(No)Where to Go: Street-Involved Queer, Lesbian, and Bisexual Young Women and 'Relations of Ruling'

by

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the experiences of five lesbian and/or bisexual young women who are or have been homeless and/or street involved in BC’s Lower Mainland. Following key informant interviews with these young women, I combine an intersectional analysis of gender, ‘race’, class, sexuality, and whiteness with an adapted version of Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography in order to critically interrogate the institutional relations determining their experiences with homes and families; public schools; and social service enclaves.

The young women’s narratives disrupt mainstream, ‘common sense’ notions that position homes and families as sites of unconditional love, support, and safety. In addition, their stories reveal a key disjuncture between so-called family values, and the norms that families value vis-à-vis their queer members. Issues of gender, ‘race’, sexuality, whiteness, and heterosexism inflect the young women’s experiences of home and family. Their stories of becoming homeless expose that the ideologically unified duality of home and family has far more to do with (re)producing heteronormativity and nuclearity than idealized relations of mutuality and stability.

Exploring the young women’s experiences within schools demonstrates that there is a highly coordinated elision of queer genders and sexualities from the discursive and material landscapes of this institution. In addition, overt homophobia and heterosexism within schools remains unchallenged due to the uncritical acceptance and reproduction of heteronormativity. The narratives of these young women expose the persistent entrenchment of an institutionally violent atmosphere for queer youth. Indeed, those interview subjects who approached teachers, counselors, and administrators for help were positioned as problems for the school and its staff.

Similarly, my informants’ discussions of their encounters with youth housing, BC Benefits, police, mental health care, and addictions services demonstrate that that their age, gender, class and sexualities converged with the material conditions of homelessness to constitute multiple barriers in accessing existing services. Their narratives reveal that, not only are there insufficient services available to homeless youth in the Lower Mainland; but also that existing services reproduce gender-, ‘race’-, class-, and sexually-inflected norms and values in carrying out service delivery. These determinants of service provision are further complicated by assumptions regarding who is or is not deserving of social service assistance.
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Chapter 1
~ Introduction ~

The Personal is Sociological – Reflections on Beginnings

Sometimes when people ask me why it is that I pursued a research project with queer, street-involved young women in Vancouver, I talk about some of the alarming statistics about queer youth, or elaborate on gaps in the available academic literature pertaining to these young people. However, this is not the same answer that I give to the people I am close to. To them, I always give the same answer. It goes something like this: Whenever I am out with queer friends – having dinner, debating politics, and generally just enjoying each others’ company - a thought often strikes me. I look around at the five or six or seven people sitting around the table, and I think about those who are missing. I think about the queer men and women who I have never met, who I will never meet. I think about the queers who did not survive their adolescence, who took their lives because they could not stand one more day of verbal or physical abuse at school; one more frosty silence at the dinner table; one more moment of isolation and estrangement from the world around them. Given that 30% of all completed adolescent suicides are committed by queer youth, where

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1 Throughout my thesis, I use the expressions “queer”, “sexual minority”, and “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and / or trans*” interchangeably. Though none of my research subjects self-identified as “sexual minority youth”, this phraseology appears frequently in the literature on queer youth, and is (variously) used to refer to some or all of gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and trans* adolescents. My usage of the term “sexual minority youth” – in addition to queer, etc. – reflects its invocation in literature on queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans* youth. In addition, I deploy the usage “trans*” to refer to both transgender and transsexual persons.

2 According to Cleta Dempsey (1994), “gay and lesbian youth account for 30% of all teen suicides...whereas 1 in 10 heterosexual teens attempts suicide, 2 to 3 of every 10 gay teens attempt suicide” (1994: 164). She notes that this figure of 30% has been known since (at least) the 1989 U.S. Public Health Service’s Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide (ibid). Interestingly, according to Ritch C. Savin-Williams, this report on youth suicide touched off a controversy in the (first) Bush administration (1994: 266). He goes on to state that the Bush administration quickly “repudiated” the report “in response to conservative and religious opposition” (ibid). Williams’ research cites even earlier studies that show shocking suicide rates among queer youth – in particular, Remafedi’s 1987a study, and the 1982 National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (ibid).

3 In British Columbia, the Child, Family and Community Services Act defines a child as “a person under 19 years of age and includes a youth” (emphasis added; as cited in Frail and Ross, 2001: 1). However, youth service organizations in the Lower Mainland define youth as ranging from 12-35, depending on the agency,
there are six or seven of us around that dinner table, there really ought to have been nine or ten. I will never know what those individuals would have brought into my life. No one will. And I resent their absence. It's wrong, and it makes me very sad, and very, very angry.

I do not know why I survived my adolescence as a young gay woman, when so many do not. If asked what it was that got me through years of verbal assault, bullying, fights, silences, shouting, self-hatred and loathing, alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts, and self-destructive behaviours, I really cannot give any thoughtful answer. Perhaps my fear of being dead was greater than my fear of being alive. I just don’t know. And between the ages of about twenty-one and twenty-six, I seldom thought about it. But while conducting research for a class assignment in 1999, I was halted in my tracks upon finding suicide statistics that are attributed to queer youth. Similarly, figures which related incidence of violent physical attacks at school, in public, or at home\(^4\) demonstrated that I certainly was not alone in experiencing premeditated beatings as a queer youth and young adult. And like 77% of the youth in one study (Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, et al., as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265), I attempted to cope with these difficulties by abusing alcohol myself - literally, at times, trying to drink myself to death. Yet my story is hardly unique. Given that the above figures are well known, why are sexual minority youth still exhibiting such dangerous risk profiles?

My education as a feminist, anti-racist social scientist led me to ask: Where were my high-school counselors, teachers, and coaches? And in lieu of the dilemmas I perceived growing up as a gay, middle class, white female, what, then, are the experiences of queer

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\(^4\) The rates of violence for queer youth are as high as 46% in one study (Rosario, Rotheram-Borus, & Reid as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 262).
youth from different locations - particularly in view of the fact that many of them will come into contact with numerous institutional structures as a result of the conditions forced upon them by systemic oppressions? How are risk profiles compounded by the realities of gender, racism, genocide, economic status, gender identity, prostitution, and homelessness, in addition to the heterosexism and homophobia encountered by all queer youth?

Backgrounds: History, Policy, and Politics

The reflections above detail the beginnings of my research with queer, street-involved young women in Vancouver. However, prior to exploring a more detailed rationale for this project, it is first necessary to outline the social historical context of my project. Canadian social scientists Becki Ross (1997; 1998), Gary Kinsmen (1987; 2000), Mary Louise Adams (1997); as well as American historians Leslie Feinberg (1993), Joan Nestle (1992), and Liz Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1993) have documented the travails of queer and (often) working class youth in the pre-Stonewall era. In particular, Ross' studies demonstrate conclusively that homelessness, alcohol and substance use, street-violence, sex work, and homophobic barriers to service provision were typical among poor and working class lesbians in Toronto in the post-war era (Ross, 1997; 1998). Indeed, the criminalization and medicalization of homosexuality throughout the first three-quarters of the 20th century (Kinsman, 2000; 1987; Ross, 1997: 565) – and beyond – informs the punishing social

5 In Chapter 3, I address – at some length – other issues pertaining to my positionality as a white, middle-class, feminist researcher, as well as some of the methodological intricacies of doing research with young queer women as a queer woman. Also, I explore areas where I did and did not share experiences with my informants, and what sense I have made of these similarities and differences.

6 Though homosexuality itself is no longer officially considered a mental illness or a criminal predisposition (Ross, 1997: 565) in North America, the persistent treatment of homosexuality as criminal may be observed in the ongoing state-sanctioned harassment of gay men in parks and bathhouses in major cities across Canada; legal restrictions vis-a-vis the age of consent for anal intercourse that are older than those for vaginal intercourse; sodomy laws that still exist in many U.S. states; American legislation prohibiting same sex marriage in the U.S.; and, in particular, the state organized – yet patently illegal – censorship of gay and lesbian bookstores such as Little Sisters in Vancouver.
conditions that constitute an everyday world in which queer youth are over-represented for homelessness and street-involvement in Vancouver in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. ⁷

In Vancouver, however, these social historical factors are further compounded by the existing provincial policy and political climate. ⁸ Indeed, according to Status of Women Canada (2002), youth in BC who are “under 16 are ineligible for income assistance. Their only choices are to live with their parents or enter care” (2002: 79). The authors continue, “youth between 16 and 19 are eligible for income assistance (BC Benefits) in certain circumstances – first and foremost if their parents inform the child welfare authorities that they are not welcome at home or if there are child protection issues” (ibid). And, perhaps most significantly, this report foregrounds the fact that,

The allocation of benefits has shifted to a focus on eligibility rather than need, and eligibility is linked to participation in job training or job searches. Youth with developmental delays or other challenges, such as mental illness, addictions or abusive backgrounds, often have difficulty successfully participating in job training or job-search activities. As a result, they are not eligible for assistance (emphasis added; ibid).

A City of Vancouver Development Permit Board report (2003) highlights the impact of such policy changes on youth in Vancouver:

Social Planning staff believe that some [provincial] policy changes are having negative effects on youth. The Province is now taking very few youth over 15

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⁷ Indeed, I suspect that the post-Stonewall, queer liberation movements in North America inform the development of research agendas that have generated subsequent studies – beginning in the 1980’s – of sexual minority youth as such, and the risks, dangers, and trials of growing up gay in a heterosexist culture. Indeed, of the body of research I review below, the earliest examples emerge around the same time that Women’s Studies, critical sexuality studies, and other academic (ostensibly) liberatory streams begin to solidify in North America. It is very likely not a coincidence that such academic (and projects) – which fundamentally problematize relations of social inequality – begin to emerge in some numbers following 60’s social movements such as that which emerged from the Stonewall riots in the summer of 1969.

⁸ Indeed, while Vancouver’s mild climate and thriving queer communities render it a desirable destination for queer youth who are homeless and street-involved – hence making Vancouver an excellent site for research with this subject population – the policy climate in British Columbia is particularly punishing for youth who are homeless or street-involved. Though I only briefly deal with the political changes (and subsequent alterations to BC benefits, etc.) as they affect the queer young women in my study, a more textured and thorough treatment of the impact of the BC Liberal government’s service cuts should certainly be a part of future research in this area.
years of age into care (where they would be fed, clothed and housed). At the same time, while the number of youth under 19 who are on Income Assistance has decreased (1408 in December 2000; 609 in December 2002), the number of youth on the street has increased. The agencies who work with street youth think that barriers to accessing IA - such as the 3 week waiting period and the stipulation that youth must be independent for 2 years before applying - have discouraged youth from applying for IA. The result is many youth have no income, access to employment, or home.\(^9\)

Indeed, the situation has deteriorated to the point where stories about government cutbacks to social services have become an almost daily occurrence in Vancouver newspapers. For example, Daphne Bramham writes about the disappearance of “Vancouver’s only safe house for children 15 and younger” (2004: C7). She goes on to assert that,

One of the biggest changes is that the ministry is trying to keep more kids aged 16 to 18 out of government care. Instead of paying for foster homes or group homes, the ministry is getting these kids to sign contracts, then handing them over money for rent and food and setting them loose (ibid).

Pivotaly, these changes seem to be having a disproportionately negative impact on young women who are homeless and / or street-involved. A 1998 report from the City of Vancouver Child and Youth Advocate states that, “young women are particularly vulnerable and have fewer emergency shelter options than young men” (City of Vancouver Child and Youth Advocate, 1998: 7).\(^{10}\) If, in addition to this information, we consider the City of Vancouver’s

\(^9\) See http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/planning/dpboard/2003/1210seymour.htm.\(^{10}\) Clearly, there is a drastic disparity between the content of municipal and provincial reports that acknowledge the desperate needs of queer homeless youth – and of youth in general – and the realities of the provincial Liberal government’s ruthless and flagitious cuts to social services. Indeed, if we relied only upon text-based knowledges of this subject population, we might get an (incorrect) impression that the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia well serve this population because they have generated reports acknowledging their alarming risk profiles. Given the incompatibility of these reports and the practices of the BC government, it is crucial to perform interview-based research to determine what, precisely, experiences with social services looks like. Indeed, from this perspective, the existence of provincial and municipal government papers that reflect the dire conditions confronting of queer youth who are street-involved may be seen as an indictment of these levels of government. For, as the literature reviewed above clearly demonstrates, it is not as though provincial and municipal governments in BC can be “unaware” of the problems faced by these youth. Rather, ongoing and increasingly ill-conceived reductions to social services in BC continue in spite of this knowledge.
admission that queer youth and Aboriginal youth are “the most at risk of all youth populations” (City of Vancouver Park Board, 1998: 2), it becomes apparent that there is an alarming potential for these various factors – social historical, legal, political, policy, etc. – to converge in the lives of queer young women.

Empirical Rationale(s): Risk Profiles of Queer Youth

For more than a decade, alarming statistics have been published which highlight the risk profiles exhibited by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth.\footnote{With the exception of the (1989) Winnipeg study; the McCreary Centre Society (1999) Vancouver survey; and Carol Anne O’Brien’s (1994) report on group homes and shelter in Toronto, all other data cited in the introduction is American. Indeed, the alarming dearth of Canadian research on queer youth is a gap in the literature that I endeavour to address with this project. Moreover, other than these 3 exceptions, all of this research has been conducted in large American cities, due to the fact that queer youth – and adults – tend to migrate to larger urban centres in order to find queer communities (Lerat, 2004: 5). The closest data I have found to a ‘rural’ study is the AIDS Prince George (2001) study - “Why do we even have to do this? Why can’t we be treated the same?” Report on the Results of a focus group with Gay Youth in Prince George, BC – which demonstrates that queer youth in BC’s northern interior face identical family, school, and social service issues as youth in the Lower Mainland (AIDS Prince George, 2001). This is further substantiated by one of my research subjects, Kay, who grew up in Prince George prior to being homeless in Vancouver. The population of Prince George, BC, hovers around 80 000 (http://www.city.pg.bc.ca/) - thus, is does not qualify as a rural setting. However, Prince George – as BC’s “Northern Capital” (ibid) - does attract individuals to migrate (or visit) from even smaller feeder communities in the surrounding area. Other than the AIDS Prince George survey, I have been unable to find research on queer youth in rural areas – clearly, this represents an area for future research, as it is reasonable to suspect that the lack of established queer communities, services, and events in rural areas compound the difficulties involved in growing up queer. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that, in future research with queer youth, soliciting interviews with individuals who have migrated to Vancouver – BC’s largest urban setting – could provide very fertile ground for a discussion comparing and contrasting the experiences of rurally situated queers, and those born and raised in urban settings.} Studies such as those conducted by P. Gibson (1989) and Remafedi, et al. (1991) have suggested that suicides amongst sexual minority youth “may be found to constitute 30% of all adolescent suicides” (Gibson and Remafedi cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 266). Specifically, of the 137 gay and bisexual males (ages 14 to 21) he studied, “one third had at least one intentional self-destructive act; one half had multiple attempts” (Remafedi cited in Savin-Williams, 1994: 266). Of these, 21% required subsequent hospitalization; 54% made the attempt in what was determined to be a moderate to high risk fashion; and 62% made the attempt in a
location that was determined to be moderate to least rescuable (ibid). Far from existing on the fringes of such research, these figures are supported by comparable data compiled in subsequent studies. In the 1992, Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, et al. study, 139 youth, ages 14 to 19 years were interviewed (Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, et al. as cited by Savin-Williams: 266). Of these, “39% had attempted suicide; 52% made multiple attempts... [and] nearly 60% reported suicidal ideation during the week before data collection” (ibid). Similarly, the Fikar (1994) project supports previous findings of sexual minority youth suicide rates comprising 30% of completed suicides annually (Fikar cited by Dempsey, 1994: 164). Canadian figures support this data: of 45 young gay males and lesbians interviewed in a 1989 Winnipeg study, “one-third had attempted suicide and two-thirds had suicidal feelings, largely related to their sexual orientation” (Prairie Research Associates as cited by O’Brien and Weir, 1995: 120). Similarly, the McCreary Centre Society (1999) report, Being Out: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth In BC, reports that 46% of their 77 respondents reported at least one suicide attempt (1999:28). Finally, Gil Lerat’s report for Urban Native Youth Association found that 34% of two-spirit youth felt they were “more likely to attempt suicide” than heterosexual Aboriginal youth (2004: 17).

Unfortunately, suicide is not the only “risk” associated with sexual minority youth. In Los Angeles, for example, the L.A. County Task Force on Runaway and Homeless Youth

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12 By comparison, Cleta Dempsey cites data that suggests that only 1 in 10 heterosexual youth attempts suicide (1994: 164). The data available to us makes it very difficult to get an accurate picture of how populations of white queer youth compare to youth of colour and Aboriginal youth. As Brian O’Neill notes, “there is little Canadian literature on gay and lesbian issues in relation to ethnocultural minorities in general, and First Nations peoples, in particular” (1999: 76). Of the literature that is available – for example, Lerat’s (2004) study on two-spirit youth – we must compare data sets from studies that pose different types of questions to respondents. Lerat’s study asked, “are you more likely to attempt suicide” (2004: 17) than heterosexual Aboriginal youth, whereas the McCreary Centre asked about suicide attempts, specifically. As a result, our knowledge about queer youth of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds is very incomplete, and highlights additional areas for future research. As I discuss in Chapter 3, in my own project, I went into the field with the
(1988) report found that 25-35% of homeless youth are gay (Kruks, 1991: 516). Similarly, the Seattle Commission on Children and Youth published 1988 figures stating that 40% of street youth are queer (ibid). Indeed, as Gabe Kruks observes, "Kinsey reports suggest approximately 10% of the population is gay...these estimates, if accurate, clearly indicate an extreme over-representation of gays in the street youth populations" (ibid). Similarly, lesbian, gay and bisexual youth have been found to demonstrate extreme risk for substance use. In G. Remafedi's 1987(a) study, "nearly 60% [of subjects] were abusing substances and met psychiatric criteria for substance abuse. Seventeen percent had been in a chemical dependency treatment program (Remafedi as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265). And, it should be noted, this empirical evidence correlates with data regarding "ethnic-minority lesbian, gay male, and bisexual youth who had a drug or alcohol problem in New York City” (Rosario, Hunter, et al. 1992; Rotheram-Borus et al. 1991; and Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, et al. 1992 as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265). Specifically, the 1992 Rotheram-Borus, Rosario et al. study showed that, “in a sample of 20 lesbians, mean age of 19 years, all had consumed alcohol and three quarters had used drugs, including 28% who reported cocaine or crack, and 15% took hallucinogens during their lifetime” (ibid). The same study demonstrated that, of 136 gay and bisexual male youths, “77% drank alcohol, 42% smoked marijuana, 25% used cocaine or crack, and 15% took hallucinogens during their lifetimes” (ibid). As with the over-representation among queer youth in regards to suicide rates and homelessness, the authors of this study noted that, “substance use was considerably higher for their sample than among national surveys” done on youth who did not specify their sexual orientations (ibid). The net result was that “lifetime prevalence

intention of locating young Aboriginal women or women of colour for my project in order to begin exploring such gaps in the existing research on queer youth.
rates for gay youths are 50% higher for alcohol, three times higher for marijuana, and eight times higher for cocaine/crack” (ibid).¹³

Two other areas require iteration. Research indicates that the vast majority of adolescent male prostitutes are gay or bisexual (Coleman, 1989: 132). Evidently, “many of these boys begin prostitution in their early teenage years. They drop out of school, use drugs and alcohol, and run away from home or are thrown out by the family because of their sexual orientation” (Coleman as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265). A Minneapolis study demonstrated that 75% of male street hustler youths are gay, “with a history of dropping out of school, substance abuse, homelessness, and running away from home...In desperate need of money, they feel that they have no choice except to mug others or prostitute themselves” (Frieberg as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265). Though there is little data on young lesbian prostitution, the 1992 study conducted by Rotheram-Borus, Rosario et al. found that 5 out of 20 Hispanic and Black New York City lesbian adolescents had exchanged sex for drugs or money” (as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265). Notably, it is suggested that, “the rate of prostitution among other samples of lesbian adolescents is unknown” (emphasis added, ibid). Lastly - as in the areas listed above - sexual minority youth are again over-represented among their heterosexual peers for HIV infection: “gay and bisexual young men...constituted 64% of AIDS cases reported between July 1993 and June 1994 among those below the age of 25” (CDC as cited by Sullivan, 1996: 59).¹⁴

¹³ The McCreary Centre Society (1999) report also suggests that queer youth in Vancouver demonstrate much higher rates of substance use than non-sexually identified youth from a general survey. Specifically, 75% of queer youth reported marijuana use, as opposed to 41% of a general population of grade 12 students (1999: 32). Also, 25% of queer youth surveyed had tried cocaine, versus 8% of grade 12 students (ibid), while “over half of LGBT youth have used other illegal drugs, compared to about a quarter of grade 12 students” (ibid).

¹⁴ As is evident from these figures vis-à-vis risk for HIV transmission, studies refer to young men almost exclusively. This is because the existing literature on queer youth links prostitution - as a male activity - with HIV infection. While the data on young queer women’s participation in sex work is minimal (Savin-Williams, 1994: 265), this gendering of queer prostitution as an exclusively male activity is extremely problematic.
Obviously, the risk factors experienced by queer youth — street-involvement, suicide rates, substance use, prostitution, and risk for contraction of HIV — do not occur in isolation from one another. T.R. Sullivan's (1996) interview-based study with male sex workers in Hollywood, CA demonstrates this convincingly. Of 60 young men, aged 13 to 29 (M 17), 90% were gay or bisexual, and 33% reported they were engaged in prostitution\(^\text{15}\) (Sullivan, 1996: 62). In addition, only 25% were in school when interviewed; 16% lived with family or relatives; 19% lived with friends; 21% lived in a group home or foster home; and the remaining 44% had “no fixed address and no reliable shelter” (ibid). Moreover, “thirty percent of the 60 youths had been living independent of their families for more than one year” (ibid), and “46% had been separated from their families for less than a year” (ibid).

In regards to substance use, 57% of Sullivan’s subjects reported drug use, and 62% of these reported daily use (ibid). Sixty-eight percent reported alcohol use (ibid). With regard to sexual practices: “60%...reported that they had practiced oral sex without a condom, and 34% of the youths acknowledged that they did so at least once a week” (ibid); 53% stated that they had engaged in anal or vaginal intercourse without a condom, and 46% of these indicated that they did so at least once a week (ibid); and 29% reported “unprotected anal or vaginal intercourse five or six times per week” (ibid). Perhaps even more alarmingly, 67% of the research subjects reported that they had engaged in intercourse with multiple partners.

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According to my preliminary interviews with youth service providers, this supposition is based on a conceptualization of sex work that assumes young lesbian and bisexual women would not engage in a line of work with almost exclusively male customers. In addition, the informal exchange of sexual services for cash, shelter, drugs, etc. with men that two of my respondents report does not seem to fit researchers’ assumptions vis-a-vis prostitution as an exclusively queer male risk factor. In short, few researchers have gone beyond such assumptions to ask the question, "Do young queer women who are street-involved participate in sex work, and if so, what impact does this have on their risk for HIV infection?". I trouble such difficulties in the available literature further in Chapter 4 in the section Not the Hallmark Version: Stories of the Home as well as in Chapter 5 in the section that deals with my informants’ experiences with social services.
during the previous month - "the estimated average number of partners during that period was 18" (ibid). Sullivan comments, "Despite their apparent risk, 63% of the participants had not been tested for HIV infection" (ibid). As is clearly evident here, sexual minority status, substance use, homelessness, prostitution, and increased risk for HIV often exist simultaneously.

Thus, as Sullivan's study indicates, there is a disconcerting convergence of risk factors in the profiles of sexual minority youth. Yet perhaps even more alarming than this is the frequency with which youth in all of the above studies are coming into contact with legal, health, social welfare, and educational structures - apparently to no avail. In one study, activities such as substance use, prostitution, truancy, and running away put 25-50% of the research subjects in contact with the police (Remafedi, 1987; Rotheram-Borus et al., as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 264-5). At school, many "gay and lesbian youth are isolated, silenced, and harassed...leading some to drop out" (O'Brien and Weir, 1995: 121). O'Brien and Weir also found that "some gay and lesbian youth are placed in group homes or treatment centers when their families discover their sexual orientation" (ibid). Far from encountering support or assistance in these social welfare institutions, many of these youth experience physical and verbal harassment, are forced to remain silent about their sexual identities, or are rejected outright for residency at certain homes because of their sexual orientations (O'Brien, 1994: 38). In her groundbreaking study on lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in group homes and shelters, Carol-Anne O'Brien examines "how youth services are implicated in the social organization of sexuality and, in particular, the dominance of heterosexuality" (O'Brien, 1994: 37). She argues that "professional discourses of

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15 Sullivan notes that, "responses to some of the questions about sexual behaviors and their number of partners in a typical week indicated that this figure underestimated the number actually involved in the exchange of sex
homosexuality and lesbianism as 'pathological' or 'deviant' have reinforced grave inequalities in the treatment of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth by group homes and youth shelters" (ibid).

Indeed, the above empirical data represents well over a decade of research into the lives of sexual minority youth. It is not new information. Clearly, the persistent nature of these statistics regarding the lives of sexual minority youth entreats critical scrutiny. More recent research demonstrates how the daily existence of many sexual minority youth continues to reflect disproportionate risk for suicide, substance use, dropping out of school, prostitution, violence, etc. (AIDS Prince George, 2001; Mallon, 2001; Schneider and Witherspoon, 2000; McCreary Centre Society, 1999; O’Neill, 1999; Travers and Paoletti, 1999). Why do these youth – who must nearly always have families somewhere – end up on the street in the first place? And in view of the fact that many street-involved, sexual minority youth will come into contact with police, social workers, counselors, court workers, nurses, doctors, etc., why are they still exhibiting such dangerous risk profiles? Indeed, in Gerald Mallon’s 2001 study, sexual minority youth in child welfare settings experience daily verbal abuse (98%); beatings (52%); and rape (7.4%) ⁶ by peers and staff within group homes, shelters, and foster homes. Worse still, respondents who reported sexual assaults were all attacked by staff members in these “care” settings. For most of the subjects interviewed in his study, these so-called structural interventions forced sexual minority youth to run away to the streets for safety.

*More than Queer - Developing a Research aGender*

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⁶ Given the chronic under-reporting of sexual assault – it is estimated that only 6% of assaults are reported to police (Statistics Canada, 1993) - it is likely this is only a fraction of those who experienced sexual assault in out of home care settings.*
While the research-based literature on queer youth constitutes a textured depiction of their risk profiles as sexual minority youth, it also exhibits a number of limitations. It is noteworthy that much of the literature cited above is quantitative in nature. Thus, while we know how many homeless youth in urban areas are queer, we know less about how and why they entered the homeless populations of these locales in the first place. In addition, existing literature on sexual minority youth exhibits a distressing lack of analysis into the differences between the experiences of young men versus young women. We know very little about how gender differences affect the lived realities of queer youth, unless we are content to assume that gender is no more than a statistical variable – for this is almost always how gender is treated in (particularly) quantitative literature. In addition, literature(s) regarding queer youth are equally inadequate in confronting how ‘race’, ethnicity, and whiteness influence the material realities of queer youth.

17 Indeed, while quantitative social science fails to ask why gender is important – and what impact it has on lived experiences – I should also note that most of the interview based literature I have consulted similarly treats gender as a variable, rather than a primary axis of experience and sociological analysis.

18 Here, and throughout this investigation, I place the term ‘race’ in scare quotes for several reasons. First, I am signaling that the term is contentious and problematic because it is (and has been) deployed to referent supposedly naturalized biological differences between different groups of peoples. Indeed, “Recent findings of the Human Genome Project conclude that 99.9 percent of our basic genetic material is the same for all of us, regardless of so-called ‘race’ differences” (2004: http://www.eraseracismny.org/institutional_racism/race_not_scientific.php). In addition, as a sociologist, I am aware that ‘race’ is a socially and historically constructed concept (Frankenberg, 1993: 6; 11; 119) that has been deployed to justify horrific practices – including the colonization of 3/4 of the world’s peoples (Ashcroft et al, 1989: 1). Moreover, I do not mean to suggest, here, that because ‘race’ is a social and historical construct, that it is not somehow real. The mobilization of ‘race’ into racist, colonialist, and genocidal practices is ample proof that ‘race’ has material consequences for peoples who are marginalized by the acceptance of supposed racial differences. In short, ‘race’ as it has been invoked historically, is about power: taking it, keeping it, and keeping it out of the hands of those who do not possess it. Indeed, Ruth Frankenberg concurs, suggesting that, “Race...is ‘real’ in the sense that it has real, though changing, effects in the world and real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals’ sense of self, experiences, and life chances. In asserting that race and racial differences are socially constructed, I do not minimize their social and political reality, but rather insist that their reality is, precisely, social and political rather than inherent or static” (1993: 11).

19 By foregrounding the term whiteness here and throughout my investigation, I am pointing to the fact that, although it has socially and historically been an unmarked, normative subject position, “whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege” (Frankenberg, 1993: 1). Indeed, “white people are raced just as men are gendered...in a social context where white people have too often viewed themselves as nonracial or racially neutral” (ibid). Most importantly, “Naming whiteness displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed, status that is itself and effect of dominance” (ibid: 6). And while “whiteness refers to a set of locations that are
In order to begin probing these significant gaps in the literature on queer youth, I set out to design a feminist, anti-racist institutional ethnographic research project with street-involved, female, sexual minority youth in Vancouver that broadly addresses the dual considerations of equity and access. In my preliminary interviews with front-line, youth service providers in the Greater Vancouver area, it was suggested to me that it may take multiple attempts for a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender young woman to find a sympathetic or helpful staff-person amongst the ostensibly youth-specific services in the Greater Vancouver area. In particular, interviewed service providers have confirmed that a young lesbian or bisexual woman's sexual orientation may increase her risks in out-of-home care settings such as group homes and shelters. This information engendered my interest in the implications of access in terms of the available services for lesbian and bisexual young women who are at risk in Vancouver. In conjunction with what I was finding in the literature on queer youth (O'Brien 1994; Mallon, 1992), I hypothesized that, where services are available, sexual orientation may represent a barrier for street-involved, sexual minority young women attempting to access services that are ostensibly geared towards youth at risk.

Similarly, age represents a significant area of difficulty in attempting to access social services, particularly if the young woman is under the age of 19, and not already in the care of the BC Ministry of Children and Families (Status of Women Canada, 2002: 79). Without parental consent or social service intervention - in the form of apprehension - a young woman cannot be admitted to a group home, or foster-care setting (ibid). Social service policies that historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced (ibid), these are “intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” (ibid). In taking up this analytic position, I endeavour to engage with how whiteness - as well as ‘race’ – impacts upon the lives of street-involved queer young women.

20 The phrase “at risk” refers to a battery of risk factors such as suicide, substance use, violence, dropping out of school, family problems, etc. It is also often used to referent risk for homelessness and street-involvement. In turn, street-involvement is deployed to refer to street-level activities such as drug and sex-trades. The phrase
do not recognize sexual orientation as a risk factor for this young woman may severely curtail her ability to justify her desire to leave either the parental home or an out-of-home care setting. This situation is further compounded by a young woman’s gender. For example, in discussions with service providers, it was indicated that youth-specific shelters, group homes, treatment centres, and low-income housing are co-ed. Hence, young women seeking shelter or treatment must be housed in the same facility as young men. As Mallon’s (2001) research demonstrates, the danger of rape in these settings is very real. Clearly, this represents a barrier for young women seeking shelter or treatment due to feelings of lack of safety. In addition, queer young Aboriginal women or young women of colour may be confronted with additional difficulties due to systemic racism and / or ethnocentrism.

Because much of the literature on queer, street-involved youth does not acknowledge these additional dilemmas – or minimizes the potential effects thereof – I investigate such considerations in order to acquire a fuller understanding of the issues confronting queer, homeless and / or street-involved young women in Vancouver. To facilitate this endeavour, I focused my investigation to address the following research questions: How do queer young women interpret their experiences of being street involved, and of coming in contact with numerous social service and welfare agencies, police, health care professionals, etc.? What strategies are employed by these young women to negotiate the circumstances of their everyday lives? Are these youth encountering barriers to accessing services and support on the basis of their gender, ‘race’, sexual orientation, and / or age? For the young women in my study who are white, what role has whiteness played in their experiences of being queer and street-involved? Are there additional barriers for sexual minority Aboriginal youth and youth

“at risk” is also used in Canadian federal studies interchangeably with the expression “out-of-the-mainstream youth”.
of colour arising from issues of race and/or ethnicity? And, most broadly, what are the implications of such obstacles for issues of equity and access to social services for this population?

To explore these questions, I conducted five key informant interviews with ‘queer’ young women, 19-29 years of age, who are or have been homeless or ‘street-involved’, and who are currently living in the Greater Vancouver area.\(^{21}\) I elected to use the framework of Dorothy Smith’s “sociology of women” (1987: 49) to generate a ‘pilot’ study of this subject population.\(^{22}\) Given the conspicuous absence of young women’s voices in literature on queer youth at risk, the testimonies of the young women in my research comprise the “point of entry” (ibid: 157) into understanding how both the relations and apparatus of ruling affects their lives as queer, street-involved young women. In order to interpret my interviews, I situate them through the framework of Smith’s explication of the interactions between these elements of ruling apparatus:

I am using the terms ‘institutional’ and ‘institution’ to identify a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus, organized around a distinctive function – education, health care, law, and the like...state agencies are tied in with professional forms of organization, and both are interpenetrated by relations of discourse of more than one order...Integral to the coordinating process are ideologies systematically developed to provide categories and concepts expressing the relation of local courses of action to the institutional function (ibid: 160).

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\(^{21}\) Four of the young women identified as ‘white’- one of whom identifies as such, though she told me that family members have informed her that she has some Aboriginal heritage. The fifth young women in my study identifies as an Aboriginal women of Cree, Irish, and gypsy ancestry. The interviews were conducted over the period March 14, 2004, to April 8, 2004.

\(^{22}\) In chapter 3, I discuss the adaptability of Smith’s method for a smaller scale research project, and elaborate on my reasons for doing a small scale project for my thesis research.
Indeed, Smith’s method is incredibly well-suited for my research, as the interviews generated a richly dense nexus of ideological, discursive, institutional, as well as experiential data.

In order to contextualize the interviews, I conduct a lengthy review of literatures relating to queer homeless and / or street-involved young women in Chapter 2. First, I situate my project within the broader framework of feminist and anti-racist Canadian social science. Then, I review literatures that expose some of the discursive and ideological factors informing social and historical constructions of youth and street youth. Because there are no other studies that focus on the subject population in my study, I survey literatures on youth, youth-at-risk, homelessness, youth and substance use, sexual exploitation of youth, and queer youth in general. For the sake of clarity, I separate this portion of the literature into governmental and academic knowledges. Finally, in reviewing literatures that are specifically focused on queer youth, I highlight five studies, in particular, that have influenced and shaped my research questions, focus, and original contributions to knowledge. I then review academic literature on queer youth along the lines of literature that speaks more broadly to the risk profiles exhibited by queer youth; social work and health-related information on queer youth; and finally, texts on queer youth in educational settings.

In chapter 3, I outline the theoretical and methodological aspects of my research, as well as some of the methodological issues that arose during my interviews. First, I outline the influence of post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Pierre Bourdieu on my ways of thinking about and analyzing power, knowledge, and discourse. I move then to elaborate upon the influences of feminist and anti-racist knowledge producers

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23 In chapter 3, I elaborate more fully on my reasons for choosing Smith’s methodology as the framework for my project.
whose deliberations have underscored every phase of this project. In particular, I focus on the development of gender as a central axis for critical analysis; as well as the genesis and significance of intersectionality - vis-a-vis gender, ‘race’, sexuality, class, whiteness, etc. - as a lens for analyzing everyday worlds. I segue from here into feminist and anti-racist methodological contributions to knowledge, and highlight the method embodied in Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography. Finally, I address issues of knowledge production, power, and rapport as they manifest in the research process.

In chapter 4 - *Becoming Street Involved: Experiences of Home and Family* - I analyze the five key informant interviews I conducted as the focus of this project, and elaborate on how issues of gender, ‘race’, sexuality, whiteness, and heterosexism inflect the young women’s experiences of home and family. Taking up Dorothy Smith’s suggestion that social institutions - such as the family - form a part of the ruling apparatus, and are organized around a distinctive function (1987: 160), I position mainstream ideologies that represent homes and families as sites of safety, stability, unconditional love, and cooperative relations against the lived experiences of the young women in my project. In brief, I ask: What does home mean to the young women in my research? What are their experiences with the institution of the family? And, pivotally, what can this tell us about the norms that families value vis-a-vis their queer daughters and family members? What emerges from this juxtapositioning of discourse versus experience is a compelling “line of fault” (Smith, 1987: 49) that challenges common sense notions positioning queers as a danger or a threat to normative, heteronuclear families. Specifically, I discuss how this homophobic logic resides at the heart of discourses that depict (white, middle class) heteronuclear family formations as ideal, superior, and above all, *natural*. In this fashion, I discuss the ways in which five young women’s testimonies reveal
how the values and norms that are socially reproduced via the institution of the family have more to do with heteronormativity, class relations, and gender inequality than unconditional love and safety.

In chapter 5 - *Socially Serv(ic)ing Ruling Relations: Public Schools, Social Service Institutions, and Queer Young Women* – I extend my exploration of social institutions to interrogate how relations of ruling emerge in the context of queer young women’s experiences with public schooling and social service enclaves such as mental / health, social work, law enforcement, addictions services, and youth-specific services. Public schools are implicated as institutional sites for the social reproduction of heteronormativity and heterofemininity – indeed, four of the five young women in my study report deeply disturbing experiences with homophobia and heterosexism in schools. Moreover, none of the narrators could recall ever witnessing a teacher, school counselor, administrator or staff person confront issues of homophobia and heterosexism in their schools. With regard to their experiences with homelessness, street-involvement, and social service provision, my informants’ narratives unanimously and unequivocally demonstrate that being young, female and queer increased their sense / experience of vulnerability, and detrimentally affected their ability to access various social services. Despite the small scale of my research, the testimonies of these five young women have much to tell us about the institutional discourses and practices of both governmental and non-governmental social services available to street-involved, queer young women in the Lower Mainland.

Finally, in chapter 6 – *Reflections on the Research Process: Limitations, Recommendations, and Areas for Future Research* – I address the issue of resistance, and the ways in which it manifested in the narratives of my informants. I then move into a
discussion of the nature and scope of my findings; the limitations of my research; as well areas for future interview-based projects with queer street-involved young women and men in Vancouver. I offer suggestions vis-à-vis ways of reaching youth who are homeless or street-involved in order to perform larger scale research projects. Finally, I discuss recommendations arising from this project in regards to service provision, policies, and training among social workers, educators, mental health professionals, queer youth services, addiction services, etc. I make these recommendations in the hope that this patently politically interested project might represent one more resource to be deployed by queer youth service agencies and other advocates for this subject population in their ongoing struggles to not only improve, but save the lives of young queers.
Chapter 2
Critical Review of the Literature - Discursive, Governmental, & Academic Knowledges of Queer Youth

*Looking for Queer / Young / Women in Knowledges of Youth (at risk)*

There are three broad areas of academic literature that have assisted me in formulating my research questions. Cumulatively, these (overlapping) streams of research constitute a complex and multifaceted battery of knowledges that comprise the scholarly context of my research with queer, street-involved young women. First, I briefly acknowledge a body of inspiring, critical literature on social and historical constructions of gender and sexualities in Canada, and move on to discuss how this work broadly frames my interest in social and discursive constructions of youth in general, and queer female street youth in particular. Though much of this background literature has little or nothing to say about queer female street youth specifically, it is nonetheless significant in acquiring a textured understanding of certain ideologies and discourses underlying the other two substantive areas of the literature review. These are: Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal documents regarding homelessness, youth and / or youth-at-risk, and academic literature specifically about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans* youth.

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24 The two noteworthy exceptions to this statement are Ross’ 1997 and 1998 articles on Toronto’s Street Haven — in particular, the ways in which staff, volunteers, and administrators engaged in a variety of activities to rehabilitate and reform butch and femme Haven clients into respectable, heterofeminine women.

25 There is an abundance of literature on homelessness in Canada. For purposes of synthesis, I have selected particularly relevant documents on homelessness, rather than attempting to survey all of the literature on homelessness as well as literature on queer youth, street youth, etc. For a more comprehensive list of sources on homelessness, the CMHC Bibliography on Homelessness (1998), provides an excellent resource. In addition, the CMHC website annually compiles and updates current housing research on their website at [http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/Library/cuhore/cuhore_001.cfm](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/Library/cuhore/cuhore_001.cfm). These compilations are available in PDF form on these web pages.
The Everyday Construction of (Street) Youth as Problematic: Youth, Discourse, & Practice

This project is inspired by a growing body of social science literature that has drawn my attention to the highly contested terrain of gender and sexualities within Canadian social history. Gary Kinsman (2000; 1987), Becki L. Ross (1995), Angus McLaren (1999), and Steven Maynard (1998; 1997), for example, have explored the pernicious and far-reaching effects of highly organized, state-sanctioned (as well as non-governmental) campaigns to harass and persecute queer Canadians and our allies—either through highly organized police / state surveillance and prosecution; or via the vilification and demonization of queers in the mainstream media. In addition, feminist social scientists Marianna Valverde (1991), Andree Levesque (1991), Annalee Golz (1995), Carolyn Strange (1995), Joan Sangster (1996), Becki L. Ross (1998; 1997), Mary Louise Adams (1997; 1995; 1993) and others have demonstrated how class- and 'race'-inflected\textsuperscript{27} psycho-social-medical-religious discourses of heteronormativity and moral regulation have played a pivotal role in educational, social work, legal, and health-related institutional practices throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century. Crucially, for the purposes of this research, these researchers have illuminated some of the ways in which these ideologically mediated interventions by members of such professional enclaves have impacted particularly upon women whose sexualities have been variously deemed inappropriate, abnormal, or deviant.

\textsuperscript{26} Phrases such as youth-at-risk or at-risk-youth are used throughout the literature to refer to “risks” such as homelessness, street-involvement in sex and/or drug trades, etc.

\textsuperscript{27} By class and ‘race’ inflected, I mean to highlight the ways in which discourses pertaining to gender and sexuality are further complicated by intersections with the class-specific, racialized stereotypes and assumptions derived from (but not exclusive to) eugenics, orthodox criminology, sexology and other arenas of knowledge that rely upon biological essentialist suppositions regarding naturalized differences between peoples of varied ‘races’. From this perspective, for example, it is possible to explore and reveal how mainstream notions of heterofemininity are in fact grounded in unspoken and unmarked categories of white, middle class heterosexual femininity.
Inspired by this body of feminist and anti-racist social science, my research with queer, street-involved and / or homeless young women is also necessarily informed by official\textsuperscript{28} conceptualizations of youth / street youth and their intersections with discourses of classism, racism, homophobia and sexism. The ways in which these co-implicated discursive constructions find their terminus in the everyday worlds of queer young women who are street involved – either through problematic constructions of young, street-involved women;\textsuperscript{29} or by ignoring female youth altogether, for example – is a central preoccupation of this project. Significantly, official (academic, legal, governmental, etc.) knowledges of youth / street youth demonstrate the connections between social and discursive constructions of youth / street youth / young women, on the one hand; and social service practices, legal interventions, and policy development, on the other. In order to outline the correspondences between discursive conceptualizations and social service interventions, it is helpful to recall Dorothy Smith’s suggestion that women’s daily, lived experiences are “organized and determined by social processes that extend outside the scope of the everyday world, and not discoverable within it” (1987: 152). In particular, institutional processes – including policing, education, health, and other social services – work together to “organize,

\textsuperscript{28} By “official”, I mean to infer academic, legal, governmental, institutional and other authoritative texts about youth and street youth that come to represent accepted truths about who and what youth or street youth are. Such accounts constitute both official and common sense knowledges about what may be said to be known and knowable about youth and street youth.

\textsuperscript{29} See Tanner, Justice for Girls, and Smart, below. Young street-involved women are often portrayed as “prostitutes” or otherwise ‘inappropriately’ sexually active. For example, a July 10, 2004 Vancouver Sun article titled, \textit{Vancouver Teen Found Dead} predictably reproduces this common sense assumption, stating: “A teenager found dead in a...Calgary park...was a runaway from Vancouver who landed on the streets and engaged in ‘high-risk’ behaviour, said police...Police do not believe the teen was involved in prostitution, but confirm she was into drugs. A cause of death is not yet known” (The Vancouver Sun, Sat. July 10, 2004: A2). The fact that the police felt the need to comment on her lack of involvement in the sex trade illustrates my point. Obviously, social and historical constructions of ‘the prostitute’ are multi-layered and complex, while being nuanced by additional discourses of gender, ‘race’, class, ability, etc. Marianna Valverde (1991), for example, has provided an excellent account of how ‘the social evil’ has inflected policing, social work practice, and moral regulation in Canadian social history. See also Joan Nestle and others in Laurie Bell (ed.), \textit{Good Girls, Bad Girls: Sex Trade Workers and Feminists Face to Face} (1987).
coordinate, regulate, guide, and control contemporary societies” (ibid) through the deployment of specialized knowledges that are “mediated ideologically” (ibid: 161). Thus, in order to address the research questions this project confronts, we must pay particular attention to discourses that are both overtly and covertly evident in literature pertaining to queer, street-involved young women.

In the second half of the twentieth century, there have been (seemingly) landmark studies focusing on youth: “adolescents began to be treated as a problem for society after the Second World War, during a period by which young men, in particular, were gaining cultural and economic independence from their families of origin” (Skelton and Valentine, 1998: 10). As a result, “academic study of ‘youth’ as a distinctive social category became established during the 1950’s and 1960’s in the United States and Britain” (ibid). Significantly, however, academic research about youth began within criminology, “fuelled by moral panics concerning the nuisance value of young people on the urban streets of Western societies” (ibid). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that many of the early studies equate the term “youth” with the “deviant, spectacular, male” (emphasis added; ibid: 16). This conceptualization has had significant influence on dominant accounts of youth as a (Western) social problem in the latter half of the twentieth century (Tanner, 1996: 1). For example, the gendering of youth as male has definitive consequences vis-a-vis the development of social policies that do not take into account young women’s experiences - unless they are specifically depicted as sex workers.

In response, Angela McRobbie and others have criticized “the tendency for male academics...to generalize about youth from male samples” (ibid). Feminists’ critical contributions were to challenge the notion that only male youth subcultures were worthy of
study; and to demonstrate that gender could and should be deployed as a central axis of analysis in studying youth populations. However, studies by McRobbie and her contemporaries – Griffin (1985) and Winship (1987), for example – have neglected to study girls who did not engage in such stereotypically ‘feminine’ pursuits as the consumption of heterosexual romance novels, women’s magazines, soap operas, cosmetics, etc. (Skelton and Valentine, 1998: 17). Feminist geographers Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine point out that lesbian women and/or other non-conforming girls were excluded in studies by McRobbie and her feminist contemporaries – despite the fact that their research with young women was designed as an exegetical rejoinder to male academics’ exclusionary, romanticized accounts of working class male youth subcultures. Shelley Budgeon and other feminist social scientists influenced by McRobbie’s research have, unfortunately, duplicated this elision of young butch, femme, and other non-heterofeminine identified women – primarily by conflating ‘female’ with (hetero)femininity. Indeed, Budgeon cites McRobbie’s work when she pens the statement, “The widening of lifestyle choices is particularly relevant for young women in the late 1990’s who must negotiate tensions between feminine identity shaped by forces such as feminism and more conventional modes of femininity” (1998: 116). Young butch women who negotiate masculine identifications are erased by such analytic biases. Similarly, the notion that young women possess (access to) the disposable income necessary to purchase cosmetics, romance novels, etc. presupposes a particular level of economic resources that may be associated with middle-class families – who, for example, are

30 Clearly, there are some young lesbian women and some men and trans* individuals who do partake of such consumption patterns, a fact that is overlooked by Skelton and Valentine in their discussion of McRobbie and her contemporaries. Indeed, they seem to imply that lesbian identification equals non-feminine or female born when, clearly, this is not the case. However, it is fair to critique these early studies by McRobbie and others insofar as they would certainly have excluded young butch lesbians, for example. From this perspective, Skelton and Valentine’s comments are useful.

positioned in such a way as to provide their daughters with allowances and spending money. Such practices – while perhaps deemed unremarkable – are nevertheless rendered possible by economic and class privileges. Thus, while research about girls and women has confronted some of the failures of masculinist social science regarding male youth, it has at times reproduced heterosexist and classist assumptions by representing young women as hetefeminine and (largely) middle-class.32

In addition to tendencies that gender “youth” as male – or, when taking young women into account, assuming middle-class and / or heterosexual young women – constructions of street youth have also depicted this population as a largely homogenous group (de Moura, 2002: 356; Caputo et al for Health Canada, 1996: 14). In his exploration of the social construction of street-children,33 Sergio Luiz de Moura argues that, “the discourses found in the literature construct the subject of street children...they do not simply represent descriptions of reality but rather construct versions of a social event” (2002: 354). He goes on to assert that “discourses on street children are well established among policy-makers and scientists” (ibid), and depict street youth as “either victims or deviants” (ibid: 356) who may possess “deficient characteristics” (ibid) that lead them to “surrender to the ‘temptations of the street’ ” (ibid: 358) - including “drug use and sexual promiscuity” (ibid). Too, popular discourses regarding street children and youth depict the problem as caused by “the

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32 It should be noted that there is a growing body of literature about the experiences of young women who are of colour, disabled, Jewish, Muslim, etc. See Levine, 1998; Claire Dwyer, 1998; and Suzuki, 1998.

33 de Moura uses the phrase street-children in his paper rather than street youth. However, this difference in terminology does not mean that he is speaking exclusively about non-adolescent children. Indeed, he is clearly including youth in his use of the term “children”, as demonstrated by his comments about sexual promiscuity (2002: 358) for example. Note, he does not use the term “sexual exploitation” as is common in literature that speaks exclusively about non-adolescent children’s experiences, and is based upon the idea that non-adolescent children are not capable of consenting to sexual activity; hence the term “exploitation” versus “promiscuity”. Moreover, children are legally defined in BC as persons – including youth – under the age of 18 (Frail and Ross, 2000: 2).
breakdown of the traditional family” (ibid: 357-58) and / or poverty (ibid). Most importantly, however, de Moura emphasizes that these socially constructed knowledges “legitimize certain types of interventions at the expense of others” (ibid: 363). Indeed, he suggests that, “the social construction of street children does not favour holistic and comprehensive practices, but inspires interventions that sustain the status quo of social inequalities” (emphasis added; ibid: 362).

De Moura’s analysis renders explicit the connections between discourses about street youth and the (inadequate) policies and practices designed to manage them. This critical contribution is of fundamental significance in mapping how ideologically mediated relations of ruling impact upon the lives of queer, female street youth. Indeed, implicit in the discourses de Moura identifies as pivotal in formulating the social construction of street youth are notions such as individual deficiency, immorality, impetuousness, sexual deviance, and the supposed dysfunction of poor and working-class families. In other words, the dominant discourses that have been deployed by academics, social service personnel, and policy makers in regard to street youth are deeply grounded in problematic ideologies that uncritically reflect social inequalities. Moreover, with regard to street-involved young women in Vancouver, recent research again demonstrates this highly problematic convergence between discourse, on the one hand, and social service practices, on the other.

34 Taken together, these notions of sexual promiscuity and the breakdown of the ‘traditional’ family seem highly reminiscent of turn of the century eugenicist preoccupations with the supposed sexual licentiousness and instability of poor and working class families. Indeed, such class and ‘race’ specific moral panics lead to the sterilization of over 33,000 Americans – most of them women – during the first half of the twentieth century (Ladd-Taylor, 1997: 141).

35 Throughout this paper, I deliberately deploy the phrase “social services” to refer not only to Ministry of Children and Families services, but also to a variety of organizations, agencies, and institutions that can and do play a role in managing, regulating, assisting, or otherwise interacting with youth who are or have been homeless and / or street-involved. This includes social workers, police, health care professionals (including mental health, addictions, and other health-related fields), educators, public school guidance counselors, street outreach services, youth service organizations, etc. While there are clearly distinctions between these agencies
As local Vancouver advocacy group Justice for Girls suggests, policing trends are part of a broader social picture – one that illustrates the gender, ‘race’, and class specific character of policing interventions:

The Alberta Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act...was recently described as ‘draconian’ by the Alberta Supreme Court and ruled unconstitutional on a number of grounds. Looking at the Alberta legislation, it is clearly discriminatory in terms of gender...over 99% of youth apprehended were girls...The [proposed] BC Secure Care Act [similarly] violates young women’s right to equality before and under the law...in that it will almost exclusively be used to detain young women, and especially First Nations girls...Rather than addressing poverty, male violence, colonial devastation of First Nations communities, or shamefully inadequate and inappropriate...services for young women, The Secure Care Act instead criminalizes and pathologizes young women (Justice for Girls, 2001: 1).

The suspicions of such advocacy organizations are borne out when we examine local policing practices in the Lower Mainland. For example, Vancouver Police Department Statistics for the period May 18, 2000 to July 5, 2000 indicate that two special police units alone affected 283 interventions with youth deemed “at risk” (Frail and Ross, 2000: 4). Significantly, 75% of these “captures” were female (ibid). Also, of the 283 interventions,
41% were Aboriginal youth, and 31% were Aboriginal females, specifically (ibid.). Given that Aboriginal people make up only 7% of the population of British Columbia, clearly Aboriginal young women are over-represented in police street-level interventions in Vancouver (Frail and Ross, 2000: 9). In addition, over 90% of the “captures” detailed in the report were for non-criminal activity (ibid). In other words, police personnel in the two street units have discretion as to whether or not a young person is ‘at risk’ – based on where they are, the time of day, etc. (ibid: 5; Novae et al, 2002: 79).

Further investigation of policing patterns reveals a historically gendered deployment of “status offences” in Canada:

Since its inception in the nineteenth century, the juvenile court has been invested with powers over young people that are by no means limited to those who break the law. A paternalistic concern with the moral well being of children and youth gave rise to the category of misbehaviours that are commonly referred to as status offences. These offences have special relevance for female adolescents because historically, it is for ‘incorrigibility’, truancy, ‘moral deprivation’ and the like that girls, rather more frequently than boys, are called in to the juvenile court.

To put this particular statistic into context, it is interesting to note that, according to a May 27, 2004 article in the Vancouver Province, a young Aboriginal woman was arrested on January 22, 2004 “in a case of mistaken identity” (A22) – police “mistook [Melissa Joseph] for a prostitute” (ibid) and she was subsequently “jailed for 21 hours” (ibid). The article further suggests that Vancouver police Chief Jamie Graham called the incident “an unfortunate error” (ibid), and promised that the police have “taken steps to make sure it never happens again” (ibid). However, given that this incident is highly consistent with the data gathered in the Frail and Ross report just four years earlier, it seems that such practices are a matter of course as opposed to “errors” or aberrations in police procedure. It seems highly unlikely that Chief Graham or the Vancouver Police Department could effect either the procedural or ideological re-training necessary to “make sure it happens again” in the mere 5 months between the incident and the wholly empty apology offered to Ms. Joseph. Indeed, according to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, “North American society has adopted a destructive and stereotypical view of Aboriginal women” (1991: 479), typified by “twisted notions of ‘Indian girls’ as ‘squaws’” (ibid). The racist and sexist discourses underlying such policing practices are deeply entrenched in Canadian jurisprudence. Indeed, the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry goes on to suggest that the (now) infamous sixteen year cover-up of Helen Betty Osborne’s rape and brutal murder at the hands of four white men is typical of problems with “the whole criminal justice system, from police to Crown attorneys, judges, and correctional institutions” (ibid: 484). Significantly, Aboriginal women are over-represented in incarceration rates in all provinces (LaPrairie, 1996: 103). Moreover, there is a “correlation between severity of sentence and racial designation, with Native women more likely to receive custodial sentences (at 41.2 per cent) than white women (25.7 per cent)” (Faith, 1993: 192). See also Emma Laroque (1993), and Faye Blaney (1997), and Novae et al (2002: 78).

40 Given that the two police units in question “spend the majority of their patrol time in the Downtown East Side” (Frail and Ross, 2000: 1), location at the time of apprehension is clearly a determinant of who is or is not ‘at risk’. Indeed, according to Frail and Ross’ report, “ ‘youth at risk’ refers to any child under the age of 19 who has indicators their health or safety is in immediate danger” (ibid).
have been referred to the juvenile court. Likewise, girls have often been punished more severely – with custodial sentences – for violating moral codes than the Criminal Code. Status offences are...often little more than a convenient cover for acts of sexual deviance\(^4^1\) (Tanner, 1996: 191).

Tanner goes on to point out that differential “sex-role” expectations of boys and girls (ibid: 182; 192) – such as the ideological association of girls and women with the domestic sphere (ibid: 171; 175; 182; 192) – play a pivotal role in the legal, parental, and social ‘policing’ and surveillance of girls and young women.\(^4^2\) Moreover, as Carol Smart points out, “Courts operate with a double standard of morality and overemphasize the sexual nature of female juvenile offences...the courts actually ‘sexualize’ the nature of female deviance due to their overwhelming concern for the sexual morality of young women – this is not a concern which is extended to young men” (1999: 29).\(^4^3\)

This relationship between ‘race’, class, and gender-inflected ideologies, institutions, and institutional practices is similarly evident in data detailed by the Vancouver Police Youth At Risk Research Findings report (2000) cited above. Indeed, upon closer scrutiny, this data implicates a range of social services / personnel within and beyond the rubric of law enforcement. According to Frail and Ross, 19% of the youth “captured” also lived in a group

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\(^{4^1}\) I would add that status offences are clearly a cover for suspected acts of sexual deviance, since it is clear from the Frail and Ross report that young women, much more often than young men, are apprehended simply based on where they were seen by officers (2000: 5) – as opposed to based on any particular criminal act.

\(^{4^2}\) Indeed, he states, “Girl offenders are viewed and treated in this way because our society has established different standards of sexual behaviour for males and females. Adolescent males who engage in sexual activity find their behaviour justified – or even lauded – as ‘sowing wild oats’; adolescent girls who do the same are condemned as ‘loose’ and ‘immoral’” (ibid: 192). While Tanner is clearly referring to heterosexual young men and women – since queer young men who, for example, are active in sex-trade work are certainly not ‘lauded’ as sowing their wild oats – his illustration of the double standard in policing practices and legal codes / definitions is nonetheless useful.

\(^{4^3}\) Like Tanner, Smart neglects to consider young men who are queer and sexually active in sex work who are clearly viewed as a ‘problem’ for authorities. Again, however, Smart is helpful in illustrating a clear, gendered double standard in legal practices vis-a-vis youth at risk; she goes on to cite (1969) figures suggesting that, “64 per cent of girls are committed to penal institutions without having committed any criminal offence. The justification for this discrimination is often couched in humanitarian terms, for example as a form of protection, or as an opportunity for moral guidance, but in practice it would seem that juvenile girls are punished severely for behaviour which is sometimes condoned, or at least expected, in boys” (1999: 29-30).
home or other out of home care setting (ibid: 5); 32% were in the care of the province (2000: 2; 4); and 12% were in foster care (ibid: 4). In addition, 25% of the young people apprehended were runaways or missing persons (ibid: 5). This data illustrates a highly integrated level of coordination between different social services – social workers, foster parents, group home staff, etc. For example, those youth who are classified as runaways would have been reported to police as such by a care giver (foster parent, group home staff person, etc.). Similarly, 9% of the youth were apprehended “for breach of probation or warrants” (ibid: 5), thus implicating courts, youth advocates, and probation officers, as well as police personnel. And while 79% of the youth were “spotted by the officers in the youth cars” (ibid: 6), 19% were reported by other police not involved with the special youth units (ibid), and a further 2% resulted from calls by “outreach workers” (ibid). Moreover, of the 80% of those apprehended who related their educational status, 39% said they were in school at the time (ibid: 4), highlighting the (ostensible) involvement of teachers, school administrators, and school guidance counselors in the lives of these youth who are street-involved.

Clearly, there is extensive coordination among this network of social service agencies and personnel. Moreover, as noted above, the youth apprehended by the two special police units were disproportionately female and First Nations. Notably, most individuals in the social service professions implicated by the Frail and Ross report receive formal training of some kind, either through their agencies’ training protocols, or – as in the case of social workers, lawyers, judges, teachers, etc. – through post-secondary education. Thus, in conjunction with the gender, class, and ‘race’ specific ideologies reflected by social service practices, social constructions of street youth both produce and reflect academic and policy-
related understandings regarding this subject population. As de Moura makes clear, this is highly problematic. Even when these discourses do not reflect the material actualities of the lives of street youth, they have an impact on social service interventions and policy development / implementation (2002: 354; 362).

Mapping how these factors converge in the lives of the queer, street-involved young women constitutes one of the primary questions addressed by my research: are these young women encountering barriers to services as a result of homophobia, sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism? Cumulatively, the literature reviewed above clearly demonstrates the necessity of attending to discourses and ideologies as they inform both social constructions of - and institutional knowledges and practices pertaining to - youth at large, and street-involved youth in particular. In establishing this critical connection, it becomes possible to identify and problematize the ways in which the local and particular experiences of queer, street-involved young women are affected by relations of ruling not immediately visible at the level of everyday experience (Smith, 1987: 106).

The literature reviewed above outlines a network of mutually reinforcing ideologies vis-à-vis gender, ‘race’, class, and sexuality, and their impact upon social constructions of street youth, social service interventions, and policy development / implementation. Indeed, this accurately reflects Dorothy Smith’s description of the convergence of ruling relations, ideologies, local interventions, and institutional functions and organization (1987: 160). Clearly, discursive constructions of street youth embody value-laden notions in regards to poverty, immorality, sexual deviance, drug and alcohol use, as well as other forms of supposed individual deficiency. These ideologies are shared by social service institutions, police, courts, etc., and represent a “common conceptual organization” (ibid) - thereby
making it possible for assorted agencies and organizations to communicate with one another, while simultaneously (re)producing a particular, discursive construction of "street youth".

*Federal, Provincial, & Municipal Knowledges of Homelessness, Youth, & Youth-at-Risk*

Just as it is necessary to outline the discursive context detailed above, it is similarly important to review Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal documents that variously address homelessness, youth, and/or youth-at-risk. Government agencies – for instance, social services like education, health, the law, etc. – form an integral part of the relations and apparatus of ruling (Smith, 1987: 160). In order to situate such a discussion, however, it is necessary to probe documents that constitute state knowledges of (or related to) this subject population. It should also be noted that I have been able to discover very few government generated reports or publications that even mention queer youth (homeless or otherwise) – and none on street-involved lesbian and bisexual young women. In order to cast the net wider – and in the hope that other publications on youth-at-risk might incorporate some discussion of queer youth and / or queer young women - I have consulted government literatures on homelessness, youth and substance use, youth and street life, young women and homelessness, sexual exploitation of youth, youth services, etc.

Of the federally generated documents surveyed for this critical review of literature, only two mention queer youth. For example, Caputo et al's 1996 report, *Peer Helper Initiatives for Out-of-the-Mainstream Youth: A Report and Compendium*; and Currie's 1996 paper, *Best Practices: Treatment and Rehabilitation for Youth with Substance Use Problems* – both make mention of gay and lesbian youth briefly. However, gay and lesbian youth do not receive more than a tokenistic mention in these reports; there is no substantive discussion whatsoever about queer youth. In addition, the reports do not consider the potential
differences between young men and young women's experiences of being "out-of-the-mainstream". Similarly, 'race' and racism are either not mentioned in the reports, or are dealt with very superficially - nor is whiteness taken into account as having any role whatsoever in the experiences of white youth who are at-risk. In ignoring sexuality, gender, 'race', and whiteness - and their intersections - these reports do little to reflect the actual and highly significant demographic variations in at-risk youth populations. In other words, certain groups of youth - queer youth, Aboriginal youth, etc. - are, according to research, much more likely to become street-involved for various reasons. Federal researchers either ignore or are unaware of this research.

Other federal publications demonstrate even less consideration of queer youth, youth of colour, and / or at-risk young women. Janet Currie's (2001 a) report, Best Practices: Treatment and Rehabilitation for Women with Substance Use Problems; and Health Canada's reports, Meeting the Needs of Youth-at-Risk (1997); Horizons Three: Young Canadians' Alcohol and Other Drug Use: Increasing Our Understanding (1995); and Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth (1999) duplicate the same oversights as those found in the literature reviewed above, in addition to the fact that they do not mention queer youth at all.

However, perhaps the most disappointing of all the federal studies on youth-at-risk is Caputo et al's (1997) report, The Street Lifestyle Study. This study of street youth is helpful insofar as it acknowledges street-involvement among youth as a serious national issue: for example, the authors state that, "in some cases, the street is seen by...young people as the safest place to be, and going to the street represents the only viable alternative to an abusive and dangerous home situation" (Caputo et al for Health Canada, 1997: 35). With statements

like this, the study assists in breaking down common sense stereotypes of street youth as simply rejecting parental authority, or seeking dubious or criminal activities for fun and profit. Yet the authors do not go far enough in examining how and why youth end up on the streets.45 This is particularly distressing in view of the fact that a study of street youth is one of the most likely to encounter queer respondents. The study explores, for example, what the respondents' experiences with their families were like prior to becoming street-involved (Caputo et al for Health Canada: 1997: 15): 47.1% of young men, and 60% of young women reported that their home lives were "intolerable" (ibid). However, though there is academic research that demonstrates that between 25 and 46% of urban street youth are queer (Kruks, 1991: 516; McCreary Centre Society, 1999: 18), Caputo et al. do not investigate the prevalence of homophobia, heterosexism, and / or related violence, abuse, or neglect as manifestations of "intolerable" home situation.46 If the Kruks and McCreary data is accurate, nearly half of Caputo et al's respondents may have been gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans* youth. Yet queer youth are not mentioned anywhere in this report. Similarly, the authors do not take 'race', ethnicity, or Aboriginal status into account – despite the fact that Aboriginal youth are also reported to be over-represented among homeless youth (Kidd as cited in Collaborative Community Health Research Centre, 2002: 15). The authors do mention gender in their report; however, it is merely deployed as a statistical variable (Caputo et al, 1997: 1; 14; 15). In other words, there is no discussion of why, for example, there are statistically

45 In chapter 4 - Becoming Street Involved: Experiences of Home and Family – I take up this question, paying particular attention to my informants’ experiences of home and family.
46 Given that the McCreary Centre Society’s report on street youth in Vancouver demonstrated this figure of 46% of respondents being queer, it is not as though there was not specifically Canadian data on street youth populations available to Caputo et al. Yet the authors did not cite the McCreary report – in fact, according to their References section, they consulted only 13 sources in order to contextualize their report.
significant differences in reported pre-street and “post-street involvement self images” of young men versus young women (ibid: 14).

Like the federal reports dealt with above, I have been unable to discover any provincial research / reports that focus on queer young women who are homeless and / or street-involved (or queer youth in general). Of the four provincial reports on areas related to these subject populations – homelessness, sexual exploitation of youth, and youth services – two deal with explicitly queer youth. The other two reports – Local Responses to Homeless: A Planning Guide for BC Communities (2000); and Homelessness – Causes and Effects: The Relationship between Homelessness and the Health, Social Services and Criminal Justice Systems (2001) – do not mention or otherwise deal with queer youth. However, despite such shortcomings, the 2001 report does cite useful American data that points out the differential vulnerability to violence and sexual assault experienced by homeless women, in particular:

The rate of sexual assault against homeless women is 20 times higher than that for United States women in general. One study of women...found that these women were 106 times more likely to be raped, 42 times more likely to be robbed, and 15 times more likely to be assaulted than were housed women (2001: 9).

Thus, the report does substantiate one of the fundamental premises of this thesis project: that it is crucial to study the differences in the experiences of young queer women who are homeless or street-involved, as their respective levels of vulnerability and subsequent needs for various services may be different as a result of issues pertaining to gender. Similarly, the

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47 In searching for provincial literature, I explored 80 youth-related reports via the Province of British Columbia website. The four discussed herein represent those that (might have) had some relevance to this thesis project.

48 With regard to provincial literature, the phrase “youth services” refers to youth-in-care – that is, youth who are in the care of the Ministry of Children and Families. This can include youth in foster-care, group homes, youth on the street, runaways, as well as youth who have established a youth-agreement with the Ministry who are living independently on BC Benefits (Status of Women, 2002: 79).
report contributes an important perspective on homeless youth, death rates, and suicide statistics. For example, the paper notes a Toronto study of street youth that demonstrated “37 per cent of males had a history of attempted suicide, compared to 61 per cent of females” (ibid). Disappointingly, there is once again no discussion of why these statistics are so alarmingly high for street youth, or what the reasons may be for the statistically significant differences in male versus female suicide risks.

In contrast, the report, Sexual Exploitation of Youth in British Columbia (2000),\(^49\) acknowledges gender differences (Province of British Columbia, 2000: I.2), racism (II.11-12), and social isolation among queer youth as playing a significant role in risk for sexual exploitation (ibid: I.6). Similarly, the report states that queer youth’s higher risk for sexual exploitation could be mitigated by “a climate of acceptance for gay youth” (ibid: II.10). In this fashion, the authors make critical interventions in acknowledging the role played by social relations of homophobia and heterosexism in contributing to street-involvement among queer youth. In addition, the report acknowledges – unlike Caputo et al’s 1997 federal study of street-involved youth – the role that homophobia-related “verbal and physical abuse” (ibid: III.10) as precursors to “alienation, running away, and prostitution” (ibid). The report also implicates interconnected factors such as social relations of homophobia and heterosexism; the education system; and service / program provision in the lives of queer youth who are sexually exploited (ibid: III.12).

Disappointingly, however, the report uncritically invokes Boyer’s (1983) research that suggests, “involvement in prostitution is one of the few links to the gay community for young gay males, providing them with a means of self-recognition and of practicing being

\(^{49}\) The report does not mention anywhere the authors or researchers that prepared it. It is simply credited to the Assistant Deputy Minister’s Committee on Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Youth.
Reproducing stereotyped views of gay men as neo-nymphomaniacal individuals incapable of forming communities that are not sex-related is damaging – both to the report’s credibility, and the populations it intends to serve. It should also be noted that the research team only interviewed service providers, and not the youth themselves - a significant drawback to the report. This provincial study begins within an institutional context to look at the ‘problem’ of youth sexual exploitation. Based on interviews with public health nurses, youth outreach workers, social workers, police, and city counselors (2000: 1.3), the report completely silences already marginalized youth populations. My own research addresses this oversight, taking up the standpoint of street-involved and / or homeless queer young women located in their everyday worlds.

The 2002 provincial report, Research Review of Best Practices for Provision of Youth Services, similarly represents an enormous improvement over other provincial and federal studies. For example, though this review is less successful in addressing the needs of ethnocultural minority youth accessing services, it does include a discussion of the necessity to “provide culturally sensitive programming to meet the unique needs of Aboriginal youth” (Collaborative Community Health Research Centre, 2002: 15). In addition to mentioning LGBT youth throughout the report, the authors have included a substantive discussion of the particular needs of this sub-group of youth (ibid: 73-80). Perhaps most encouragingly, the report explicitly (though very briefly) articulates the intersections of gender and sexuality in the lives of street-involved lesbian and bisexual young women – suggesting that, because the “proportion of homeless youth that are lesbian and bisexual is very high” (Noell and Ochs as cited by Collaborative Community Health Research Centre, 2002: 75), services need to be
gender-sensitive, as well as queer friendly. This crucial admission is absent in all other governmental reports. Given that this is the case, this provincial paper on best practices supports my central hypothesis: that it is, in fact, crucial to study the experiences of queer young women who are homeless or street-involved because gender – in addition to other aspects of social location - can and does play a pivotal role in these young women's experiences. My own research explores this in some detail, thus going beyond the brief acknowledgement of gender that is undertaken in this report.

Similar to the provincial papers discussed above, the City of Vancouver has generated several reports that provide somewhat helpful contextualization for this study. While there are no municipal research-based reports available on queer female youth who are homeless and / or street-involved,\textsuperscript{50} the City of Vancouver Park Board Report (1998); the City of Vancouver Child and Youth Advocate Report (1998); The Child and Youth Advocate Review Paper (1999); and the Administrative Report on the Advocate's Youth Plan (1998) effectively convey that queer youth and Aboriginal youth are “the most at risk of all youth populations” (City of Vancouver Park Board, 1998: 2). In addition, the reports note that “young women are particularly vulnerable” (City of Vancouver Child and Youth Advocate, 1998: 7). However, the primary area for improvement in these is the absence of an intersectional treatment of sexuality, gender, 'race', class, and whiteness. Rather, the authors seem content to treat young women, queer youth, etc. as mutually exclusive and discrete populations. My research builds on the acknowledgement of these factors by considering the ways in which these issues can converge in the lives of queer young women.

\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, nor are there any research-based reports on queer youth. However, the few mentions of the needs of gay and lesbian youth occur in various reports available through the City of Vancouver's website: \url{http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/}. 
(re)Searching for Young Women in Research-Based Knowledges of Sexual Minority Youth

In this section, I have loosely separated the remaining research along the lines of: reports that discuss the broader picture of queer youth’s risk profiles; social work and health-related literature; and texts on queer youth and educational systems.51

With regard to risk profiles of queer youth, Gary Mallon’s pivotal 1992 study, *Gay and No Place to Go: Assessing the Needs of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents in Out-of-Home Care Settings* is impressive in its implication of social service agencies’ role in compounding the difficulties experienced by queer youth. Based on his experience in the social work profession, Mallon analyzes “practice wisdom, the literature, theories, concepts, and models…used to inform and guide social work practice with families” in order to explore dynamics between queer youth and their families. According to his analysis, institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism have resulted in “decades of fear, misinformation, and the mistaken belief that this population of youngsters should be able to fit into existing youth service systems” (Mallon, 1992: 547). This “lack of appropriate program planning” (ibid) has made the lives of these youth in out-of-home care settings “intolerable, impelling them in many cases to return to the streets for safety” (emphasis mine, ibid). Mallon asserts that, “Lesbian and gay adolescents…often have had to endure name-calling and harassment by peers, and, unfortunately, sometimes by staff as well. At times, the verbal harassment can escalate into physical violence or even rape” (ibid: 551). Those youth who decide to challenge this type of systemic persecution are subsequently deemed “provocative or aggressive” (ibid). On grounds such as these, or simply “for their own safety”, queer youth are often rejected for placement in group homes and shelters. As
if this were not bad enough, “workers have found excellent prospective foster parents for lesbian and gay youths only to have the placements disallowed by supervisors because the prospective foster parents were gay or lesbian couples” (ibid: 552). Mallon makes it clear that institutional ideologies around heterosexism and homophobia converge with the structural interventions of social welfare at times consolidating the oppressions experienced by sexual minority street youth.

Mallon’s exposure of the amplification of risk factors by social welfare agencies inspires several other questions. Specifically, does gender enhance the negative impact of structural interventions? For instance, are lesbians more susceptible to sexual violence than gay male youth in these settings? While neither of these questions are addressed by Mallon’s study, they are, nevertheless, stimulated by it. Mallon may be seen to ignore or paper-over the convergence of, for example, racism and homophobia in the statement: “Unlike other minority groups...gay and lesbian adolescents do not grow up in a supportive cultural environment that can act as a buffer against stigmatization...In addition, other minorities are not thrown out of their homes for being what they are; gay and lesbian youngsters often are” (ibid: 553). Queer homeless youth of colour, or those who are Aboriginal, Black, or Metis are subsequently rendered invisible by Mallon’s account. In order to address the gaps left by Mallon’s research, I have endeavoured to reflexively and consciously deploy an intersectional analysis that simultaneously considers gender, sexuality, ‘race’, class, and whiteness.

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51 It should be reiterated that there is only a very small body of literature that specifically deals with sexual minority young women – an even smaller portion of which deals with street-involved members of this subject population.

52 In listing a variety of identity categories here, I do not mean to suggest that Aboriginal, Black, and / or Metis youth may not also - or prefer to - identify as youth of colour. Rather, I am interested in acknowledging – and naming – some of the various ways that individuals may self-identify. Youth who are Aboriginal may or may
Based on a review of relevant literature, Eli Coleman's (1989) paper, *The Development of Male Prostitution Activity Among Gay and Bisexual Adolescents* also raises several significant issues regarding the theme of sex work in this population. His analysis provides crucial insight into some of the reasons why street-level prostitution is so prevalent among queer youth. Indeed, Coleman states explicitly that *economic need* is a primary motivational factor for participation in sex work (Coleman, 1989: 135). The implications of this assertion in regards to the availability and adequacy of social assistance benefits are incredibly significant. In addition, his data indicates a distinct correlation between the subjects' homosexuality and the “precipitation of family problems...leading to the decision to run away or be thrown out” (ibid). Coleman brings sharply into focus the convergence between problems in families, street-involvement, lack of economic stability, and prostitution amongst adolescent gay male sex trade workers.

However, it is a considerable drawback to Coleman's study that his subjects were exclusively male. While it may be uncritically assumed that sex work is not an issue for young lesbian and bisexual women – due to the fact that the majority of sex workers' customers are *male* – it would be premature to suppose that young women do not engage in survival sex. This assumption informs a significant gap in research on queer youth, for there is very little information about lesbian and bisexual young women's participation in sex trade work. For instance, in Savin-Williams' (1994) survey of the empirical literature on queer youth, he relates that, “5 of 20 Hispanic and Black New York City lesbian adolescents had exchanged sex for drugs or money” (Rosario, Rotherum-Borus, et al., as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265). In addition, my preliminary discussions with staff at one West End...
youth service organization indicate that lesbian-identified young women in Vancouver have, indeed, reported participation in paid sex work. In order to trouble this assumption that male sexual minority youth participate in sex-trade work while young women do not, I intentionally expanded my search for research subjects to include young women who self-identified as having been homeless or street-involved.53

Carol-Anne O'Brien and Lorna Weir’s (1995) article *Lesbians and Gay Men Inside and Outside Families* takes up the crucial theme of the family – in particular, they confront the ideological tension apparent in heteronormative discourses of the family, and their implications for queers as members of families. O'Brien and Weir provide a nuanced discussion of the ideological issues that may contribute to queer youth experiencing difficulties with their natal families. O’Brien and Weir’s analysis demonstrates some of the ways in which sociological research has duplicated the ideological “opposition between ‘family’ and homosexuality” (O’Brien and Weir, 1995: 111). The authors then proceed to assert that a “homophobic and heterosexist ideology has been firmly implanted in the Canadian state and is found everywhere, from hospital insurance plans to child adoptions to social benefits” (ibid: 132). These assertions are integral to my research, as it is implicitly preoccupied with discovering how legal, educational, health, and social welfare agencies are implicated in sustaining many of the pervasive and adverse conditions which have such an impact upon the lives of female, queer street youth.

Furthermore, O'Brien and Weir produce a counter-narrative to mainstream ideologies regarding families, reversing the myth that queers are dangerous to families and ‘family values’; they point out that, “families are sites of violence as well as comfort, of massive

53 As I discuss again later in Chapter 3, the term “street-involved” - unlike the term “homeless”, which invokes notions of unstable or unreliable housing - refers to participation in sex-trade, drug-trade, and / or other related
social change and little stability. Attempts to construct families as little oases of security fly in the face of massive sociological evidence to the contrary” (ibid: 113). Such insightful comments have been pivotal in encouraging me to ask the young women I interviewed about their family lives. Indeed, this is relevant because family experiences represent the primary justification for entry into street-life for three of the five young women I interviewed. Moreover, I am particularly interested in the ways that mainstream ideologies regarding the family may actually reinforce institutional shortcomings based in social power relations. For instance, social service interventions are posited on the assumption that family reconciliation is the ideal goal for homeless youth (Status of Women Canada, 2002: 79). If, as O’Brien and Weir suggest, there is an inherent incompatibility between mainstream discourses of the family and homosexuality (1995: 111), then clearly such assumptions on the part of social service personnel demonstrate fundamental flaws in the ideologically mediated assumptions deployed by so-called ‘helping’ agencies.

In addition, O’Brien and Weir demonstrate an intersectional analysis of homophobia and racism that is absent from research such as that conducted by Gary Mallon and others. Indeed, the authors categorically state that,

**Racism is also an important determinant of the lives of nonwhite communities. Moreover, the social consequences of being a member of a non-white group do not end when someone has sex with another person of the same gender: the low life expectancy and high mortality rates of Aboriginal people may be predicted to also hold true of Aboriginal gay men and lesbians (O’Brien and Weir, 1995: 117).**

Indeed, disempowering social inequities often exist in conjunction with one another, and therefore cannot and should not be studied in exclusion of one another. O’Brien and Weir illustrate this in their suggestion that, “For nonwhite lesbian and gay youth, revealing their street-level activities.
sexual orientation may also jeopardize the extended family relations and communities that provide support in racist societies” (ibid: 119). While they do not incorporate an analysis of the implications gender may have as a factor in queers’ interactions with the family, O’Brien and Weir’s investigation incorporates ideological, institutional, and a degree of intersectional analyses. Subsequently, they provide both a model and a valuable theoretical expansion of themes regarding the dynamics between queer youth and their families.

Ritch C. Savin-Williams’ highly useful review of literature pertaining to queer youth - *Verbal and Physical Abuse as Stressors in the Lives of Lesbian, Gay Male, and Bisexual Youths* (1994) - has also contributed substantially to this research. Indeed, the study brings together various sources of empirical data regarding queer street youth and prostitution, substance abuse, homelessness, suicide, etc., and the risk-profiles exhibited by queer youth. Moreover, Savin-Williams’ study is conducted with an intended audience of “clinicians and researchers” in fields related to mental health (Savin-Williams, 1994: 261). This is particularly significant to my project in regards to examining health intervention agencies’ role in dealing with/processing homeless sexual minority youth. He begins by dismissing a key myth surrounding adolescent homosexuality: “these youth face an increased risk of medical and psychosocial problems, caused not by their sexual orientation, but by society’s extremely negative reaction to it” (Center for Population Options as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 261). Savin-Williams’ inclusion of this assertion indirectly suggests that there are members of the psychiatric health community who need to be corrected on this account.

54 In my interview with Phoenix, she shared stories of her encounters with members of the mental health profession that were truly staggering. Savin-Williams’ paper has been very helpful in positioning and contextualizing her experiences.
In addition, Savin-Williams’ is one of the only studies in which I have been able to find references to lesbian and bisexual women’s sex work. He reports that, “5 of 20 Hispanic and Black New York City lesbian adolescents had exchanged sex for drugs or money” (Rosario, Rotherum-Borus, et al., as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994: 265). Unfortunately, Savin-Williams’ research does not speculate or consider how gender differences may inflect the data he surveys. Given, however, that Savin-Williams later includes the groundless statement, “the experience of being gay or bisexual in our society overwhelms any potential differences in social categories involving age, ethnicity, race, social class, or geographical region of the country” (Rosario, Hunter, et al., as cited by Savin-Williams, 1994, 267), perhaps his lack of analysis regarding gender, ‘race’, class and whiteness in the above empirical data is not surprising. Indeed, he actually seems to reject an intersectional conceptualization of these elements of social location – a serious flaw in his discussion of the data, and one which I have endeavoured to address in my research by deploying an intersectional analysis.

Finally, of the current literature available on queer youth, Carol-Anne O’Brien’s (1994) institutional ethnographic, interview-based study - The Social Organization of the Treatment of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth in Group Homes and Shelters, is truly invaluable. Performed in Toronto, O’Brien’s study focuses on the testimonies of 17 queer youth, and represents some of the only Canadian literature to be found on this subject. In addition, O’Brien’s study is remarkable because it is one of the only ones I have found that incorporates an analysis of ‘race’ and gender identity into the analytic framework. Though other researchers often provide demographic breakdowns of their research subjects - including the race and/or ethnicity of the participants - few examine the convergence of
institutional racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia. In contrast, O'Brien recounts the experiences of two-spirited Aboriginal youth who reported that “white-dominated residences...reproduced the colonial subordination of Aboriginal people, as living in a group home meant being denied access to Native traditions concerning sexuality and gender, and being deprived of the support of families” (O’Brien, 1994: 49).

Similarly, O’Brien’s account stands out for its consideration of cross-dressing and / or transgender youth. She reveals, for example, some of the difficulties experienced by a transgender youth whom staff felt belonged in neither female nor male sections of the shelter; hence, this youth was billeted in a hallway (ibid: 46). In addition, both female and male research subjects were prevented by staff at some shelters from cross-dressing, or wearing clothes that might be characterized as gender transgressive. Her discussion of gender identity and legacies of colonization highlights how multiple factors can converge with sexuality to impact upon queer youth who are in out-of-home care settings. These elements of her paper have served to emphasize to me the importance of deploying an intersectional analysis of sexuality, ‘race’, gender, and whiteness. In addition, O’Brien’s adept application of Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnographic method (ibid: 39-40) is similarly noteworthy. In particular, I was impressed by her statement that, “the subjects of the study were the residences themselves”, and that “[the youth’s] knowledge and experience would help us understand how group homes and shelters work” (ibid: 40). Rather than positioning her subjects as the “object” of her study, she instead takes up their standpoint (ibid) in order to perform an investigation of out-of-home care settings. Inspired by her example, I have endeavoured to position my own research subjects as informants whose testimonies represent the point of entry into an
exploration of institutions and discourses that (over)determine the everyday experiences of queer young women who are or have been homeless or street-involved.

The five studies discussed above have been invaluable to me in narrowing – and at times expanding – my research questions. First and foremost, the conspicuous absence of young women’s lives and voices as a central preoccupation in existing literature on queer youth is striking, and needs to be addressed. For this reason, I chose to conduct interviews with young women, specifically. Also, O’Brien and Weir’s (1995) paper has provided me with a theoretical basis for exploring not only how youth experience the family, but also how discourses and ideologies about the family play a significant role in material, lived realities. In addition, Savin-Williams and Coleman’s discussions of the prevalence of survival sex (among gay male youth) inspired my interest in the implications of street-involvement – particularly because I felt unsatisfied with the dearth of research on young lesbian and bisexual women’s role in sex work. Savin-Williams’ very useful survey of research that irrefutably illustrates the high-risk profiles of queer youth has been an anchor, of sorts, in reassuring me that the provision of social services to these youth had to be problematized, since their levels of risk have been clearly demonstrated in an extensive body of research. It was this realization that inspired me to look farther afield for social work related research on queer youth. I subsequently discovered Mallon’s research, which definitively implicates a variety of social services in sustaining the risk profiles exhibited by this subject population. Finally, O’Brien’s work provided me with a model for my own research, and also represents some of the only Canadian literature on this subject. Her research demonstrated to me that additional Canadian studies were needed to supplement American data – particularly since the legal, policy, and social service contexts of Canadian society are distinct from those in American jurisdictions.
Her use of an intersectional analysis illustrated that other studies which do not deploy - or actively reject - such an approach leave many questions unanswered.

Other research on queer youth has reinforced for me the gaps and inspirations evident in these five studies. For instance, Savin-Williams is not alone in his endeavour to outline the alarming risk profiles of queer youth. Studies by Boyer (1989), Kruks (1991), Grossman and Kerner (1998), Saulinier (1998), and Gustavsson and MacEachron (1998), McCreary Centre Society (1999), Scheer et al (2001), and Noell and Ochs (2001) variously address suicide risk, risk for violence, participation in sex work, substance use, homelessness, and violence in populations of queer youth. None of these studies deploy an intersectional analysis of sexuality, gender, 'race', class, and whiteness; indeed, if these factors are mentioned, they are almost always noted as statistical variables, not central axes of critical investigation. Of this body of literature, only one paper – the Scheer et al (2001) study - focuses on young women in particular. The authors endeavour to address problems with existing literature on substance use and violence that does not adequately account for differences in sexuality among women. However, while the authors foreground the importance of considering gender, class, and sexuality simultaneously, they do not consider additional intersections with 'race' or whiteness in their study of low-income young women. There is no discussion of class differences, simply a note that the study was done with low-income subjects. Significantly, though, they note that bisexual and lesbian women reported higher rates of victimization than heterosexual women vis-a-vis sexual violence (2001: 78). Contrary to research on queer youth that focuses on young men's sex-trade work, Scheer et al's data may suggest that lesbian and bisexual young women also participate in trading sexual services for drugs, cash, or shelter.
The Noell and Ochs (2001) study is also noteworthy. While the authors do not focus on young women exclusively in their brief article, they do incorporate a promising discussion of gender differences between queer male and female street youth. Though their discussion is very short, they make an important contribution to gaps in the existing literature on queer youth. Unlike other studies, Noell and Ochs note that while only 13.9% of male respondents were gay or bisexual, 44.9% of female respondents identified as lesbian or bisexual – suggesting that queer street youth may be more likely to be female than male – a possibility that is not considered elsewhere in the literature. The authors go on to suggest that “These findings illustrate that homosexuality may have different implications for males than females” (2001: 32). This is the only study I have been able to find thus far that supports my hypothesis that gender differences can and do inflect the lives of queer youth in particular. Unfortunately, the authors do not examine how ‘race’, class, and whiteness further influence the risk-profiles of sexual minority youth. Moreover, their study is quantitative in nature, and therefore does not provide any insight as to what respondents themselves have to say about how their gender impacts their lived experiences.

Social Work and Health Literature in Focus

Social work literature on queer youth demonstrates a similar absence of intersectional approaches to gender, ‘race’, class, and whiteness in populations of queer youth. For example, while Brian O’Neill’s article, Social Work with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Members of Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups (1999) is unique in its consideration of the convergence of ‘race’ and sexualities in a Canadian context, he only briefly mentions the importance of gender, class, and other factors in generating knowledge about queer clients: “gay, lesbian, and bisexual members of racial cultural minority groups confront multiple
oppressions...Women and individuals who are poor, handicapped, or elderly are subjected to additional prejudice” (1999: 75). However, his paper is not interview-based, but rather meant as a “theoretical framework for considering issues of same-sex orientation in a cross-cultural context” (ibid: 76). Thus, while O’Neill’s insights point us in some compelling directions, he does not apply this theoretical framework to actual persons. I am also troubled by the fact that some of the research O’Neill cites treads very close to reproducing racist stereotypes. Citing a 1986 study, he suggests that, “the combination of racism, ethnocentrism, and heterosexism can cause ethnic minority gays and lesbians to...acquire poor life skills” (Icard as cited in O’Neill, 1999: 83). O’Neill does not elaborate on said “poor life skills”, and as a result, he may reproduce stereotypes about the supposedly inferior life skills of ethnic minority communities. Some commentary or discussion seems warranted by such research, but O’Neill does not contextualize or problematize the potential implications of Icard’s conclusions.

Gerald P. Mallon’s (2001) analysis of the narratives of 54 youth and 88 child welfare professionals also deals inadequately with issues of gender, ‘race’, class, and whiteness. Though his research is very helpful in substantiating the need to investigate the role social services play in reproducing violence, homophobia, and heterosexism in the lives of youth-in-care – reporting truly shocking statistics about harassment, abuse, and rape of these youth by other youth and even staff - his findings are necessarily limited because he does not incorporate an intersectional analysis of factors other than age and sexuality.

Not surprisingly, health-related knowledges of queer youth’s experiences are similarly limited. Cleta Dempsey, for example, makes an important contribution by implicating health

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55 For example, bell hooks discusses this tradition of pathologizing black families and communities in her discussion of the impact Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s 1960 report on America (1995: 82-3).
and mental health care providers in falling prey to homophobic ideologies that have a detrimental effect on the quality of care they provide:

**Practitioners must examine their own attitudes toward and beliefs about homosexuality. They need to become knowledgeable about gay and lesbian issues in order to provide competent, sensitive services...If they cannot provide such care, they must refer gay adolescents to practitioners who can do so (1994: 166).**

Indeed, she finds it necessary to challenge health care workers to provide queer youth with "comprehensive, sensitive, and culturally appropriate physical and mental health care" (1994: 166). In this fashion, Dempsey illustrates that queer youth require excellent health care because of their alarming risk profiles. However, Dempsey does not trouble issues of 'race', gender, class, or whiteness in her paper, choosing instead to focus solely on sexuality. Her admonishment that health care providers examine their attitudes about sexuality should realistically be broadened to include considerations of 'race', for example. Just as not all patients are heterosexual, nor are they all white or middle-class.

**Literature on Queer Youth in Schools**

As with social work, health, and other literature on queer youth, there is a growing body of research that speaks to the educational experiences of this subject population. Peter McCue (1991), Michael Wicks (1992), Linda Eyre (1993), Didi Khayatt (1995), Lisa Loutzenheiser (1996), Cheryl Finlay (1998), Kathryn Herr (1999), and others have written about the persistence of homophobia and heterosexism in public schools. Crucially, these authors are unanimous in identifying homophobia as tenaciously alive and well in public schools – both in the U.S. and Canada. Indeed, from dealing with school counselors (Finlay, 1998), sexual health seminars (Herr, 1999: 248; Khayatt, 1995: 153-4) and classroom curriculum (Khayatt, 1995: 150; 153-155) to teaching practices (Kyhatt, 1995: 155-57; 159-160; Loutzenheiser, 1996: 59), administrative procedures (Kyhatt, 1995: 158; Loutzenheiser, 1996: 60; Wicks,
1992) and blatant harassment in hallways, classrooms, and other school property (Loutzenheiser, 1996: 60; McCue, 1991; Wicks, 1992), literature on the experiences of queer youth in schools depict a unilaterally horrific situation. Not surprisingly, this type of environment informs the disproportionate risk for dropping-out demonstrated by queer youth (Herr, 1999: 243). This body of literature is particularly helpful to me in my work with lesbian and bisexual young women who are homeless and/or street-involved. Indeed, four of the five young women I interviewed for this research experienced deeply hurtful and destructive homophobia in their public school experiences, leading three of them to change schools or drop out altogether.

What is missing from this literature is a consideration of how gender, ‘race’, and whiteness further complicate the existence of homophobia in schools. Once again, the absence of a trenchantly intersectional analysis informs troubling gaps in our knowledge of how queer youth – and queer young women, in particular – experience public schools. For example, where are the discussions of multiply marginalized youth who perforce must confront homophobia, racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry? Does the harassment of queer young women manifest differently than homophobia directed at young men? These types of questions go unasked in the available literature on school-related issues. Once again, I have endeavoured to address the gaps left by this body of literature in my own research.

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Chapter 3
Theory, Method, and Methodology

"Here I Am!" - On (Not) Playing Hide and Seek: Locating the Researcher in the Research Process

We begin from where we are...beginning from some position does not destroy the 'scientific' character of the enterprise. Detachment is not a condition of science...in sociology there is no possibility of detachment. We must begin from some position in the world...the specification of that somewhere and the explication of the relations to which it is articulated, including ideological discourse, are the aim of inquiry (Smith, 1987: 177).

The primary theoretical and methodological framework of this project is Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography. My first exposure to Smith's exegetical treatment of the conventions of standard sociological research occurred during precisely the same time that I first became interested in doing research with homeless queer youth - at which time it seemed clear that Smith's method was ideally suited for this research. Upon reflection, however, I must acknowledge that this apparent synchronicity had less to do with the happy coincidence of timing, and more to do with the impact of other streams of thought that prefigured my encounter with Smith's writing. Thus, prior to reviewing the methods deployed in carrying out this project - and in order to truly 'begin from where I am' (ibid) - it is first necessary to discuss the breadth of theoretical and methodological streams that have variously shaped and inspired my research.

Though this body of work defies facile categorization, in the interests of synthesis, I will explore four general areas that require elucidation: the post-structuralist reflections of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler; feminist theory, particularly notions of 'intersectionality'; feminist research methods; and finally, Dorothy Smith's institutional

57 In other words, I was only able to recognize the compatibility of Smith's method with the project I envisioned because of the ideological and theoretical influences prefiguring my exposure to her work.
ethnography. It is no coincidence that there is extensive overlap and cross-fertilization between these political / conceptual / methodological spheres. A comprehensive discussion of their cumulative impact upon how I have come to think about and perform research is not possible here. However, in order to foreground my own subjectivity – and in doing so, reject masculinist, positivist, and empiricist research traditions that promote “neutral or objective sounding, summative voices which...obscure the value-laden and interested bases for research” (Roman, 1992: 46) – it is necessary to review the influences that have shaped the conceptual and methodological foundation of my practice as a queer, feminist, anti-racist producer of knowledge.

*Foucault, Butler, & Bourdieu: An (un)Holy Trinity of Post-structuralist Intervention*

Given his considerable influence on a plethora of epistemologies – including segments of feminist theory, queer theory, post-modernism, post-structuralism, criminology, historiography, and philosophy – Michel Foucault’s contribution to my own research with street-involved queer young women is, perhaps, unsurprising. Two of his (many) works, in particular, have transformed my understandings of power, knowledge, and the social and historical construction(s) of sexuality: *The History of Sexuality, vol 1* (1978); and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). Significantly, Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis outlines the historical particularities of how, at the end of the nineteenth century, ‘sexuality’ comes to be discursively defined and subsequently *experienced* as a ‘problem’ in Western societies via an incitement to discourse: “One had to speak of sex...as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed...regulated for the greater good of all” (1978: 24). Foucault’s articulation of the processes through which discourses regarding sexuality shift from a focus on ‘behaviour’ to
the primary, epistemological ‘dilemma’ or ‘problematic’ (ibid: 78) of Western societies is particularly useful for framing the experiences of queer young women who - in speaking of their experiences of ‘sexuality’ - expose issues pertaining to sexuality as the source of a multiplicity of struggles vis-a-vis the family, educational settings, social service interventions (or the lack thereof), employment, poverty, violence, homelessness, sexual exploitation, and many more.

In essence, then, Foucault’s theoretical contribution demonstrates enormous utility for beginning to understand how and why ‘sexuality’ is (still) experienced as a source of immense and varied difficulty for the queer young women who participated in this research. Indeed, Foucault outlines how it is that ‘the homosexual’ becomes discursively defined as a distinct and identifiable personage or ‘species’ (ibid: 43) that subsequently becomes an object of knowledge, surveillance, and (moral) regulation. In this fashion, Foucault adroitly exposes the enormous impact of “discourses that were interlocking, hierarchized, and all highly articulated around a cluster of power relations” (emphasis added; ibid: 30). Thus implicating relations of domination and subordination; ideological conditions; as well as a variety of institutions and professions, he vigorously illustrates how sexuality “appears...as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (ibid: 103).

In addition, I must acknowledge Foucault’s discussion of the “pedagogization of children’s sex” (ibid: 104) for drawing my gaze toward the ways in which “sexual activity poses physical and moral, individual and collective dangers... [to] parents, families, educators, doctors and eventually psychologists” (ibid: 104). Elsewhere, in foregrounding the development of what he calls “the disciplinary society” (1977: 209),

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58 “The movement from one project to another, from a schema of exceptional discipline to one of a generalized surveillance, rests on a historical transformation: the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline
elaborates that a shift occurs from the threat of force to the power of discourse operating through “the gradual extension and development of increasingly specialized fields of knowledge” (emphasis added; ibid: 28), and ultimately, the establishment of “the Normal as the principle coercion” (ibid: 184):

Like surveillance, and with it, normalization becomes one of the greatest instruments of power at the end of the classical age. For the marks that once indicated status, privilege, and affiliation were increasingly replaced...by a whole range of degrees of normality (ibid: 184).

Given the impact of various regulatory systems of knowledge in the lived experiences of the young women in my research (educational, psychiatric, social service, etc.), the persistence of sexual ‘norms’ as foundational to these discourses is highly significant, and particularly so for women who are both young and queer. For, along with pedagogization of children’s sex (ibid: 104), Foucault argues that “the hysterization of women’s bodies”; a “socialization of procreative behaviour”; and the “psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” (emphasis added; ibid: 104-105) constitute the “four, great strategic unities which...formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex” (ibid: 103). These theoretical contributions directly implicate the family and so-called helping professions – teachers, doctors, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, etc. – in the regulation and maintenance of gendered sexual norms. For this reason, Foucault’s perspective is vital for explicating throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, their spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society” (Discipline and Punish. 1977: 209).

Though he has been criticized by many feminists for paying scant or no attention to gender, patriarchy, etc. as fundamental arenas for relations of domination and subordination - and at times even being accused of profound andocentricity (Howe, 1994: 110) – I would argue that Foucault does not ignore gender entirely. Indeed, his elaboration of the pivotal nature of the “systemization of women’s bodies” (1979: 104-105) and the “socialization of procreative behaviour” (ibid) demonstrate that he was at least minimally aware of and interested in the ways that gender and sexuality intersect in discursively mediated relations of power. Indeed, is it somewhat ironic that Foucault has been accused by historian Michael Ignatieff of “falling prey to ‘a fashionable current of thought’ in the 1970’s, notably feminism, or more especially, ‘the feminist critique of patriarchal domination’ – a critique which, in his view has ‘over politicized’ family social relations, neglecting the collaboration and sacrificial elements of family attachment and over-emphasizing the power aspects of family interaction” (Ignatieff as cited in Howe, 1994: 62).
the highly problematic relationships my research subjects speak of in relation to families, as well as members of ‘helping’ professions and their corresponding institutional enclaves.

In addition to Foucault’s work, I have drawn on other post-structuralist thinkers in order to critique ‘common sense’ ideologies which provide the discursive floorboards of issues such as gender / performance, homophobia, heterosexism, and sexuality. A post-structuralist approach is appropriate because it is helpful in exposing the relations of power and inequality endemic to discursively constituted ‘truths’, norms, and subjectivities. However, given existing debates over its applicability, I must position myself in regards to debates over the utility of theories falling under the rubric of post-structuralism. In brief, I concur with Judith Butler’s argument that the aim of post-structuralism is not to dispense with terminology such as ‘women’, ‘queers’, etc., but to deconstruct these terms in a strategic fashion that reveals how relations of power are (re)produced through discourse. She argues,

The aim of post-structuralism is not to abolish categories but rather to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses (Butler 1995: 39).

From this perspective, it becomes possible to speak of the ways in which discursively mediated signifiers such as ‘queer’, ‘young’, and ‘women’ have converged to inflect the lived experiences of the young women in my research.

In addition to retrieving the legitimacy of post-structuralism, Butler’s theoretical formulation of the intersections between gender and sexuality is also exceedingly useful in

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60 Clearly, other post-structuralist thinkers have been similarly impacted by Foucault’s body of work. Indeed, feminist sociologist Carol Smart argues that Foucault’s work represents “the earliest and clearest articulation of the post-structuralist project” (1999: 7).

61 Some have argued that post-structuralism entails the eradication of political categories for analytical purposes. This leads, for example, to questions such as, how, as feminist knowledge producers, can we speak about or mobilize around the oppression of ‘women’ when this signifier is clearly unstable?
regards to mapping relationships between these elements of identity and experience and material relations of power such as homophobia and heterosexism. Moreover, unlike the majority of academic literature which deals with queer youth *without* regard to the complexities of gender, Butler articulates a nuanced theoretical perspective that demonstrates their inter-connectedness. She asserts,

the heterosexuality matrix proves to be an *imaginary* logic that insistently issues forth its own unmanageability. The heterosexual logic that requires that identification and desire be mutually exclusive is one of the most reductive of heterosexism’s psychological instruments: if one identifies *as* a given gender, one must desire a different gender (emphasis original; ibid: 239).

Post-structuralism problematizes such ‘common sense’ logic, exposing how it is deeply grounded in relations of power and privilege. As such, common sense ideologies are often mutually reinforcing – take, for example, the very relevant construction of the ‘nuclear’ (read: heterosexual) family, and its implications for the queer subjects whose testimonies constitute the foundation of this project. As Pierre Bourdieu points out, assumptions regarding the predominance of nuclearity are linked to “*normative* prescriptions about the *proper* way to conduct domestic relations” (emphases added; 1998: 65). These, in turn, endow the “well-founded fiction” (ibid: 66) of the nuclear family with a character that “seems to belong on this side of nature, the natural, and the universal” (ibid: 67). Subsequently, “the family in its legitimate definition is a privilege instituted into a universal

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62 Clearly, post-structuralists are not alone in examining common sense ideologies. Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, articulates a very nuanced critique of (Western) conventional morality, and the genealogy of the terms good and evil in his work, *The Genealogy of Morals* (1956: 151). Of course, there is a well understood connection between Nietzsche and Foucault, who was deeply influenced by Nietzsche’s work, and his conceptualization of the genealogy of ideas, in particular. His subtitle for *The History of Sexuality, vol 1: The Will to Knowledge* is clearly a gesture toward Nietzsche’s discussion of the will to power (1956: 210). But for the disruption it might cause in widely accepted timelines vis-a-vis the development of modernism, post-modernism, and post-structuralism, perhaps it might be more accurate to attribute Nietzsche with some of the credit Foucault is accorded in articulating the post-structuralist project.

63 Bourdieu suggests that the nuclear family, “which we are led to regard as *natural* because it presents itself with the self-evidence of ‘what has always been that way’, is a recent invention” (1998: 64).
norm: a de facto privilege of being comme il faut, conforming to the norm, and therefore enjoying a symbolic profit of normality" (ibid: 69). Herein, two common sense ideologies - heterosexism and nuclearity - intersect to materially privilege those possessing the symbolic and material currency of 'normality'. At the same time, those who defy the dictates of heteronormativity – such as the young women in my research – report enormous disruption in their natal families when the ideologically incompatible experiences of queerness and family intersect. By deploying the insights of Foucault, Butler, and Bourdieu, it becomes possible to observe in such instances how the supposed stability and constancy of the heterosexual, nuclear family is deeply grounded in converging, socially constructed, ‘common sense’ ideologies.

Feminism, Feminist Theory, and Intersectionality

Just as the post-structuralist insights of Foucault, Bourdieu, and Butler have assisted me in theoretically grounding my research with homeless and / or street-involved, queer young women, I must also acknowledge the foundational impact of feminist theory and the interventions of black feminists and feminist women of colour in my practice as a feminist and anti-racist sociologist. Clearly, the fundamental importance of gender as a central axis of social power relations – and therefore of critical analysis – has been crucial to this project since its conception. Indeed, given that my primary research question probes the possibility that gender may further complicate the lived experiences of young queer women who are homeless or street-involved is trenchantly grounded in feminist theories of “women’s oppression as women” (Grant, 1993: 20). Without this analytic orientation, I would not have initially recognized the limitations of existing literature on queer homeless youth, and
subsequently designed my thesis research to confront the additional complexities that flow from issues pertaining to gender. Similarly, the critical interventions of black feminists and feminist women of colour have made it possible to explore the intersections of gender and sexuality with class, ‘race’, ethnicity, and whiteness. Indeed, I would not have possessed the analytic foresight to pose the research questions this project addresses without the inspiration and example provided by this body of work.

The theoretical work that has impacted my practice as a feminist producer of knowledge is diverse and wide-ranging. Influenced by the meditations of individuals such as Simone de Beauvoir and her simple yet compelling query, “What is a woman?” (1971: xiii), second wave feminists embarked on a project to invent a feminist theory that would redress gaps in the (Western) radical and liberal political theories of the 60’s and 70’s with the “central pillars [of] the category Woman and the notions of experientialism and personal politics” (Grant, 1993: 18-19). Such notions informed the development of sex – and later, ‘gender’ – as a central theoretical tool for analyzing social relations marked by inequality.

However, as an anti-racist feminist, I must also acknowledge that the utility of this analytic device was considerably curtailed by the absence of an intersectional analysis of gender as it converges with issues of class, race, sexuality, ability, etc. Indeed, as bell hooks points out, Western feminist theorists such as Betty Friedan completely overlooked or dismissed other axes of social inequality in their (in)famous theories: “Friedan’s famous

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65 Grant goes on to elaborate the reasons why this was a necessary element of early second wave feminist theory: “Oppression included anything that women experienced as oppressive...This counter-formulation...warded off those who claimed that sexual problems were invalid because [they were] subjective and personal. ‘Experience’ became the byword of the new feminism” (Grant, 1993: 30).
66 The pivotal nature of ‘the personal’ was most succinctly expressed via the statement, “The personal is political” (ibid: 33).
phrase, 'the problem that has no name'...actually referred to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women” (1984: 1). Indeed, I and other white feminists are wholly indebted to a series of determined interventions by Black feminists and feminist women of colour, such as the members of the Combahee River Collective, who began meeting in 1974:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking (emphasis added; Combahee River Collective as cited in Jagger and Rothenberg; 1984: 202).

These early discussions of the intersections of gender, class, ‘race’, and sexuality were part of a broader critique posed by women such as bell hooks (1984), Audre Lorde (1984), and later Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham (1992), Patricia Hill Collins (1999; 1997) and Evelyn Hammonds (1997), who defiantly and unapologetically exposed the problems inherent in feminist theories – and a mainstream feminist movement – that was formulated “as though all women were white” (Grant, 1993: 26):

It was a mark of race and class privilege, as well as the expression of freedom from the many constraints sexism places on working class women, that middle class white women were able to make their interests the primary focus of feminist movement and employ a rhetoric of commonality that made their condition synonymous with ‘oppression’ (hooks, 1984: 6).

In addition to these earlier contributions, other feminist women of colour have contributed additional insight to critiques of Western feminism(s). As Western feminist theorists began to take note of the elision of ‘race’ or ethnicity from their analyses - and subsequently began to grapple with the intersections of gender and ‘race’ - it became necessary to trouble the ways in which women of colour and / or ‘third world women’ were positioned in white feminist scholarship. Sherene Razack, for example, articulates how the
legacies of colonization between white and non-white women can be characterized through "the imperial politics of saving" (2000: 40), which has impacted upon the ways that some white feminist scholarship may be seen to depict "racialized women [as] the bodies to be saved by white women" (ibid: 41) – through both the "regulatory practices of scholarly production" (ibid), as well as through the "female professions" (ibid: 45) of social work, teaching, etc. (ibid: 46). As a result, Western feminist theory has, at times, been complicit in the "production of the 'third world woman' as a singular, monolithic subject" (Mohanty, 1991: 51). Indeed, Mohanty identifies

a certain mode of appropriation and codification of 'scholarship' and 'knowledge' about women in the third world by particular analytic categories employed in specific writings on the subject which take as their referent feminist interests (Mohanty, 1991: 51-2).

Such contributions implicate Western feminist scholarship in a number of problematic discursive practices: positioning women of colour and/or 'third world women' as a homogenous group (ibid: 56); as "victims of male control"; (ibid: 58) or as dependents of men (ibid). In exposing these problems in Western feminist scholarship, Mohanty, Razack and others have articulated a theoretical contribution which fundamentally critiques legacies of colonization while acknowledging "how women are embedded in several hegemonic systems (Razack, 2000: 50) – what Patricia Hill Collins terms a “matrix of domination” (as cited in Razack, 2000: 50). Thus, in applying an intersectional approach to exploring social relations, I have made an effort to balance the need to avoid positioning my research subjects as 'victims' or 'dependents', while foregrounding how legacies of colonization vis-a-vis ‘the imperial politics of saving’ (Razack 2000: 40) can impact upon how I position myself and my informants in the knowledge that I produce. This has meant that I have had to remain conscious that power is, in fact, ‘multidimensional’ (Hsuing, 1996: 123), while
remembering that, "it is simplistic to assume that the only power relation is that which exists between the researcher and the researched – the powerful and the powerless, respectively" (1996: 123).

The impact of such observations on my research practice has been immense. Not only has this critique encouraged me to engage with my own privilege as a white feminist producer of knowledge; it has also substantially marked the analytic focus of this project. For example, I had initially posed as one of my research questions, "Are there additional barriers for sexual minority Aboriginal youth and youth of colour arising from issues of race and/or ethnicity?". However, in my substantive analysis of the key informant interviews, I have also endeavoured to probe how whiteness shapes the experiences of the young women in my research who are Caucasian – thereby derailing whiteness as the unmarked, normative racial category, and adding further nuance to my incorporation of intersectionality as a means of exploring relations of power and privilege.

Collectively, the theoretical reflections of post-structuralists, early feminist theorists, Black feminists, and feminist women of colour have made it possible to apply an intersectional analysis of power; gender and sexuality; as well as ‘race’, class, and whiteness. This analytic approach is particularly appropriate in view of the fact that, just as literature on queer youth has effaced the impact of gender, it has also largely ignored or minimized the impact of ‘race’, ethnicity, and whiteness on the experiences of this subject population.\(^{67}\) In my research with queer, homeless and / or street-involved young women, these various streams of thought have inspired me to be trenchantly self-reflexive and deeply cognizant of my biases, as well as my power and privilege as a white, middle-class, queer

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\(^{67}\) As I have noted in the review of literature, the most notable exceptions to this are the work of Carol Anne O’Brien (1994) and Brian O’Neill (1999).
feminist and anti-racist knowledge producer - not only in the research questions I posed, but also the ways in which I interacted with both the young women who consented to be interviewed, as well as (and especially) the testimonies they shared with me.

Feminist Methods and Institutional Ethnography

In order to bring together these rich and varied theoretical contributions, I have explored the work of numerous feminist and anti-racist ethnographers in designing the methodology for my research. Leslie Roman, for example, in discussing the limitations of “traditional positivistic social science” (Roman, 1993: 281), recommends that we “self-consciously and reflexively expose how... prior beliefs and structural (class, gender, and racial) interests partially constitute the empirical evidence for or against... descriptions and analyses of research subjects” (ibid.). Similarly, Judith Stacey’s work extends the call for reflexivity in her discussion of problematic “elements of inequality, exploitation, and even betrayal” (Stacey, 1991: 114) - which, in her view, are “endemic to ethnography” (ibid.) - adding texture to discussions surrounding the researcher/researched power dynamics. Karen Norum foregrounds how the biases we bring to our work as feminist researchers “help us define the beginning and ending points” (2000: 319) of our research, as well as “whether we are listening to a story or for a story” (ibid). In discussing the subjectivity of the research process, she points out that, “we often draw on our own experiences to make meaning of what we are studying” (ibid: 334); hence, “‘there is no innocent writing’” (Richardson as cited in Norum, 2000: 335). Indeed, McCorkel and Myers point out that, in grappling with such issues, we must do more than “briefly acknowledge crude aspects of... identity such as race, class, and gender” (2003: 200). Admonishing us to go further, they advocate “explicating how... data, analyses, and conclusions are shaped by... positionality” (ibid).
Taken together, such insights on feminist research methods have contributed enormously to my understanding of power dynamics as they manifest in the research process, as well as the need to remain trenchantly self-reflexive about power, privilege, and positionality in all phases of the research – from the development of research questions, through interviews and interpretation, to the final write up and analysis. As a queer, middle-class, white feminist and anti-racist sociologist, the various elements of my social location have impacted upon my research in numerous ways – indeed, my ability to do such research is deeply informed by my privilege(s) as a middle-class white woman who has been able to acquire particular academic and professional credentials in the context of a colonizing liberal democracy.68 Similarly, upon first reading literature on queer homeless youth, I recognized many elements of my own experiences with growing up gay – alcohol abuse, violence, family problems, troubles at school, etc. The ways in which ‘risk profiles’ described in academic literature resonated with my own lived experience constituted the primary incentive for pursuing this research. On a variety of levels, then, my social location and my lived experiences have inflected this research, and in foregrounding my subjectivity as a producer of knowledge, it is appropriate that I incorporate feminist insights vis-a-vis reflexivity, power, and positionality into my analysis.69

In the context of a feminist and anti-racist research project with queer homeless and / or street-involved young women, a plethora of agencies, institutions, ideologies, and experiences are immanently and intricately co-implicated. In order to navigate these strands

68 By ‘colonizing’ liberal democracy, I am drawing attention to the fact that Canada is patently not a ‘post-colonial’ society. Indeed, the ongoing displacement and marginalization of Aboriginal Peoples in this country has not ‘stopped’, nor have the colonizers ‘gone home’. Moreover, my ability to acquire a post-secondary education has been deeply impacted by my colonially derived white privilege, and should be viewed in the context of the vast under-representation of Aboriginal students in Canadian undergrad and graduate programs.
69 Below, I will further discuss some of the complexities involved in negotiating my memories of lived experiences that resonated with stories shared with me by the young women in my research.
– and the interrelations between them – it was necessary to look farther afield for a framework that could assist me in drawing together these elements of the research. In seeking a particular method that would allow me to integrate exceedingly rich interview data with post-structuralist, feminist, and anti-racist intersectional analyses - while integrating a very rich body of feminist methodological debates - I have found no better model than Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography.\textsuperscript{70} Most simply described, her method “of institutional analysis explicates generalized bases of the experience of oppression” (ibid: 154). This is particularly useful for a project that focuses on the experiences of multiply marginalized subjects, since relations of power and privilege can have a cumulative impact. Unlike traditional ethnography – which “portrays one culture in terms of another culture” (Van Maanen, 1988: ix) – Smith deploys the term ‘ethnography’ “to commit us to an exploration, description, and analysis of...a complex of relations, not conceived of in the abstract but from the entry point of some particular person or persons” (ibid: 160). Similarly, her sociology for women”\textsuperscript{71} (ibid: 105) is posited on the notion of a “world we hold in common” (1987: 124-125) – as opposed to ‘worlds’ that are essentialized as fundamentally ‘different’ - and particularly how “everyday worlds are organized...shaped and determined by relations that extend beyond them” (ibid: 121).

Additionally, in promoting the notion that we foreground both our own subjectivities as researchers, as well as those of our research subjects (ibid: 105), Smith accomplishes a

\textsuperscript{70} This being said, it is clear that Sangster, Norum, McCorkel and Myers, Roman and other feminist ethnographers have generated a body of work that is both potent and vigorous in its critique of traditional social science. While I am foregrounding Smith’s method, I have used and will continue to invoke the insights of feminist researchers who have contributed to critical discussions of research and knowledge production.

\textsuperscript{71} Smith grounds the development of her method in a nuanced critique of “the objectifying practices of established sociology” (ibid: 111), and argues that the standpoint of men has been represented as universal (1987: 19). In order to address this dilemma, Smith promotes “a sociology for women [that] preserves the presence of subjects...[and] does not transform subjects into the objects of study or make use of conceptual devices for eliminating the active presence of subjects” (ibid: 105).
critical intervention in social science research methods. At the same time, her institutional ethnography provides a unifying framework for incorporating multiple levels of analysis into our research:

I am using the terms ‘institutional’ and ‘institution’ to identify a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus, organized around a distinctive function – education, health care, law, and the like...state agencies are tied in with professional forms of organization, and both are interpenetrated by relations of discourse of more than one order...Integral to the coordinating process are ideologies systematically developed to provide categories and concepts expressing the relation of local courses of action to the institutional function (ibid: 160).

Thus, institutions, ideologies, and relations of discourse are conceptualized as components in the ruling apparatus, which she defines as:

that familiar complex of management, government, administration, and intelligentsia, as well as the textually mediated discourses that coordinate and interpenetrate it. Its special capacity is the organization of particular modes vested in categorical systems, rules, laws, and conceptual practices (ibid: 108).

In order to explore how the ruling apparatus is implicated in the organization of the everyday world - and practices of real individuals located in it - Smith advocates an innovative approach which privileges the daily lived experiences of “women...located in their actual everyday worlds rather that in an imaginary space constituted by the objectified forms of sociological knowledge built upon the relations of the ruling apparatus and into its practices” (Smith, 1987: 153).

Thus, in accordance with Dorothy Smith’s method, I chose to develop my research with queer homeless and / or street-involved young women so as to “create the space for an absent subject, an absent experience...to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds” (1987: 107). Given the conspicuous absence of young women’s voices in literature on queer youth at risk,
the testimonies of the young women in my research comprise the "point of entry" (ibid: 157) into both the discursive and institutional forces – educational, legal, social welfare, etc. – affecting their lives. In accordance with Smith’s recommendations, I have endeavoured to regard these young women as subjects; (ibid: 153); as knowers (ibid.); and as experts in their own experiences (ibid: 161) – not as the ‘objects’ of my study (ibid: 105). These women are the expert practitioners of their lives (ibid: 154) – the only individuals with the experience, the insights, and the knowledge to explain to me, the investigator, how they have negotiated the material conditions of their everyday worlds as queer young women who are or have been homeless and / or street-involved. In uniting the many axes of Smith’s method, I have been able to take up their testimonies and begin to explore how their experiences speak to “the coordination of institutional processes” and relations of ruling that are “mediated ideologically” (emphasis added; Smith, 1987: 161). Though the scale of my project is smaller than the full-scale method articulated by Smith, an adapted institutional ethnography nonetheless provides a flexible model from which to facilitate the navigation of individual experience; ideologies surrounding gender, sexuality, ‘race’, ethnicity, and whiteness; social institutions; and, ultimately, a discussion of the relations and apparatus of ruling.

Indeed, because research on female sexual minority youth is exceedingly scarce – and given constraints regarding both the length of a Master’s thesis, as well as time limitations - I elected to use the framework of Dorothy Smith’s “sociology of women” (1987: 49) to generate a ‘pilot’ study of this subject population.72 For this reason, I elected to do only five interviews, and did not choose to pursue a full-scale institutional ethnographic project that

72 As Smith herself notes, the model provided by institutional ethnography may be incorporated into various types of research: “Institutional ethnography explores the social relations individuals bring into being in and through their actual practices. Its methods, whether of observation, textual analysis, recollection...use of
would have involved more key informant interviews – including interviews with service providers, teachers, social workers, counselors, policy makers, etc. – as well as a more in-depth analysis of the protocols and policies of various institutions that are encountered by street-involved, female sexual minority youth. It is my hope that the research can be deployed to demonstrate the need for additional research with these young women on a larger scale. In turn, both my research and subsequent projects might be deployed by social service providers in lobbying for grants to provide additional research, services, policy changes, etc.⁷³

Despite the smaller scale of my research, the testimonies of five young women – and my analysis thereof – have much to tell us about such issues as the institutional discourses and practices of both governmental and non-governmental social services available to queer young women in the Lower Mainland; educational discourses and practices that marginalize queer young women in BC schools; the difficulties queer young women can encounter with their natal families around issues of gender and sexuality; the very real additional vulnerabilities inherent in being both female and queer while living on the street – particularly vis-a-vis sexual exploitation; the moral and sexual regulation of young women at the hands of mental health care professionals; as well as the ‘common sense’ ideologies regarding gender and sexuality endemic to a Western liberal democracy (ostensibly) premised upon principles of equality. Indeed, though my research represents a ‘pilot’ study, Dorothy Smith asserts that,

archives, textual analysis, or other, are constrained by the practicalities of investigation of social relations as actual practices” (ibid: 160).

⁷³ At this time, individuals from GAB Youth, Youth Quest, Urban Native Youth Alliance, and a Ministry of Children and Families staff person have requested copies of the finished thesis project and its recommendations.
the aim is not, as it might be in standard sociological practice, to identify the
typical features and variations among the class of [queer street-involved young
women]...or to represent the institutional order as a system in itself, but to
explicate...institutional relations determining everyday worlds and hence how
the local organization of the latter may be explored to uncover their ordinary
invisible determinations in relations that generalize and are generalized
(emphasis added; ibid: 160).

Being generalized, the relations of ruling extend beyond the level of the everyday world
(ibid: 106), and possess an underlying, historically determined structure (ibid: 114). Thus,
while my research takes as its ‘point of entry’ the testimonies of ‘only’ five young women,
the relations determining their everyday worlds themselves “generalize and are generalized”
(ibid: 160). In other words, questions regarding the generalizability of a project based on
five one-on-one interviews may be confronted by foregrounding – as Smith’s method does –
an investigation into the relations of the ruling apparatus. Where relations of ruling are the
object of study (as opposed to the young women themselves), it becomes possible to trace
and analyze how the institutional ideologies and practices that determine everyday
experiences constitute a dilemma: ‘the problematic of the everyday world’. Indeed, if “the
distinctive property of the ruling apparatus is its capacity to organize the locally and
inexhaustibly various character of the actual into standard forms of organizational action”
(ibid: 158), then it becomes possible to render visible the ways in which the particular
experiences of five queer, street-involved young women are embedded in relations that are
not particular or unique (ibid: 157), but are in fact uniformly coherent and intelligible across
diverse social settings. Thus, such a pilot project can tell us more than simply how five
individuals experience being female, queer, and street-involved. In fact, by deploying
Smith’s method as a means of framing and interpreting their testimonies, we can begin to
construct an integrated understanding of the generalized ideologies, social relations,
institutions, and practices that converge to determine the everyday worlds of queer, street-involved young women beyond the scope of this investigation.

*Institutional Ethnography Redux: A Sociology for Queer, Homeless Young Women*

Thus framed as a 'scaled-down' institutional ethnography, my study is comprised of five key informant interviews with ‘queer’ young women, 19-29 years of age, who are or have been homeless or ‘street-involved’, and who are currently living in the Greater Vancouver area. Three of the young women were nineteen years of age; one is twenty; and one was twenty-five years of age. In addition, four of the young women identified as ‘white’, and one as having Cree, Irish, and gypsy ancestry.

The terms queer, lesbian, and bisexual were deployed in the research process in such a way that they were contingent only upon how an informant self-identified vis-a-vis their sexual identity. Informants were self-selected in response to recruitment posters disseminated via an email list for queer young women run through a local queer youth service organization; and through a presentation I gave at a queer youth drop-in for the same agency – all of which used the expressions queer, lesbian, and bisexual. ‘Homeless’ or ‘street-involved’ were meant to include any potential participant who had experience with: ‘couch-surfing’; not being able to return to a family residence; possessing no fixed or

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74 In British Columbia, the Child, Family and Community Services Act defines a child as “a person under 19 years of age and includes a youth” (as cited in Frail and Ross, 2001: 1). However, youth service organizations in the Lower Mainland define youth as ranging from 12-35, depending on the agency, their mandate, and the services they provide. This broader delineation of ‘youth’ more accurately reflects the realities of adolescence and young adulthood, particularly relations of in / dependence, particularly in economic terms.

75 See Appendix One.

76 This term was used in the interviews to refer to the practice of sleeping on a friend, acquaintance, or even stranger’s ‘couch’ rather than in the natal home or other stable residence. In the context of my research, this expression was consistently invoked within the context of needing to stay at a friend’s house, rather than choosing to for fun or entertainment. In other words, the young women in my study were not engaging in ‘slumber parties’ or ‘movie-nights’ with friends. They stayed at other people’s houses when they felt they had nowhere else to go.
stable address,\textsuperscript{77} including living in an out-of-home care setting such as a temporary foster home, group home, youth hostel, or youth shelter; living on the street, in parks, alleys, stairwells, under bridges, etc; being active in street level sex work, drug trafficking / use.\textsuperscript{78}

In order to find potential research subjects, I initially advertised via recruitment posters. Beginning February 12, 2004, these posters were placed in and around youth service organizations and community services. These included a shelter such as Covenant House\textsuperscript{79}; as well as agencies such as Dusk to Dawn\textsuperscript{80}; The Centre\textsuperscript{81}; The Gathering Place\textsuperscript{82}; Street Youth Services; Little Sisters'; and the Union Gospel Mission. In addition, I placed the posters around Nelson Park, in Vancouver's West End, as I had observed youth gathering there in the past. On the same afternoon, I dropped into a West End service organization that provides services to queer youth, and spoke with the Program Coordinator about my research. She was extremely supportive and helpful,\textsuperscript{83} making several phone calls to other service providers on my behalf, and recommending I speak to one of the street nurses that provide health counseling for youth accessing the organization.

\textsuperscript{77} For example, one of the young women referred to sharing a ‘squat’ with other individuals who were homeless. She elaborated that this ‘squat’ was actually out of doors, under a bridge (interview with ‘Vi’, April 1, 2004).

\textsuperscript{78} Thus, for example, a young woman who had to periodically stay with friends or on the street due to temporary or periodic difficulties in her natal home would qualify as homeless or street-involved for the purposes of this study.

\textsuperscript{79} Covenant House is “crisis intervention centre and residence for homeless and runaway youth, aged 16-24” (see http://www.covenanthousebc.org/).

\textsuperscript{80} Dusk 2 Dawn Youth Resource Centre is “a drop-in centre serving street youth in the downtown south area between the hours of 7:00 pm to 5:30 am. It provides a safe, non-judgmental environment for street-involved youth, especially when other services are not available. Food, laundry, showers, counseling, and referrals to other services are provided” (see http://www.fsgv.ca/programpages/youthservices/dusktodawn.html).

\textsuperscript{81} The Centre “is a community resource providing support, health and social services, and public education for the well being of lesbians, gay men, transgender and bisexual people and their allies in Vancouver and throughout BC” (see http://www.lgtbcentre.vancouver.com/).

\textsuperscript{82} The Gathering Place is a community centre that “caters to the disadvantaged in the Downtown South community and anyone can buy an annual membership for one dollar” (see http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/GATHERINGPLACE/).

\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, when I offered to share the research report with her agency, she enthusiastically accepted my offer, expressing that research on queer young women who are or have been homeless and / or street-involved is both groundbreaking and highly necessary.
Nearly one month later – after re-postering twice – I had received no phone calls as a result of the recruitment poster.\textsuperscript{84} In desperation, I reached out again to the Program Coordinator at the West End queer youth organization who had previously been so enthusiastic about my research project. She provided me with additional phone numbers and contacts with other youth service organizations\textsuperscript{85} (none of which returned my phone calls).\textsuperscript{86} She also suggested to me that I email her with the information from the recruitment poster, which she then passed on to an email list she facilitated. This was the most successful approach to soliciting interviews, as it yielded four of the five interviews I performed.\textsuperscript{87} Without this intervention by a supportive service provider, I may not have been able to locate the five young women I hoped to interview.

In all, I conducted five, taped-recorded, key informant interviews, four of which occurred in Vancouver, and one in New Westminster. Interviewees were paid a twenty-five dollar honorarium for their participation in the study. In addition, each participant reviewed

\textsuperscript{84} I did, however, get a phone call from a gentleman who objected to posters being placed on trees, telegraph poles, etc. in the West End of Vancouver. He expressed concern over the trees’ health, and speculated that BC Hydro personnel may have difficulty accessing hydro poles due to my posters. After a fairly lengthy discussion about the research project, tree health, as well as hydro employees’ skill and experience vis-a-vis negotiating 8 1/2 X 11 inch posters while going about their work, the gentleman withdrew his threat to remove all of my posters. In turn, I promised to remove my posters once the study was concluded.

\textsuperscript{85} Street Youth Job Action (a subsidiary of Dusk to Dawn); Rites of Passage (a 2nd stage housing facility for youth, affiliated with Covenant House); WATARI (a drug and alcohol counseling service for youth and families; and Youth Driven (part of Environmental Youth Alliance).

\textsuperscript{86} I suspect this is largely due to the fact that the staff at these agencies are both extremely busy (particularly in the current climate of cutbacks to social services under the BC Liberal government). In addition, it is very likely that staff at these agencies often receive phone calls from ‘researchers’ seeking to access persons who use these services. Without having a face-to-face contact, such as the one I had with staff in the West End organization, it was difficult to convince them – within the limitations of voicemail messages - that my research might have the potential to benefit them and /or persons in their clientele.

\textsuperscript{87} The first interview I did resulted from the presentation I gave to a queer youth service organization. The subsequent four interviews came as a result of putting the recruitment information out on the email list through the very kind intervention of a local service provider. In fact, I might have done an additional interview – for a total of six – as I was emailed by another young woman who received the recruitment poster information through this email list. However, as I had already done five, I chose not to perform a sixth due to the time constraints of finishing a Master’s thesis.
the interview questions (see Appendix Two) prior to reading and signing a consent form. In an attempt to create a more comfortable setting for the interviews, I made it very clear to the participants that they were welcome to turn off the tape recorder at any time if they felt uncomfortable or if they needed a break. Moreover, I emphasized that they could withdraw from the research at anytime if they wished – either before, during, or after the interviews.

Each of the young women chose the place and time of their interview; as well as the pseudonyms I have used to refer to them herein in order to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews took place over the period March 14, 2004, to April 8, 2004. All of the interviews were conducted in restaurants and coffee shops selected by the young women themselves, with one exception: my interview with Darian took place in the private meeting room of a youth service organization, and she facilitated these arrangements for us. Interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours in length, the average being approximately one hour and forty-five minutes.

*Restoring Subjectivity - Issues of Knowledge Production, Power, & Rapport*

To ignore questions of methodology is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere allowing knowledge makers to abdicate responsibility for their productions and representations...to side step methodology means that the mechanisms we utilize in producing knowledge are hidden, relations of privilege are masked, and knowers are not seen to be located (Skeggs, 1997: 17).

As I have noted above, an adherence to Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnographic method is premised upon the notion of preserving the presence of subjects “as knowers and

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88 Like Valerie Matsumoto, I elected to share the interview questions with my research subject before the interview in order to “demystify the process of the interview and to give the interviewee as much control as possible” (1995: 162).
89 The study, interview questions, consent forms, etc. were vetted and approved through UBC Ethics Review protocol.
90 None of the young women I interviewed elected to withdraw from the process.
91 Here, as elsewhere, all names used to refer to informants are pseudonyms. In addition, I have used only upper case initials – e.g. “A.” – rather than the names of individuals who are named or mentioned by the informants in the interviews.
actors” in social science research (Smith, 1987: 105). This perspective stands in contrast to research that erases the subjectivity of researcher and research subjects in order to present a sanitized account that may be regarded as ‘knowledge’. However, the latter approach ignores very fertile ground for analysis and reflection regarding the complexities of negotiating agency, positionality, and issues of power and privilege in knowledge production. Indeed, the attendant complexities that arose over the course of my interviews have served to augment my awareness of issues such as distortion, interpretive authority, and misrepresentation in knowledge production.

For example, in meeting the requirements of a Master’s thesis, it is necessary to write in certain ways and to particular audiences – the supervisory committee, in particular, and the academic community more generally. This presents a quandary. If I endeavour to publish in order to share this patently politically interested research – and thus to reach a broader audience of individuals who are potentially in a position to lobby funding agencies, write better policy for, and demand better practices from social services – then it is necessary to write closely in accordance with the conventions of scholarly literature. However, this means that my research will be written in a way that may be less accessible to those whose contributions make it possible in the first instance: my informants, and other young women like them.

How do I ensure that my informants can find themselves in the final versions of this research? The conventions and requirements of academic research clash with my desire to write a report that is accessible to a non-academic audience that includes, first and foremost, my informants; as well as service providers, policy makers, funding agencies, etc. While I am still struggling with these issues, I have endeavoured to (at least) mitigate this dilemma
in two key ways. First, by using longer quotations from my informants in chapters 4 and 5, I hope to make it possible for these young women to see themselves in the research. Second, in writing these substantive chapters, I have made an effort to bear in mind that, beyond the academic community who will evaluate this research, there are communities and individuals who can actually use it. In other words, if I strive to write more accessibly – particularly in the substantive chapters – then there is a greater likelihood that service providers, community groups, and advocates of queer / street-involved / youth / young women will be able to understand its contributions to knowledge, and deploy this research to effect real changes that could impact on the daily lived experiences of individuals.

Indeed, as a white, middle-class, queer producer of knowledge, I am located within the academy – a site of power and privilege. The young women who consented to participate in my research did not possess comparable economic, social and educational privilege. Moreover, one of my informants – who identifies as a Native woman of Cree, Irish, and gypsy heritage – does not share the unearned privilege by virtue of my whiteness. Indeed, as Sherene Razack suggests, my endeavours as a white academic - interviewing younger and / or non-white women - have a particular, racialized and historical tradition:

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\text{Just as white women in the 19th century facilitated imperialism through the assumption of the role of saviour of less fortunate women, so, too, white women in the 20th century, in the academy and in the female professions, can also gain a 'toehold on respectability'...that is, the possibility of a public role, through the same hierarchical relations and the politics of saving (Razack, 2000: 45).}
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\[92\] See Peggy McIntosh, 1988 (http://www.utoronto.ca/acc/events/peggyl.htm).
\[93\] As I note in the Chapters 1 and 4, one of the white-identifying young women in my project shared with me that her family has told her she has some First Nations heritage. However, she does not self-identify as Metis, Aboriginal, two-spirit, etc. – rather, she referred to herself as white, and suggested that she is perceived as such by others.
These histories are well understood by the young women I interviewed, for each reported multiple experiences with social service, health, and education interventions as a result of their experiences with being queer and homeless and/or street-involved. Moreover, four had been interviewed by researchers before. Because I elected not to do follow up interviews, I ultimately have the power to interpret the stories that were shared with me. The potential mistrust engendered by historical traditions and lived experiences with members of ‘helping’ professions (academics, health service staff, social workers, etc.) was at the forefront of my consciousness as I approached my fieldwork. As a result, I am confronted, even now, with the very real possibility that I might misunderstand, filter out, or otherwise misrepresent testimonies regarding experiences that I do not share. Indeed, if ‘observation is not separate from interpretation, [but] rather these are two facets of a single process’ (Mulkay as cited by Hill Collins, 1999: 168), then foregrounding my negotiations with self-reflexivity seems an appropriate way to mitigate—though not remove—issues of bias, rapport, and power dynamics as they have arisen in my research.

At the same time, I am encouraged by Beverley Skeggs’ assertion that, “we are positioned in but not determined by our locations” (emphasis added, 1997: 17). While it is crucial that issues of power and privilege in knowledge production be addressed—and redressed—it is absolutely not my intention to construct or produce an account depicting

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94 Again, this was due to the time constraints involved in trying to complete my Master’s Thesis. I would like to have conducted follow-up interviews, as this provides an excellent way of further negotiating power dynamics between the researcher and the research subjects vis-a-vis interpretive authority. I did ask my informants if they would like to have a copy of the transcripts or the final version of the thesis, and provided them with my contact information so that they could think about it, and contact me if they were interested. To date, none have contacted me to follow up on the offer. However, as I have noted above, it is my hope that this ‘pilot’ project may demonstrate the need for additional research on a broader scale that can be conducted over a longer period of time, and allowing for follow-up interviews with research subjects. Indeed, as Katherine Borland (1991) demonstrates, while follow-up interviews can generate conflict over interpretations, they nonetheless represent an extremely useful method of mitigating the researcher’s interpretive authority.
powerless victims. None of my research subjects referred to themselves as victims – not once, despite the extremely troubling histories of violence, abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect, etc. that emerge from the five separate accounts. As a researcher committed to remembering “the ease with which those researched can be constructed as objects of knowledge without agency or volition” (Skeggs, 1997: 19), I argue that it is not a denial of one’s own power and privilege to acknowledge the potential agency, resistance, or empowerment of research subjects who possess far less power and privilege than myself. Conceptualizing research subjects as ‘powerless’ - like the “imperial politics of saving” (Razack, 2000: 45) - has a particular historical tradition in deliberations regarding feminist research. For example, as Mohanty points out that, “women are consistently defined as the victims of male control” or as “dependents” of men (1991: 58) in Western feminist scholarship. This represents an epistemic dilemma that I wish to actively challenge by upholding Dorothy Smith’s suggestion that we regard women as knowers and actors (1987: 105). Indeed, Smith speaks of oppression and power relations, but does not advocate that we position our research subjects as abject or victimized.

In order to regard the women in my study as actors and knowers (ibid), I have found it crucial to be mindful of how I approach the interview recordings – listening not only to stories of marginalization, but also for resistances, empowerment, survival tactics, successes and victories. In this fashion, I have endeavoured to “challenge the dichotomous portrayal of the power relations between female ethnographers and female subjects” (Hsuing, 1996: 123) while honouring the contributions of the young women who chose not to self-identify as ‘victims’ – thereby “keeping the respondents’ voices and perspectives alive, while at the
same time recognizing the researcher's role in shaping the research process and product” (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998: 119).

At the same time, listening to the interview transcripts involved remembering Joan Sangster's suggestion that we pay attention to “revelations [that] may also come from the silences and omissions in women’s stories” (1994: 5), as well as “other ingredients of narrative form, such as expression, intonation, and metaphors” (ibid). For example, during one interview\(^6\), I asked Darian about her experiences with a local youth service organization that I had heard was unsafe for queer young women who were homeless. In particular, I had heard from three other informants\(^7\) that the staff at this organization attempted to morally regulate young women in regards to being sexually active, and engaged in such practices as searching the belongings of those accessing its services. In contrast to these other testimonies, Darian spoke about the freedom and latitude she had personally enjoyed in accessing services with this organization. Though she acknowledged that other clients had experienced difficulties working within the rules of the organization, for the most part, Darian had managed to avoid problems with agency staff. Indeed, she had arranged for us to meet there. However, as I listened to the interview tape, I realized that her normally boisterous and vivacious voice dropped to a near whisper while we discussed – at length – issues about how this organization impacted the autonomy of the clients accessing its services, homophobic attitudes among some of the staff, etc. Thus, while what she reported vis-a-vis her personal experiences spoke in contrast to other reports of homophobia or moral regulation at this agency, there seemed to be some sense of vulnerability or uncertainty on her part as to what the ramifications might be if she were overheard speaking

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have endeavoured to confront them as an integral part of the process of knowledge production.
about such matters by one of the staff. Yet while I make note of this, it would be inappropriate to portray Darian as being ‘victimized’ by this agency. To do so would be to ignore or second-guess what she did say, which reflected her active – and successful – negotiations with the power dynamics at this service organization. Indeed, Darian’s story speaks less of an egalitarian agency, and more of her enormously skillful and astute ability to access the services that she needed while remaining assertive and autonomous.

Being rigorously self-reflexive about how I represent my research subjects also informed my choice of one-on-one interviews as a means of collecting information about queer homeless and / or street-involved young women. As discussed in chapters one and two, there is an identifiable dearth of research-based literature on female sexual minority youth. As a result, it is impossible to learn about the lived experiences of these young women through recourse to academic literature alone. In order to probe such uncharted territory – and given the potentially sensitive and difficult subject matter involved in discussing the experiences of queer, homeless and / or street-involved young women – focus groups and questionnaires were far less likely to yield testimonies as rich in detail or as intimate in their content as one-on-one interviews. In addition, however, utilizing substantial excerpts from the interviews makes it possible for readers to analyze the stories for themselves, apart from my analysis and interpretation. By deploying this strategy in my substantive chapters, I am deliberately trying to mitigate my own interpretive authority over the information contained in the interview transcripts.

96 Interview with Darian, April 7, 2004.
97 Interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004; Interview with Kay, April 4, 2004; Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004.
Moreover, in foregrounding my own power and interpretive authority as the researcher, there is a case to be made in favour of performing key informant interviews. For, in response to those voices that would dismiss qualitative interviews for their ‘subjectivity’ Joan Sangster suggests that, “women interviewed will shape the research agenda by articulating what is of importance to them” (emphasis original; Sangster, 1994: 2). Similarly, Nwando Achebe relates how in her interviews with women, “in order to hear, and not misappropriate women’s words, I asked for clarification when I did not understand. I also asked women to interpret and provide perspectives on their own experiences and lives” (2002: 14). These insights were certainly true in my own highly dynamic interviews, as my informants repeatedly corrected my misunderstandings when I would request clarification, ask what they made of their experiences, or reflect my interpretation of their stories back at them in an effort to acquire a clear picture of their testimonies.

For example, in an interview with Kay, she shares a story about how, in an attempt to (re)gain the approval of her female peers, she engages in her first sexual intercourse with a young man. Initially, I thought she was suggesting that she was indifferent regarding the sexual experience itself, and that it was noteworthy because it helped her to clarify that she was neither sexually attracted to men, nor willing to pretend she was. Her suggestion that “he was a good guy” lead me to believe that the sexual experience was simply unremarkable rather than particularly unenjoyable. However, this was a misinterpretation on my part:

K: he was a good guy...he was a good guy.

EB: yeah...

K: he was okay...

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98 Indeed, “as researchers / writers, we exercise ‘power’ by determining which stories, quotes, and voices to display and how to display them” (Norum, 2000: 336).
EB: that's good. Um, well, I'm glad that you had that experience and it was, like, okay. You know, it wasn’t like, you know – [Kay interrupts]

K: I hated it. I hated it. 99

Clearly, this situation raises “the question of meaning and its variability” (Borland, 1991: 63), and the ways in which the researcher’s understanding or interpretation “may at times differ from the original narrator’s intentions” (ibid: 64). In this instance, Kay intervened in my interpretation, making it clear that she actively disliked the experience. It was important to her that I understand this. As I tried to reflect back on my developing understanding of both this story and what it meant to her, Kay was able to correct me. Indeed, I deployed this strategy throughout my interviews in an effort to check my interpretations against what the young women were actually trying to tell me.

Alongside these elements of interaction, interview-based methods involve issues of rapport, and the various elements that constitute the relationship between the researcher and her research subjects. In terms of establishing rapport with my narrators, I have benefited from the reflections of Leslie Roman and Judith Stacey. Whereas Roman asserts that it is inappropriate to “privilege the idea that the more one distances oneself from the object of the study, the better one is as a researcher” (Roman, 1993: 281), Stacey admonishes us to be aware of the potential for exploitation, “because ethnographic research depends upon human relationship, engagement, and attachment, it places research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer” (Stacey, 1991: 113).

Though I did not assume that our common queer identity would culminate in an automatic and edifying sense of mutuality, I had anticipated that my informants might feel more comfortable at the prospect of being interviewed by another queer woman who had
also experienced homophobia, heterosexism, family violence, alcohol abuse, severe problems in public schools, etc. However, this commonality did not always translate into shared understandings. For example, as noted above, all but one of the young women interviewed elected to meet in coffee shops and restaurants, despite the lack of privacy this entailed. Initially, I assumed that this might be due to the absence of a home or shared residence in which to conduct the interviews; however, at the time I interviewed them, all of the subjects had some form of housing, though it was not necessarily ‘stable’ or permanent. Clearly, there were drawbacks to meeting ‘in public’ for four of the interviews. I was very conscious of the young women’s respective comfort levels during the interviews, and reiterated this to each of them before and during the interviews. Indeed, there were moments in each of the four ‘publicly’ held interviews when the narrator would stop speaking because a server or staff person approached our table and might overhear sensitive information. After the waiter or waitress departed, I would state again that it was okay to stop anytime if the interviewee felt uncomfortable or compromised in any way. We also endeavoured to pick a table that was well away from other patrons of the establishment, and on several occasions when someone would sit down nearby, I would ask my informant if she wanted to change tables or locations. At the same time, however, the general background noise of the establishments we met in was generally sufficient to conceal our conversation, and I deferred to my subjects’ judgment about whether to move, stop, pause, or otherwise shift the interview setting.

Based on what I learned about these young women’s histories of violence and sexual exploitation, I suspect they may have elected to meet in public due to issues of safety. Prior

to meeting for the interviews, I had not met my informants in person, and it is very possible that they might have in fact felt safer meeting in public than inviting a stranger to their residence – the lack of interview privacy notwithstanding. In retrospect, I recognize that there was a disjuncture between my notion of creating a safe space for an interview, and that which my subjects possessed. The former was premised on privacy and confidentiality during an interview; and the latter may well have been premised on issues of physical safety.

In turn, my very academically influenced assumptions about safety in regards to confidentiality and privacy is also informed by the contrast between my experiences of violence as a child and young adult – which are removed in time from my current reality - and the current or very recent histories my informants reported vis-a-vis abuse, sexual exploitation, vulnerability, sexual assault, etc. For example, when Phoenix spoke about the relationship between being able to trust people, she asserted that,

I can't stand it when people are nice to me because, like, the only reason people would be nice to me before was like, they were trying to, pimp me off, drug me, or something, right? It's, it was awful. It's like this constant survival mode that you're in, and uh, eventually it just gets to be normal, right? Like you don't even think twice about it, but it's really so fucked up (interview with Phoenix; April 8, 2004).

Significantly, Phoenix emphasizes how ‘normal’ this ‘survival mode’ was for her – it became a part of the landscape of her everyday world. In contrast, my everyday world has not been inflected by this characteristic vulnerability. This disparity informs very different conceptualizations of safety and trust, and subsequently, our shared queerness and our shared gender did not generate a shared rapport. Indeed, this instance highlights the importance of taking up the standpoint of women located in their everyday worlds (Smith, 1987), rather than beginning from the researcher’s standpoint.

100 In discussions with other sociologists, I have often been given to understand that it is not uncommon for an
From the outset of my research, it was extremely important to me to avoid reproducing the gaps evident in the academic literature on queer youth vis-à-vis the importance of ‘race’ and ethnicity. For example, in my discussions with service providers who had access to populations of young women I was trying to reach, I was very clear that I wanted to redress these problems with the existing research by including – as much as possible – an intersectional analysis of the perspectives of young women who are not white. However, as I noted above, there was a shift in my approach when I realized that this analytic orientation left ‘whiteness’ as the unmarked, normative racial category – which would, in turn, (re)produce problems with the existing academic research. For this reason, I continued to search for young women of Colour, Aboriginal young women, and women of mixed race heritage, while being mindful that I had to also trouble and explore ‘whiteness’ as it has affected the experiences of young women in my study who are white.

Indeed, ‘whiteness’ does inflect the experiences of white queer young women who are homeless and / or street-involved, and this is evident particularly in what is not said in their interviews. None of the four white women I interviewed raised issues of their finding, embracing, or grappling with their cultural heritage or cultural assimilation, for example. Similarly, in our discussions of difficulties with their families, the young white women in my study never once mention how various branches of their families have negotiated, concealed, or rendered more acceptable their ‘racial’ or ethnic backgrounds via promoting themselves as ‘respectably middle class’. However, these elements of negotiating ‘racial’, ethnic, and cultural heritages do arise in the context of my interview with Vi.

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101 Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004.
In reflecting on my interview with Vi, I was reminded of Joan Sangster’s suggestion that oral histories are mediated by factors such as gender, race, class, as well as the presence of ideologies - “whether dominant, submerged, oppositional” (Sangster, 1994: 3). In approaching my interview with Vi, a two-spirit young woman of Irish, Cree, and gypsy heritage, I brought with me my politically charged ideologies of how my whiteness locates me differentially – i.e. in privileged ways – from non-white people(s). As a result, I found myself listening for a story, instead of to a story (Norum, 2000: 319) during our interview. Specifically, I expected Vi to foreground experiences of racism in attempting to access social services, housing, education, and employment/services. And while racism has impacted upon her dealings with these institutions, in discussing her cultural heritage, Vi focused more on dynamics within her family regarding her Aboriginal ancestry. Though her father was “full blood Cree” (Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004), Vi grew up with her mother, who is of Irish and gypsy heritage. During her childhood and adolescence, Vi states, “It was never really spoken about that we were Native” (ibid). In addition, she spent little time with her paternal grandmother who is also full blood Cree, but does not identify as Native: “her family, because of residential school, were so uh, ingrained with internalized racism that it was like, they had become white, now, and were somewhat free of whatever…” (ibid).

In revisiting the audio tapes of my interview with Vi, I am reminded of Joan Sangster’s assertion that “It is important to acknowledge how our own culture, class position and political worldview shapes the oral histories we collect, for the interview is a historical document created by the agency of both the interviewer and the interviewee” (Sangster, 1994: 6). It is somewhat ironic that my anti-racist personal and political orientation lead me to make suppositions about the shape that racism and legacies of colonization would take in
Vi’s story. My whiteness – and subsequent inexperience with racism and legacies of colonization – informed my assumptions. Additionally, however, it would be misleading – and problematic – to suggest that my whiteness only or exclusively impacted upon my interview with Vi. Indeed, it very likely that our shared whiteness inflected my interviews with the white women in various ways. For example, if I were not white, it is possible that the young white women in my study might have been less comfortable being interviewed, or assumed that we were ‘different’, and that subsequently I might not understand their stories. Indeed, when I asked Jupiter if she felt that her whiteness had any impact on her experiences as a queer young woman who has been homeless, she suggested that her access to services might have been better if she were Aboriginal. While this was not the answer I expected vis-a-vis white privilege, it is revealing, nonetheless, in so far as it reproduces popular misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples’ supposed dependence upon, ‘overuse’ of, or ‘free’ access to various social services. Would Jupiter have said this to me if I were an Aboriginal woman conducting the interview? I can only speculate. However, in confronting whiteness as a pivotal axis of experience – both mine, and my research subjects – it is important to acknowledge the unseen or less ‘knowable’ ways that whiteness may operate within the context of women’s particular experiences of their everyday worlds.

In addition to these complexities, I had to consider commonalities that I anticipated might be present between my informants and myself. For this reason, I was very open with

102 For example, research on First Nations women’s encounters with health care services makes note of such stereotypes vis-a-vis “status Indians” (Brown et al, 2000: 10) access to health care: “Although this [health] service is a federal obligation, it has given rise to resentment from members of the dominant society respecting ‘free’ health services and is often seen as an extension of welfare or charity…members of the First nation are acutely aware of this resentment and recognize that these perceptions contribute to negative stereotypes” (ibid: 11). Brown goes on to include the testimony of an Aboriginal woman who speaks directly to the racist supposition that Aboriginal peoples receive disproportionate access to social services and institutions: “I think too there’s really a myth out there in the general society that First Nations people get everything. You
my interviewees about my own history because I wanted them to feel comfortable discussing difficult issues such as violence/abuse within families if they felt this was important to their stories. Indeed, when considering whether or not to raise these issues in the interview, I had concluded that this approach was the most compassionate way of opening the door to a discussion of painful experiences. Moreover, my level of disclosure was intended to reassure my informants that my interest in such issues is neither gratuitous nor uninformed. Indeed, my own 'subjectivity' regarding such issues enabled me to recognize and articulate to my research subjects that we did not have to discuss any interview question they felt uncertain about, or pursue any topic that they did not wish to elaborate on. This was certainly a beneficial aspect of my 'lack of objectivity' as a researcher.

These elements of my interview practice notwithstanding, there were moments in each of the interviews when my informants were experiencing strong emotions as they told their stories. Though I had anticipated the possibility that this might occur – given my own sensitivity regarding painful experiences – taking such measures as reviewing the interview questions could not prevent how “seemingly innocuous questions might open the floodgates of painful memories” (Matsumoto, 1996: 163). Though I did not directly ask about abuse, violence, family problems, or sexual exploitation – and the feelings that accompany such experiences – these issues arose in the women’s stories. In these instances, I would ask if they wanted to take a break, turn off the tape, or otherwise stop the interview. However,  

103 Sometimes, an informant would apologize for needing to take a moment to compose herself, or for having strong emotions during the interview. In response I would assure her that this was okay, and that it was totally reasonable that she had feelings about painful experiences; that being able to emote was a sign that she had survived as a feeling individual; that this was, in my opinion, a victory of sorts. These types of statement are
the young women I interviewed consistently expressed a determination to continue—demonstrating, without exception, "the force of the need to tell" (ibid). While I felt conflicted about the potentially exploitative aspect of continuing in these moments, I chose to honour both their deeply tenacious determination to tell their stories, as well as their agency in choosing to move forward with the interview. Given that, at the conclusion of the interviews, each of the young women volunteered that she had truly enjoyed having someone hear her story, and validate her experiences, I am hopeful that honoring their choices in these moments was a respectful decision.

At the same time, there were numerous occasions when stories about violence at home and/or at school gave rise to extremely painful memories of my own lived experiences growing up as a butch dyke in a small community in Northern BC. For example, in my interview with Jupiter, her description of elementary school experiences was very familiar to me:

J: ...It was a horrible school. It was um—it was really bad. All the kids there, who, what can I say? I don’t know. There was just something about it. Um...[pauses momentarily—searching for the right words]...Immediately I stood out. I stood out from the other kids. Like, and I noticed that from the time that I was in pre-school. You know. I noticed that, I was more into playing like cars and I was more into playing like, you know, you know, like, if I wanted to be, I was more into, I was more into...
play house, I wanted to be the daddy, right? I wanted to be the one going to work-

EB: [interrupting] I hear you (laughing). I know exactly what you mean (laughing).

J: Yeah (chuckles).

EB: I’m with you all the way (laughs).

J: And I was always playing on the jungle gym, and you know, just, you know, horsing around and stuff. And I didn’t really have any desire to like, really sit still or be pretty or – I just wanted to be rough and tumbling. And, right away, like, from the time I was in preschool, um, the boys didn’t really know what to think about me. You know, like, “What’s this?” right? And, some of them thought I was okay, but some of them were really, like, “You can’t do this. Go away. You’re a girl”, you know. “You’re being stupid, go play dolls”. And, I was like, “No, I’m going to play cars, I want to play cars”. And, they were okay with it for a little while, and then they started getting like, “No”. This wasn’t okay. This was just weird. Um, and at the same time, I wasn’t really accepted by the girls in the school because I played with the boys. I was rough and tumbling, right? (interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004).

When I asked Jupiter why she thought she “stood out”, her response again echoed my own experiences. She said,

I also think I got singled out because you know, I was a fairly masculine child, you know...I had a different way I wanted to dress, you know. I, you know, I wanted to wear pants and sneakers to school every single day, and I did. Um, yeah, I didn’t get along with the girls, I didn’t want to do girly things (ibid).

105 Such instances in my interview with Jupiter were highly evocative of moments of personal and political unity that I have shared with other butch-identified women. However, in endeavouring to make sense of such moments as they arose in this interview and others, I have been careful not to apply terms such as butch and femme to any of my informants because none of them identified with these terms in the course of the interviews. Jupiter, for example, used the term androgynous to refer to her gender performance, not butch. Indeed, I was hesitant to probe further into these areas of gender and sexual identity because of my own experiences with backlash against butch and femme identities, desires, and practices. Based on these experiences, I worried that asking my subjects about their thoughts on butch and femme dynamics might derail the interviews and take us in a different direction entirely. However, given the recent resurgence of butch and femme communities - for example, online web sites such as www.butch-femme.com - I remain deeply interested in how younger lesbian and bisexual women make sense of butch and femme identities, histories, and communities, and hope to conduct interview-based research on this topic in the future. For a fuller discussion of backlash against butch and femme communities, see: Crawley, 2001; Abrams, 1999; Maltz 1999; Inness 1999; Ross 1995; and Nestle 1992.
Similarly, as with my elementary school experience, Jupiter’s situation deteriorated into violence and harassment:

Um, well, I did have kids chasing me home. Um [pauses] and I did have a lot of, a lot of emotional torment. Um, I find...if I was out on the playground, like, during a break, like recess or lunch, I would have a lot of kids come up and swarm me (ibid).

Indeed, both in her experiences of harassment and in the reasons she cites as underlying this torment – i.e. being a masculine girl – Jupiter’s story resonated with me deeply. Even Jupiter’s use of the term ‘swarm’ to describe group harassment of an individual mirrors precisely my own recollections of bullying and torment at the hands of my elementary school peers. Too, like Jupiter, I had to negotiate the additional burdens of an alcoholic parent and family violence while all of this was going on at school.

Initially, I was unsure of how to negotiate my own discomfort and what to make of these similarities that arose in four of the five interviews. The approach that I took at the time was to be (briefly) honest and forthright about experiences that I shared – without turning the interview into my story (or ‘mesearch’). With regard to how this impacted my research subjects, three of them made remarks at the end of their interview to the effect that they felt I was a skillful interviewer, and that they appreciated that I gave something of myself in the process by sharing some of my own stories.Phoenix, for example, stated that this approach made her feel “heard and validated, as opposed to judged” (interview with Phoenix, April 8, 2004). Thus, to some extent, at least, sharing something of myself with the young women I interviewed was helpful in establishing safety and rapport.

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106 All of the young women I interviewed volunteered that they had enjoyed the process as a whole; however, three of them made specific remarks about this particular aspect of my approach to the interview.
Clearly, however, there is a risk of over-emphasizing commonalities in the interviews. To do so would efface the very real privileges that I possess economically, socially, and by virtue of my whiteness. Too, this would be tantamount to importing my own history or expectations into these women’s stories in a fashion that does not do justice to the particularity of their individual lived experiences. To stray into such dubious territory would be patently incompatible with the method of taking up the standpoint of the research subjects as they are located in their everyday worlds. Thus, I find myself echoing Karen E. Norum’s questions, “What happens when the distance between the ‘researched’ and the ‘researcher’ is minimized because of a shared, similar experience?”; “How much of ourselves bleeds through our research – not just in writing, but also in conceptualizing and conducting it?” (2000: 320). Indeed, like Norum, I was motivated to do this research because of my own experiences as a queer young woman. Yet because I was never homeless or street-involved, I am “neither a complete insider nor outsider” (Achebe, 2002: 12). At the same time, however, I am deeply aware that in all researched based knowledge, “the researcher’s voice is everywhere – overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, echoing through the central themes” (Norum, 2000: 335).

Based on these reflections, I have endeavoured to be forthright in “disclosing how [my] background assumptions and beliefs...generate a problematic to be studied” (Harding as cited in McCorkel and Myers, 2003: 203); while at the same time analytically de-centering commonalities that arose between myself and the young women in my research. In other words, my goal has been “to draw [myself] into the lines of the picture without creating a self-portrait” (ibid). Being trenchantly forthright about the ways in which my own experiences have inspired and informed this research is a conscious attempt to “embark
upon processes of honest self-interrogation – assessing...personal agendas and motives – as insights garnered about [myself] can, and often times do, greatly affect the outcome of research and evaluation of evidence” (Achebe, 2002: 27). By returning to Smith’s method, it has become possible to make sense of these similarities in my analysis of the interviews. Indeed, it is unsurprising that certain types of experiences can be common to queer women because they are informed by ideologies regarding sexuality, heterofemininity, homophobia and heterosexism - social relations that “generalize and are generalized” (Smith, 1987: 160). From this perspective, it is less surprising, for example, that two masculine, queer women – whose ages are 13 years apart – might both experience harassment, bullying, and emotional abuse by peers in different public schools (one in Surrey, BC, and one in Prince George, BC). Here again, Dorothy Smith’s insights about how the local and particular are embedded in ideological, institutional, and ruling relations enabled me to make sense of the experiential similarities without over-emphasizing their significance.
Chapter 4
Becoming Street Involved: Experiences of Home and Family

Social Institutions: Mapping Relations of Ruling

In the next two chapters, I discuss the themes that arose in the context of my interviews with five queer young women who are or have been homeless/street-involved. Returning to the research questions I outline in my introduction, I examine the ways in which these women interpret their own experiences of being/becoming street involved, and the strategies they employ to negotiate and, at times, resist the circumstances they confront in negotiating their everyday lives. At the same time, I view their experiences with homelessness, street-involvement, and social welfare agencies through an intersectional lens in order to map the "institutional relations determining [their] everyday worlds" (Smith, 1987: 160). Following the method suggested by Dorothy Smith (1987), I take up the standpoints of these young women as the "point of entry" (1987: 157) into a study of "the coordination of institutional processes" and relations of ruling that are "mediated ideologically" (ibid: 161). The testimonies of the young women in my research reveal much about the discursive and institutional forces that organize their lived experiences (ibid: 160). However, it is important to reiterate that the object of my analysis is the ruling apparatus which "organizes the locally and inexhaustibly various character of the actual" (ibid: 158) — not the young women themselves.

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107 In regards to questions about the generalizability of an analysis based on five key informant interviews, see Chapter 3. In brief, I argue therein that if "the distinctive property of the ruling apparatus is its capacity to organize the locally and inexhaustibly various character of the actual into standard forms of organizational action" (Smith, 1987: 158), then it becomes possible to render visible the ways in which the particular experiences of five queer, street-involved young women are embedded in relations that are not particular or unique (ibid: 157), but are in fact uniformly coherent and intelligible across diverse social settings.

108 Again, as Smith herself defines it, the ruling apparatus is "that familiar complex of management, government, administration, and intelligentsia, as well as the textually mediated discourses that coordinate and interpenetrate [the everyday world]. Its special capacity is the organization of particular modes vested in categorical systems, rules, laws, and conceptual practices" (ibid: 108).
In order to study the apparatus and relations of ruling, I explore specific institutional enclaves and their attendant ideologies and practices: home and family; educational settings and social services\(^{109}\) – primarily the BC Ministry of Children and Families, legal, health, and mental health locales; as well as community service agencies geared toward youth in general and queer youth specifically. In this chapter, I focus on the home and family as a pivotal discursive / institutional duality that reproduces gendered, classed, racialized, and heterosexist norms and practices prefiguring the entry of queer daughters / family members\(^{110}\) into conditions of homelessness and / or street-involvement. In chapter 5, I turn my focus toward the public schools and the social service institutions outlined above, and explore these same issues of social inequality as they emerge in the ways queer, street-involved young women are – or are not – served. Inarguably, there is extensive overlap and coordination between these varied institutional locales in the lives of the young women whose stories provide an entrée into this “complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus” (ibid: 160). However, for sake of analytic clarity, I endeavour to deal with institutional sites individually while acknowledging the ways that these seemingly discreet sites of local organization in fact work together to perform the work of ruling.

*(What) Family Values: Homophobia, the Prodigal Home, & Throw(ing) Away Youth*\(^{111}\)

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\(^{109}\) As noted in chapter 2, I use this phrase “social services” to infer not only social work settings and the like, but also legal, health, mental health and youth specific agencies that are ostensibly geared toward providing services to society.

\(^{110}\) Two of my respondents – Vi and Darian – spoke at length about extended periods of living with aunts and uncles. For this reason I deploy expressions such as queer daughters / family members.

\(^{111}\) The phrase “throw away youth” is used in some of the literature on homeless or so-called runaway youth to challenge the value-laden notion that out-of-control adolescents *ran* away from their (good) homes and (loving) families. Jeanne Stanley, for example, defines the phrase “throw away youth” as “teens rejected by their family and [or] made to leave home” (2003: 256). In addition, LGBTQ youth are specifically – though not exclusively – referred to in literature on homeless youth as “throw away youth” because it is increasingly recognized that family rejection, homophobia, violence, abuse, and neglect can and often do characterize the family relations of queer youth (ibid). See also Gerald P. Mallon (2001: 67-68).
Families are...animated by a...tendency to perpetuate their social being, with all its power and privileges, which is at the basis of reproduction strategies (Bourdieu, 1998: 19).

What is the relationship between young queer women who are or have been homeless and / or street-involved and their experiences of homes and families? Negative family relations often prefigure entry into experiences of homelessness and street-involvement among queer youth. This relationship between queer youth, the family, and homelessness is well established in existing research (Kruks, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1994; O’Brien and Weir, 1995; Mallon, 1999; McCreary Centre Society, 1999; Stanley, 2003). As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that all of the young women interviewed for this research share stories about their homes and families that belie the notions of stability, support, cooperative relations, and unconditional love that characterize mainstream representations of the family and family values (Bourdieu, 1998). Indeed, according to feminist, anti-racist social scientists like Annalee Golz (1995), Carol Anne O’Brien and Lorna Weir (1995), Ellen Lewin (1996), and Sandra Kopels (1998), the family can also be a site of instability, violence, neglect, estrangement, homophobia, gender inequality, etc. In order to make sense of this disjuncture between dominant (and romanticized) conceptualizations of the family, and the comparatively incongruous family experiences discussed by young queer women located in their everyday worlds, it is critical to foreground that the family embodies characteristics consistent with those of other social institutions. As Dorothy Smith suggests, an institution is recognizable because it forms part of the ruling apparatus and is organized around a distinctive function (1987: 160). However, idealized conceptualizations of the family as a “united, integrated entity” (Bourdieu, 1998: 68) – and the home as a site thereof
elide both the institutional character of the family, and its “distinctive function” (Smith, 1987: 160):

The family plays a decisive role in the maintenance of the social order, through social as well as biological reproduction, that is, reproduction of the structure of the social space and social relations (emphasis added; Bourdieu, 1998: 69).

In other words, the family represents more than an immediate kinship network or source of shelter (or its lack). Indeed, the family is an institution unto itself. Moreover, the natal home — though officially a private locus of family relations — as the site of institutional relations, is simultaneously reproduced alongside family relations. It is important to emphasize that home and family are socially constructed ideas that are not necessarily unified in the everyday world. This ideological duality — one that is steeped in relations of power and privilege (Bourdieu, 1998) — is rendered visible as such in my informants’ narratives because it is shattered when family and home become separated by young women’s entry into conditions of homelessness and street-involvement. Indeed, for the young women in my study, home and family are not one and the same, but, at times, deeply fractured sites of experience.

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112 Bourdieu takes up this dubious notion of the family as a private entity, arguing that: “definitions of the family are seen as having in common the fact that they assume the family exists as a separate social universe, engaged in an effort to perpetuate is frontiers and oriented toward idealization of the interior as sacred, sanctum (as opposed to the exterior). This sacred, secret universe, with its doors closed to protect its intimacy, separated from the external world by the symbolic barrier of the threshold, perpetuates itself and...its own separateness, its privacy, as an obstacle to knowledge, a private, secret, ‘backstage’” (1998: 65). He later goes on to argue that, “The state, through its official recording operations...performs countless constituting acts which constitute family identity as one of the most powerful principles of perception of the social world...A social history of the family...would show that the traditional opposition between the public and the private conceals the extent to which the public is present in the private, and in the very notion of privacy. Being the product of a sustained effort of juridical and political construction culminating in the modern family, the private is a public matter...our most private behaviours themselves depend on public actions, such as housing policy, or, more directly, family policy...Thus the family is...being produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the state, it receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist” (ibid: 72-73).

113 Just as Michel Foucault attends to the geo-spacial construction and physical organization of the school in discussing how education systems are designed to regulate children’s sexualities (1978: 27-29; 126), he also spends time discussing the spatial layout and construction of the family home (ibid: 46) and how it is constructed in order to regulate sexualities — especially children’s. Foucault’s discussion of these issues lead me to consider home / house and family as an ideological and experiential duality that — in common sense
If the family’s role as a social institution is to reproduce the social order, then we must trouble what, precisely, that order is comprised of. Berger and Luckmann, for example, point out that primary socialization\(^{114}\) embodies a process through which \textit{norms} become generalized through an “abstraction from the roles and attitudes of concrete significant others [parents, grandparents, etc.]” (ibid: 122). This “generalized other” (ibid) operates to ensure that “the individual...identifies not only with concrete others, but with a generality of others, that is, \textit{with a society} (emphasis added; ibid). Thus, reproducing the social order is equated with the transmission of cultural norms. Significantly, Foucault points out that it for this reason that the family’s role in socializing children is fundamentally tied to issues of power; for, in his formulation, the normal is “established as a principle of coercion” (1977: 184) that imposes homogeneity (ibid). This process is implicated in relations of domination and subordination because there is “a symbolic profit of normality” (Bourdieu, 1998: 69). At the same time, however, “Stigma...is an offshoot...of the stereotyping or ‘profiling’ of our normative expectations” (emphasis added; Goffman, 1963: 51).\(^{115}\)

If the family may be seen to reproduce social norms that are implicated in such relations of social privilege versus condemnation – or the “symbolic profit of normality” versus stigma – then the process by which gender and sexual diversity come to represent a dilemma for queer youth in their homes and families is inherently tied to notions of discourse – is conceptualized as an inseparable unity. However, the experiences of \textit{homeless} young queer women render visible the fact that home and family are ideologically mediated, social constructions that operate in tandem to (re)produce the notion that privacy and stability are both necessary to and synonymous with this locus of intra-familial relations. These “conceptual practices” (Smith, 1987: 108) organize family relations in particular ways to reflect the social norms.

\(^{114}\) Berger and Luckmann describe the individual’s entry into normative social relations and ideologies as primary socialization – “the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society” (1966: 120).

\(^{115}\) In his 1963 edition of \textit{Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity}, Erving Goffman cites social psychology to preliminarily define stigma as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (1963: un-enumerated page prior to the Table of Contents).
heteronormativity. Indeed, as O’Brien and Weir suggest, families “are also institutions in which the dominance of heterosexuality is reproduced” (O’Brien and Weir, 1995: 118). The discursive and ideological incompatibility between queer genders and sexualities, on the one hand, and the (normative) nuclear family, on the other, is clearly visible in mainstream discourses that position queers as a problem (or even a danger) for families (ibid: 113):

When a Milwaukee legislator announced that she was going to introduce legislation to legalize same-sex marriages in Wisconsin, the proposal was called a “social reign of terror” and equated with “inner-city violence, drugs, and crime” as destroyers of the traditional family (Dietrich as cited by Kopels, 1998: 81).

In addition, it is important to point out that dominant ideologies vis-a-vis the family are also inflected by issues of gender, class, ‘race’, and nuclearity. As Bourdieu points out, we are lead to regard the nuclear family “as natural because it presents itself with the self-evidence of ‘what has always been that way’” (1998: 64) – despite the fact that “in most modern societies the nuclear family is a minority experience” (ibid). The nuclear family embodies “normative prescriptions about the proper way to conduct domestic relations (ibid: 65) – for example, the ways in which “power relations among members of a family group [are marked by] the effects of male domination” (ibid: 70). Similarly, assumptions regarding the superiority of white, middle-class families and family values further complicate dominant conceptualizations of this social institution,116 as well as my informants’ experiences of it.

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116 These class and ‘race’ specific notions of the supposed moral and social normality of white, middle-class families represent a significant characteristic North American social relations. For example, the efforts of white, middle-class families to keep Black families out of white neighbourhoods (Frankenberg, 1993: 46-49) reflect the notion that white families needed to protect themselves and their children from Black people and Black families (ibid: 47). Similarly, moral reform and social purity activists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were spurred on in their efforts by eugenics discourses that posited the biological superiority of white, middle-class values (Ladd-Taylor, 1997; Valverde, 1991; Ordover, 2003). Too, the incarceration of Aboriginal children in residential schools in Canada and the United States was premised upon the notion that white, Christian religious authorities would provide a refuge from “the insalubrious influences of home life on reserve” (Kelm, 1998: 57) that was regarded as “by nature unclean, and diseased” (emphasis
Set against this ideologically mediated institutional framework of the family, the testimonies of the young women in this research contradict the homophobic logic that suggests queers are a danger to families. For, as these young women demonstrate, the home was a place to get away from; and relations with family members were characterized by homophobia, heterosexism, neglect, violence, and sexual abuse. By taking up these two primary nodes of lived experiences—the home and the family—I trouble the distinction between the ideology of family values, and what families actually value vis-a-vis their queer daughters/members in the everyday world.

**Not the Hallmark Version: Stories of the Home**

Over and over again in the interviews I conducted with queer young women, I heard the home described not as a locus of refuge, but as a place to get away from. Indeed, experiences of the home are pivotal for young women who later become homeless. Specifically, four of the five young women I met with spoke of the home as a site of violence, neglect, instability, tension, and fear. Vi, for example, contrasts her experience of her mother’s natal home with what it was like to experience an alternate home setting. In discussing her reflections of temporarily living with the family of a former babysitter, she says,

*It gave me a chance to settle, and to realize like, what, what love was in a home. Because I had never, ever known that. I had never known peace. There was always fighting...even if there wasn’t fighting, someone would create a fight* (Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004).\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117}In regards to excerpts from the interview transcript, I have attempted to represent pauses, emphases, rhetorical questions, etc. exactly as they emerge on the taped interview recordings. Any quotations with italics, bracketed pauses, laughter, hesitations, etc. are original emphases, not mine, unless specifically noted in the citations. In addition, I endeavour to capture and duplicate the texture of the young women’s testimonies, noting my interpretation of irony, cynicism, bitterness, etc. In listening to and transcribing these interviews, these elements of expression—though non-verbal—certainly stood out at times, depending on the topic being discussed. For example, there is a great deal of difference between laughter and bitter laughter; between an
This excerpt reveals a great deal about what home had previously meant to her when she lived with her mother. Vi goes on to reflect that living with the family of her former babysitter was very strange for her: “It was almost unnerving how settled it was” (ibid). Indeed, for Vi, recollections of her mother’s home were completely antithetical to both her later experience of stability, as well as more mainstream conceptualizations of the family. This is largely due to the fact that she and her younger brother had been forced to negotiate their mother’s alcohol addiction and violence towards them. Not surprisingly, this absence of love and stability at home motivated eleven-year-old Vi to run away in the middle of the night. Though she was eventually caught by police in Vancouver, and returned to her mother in Kamloops, Vi ran away again soon after: “The second time I ran away was more [long pause] final. I didn’t even think about coming back” (ibid).

Subsequently, between the ages of eleven and thirteen, Vi lived on the street. For a time, her best friend was with her. The two young women survived with each other’s support, but were at times unable to avoid exchanging sexual services with young men in exchange for shelter, drugs, food, etc.:

Our life at that time was all about getting out of [pauses] whatever. So we spent most of our time high, drunk, it didn’t matter. Between the ages of 11 and 13, I probably did acid, like, every third day. Uh, but living that kind of lifestyle depended – because we didn’t have any money – on other people giving us stuff, but “for free”. But it wasn’t really for free, because we knew that the exchange meant, um, any kind of uh, sexual contact for whatever. That was, um [pauses] how we lived...My experiences with men were that, uh, they would give you drugs or alcohol in exchange for sex, um, that was the un- [pauses] that was the uh, that was taken for granted. Like I remember so many times where I was so

ironic, rhetorical question, and a sincere question; or between a story told in full voice, or one told in a whisper. In order to accurately represent the young women’s testimonies, I have noted where such elements of expression were significant enough in the taped recordings to warrant notation. Of course, these are my interpretations of what I was hearing in the transcript, and as such, are not unproblematic. I have exercised care and consideration in places where I note such forms of expression, and deployed my interpretive notations sparingly in order to reflect the original emphases of the narrators, rather than what I thought was important or noteworthy in a quote.
not interested in engaging in that, but it was like, “Whoa, what are you doing?” and sometimes even forced...If we slept over at a guy’s house, we knew that the exchange would have to be sex (ibid).

Herein, Vi notes that “getting out of whatever” – i.e. their familial homes – was their primary objective. Yet, in order to do so, the two women had to endure coercive sexual exchanges and, at times, were subjected to sexual assault. Yet, she maintains that at the time, living on the street was preferable to returning to her mother’s home and being subjected to violence that was worsened by her mother’s alcohol addiction.

After her best friend was put into foster-care, Vi was alone in negotiating street life:

Because I didn’t have a space, I was, you’re always on the go. You’re always looking for the next space that you’re going to be in. You’re also looking to sedate yourself as much as possible to forget about all the things you have to worry about. Plus, I mean, by that time, I don’t know what I would have known or thought about myself had I been sober during that time. Like, I had so much internalized self-loathing, that I - and shame – that I was terrified of seeing my own reflection (ibid).

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118 All of the women in my research reported a range of problematic sexual experiences – including incest, sexual violence, assault, rape – as well as what I am calling coercive sexual experiences such as those in which my informants exchanged sexual services for shelter, etc. Clearly, issues of consent versus coercion are inherent in such experiences. Where the young women have named their experiences as assault, rape, etc., I have deployed such terms. However, in instances such as the ones Vi describes, I utilize the phrase “coercive sexual exchanges” in order to name the problematic, coercive dynamic involved in such encounters, while honouring my informants’ agency in not calling these exchanges rape, assault, etc. This notion of coercive sexuality is a conceptualization developed by Patton and Mannison in their (1998) article, Beyond Learning to Endure: Women’s Acknowledgement of Coercive Sexuality. They articulate the need for viewing “a continuum of sexually intrusive behaviours” (1998: 31) that “often begin in childhood, and continue through adolescence and adulthood, with perpetrators being fathers, uncles, family friends, and neighbours through to boyfriends, fiancés, husbands, and partners” (ibid). They go on to suggest that this conceptualization of a continuum can “explain common elements in experiences, and to illustrate the lack of clearly defined and discrete categories for the broad range of women’s unwanted sexual experiences” (ibid). Significantly, Patton and Mannison go on to suggest that, “more normative forms of unwanted sexual attention” (ibid) are constructed as such “within dominant heterosexuality discourses” (ibid). As a result, women may be uncomfortable using terms such as rape, assault, etc. in describing experiences that, for them, do not necessarily fall into these categories. In particular, I find their discussion of Nicola Gavey’s (1989) “technologies of heterosexual coercion” (ibid: 33) useful in the context of this research. Eight women in Patton and Mannison’s research reported, for example, “coercion in a car and the associated threat of walking home at night” (ibid): “‘I began to walk home but really didn’t have any idea where I was so was forced to return to his car. I felt quite helpless, and he was in total control’” (ibid: 33). Such acts – which are inarguably problematic and coercive – are representative of technologies of coercion that “maintain male dominance in...sexual relationships without resort to direct force or violence” (ibid: 33).

119 Vi talked in our interview about being very young, and realizing that the thermos her mother carried everywhere was full of rum, not tea or coffee (Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004).
In this excerpt, Vi associates substance use with the need to “sedate” herself. This testimony belies mainstream constructions of street youth that portray them as rebellious teens getting involved with drugs and sex for fun and entertainment (de Souza, 2002: 358). Rather, Vi attempted to avoid the feelings that emerged out of her lived experiences by using substances as a means of forgetting “all the things that you have to worry about”. In other words, substance use was, at least in part, another means of escaping the home – and, in particular, her memories of it.

By the time Vi was 13, her paternal aunts intervened with social services to have her relocated to their custody in Burnaby. Vi describes how she felt about this opportunity to leave her life in Kamloops behind:

I’d always knew that there was more, for me. I always knew that [pauses]. When this opportunity was given to me, I knew that I needed to take it. And so I didn’t think twice about going – though I was afraid. I knew I needed to see what it was about (ibid).

This feeling of knowing she needed to leave her home created a profound sense of inner-conflict for Vi, because in order to finally and completely get away from her home, she had to also leave her best friend. She goes on to describe how they parted ways:

She said, “you don’t have to go there...it will just be you and me, and we’ll leave”. And [short pause] her telling me this broke my heart. Like, I was fucking fabulously in love with this woman. And um, though I didn’t want to admit it to myself just quite yet. I, I knew though. And, so, I had to tell her that I needed to leave. And that was the hardest thing that I had to say. But I did. I needed to go, and I knew that I needed to go. And I knew this was exactly what I had been waiting for my whole life. Or, not waiting, fucking working for my whole life up to that point. And mind you, I’m only 13 at this point. So I go on the bus, and [she] chases it. And I have to watch her, bawling her eyes out, and chasing the bus and yelling (ibid).

These two anecdotes are particularly revealing in regards to Vi’s experiences of home. By the age of 13, Vi’s feeling that she had to leave was so profound that she chose to confront
both her fear of an unknown life with her aunt’s family in Burnaby, as well as the prospect of life without this woman who had, in her words, become her “whole support system” – a woman that she loved as more than a friend.

Like Vi, Darian was willing to take extreme measures to escape the abusive and neglectful home she shared with her mother, twin sister, and younger brother:

We were [sighs]...things were really bad at home, and there was one night, um, that I’ll never forget. And it was me and my sister staying up and we cried all night. I didn’t sleep a wink. And she was cutting up her leg, and uh...in kind of like a daisy pattern. And she was talking about like, “I can’t leave here. I can’t leave Mom.” And I was like, “I have to go. I can’t stay here. I can’t live like this.” [speaking very quietly] So I left. And she stayed (Interview with Darian, April 7, 2004).

After she left her mother’s house, Darian went into foster-care for six months. At this point, her twin sister moved into her maternal aunt’s house where Darian later joined her. However, this familial home was also not a site of safety or security, but a place where she was sexually abused by her uncle. However, before she could get away from this place, Darian felt she had to protect her sister:

Darian: about this time I was smart enough to kind of orchestrate my sister moving out with kind of friends...of the family, like through this mentor organization, like Big Brothers and Sisters, Her actual Big Sister? She moved in with them. And I couldn’t leave....And [pauses] I didn’t want anything to happen to [sister’s name], so I didn’t say anything because that was the kind of agreement [with my uncle]. ...if I talked, something would happen to [sister’s name]... But, so like at that point, I um...talked to the friends of the family kind of thing, and was like, “she’s miserable here...I think she’s going to hurt herself if she’s here, because it’s just reminding her of mom” and I just kinda...I went all out....But I was worried about her getting abused, and all the bad stuff that was going on. And I saw a way to get her out...And so she was removed and I was told, you know, because my uncle knew about this...and he was fine with that, but he said that if I tried to leave he’d fight for custody, and he’d win...

EB: And in the meantime...is this guy abusing...?

Darian: [interrupts] Yeah. Not my sister. But me. And quite often everyone else...like sexually. And then...so I stayed there for about another three months...
or so...and then I ran away in the middle of the night, and called HelpPhone...And from there I got taken back into the foster home I’d left (ibid).

Significantly, Darian’s story illustrates that only her desire to protect her sister from an abusive uncle kept her at her aunt’s home.

Like Vi, Darian’s testimony stands in horrifying opposition to notions of the familial home as “a stable, enduring locus” (Bourdieu, 1998: 65; O’Brien and Weir, 1995: 113). This disjuncture between ‘common sense’ discourses about the home and my informants’ experiences of it also emerges in Kay’s story in which her natal home was characterized primarily by neglect:

[My parents] were doing drugs when I was younger, so they were really, like, occupied. They weren’t really messed up. Like I wasn’t treated like incredibly poorly. They just weren’t around. All my childhood memories don’t have them in there. You know, there’s me, waiting for my friends to get permission to come out, to hang out with me, you know? (Interview with Kay, April 4, 2004).

Due to her parents’ drug and alcohol use, Kay lived with her grandmother between the ages of 13 and 15. When Kay was 15, her grandmother passed away; as a result, she attempted to live with her parents again. However, Kay experienced so much conflict at home that she chose to couch-surf with friends rather than live with her parents and younger siblings. Like Darian and Vi, home was somewhere Kay wanted to get away from. At the age of 17, she left her hometown of Prince George to move to Prince Rupert with her first girlfriend:

it was kinda a big deal, but it kind of wasn’t, because [pauses] it was a new city, I’d never been to before, and...there’s not so much...I never had...really anything for me in Prince George, because for me, in my head, my parents...they were never really there. They were never something that I could like put down like, a base, like a safety net. They just like, weren’t that. You know? Home’s wherever I make it That’s not my home. You know? (ibid).

Significantly, Kay rehearses mainstream discourses of the family in the above anecdote. Clearly, she understands that home is supposed to be where one’s family is. However, in her
experience, this was not the case. Her direct observation of this disjuncture reflects both the ideological purchase of dominant discourses of home and family, as well as her own consciousness of the fact that her lived experiences are incompatible with normative conceptualizations of home and family as one and the same. Indeed, Kay’s comments expose how the ideological unity of home and family is socially constructed: an ideological duality that is detonated when viewed through the lived experiences of homeless youth.

Making sense of such contradictions similarly arose as an element of Jupiter’s recollections of the home. Like Darian and Vi, Jupiter’s household was a site of alcohol abuse, violence, and, at times, even imprisonment:

*It was total, total abuse...all different kinds. Um, so and, then they would threaten to, you know, throw me out. There were periods where if I didn’t do what they wanted, exactly the way they wanted it? They would take away my house keys, and basically make me a prisoner, for weeks at a time. They used to take away the phone privileges, so I couldn’t call anybody and tell them what the hell was going on...Um, the one time I did, kinda run away, when I was about 16 or 15, and I spent a couple days at my grandmother’s house. My dad called her up, and told her that I was doing all this bad stuff, and that I was breaking the law, and that I was having fights with my mom and that was why I was really there. My grandmother ate it up with a spoon, right? I got sent back to my dad, he took away my keys and he said, “you’re not leaving the house for three weeks”. And I didn’t* (Interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004).

Pivotaly, she reflects on coming to the realization that daily violence and verbal abuse are not compatible with mainstream notions of a ‘normal’ home life:

*There was tonnes of times where [my dad] was like, coming after me with like, you know, a board or a belt, or just himself, and, he chased me through the house, you know...It wasn’t until much later, much later, when I found out, no, that’s not the way it is supposed to be* (emphasis added; ibid).

Eventually, at the age of 17, Jupiter would, with the help of her girlfriend, have to fight her way through her parents to escape her home:

*My dad came up from the basement and he started yelling. And he’s like, “You’ve got half an hour to get your asses out of here.”...and at this point in*
time I’m just freaking out, because I have this feeling that something bad is
going to happen...I’m just like, I had this feeling like, “I’m not going to be back
here for a while.” So I grabbed everything that I could possibly think of that
was important to me, and threw it in my backpack. And I’m just scrambling to
get all my stuff, and um, put it in my backpack and my dad’s like, “You’ve got
20 minutes...you’ve got 10 minutes...now you’ve got 5...now get outta
here!”...Then my mom, comes out of the bedroom, and she’s like, “Give me
your keys and your cell-phone, right now.” And I’m like, “No, I’m not giving
you my house keys. I’m not giving you the phone.” And she starts beating me.
Scratches me and claws me, tears at my clothes. Um, and then, um, my
girlfriend turns around and my dad is like, in front of my girlfriend? My
girlfriend turns around, sees what’s going on and she’s like, “Ohhhh no, you’re
getting out of here, honey!” So she turns around to grab me in the arm, right?
And I know this because I’m right there and I see it. She’s not trying to touch
my mom at all. My dad thinks that she’s going after my mom, my dad picks her
up from behind and bear hugs her and tries to throw her down the stairs.
[pauses] They were hardwood stairs...And um, basically I get to the front of
the stairs and I see this happening and I’m like, “Oh my God.” And so I dash
out the back, we had a back door, and I ran down the back steps and I was just
like freaking out. I was like shaking and everything. And um, yeah I started
just like crying and screaming and, my mom came downstairs, and...[voice
starts to get a bit shaky]...she followed me down and she came from behind and
she had her nails and her...she started scratching at my face, and just started
hitting me and yelling at me and kicking me and I was just...totally like, as if,
you know, just beating the crap out of me. And [pauses]...And, and I had to
take her...I had to grab her hair and yank her hair back, and hit her in the face
to get away. And...I got...I just ran, and I didn’t think that...[voice becomes
much more shaky] I didn’t even think that I’d make it to the end of the
driveway... That was like, that was, I just, I can’t believe it. It’s something that,
it’s something that, like, will never leave me. And [voice starts to shake
again]...[crying] it’s just terrible (ibid).

Later, Jupiter poignantly reflects on how tragic it was that she felt compelled to leave her
home:

Nobody wants to lose their home, nobody wants to leave where they grew up. They have roots there, they’ve got family, they’ve got maybe some friends? They have a history there. They’re comfortable. And for somebody to have to leave? That says a lot. And it should (ibid).
For Darian, Vi, Jupiter, Phoenix, and Kay, the institution of the family was patently
not a site of safety and security. Indeed, their stories constitute a profoundly distressing
counter-narrative to dominant images of natal homes as (happy, safe, secure) sites of
cooperative relations and unconditional love between family members. My informants’
narratives reveal family dynamics inflected by normative expectations vis-a-vis gender and
sexuality – particularly in regards to the dictates of heterofemininity and compulsory
heterosexuality – as well as class, ‘race’, and whiteness. These relations were further
compounded – and, indeed, at times manifested through – violence, sexual abuse,
incarceration within the home, as well as verbal and emotional abuse.

In my interview with Vi, she notes that her biological father – who was “full blood Cree”
(Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004) – left the family when she was eight years old to service
his heroine addiction in Vancouver. Vi spent little time with her paternal relatives, and was
raised instead by her mother – who is of Irish and Gypsy ancestry – in Kamloops, BC.
Despite the fact that Vi’s mother had been sexually abused by her own father until the age of
17, Vi was left by her mother in this man’s care every Sunday. Every Sunday, he would
sexually abuse her. At the age of 9 or 10, Vi’s mother asked her “if something odd was
happening” (ibid). At this point, Vi disclosed the sexual abuse, and together they approached
a local sexual assault centre and laid charges against this man.

Though she received support from her mother around this issue, the rest of Vi’s maternal
relatives “hated her” for charging him because

He’s the patriarch. My whole family blamed me and not him. They protected
him, grew closer to him. Everybody – because it was in the paper, too, right, his
name. And, um, so they all went like that. From there it was like, ummmm
[voice shaking] I became the black sheep (ibid).

120 Again, here, as elsewhere, all names used to refer to informants (or persons discussed by informants) are
pseudonyms.
Crucially, Vi attributes this reaction from her maternal relatives to relations of male domination in the family. Dorothy Smith’s assertion that “institutional analysis explicates generalized bases of the experience of oppression” (1987: 154) is useful in this instance, because it highlights the ways in which the patriarchal structure of Vi’s family can and should be problematized – as opposed to normalized. As “the patriarch”, her grandfather’s character was treated as unassailable by Vi’s family members, while she was positioned in this hierarchy as the problem. However, viewing the family as a social institution that performs the work of ruling – including the reproduction of male power and privilege – renders visible how relations of inequality stemming from her grandfather’s age and gender (over)determined her family’s wholly problematic interpretation of events.

This element of Vi’s narrative is startlingly similar to Darian’s account of how she was sexually abused while living with her maternal aunt’s family. A young woman of mixed heritage, though Darian did not self-identify as either First Nations of Metis, she commented that she has been told by family members that she has some First Nations heritage. Thus, I do not refer to her as white, but of mixed heritage. Significantly, this aspect of Darian’s story disrupts the binary of white / non-white, as well as attendant issues vis-a-vis identity versus heritage. She does not identify as First Nations, but does claim First Nations heritage. I discuss Darian’s account of what home was like with her mother below, in the section titled, Not the Hallmark Version: Stories of the Home.

Dorothy Smith discusses class-inflected discourses of single / parenthood in regards to her own experience as a single mother in Ideology and Work in the Experience of a Single Parent (The Everyday World As Problematic, 1987: 167-174). She argues that the work of parenting “is embedded in the social relations of the extended social and economic process” (ibid: 170): “‘single parent is a constituent of a discourse, naming a form of family that is defective...The effective form is one in which the man heads the household and earns a salary or wage, thus enabling his wife labor to be exclusively available for the tasks of housewifery and mothering. Such...processes must be situated in their material conditions...as a part of the social organization of class” (ibid: 171).
provided a safe and cooperative family environment, Darian would be forced to run away again to escape her uncle’s sexual abuse. She then laid charges against him with the police.

Her extended family – like Vi’s – responded thusly:

I charged him. I was going to go to court, but then my family had kicked me out of the family...I don’t know how it happens, but they do, right? They call you up... “You’re no longer part of our family” [said in mocking voice]. And I got told that...at the same time my grandpa came down with cancer, and the whole family blamed me for stressing him out. [pauses] Yeah, and then I was told, by my grandpa, who’s like, dying, right? [voice is very soft at this point...sounds sad and a little bit tired] And he talks to me and he’s like, [pauses] “I don’t believe you. I don’t believe him. I’m going to go to court and find out for myself.” And so my whole family was going to sit in court and judge me for themselves. Because they’d already picked a side. And at that point I was just like, “fuck it, it’s not worth it” (Interview with Darian, April 7, 2004).

Like Vi, Darian’s choice to report the abuse to police resulted in this expulsion from her extended family. In addition, her uncle deployed his position as a family member – someone ostensibly supportive – to use Darian’s previous history of childhood sexual abuse against her with their relatives:

my brother at this point, did not believe me, what I was saying, and it didn’t help that when I was at my uncle’s I came out about being abused when I was younger? And I think this helped my uncle to get all...this is just looking back, right? Because he wanted me to “talk to him about it”...So he could ‘support me’...[bitter laughter] (emphasis added; ibid).

By positioning himself as the benevolent uncle who had taken in his runaway niece, Darian’s uncle attempted to extend his paternalistic authority – which operates in specific, institutionalized ways within mainstream discourses of the family (Bourdieu, 1998: 70) – to get her to talk about her (previous) experiences with childhood sexual abuse. Herein, we can observe how this man deployed what Foucault terms, “the obligation to confession” (1978: 33) in an attempt to extend his paternalistic power over her – all the while positioning himself as ‘helping’ her to manage her history of child sexual abuse “for the greater good”
Darian's experiences with this man are further implicated within "discourses that are interlocking, hierarchized, and all highly articulated around a cluster of power relations" (ibid: 30) – for, in addition, relations of homophobia and heterosexism emerge from this story: "It really fucked me up - not because it was abuse, but because he had figured out that I was gay, and he abused me to 'help me' become heterosexual" (interview with Darian, April 7, 2004). This man's ability to deploy such a rationale is directly linked to common sense, homophobic discourses that promote the notion that a queer individual 'needs' to change, to 'become' heterosexual. From this perspective, Darian's story reveals how, indeed, sexuality represents "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" (ibid: 103) within families.

For Jupiter, discourses of heterosexism and homophobia also emerged within her family. In speaking of growing up in a white, middle-class suburb of Surrey, BC, she reminisces about how, as a very young child, she attributed her parents' violence to the fact that she was "a fairly masculine child" (interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004):

> I thought...they're doing it because I'm not a good enough daughter. My thing was, they're doing it because, you know, I'm not girly enough, or I'm not pretty enough, or I'm not what Dad expects of me to be as a girl, you know (ibid).

Herein, Jupiter reveals that, even at a young age, she was aware of the pervasive expectations of heterofemininity within the institution of the family – enough so to feel responsible for the violence she experienced in her home.

By the age of 14 or 15, Jupiter was beginning to explore her queer identity – making trips to the local library to do research about sexuality. However, despite keeping this from her family, her mother, and later, her father found out:

> Jupiter: So um...yeah, and then, um, as I was going to the library, um, this was actually when my mother started, still being my mom, she uh, she came across
some notes I’d scribbled out, about books and stuff...Yeah, so she found them. And uh, she didn’t say anything. But she was like, you know, kind of keeping an eye on me, and sort of questioning me...

EB: In what ways?

J: Um...just sort of like, “you know, if there’s anything you want to talk about...” or, um...what else did she say? I guess that was really about it. Um, but I ended up telling her. And um, it was, I was very emotional about it, because I didn’t know what was going to happen, and it was very scary.

EB: How old were you?

J: I was actually like, 14, 15...I was pretty young. And I told her, and she didn’t believe me... She was like, “so you think you’re gay, eh?” I’m like, “No, I am!”...I’m not telling you, for like, attention...So she just, she didn’t believe me at all. She’s like, “you’re too young, how do you know? You’ve never been...even gone on a date with a boyfriend...” and stuff...But, my mom, I don’t know what was going through her head, but she wasn’t...she wasn’t the type of person who could really, like, deal with stuff, in a mature manner? She told my dad. I had a problem with that. I told her, “Don’t – ever – tell him.” And she, she was a total bitch, I have to say. Because she acted like there was something so wrong, like we’d had this huge fight, like something had like happened to me...and my dad was like, “what is it? What is it?”...“I can’t tell you. She told me not to tell you.”...Yeah. So, um...and he’s like, “what is it? What is it?”...“Can’t tell you.” And so they started fighting about it, and I was like “oh God, I really have to tell him” And so I did, and...he was really shocked. And he didn’t believe me either (ibid).

Compounded by what Jupiter calls her parents’ “sick, twisted little alcoholic, co-dependent relationship” (ibid), her parents’ denial deteriorated into verbal abuse about her sexuality:

You know, like, sometimes they would tell really over-used and gay jokes, and stuff like that? Try to make me uncomfortable. They didn’t ... they didn’t tell any of my other family (ibid).

Significantly, though Jupiter’s parents were willing to rehearse homophobic jokes and slurs in order to make her uncomfortable, they were simultaneously unwilling to share information about her sexuality beyond the four walls of the natal home. This may indicate that her parents were at least marginally aware of the homophobic, common sense logic that suggests queer children are the result of some pathological or social failure of the parents.
As the months went by, Jupiter’s family life worsened. As she reflected back on this, there was no doubt whatsoever in her mind that her parents’ knowledge about her sexuality played a role in the further disintegration of her home life, and the escalation of the violence she experienced therein:

When I was 16, things started getting really bad in the house. Period. My mom and dad’s relationship basically dissolved. They’d been married since they were like, 20. And my dad had been alcoholic since he was 15. And so they were just like, like totally just at each other’s throats and just hated each other, and had...they had a completely sick love. And in the middle...us. So who gets it? The kids get it, right? Like, who gets it the most? The kid does. The kids that’s, you know, right there – the gay kid. I was the gay kid. Like, “there’s something wrong with you, you’ve got a problem.” Um, so...yeah, I um, I constantly had fights with them. At that point in time, my dad was also getting very abusive to my mom. You know, broke her jaw. Um, beat the crap out of her. Literally beat the crap out of her. On like, pretty much a monthly basis. And, you know, when you’re 16...I was like, I remember going down and talking with my mom, after my dad had left and stuff, “why didn’t you call the police? Do you want me to call the police?” and she’d just be like, just sitting there, right? With this horrible, dark, kind of creepy energy on her. And she’d be like, “just go back up to your room.” I could see blood on her, and I’d be like, “why don’t you call the cops? He beat the crap out of you.” You know, you could put him in jail, right now. And she wouldn’t, and it made me really angry, you know? Because she wasn’t the only one getting beat up. You know, I was getting my lick, too. Not to the same extent, because I appeared more in public, um...but, you know? I still got thrown into walls. You know, I’ve gotten doors slammed on me. My dad had a habit of breaking doors down, which is why none of the doors had locks (ibid).

As with Darian’s story, Jupiter’s narrative exposes how issues of sexuality augmented her risk for abuse within the family. In addition, however, Jupiter’s story reveals how the expectations of heterofemininity created an additional layer of stigma for her. As a masculine girl and young woman, Jupiter had felt that she was a disappointment to her family – so much so that it enabled her to rationalize the violence she witnessed and experienced. Herein, the normative expectations of heterofemininity and those regarding the supposed safety and security of the family converge. That it was necessary for her to draw a
connection between her gender performance and the chaos at home renders visible the enormous power and purchase of mainstream ideologies that position gender and sexual variance as 'problems' for the (otherwise) loving family.

In all five of the interviews, stories such as these underlie my informants' entry into homelessness and / or street-involvement. For example, at the age of eleven, Vi ran away from her mother's home for good. Her sole support system became her best friend - another young woman who was street-involved. Though not tied to one another by any familial bonds that would be recognized within the context of mainstream, heteronormative discourses of the family, Vi had worked together with this woman to survive street-life for a time: “When we were together, we felt like we had so much power. We got each others' backs...we felt safe with each other, you know?” (interview with Vi, April 1, 2004). In addition, Vi says of this woman, “she was the reason why I was alive...she was my whole support system, and what I wasn't getting anything any other place in my life” (ibid). Vi's characterization of this young woman as her support system, her reason for living, and someone she felt implicitly safe with bears a stark contrast to her description of her maternal family. The elements of connection and mutual trust attributed to the nuclear family in mainstream discourse were present only with this person who was not a part of Vi’s biological family. Indeed, Vi directly contrasts the bond she shared with this young woman with what she was not getting “any other place in life” (ibid).

In spite of the desperation clearly evident in Vi’s need to escape her family home – for which she clearly had ample motivation – her mother and other maternal relatives made sense of the fact that she ran away by constructing her as “just a rebellious, fucked up person” (interview with Vi, April 1, 2004). In order to make sense of this element of Vi’s
experience, it is helpful to recall Sangster’s suggestion that, “understanding the ideological context may help to unravel the apparently contradictory effects of ideology on experience” (1994: 6). If we take into account the enormous ideological purchase of mainstream constructions of the family, it becomes evident that dominant discourses of the family as a site of safety and security were active in constructing Vi as ‘the problem’ for her family (rather than the reverse). Having rejected the patriarchal hierarchy she identifies as integral to her family – by charging her grandfather with sexual abuse, by running away from home – Vi disrupted her relatives’ shared conceptualization of their kinship group as a safe and supportive environment. In order to reconcile Vi’s actions with powerful ideological understandings of the family as a locus of unconditional love and security, Vi was (re)positioned as the deviant element – or, as she puts it, “the black sheep” – by her maternal family.

Similarly, Phoenix and Kay – both from white, middle-class homes – chose to couch-surf rather than live with their parents, and they formed close bonds with other youth, many of whom were queer. However, prior to finding a queer community, Phoenix describes her time on the street as one of precariousness and instability:

I never like, prostituted myself off the street. It’s like a grey area there. Where I don’t know how I made money for drugs, but it was there and [pauses]...I’d be out for 5 nights, sneak into mum’s house, sleep and shower and then leave again. Sometimes I’d crash with guys I was hanging out with. It was just like I was constantly on the go. I’d go out to Kelowna, out to Abbotsford. It’s funny – I don’t remember sleeping much, except on the bus or in a car. It was just like I was constantly on the go (Interview with Phoenix, April 8, 2004).

In contrast, Phoenix describes finding a community of queer youth through a local service organization thusly: “I finally found a family” (ibid). Kay, too, emphasized the importance of finding other queer youth and queer positive spaces: “I needed the atmosphere – it was
necessary for me. I needed it. I needed to be in a gay comfortable place” (Interview with Kay, April 4, 2004). What stands out in both Kay and Phoenix’s stories is that this comfort, this queer-positive space was not evident or possible within their middle-class, heteronuclear families – indeed, to achieve a sense of belonging, both women felt they had to look outside their families.

In addition to the elements of homophobia, heterosexism, and heterofemininity that emerge from the narratives discussed above, it is important to note that axes of class, ‘race’, and whiteness also inflect these young women’s experiences of the family. Significantly – with the exception of Vi, who identifies as two-spirit - comments about the importance of ethnicity, cultural heritage, ‘race’, and legacies of colonization are missing from stories of family relationships. The conspicuous absence of such comments highlights the extent to which whiteness represents the unmarked ‘racial’ category in terms of identity and experience (Frankenberg, 1993: 1). Kay, Phoenix, and Jupiter, do not speak of being white women except when asked about their cultural heritage; they do not highlight or articulate ways in which their whiteness impacted on relations with family; on the class position of their families; on sexual and gender identities as they emerged as a source of difficulty in their families. Indeed, their silence on such matters is so unanimous that it invites critical scrutiny. That the young white women in my study did not have to deal with or think about such issues is an indication of white privilege, and the ways in which it operates to normalize white subjects in direct opposition to Aboriginal peoples and people of colour. For instance, none of the white women in my study self-identified as colonizers or settlers. The marking of whiteness as a normative category erases, for example, the historical
particularities and atrocities of colonization in ways that (re)produce whiteness as a characteristic of Canadian national identity (Schick, 1995: 2). In the context of my interviews with queer young women, these relations of ruling are evident at the level of everyday experience within white families for whom ‘race’, racism, and colonization are simply not issues.

However, it would be problematic to exclusively position Vi’s Aboriginal heritage only or exclusively as a liability to her. This would be tantamount to representing her as a victim—a term she did not use in reference to herself. Indeed, Vi identifies her Aboriginal heritage and the notion of the two-spirits as enormously empowering:

Two-spiritedness? I think, yeah, it had more room for me. I also found way more truth in walking the red road, the red road is...In walking the red road than I did anywhere else, because [long pause, begins with a deep breath] for me, my culture is so much. Um...so meaningful to me. I find so much strength from there...two-spirited was actually coined in Winnipeg in 1991. It was a word that was made up by someone, and it just kind of stuck, because there was no word to describe, even in cultures like, even in, um...the Cree nation, where there are six genders, there wasn’t any like, words to explain it. It’s just like, six ways that you were known that you could be, you know what I mean? But, that’s also coming from a culture where diversity was, um, was great, because it added to, um, to the wisdom that could be extracted. Not only for someone individually, but for the whole community...You know, so um, there was all sorts...there is all sorts of homophobia, but I find that it’s less than uh, in the mainstream community. Like, if I walked into a pow-wow holding my girlfriend’s hand, I wouldn’t get any second looks. Um, but if I walk down the street, holding my girlfriend’s hand, even on Commercial Drive...I would get looks (Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004).

Thus, while it is clear that two-spirit youth must negotiate racism, legacies of genocide, colonization, and residential schools (Lerat, 2004: 3-6), Vi’s narrative also reveals that Aboriginal identity and heritage can, in fact, represent an empowering knowledge system for

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124 As I have noted elsewhere, Darian notes in her interview that she has mixed-race heritage somewhere in her background. However, other than mentioning that this is so, she does not discuss this in relation to her family at all.
individuals whose gender and sexual identities are considered ‘abnormal’ by white, Western / European standards.

In contrast to the white women in my study, Vi identified axes of ‘race’ and cultural heritage as highly significant in her relationships with family – indeed, in her narrative, these axes of identity and experience converge with sexuality, gender identity and class. Indeed, unlike academic literature that uncritically positions sexuality and ‘race’ as mutually exclusive axes of experience (Mallon, 1992: 553), Vi’s narrative demonstrates that legacies of colonization have a tremendous impact and importance in her consciousness:

like maybe, no, your family doesn’t kick you out of the house because you’re Aboriginal, because the whole family is Aboriginal, right? But um, maybe your family, who is Aboriginal, uh, [takes a long deep breath in and out] has had, the fucking degradative effects of colonization, where, uh, three generations of your...fucking race, have um, were um, put in residential schools, so uh, their language, their spiritual identity taken away, never mind daily...being humiliated on a daily basis. Never mind sexually abused by people who profess to be the people of God [voice gets thick with emotion...she’s fighting to get these words out] Um, never mind uh, physically abused and things like that where, okay, one-two-three generations who go through this like, how effectively disturbing of...of a way to commit genocide on a nation of people? Um, because you do it like that, and then they’ll carry on the abuse for the next generations to come by themselves – you don’t need to do anything else...you know? [voice is still broken-up] So um...so how do...you know, that’s a big effect (ibid).

Unlike Jupiter, Phoenix, and Kay’s accounts, Vi’s narrative emphasizes issues of colonization, genocide, and racism – even though the white women’s lives are structured by the very same histories, the very same relations of ruling. However, for young, white

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125 Mallon states, “Unlike other minority groups...gay and lesbian adolescents do not grow up in a supportive cultural environment that can act as a buffer against stigmatization...In addition, other minorities are not thrown out of their homes for being what they are; gay and lesbian youngsters often are” (ibid: 553). Herein, Mallon erases the experiences of queer youth of color, bi-racial queer youth, Aboriginal queer youth, etc.

126 Ruth Frankenberg elaborates on how whiteness “is a location of structural advantage” (1993: 1) that impacts on the everyday experiences of white people.
queer women in my study, the unearned privileges (MacIntosh, 1998) of whiteness render these ruling relations invisible.

In addition, Vi goes on to note that during the eleven years she spent living with her non-Aboriginal, maternal family (mother, maternal grandfather, aunts, etc.), she often felt out of place:

I always knew that I was...different from the rest of my family in a lot of ways. But um, one of those ways was that...the way that I looked, or felt about life...um, the way that I thought that things should be, uh, I later found out correlated with the traditional values of our First Nations culture...So um, right, so discovering that, and feeling more identification with my culture, and also finding that there was more room for me. Um...and all the ways that I was. Um, in so many ways (Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004).

This sense of “difference” became increasingly evident to her when, at the age of thirteen, her paternal aunts intervened with social services to have her transferred to their custody in Burnaby. Both of these women identify as Metis, and encouraged Vi to attend an acting camp for Aboriginal youth. At the same time, however, her aunts were engaged in the process of training Vi to behave in ways consistent with their upper middle class values vis-à-vis heterofemininity:

This is my training. From the mainstream, upper class of all the social rules. I remember being in New York, having walked everywhere that day. We were waiting in line for the Empire State building. And I slid down the wall – I was wearing a skirt – but I slid down the wall to sit. And getting like, ‘the look’...the look of death from my aunt – like that was the most atrocious thing that I could think of doing, so there was all sorts of social conditioning, um, going on...all of a sudden, I was expected to be, um, so, this lady...when I came to Burnaby, and was all of a sudden in this new, like, social niche, where all of a sudden I was expected to be, you know, more ‘girly’...and so, yeah, I’m in – the prime focus is, before I went school, was um, getting myself clean, getting myself clothed – lots of nice clothes, went to Bloomingdales. I’m like, dude! (ibid).

127 Again, Vi notes that her maternal family is of Irish and gypsy ancestry. Her Aboriginal heritage derives from her Cree father’s side of the family.
Later, Vi goes on to talk about how her aunts’ support and affection was conditional on her performance of middle-class heterofemininity:

This is the most girly time in my life. I’m wearing dresses and doing my nails and things like this. And um, it was all part of the thing. Like, I didn’t question a lot... I felt like I didn’t have to prove my love or, or get it, buy it, earn it, do you know what I mean? But then, I was sadly mistaken, because when I was 19 – or 18, yeah 18 – I was beginning to realize things like, ‘Why do women have to shave their body hair Men don’t have to...thinking about things like um... ‘why don’t I own any CD’s? Why don’t I? Everybody else I know owns CD’s. Oh, I know. It’s because they don’t like the music that I listen to’. You know, all of these kinds of questions. Like, I really think that women who wear no make-up are very attractive. Why do I feel like I have to put on a mask every single time I leave the house? (ibid).

To further complicate her negotiation of this conflict, it is during this same time that Vi begins to confront her own sexuality:

I started to have this skip in my brain. And like, it was a skip, that would like, creep up on me. And then there would be a whisper, and the whisper would tell me, would realize, that I was a lesbian, at that one second. And then I would grab it and push it to the back of my brain, and I would not remember that I thought that until the next time I thought it. And then the next time I thought it, I would do the exact same thing. And um, so I started like, renting dyke movies and bawling my fucking head off. Um, I was an active volunteer in various places, and um, I started requesting um, workshops come in from The Centre [a queer service agency in Vancouver]. Um, and so when I was ready - and it was literally like, I dumped my boyfriend then I got my hair cut and then (laughs) – I was like, “Okay world. I’m a lesbian” (laughs). But I had to practice saying the word first – me going le-, le-, le-, le- ahhhh! Le-, le-. You know? But so, this whole process happens, and I’m out in the world, and I’m a dyke (ibid).

Unfortunately, Vi’s rejection of heterofeminine gender performance, and her conscious self-identification as a lesbian revealed the contingent nature of her aunts’ support, as well as her inclusion within their family. Indeed, though they had created a sense of belonging for Vi vis-a-vis her Aboriginal heritage, her sexuality increasingly became an issue with her family: “My aunts...when I came out to them, they were like, ‘We don’t like things to be a big issue...’We don’t like big statements’” (ibid). When Vi returned from university with
her girlfriend one summer, her aunt’s homophobia became overt. Vi tells of her aunt’s reaction to seeing her holding hands with a girlfriend in the family car: “she said...Don’t you ever do that in front of my son! Your grandmother is coming and I don’t want you two to even touch each other! You’re just friends!’ ” (ibid). After this episode, her aunts inform Vi that she cannot stay with them, and has only a few days to find another place to live. Indeed, this disintegration of Vi’s relationship with her aunts prefigured her becoming homeless again, on and off, for several years.

_Becoming Street Involved: Ruling Relations & the Value(s) in Family_

According to Eli Coleman, there is a distinct correlation between queerness and “the precipitation of family problems...leading to the decision to run away or be thrown out” (1989: 135). As the above narratives clearly demonstrate, this is as true for queer young women as it is for sexual minority youth in general. Indeed, experiences of home and family relations are an integral part of homeless street-involved young women’s pathways to homelessness. Moreover, as Dorothy Smith points out, “Individuals’ accounts of their experiences may disclose a level of organization beyond that experience” (ibid: 128). The stories above reveal a great deal about dominant ideologies of the home and family, as well as the intersections of issues pertaining to class, ‘race’, whiteness, gender / performance, and sexuality. Subsequently, these narratives also expose how particular relations of ruling are present – though not necessarily visibly so – at the immediate level of everyday experience. In particular, Jupiter and Vi’s narratives demonstrate how pressures within their families vis-a-vis the performance of heterofemininity lead to extreme conflict. Similarly, as with Darian, their queerness represented an additional layer of vulnerability in the home. Indeed,
Darian's uncle attempted to use her queerness against her to rationalize his sexually abusive behaviour.

My informants' testimonies contradict common sense notions of the home and family as sites of safety, security, unconditional love, and cooperative relations. This leads me to ask: in whose interest is it to reproduce social ideologies that promote the home as a site of safety? What role do such discourses play in maintaining relations of power and privilege? If dominant representations of the home embody ideologies about the superiority of middle-class, heterosexual nuclearity, then these young women's stories speak in opposition to the supposed solidity of such homes. For instance, Darian fled a single-parent home when she left her mother's house; her aunt and uncle's home should have, in contrast (and according to dominant notions vis-a-vis the inherent stability of heteronormative nuclearity) been more stable, not less. Yet she had to escape this home, too, because of her uncle's sexually abusive behaviour. Kay and Jupiter both came from homes with two, married, heterosexual parents. Yet their stories also do not reflect stability and security in the natal home. Both left their parents' homes in order to find – or keep, as in Kay's narrative – queer community.

These accounts highlight the inaccuracy of the homophobic proposition that suggests queer individuals represent a danger to the sanctity of the familial home. Moreover, my informants' testimonies expose how normative conceptualizations of the natal home are premised on the assumption that it is a site of stability prior to its 'disruption' by a queer family member. The stories shared by Vi, Darian, Kay and Jupiter rupture this empirically dubious, common sense supposition.128

128 Here, I am again referring to both my own research, as well as that which demonstrates the home can be a site of violence, neglect, instability, etc, as well. See Annalee Golz (1995), Carol Anne O'Brien and Lorna Weir (1995), Ellen Lewin (1996), and Sandra Kopels (1998).
Indeed, if instead of viewing these young women’s experiences through the lens of dominant discourse, we look at the latter through the lens of these testimonies, then it is the home itself that is rendered questionable as a site of stability. This is a very controversial proposition, because it challenges the presumed superiority of heterosexual nuclearity, while at the same time troubling the presumption that the home is a reliable site for the reproduction of socially acceptable, ‘family values’. Indeed, if the home is a place that queer young women will risk almost anything to escape from – including violence, homelessness, coercive sexual encounters, and the loss of ties with siblings and other loved ones – what is being learned at home vis-a-vis ‘family values’ are notions of violence over safety; neglect over stability; and, ultimately, survival over family.

Does this mean that there are separate family values enacted in homes with queer daughters? No. These narratives suggest something broader – something much more threatening to value judgments about the superiority of heterosexual unions and heteronuclear families. The narratives cited above expose that romanticized invocations of family values and stability in the (heteronormative) home refer to a mythical, Norman Rockwell fantasy that is deployed strategically to buttress the ideological incompatibility of queers and home – queers and family – in mainstream discourse. In other words, these testimonies highlight how dominant ideologies of the family support ruling relations promoting heteronormativity. Michel Foucault argues that,

intra-familial relations...have become ‘disciplined’, absorbing since the classical age external schema, first educational and military, then medical, psychiatric, psychological, which have made the family the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal (1977: 215-16).

Herein, Foucault suggests that the role of the family is not to promote stability and security, as well as their attendant ‘family values’ – but to reproduce the hegemony of the norm and
the privilege of normality (Bourdieu, 1998: 69). As an institution, then, the family is implicated in ruling relations thusly:

The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions [such as the family] compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (emphasis original, 1977: 182-83).

If the family is not a de facto site of stability; if homes are not safe prior to some anticipated detonation by a queer insider (or outsider); then positioning the family as a sacrosanct – and threatened – social institution can only serve to (re)entrench the class-, ‘race’-, gender-, and sexually-inflected relations of ruling that sustain the family as an ideologically heterosexist “conceptual practice” (Smith, 1987: 108). In other words, if the nuclear family is socially constructed as the most natural, normal, and ideal family formation – despite the fact that it is, empirically, a minority experience (Bourdieu, 1998: 64) – its role in performing the work of ruling must be to organize local experiences in ways that reproduce the values and practices of dominant groups.
Chapter 5
Socially Serv(ic)ing Ruling Relations: Public Schools, Social Service Institutions, and Queer Young Women

Socializing for Heteronormativity: BC Schools and Relations of Ruling

The education system...maintains the pre-existing order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998: 20).

School was a place where fitting in was more important than being who you really were (Interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004).

When I initially set out to interview queer young women who are or have been homeless or street-involved, it did not occur to me that experiences with public schooling would constitute such an integral part of their narratives; instead, I primarily anticipated stories about other social service enclaves, such as the group homes, foster homes, BC benefits, homeless shelters, etc. However, in four of the five interviews, my informants related stories that variously testify to the existence of homophobia, heterosexism, violence, emotional and verbal abuse in schools - all in the face of near total apathy on the part of school teachers, administrators, staff, and counselors. According to Didi Khayatt (1995), Kathryn Herr (1999), Calvin Knight (2000), and others, queer students experience both overt and covert manifestations of homophobia and heterosexism in public schools. Indeed, research-based data that exposes these trends is well established. The dogged persistence of these conditions – in spite of ample proof that they exist to the detriment of queer students –

129 In retrospect, I realize I should have anticipated this, particularly given that my subject population is comprised of young women. Similar to the family, schools are pivotal institutions that perform the work of ruling via secondary socialization – which Berger and Luckmann define as a process subsequent to primary socialization that “inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society” (1966: 120).

130 The exception, here, is Vi’s story. Though she did mention high school fairly briefly in regards to how school and social service agencies colluded in separating her from her best friend – her “whole support system” (Interview with Vi, April 1, 2004) – experiences with public schooling received far less ‘air time’ in her interview than in the other four.
reflects their systemic and institutional character. Kathryn Herr (1999) has referred to the failure of school personnel and educational authorities to protect queer students from homophobia and heterosexism as “institutional violence” (1999: 243). She goes on to suggest that,

Institutionally violent practices...are expressions of dominant societal ideologies and function as a mechanism of social control; for example, one implicit role of societal institutions, such as schools, is to promote the pervasive ideology of heterosexism and thereby perpetuate clear constructs of maleness and femaleness (ibid: 244).

In this fashion, Herr points out how schools are implicated in relations of ruling: “domination and...violence, in the form of everyday institutional practices, are disguised from recognition and critique” (emphasis added; ibid).


The [education] system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences in aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain preexisting social differences (1998: 20).

Herein, Bourdieu is describing how cultural capital operates in schools. Specifically, he is referring to the “particular types of linguistic competence, authority patterns...dispositions, behaviour, habits, good taste, savoir faire and attitudes” (Bellamy, 1994: 122) that are transmitted “by families of higher social status...as a result, their children are more easily..."
able to access academic rewards” (ibid: 123). However, I would argue that the compulsory character\textsuperscript{132} of heteronormative gender performance and heterosexuality operate in a very similar fashion to – and very compatibly alongside of – cultural capital. For example, Bourdieu emphasizes the (middle) class-inflected nature of cultural capital and the ways it is transmitted by families and later interpreted by as “legitimate competence” (Bellamy, 1994: 123). Similarly, my subjects’ testimonies demonstrate that the heteronormative attitudes and behaviours that prevailed in their families were rewarded by schools via the institutionalization of homophobia and heterosexism. Indeed, the compatibility of heteronormativity with middle-class cultural values and norms – or cultural capital – is entirely consistent with what Patricia Hill Collins conceptualizes as a “matrix of domination” (as cited in Razack, 2000: 50). As discussed in Chapter 4, heterosexism and homophobia within families work to (re)produce heterosexuality as a normative subject position at the same time that certain values vis-à-vis class, ‘race’, whiteness, and culture are (or are not, according to Bourdieu) diffused. As diverse sites of the ruling apparatus, schools and families are ideologically interconnected by heteronormative (as well as gender-, class-, and ‘race’-inflected) discourses (Smith, 1987: 160). Indeed, Dorothy Smith argues that this common ideological framework is crucial to the functioning of the ruling apparatus:

\begin{quote}
We might imagine institutions as nodes of knots in the relations of the ruling apparatus...Integral to the coordinating process are ideologies systematically developed to provide categories and concepts expressing the relation of local courses of action to the institutional function...providing a currency or currencies enabling interchange between different specialized parts of the complex and a common conceptual organization coordinating its diverse sites (ibid).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} In her research on lesbian students in schools, Didi Khayatt suggests that there is a “systematic and forcible imposition of heterosexuality through institutional and cultural arrangements that privilege people for being or appearing heterosexual” (1995: 150).
Thus, heteronormativity operates alongside of cultural capital in schools to advantage heterosexual students at the expense of queer ones.

*In the Closet or Out(ed) at School: Gender, Sexuality, and the High School Confidential*

The ways in which three of the queer young women in my study were deeply divided—both by and from their (ostensibly) heterosexual peers, as well as the school system itself—is highly familiar. Just as schools interpret cultural capital as “differences in aptitude” (Bourdieu, 1998: 20) to separate students into so-called high academic achievers and their (Other) age group peers, so too do relations of heteronormativity simultaneously impact upon the formation of (social) peer groups as well as academic success. Kay, Phoenix, and Jupiter were all pushed out of the mainstream school system because they could not withstand the homophobic and heterosexist treatment meted out by their peers. Darian chose to remain closeted in order to access the support of teachers and counselors within a school where she felt she had no friends. Thus, like absence of cultural capital, non-normative gender(s) and sexualities were variously translated into “fundamentally punishing conditions” (Hesch, 1994: 200) for the young women in my study. These are conditions that heterosexual students generally do not have to deal with, yet benefit materially from because the maintenance of heteronormativity in schools detrimentally affects queer students while it simultaneously privileges heterosexual students.

I use the phrase pushed out, here, instead of drop-out, for several reasons. Primarily, I am deploying this terminology to highlight the ways that institutional violence, apathy, and inactivity in the face of daily homophobia and heterosexism alienates queer students from the school system, thereby pushing them out of school. For the young women in my study, the cumulative result of the homophobic environment that was allowed to flourish in public schools *unchallenged* was that leaving their schools became a matter of protecting their physical, emotional, and psychological selves. These three young women endured almost unbelievable bullying, harassment, and abuse before making the decision to leave school. It would be incorrect, therefore, to simplistically position them as drop-outs, when they endured so much in order to stay in school.

I should note, here, that heterosexual students who are perceived as gay also experience fundamentally punishing conditions vis-à-vis homophobia and heterosexism. However, they may have recourse—and solace—in the knowledge / claim that they are heterosexual. Certainly, this is not always the case. Hamed Nastoh, a
Darian, for example, talks about how high school represented her first encounter with ongoing, positive feedback:

I was doing really well in school, I tried really hard. And I refused to leave my one school, and I kept commuting there, like, by bus and whatnot, and would travel...forever and do all my homework like, three months in advance [laughs] you know, like stupid shit, right?...Cuz' that was the only positive feedback in my whole life that I ever had, was through high school. Kind of liked the attention...And I...I found support there [pauses]. So I became everybody's teacher's pet, you know? And...which was fine, because I didn’t have friends, so it worked (Interview with Darian, April 7, 2004).

Having taught herself to read in the eighth grade, Darian was deeply committed to getting an education. While moving from one foster home to another, Darian demonstrated incredible determination in refusing to change high schools:

young South Asian man committed suicide after having been subjected to homophobic abuse by peers at a Surrey district school (Yeung, 2000: http://www.xtra.ca/site/toronto2/arch/body572.shtml). Though Hamed stated in his suicide note that he was straight (ibid), the abuse he was subjected to prior to his suicide was clearly no less torturous than that a queer student might experience. In addition, it should be noted that queer students who are closeted, and who pass for heterosexual successfully, can, in this fashion, mitigate some of the impact of homophobia and heterosexism. However, as Vi and Darian both testify, not being out at school did not eliminate the emotional and social distress that emerges from witnessing these forms of oppression in public schools on a daily basis – all without any intervention from teachers and other educational personnel. Moreover, the so-called choice to be or remain closeted is deeply problematic in the context of schools that permit, uphold, and enable a homophobic (non)learning environment. Darian, in particular, expressed how the positive feedback she finally found at school was contingent upon her remaining closeted (Interview with Darian, April 7, 2004). I discuss her comments about this state of affairs further, below.

Darian’s experiences with elementary school were deeply problematic. Because her mother would move her children to a new school every time social services or educational authorities began to investigate why Darian and her siblings were obviously battered, not being fed at home or clothed adequately, etc., Darian attended in excess of thirty different elementary schools (Interview with Darian, April 7, 2004). As a result, teachers and administrators assumed she was, in her words, “retarded” (ibid). By the beginning of high-school, Darian took control of her education: “I decided to...change. Like, “fuck this shit, I’m smart” you know? And nobody got that? And it’s so easy because everybody would talk about me around me, but I didn’t exist. And I...I figured out why. I was saying stupid things. Cuz my mom taught me...like, my mom taught me like, I remember in class saying like, “yeah, there’s people living on the moon” and thinking it was right, because that’s what my mommy said, you know? ...I didn’t say...didn’t speak a word probably that whole year, in the school. As much as possible kept my mouth shut, because I was wrong. Everything I said was wrong. And you know what? It was kinda true [laughs]. So I just listened and learned...about everything, and just like, you know? Like, kinda huddled in my desk, and at one point I took a book, and it was Stephen King’s “Tommyknockers”, about 800 pages, not sure...and that was the first book I ever read. It took me...probably 3 or 4 months...And the stuff AT my reading level wasn’t that good, so when there was a word that I couldn’t read, I’d look it up in the dictionary. And then in the definition there’d be like 5 words that I couldn’t read, so then I’d look that up in the dictionary...It took me at least 3 months to read that book, and I was reading probably 5-10 minutes a page. And then, by the end of it, it was less. And now it’s like, what...10 seconds a page?...And then, from there I just kind of turned myself around at school. And by grade 9-10 I was on the B Honor Roll” (ibid).
I moved several, maybe 10 foster homes...but if they had to commute an hour and drive my ass or I had to bike for half an hour, I was there at school, right? Because that was the decision I made, because I didn’t want to...like everyone else in my family dropped out and everything, and...you know? Something that I made important to myself (ibid).

When I asked her about her relationships with school personnel, Darian suggested that her guidance counsellor and teachers were “great” (ibid) – even referring to her teachers as friends. However, when I asked Darian if she was open about her sexuality with her teachers or guidance counsellor, she replied that she was not. When I inquired as to why she did not come out to her teachers, she struggled to answer my question:

Well, it was...[pauses] like the people that all...like the people I wanted to impress and whatnot. And I cared what they thought about me...but...[pauses] yeah, no [makes a scoffing sound] (ibid).

Troubled by the contradiction I saw between Darian’s choosing to remain in the closet - despite characterizing her school counsellor, in particular, as very positive and supportive – I shared my confusion. She then elaborated:

She’s someone I cared too much to talk to [about that]. And it sounds weird, but I couldn’t deal with the fact...what if she just didn’t like me? And she’s the one person that I’ve never come out to...And it’s not because I’m not brave...I’m like, ‘I’m gay’ in front of a thousand people and it doesn’t bug me. But...I couldn’t handle...if she didn’t...Because she meant too much to my life...I cared too much (ibid).

Darian’s response, here, is extremely telling. Though she did not experience overt homophobia from her teachers or counsellor, she was clearly aware that their approval and support might evaporate if she disrupted their assumption that she was heterosexual. Clearly, Darian felt that the positive feedback she so richly deserved for her academic endeavours was contingent upon not being open about her sexuality. In addition, school personnel knew that Darian was struggling with unstable foster homes, sexual abuse from her uncle, depression, and the aftermath of a suicide attempt. Yet, in spite of this, she felt that they
would withdraw their approval — and their material support vis-à-vis her desire to get an
education — if she disclosed her sexuality.

For Darian, then, remaining in the closet at school was necessary in order to have access
to the education she worked so hard to acquire. However, it is important to point out that,
“whether a lesbian is out or not, the isolation (or threat of it)...creates a hostile
environment” (Khayatt, 1995: 152). Darian clearly understood that her school was
absolutely not a safe place to be out. She states, “I wasn’t comfortable being out to anybody.
It was high-school, right? [laughs]” (Interview with Darian, April 7, 2004). The very casual
way that Darian equates high-school with not being able to be out is very revealing. She
renders this statement as though it is simple common sense - exposing the trenchantly
fractured polarity of school and queerness in her lived experiences. It should be emphasized
that it is not schools and sexualities at large that are incompatible. Rather, queer
genders and sexualities represent a problem for public schools because reproducing heteronormativity —
as well as gender, class, and ‘race’ specific values — is part and parcel of mainstream
educational systems (Herr, 1999; Khayatt, 1995; Eyre, 1993). For instance, when I asked
Darian if she could recall instances where students rendered homophobic remarks — such as
name-calling — in and around the school, she replied very affirmatively: “Oh yeah!” (ibid). I
then asked if she had ever seen a teacher, administrator, or counselor intervene with students
in such instances. She replied that she had not. The importance of such behaviours —
particularly when they go unchallenged by school personnel — should not be underestimated.

Didi Khayatt argues that,

Name-calling is a manifestation of the pressures to conform to certain notions of
masculinity and femininity. Such an environment regulates sexuality, enforcing
hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality. But name-calling is sustained,
indeed, structured, by a range of institutional practices which coordinate sexual regulation in schools (emphasis added; 1995: 152-153).

Such institutional practices are evident in official sex education curricula (Herr, 1999: 248; Khayatt, 1995: 153-4), classroom curricula (Khayatt, 1995: 150; 153-155), teaching practices (Kyhatt, 1995: 155-57; 159-160; Loutzenheiser, 1996: 59), administrative procedures (Kyhatt, 1995: 158; Loutzenheiser, 1996: 60; Wicks, 1992) as well as in the blatant harassment in hallways, classrooms, and other school property (Loutzenheiser, 1996: 60; McCue, 1991; Wicks, 1992). From this perspective, then, Darian’s narrative reveals how being closeted in school is really not a choice for queer students who must negotiate the cumulative impact of this institutional violence in schools.

Similarly; Kay, Jupiter, and Phoenix shared experiences with heterosexism and homophobia in their schools. However, unlike Darian, for these three women, school was not a place to pursue learning and academic achievement. Unable to pass as heterosexual subjects with their peers, public high school became something to be survived and ultimately, a place to flee from. Phoenix, for example, spoke of the daily sexual harassment by her male peers dating back as early as the sixth grade. As MacAnghaill (1994) and Blackman (1998) demonstrate, sexual harassment of young women by male peers is one of the ways in which young men perform – and reproduce – hegemonic (hetero)masculinity. At the same time, the ways in which sexual harassment, rape, and sexual assault are manifestations of homophobic attitudes enacted against queer female subjects has been well documented by queer historians. Phoenix’s experiences of sexual harassment demonstrate that coercive sexual conditions (Patton and Mannison, 1998) can and do exist within public schools. In addition, Phoenix draws a connection between sexual harassment by her male

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136 See Leslie Feinberg (1993), Joan Nestle (1992), and others.
peers, and the homophobia she experienced beginning in elementary school: “I was getting gay bashed, like, at 10 or 11 years old” (Interview with Phoenix, April 8, 2004). For Phoenix, being sexually harassed was punishment for being queer. It also represents an area in which her gender and her sexuality converged as liabilities for her in negotiating homophobic male peers. For, while heterosexual young men will bully, beat, and harass other young men that they suspect are queer, the sexualized nature of the harassment that Phoenix was subjected to is directly tied to her gender. In this instance, the intersections of gender and sexuality are rendered visible, demonstrating that, indeed, the experiences of queer youth are not solely determined by their sexualities. For Phoenix, gender was an additional axis of heightened vulnerability.

By high school, Phoenix was “totally ostracized from everyone. Nobody talked to me. Nobody dared to” (ibid). However, in addition to this social isolation, Phoenix was subjected to physical assaults by her female peers:

*We were in gym...and, like, I got like, totally beat up by these three girls. They tried to make it look like it was part of the game, but they, like, totally dog-piled me, and pushed my head into the ground. And the teacher was right there...saw it...and just [pauses] just let it happen. I looked right at him...he watched the whole thing (ibid).*

Though Phoenix’s mother phoned the school to complain about this incident, administrators did nothing to assist Phoenix or punish the three young women who assaulted her. In fact, these three girls later were awarded sportsmanship trophies by the school.

At the age of fourteen, Phoenix approached her guidance counselor in an attempt to get transferred to an alternate school. Though she explained the isolation, harassment, verbal and physical violence she was dealing with, her request was refused. In another attempt to get help, Phoenix spoke to her Family Studies teacher, and disclosed that she was cutting
herself. The school district suicide prevention team was called in, and she was sent to BC Children's Hospital for an assessment - during which an older, white male psychologist asked her, “Don’t you think it’s a little bit silly to cut yourself?” (ibid). Immediately after leaving the hospital, Phoenix attempted to commit suicide.\footnote{Below, I discuss in more detail Phoenix’s encounters with the mental / health system, and the ways in which this social service enclave consolidated – rather than alleviated – the homophobia and heterosexism Phoenix faced.}

Significantly, through all of the harassment, homophobia, and abuse, the school itself – and its institutional support of homophobia – was never problematized. Rather, Phoenix was positioned as ‘the problem’ in need of a psychological assessment. This element of Phoenix’s narrative resonates with Savin-Williams’ assertion that, “Lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents…face an increased risk of medical and psychosocial problems, caused not by their sexual orientation, but by society’s extremely negative reaction to it” (1994: 261). The ways in which the school mobilized district and mental health authorities to categorize Phoenix as ‘needing help’ represents an institutional process that enabled the school (and its personnel) to sustain the organization of heteronormativity as an inherent, unchallenged, and uninterrupted aspect of the school’s ideological and material landscape. Indeed, as Phoenix later found out, there had been numerous attempted suicides among queer students in her school district during her grade eight year – all related to gay-bashing. This information was shared with her by the school district psychologist. Moreover, it is not as though she did not attempt to get help from her school counselor, administrators, and teachers. Though it was known in her school district that queer students were encountering significant difficulties in public schools, homophobic harassment and violence were permitted to continue unchallenged in Phoenix’s case. Yet it was Phoenix – not the school, not school staff – who was positioned as ‘the problem’.

\footnote{Below, I discuss in more detail Phoenix’s encounters with the mental / health system, and the ways in which this social service enclave consolidated – rather than alleviated – the homophobia and heterosexism Phoenix faced.}
In order to pursue her education after she recovered from her suicide attempt, Phoenix left her public high school, and moved into an alternate program. Not coincidentally, she suggests that, "40-60% of the kids at the alternate school were gay" (ibid). Her need to leave the public school system in order to get an education is profoundly troubling. However, of the women in my study, Phoenix was not the only student who ultimately left a mainstream, public high school to attend a safer, alternate program. Like Phoenix, Jupiter was subjected to ongoing, everyday verbal and physical violence in her public schools, starting at a very early age:

by the time I was in grade 7, I had been, I had been chased home from school, a lot of the times. I'd have like, things just trashed. When I was in gym class, I'd have my clothes like slashed with scissors, um, what else...Yeah, it just escalated. I'd have people come up in the middle of class and punch me for no reason. For like saying something or looking at them. And the teacher would be like, “Sit down”. And I'd be like, “But, you know, she just like, hit me”. And she'd be like, “Shut up”. Or, “Go out into the hall”. You know, and, it's just that kind of attitude (Interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004).

When I asked Jupiter why she thought these kinds of things happened to her, she said,

I just didn’t fit in. I just didn’t fit in. And I was a very [short pause] I was a very active child, and I was very attentive, and I was very smart. You know, um, I had, as far as I can remember, I had advanced reading skills, when I was in school, as well. And I was always questioning (Interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004).

Significantly, despite her academic skills, Jupiter felt that she did not fit in. At first glance, this seems incongruous with the official purpose of schooling – to educate. From this perspective, an inquisitive child with advanced reading skills should have fit in very well. The contradiction, here, highlights that reading aptitude, etc. was not sufficient to enable

struggled to deal with.

138 Jupiter's story about having her clothes cut to ribbons while she was in gym class triggered a memory from my own elementary school experiences that I had completely forgotten until I was transcribing her interview. I remember leaving my clothes in the change room during gym class – also in grade 7 – and coming back to find them in the (used) toilet. Though Jupiter and I grew up in different cities, and though there is 14 years difference in our ages, the similarity of our
Jupiter to successfully immerse herself in school culture. Her lived experiences expose that the school’s (ostensible) function to educate students is contingent on other factors—other qualities or characteristics that girl-children must possess and perform in order to be accepted and rewarded for their academic endeavours. In reflecting on her early school experiences, Jupiter attributes the bullying and harassment—as well as apathy on the part of school staff—to very specific aspects of her gender performance: “I got singled out because, you know, I was a fairly masculine child” (ibid). Jupiter’s failure to perform a heterofeminine subjectivity was incompatible with both her peers’ notions of what a little girl should be, as well as those of her teachers:

if you looked different, or if you didn’t, if you thought there was, like, more to life, or just, you know, didn’t feel like, you know, I don’t want to play house, or, you know, be a cheerleader or a dental assistant, you know. I think there’s more to my life—they didn’t care about you. You were on your own, you know. And, it, to this day, it just turns my stomach when I think about it (ibid).

These conditions had intensely negative ramifications for Jupiter:

if I was out on the playground, like, during a break, like recess or lunch, I would have a lot of kids come up and swarm me. Or I would have one start—sort of test the waters, you know, and then another kid would come, and then another, and it would all sort of be really berating, or stuff like that. Um, I would also have, like, just out for walks and stuff, and people would see me, like, I’d be walking by the basketball court, right, and the boys would see me. And they would start throwing basketballs at me, as soon as I turned my back. And 6 feet away, there was a teacher supervisor [pause] you know, with his thumb up his ass, basically, yeah (ibid).

Upon hearing this, I again asked Jupiter if the school ever responded. Her response is highly reminiscent of Phoenix’s encounter with school bureaucracy vis-à-vis who or what, in fact, was ‘the problem’:

Jupiter: what the school did, was that they set me up with a counselor. Um—

experiences as young, masculine women in public schools speaks eloquently to the persistence of homophobia and heterosexism in schools, and to the institutionalized entrenchment of heteronormativity therein.
EB: - they set you up with a counselor –

J: - they set me up with a counselor –

EB: - so, so you had a problem –

J: - I had the problem –

EB: - oh, okay, all right –

J: - yeah, it was all my fault, right? [ironically]

EB: - of course, yeah [ironically]

J: And basically, the counselor, he and I, I don’t think, ever really got along...and so, like, he would talk to me and tell me stuff, and I used to tell him – try to tell him in the best words that I could at that moment...You know, and I'd tell him about the problems at school, and all I remember him telling me is, you know, that I was a panic artist. That –

EB: panic artist?

J: - yeah, panic artist...It’s sort of like, just doing it for attention, sort of thing...over-reacting, that’s what he was telling me...

EB: So how did the school single you out for counseling?

J: Like, I can’t even remember. I can’t even remember. I think maybe my mom went to the school, um...

EB: ...So as a response to the bullying, your mom went to the school, and their solution was to put you in counseling? [incredulous]

J: Yeah. Maybe like, she could work through her problems with the other students if she went to counseling, right? (ibid).

Significantly, Jupiter points out that she – and not the students bullying, harassing, abusing her – was sent to the school counselor. The accumulation of these organizing processes among teachers, administrators, and counselor had a profound impact on how Jupiter was, as a young girl, able to make sense of her experiences: “Everybody thought that I had a problem, and like, so did I” (ibid). She elaborates,
I remember one time I said, that um, I said on the playground or something – I don’t know why I said it – but I just said that, “I feel like I got like a guy’s body – a guy’s soul in a girl’s body”, you know. And that’s the way I felt. But, yeah, I think that’s why I was really singled out (ibid).

As with Phoenix’s experiences with public school, the coordination of the school’s institutional processes positioned Jupiter as possessing some characteristic(s) that justified treating her as ‘a problem’. And, indeed, female masculinity does represent a problem for schools because, in reproducing “preexisting social differences” (Bourdieu, 1998: 20), schools operate in and through a heteronormative paradigm that is incompatible with non-heterofeminine gender performance by girls and young women.

By the end of elementary school, Jupiter had had enough of public school. However, her administrators and teachers convinced her that high school would be a fresh start. Despite these reassurances, high school consolidated and intensified the “absolute shit” (ibid) that Jupiter had endured in elementary school:

compared to...elementary school, I was more afraid of high school. Far more afraid. There were, there were just more breaks in the school, so there was more opportunities for kids to come down the hall and you know, like, try to get in trouble. Um, uh, there was a lot of apathy. A lot of apathy. All the teachers knew it was going on. But, and, no one would do anything. Um, what else...I got, oh man, I got, yeah, when I was in school, everyday was like a new threat. Everyday I would wake up and – by this time, I’d been taking, you know, B.S., like through elementary, and there was so many problems at home, I was getting like, panic attacks everyday when I woke up. You know, I was shaking, I would just make excuses, I mean, I missed half the year, like, I basically, would like, fake being sick. You know, by the time I was 8, I learned that, like, how to get sick, so that, you know, I could not actually have to fake it, and stay home...Um, I would just hang around kids that were sick...Um, you know, and like, constantly getting bronchitis, so I’d like, go outside without a jacket on and stuff like that, so, just you know – I just, you know, I just didn’t want to go (ibid).

As with her elementary school, Jupiter’s masculinity caused her to be singled out:

I was really starting to hate the way I looked. Because, um, I don’t know, I just didn’t feel that I was dressing adequately enough, and, I didn’t have like, nice
clothes and nice jeans, and I mean I didn’t look like one of the girls, and I didn’t look like one of the boys...and that school was so homophobic. It was so homophobic. And I mean, it’s not surprising. But, like, you even mention the word “fag” and I mean, you got things thrown at you. Yeah, you just got pencils, erasers...just whatever they could find, um, you know, they would find – they would beat up faggy looking people. To be called a fag or gay in school was total, like, you could never recover from it, once you had established that in your status.

Here again, Jupiter made sense of this climate by interrogating her own appearance – and herself – as the cause of the ongoing harassment. Following this statement, I asked Jupiter what the effect of this homophobic and heterosexist climate was on her ability to learn and to focus on her school-work. She said,

Um, I remember, I remember, I would try so hard, you know, I would try so hard and, I’d be having you know, maybe an okay morning, maybe a good morning, and then, somebody would do something, say something really bad about me, or do something behind my back – and I remember just being in class, and just sitting in tears. Having tears just stream down my face. And everybody looking at me, and the teacher looking at me, and just not caring...And, trying to do my work...you know, trying to do my assignments, and I mean, you don’t care. You don’t care when you’re that upset. You just, you basically want to die. You really do. And you don’t think it’ll ever end. And you get so depressed. You get so sad. Um, yah, my academic performance went downhill. And, especially, in high school. The first term, I was fine. I did really well. And then, the next part of the semester, my grades just totally dropped. I was extremely stressed. My hair started falling out at the end of grade 8. I mean, not in just strands, I mean, I could pull out clumps. I was that stressed, out. I lost weight, too, because I got so nervous couldn’t eat. I would never hang out around lunchtime. Because, like, there’s only one cafeteria, and, just the things that happened. Um, what else do I remember? I remember getting, um, bullied a lot in the hallways. I remember getting called really nasty names. I remember, just, people would be like, um, you know, like, “Suck it bitch”. That was sort of like, how they would say “hello” to me. Um, and teachers – teachers were absolutely terrible. They were very despicable (ibid).

As Jupiter so eloquently demonstrates, the institutionally violent environment of her high school was entirely counter-productive to her ability to get an education. In addition, however, the constant fear of harassment had severe ramifications on her physical and emotional health and well being: anxiety, depression, weight and hair loss, and “just wanting
to die” (ibid) were daily aspects of her high school experience. At the same time Jupiter was struggling to negotiate and interpret the conditions emerging from the unchallenged heterosexism and homophobia, she was also subjected to deeply sexualized verbal abuse when she was targeted by her male peers:

boys would say really crude, rude things to us, like, “Hey bitch, you want to go out”, you know. They’d talk about sex and drugs and – just being very nasty, being very chauvinistic… it’s just like, you know, big tough strong guy, and women are supposed to put up with that, and that’s expected of them (ibid).

Here again, as with Phoenix, Jupiter’s gender and gender performance represented intersecting areas that inflected the shape and form of the abuse she experienced from male peers. Indeed, she noted that the harassment from boys was “definitely sexualized” (ibid), and very “anti-feminist” (ibid). Clearly, being female and masculine represented dual axes of vulnerability for Jupiter.

Despite these daily struggles with gendered and heterosexist institutional violence, Jupiter never received help from teachers, administrators, or counselors. Even when her grades dropped noticeably, no one offered to help or asked Jupiter why. When I inquired further, specifically about guidance counselors, Jupiter recalled an incident that demonstrates the utter compatibility of heteronormative discourses and the practices of educational personnel:

There was an incident in my sewing class… I left the class because like a teacher had called me out. And wanted to speak to me about something – I wasn’t in trouble or anything, um, and then I came back and my project was completely fucked. Like, all my supplies – like you had to buy your own supplies like, needles and pins – everything was thrown across the room. And the teacher was like, at the doorway or in the class, and she obviously saw this happening – didn’t do anything about it. Didn’t even look. And I got so pissed off – ‘cause that was for marks. And I went to speak to the guidance counselor. The guidance counselor, oh, you know after about a week got back to me – pulled me out of class and she said, “Well, you know what, unfortunately, you’re a very mature young girl for your age, and I will tell you one thing that whether
boys are 13 or 31, boys will be boys, and that’s what boys do”...And that was
the last time I ever spoke to my school guidance counselor. And, you know, to
this day, it’s just [pauses] like, if I see her, I wouldn’t actually do it, I’d just
want to rip her heart out, you know? That’s the kind of attitude that all those
girls and all those boys had. And I mean, you would expect your school
guidance counselor, if they couldn’t do anything about it, at least say, you know,
“That wasn’t right. What happened to you was wrong, and just because they’re
boys doesn’t give them an excuse to do that”, you know. But that’s what I got.
You know – and you know, this is, like, you know, 1998. This isn’t like 1963, or,
you know, and it’s, it’s like in the Lower Mainland – and this is the kind of
attitude that they teach kids. But, so there you go, um, yeah. So, and you know,
needless to say that, after that, I got very scared...because I realized that
nobody was on my side, no one.

Not surprisingly, after 8 months at this school, Jupiter forced her mother to pull her out
of high school, and enroll her in a distance education program. Her experiences here were
radically different from her public school – in part because the distance education counselor
was queer:

what a different world...It rocked. He was so nice. And he asked me, like, “Well
why do you want to leave school?”...And I told him all about it. I told him how,
you know, everyday I’d go there and I’d have like a panic attack and how these
kids were terrible. And he’s just like, “Oh my god! It sounds like there was a
huge black ominous cloud overhead.” And I was like yeah, that’s exactly it. And
he was the first educator that I’d ever, ever seen or heard that actually
understood me. And not only that, but was listening. And I was like, omigod.
And I liked how it worked because it worked on a mutual respect. So, like, if
you were going in there and you were very nice and you were polite, that they
would be very nice and polite to you, too. And they sort of treated me like –
well, they treated me like a human being. You know, like an adult. And you
know, all the staff were very supportive and very nice. And boy, did my grades
go up (ibid).

Though she notes the importance of having a queer role model, Jupiter’s comments here also
point to something that is, perhaps, even more significant: that being listened to, treated with
courtesy – “like a human being” (ibid) – enabled her to achieve solid grades. Creating – and
sustaining – such conditions does not require the presence of out, queer role models
(however important they may be). Indeed, Jupiter points out that the unchallenged
homophobia and heterosexism in her high school was a fundamental denial of her humanity. Moreover, this argument by and on behalf of queer youth in schools is certainly not a new phenomenon. However, as Bourdieu, Smith, and others have pointed out, educational systems are not organized to facilitate equality on the basis of a common humanity – rather, they are ideologically and materially arranged to (re)produce relations of power and privilege. As Jupiter, Phoenix, and Darian’s stories demonstrate, public educational sites promote, rather than challenge, heterosexism and homophobia.

In addition to the consistent references to homophobia and heterosexism in these young women’s narratives, the BC public school system is still further implicated in sustaining these relations of ruling when we look at Kay’s lived experiences. Indeed, her story reflects nearly identical experiences with homophobia and heterosexism as those shared by the young women above – even though she attended high school in Prince George. Here again, Kay’s narrative demonstrates that heteronormativity represents a “common conceptual framework” that manifests “across diverse [institutional] sites” (Smith, 1987: 160). In other words, the geographic separation of Kay’s high school from those attended in the Lower Mainland by Phoenix, Darian, and Jupiter emphasizes the generalizability of relations organizing the experiences of queer young women located in their everyday worlds. While the details of how dynamics of inequality differ between the young women, the underlying ideological and material climate of the high schools as institutions is remarkably similar.

140 I highlight this in order to pre-empt responses that might suggest that the local school districts of the Lower Mainland somehow experience more problems with students experiencing homophobia and heterosexism due to differences in population density or demographics. This assertion is substantiated by research that has been undertaken with queer youth by AIDS Prince George (2001) titled, “Why do we even have to do this? Why can’t we be treated the same?*: Report on the results of a focus group with Gay Youth in Prince George, BC.
For example, the social isolation Kay experienced in her high school had very specific implications:

Kay: high school, like really like, fell apart. And it had a lot to do with like everything that was going on in my life. Like...like sexuality was part of it, because, like I was already, like, in a group of people...and, you know like the way high school is...it’s cliquey and stuff...and you know, all the girls always...they’re like getting into, like, you know, stuff with like, guys and stuff, and I couldn’t really do that? Cuz...I just couldn’t do that...High school...high school was really messed up, you know?...I had lots of problems in high school, like, I just completely became withdrawn from everyone because my friends, like, disowned me because I started hanging out with other people. And I didn’t really so much get along with those other people very well, like, at all. So I had no friends again.

EB: So did this come out of...like you said they were experimenting sexually with guys?

K: yeah

EB: And you not wanting to have a part of that? Did that have something to do with how this played out?

K: yeah, yeah. Cuz they uh...that’s why I withdrew, that’s why I started talking with other people, because I didn’t want...you know, they were asking questions like, “how come you don’t have a boyfriend”, “how come you don’t get a boyfriend”, “which guys do you think are cute?” I’m like...I...I don’t like that, you know? I don’t want to go out there and...I was never one for lying to myself (Interview with Kay, April 4, 2004).

In this excerpt, Kay elaborates on how the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality were unilateral, despite her attempts to spend time with different groups of young women. In addition, her story illustrates the tensions that can arise around identity in a heterosexist environment. Kay did not want to lie to herself about her disinterest in heterosexual dating and flirting, however, she felt pressured to do so by her peers. When I asked Kay if she could have told any of her peers about her sexuality, she replied, “Not at all. Not at all. I couldn’t even say it. You could NOT say the word ‘lesbian’” (ibid). I then asked if she felt she could talk to her teachers, guidance counsellors, or administrators regarding some of her
struggles around her sexual orientation. Like Darian, Phoenix, and Jupiter, Kay felt that school personnel were not approachable around the issues of her sexuality:

None of the adults at the school - no. I could not do it. Like, it scared me way too much. I didn't feel any openness, I...it was like, like I was the only person in the whole wide world who thought, felt this way, you know? Like, it was like everyone else was normal and I wasn't. How do you go off and talk about that? (ibid).

Significantly, Kay speaks to the lack of “openness” among school staff in a fashion that highlights the systemic entrenchment of heterosexism in public schools. It is crucial to recognize that such a climate is the result of multiple elisions of queer genders and sexualities – from classroom curriculum (Khayatt, 1995; Herr, 1999; Wicks, 1991) and school sex education content (Khayatt, 1995; Herr, 1999) to the closeting of queer teachers (Wicks, 1991; McCue, 1991) and students. Suppressing these multiple and various sites of queerness requires a level of coordination that exposes the organizing function of a fundamentally heterosexist ruling apparatus.

In contrast, it should be emphasized that Kay witnessed ample openness on the part of teachers and other school staff in discussing heterosexuality vis-à-vis wives, husbands, etc. (interview with Kay, April 4, 2004). Being out as heterosexual was not a problem for the school – it was, unlike queer identities and relationships, something referred to almost daily. Kay’s reflections eloquently depict how these kinds of professional practices by her teachers informed her feeling that there was something wrong with her, that she was “abnormal”:

Kay: Well, sometimes...sometimes when one teacher impressions you sort of one way...you’re kinda like, “well, maybe that’s how they all are”. You know?

EB: Did you have experiences like that with some of your teachers? Were they open...?

K: In grade 8 there was one teacher, and he really affected me. I really, really enjoyed his class. There was actually two of them...they were both male
teachers, they were, uh...they were great teachers. They made me feel like I could really accomplish something...like, I really could get ahead, kind of thing? I really...really enjoyed the classes and stuff...and the one, like, he was very, into God. Like, he actually, like, said some stuff about God and his beliefs in class, which he’s not supposed to do. Like, he’s very into God. And I don’t know...I just don’t know. Like, right now I’d still be scared to tell him anything...[pause] it’s just...it’s not...a receptive – still, as it could be...And you know, they’re all...they’re all kind of like... Teachers have to give off, like, how they’re proper, and they, like, come to school in a suit...you know, they’re proper, they’re all “up there” and, like...

EB: does proper mean heterosexual? Like, in sort of how they’re promoting themselves, do you think?

K: Yes!

EB: Talking about wives, and husbands, and children...

K: yes, yes, I definitely think so. I mean, think about it. Nowadays, if you’re going to be “up there” somewhere, you have to promote yourself as proper...and sometimes proper does mean heterosexual, right?

Herein, it becomes possible to see how heterosexuality represents a key aspect of the cultural capital performed by teachers in public schools. Being out as hetero-married becomes a means of establishing the ‘proper’ persona of a high school teacher. At the same time, however, promoting and (re)producing these norms in the absence of any validation or reflection of queer genders and sexualities has severe implications for queer students, and their ability to reconcile their identities with the school environment in which they spend so much time during adolescence.

In addition to the deeply heterosexist environment of her school – as well as social isolation amongst her peers – Kay witnessed overt homophobia in the form of verbal and physical assaults. As her own queer identity solidified around the age of fourteen, Kay became friends with a young queer man at her high school who was targeted routinely by their peers for harassment abuse:
Kay: Like, he went through a lot of shit. Him and this other gay boy, they both went through a lot of shit in high school. Like they got bottles thrown at them, and they weren't, they couldn't go into the washroom. They had to use the staff washroom when they needed to use the washroom...because they were going to get beaten up, they were thrown against lockers, they were like thrown down the stairs...[pauses]

EB: where were the teachers??

K: they couldn’t go outside...Teachers? I don’t know where the teachers were. Sometimes the teachers were there, but...you know, he couldn’t leave the school. Couldn’t go outside the doors of the school, so...so if we wanted to go to the mall or something, he couldn’t (ibid).

In this anecdote, Kay demonstrates how the entrenchment of homophobia and heterosexism in her high school created an environment characterized by institutional violence – for, rather than challenging, counseling, or punishing the students who turned high school into a prison for these young gay men, the best help the administration would offer was to give them permission to use the staff washroom. However, this wholly inadequate ‘solution’ is unsurprising given Kay’s description of how school staff treated her friend when he approached them for help:

I remember...conversations with teachers, like not me personally, but like being there? Like [friend’s name] freaking out because people were throwing bottles at him...and like a lot of like...I remember the way that they talked to him. A lot of the teachers wouldn’t help him...a lot of teachers, they were very like, “you kinda deserve this” – they had that kind of tone in their voice, you know? Like...if you’re going to be out there like that, you kind of expect this kind of, you know, behaviour from other kids and stuff, you know? (ibid).

This anecdote, in particular, demonstrates that not only do some school staff allow homophobia and heterosexism to flourish unchallenged; in fact, some of these professionals share homophobic attitudes. The notion that a student deserves homophobic abuse because of their orientation is grounded in ideologies that position queerness as abnormal, unnatural, undesirable, etc. By giving queer students the impression that they are inviting physical and
emotional violence – which stands in direct opposition to a professional’s duty to report other forms of child abuse (Wicks, 1991)\textsuperscript{141} – homophobic teachers and administrators are not merely allowing homophobia to proliferate unchallenged. Indeed, this is a form of what I would term \textit{active} apathy; in other words, teachers and administrators who condone homophobia in schools are not taking a ‘neutral’ position. They are aligning themselves with a dominant ideology – namely heterosexism. Heterosexism – though ideologically positioned as a normative (and therefore unmarked, un(re)markable) belief that everyone is or should be heterosexual – is premised on the condemnation and pathologization of queer genders and sexualities. From this perspective, it becomes possible to (re)position the professional practices of teachers who ‘do nothing’ and ‘say nothing’ as ideologically \textit{sited}. Supported by the heterosexist institutional framework of public schools, teachers who tell queer students that they are ‘bringing it on themselves’ position queer students as ‘the problem’ – thus revealing their own prejudice and bigotry.

The accumulation of institutional and interpersonal violences that were evident in her educational experiences gave Kay the impression that she was not normal (ibid). And, indeed, the attitudes of teachers and staff in her high school supported this notion that she and her queer friends were somehow undeserving of protection – and of justice – within the context of blatantly homophobic abuse and harassment. It is in this fashion that queer students become alienated from schools and school personnel, leading many to leave school before graduation (McCreary Centre Society, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1994; O’Brien and Weir, 1995; AIDS Prince George, 2001; Herr, 1999). Kay and the young gay man she attended high school with were both pushed out of school, demonstrating that statistics

\textsuperscript{141} Wicks states, “An abused child in our society can now approach someone and expect to receive a hearing, empathy, help in corroborating facts, protection from reprisal, and punishment of the abuser. But where does a
which show alarming “drop-out” rates for queer youth are neither overblown, nor out of date.\footnote{Indeed, like 37\% of the respondents in the McCreary Survey of queer youth (1999: 14), Kay and her queer friends hated high school. However, the McCreary data does not tell us \textit{why} this is so. Kay, Jupiter, and Phoenix’s stories demonstrate clearly that an environment of unchallenged homophobia and heterosexism represents a significant barrier to acquiring an education.}

Lisa Loutzenheiser has suggested that, “by allowing anti-gay harassment to be voiced without reprimand, schools are sanctioning and even encouraging bigotry” (1996: 59). However, it might be argued that the recent proliferation of GSA’s – or Gay / Straight Alliances – in BC public schools represent a solution to the social, emotional, and psychological isolation experienced by queer youth. However, not all schools have or will allow a GSA to be started. For example, in the latter months of 2000, the (in)famous Surrey School Board enacted regulations governing the formation of clubs and groups in its high schools to specifically discourage GSA’s from forming in Surrey Schools. I attended the public school board meeting in which these regulations were passed, and submitted a written question\footnote{I was forced to submit my question in writing because the trustees did not allow a free exchange of questions from members of the public during their deliberations. In addition, they adjourned the meeting early – and thereby shut down the miniscule question period they had condescended to permit - when a queer youth theatre group would not frame their query in the form of “question” for the Board. Here again, the ways in which institutional processes are invoked to sustain an environment of homophobia and heterosexism highlight how the apparatus and relations of ruling work to sustain material relations of inequality.} regarding their stipulation that students’ parents must be aware of any clubs they join. My que(e)ry spoke to the obvious problems that could emerge if queer students were wanting to form or attend a GSA and were outed to their parents in accordance with the Board’s (new) rules and regulations. In a letter dated January 24, 2001, Deputy Superintendent Lawrie Chute endeavoured to assuage my concerns by stating:

\textbf{Please be assured that counselors in the Surrey School District are able and willing to assist students who have concerns of a personal nature. School counselors provide confidential support to youth, and may be accessed through the school office.}

\textit{gay or lesbian child, feeling abused in an anti-gay school system go?}” (1991: no page numbers given).
This facile and wholly inadequate response – which represents the totality of the Board’s response to a complex question on my part – actively papers over the fact that, like many teachers and administrators, school counselors can be homophobic and heterosexist; not “open”, as Kay suggested; or operating within a heterosexist and apologist paradigm as Jupiter encountered with her guidance counselor. In other instances, I have informally spoken with high school teachers and parents of high school students in other districts in which principals, counselors, and teachers collude to actively prevent GSA’s from forming.\textsuperscript{144} Thus, while such associations can be enormously beneficial to students in BC schools, not all queer youth have access to the support and safety that a GSA provides.

In addition, Jupiter and Phoenix’s stories illustrate how gender and sexuality converge for young queer women in BC schools. Subjected to deeply sexualized harassment from male peers as punishment for their queerness or their gender performance(s), their narratives illustrate how common sense ideologies vis-à-vis the supposed naturalness of heterofemininity converge with homophobia to create fundamentally punishing conditions (Hesch, 1994: 201) for youth who are female and queer. Indeed, as I discuss above in Chapter 3, for Kay, the pressures to conform to heterosexist expectations of young women were so intense, that she “lost her virginity” (interview with Kay, April 4, 2004) to a young man:

\begin{quote}
Like I was really messed up about losing friends, and I had nobody to call... It’s not like I was interested in him, but he was like hitting on me and stuff, and it was just really weird. And I thought it was a big deal...you know, like all the sudden people were having sex...so I felt really behind, you know? And nobody was around. And I was really...I was really messed up about that, everything.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{144} For example, my partner – a high school English teacher – was told by an administrator (after he ostensibly spoke to the high school counsellors) – that is was not necessary for her to volunteer to sponsor a GSA because “it” was not an issue for that school.
Like you know, drinking and all that stuff kind of like came into view, and...you know, it was just a really messed up period in time (ibid).

She elaborates later that, at the time, she thought,

The whole guy experience, like, I just felt like out of the loop. I felt like, you know, “what’s wrong with me...why can’t I do it too?” kinda thing, like, you know?...You know, like it will make me normal, you know? [nervous laugh] (ibid).

The environment of unchallenged, institutionalized heterosexism in her school overwhelmingly contributed to Kay feeling like she was not normal. Yet, just as sexual norms are classed and racialized, they are also gendered. Being a ‘normal’ young woman in Kay’s high school meant being sexually active with young men. By enabling – and thereby encouraging – a climate of homophobia and heterosexism, the authority figures at Kay’s high school are implicated in organizing conditions in which coercive sexual experiences such as this can occur. Kay knew she was not attracted to this young man; she knew that she was queer. Yet the pressure within the school to conform to the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality – intensified by the conspicuous absence of any anti-homophobia or queer presence (either ideologically or materially) – congealed into oppressive conditions that placed enormous pressure on Kay to conform. And, in this instance, conformity meant engaging in sexual activity with a young man she was patently not attracted to.

Clearly, institutionally violent conditions make it difficult, if not impossible, to learn. Jupiter, Phoenix, and Kay’s stories make this very clear. Apathy – whether (ostensibly) passive or active – is enabled by an institutional framework that is premised on the notion that reproducing heterosexual, heteromasculine, and heterofeminine students is not only normal and neutral, but ideal. This is evident when we interrogate the ways that these queer young women and their queer friends were positioned as ‘problems’ for mainstream public
schools when they attempted to get help. Repeatedly, the above accounts demonstrate that when tensions between being queer and in school reach their peak, it is the students – not the schools system, teachers, administrators, etc. – who are constructed as emotionally or psychologically troubled, problematic, ‘abnormal’, or even (and perhaps worst of all) the authors of their own difficulties with peers and school staff.

*Down and Out / Queer and on the Street: Young Women and Social Services*

In response to the notion that our social service system is failing young Canadians, everyone has choices. I’ve made the choice to work hard and contribute to society. If I need help along the way, there is a more than adequate social-service system here to help me. Street youth in BC have made the choice to do nothing and they contribute little or nothing to society, so why should they benefit from society at our expense? You can’t help people who don’t want to help themselves (Letter to the Reader’s Page of *The Province*; Daniel Cindric, 2004: A15).

According to Daniel Cindric’s view (above), a “more than adequate social service system” (2004: A15) is providing ample services to those in need in the province of British Columbia. To extend his logic further, if the existing services are somehow insufficient, then it must be because those accessing services “do not want to help themselves” (ibid). Implicit in Mr. Cindric’s arguments are common sense ideologies regarding who is or is not deserving of social service assistance. Such notions have an extensive and well-documented history in Canada. Indeed, according to feminist social scientists Becki Ross (1997), Annalee Golz (1995), Margaret Hillyard Little (1994), Mariana Valverde (1991), and others, social welfare discourses and practices have been historically premised on the notion that those in need must fit into “a hierarchy of deservedness” (Hillyard Little, 1994: 234): “Each new [welfare] category has called for new types of regulation in order to determine who is and is not worthy” (ibid).
Implicit in Mr. Cindric’s arguments, I suspect, is the notion that street youth are inherently undeserving because, after all, they belong with families that will assume the economic cost of their care and containment. Herein, mainstream discourses of the family converge with common sense and social service ideologies in ways that expose “the intersection and coordination of more than one relational mode of the ruling apparatus” (Smith, 1987: 160). As discussed in Chapter 2, mainstream conceptualizations of street-involvement among children and youth posit this phenomenon as the result of familial and/or individual pathology (de Moura, 2002: 354; 362-363) which, in turn, represents a dilemma for social service providers, policy makers, etc. (ibid). Expressing the genesis of a ‘social problem’ (street youth) in terms of its relationship to social institutions (the family and social service institutions) illustrates yet another instance in which “institutions [as nodes or knots in the relations of the ruling apparatus]...coordinate multiple strands of action into a functional complex” (Smith, 1987: 160). The coordinating function performed by diverse institutional sites is reliant on such shared ideological currencies (ibid). In this case, families and social service enclaves are connected via the social construction of street youth because it is bound up with notions of the (heteronuclear, middle-class, white) family and discourses of deservingness in ways that inflect social service discourse and practice (de Moura, 2002: 354; 362-3).

For instance, social service interventions are posited on the assumption that family reconciliation is the ideal goal for homeless youth (Status of Women...
Canada, 2002: 79). Clearly such assumptions on the part of social services demonstrate fundamental flaws in the ideologically mediated assumptions deployed by so-called helping agencies. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 4, family reconciliation was neither desirable nor ideal for Jupiter, Darian, Vi, or Kay.

Mr. Cindric’s arguments on the Reader’s Page of The Province nevertheless reflect well-established – and popular – notions regarding the ‘undeservingness’ of street youth in British Columbia. His argument that “street youth in BC have made the choice to do nothing and they contribute little or nothing to society” (2004: A15) draws on these common sense ideologies to position street youth as both undeserving of help and, perhaps more crucially, as the authors of their own disenfranchisement. The cumulative impact of such misconceptions has distinct and distressing material consequences. Indeed, recent changes to eligibility criteria for BC Benefits – from “eligibility rather than need” (Status of Women Canada, 2002: 79) – are grounded in discourses that require those attempting to access social services to prove that they are worthy and deserving. In the case of youth attempting to access BC Benefits, the ‘proof’ required has to do with job searches and job training (ibid). Mr. Cindric – and others like him – might argue that such policy changes are reasonable. However, a City of Vancouver Development Permit Board report (2003) suggests:

Social Planning staff believe that some [provincial] policy changes are having negative effects on youth. The Province is now taking very few youth over 15 years of age into care (where they would be fed, clothed and housed). At the same time, while the number of youth under 19 who are on Income Assistance has decreased (1408 in December 2000; 609 in December 2002), the number of youth on the street has increased. The agencies who work with street youth think that barriers to accessing IA - such as the 3 week waiting period and the stipulation that youth must be independent for 2 years before applying - have
discouraged youth from applying for IA. The result is many youth have no income, access to employment, or home.\footnote{147}

Rather than blaming youth themselves for being unmotivated to ‘help themselves’, the report draws a direct connection between social policy changes and the worsening conditions confronting street youth in BC.

Similarly, a (limited) body of research on women and homelessness demonstrates that violence, robbery, sexual assault, and sexual harassment are extremely common experiences for street-involved women (Currie, 1995; Novac et al., 1996: vi; Noell and Ochs, 2001: 35; Eberle, 2001: 9). Significantly, it must not be overlooked that homelessness is often a strategy for women escaping violence (Novac et al., 1996: v) – as discussed in chapter 4, this was the case for three of my informants: Vi, Jupiter, and Darian. However, homelessness clearly involves additional physical dangers. According to the Eberle report (2001),

The rate of sexual assault against homeless women is 20 times higher than that for United States women in general. One study of women...found that these women were 106 times more likely to be raped, 42 times more likely to be robbed, and 15 times more likely to be assaulted than were housed women (Eberle, 2001: 9).

Clearly, being female and homeless involves enormous risks. However, according to reports by Novac et al (1996)\footnote{148} and Currie (1995),\footnote{149} far from being unwilling to help themselves, street-involved women make repeated efforts to access existing services. However, the
services themselves are often inadequate, insensitive, or inappropriate for the populations they are ostensibly meant to serve.¹⁵⁰

To complicate matters further, a 1998 report from the City of Vancouver Child and Youth Advocate states that, “young women are particularly vulnerable and have fewer emergency shelter options than young men” (City of Vancouver Child and Youth Advocate, 1998: 7). Clearly, the risks involved in being homeless and female can be compounded by a woman’s age. Similarly, the City of Vancouver Park Board argues that queer youth and Aboriginal youth are “the most at risk of all youth populations” (City of Vancouver Park Board, 1998: 2). Laurette Gilchrist concurs, arguing that racism and legacies of colonization compound the already precarious circumstances of street youth who are Aboriginal (1995). Rather than the picture of ‘more than adequate social service systems’ invoked by Mr. Cindric, young women and Aboriginal youth, in particular, are subjected to ideologically inflected, differential, and often intensified scrutiny and intervention by law-enforcement agencies, outreach workers, and social policy makers.¹⁵¹ This leads me to ask: What happens when material consequences of gender, ‘race’, class, and sexuality converge with the overarching social service logic of deserving vs. undeserving persons in the lives of young queer women who are homeless and / or street-involved?

¹⁵⁰ For example, the Novae (1996) study notes that shelters are often co-ed, presenting problems for homeless women who have experienced “sexual harassment by male residents [as] a common problem” (1996: vi). Novae also points to the ways that “deinstitutionalization and the withdrawal of psychiatric and medical services contribute to chronic homelessness” (emphasis added; ibid). Similarly, Currie’s (1995) interview and survey-based research with 145 street-involved women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside found that women who attempted to access police, the judicial system (e.g. restraining orders), social workers, and health care professionals often did not receive the kind of help they were looking for. One respondent stated, “Had a restraining order on my ex-husband. He kept coming around and the police weren’t responsive. They knew that I was Native and that I had a criminal record, so they were not too concerned: I just stopped calling” (1995: 17).

¹⁵¹ However, rather than beneficially impacting their ability to get assistance when they need it, these trends pathologize, criminalize, and disenfranchise these subject populations, alienating them from ostensibly social services. See Justice for Girls Statement of Opposition to the Proposed Secure Care Act (2001); Frail and Ross (2000); Carol Smart, 1999; and Julian Tanner, 1996.
Exploring the ‘Line of Fault’: Mental Health and Addiction Services

In exploring the experiences of queer young women who are or have been homeless or street-involved, a “line of fault” (1987: 49) emerges between the material, lived realities of my research subjects, and the discourses of deservingness that reside within common sense/social welfare policies and practices that require proof of eligibility – read: worthiness – for social service provision. All of the young women in my research reached out to – and/or were referred into the hands of – a plethora of social service enclaves. These include police, health, mental health, social work, addictions, and youth shelters. Without exception, each of my informants related stories of how their age, gender, sexualities, and - in Vi’s case - ethnicity converged with the “hierarchy of deservedness” (Hillyard Little, 1994: 234) to detrimentally impact upon their efforts to access services.

For example, at the age of sixteen, Phoenix was referred to a psychiatrist at BC Children’s Hospital after she disclosed to a teacher that she was being bullied, harassed, and abused by her school peers, and was cutting herself as a result. The white, male mental health professional who interviewed her accused her of being “silly” (Interview with Phoenix). In the sub-sections that follow, I have treated mental health and addictions services together because these social service enclaves are intertwined in Phoenix’s experiences. Similarly, below, I group housing services, social work and law enforcement together because these institutionalized services are inter-related in the narratives of my other research subjects. In doing so, I have elected to adhere to the internal logic of my informants’ narratives – the chronologies as they were expressed to me, for example – rather than imposing artificial separations between distinct areas of service. This approach is not only more faithful to the ways in which these stories were shared with me; it also demonstrates the ‘snowball’ effect of not being able to access multiple sites of service, and the ramifications of this lack of access in the lives of these young women. In short, they experienced struggles accessing help from multiple sites at the same time. To represent these sites as discretely separate would not, in my opinion, reflect the accumulation of these struggles in the daily lived experiences of my informants.

As I have suggested throughout my research, whiteness can and does inflect the experiences of my white informants, just as being Aboriginal impacted upon Vi’s lived reality. However, when I asked my white narrators if they felt their whiteness had an influence on their ability to access social services, their responses demonstrated what Ruth Frankenberg calls “the unmarked, unnamed status [of whiteness] that is itself an effect of its domination” (1993: 6). In other words, they could not conceive of how their racialized positionalities as white might have privileged or otherwise impacted their attempts to access social services. The one exception to this among my white informants was Jupiter’s suggestion that she might have had better access if she had been an Aboriginal woman. I discuss the implications of this speculation above, in Chapter 3.

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Phoenix, April 8, 2004) for doing so. When I asked her if she felt that her age had anything to do with this man’s condescending and inadequate assessment of her as ‘silly’, she said:

You just, you just um, these people are the experts, and you’re just so desperate. And, and I mean I was just so helpless, too, right? Um, if I’d been an adult, I would have been able to access – like I remember they have – like they do have, almost like a lawyer? In the mental health system. And there was a guy in Surrey who was being over-drugged...so he was getting an injunction to stop that. So, had I been an adult, um, I might have been taken more seriously by this shrink (ibid).

Significantly, Phoenix’s narrative exposes how both the age difference between herself and this man, as well as his status as an expert made her feel more helpless. After this interaction with the psychiatrist, she ran away from BC Children’s Hospital for several days, during which time she tried to kill herself with an overdose. Phoenix’s subsequent hospitalization placed her back in this man’s care.

When I asked if she thought issues of gender and / or sexuality had made any difference in her experiences with mental health services,\textsuperscript{154} Phoenix related an anecdote that reveals how ideologies that position young women’s sexual activities as de facto problematic – and in need of policing\textsuperscript{155} – further complicated her relationship to this psychiatrist:

\textbf{Phoenix: After the coma...he broke my confidentiality...he found a loophole because, I had escaped, for like 5 days. I ran away. And this had like, never happened, so he was very angry with me. And they asked me if I’d slept with anyone while I was out. And I said, “Yes”. And then so he called group meeting and he decided that he could tell my parents, because if I...and they figured if I had HIV or if I cut myself, then my parents might contract it, and so he had to

\textsuperscript{154} Of course, it should be reiterated that it was unchallenged homophobia and bullying in her school that had culminated in Phoenix’s referral to the mental health care system in the first place. For this reason, matters of sexuality were already a determinant of her experiences prior to her encounters with mental health care professionals.

\textsuperscript{155} Julian Tanner (1996) and Carol Smart (1999) have both highlighted the ways in which “girls have often been punished more severely – with custodial sentences – for violating moral codes than the Criminal Code. Status offences are...often little more than a convenient cover for acts of sexual deviance” (Tanner, 1996: 191). Moreover, as Carol Smart points out, “courts actually ‘sexualize’ the nature of female deviance due to their overwhelming concern for the sexual morality of young women – this is not a concern which is extended to young men” (1999: 29). Regarding the policing of young women’s sexualities, see also Ross, 1997; 1998; Levesque, 1991; Strange, 1995; Sangster, 1996.
tell them for their safety...in case they cleaned it up or something...I told them that wasn’t all right. It was definitely to make me feel small. And then he’s like, “Well, you know, you have this conception that people with HIV are just the man on the corner, but it could be anyone (ibid).

EB: Did this maybe feel like you were being punished? For running away?

P: Yeah, I did make an ass of him.

EB: Was this an attempt, do you think, on his part to, to, um, make you sort of ashamed of being sexually active?

P: Yeah, yeah, and in front of like, 4 people without talking to me at all (ibid).

The psychiatrist’s ability to make Phoenix “feel small” illustrates how her age, gender, and sexuality were mobilized to position Phoenix as inappropriately sexual, disobedient, and, in fact, dangerous to her family.156 A day after this man broke her confidentiality, she was “cornered” (ibid) by a mental health nurse who asked Phoenix’s private nurse to leave the room. This woman then told Phoenix,

‘You’re a waste of time, I see girls like you all the time coming in, ‘cause I work in the psych ward. You’re just going to wind up on welfare, and on the streets’...I’d been in a coma for like 3 days, and I’d just woke up. This is the first thing I hear. And I really took it in...I took it in for a long time (emphasis added; ibid).

Aside from the obviously disturbing nature of such comments from a mental health care professional to someone who had just tried to commit suicide, this element of Phoenix’s narrative resonates with discourses of deservingness. Her non-compliance with a credentialed psychiatrist in the psych ward positioned Phoenix as ‘a waste of time’ – read: undeserving of help or assistance. Once again, it was Phoenix who was positioned as ‘the

156 The scenario Phoenix describes is also reminiscent of how Michel Foucault’s discussion of how a social preoccupation with the “licentiousness” and cajolery” (1977: 212) of young women is a salient characteristic of “the disciplinary society” (ibid: 209) – particularly within the rubric of normalizing discourses such as psychology. Indeed, he refers to the birth of psychology as “a new type of supervision...over individuals who resisted disciplinary socialization (ibid: 296).
problem’, and not the highly gendered and sexualized ‘assessments’ made by her mental health care providers.

Several months after this introduction to the mental health system, Phoenix was sexually assaulted at her summer job. According to her testimony, this led her to “get into drugs pretty hard” (ibid). Subsequently, she became increasingly involved in street-communities where she could acquire controlled substances. Shortly thereafter, she tried to kill herself once more and was re-hospitalized. At this time, Phoenix ran afoul of another male psychiatrist:

I think it was pretty fucking insensitive that I was – well, when I was in the hospital, I’d disclosed the sexual assault. I told them I wasn’t comfortable being around men or talking to men and they put me with this shrink who was like, total psycho. And, he was a man, and like, I didn’t want to talk to him. And then they write me up and say, ‘she’s anti-social, she’s difficult and unwilling to change’...they just thought I was like manipulating the situation...he actually said I was like, the most difficult patient he’d ever had (ibid).

When I asked Phoenix to clarify how exactly she was seen to be manipulating the situation – what exactly it was that they thought she should change – she said, “I don’t think that they believed me – about the rape...because of my history” (ibid). This skepticism on the part of mental health care professionals vis-à-vis her experience with sexual violence was directly tied to her supposed ‘history’ of sexual activity as it was framed and charted by the first male psychiatrist Phoenix encountered.157 As Marina Morrow and Monika Chappell suggest,

157 Professional practices of charting within hospitals ensure that diagnoses and assessments of previous health care providers can be accessed by new ones when a patient or client re-enters a hospital, clinic, or other health care setting. While Phoenix’s discussions with her first psychiatrist should have been protected via her right to confidentiality, we know from her narrative that her confidentiality was violated by the first psychiatrist when he disclosed her sexual activities “in front of 4 people without even talking to [her]” (ibid). It is reasonable to suspect that the charts and records her second psychiatrist had access to referred, in some way, to her ‘risk’ for contracting HIV, as this was the excuse mobilized by her first psychiatrist to justify violating her right to confidentiality. He argued that the people around Phoenix – in particular, her family – needed to be protected from her potentially HIV infected blood, because she had been cutting herself. There is little doubt that he would have similarly sought to ‘protect’ Phoenix’s nurses, etc. by noting this in her charts, and these are records her second psychiatrist would have had access to.
mainstream mental health care has a deeply problematic relationship to women’s disclosures of trauma and violence (1999: 33-34).\textsuperscript{158} In this instance, Phoenix’s reporting of a sexual assault was interpreted as an indictment of her sexuality, rather than a violation of the same, and her very reasonable desire to work with a female therapist was interpreted as being difficult, non-compliant, and ‘unwilling to change’. Here again, Phoenix was positioned as ‘undeserving’ of help, and the author of her own difficulties.

It is unsurprising that after these experiences with ‘helping’ professionals, Phoenix’s addiction “really took off” (interview with Phoenix, April 8, 2004). Being constructed as ‘a waste of time’, as ‘difficult’ – in other words, as undeserving of help – as well as deeply problematic attempts to regulate her sexual activities made it impossible for Phoenix to trust mental health care providers. As a result, Phoenix was effectively alienated from accessing these services. Ironically, this contributed directly to the escalation of her addiction and subsequent street-involvement with young men who were (equally) interested in controlling her sexuality.\textsuperscript{159} Whereas mental health care professionals had tried to regulate her sexuality via discourses of ‘appropriate’ heterofemininity – vis-à-vis abstinence – young street-involved men endeavoured to control Phoenix’s sexuality in other ways:

\begin{quote}
I never like, prostituted myself off the street, it’s like a grey area there. Where I don’t know how I made money for drugs, but it was there and [pauses]. I’d be out for 5 nights, sneak into mum’s house, sleep, shower, and then leave again. Sometimes I’d crash with guys I was hanging out with. It was like I was just constantly on the go...guys were constantly trying to, pimp me off, drug me, or something, right? It’s, it was awful. It’s like this constant survival mode that you’re in, and uh, eventually it just gets to be normal, right?” (ibid).
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[158] Indeed, one of Morrow and Chappell’s informants “noted that when she volunteered that she had been abused, she was told by her psychiatrist that it was all a bad dream, even though she had physical injuries” (1999: 34).
\item[159] I use the term ‘ironically’ not to minimize Phoenix’s experiences, but rather to highlight the similarity in her treatment by men from vastly different milieux. Phoenix’s experiences with male mental health care professionals and street-involved young men share a common denominator, of sorts. In both settings, attempts were made to control her sexuality.
\end{footnotes}
Though Phoenix was sexually active with young men during this time, some of her encounters certainly fall under the rubric of coercive sexual conditions - in order to acquire substances, she was in the company of young men who were either trying to drug her in order to sexually assault her, and / or sell her sexual services to other young men. However, she contrasts her relationships with young men on the street as different from the “prostitution” engaged in by a young gay male friend whose parents kicked him out of the house, forcing him to work in the sex trade in Vancouver’s Boys Town. The “grey area” (ibid) that Phoenix alludes to after her firm statement that she “never prostituted herself off the street” (emphasis added; ibid) seems to indicate that while she was, at times, able to maintain sexual boundaries with these young men, at other times she was involved in sexual activity that was – under the coercive conditions of servicing an addiction – an expected exchange. Indeed, when I asked her if she felt that being a street-involved woman made her more vulnerable to unwanted sexual attention, she vehemently agreed, and then stated, “‘Yeah...yeah, it’s just like...constant...it’s just such a cycle. Like, sex isn’t even about attraction, right?’” (ibid).

Phoenix’s addiction eventually led her to seek alcohol and drug counseling. In contrast to her experiences with male psychiatrists and psychologists, she characterizes her addictions counselors as “very progressive. Because they look at the whole person” (ibid).

My interpretation of this “grey area” has been influenced by Kathy Peiss’ (1989) chapter “Charity Girls” and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working Class Sexuality, 1880-1920. In this article, Peiss discusses how young, working class women in New York engaged in a system of “treating” (1989: 60) in which a variety of sexual services – “ranging from flirtatious companionship to sexual intercourse” (ibid: 61) was exchanged for the young men purchasing cover charges, drinks, meals, etc. that the women could not afford to pay for themselves. Peiss notes that the ‘charity girls’ differentiated themselves from prostitutes because they did not accept cash from these young men (ibid: 61). Phoenix definitively states that she did not “prostitute” herself. However, I find that the concept of “coercive sexuality” as developed by Patton and Mannison (1998) is a helpful tool for interpreting this area of Phoenix’s narrative. However, interpreting this story as I have done represents an instance in which follow-up interviews would have been incredibly helpful, as I am keen to know if I have interpreted – and represented – Phoenix’s discussion about her street experiences correctly.
It was during this time that Phoenix began to self-identify as queer, and disclosed this to a female addictions counselor. Significantly, she was told never to disclose her sexuality to a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other mental health care professional because of these professions' relationship to the pathologization and criminalization of homosexuality:

She told me that, not to say anything about that ever because they used to consider it a mental illness. And if you tell them that, it'll, it'll reflect badly on you...like, they use it to have more power over you, to invalidate you (ibid).

Thus, in addition to the vulnerabilities Phoenix had previously encountered with the mental health profession via her gender, age, and sexuality, her gender and queerness would increasingly become barriers in accessing mental health services and addictions counseling. The advice not to disclose her queerness to mental health care professionals was given to her by an A&D counselor in the aftermath of her third hospitalization. Unable to access help for her addiction due to the two-month waiting list in her home municipality of Ladner, Phoenix had to be hospitalized due to her “history” of suicide attempts. It was through the hospital that she was finally able to find a place in a detox facility, and go from there to addictions counseling:

Whenever I wanted to get help, it wasn’t until I ended up in the hospital that they would, you know, take you seriously...I, I uh, I reached bottom again one day, and I couldn’t even tie my shoes one day, and they put me in the psych ward because I have such a history. And then from there they put me on a list for detox. And then from detox, they’re like “Oh, there’s all these things you can do, a world of possibilities”. And then that’s when like, omigod, finally – this is like after 5 years, 6 years...I mean, for a lot of people, once you get to that bottom, you have to wait 2 months to be able to get help? Like, fuck man, it’s not going to happen. You give up hope, you’d either like be totally suicidal, or you just go back [to drug use] (ibid).

Phoenix’s comments, here, speak to an over-arching lack of addiction services. As she so eloquently points out, a 2-month waiting list for detox services represents an enormous barrier for persons attempting to access help for addictions. However, in addition, when I
probed further, asking Phoenix why she had so much difficulty finding help for her addiction, she stated,

Women aren’t taken seriously in addictions…that’s very widely known. Boys, like you can, you can look at the houses, um, they have quite a few recovery houses for young men, around. Um, but Peake House, that’s the only place for girls to go…it’s got about 8 beds. There’s another one in New West, but it’s private – costs about $200 / per day (ibid).

Herein, Phoenix highlights how class and gender work to disadvantage young women for whom there are few addiction services – unless one has access to the funds needed to finance private care. In addition to these barriers, Phoenix observed that being queer and female in the context of co-ed alcohol and drug services was also problematic:

It, it would be great if there was a queer recovery house – a young guy coming out is in treatment with a guy just getting out of jail, and they’re not safe – that’s like a huge barrier for [queer] men. And for women, as well, I’m sure…most of the people in treatment are older, and I was, was really scared, you know? I was stalked by a man from, from my 12-step program…that kind of shit happened to the women all the time (ibid).

Given the disproportionate risk demonstrated by queer youth for substance use problems (McCreary Centre Society, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1994), the absence of queer-specific addiction services in the Lower Mainland is, in itself, problematic. Moreover, Phoenix points to a lack of safety for queers in existing services. This represents a barrier for queer youth. In addition, however, she points to a sexually predatory environment in existing services that is enabled by their co-ed nature, and constitutes a further deterrent to young queer women who want to access addiction services. From this perspective, Phoenix’s narrative highlights the ways that sexuality and gender constitute multiply layered barriers to existing addiction services.

In viewing mental health and addictions enclaves through Phoenix’s experiences thereof, it becomes clear that gender, age, class, and sexuality converge with discourses of
deservingness to constitute significant and multiple barriers to accessing services. In her experiences with these social service sites, Phoenix was forced to negotiate the sexist assumptions of white, male psychiatrists; the dehumanizing implications of being told she was “a waste of time” by a mental health nurse; a lack of addiction services for women; an unsafe environment for women and queers in the addiction services that she finally did access; as well as a deep and justifiable mistrust of mental health care professionals’ sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism. These circumstances emerged in the context of two suicide attempts, three hospitalizations in the psych ward, and an addiction to substances. It is impossible to attribute Phoenix’s survival to anything but her own strength, resilience, and determination. Viewed in this fashion, Phoenix’s story represents an eloquent counter-narrative to those who view street youth as “not wanting to help themselves” (Letter to the Reader’s Page of The Province; Daniel Cindric, 2004: A15) – and therefore undeserving of service provision – or existing services as “more than adequate” (ibid).

Indeed, it should be noted that Phoenix was not alone among my informants in running afoul of homophobia and heterosexism with mental health care professionals. Kay, for example, also tried to access counseling in Prince George through the hospital. Like Phoenix, she had been cutting herself as a result of homophobia and bullying she endured at school, and the instability of being homeless. When I asked Kay if she ever talked about her sexuality to the counselors she saw in Prince George, she said,

Kay: I was trying to talk to them about it, but...I didn’t find them very helpful at all, you know? Like -

EB: - you told them that you were bi, or that you were gay, or...

K: - yeah yeah, you know I’d talk to them about things, and like, I don’t know...it was like talking to a wall. It was like nothing. You know? I don’t know what I wanted out of them, but -
EB: So they didn’t -

K: They just -

[both pause]

EB: They weren’t, I mean they didn’t refer you to...you know, any groups in town...

K: Oh, sometimes they referred me to like, YouthQuest, but I was like, I’m already involved in that. You know, like this is because I’m sad. I want to talk to someone because...I’m sad (Interview with Kay, April 4, 2004).

Though it might be argued that by referring Kay to YouthQuest or other queer positive groups, the mental health care providers in Prince George did somewhat better than their colleagues at Vancouver Children’s Hospital, Kay’s testimony nevertheless reveals a troubling unresponsiveness from these professionals in regard to her disclosure of her sexuality. Indeed, she uses terms like “not very helpful”; “it was like talking to a wall”; “it was like nothing”. Her clinicians’ unwillingness to do anything more than refer Kay to non-mental health care services such as YouthQuest must be seen in the context of extensive research that demonstrates queer youth are at disproportionate risk for suicide, substance use, dropping out of school, violence and harassment, homelessness, etc. Kay’s experience seems to reflect the very same professional reticence vis-à-vis queer sexualities that Ritch C. Savin-Williams refers to as a “clinical...silence and neglect” among clinicians and researchers who are – for a variety of reasons – unable or unwilling to engage with the health care needs of queer youth (1994: 261).

How are we to account for this aspect of Kay’s narrative? Esther Rothblum (1994) argues that, “the history of pathologizing homosexuality is recent enough to have affected the training of most mental health professionals who are currently practicing” (1994: 213).
Indeed, she goes on to point out that de-pathologizing homosexuality within the mental health care profession “did not improve [attitudes toward lesbians and gay men] in the years immediately following the removal of homosexuality as a diagnostic category from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973” (1994: 261). In other words, Savin-Williams and Rothblum point to the persistence of pathologizing attitudes towards homosexuality among clinicians and other mental health care practitioners. Morrow and Chappell’s (1999) report on women’s experiences with the mental health system concurs with this assessment. Their queer informants reported “actively avoiding mental health services or revealing their sexual identity to avoid being pathologized” (1999: 53). Clearly, there is some consensus regarding the existence of homophobia in the mental health care system – a consensus that is reflected, for example, in the way that an addictions counsellor advised Phoenix not to disclose her queerness to mental health care professionals.

Phoenix and Kay’s testimonies demonstrate that gender, age, class and sexuality can place queer young women who are homeless and / or street-involved in an even more vulnerable position within the context of accessing mental health services. In addition, however, Morrow and Chappell suggest that, “research has shown that diagnostic tools and diagnostic processes reflect the systemic biases (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism) found in society more generally” (1999: 10). If this is the case, it is reasonable to speculate that Phoenix and Kay’s shared whiteness may also have inflected their experiences of mainstream mental health and addiction services. Unlike women of colour and Aboriginal women who are young, queer, and seeking these types of

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161 Morrow and Chappell go on to suggest that one impact of such systemic biases is reflected in the fact that, “women outnumber men on all major psychiatric diagnoses except antisocial personality response and alcohol abuse” (ibid).
services, Phoenix and Kay did not have to negotiate additional marginalization stemming from racism and legacies of colonization.\footnote{In their interview-based study on First Nations women’s encounters with mainstream medical health system (2000), Brown, Fiske, and Thomas emphasize that multiple factors — including the absence of First Nations staff and care providers, clinical fee structures, patient scheduling, etc. — alienate First Nations women from the medical system, and are compounded by “contemporary power relations [that] are troubled by a cultural legacy of mistreatment and abuses that arose in past decades” (2000: 10-11). Morrow and Chappell’s (1999) research on women’s encounters with the mental health system confirms that, within this sector of health care, “barriers to service include the lack of culturally sensitive services and a lack of recognition by mental health care providers of the impact of racism...[and] the legacy of colonialism and its impact on mental health” (1999:)}

\textit{(No)Where to Go: Queer, Street-Involved Young Women and Social Service Provision}

The material consequences of gender, age, sexuality, ‘race’, class, and whiteness are similarly reflected in my informants’ experiences with and / or attempts to access foster-care, social work intervention, income assistance, employment, youth housing services, and law enforcement. The five young women who shared their stories with me had interactions with some or all of these social service enclaves, and were frequently forced to negotiate multiple institutional sites simultaneously as a result of being homeless and / or street-involved. For example, as discussed above, some of Phoenix’s encounters with mental health care professionals – and subsequent discourses of (un)deservingness – occurred at the same time she was seeking addictions treatment. Thus, these two ostensibly discrete forms of social services intersect in her lived experiences. At the same time, she found that gender, class, and sexuality represented areas of vulnerability, danger, and marginalization across institutional settings.

In the discussion that follows, I have (again) endeavoured to illustrate the ways that my narrators experienced their interactions with multiple sites of service provision: that is, simultaneously and cumulatively. Significantly, representing their testimonies in this fashion reflects more than the reality of concurrent – and problematic – experiences with multiple
social service enclaves. Indeed, this approach exposes how institutional coordination is ideologically facilitated and mediated (1987: 108; 160) via “a hierarchy of deservedness” (Hillyard Little, 1994: 234) that is constituted in ways that reproduce specific assumptions vis-à-vis gender, age, ‘race’, class, whiteness, and sexuality. The singular case or instance as such makes it difficult to observe how institutional coordination accomplishes the work of ruling by operating through existing categories that are grounded in material relations of inequality (Smith, 1987: 156-157). Taking as our point of entry (ibid: 115) the experiences of five narrators who are experts in their everyday worlds (ibid: 110) reveals more than a uniformity of experience with various social service providers; indeed, this approach problematizes the apparatus and relations of ruling – of which these diverse institutional sites are “nodes or knots” (ibid: 160) – that coordinate, organize, and, indeed, determine everyday worlds.

For instance, Darian’s experiences with multiple social service enclaves - including social workers, a Ministry appointed psychiatrist, foster-care settings, social service housing for youth, and the legal system – illustrate how age, gender, sexuality, and discourses of deservingness converged to determine her daily lived experiences of being in the care of the Ministry of Children and Families. For example, at the age of 14, Darian and her twin sister had to fight against an adult social worker in order to be taken into Ministry Care, and away from their biological mother:

Darian: I actually, ironically I had to fight to get into the Ministry.

48) Morrow and Chappell’s informants confirmed that “their experiences of the racism of service providers” (ibid: 49) represented a key barrier to accessing mental health care services.

163 For example, Dorothy Smith comments on the connections between social work discourse and unchallenged ideologies about women’s role in the institutional setting of the home: “social workers...have come to address families in terms of interpersonal relations and roles, a language that has rendered the institutional presence of the home as a work setting for women...invisible” (emphasis added; 1987: 163).
EB: you had to fight to get into...to get in care?

D: To get into care...which is really ironic, because they kept trying to take us away when we were smaller, and I...had a bitch of a social worker....sorry, I'm going to use the bad word. Um, that I had to fight to get into care, and finally me and my twin sister, we said to the social worker, like, there was no food in the house, she'd seen the house, she'd seen that there was nothing. There was abuse going on, we were being beaten, neglected...I was anemic, um...[pauses]. It was just really bad. My sister was cutting, and we were both cutting and very depressed and stuff, and...we used to run away, er...I used to run away and stay in the park? Cuz you know, our mom's crazy, there's no food in the house, there's no point in being there, so we used to stay there. And we found out about the Ministry and we tried to get in and tried to get in...and they wouldn't let us. So, um...one day, I found out later that there's trigger words that you can use, and me and my sister just walked in there, and we meant it, we were like two fourteen year old girls, and we said, “you know, if you don’t take us into care we’re going to fuckin’ kill ourselves and name you in the letter”. And...they found a placement for us immediately...‘Cuz we heard these things make headlines, you know? [bitter laughter] (interview with Darian, April 7, 2004)

Defined as children, Darian and her twin had to resist and subvert power dynamics arising from their relative lack of power in relation to this Ministry social worker. In addition, deploying the ‘trigger’ of suicide was an adroit appropriation of discourses of deservingness. The social worker in question had concluded that there was not adequate cause to apprehend them – despite ample documentation of the abuse, neglect, etc. that the girls were experiencing in their mother’s care. However, Darian and her twin surmised that, if they threatened to publicly announce their desperation via a suicide note, the social worker would be forced to reconsider them as ‘deserving’ of Ministry intervention. This threat was effective because – if carried out – the social worker’s ability to interpret and apply institutional criteria for ‘worthiness’ – and, indeed, the “hierarchy of deservedness” (Hillyard Little, 1994: 234) itself – would be called into question.

As a result of their successful navigation of these power dynamics, Darian and her twin were ultimately placed into foster-care with their aunt and uncle. In Chapter 4, I discuss how
Darian had to flee this home because she was being sexually abused by her uncle, who targeted her “because he figured out that I was gay, and he abused me to ‘help me’ become heterosexual” (ibid). Despite what she herself was going through, Darian managed to orchestrate her sister’s removal from her aunt and uncle’s care:

So she was removed and I was told, you know, because my uncle knew about this…and he was fine with that, but he said that if I tried to leave he’d fight for custody, and he’d win (ibid).

There are multiple power dynamics at work, here, in her uncle’s actions. Mobilizing Darian’s queerness against her was a silencing maneuver that operates through heterosexist and homophobic notions that position heterosexuality as the only normal, natural sexual orientation. In order to silence her about the abuse, he mobilized the silencing power of heteronormativity by associating his abuse with her sexuality. Indeed, implicit in her uncle’s actions was a threat to reveal Darian’s sexuality to others – a threat that can only exist within the broader, hegemonic framework of heteronormativity.

Indeed, this aspect of Darian’s experiences in care must be viewed through an “underlying historically determined structure of relations” (Smith, 1987: 114): in other words, social work - like other institutional enclaves - has been implicated as a profession that embodies deeply problematic histories vis-a-vis the pathologization and criminalization of homosexuality (Ross, 1997; 1998). Moreover, as research by Gerald Mallon (2001), Carol-Anne O’Brien (1994), and others demonstrates, such discourses are still actively at work in many out-of-home care settings. The persistence of structural – and structuring –

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164 See Chapter 4, page 102.
165 For example, Ross’ research on Street Haven in the 1960’s demonstrates that butch and femme lesbians were – along with sex trade workers and drug users (1997: 562) positioned as among the least deserving of access to social services. As a result, Street Haven’s willingness to provide services to populations of street-involved and / or homeless queer women made this social service enclave highly unique. However, as Ross goes on to demonstrate, Haven staff and administrators endeavoured to rehabilitate lesbian clients along lines of middle-class, heterofeminine respectability (ibid: 563-
relations of homophobia within social service institutions position queer youth as less deserving of care than their heterosexual peers in the “hierarchy of deservedness” (Hillyard Little, 1994: 234). In Darian’s case, these relations informed her feeling that she could not disclose the abuse to her caseworker because her uncle had tied it to her queerness.

In addition, the uncle’s threat to have Darian permanently placed in his custody was intended to pre-empt any further resistance on her part. This layer of coercion must be viewed within the unequal power dynamics that emerge in the context of children and youth who are in Ministry care and in the charge of the adult foster-parents. Discourses of deservingness and the social construction of street youth as a ‘problem’ assist in constituting these power dynamics, because a youth who is placed in care is supposed to be grateful to have a home in the first place. Indeed, they have already been constructed as “socially problematic” for social service agencies and, indeed, society as a whole (de Moura, 2002: 355). As a result, a homeless child or youth’s placement in foster-care is supposed to represent a ‘solution’ to the dilemma of a child or youth who does not have a home. However, underlying this logic is a discursive framework that places youth in an unequal position of power vis-à-vis the foster parent – the adult who is framed in opposition to the discourses of individual pathology, delinquency, and deviance that constitute the social construction of street children and youth (de Moura, 2002: 356). Within institutional discourses, the foster-parent is the hero or ‘foil’ for the personage of the homeless youth or child. They are the solution to a social problem. Darian’s uncle was confident of his position in this discursive hierarchy as the benevolent relative who kindly opened his home to Darian and her sister. Clearly, Darian was also sure of her position in this power dynamic – for his
threats to have her permanently placed in his custody prevented her from running away and reporting the abuse for several months.

In addition, it is also important to note that, though Darian was officially in the care of the Ministry when the sexual abuse happened, neither her Ministry appointed counselor — whom she saw weekly — nor her social worker noticed that anything was wrong in this foster-care setting. The fact that Darian was in a foster home was interpreted by her caseworker to mean everything was fine — read: ‘problem’ solved:

In the Ministry, like, if you don’t have a problem, they don’t have time for you. It’s like a...I was a green light. And a green light means go...everything’s fine. So let’s not mess with this (ibid).

Indeed, Darian did not meet her social worker in person until he had to document her reporting of the sexual abuse (ibid). This was two years after he was assigned as her caseworker (ibid). In addition, though Darian met with her Ministry appointed psychiatrist weekly, he did not interpret the signs of sexual abuse that manifested in their meetings, nor did she feel comfortable disclosing either her sexuality or the sexual abuse. Indeed, her uncle had attended counseling sessions with her, in order to enforce her silence. Darian describes her counselor’s reaction to his realization that he had misread the signs that were evident in such meetings:

Darian: Um, my shrink freaked out, because he actually had had meetings with them and me, and he was thinking they were...weird?

EB: So your therapist had meetings with your uncle and your aunt and you before you ran away and reported the abuse?

D: Yeah.

EB: And your therapist had picked up that there was something going on?

D: Well...there was weird shit going on, but he didn’t click, right?...And he fucking...the second he found out he got it, and he just like, broke down. He
was like, “I’m so sorry” and I remember having this....like feeling like I should console him... [laughs] (ibid).

Having been failed by her psychiatrist and neglected by her social worker, Darian hoped to find some support through the Ministry in charging her uncle with sexual abuse. An appointment was arranged by the Ministry between Darian and a Crown attorney. Neither her social worker nor her psychiatrist accompanied her to the meeting. There was no other advocate available for Darian at this appointment, and her new foster-parents did not attend the meeting with her:

Darian: The lawyer was probably pretty good, but like, busy, and...like, it was a woman, and I remember going to the lawyer, and it was kind of the...I went alone, and was left alone in this office...scared shitless, right? I was like sitting in this law office, and...

EB: So a social worker doesn’t go with you?

D: No.

EB: Social worker doesn’t go with you...? Youth worker...? Nobody goes with you?

D: Yeah. And I was in this office alone, and there was a crown...lawyer...I think it’s a crown lawyer...And they’re busy as hell, and I was trying to make logic out of it, and I was like “what are my chances of winning?” and they were like, it depends on blah blah blah, which judge. And so, I’m like, “which judge is appointed?” like “is this judge good about these cases”, you know? And so I started like...and then, and then she was talking about, “well, they normally lean on this side of it” and so I started like...of the judges...and I started doing like, coming to simple math, like plus/minus, you know? Like, of my chances of winning. And it doesn’t work like that, and I know it doesn’t...but I tried to find some logic to the system that just...it just isn’t there... So at that point I...I was crying, and I was there for probably maybe an hour...I don’t know. It seemed like not too long, because I didn’t get half my questions answered. And they were like, “what’s your decision?” because they wanted me out of the office kind of thing, to go on to the next case, because they were busy. And they had a lot of things to do. [pauses] And so...I...I was like, “I don’t think I’m going to” because she...the lawyer...I kept asking her, “well, what would you do?”

EB: yeah
D: Cuz nobody was talking to me about this...nobody really...like, I was on my own. And so um...she said, “There’s no point”. There’s no point. And I was like, “you know what? You’re right”. And so I decided not to do anything (ibid).

In this exchange with a Crown attorney, the power dynamics between a foster-parent and a foster-child are clearly visible as they manifest within legal practices. Even though Darian had been subjected to illegal acts – i.e. child sexual abuse – she was told that “there was no point” in going forward with the charges against her uncle. She was, in her own words, “on her own” (ibid). This begs the question: Why, if Darian was in Ministry care - and ostensibly on the same side as all the resources that the Ministry could marshal in a court proceeding – would she be told that there was no point? In answering Darian’s questions thusly, the Crown counsel was interpreting the ways that Darian would be positioned – in court – by discourses of deservingness, the social construction of street youth as de facto problematic (read: not credible but deviant or pathological), as well as other power dynamics that positioned Darian in specific ways vis-à-vis her age. In short, Darian was convinced by her lawyer that she would not be believed in court. Here again, the power dynamics between Darian and her uncle shaped not only his abuse of her, but also her expectation – and the lawyer’s – that she would not be believed; that, in a courtroom, his positionality as an adult, as a family man, as the munificent uncle would operate through the social constructions of street youth and discourses of deserving to position her as ‘the problem’.

Unfortunately, this part of Darian’s narrative is not the only area in which she was impacted by homophobia and heterosexism while in care. After leaving her aunt and uncle’s home, Darian lived with a “strict Seventh-Day Adventist foster family” (interview with Darian, April 7, 2004). However, as she grew more confident about her queer identity, she
came into conflict with her foster-parents, who had initiated proceedings to legally adopt

Darian:

Darian: I don’t know how to explain it. Like, I didn’t...I didn’t understand homophobia, I didn’t understand all that stuff. All I knew was...gay was a place that I finally felt like I was home...And so I wanted to talk to them about being gay-

EB: [interrupting] Talk to who?

D: Um, my foster parents there. Who, they were actually in the process of adopting me and stuff?...I remember just joking about stuff. Because I used to bug my foster-mom about stuff, and... And I said something about “what if I marry a girl?” And she’s like [said in a high-pitched voice], “don’t even SAY things like that. Those people are sick. They need to be taken out in the middle of the road, and shot. They’re sick.”... And this was about the time when I started taking pills [laughs] right? Cuz she’s like, “you can’t be like that in my house” kind of thing? Like...

EB: And you know that they’re in the process of wanting to adopt you... My name was changed on my ID and everything...

EB: Okay, so you’re in the process of being adopted, having a home...

D: Everything I ever wanted.

EB: Everything you ever wanted. And then this gets dropped on you...

D: ...And it was just a joke, like she didn’t know I was kind of coming out to her? And so...I...things were really bad, so I just took the pills (ibid).

In trying to understand why Darian felt she had no alternative but to attempt suicide, I asked if she had ever told her caseworker about what was going on in this foster home. However, she was still not out to her caseworker, and so could not explain that she was being subjected to virulent homophobia by foster-parents who told her that all homosexuals were pedophiles (ibid). However, even though she did not feel she could disclose her queerness, Darian tried repeatedly to get moved to a new foster home:
I kept asking [my caseworker] to be moved and they wouldn’t move me...

...But then, you’d be amazed what happens when they find out you’ve taken a bottle of pills. [snaps fingers] Gone! [laughs] New home, next day! (ibid).

In order to understand why Darian was not out to her social worker, it is crucial to recognize that he was still under-involved in her life:

All I knew about my social worker was that when I tried to kill myself, he got in a lot of shit. [laughs] S’about all I knew. And then after that, he made time for me [bitter laughter] (ibid).

Again caught within foster-parent / foster-child power dynamics inflected by homophobia and heterosexism; again silenced by hegemonic ideologies of heteronormativity; and still unable to access the help she needed through her inaccessible social worker, Darian took the only route she felt was available to her:

I took a bottle of Tylenol, for my own benefit, because I didn’t want other people to know I was gay. Because it could hurt my whole future (ibid).

Though Darian survived the overdose, it left her with permanent liver damage and a number of other health problems that she is still dealing with (ibid). By the age of 18, she would come out to both her psychiatrist and her caseworker in the context of looking for resources to help her negotiate being out and queer. Though he proved completely incapable of providing Darian with any referrals to queer youth service agencies – for example, YouthQuest, which she eventually found through her own resourcefulness – her social worker became much more attentive in certain ways:

So when I came out of the closet, about all I got from my social worker at that point, when he started calling me every day. “You going to kill yourself? Are you okay?” Because he knew that kids that came out of the closet kill themselves. He knew that much... He’s like, “you’re not going to kill yourself. Stay away from sharp objects.” So I started going, “Fuck you!” Click. [sound of phone hanging up] Right?...And he, to this day, does not remember me swearing at him. I fucking swore at that bastard. Like, I freaked on him several times, you know? (ibid).
Darian's frustration with her caseworker highlights the apparent contradiction between his awareness of the high suicide rates among queer youth and his concurrent inability to refer her to any of several queer youth organizations in Vancouver. However, this part of Darian's narrative is also revealing in that it inspires several key questions: why would her caseworker not have made the connection between Darian's earlier suicide attempt and her sexuality? In addition, if he was so aware of the suicide risks associated with queer youth, why did he not have – and / or why was he not provided with – referral information for queer youth agencies? If he was aware of this risk, why did he or the Ministry not screen out potential foster-parents such as the Seventh-Day Adventist family that told Darian all homosexuals are sick, perverted pedophiles? Indeed, it is not as though research is lacking on queer youth and social service settings: there is an entire journal devoted to gay and lesbian social services.166

Darian was not alone among my informants in confronting the material consequences of discursive and institutional factors that (over)determined her experiences of homelessness as a queer young woman. Kay, for example, suggested that social workers were peripherally involved with her family between the ages of 13 and 17 because, in her words, she was "emotionally messed up" (interview with Kay, April 4, 2004). For part of this time, Kay lived with her grandmother because she was estranged from her parents due to their substance use. However, after Kay's grandmother passed away, she felt unable to move back in with her parents, and instead "couch-surfed" at friends' houses (ibid). Upon reviewing Kay's interview transcript, it struck me as odd that, even though social workers

were aware of the difficulties in her family, she was not put into either foster-care or an out of home care setting such as a group home.\(^{167}\)

Kay was similarly unable to find shelter through social service networks when she and her girlfriend migrated from Prince Rupert, down through Vancouver Island, to Vancouver. They were forced to couch surf along the way, and eventually ended up living on the street and in the parks of Vancouver’s West End. When I asked why they could not access youth shelters such as Covenant House, she replied simply, “Everything was full” (ibid). Significantly, when I probed further to ask Kay whether their gender or sexuality impacted on being homeless, she said,

**Kay:** It was kinda weird, because...like we couldn’t like, be gay? You just can’t, you know? You don’t know how people are going to react – you can’t risk it, you just can’t be gay...you don’t know if you’re going to be okay...

**EB:** A person says “you can crash on my couch” and if you tell them, they might say, “I don’t want you in my house”?

**K:** Exactly. They might be like “get out”...“get the fuck out”, you know? And you’re like...“ohhh...sorry”.

**EB:** So being out can...can really have a serious impact on whether or not you have a place to crash.

**K:** Yeah. Yeah. Like, even right now... And it’s still kind of scary, right, because you don’t know how people are going to react, how people...people who have nothing to lose could do anything... Like I once had a place where I felt like, incredibly unsafe, but even like hitchhiking and stuff, like, down the island, or up to Prince George, or from Prince George to Prince Rupert...the truck drivers and stuff, some of them would be hard-core religious and...you know, I didn’t come out and talk about gay, but I’m like “my friend is gay” and stuff, and they’re like “blah blah blah” and they could get really in my face about the whole thing, and I’m like I don’t understand, like why people are like that, still. (ibid).

\(^{167}\) Once again, this represents and instance in which I wish I could have done a follow-up interview with Kay to inquire further about how it was that she was not provided with more stable housing by social services in Prince George. They were involved with her family on some level, but did not intervene during the years when she felt she could not live at home with her parents.
Upon hearing this, I asked Kay to describe what it was like being queer and female while living on the streets in Vancouver. She said,

Kay: We did sleep in like like, parks and stuff, in alleys. We had nothing else to do. It really sucked, because there was nowhere to shower...I remember showering my hair in the sink a lot and stuff. I mean, we didn't know anyone...we couldn't talk to anyone. The people we talked to were scary, and the guys on the street would hit on us and stuff...and also with the way the world works, especially when you’re a street-person, you know...sexuality is power... it was...it was scarier...

EB: Did...did they...did being a woman, did you feel that’s scarier?

K: yeah, like if I was a man I’d probably be...like, way less scared. The fact that you’re a woman does like...you know...like, people don’t accept it so much anymore, but you’re like, weaker. You know? Like, you’re not weaker, but -

EB: [interrupting] - the assumption is that you are?

K: yeah, the assumption is that you are. They don’t look at you...they look at you and like, yeah, you’re a woman, so you’re weaker...There’s a lot...there’s a lot of big things. How many, how many men do you know that come on, they’re like “yeah, I was raped”? You know? Like, it’s...more...[long pause]

EB: vulnerable?

K: yeah, you’re just more vulnerable. You just are.

Kay’s comments highlight the ways in which gender and sexuality converged in her experiences to make street-life more vulnerable for her and her lesbian partner. Crucially, she characterizes the relationship between street-involved women and men with the vehement statement, “sexuality is power” (ibid), succinctly capturing with this statement the frequent, unwanted sexual attention they received from street-involved men, and the concurrent threat of rape or sexual assault that she suggests is endemic to being female and on the street. Taking Kay’s narrative up as a lens for scrutinizing the nature and availability of social services in the form of shelters and youth housing implicates social service networks in sustaining the coercive sexual conditions Kay and her girlfriend were forced to
negotiate. Had there been sufficient beds for youth – and young women, in particular – they would not have had to live in the streets, alleyways, and parks, of Vancouver, nor would they have been as likely to be subjected to unwanted sexual overtures. Moreover, this state of affairs cannot be viewed outside the (ongoing) context of the BC Liberal government’s cuts to social services and their ideological basis in discourses of deservingness.\(^{168}\)

Vi’s narrative similarly implicates social service networks in creating and sustaining barriers to services, and the ways in which such obstacles converge and accumulate to create fundamentally punishing circumstances for queer young women who are homeless and / or street-involved. At the time of our interview, Vi had been living in a shared apartment for two months. Prior to this, she had been homeless for two years. No longer able to live with her family in Burnaby because of their homophobia, Vi began to look for jobs. Significantly, she talked about how sexuality, ‘race’, and class interacted in her attempts to find paid work:

> It was like, it might as well have said in big huge letters on my resume, ‘I am a big fat Native dyke’ \(^{[laughs]}\). So I think that really affected my chances of getting employment (interview with Vi, April 1, 2004).

After two months, Vi was unable to find a job and thereby secure stable housing, so she attempted to acquire social assistance benefits. However, she was unable to wait for the time required to fulfill the eligibility criteria:

> I’d already been looking for jobs for two months. It was a whole bunch of loopholes that I had, I had to work search for [another] month, and like, um, to be able to just get an appointment. And then once I got an appointment, then they would go through all – like, I had to document all my work search for that month, but I’d already been looking. So then they would check that out, and see if I really am work-searching, and then they could give me whatever (ibid).

In order to survive, Vi couch-surfed with friends, shared a squat at the invitation of a

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\(^{168}\) For a fuller discussion of the BC Liberals’ social service cutbacks and their impact upon women and children (including youth) in BC, see the Friends of Women and Children in BC reports, http://www.wmst.ubc.ca/Reports.htm.
homeless man who lived there, and occasionally stayed in a youth hostel when she was able to make the money to do so by working in very low-income jobs. Indeed, Vi finally found work through a Vancouver temp agency – but only after changing her resume in order to conceal her queerness:

the job that I got once I actually took um, my queer-related volunteer work off my resume, um, I got a job. And the job was working for, um, a temp agency doing general labor...doing industrial cleaning, um, after disasters, like fire and flood disasters. I have just actually recently quit that job...that was a, um, gross job. Because it was, um, like I someone’s, um, slave. Seriously, seriously someone’s slave. Um, I cleaned surfaces with a fucking toothbrush – like cleaned off soot off of walls – off of white tiles...you had to really be, work your hardest, try your best to please everyone who, usually, just treated you like shit, but I guess I was used to treat – to trying to have to please people who treated you like shit...and so, yeah, I worked there for a little while...This temp agency was a higher end temp agency...like most everyone who worked there was like, lower class, white. Or, upper class anyone else of color...I knew that I was there because, no, I wasn’t white, but I was educated, and so that’s why I got a place there (ibid).

As Vi so succinctly points out, sexuality, ‘race’, and class constituted many-layered barriers to her attempts to find steady employment. Concealing her sexuality and highlighting her education enabled Vi to get a job – in spite of not being white – but it was, in her description, “slave labor” (ibid).

Though she tried to find time to look for a better job that would finance stable housing, Vi found this very difficult while working eight hours a day for nine dollars an hour.

I also felt like I could not get anything done...like it was – I would go to work and then I would not know where I was going to stay that night, and so then I would have to get a hold of someone, or have that already in place. So that the planning for where I was going to sleep took precedence over anything

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169 I am differentiating, here, between youth hostels – which are a cheaper from of paid accommodation than a hotel or motel – and social service housing for youth, which is ostensibly available to BC youth under the age of 19. However, according to one of my informants, the only long-term social service housing for youth in Vancouver (not including foster care or local group homes) is Covenant House. According to this informant, though they are supposed to be available for youth under the age of 19, they are ‘unofficially’ not taking in youth between the ages of 16 and 18.

170 Though Vi was paid an hourly rate of nine dollars per hour, her temp agency was being paid sixteen dollars per hour. In other words, the temp agency kept seven dollars for each hour that Vi worked in this job.
productive that I was going to be doing. Cause I'm like, trying to find another job on top of that, not having very much money, um, having to go to the library to stand in line for fucking a half an hour to get a half an hour on the Internet, d'you know what I mean? And what are you going to do in a half an hour? You're going to be able to locate some kinda job site, and that's it, right? Never mind all the jobs that came up were just shit, they were all telemarketing, all this and all that, and anything that I tried to get within the social work industry all required me to um, have some kind of degree (ibid).

As the above excerpts so clearly demonstrate, Vi made every effort to access existing services in order to get off the streets. However, the dynamics of low-paying, unstable temp work and being homeless made it extremely difficult for Vi to acquire more permanent and better paying work, or attempt to do the necessary, month-long job search required to access BC Benefits. Moreover, at the same time that Vi was looking for a better job, working for the temp agency, and continually trying to find a place to sleep, she was forced to negotiate sexually coercive conditions associated with being female and homeless. Speaking of her experiences of being homeless alongside a female friend, she reflected on their encounters with young men:

If it was another world, a different place, neither of us would have chosen to partner with the guys that we hung around with but, it was part of the survival...like if you willingly partner yourself with this guy, then maybe that means that this guy over here won't take anything from you because this guy is there...so you go for the least shady situation and try and pick your struggles...your um, thinking that you're doing something willingly versus having something, obviously, taken from you (ibid).

This element of Vi's narrative resonates enormously with Kay's assertion that "sexuality is power" on the street (interview with Kay, April 4, 2004). When I asked Vi to elaborate further on how she felt her gender and sexuality had shaped her experiences of street-involvement and homelessness, she added:

Like, if people assume that you're working in the sex trade, um, and...if you're street involved, everyone assumes what you're doing for money. Like, they see you around...it's a very close-knit community, um, you're also at risk – higher
risk of getting sexually assaulted. You become a target...plus, me being a dyke...there's some dangers...sometimes it makes me less of a target, uh, because people won't mess, they won't try...but sometimes that's a danger...like, in a bar, there's a clear gender division – boys look like this, girls look like this, I walk in, I look somewhere in between. Everybody notices this...a lot of girls notice this, and they start dancing with me. A guy notices this, comes up to me and says, 'Hey, you're cute'. But that's not what he means. He walks up to me and he puts his 2 fingers right on the inside of my thigh, all the way up to my crotch...there's lots of those kinds of things as well (ibid).

Given Vi’s efforts – and the cumulative nature of racism, sexism, and homophobia involved in her negotiations with homelessness and street-life – it is difficult to reconcile her narrative with common sense notions that position street youth as not wanting to help themselves, doing nothing, contributing nothing, and benefiting from society at the expense of others (Letter to the Reader's Page of The Province; Daniel Cindric, 2004: A15).

Like Vi, Jupiter also experienced unstable, unpredictable, and unsafe living conditions as a result of being homeless due to her family’s homophobia. Indeed, immediately after being violently ejected from her parents’ home, Jupiter’s parents phoned the police, who then contacted Jupiter on her cell phone. Our discussion of this part of her story reveals multiple problems with how law enforcement failed to provide Jupiter with adequate – and mandated – assistance vis-à-vis their duty to report child abuse to the Ministry of Children and Families:

Jupiter: I guess my parents knew where I was going to go. And they told the cops where to go, to find us...Um, [pauses] The cops called and they talked to me. They asked to talk to my girlfriend, right? And they were like, I was 17 at the time, my girlfriend had just turned 19?...They asked her what went on, and she told them. I mean, she was very honest, and she was very calm, and you know, very respectful even though she was really upset, right? Um, and the police had talked to my parents and asked them the story. The police didn’t even show up...And they told her that they weren’t going to press charges against my dad, even though we had a witness. Two witnesses, because I was there and our mutual friend. They weren’t going to press charges, because it was my dad’s property? And because my parents had given them some story, like, “Oh, you know, she just brought some girls around and she’s
been getting into trouble lately” which is totally untrue. And you know, “We
didn’t know what was going on, and they could have been hoodlums, and they
were causing a fuss, so...you know, we tried to get them out and they started
fighting”? And I was like, I told the cops, I’m like, “My girlfriend is 140
pounds, and she’s gonna instigate, you know, an assault, against a 350 pound
man, who’s drunk?...And so they’re like, “Sorry, we’re not pressing charges.”
And my parents were trying to press charges against her [scoffs]...And I
thought that was horrible. I mean, and unfortunately, because it happened
technically in Delta, we had to go to the Delta police, and...you know, the kind
of redneck, homophobic, really sort of -

EB: [interrupting] So did you guys catch flack from the cops? Like, around
you being gay? Or was it just sort of attitude?

J: It was attitude. Um, but definitely being gay did not help, you know? It did
not help. Because they were like, “well, you know, we don’t really get your
family problems” was what they [the police] told me. And they’re like, even
though basically my dad could have killed her? You know? They were like,
“It’s a family problem, and we don’t deal with family problems. You take care
of them on your own.”

And so, here I am, and I’m not going back to that house, and my girlfriend’s
like, “You’re not going back there!”...I had, I had asked the cops, because I’m
like, the cops were terrible. They were absolutely horrible. They didn’t even
say anything about the Ministry of Children and Families. I think they might
have told me that they were going to forward the report, because there was a
youth involved, like my brother still lived at the house? Whether anything
happened, I don’t know. I never heard back. The police officer told me,
“Don’t go back to your house. I don’t advise going back to the situation.” And
so I told him, fuckin’, “Where am I going to go? What am I going to do?”

EB: And he knows you’re 17.

J: He knows I’m 17. He’s like, “Well, you’ll have to work it out.”

EB: The cop says that you’re going to have to work it out.

J: Yep.

EB: Doesn’t bring in a social worker...nothing.

J: He doesn’t...He says, “Well, it’s a family problem, you’re going to have to
work it out with your family.”...Don’t go back to your house. Don’t live there.
But you have to go back. And I’m like, “Really”. And that’s all he said. Didn’t
even care. Didn’t even know my name. Didn’t get a social worker. I didn’t get
anything...And a big deal of that was because I was gay.
EB: Yeah?

J: Because it was my about my girlfriend. And they just couldn’t handle that.

EB: And the cops knew that she was...you referred to her as your girlfriend, and that kind of stuff...?

J: Oh, yeah...yeah, they did. I mean, they knew it, right? (Interview with Jupiter, March 14, 2004).

Numerous parts of Jupiter’s narrative implicate law enforcement personnel in sustaining the homophobia – and subsequent risk of violence – she experienced within her parents’ household. Jupiter exhibits no doubt whatsoever that her sexuality – which, she emphasizes, was known to these police officers – played a role in their refusal to deal with what was, in essence, child abuse and neglect. Still only 17 years of age, Jupiter was legally still a ‘child’ under BC law. Her testimony reveals a glaring contradiction evident in the officers’ assertion that, while she should not return to her parents’ house – presumably because more violence could ensue – they were not going to file charges or contact a social worker to assist her. This is not only a failure of their duty to report child abuse to the appropriate authorities, but also a deeply apathetic and inadequate response in light of the fact that there were two other young women who could attest to the veracity of Jupiter’s version of events. However, the fact that these other young women were also queer – and also young – disqualified their legitimacy as well. Jupiter’s parents, then, were seen by police as automatically more truthful than the three young queer women.

Unfortunately, this would not be the only time that Jupiter was forced to negotiate homophobia and apathy – instead of assistance – from law enforcement personnel. This entirely unhelpful experience with the police, combined with her vulnerability due to a lack
of stable housing, placed Jupiter in the situation where she accepted a room and board situation with a woman who she met on the bus. Though she had only agreed to exchange child-care services for having a place to stay, Jupiter became involved in a coercive sexual environment that began - but did not end with - a much older man who shared this household:

I think the dynamic that was going on, I think that he saw that I was in a very disadvantaged state. He knew that I was scared...I was chicken. This was my first time in the big world, um, you know? I didn’t really have a secure job, I was really shaky. He knew that he could take advantage of me. I was fresh meat. Um...so we were sort of getting into a relationship more and more, and, um, and then he started pulling out some tricks. That I didn’t know about. I didn’t know at the time, and no one ever told me about this guy, that he was into the S&M scene? Or what he thought was the S&M scene?...And, um, unfortunately, because drugs were like, fucking up my judgment, I just didn’t know. I went along with it...Um, so anyway things went on and on and on. And it got deeper and deeper, and he got more manipulative and he got more controlling, and um...I went along with it. And then, so things started popping up. You know, like, “what the hell is this? You know? Is this really how things are supposed to be happening?” You know? You know, is S&M really, what he’s into, or is he just controlling? And so, I actually talked to my friend about it, some close friends that I had, and they were like, “Oh my God.” They started warning me about it. But I wasn’t really listening, because I thought I was in control of the situation? Um, and things progressed. And um, eventually what happened to me is I became the house’s sex toy. You know, um...the lady who had been so nice [from] the bus...you know, started coming on to me. And we were really close to, ending up in bed together. Her boyfriend? Started coming on to me. And then, about, yeah...beginning in April, I got group-raped (ibid).

Fearing for her life, Jupiter left this environment, and reached out to friends for help. They took her to the hospital and reported the rape. Shortly after, she went to the police:

Jupiter: they come in, and one of the sergeants is like, fairly young, he’s like maybe 25, 28...and one was about 40?

EB: So there’s two of them and one of you.

J: Two guys, one girl. Two police officers and me. And they understood that it

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171 As noted in Chapter 1, in British Columbia, the Child, Family and Community Services Act defines a child as “a person under 19 years of age and includes a youth” (emphasis added; as cited in Frail and Ross, 2001: 1).
was a rape, and they asked me everything about it, identified who the perpetrator was, and told them about the fact that we’d had a relationship, and um...that we were sort of like acquaintances and comrades and stuff like that, and it just sort of progressed, and then they were like, “Okay, okay...” They seemed totally on my side, totally fine.

And then I started telling them that I was gay. You know? Um, and I told them about, you know, sort of the S/M, you know, thing, because I didn’t want to hide anything? Because I didn’t want anyone coming back to me and saying, “Oh, blah blah blah...” I was just being honest, right? And they were like, “Really.” And right then and there their attitude totally changed, when I told them those two things...Suddenly instead of um, sweet little innocent, poor little girl got caught up in some bad shit...stupid Surrey girl...I spoke to them for three hours. I told them every single detail that I could think of.

And you have to remember that, you know, I was this close to death when it was happening, and I was shook up, so...my memory was really sketchy, but I told them everything. In as best detail, and as best sequence, as I could. And they let me sit alone, for about a half hour...And my friend came back in, and I’m like, “Okay...um...”. They didn’t tell my friend, but they told me, when my friend came in. “Well, from what you’ve told us now, we really don’t have enough to go on. Because there’s no physical evidence...um...I don’t know if there was any DNA or not...I never found out. Um, and you know, what happens is that, when I was assaulted, I was in a position where I was on my back, but...he was on me, and his hand was over my mouth? So I mean, I was like, I don’t even think I was breathing. Like, you’re in pain, and I’m trying to scream and everything, but I couldn’t, I was too shocked...And they’re like, “Well, because you didn’t really say yes or no...it’s sort of in a grey area...we can’t really do anything.” So they...they left, and they came back in, right? They came back in and they were like, smiling...smiling like it was a joke (ibid).

No charges were ever laid by the police in this instance, and they did not interview or otherwise contact the individuals involved in the rape. Police personnel had the names, address, and other pertinent information – including access to hospital records of Jupiter’s visit to the emergency the day after the rape – yet, still, they took no action on her behalf or investigated further.

Significantly, Jupiter notes that these officers’ attitude and demeanor changed immediately after she came out to them as queer, and as someone who had been involved in dynamics that she described as S/M. These pieces of information made Jupiter’s story
implausible to the police. In this part of Jupiter’s testimony, law enforcement personnel are revealed to be acting (or not acting) from within ideologies that render practitioners of S/M, prostitutes, and other so-called ‘deviants’ incapable of being raped – of saying no.\textsuperscript{172} She summarized this experience in a poem which she shared with me – in particular, the line, “Cops don’t believe dykish girls in fucked up inbred towns” (ibid).

Here again, though Jupiter was a minor at the time, police did not contact the Ministry of Children and Families to report this situation. In addition, when Jupiter asked for assistance from Police Victim Services, she was denied counseling. She then took it upon herself to contact social workers with the Ministry about this incident, and asked for help with housing or income assistance. However, she was told,

‘Sorry, you’re too old. Because of all the cuts and stuff? If you were like, 15, or maybe even 16 we might be able to help you, because this is so bad? But, cuz you’re like 18? We can’t help you. You’re too old to be put in care, you’re too young to go on welfare...So uh, you might want to try a transition house’ (ibid).

This response from Ministry of Children and Families is doubly problematic. Not only was her age used against Jupiter in denying her access to services; but it was her financial vulnerability and lack of stable housing that informed her decision to accept the room and board situation that placed her in a sexually coercive environment. ‘Too old’ to be taken into Ministry custody, too young for welfare benefits, and unable to return to the violent, homophobic family she fled from, Jupiter was effectively cut off from any access to social services. Her narrative reveals an appalling accumulation of barriers to social services. Though she made repeated attempts to get help from various social service enclaves, she

\textsuperscript{172} In Sue Currie’s (1995) research on violence against street-involved women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, an informant stated, “I hitchhiked to the hospital after I was brutally raped and the receptionist told me that, ‘hookers don’t get raped” (ibid: 18). Clearly, this attitude extends beyond hospital staff to police, Victim Service personnel, and is even a ‘common sense’ element of newspaper coverage in Vancouver. See
was disqualified from Ministry intervention by her age, while her gender and homelessness increased her vulnerability to coercive sexual conditions and sexual assault; at the same time, Jupiter’s sexuality represented yet another area of liability in accessing law enforcement services and Victim Services.

Troubling Barriers to Access: Social(ized) Services and Institutional Violence

If we examine social service networks from the perspective of my informants’ experiences, it is abundantly clear that age, gender, class, ‘race’, sexuality, and homelessness converge in ways that constitute both enormous risk on the street, as well as many layered barriers to services that might have helped them escape conditions of homelessness. Whether in the care of the Ministry of Children and Families – as Darian was – or attempting to gain access to social services, my informants share deeply troubling stories of their attempts to negotiate and escape conditions of homelessness and street-involvement. In some cases, the required services were simply non-existent – for instance, Kay’s story of her attempts to access some form of youth-shelter or housing in the Lower Mainland; or Phoenix’s story of being placed on a 2-month waiting list for a bed in a detox facility. In addition, Phoenix argues that, “women aren’t taken seriously in addictions” (interview with Phoenix, April 8, 2004), and that the few addiction services that are available are generally co-ed – and subsequently unsafe for young women forced to negotiate sexually predatory behaviour from male peers. She also comments on the need for addiction services that are queer-oriented in order to increase safety for young gays and lesbians seeking a safe environment to access substance use treatment.

In some instances, my informants – fearing homophobia and heterosexism – felt they could not come out to service providers. For example, Phoenix was advised not to disclose her sexuality to mental health care professionals due to this enclave’s histories of pathologizing homosexuality; similarly, Darian chose not to disclose her queerness to her Ministry appointed psychiatrist and caseworker. When they were open with social service providers about their sexuality, Kay, Jupiter, and Darian encountered either inadequate service, or outright denial of services due to providers’ homophobia, apathy, lack of training, etc.

Viewed through the lens of these experiences with social service provision, the BC government, law enforcement personnel, the Ministry of Children and Families and other social service networks may be seen to be co-implicated in sustaining institutional conditions that place queer, street-involved young women at (further) risk. These conditions exist despite the fact that there are several municipal and provincial reports demonstrating that queer youth and young women are extremely vulnerable and have the least access to services.\(^{173}\) The testimonies of these five young women demonstrate that, indeed, dominant societal ideologies manifest as institutional practices that manifest as everyday domination and violence that is disguised from recognition and critique (Herr, 1999: 244). The social construction of street youth as deviant, individually deficient, poorly socialized, etc. converges with the institutionalized “hierarchies of deservedness” (Hillyard Little, 1994: 234) that work through established ideologies vis-à-vis gender, ‘race’, class, sexuality, whiteness, etc. It is in this fashion that queer, street-involved young women – and street youth, in general – are positioned as inherently undeserving, and treated ‘accordingly’ in
their attempts to access social services. Because the young women themselves are thusly constructed as ‘the problem’ – as unworthy – subsequent institutional violence and neglect is disguised, and social relations of homophobia, heterosexism, racism, sexism, etc. are able to flourish through social service provision, or its denial.

173 See City of Vancouver Permit Board, 2003; City of Vancouver, 1998; City of Vancouver, 1999; Collaborative Community Health Research Centre – UVic for the Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2002; Province of British Columbia, Sexual Exploitation of Youth in British Columbia, 2000.
Chapter Six
Reflections on the Research Process - Limitations, Recommendations, and Areas for Future Research

Summary of the Research Findings: Resistance is Fertile

Grappling with the actualities of extensive social relations is best taken up by inquiries opening up a number of different windows, disclosing a number of different viewpoints from which the workings of a whole (though open-ended) complex of relational processes comes into view (Smith, 1987: 177).

Deploying an intersectional lens that accounts for the possibility that lived experiences can be determined by factors related to gender, ‘race’, class, sexuality, and whiteness, exposes how related ideologies are embedded in institutionally organized discourses and practices. Clearly, gender, ‘race’, class, and whiteness are equally as important as sexuality to young queer women who are homeless, street-involved, and attempting to access negotiate families, schools, and social services. Sexuality alone is not a singular determinant of experiences involving homelessness or street-involvement. This recognition – which stands in opposition to the majority of research pertaining to queer youth – exposes the ways in which institutional processes are mediated by multiple and mutually compatible ideologies that reflect hegemonic norms. Thus, in problematizing the institutional sites that reproduce such ideologies, we must bear in mind that they reflect dominant social values, rather than being particular or unique to an institutional setting.

In their experiences of home and family, for example, my informants reported not only homophobia and heterosexism, but also relations inflected by gender, age, ‘race’, and class. In their omission of any discussion of white privilege or positionality, my white narrators highlighted how discursive constructions of whiteness as an unmarked – and, indeed, unremarkable – subject location shaped relationships with family members in regards to what they did not have to confront: legacies of colonization, genocide, and residential
schools. Moreover, by taking up the standpoint of young queer women who have been homeless and / or street-involved, the ideological duality of home and family – and its role in sustaining hegemonic relations of heteronormativity – emerges as a key finding of this research. Indeed, foregrounding the notion that these young women became street-involved speaks to their struggles within the family, thus troubling common sense notions of this social institution as a site of stability, unconditional love, and relations of mutual cooperation. Placed within the context of an institutional ethnographic recognition that families – as social institutions – form part of the apparatus of ruling, a line of fault (Smith, 1987: 49) emerges between the experiences of queer young women who, at one time, were not homeless, and the norms that families value and reproduce vis-a-vis their queer daughters / members. These findings rupture the homophobic logic that suggests queers are a danger to ‘traditional’ (read: white, middle-class, heteronuclear) families and family formations.

In addition, my narrators’ stories of their experiences with another key social institution – the school – implicate the public education system in the social reproduction of heteronormativity and heterofemininity. Indeed, their experiences with unchallenged homophobia and heterosexism in BC public schools illustrates that these forms of institutional violence (Herr, 1999) are a persistent characteristic of schools and schooling, and that “maintaining preexisting social differences” (Bourdieu, 1998: 20) remains high on the (hidden) agenda of these social institutions. Similarly, my informants’ encounters with various sites of social service provision – mental health, addictions, foster-care, social assistance (BC benefits), law enforcement, youth housing (or its lack), etc. – demonstrate that gender, sexuality, ‘race’, class, and age constituted multiple and cumulative barriers to
access. Jupiter’s attempts to acquire help from law enforcement personnel demonstrate that homophobia and heterosexism influence the (in)actions of some law enforcement personnel. Alternately, Darian’s story of her experiences with foster-families, social workers, and the legal system foreground the ways that gender, age, and sexuality can serve to place youth in care in an even more vulnerable position than they might experience on the streets. Indeed, her narrative makes it possible to understand Gerald Mallon’s assertion that, for youth in care, life in care settings can be “intolerable, impelling them in many cases to return to the streets for safety” (ibid).

Another crucial finding of this research resides in the ways that my informants discuss how being queer and female impacted upon conditions of homelessness and / or street-involvement. Though research on youth at risk – and queer youth in particular – seldom interprets gender as anything other than a statistical variable, my narrators unanimously agreed that gender and sexuality represented multiple areas of vulnerability while homeless and / or street-involved. Vi, Kay, Jupiter, Phoenix and Darian all spoke of their vulnerability as young women vis-à-vis coercive sexual encounters, violence, and rape or sexual assault. The lack of queer-positive services for young women who are homeless or street-involved is clearly at issue here. However, my narrators also point to the ways that – within existing services – discourses of deserving converge with social constructions of street youth as deviant, individually deficient, and ultimately, a social problem. These ideologies inflect social service provision – and its lack – while they simultaneously reflect broader social relations that emerge from hegemonic notions pertaining to gender, ‘race’, class, age, sexuality, etc.
At the same time, it should be noted that my research subjects did not passively accept their ideologically and institutionally proscribed role(s) in attempting to negotiate and resist the circumstances of their everyday worlds. Indeed, as Michel Foucault suggests, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (1978: 95). If we pause to consider the overwhelming suicide rates among queer youth, the fact that they have survived to share their stories is perhaps the most eloquent expression of their resilience in the face of multi-layered social and institutional apathy and indifference. In addition, four of the five women I interviewed are involved in various forms of social activism. Phoenix, for example, eventually returned to her high school and initiated a diversity awareness program for students and teachers. She is also active in local queer youth organizations that go into high schools to conduct anti-homophobia workshops. Jupiter is similarly active in local queer youth agencies, and has aspirations of training as a social worker, and perhaps even opening a group home for homeless queer youth one day. Darian has spent the past two years lobbying the Ministry of Children and Families to improve its services for queer youth in care. Vi enacts her resistance through public spoken word performances. In sharing one of her performance pieces with me, she elaborates on how she accomplishes daily resistance to material and ideological relations of inequality:

I’d walked in squares all day, so I was looking for a retreat, I decided to take a seat, and in walked the same guy I talked with last week. Same person I thought of when I crossed the street. I met him in the same dive, in the opposite seat. “Nothing’s a coincidence”, he cried, his arms fisted in pride. We always agreed that things didn’t just coincide, there was reason, and rhyme, a bye-bye both and you’ll find what the lesson’s about. Only use your mind and you’ll be headed for the round-about. The round-about, the one that’ll twist you up in circles and make you doubt your way, out to yourself that life has done you so wrong. When it was you...and I...who had the power all along, so up to a moment, from here, I thought it had always been clear between he and I, that we take the blinders off the sides of our eyes before we sat. I hate having a hard life behind my back, so when he asserted I take off my hat, told me I wasn’t
woman enough, too rough, and confessed I should wear a dress, I was just about to stack it up, but... Then I assessed it best to be slow in my attack, because if I had to address femininity, we'd have to go back, see...divinity may be round, but it knows no gender bounds, and serenity is profound, it doesn’t need to be grounded in the form in which we are found. I sense the texture of sound, not the [can’t make out word] it’s bound with. Femininity is myth, based on cowering daughters, holding fathers in the power-play, see? This is the face of pat-riar-chy, but no, he wasn’t paying much attention to me, just continued to [can’t make out word] all over me, scolding me, divinity can only be fixed when masculinity and femininity are mixed. I told him, “I am of the two-spirit” but he didn’t even leer at it. He was too busy steering to hear, wouldn’t quit, he was bent on the same track he’d always sought. The chain of his train of thought screeching round, reaching for a seat, set on repeat. “Nothing’s a coincidence,” he skipped. The click was starting to make me sick, so I decided to see if I could beat him at his own trick. I said, “don’t you think that maybe there’s more, to the story, if someone tells you different, than what you’ve always known before? Serendipity. We agree, so. But you’re only looking at it one way, though. You’re transfixed, it’s the fix of your eye, you’re funneling wisdom through the tunnels of the now, you can’t assume you know everything. Like staring in the same place, you’ve got to turn your face, and face it. We’re finally facing south, my mouth trumpeting sounds of what I see, so you can’t fix me. Because I am not broken. I am hand-made, perfectly imperfect, I laid the foundation myself, my wisdom is my wealth, this is who I am, wholly. And this is my journey, only.” So it wasn’t until I was on my way home that the night started unrolling, thought of earlier that day and how I didn’t really have much to say for myself. It had taken this day, in this way, to bring me back to the wealth of my power. I’d let my fear tower over me, block my vision, out my ears, so all I could see were mirrors of me. So I stopped, looked around me, suddenly grateful for this opportunity I had, to see (interview with Vi, April 1, 2004).

When, in the fifth and last of my interviews, I observed to Phoenix that most of my informants were involved in such politically interested challenges to the social relations that have so significantly impacted on their lives, she replied simply, “It’s the only way to make sense of it all” (Interview with Phoenix, April 8, 2004). This project, and the interviews that constitute its foundation, are also a form of resistance. Indeed, each of my informants expressed that their willingness to participate was grounded in the hope that this research might make a difference for other queer young women in the future. This is a hope – and a resistant effort – that I share with these young women.
Limitations, Recommendations, and Areas for Future Research

Though my narrators' testimonies have much to tell us about the institutional discourses and practices of both governmental and non-governmental social institutions, this research is limited in a number of important ways. First, in response to limitations in existing literature on street youth, I set out to investigate the impact of gender in the lives of queer young women who have been homeless and/or street-involved. However, in choosing to interview only young women, it may appear that I am collapsing gender with women. This is not so. Young men also experience the impact of gender proscriptions, and this is certainly true of queer young men. Future research with queer youth that also takes as a central axis of analysis issues pertaining to gender could be performed on a larger scale so as to accomplish a more nuanced comparison of the ways that gender and gender norms impact upon the lives of queer youth.

In addition, though I had hoped to interview young trans* women, I was not able to find research subjects that identify as such. This is a definite drawback to my project, and one that should be addressed in future research with populations of queer street youth. I suspect that trans* youth who are homeless and/or street-involved might have a great deal to tell us about their lived experiences with the institutional and ideological manifestations of homophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, etc. within families, schools, and social services. In addition, it would be extremely illuminating to interview queer street youth who are under the age of nineteen. My narrators' testimonies suggest that age was a significant determinant of experience in their attempts to navigate social institutions and relations, and this axis of experience should be further explored in subsequent research.
In addition, future research might benefit from some of the methodological insights that this project has to offer. Indeed, without the generous and trusting assistance of local queer youth service providers, I would not have been able to locate the five young women who consented to be interviewed for this research. Future projects could endeavour to build similar relationships with staff in these organizations, as their insights and encouragement were invaluable to this process. In addition, performing interview-based, qualitative research with queer youth enabled me to explore – and expose – areas that are unaddressed in quantitative studies of this subject population. For instance, through my discussions with these young women on the subject of homes and families, I was able to dissociate the ideological duality of the home and family, and subsequently problematize common sense notions of (hetero)nuclearity, queers as dangers to the family, and so-called family values. In turn, this enabled me to identify mainstream discourses of family values, and the ways in which these are set up to socially reproduce relations of heteronormativity. However, my ability to conduct this research was enabled through the help of youth services that may not exist in rural areas. Conducting research with queer youth in non-urban settings should certainly be a priority, given the comparable lack of services and support in the form of queer youth organizations.

With regard to service provision, social policies and practices, and the training of social service personnel, additional research is certainly warranted. Building on the work of Susan Diane (1999) and Bonnie McMackon (1998), future research could undertake to explore the perspectives of social workers, addictions counselors, foster-parents, police,

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174 Noell and Ochs concur with this recommendation, suggesting that in their research on homeless youth and sexual orientation, “of youths contacted by outreach workers, 86.8% met eligibility criteria...[for the study]...and agreed to participate” (2001: 33).
175 See Amazing Grace(s): A Qualitative Study of Lesbian Helping Professionals.
court officers, policy makers, and health care providers in order to further map out how relations of ruling pervade institutional policies and practices in the everyday world. Conducted either independent of additional and larger-scale research with queer street youth or alongside it, interviews with social service professionals could provide significant insight into the dilemmas and intricacies of service provision for this subject population. By extension, research on professional training programs related to these fields – i.e. teacher training, social work programs, law enforcement training, etc. – could also expose areas in which the reproduction of ruling relations represents a significant factor in the everyday lives of queer youth, and the service providers who serve them.

Finally, it should be emphasized that, while future research could be of invaluable assistance in identifying and addressing issues of equity and access in social service provision for queer youth, there are currently gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans* youth who are homeless and street-involved in major cities right now, today. They are encountering multiple barriers to services, and many of them are in crisis. The time to plan, carry out, and interpret research into meaningful social change is not a luxury that these youth can afford. It has been my fervent hope that this research might be deployed as a tool for queer youth and their advocates in schools and social service enclaves to lobby for changes to services, educational environments, and families. However, meaningful and large-scale social change is required in order to address the ideologies of homophobia, racism, heterosexism, and heteronormativity that remain a part of Canadian social relations. Multiple battles are being fought by and with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, yet they remain the most vulnerable members of queer communities.

176 See Lesbian social workers experiences in their professional working relationships.
Indeed, in placing my study and its findings within the context of an early twenty-first century liberal democracy such as Canada, it is impossible not to consider the implications of my narrators' economic and social disenfranchisement against the backdrop of broader issues of citizenship and belonging. While Canadian national identity may be premised on notions of "tolerance and diversity" (Mackey, 1995: 408), processes of nation building in this country are inextricably tied to relations of homophobia and heterosexism. Thus, while the Canadian federal government has recently made gestures in the direction of substantive equality for queers in this country – protection from hate crimes (Bill C250), for example – Gary Kinsman and others have warned that looking to the nation-state for rights and protections obscures the fact that, "Canadian state formation has been an anti-queer project, a project of heterosexual hegemony...in association with class, gender, race, national, linguistic and other forms of hegemony" (2001: 210). From this perspective, it may be argued that queer citizens of the Canadian nation-state have been – and continue to be\(^{177}\) – denied full citizenship rights. The state – rather than the solution to problems of (heteronormative) citizenship – "is integrated with the relations...[of]...the ruling apparatus" (Smith, 1987: 113). For queer youth, this is nothing short of a life and death struggle.

\(^{177}\) For example, I cite the federal government's ongoing waffling in regards to the issue of same-sex marriage.
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Appendix Two: Schedule of Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born?
3. How were elementary and/or high-school for you?
4. Can you tell me how you came to be involved with Vancouver's street-community?
5. Can you describe your experiences with Vancouver's street-community?
6. Do you feel your sexuality has affected your experiences with Vancouver's street-community? If so, how?
7. Do you feel that being a woman has affected your experiences with Vancouver's street-community? If so, how?
8. Do you feel your cultural background has affected your experiences with Vancouver's street-community? If so, how?
9. What experiences, if any, have you had with social services? Can you describe these?
10. What experiences, if any, have you had with youth-service organizations? Can you describe these?
11. What experiences have you had with other organizations that you may have encountered during your involvement with Vancouver's street-communities? Can you describe these?
12. Do you feel you got the assistance or support you needed from these agencies? Why or why not?
13. Do you feel that the people working for youth-service agencies, social services, etc. made assumptions about you? If so, what were they?
14. Do you feel that these assumptions may have been related to your sexuality? Your gender? Cultural background?
15. Do you have any comments you'd like to add? Any questions?