

### Initial Letter of Contact

Dear XXXX,

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting as part of my Ph.D. thesis. My thesis is a historical study of the changes in attitudes towards women and sexuality in physical education during this century, and will be based upon the life histories of female physical educators teaching in British Columbia. Gender is an issue that most of us working in physical education have been concerned about at one time or another, but only recently has the physical education profession begun to talk about sexual orientation as an important aspect of gender equity. This project hopes to explore how ideas about gender and sexuality have changed historically, and the impact these changes have had on the lives of women from different generations who work in the profession.

I wonder if you would be interested in being interviewed about your life history as a physical educator. The interviews would focus on your experiences as a woman teaching physical education alongside your personal views about gender and sexuality. I am seeking to include women who identify themselves as heterosexual, bisexual or lesbian, unmarried and married women, and women who would not use any of these labels to describe themselves. Participation in the study will involve a maximum of three one-hour interviews. Your participation can be anonymous and the content of the interviews will be confidential. Also, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time you wish to do so.

If you are interesting in sharing your life stories with me and are willing to be interviewed, please sign and return one of the attached Consent Forms. I will then contact you to arrange a convenient time and place for an interview.

Hoping to hear from you,

Heather Sykes,  
School of Human Kinetics, UBC

## Appendix 2

### Example of Narrative Analysis

#### Jenny: Travels To/From

Modern discourses of 'coming out' into a lesbian identity have begun to appear, and may be quite recognizable to both lesbian and heterosexual readers. The chronological events in Jenny's life history account may be re-told (Mishler, 1991) from the transcript to provide just such a modern tale. (Equally, a deconstructive queer reading of the gaps, slips, contradictions and boundaries in Jenny's transcript can provide us with a late-modern or less-modern tale.) Jenny's narratives pass through three phases -- adolescent naïveté, initiation, and searching for community.

#### Pre/Adolescent Naïveté

Jenny's earliest recollections of desire included a crush she had on a childhood best friend, who has since married and is quite 'right-wing and uptight'.

*That would have been in probably about grade 8 and this girl who was in my class. We had gotten to be fairly good friends and she stayed over at my house. We sort of got into touching and kissing ... But I know weren't like necking or anything but I remember sort of being thrilled and horrified at the same time.*

Later desire was transferred onto female mentors, remembered as feelings of admiration, collegiality and respect. This transference of desire within a pedagogical relationship may be deemed as love and eroticism; however, such desire is directed as much at the teacher as "the subject presumed to know" (Felman, 1987: 84) as at the adult as a sexual object.

*Miss Morris but I don't know if it was a crush as much as... I know I really liked her a lot but I don't remember having fantasies about sleeping with her or anything but she was a woman, and she was a PE teacher. It was okay to do fun PE stuff with her. So there was probably some of that.*

*And one of my favorite profs ... I wasn't attracted to her, maybe on some level I kind of knew but I loved to talk with her and I loved her course and got really high marks in it and I used to hang with her as much as a student and a prof' can.*

Jenny's memories of becoming lesbian move from self-recognition, initiation, frustration, and searching towards a self-awareness of multiple desires within her existing, committed relationship. Increasing self-awareness, experience, capability flavor Jenny's recollections, serving to assemble her sexual experiences into a productive journey which in turn supports her increasingly secure identity as a lesbian, and a lesbian teacher.

#### Revelation and Initiation

Realizing that she was or could be a lesbian was an epiphany for Jenny. She was literally spoken into existence (Davies, 1992) as a lesbian by 'The Goddess Kelly', an older lesbian colleague/mentor at a summer camp. Allowing Kelly's positioning of her as a lesbian allowed her desires to begin to follow a sexual script which had hitherto been silenced and/or repressed. The floodgates were opened, so to speak. The emphasis on Kelly's revelation in each re-telling of the story serves to cement this incident as a turning-point, as a crucial ingredient in her ability to refuse a heteronormative script, to search for a lesbian script. It tempers intolerable realizations -- how could I have not realized this myself? How could I have failed to read beyond the heteronormative script if no-one taught me how to read between the lines?

*Once my revelation was given to me by the Goddess Kelly (laughs) I don't recall ever feeling I'm awful, this is bad, what am I going to do. But there is this how thing about how am I going to tell people which I didn't really worry about too much. It was actually quite exciting. But what was hard was actually to start feeling comfortable having intimate relations with anybody, because I hadn't gone out with any guys. I wasn't even REMOTELY interested...I mean go figure.....here I am being attracted to women but 'a' not thinking anything was wrong with that or 'b' doing anything about it. You know, I just didn't have a CLUE. I thought you know "Someday someone will come along" (hamming it up)*

Jenny recounted her adult sexual relationships in terms of increasing fulfillment. That summer she remembers being sexually intimate with a woman for the first time while also being unprepared for 'the nuts and bolts' of sex.

*I'd sort of had a little bit with one woman, the woman who'd had this huge crush on me all summer and we went away for the weekend to Martha's vineyard and sort of, you know, were intimate but didn't ... you know... because I just wasn't prepared to do that right away, for whatever reasons.*

Later in the summer she was deliberately and deliciously initiated into some of the mysterious techniques of lesbian sex by her much desired and admired colleague/mentor.

Jenny: *She finally offered to... She was quite happy to sleep with other women and I guess she was attracted to me so that she didn't mind doing it. I was like "Great!" (Laughing) "Okay! When?" So it was all very interesting*

Heather: *Was there up-front talk beforehand?*

Jenny:      *Oh yes. So it "What night?" "Okay but I have to do this first" // So she  
did what she had to do that evening and then we went back to her place  
and you know, did it! (Laughs)*

### The Search for Lesbian Community

After these revelations about her lesbian identity and initiations into lesbian desire, her narratives focus as much on the material realities of finding employment, affordable accommodation and lesbian community as the variable currents of desire in a series of relationships. A year teaching in New Zealand provided a mixture of rapid professional development and frustrating isolation.

*One of the reasons I left and it certainly wasn't the only one was that I just couldn't be  
there in that town knowing that I had ZERO chance of meeting anybody that I'd  
probably want to have a relationship with. And if I did how could you possibly conduct  
one there?*

On returning from New Zealand, Jenny attempted to enter the lesbian community in Ottawa:

*I sort of looked for ways to find the lesbian community. And there's this funny little  
cafe... So I would wander in there and sort of figure out how to meet people. I'm not a  
club person, you know. I can't just go and hang out in a bar.*

Her frustration at the difficulty of locating and accessing a satisfying lesbian community precipitated her exodus to the West Coast. Here her search began afresh -- finding a teaching position, affordable accommodation and the ubiquitous Vancouver lesbian community. The financial sense of sharing accommodation in the city did not

always match her emotional requirements, as Jenny recounted two unsatisfying relationships in which cohabitation seemed to be central to the problems:

*So I moved out here and a few months later I got involved with a woman briefly. It was bad for both of us. And we ended up lasting only for a few months which didn't bother me. I needed a place to live, she had a spare room. But it was never meant to be and it never should have been...*

*[The relationship] wasn't that long, probably about a year. She broke up with me, which I wasn't at all happy about but in hindsight it was great. We were sharing the same room in this house. Like there was NO space... I mean she stayed there until she had done her school year. So here I am a mess for most of February, all of March and most of April with her still around.*

Over a number of years Jenny established a network of lesbian friends within the city and was successful in accessing a lesbian community she felt comfortable with; however, it was not a straightforward or rapid process. She recalls attending feminist events (e.g.. Take Back the Night March) and lesbian and gay sporting events (e.g.. Gay Games and volleyball leagues) without establishing fruitful contacts. Finally, she returned to her preferred individual sports of running and climbing and it was in these contexts that she made the most long-standing and fulfilling network of lesbian friends and lovers. At present, Jenny expresses satisfaction with her chosen lesbian-athletic community in Vancouver.

While she is currently committed to a long-term relationship she acknowledges the boundaries of desire are not always synonymous with the boundaries of monogamous relationships:

*But I think you can have a lot of people in your life that you just love dearly and would love to be really close with... And if you can be with one person and if you can be, say, intimate with more than one person. I mean they're very interesting things to think about... And I think that is the human condition, as far as I'm concerned. That's just me too, you know. And I just try to enjoy it.*